The Soul that Thinks: Essays on Philosophy, Narrative and Symbol in the Cinema and Thought of Andrei Tarkovsky

A dissertation presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Daniel O. Jones

November 2007

This dissertation titled

The Soul that Thinks: Essays on Philosophy, Narrative and Symbol in the Cinema and Thought of Andrei Tarkovsky

by

DANIEL O. JONES

has been approved for

the Interdisciplinary Arts

and the College of Fine Arts by

Vladimir L. Marchenkov

Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts

Charles A. McWeeny

Dean, College of Fine Arts

ABSTRACT

JONES, DANIELS O., Ph.D., November 2007, Interdisciplinary Arts

The Soul that Thinks: Essays on Philosophy, Narrative and Symbol in the Cinema and Thought of Andrei Tarkovsky (226 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Vladimir L. Marchenkov

This dissertation examines the films and philosophy of Andrei Tarkovsky in relationship to the artists that influenced him and in the context of the tradition he and those artists create. I am particularly interested in theological and philosophical aspects of his work in relation to aesthetics and in the effects of literature, painting and music on his film style. This work is part historiography and part meditation on the meanings of the films and how they are created. I suggest that, despite a reasonable popularity, Tarkovsky is widely misunderstood, and I hope to demonstrate that the cause of this misunderstanding results, at least in part, from failing to account for the broad artistic tradition to which Tarkovsky belongs.

One of the most pressing concerns is the fact that critics, and indeed western viewers in general, are bound to world views that reduce both experience and conceptualization to either/or propositions. The first two chapters address this problem in detail, and both go on to suggest the proper context in which to place Tarkovsky. Chapter one covers philosophical or theoretical questions while chapter two looks mainly at artistic production. The central idea is that, contrary to the western mindset, the truth is never a choice between mind and body, between intellect and emotion or between soul and material. The first two chapters demonstrate that the philosophers and artists to whom Tarkovsky is closest understood this.

The next three chapters examine Tarkovsky's film style, arguing toward conclusions often quite at odds with more established notions about his films regarding narrative framework, use of symbolism and sound design. Everything important in art is in its style. It is never the abstract idea expressed that matter most, but the way it is expressed. Style is what makes art irreducible to its supposed idea, and thus defeats the compulsion to fit it into a binary. This is how I would describe my methodology, and I would argue it is also how Tarkovsky viewed making films.

The chapters dedicated to specific films detail some of the complexity and difficulty of watching films with elusive and unstable ideas. Three of the chapters engage a particular artist who features prominently in each film, using him as a touchstone for addressing Tarkovsky. The point is not that Tarkovsky has something in common with Bruegel, Leonardo or Shakespeare. Rather it is to view *Solaris*, *Offret* and *Stalker* as Tarkovskian dialogues with these artists that allow the viewer to understand better their works as well as his. My study of *Zerkalo* is a more straight-forward interpretation, employing much of what was developed in the three chapters on style to understand what seems to me to be Tarkovsky's least accessible film.

The chapter about *Nostalghia* and the conclusion address two major misconceptions about Tarkovsky, his attitudes about women and his religious beliefs. Taken together they consider the false binaries inherent in feminist critiques of Tarkovsky's portrayal of women and in both dogmatically religious and skeptical views of his work. The dissertation thus ends where it began, asserting that Tarkovsky's films break down methodologies used to attack them and to praise them; the works defeat even the most carefully considered ideas about them. The Tarkovsky film makes one consider that which is opposed to their deepest

sensibility. The faithful person is made to engage their intellect, and the skeptic is made to negotiate miracles in order to experience the inseparability of the mind and the spirit.

Approved: _____

Vladimir L. Marchenkov

Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank everyone who has helped me bring this work to its current state. My committee has been a huge help, especially my chair and my advisor, Dr. Marchenkov. His attention to my work has not only made this dissertation better, but also helped to make considerable improvements to my writing style in general. I also want to acknowledge my gratitude to my wife. She moved to Athens with me and waited patiently as I completed this work for the past five years. Her encouragement has kept me going in some rather trying times. Finally, I want to thank the artist, Andrei Tarkovsky, for his mysteries and his insight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction: A Sublime, Purging Trauma

> True art is a unity of content and the means of expressing that content, but these means of expression can easily be understood simplistically, by excising some single facet from the content-laden function of embodiment. Then just one side of an organic unity, one side alone, is taken as something self-sufficient, existing in seclusion from the other facets of embodiment, even though it is really a fiction that has no reality outside the whole, just as paint scraped off a painting or the sounds of an entire symphony played all together are not an aesthetic reality. And if on the basis of this simplistic insensitivity the aesthete attempts to sever the threads or, more accurately, the bloodbearing arteries linking that facet of the work of art under examination to those other facets which the aesthete fails to notice, then he destroys the unity between the content and the means of expression, he annihilates the style of the art object or distorts it, and in distorting or annihilating style, in de-styling that work, he thereby deprives it of genuine artistic content.
>
> --Father Pavel Florensky

Film and the Other Arts

Western thought tends to divide the world into binaries and to suggest two ways of reconciling the two sides: one may choose one side or the other, good or evil; or one may find the middle path between the two choices. The either/or dichotomy insists upon the superiority of one position over another, while the synthesis tactic attempt to find compromise. Both attempt in their separate ways to eliminate contradiction. Andrei Tarkovsky does not wish to eliminate contradiction. His films and his philosophy preserve the contradiction, and they show us that morality, truth and love are possible even as their contradictions are inevitable. His ideas are not without precedent. In the west artistic and philosophical traditions that share this attitude include Byzantine and Russian icon painting; German, Flemish and Netherlandish painting of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially the works of Pieter Bruegel; Leonardo da Vinci, the tragedies of William Shakespeare; the philosophical writings of Plato, Viacheslav Ivanov and Pavel Florensky; the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoy; and the films of

Alexander Dovzhenko and Robert Bresson. One of the aims of this dissertation is to demonstrate that these artists and philosophers have something in common besides their influence on the art and thought of Tarkovsky. They offer a world-view contrary to the master narrative through which the western cultural tradition has been understood for so long.

The fundamental point of contention between the master narrative and its counter-narrative is found at the border between two different ideas about the function of art. The view that informs most aesthetic thought, and which holds sway virtually unchallenged in film theory and criticism, describes art as the imitation of appearance. On the other side is the belief that art is the means by which humanity discovers its deepest truths. This discourse is concerned with the problems that arise when an artist who puts himself firmly in the mindset of the latter is interpreted almost exclusively by proponents of the former. I shall delineate the differences between the truth-telling arts, or poetry, and the arts of virtuosity, beauty, and imitation that Plato referred to as amusement art.

The first part of this dissertation will focus on this aesthetic argument. The later chapters will suggest interpretations of Tarkovsky's films that are developed from methodologies more appropriate to his style than the theories that dominate the discipline of Film Studies. I will examine the films along the lines of the ideological goals and stylistic practices of the artists and philosophers who compose the various traditions that provide Tarkovsky's poetic and aesthetic contexts. It should be understood that my intention is not to suggest that Tarkovsky is merely the latest manifestation of a particular tradition in Western art. His vision is original and his voice is unique. The importance of

attending to his contexts and influences is the capacity to help correct specific misunderstandings and generally inaccurate ideas about Tarkovsky's films. This interdisciplinary study will go beyond merely filling in some of the holes in the body of research accumulated about Tarkovsky thus far. It is less interested in new information or shocking discoveries and more concerned with new ideas. Hopefully these essays will help to produce a clearer picture of what Tarkovsky and his films are about than the one currently in vogue.

At best this work should serve as a model for interdisciplinary pedagogy in the simple sense that to know Tarkovsky's predecessors and influences is to better understand his films and vice-versa. Northrop Frye's argument is that all the poems, plays and novels a person reads amount to something other than the sum of their parts; to read a single great work is to enter into a complete world of which every work of literature forms a part. Frye pursued this idea, and he reached the conclusion that the greatest works of art contain the sum of the entire history of artistic production. It is true that watching Tarkovsky's films is a richer experience for the viewer who has greater knowledge of art history, philosophy and literature. While the history of the world in Tarkovsky's films seems a bit large for the purposes of this project, developing sensitivity to the complex and subtle dialog Tarkovsky has with his influences through his films can teach the reader plenty about the interrelationship between art and history.

Interdisciplinarity hinges on context. An artist does not create his or her work in the vacuum of a given medium. One creates at the end of a history of all the artists who have gone before. Tarkovsky is a unique case in that he demonstrates not just knowledge

of the traditions that have preceded him, but awareness of the artists that have shaped him. In his journals, interviews and meditations on art, such as *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky invokes the names of his masters: Goethe, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Bresson and Dovzhenko. In some ways this is an intellectual tradition; Tarkovsky refers to each of the above at various times to demonstrate his beliefs about the nature of art. Yet the intellectual influence alone would carry little weight if the influence of his teachers were not evident in his films. More than just using Bach and Beethoven on the soundtrack of each film; more than *Sculpting in Time*'s discussions of Bunũel, Bergman and Kurosawa; more than setting up a shot to look like a Bruegel painting; Tarkovsky is in dialogue with art history to a degree that is rare among filmmakers. Thus, in addition to his unique understanding of the meaning of human life, his films are loaded with knowledge of art history and a specific attitude toward it. The films themselves demonstrate a preference for certain figures in the western tradition, and they impart an understanding of their works that is at odds with the canon of Western art as a history of beautiful objects.

Many artists undoubtedly share Tarkovsky's view, because they think of the problem from the creator's point of view. It is more difficult for critics to understand revelation, because almost all our training focuses on appreciation. Little wonder that treating art as an appearance of beauty has remained the essential principle of art appreciation since Vasari. The hegemony is daunting. Among the most successful attacks on it is E.H. Gombrich's *Preference for the Primitive*, his final work and his most radical. In it he describes art history in terms of two distinct and separate paths. Along

one path is poetry – the language humans use to express their deepest ideas and emotions, the language of the spirit. The other path leads to beauty and focuses attention on technical virtuosity – the language that seeks to describe perfect forms. Gombrich describes the tug-of-war between spiritual or sublime art and mimetic or beautiful art.

Film theory offers no blueprints to address the spiritual or the sublime. Therefore, this dissertation employs methodologies borrowed from several disciplines. It should remain clear that this is done dialogically rather than strictly to accomplish a feat of literary criticism, philosophical enquiry, or art history. The point is not to introduce new ideas into all these fields, or to produce a work that challenges all three disciplines. Rather my goal is to demonstrate the necessity of applying new ideas to film study. Some of these ideas will be more familiar to art historians, some to philosophers, and others to literary critics. This kind of cross-pollination is necessary, and hopefully the success of the current work will highlight the limitations of dividing the arts of film, literature, painting, music, and even philosophy into rigidly separate, static disciplines.

Tarkovsky's cinema in particular rewards training in philosophy, literature, and the visual arts. It even demands a working knowledge of certain problems: the distinctions between sight and insight and between beauty and poetry that are more familiar to those areas of study. Film studies as an isolated discipline may never foster this kind of knowledge because "film theory" is tied too closely to ideas about mimesis and entertainment. This is why it is much better to bring to the study of Tarkovsky a background in philosophy or literature than a background in film theory. Speculative film criticism all but died out with Andre Bazin. In film school one only reads him as one

watches *Nosferatu* or *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; they are all history lessons. To use Bazin as a model for serious contemporary film criticism is akin to employing Newtonian physics to explain black holes or using leeches to alleviate a headache. Film studies as a discipline exacts enormous pressure on those who would be serious critics to stay cutting edge. That means staying on top of all the fashionable methodologies of the moment, because there is really no such thing as the tried and true. The only enduring tradition in film theory is the theory of spectator identification, developed in the early work of Bela Balazcs and later abandoned by the author. Balazcs may have worked beyond it in his own criticism, but the principle of spectator identification provides the basis for a great deal of contemporary film scholarship. This is hardly surprising, given that it is simple and malleable; the first year student can grasp the basic idea and then use some version of it to write about virtually anything. Since there is no hierarchy of aesthetic values, spectator identification gels quite nicely with the currently popular ideas that value in art is illusory, and that works of art are nothing more than reflections of the society within which they are produced. By contrast, Bazin's discussion of the "holy moment" is not only much more elusive intellectually; it is also predicated upon the basic assumption that some films are better than others.

Beyond the scope of film, Tarkovsky stands as one of the major artists of the twentieth century, and he warrants all the attention and exploration critics can give him. Strangely, much of this English language work about him reaches many of the same conclusions. There appears to be little interest in challenging the Tarkovsky truisms: Tarkovsky the mystic, Tarkovsky the misogynist, Tarkovsky the formalist, though not

one of these characterizations holds up under close inspection. It is difficult for existing film theory to explain what Tarkovsky's films are about because it is entrenched in methodologies that seek to defeat, whether consciously or unconsciously, his worldview and his belief in art as a means of personal transformation. Tarkovsky's films are about trying to live better. They are about trying to love. They are about trying to make sense out of life. This can be frustrating, because such concerns are always addressed and yet never resolved. Shot length, the use of different film stocks, and all the other familiar things we know as Tarkovskyisms are important, but the viewer must approach them with the understanding that Tarkovsky's film style is the way in which he addresses age-old questions. It is a mistake to think of his style as separate from his message, and it is a mistake many critics make because they think they stand above his sexual politics, his mysticism and his nationalism.

Even though his films promote a specific moral attitude against what he regarded as a decadent world, the director and his characters often fail in their efforts to better the world. The hero always hopes that what he does has some value beyond his own self. Yet there are no clear-cut answers to moral and ethical questions in Tarkovsky's films. Certainly there is advice; Tarkovsky believes one should remain close to nature, to art, and to his or her family. The films almost always begin by showing that we live in a world where it is increasingly difficult to do these things, and even when one can do them, one still suffers. Tarkovsky teaches that living better does not mean living well or even living satisfactorily in the sense of material well-being, and this can be very hard to accept. His films are about the effort to live better spiritually, even though the spirit can

never be content. One may wonder what it means to live better. The answer in part is to live with greater reverence.

It is not that Tarkovsky's films really offer new lessons or insightful advice. Instead he shows ordinary people doing extraordinary things, and puts the viewer through experiences that focus attention where Tarkovsky believes life is at its best. I should qualify that last statement – he shows people doing things that *they believe to be* extraordinary. The only thing really extraordinary about the things the characters do in these films is the seriousness with which they approach them and the effort they make to accomplish them. And when does Tarkovsky believe life is at its best? – When spent in communion with nature, or in communion with another individual or in communion with our internal selves. Essentially we are asked to treat the films the way the characters in them treat their actions, and in this way the experience of the viewer mirrors that of the characters. This should be distinguished from spectator identification. The viewer is not in the Zone with Writer, Professor and Stalker; he or she is aware at every moment of his or her physical distance from the screen. The artificial part of art is essential. What the viewer must share with the characters is their patience, confusion, attention and intensity. The viewer's experience is not one of entering into the world he or she sees on the screen. It is a demanding experience that consists in watching very carefully what happens and thinking deeply about it as opposed to the more familiar film viewing practice of *going along for the ride*. The film screen is a window one peers into, not a door one walks through.

Tarkovsky occasionally makes comments in interviews, in his journals and in *Sculpting in Time* that allude to his belief that his films are about love, and in a sense it is love that lies behind all this. Many artists claim their works are about love, and this revelation usually does little to help one understand their works. In Tarkovsky's case, however, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of love as a subject at the outset since his films are rarely talked about for the way they depict relationships other than those that are strictly filial. The love Tarkovsky shows is always a struggling sort. First, it is never fully reciprocated. Those wanting love do not receive it, or they do not receive what they recognize as love. Those trying to give love cannot find anyone who wants it, or they are thwarted by those unwilling to admit they want it. In some cases this may be interpreted as unrequited love, but Tarkovsky is more interested in the frustrations and confusion of love that we all experience. It is not romantic, idealized love; it is not the *Romeo and Juliet* that Hollywood has been remaking for one hundred years. Rather Tarkovsky wants his viewers to deal with the everyday problems involved with loving and trying to love others that most viewers, critics and fellow artists usually ignore.

Tarkovsky's Critics

If this does not sound like the Tarkovsky familiar to the reader: the films described by scholarly texts, journalistic reviews, or synopses on websites or backs of DVD boxes, it is because his idiom is fundamentally at odds with the extremely limited way we have learned to appreciate art in mainstream culture in America. One would think the problem dissipates in scholarly film study, but as I have suggested previously, it instead grows more acute. Aesthetics of beauty can help illuminate what we often call

"entertainment," but it remains of little use to poetry. Entertainment follows a predictable path to achieve familiar, recognizable goals that can be digested by most people who are reasonably intelligent and readily capable of unsophisticated feelings. Poetry is different every time, because it is visionary and unique to the poet. The problem emerges because the way most people understand film, in fact the way most people understand painting, music, dance and the rest of the arts, is through an aesthetics of beauty, which in its base forms amounts to aesthetics of an entertainment. True, this dissertation is not much interested in the worst of these; the rudimentary understandings of art proffered by reviewers like Pauline Kael and Roger Ebert which can hardly be called aesthetics. The discussion that follows of the major works about Tarkovsky will show that even in its most sophisticated forms a beauty aesthetic misses the important aspects of poetry.

Tarkovsky's films and his life continue to be the subject of numerous essays in print and on-line. However, most of the recent books about Tarkovsky are being written in languages other than English. The scholars write in Russian, Polish, French and Spanish and hardly any of their work gets translated into English. Most of the scholarship one can find in English-language journals like *Sight and Sound* or *Film Quarterly* dates back to the original release of a particular Tarkovsky film and amounts to little more than review. It is unnecessary for the purposes of this study to catalog the various comments reviewers have made about each of the films. Suffice it to say that the Pauline Kael-style reviewers of the day hardly knew what to make of a film as "un-pleasurable," to use Kael's language, as anything by Tarkovsky. Of the three major book-

length studies of Tarkovsky's work, the only one which remains in print, Johnson and Petrie's *A Visual Fugue*, details the attitudes of reviewers of his films quite thoroughly. Moreover, for the purposes of reviewing prior studies, discussion of *A Visual Fugue* together with Maya Turovskaya's *Cinema as Poetry*, Mark Le Fanu's *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* and most recently Sean Martin's *The Pocket Essential Andrei Tarkovsky* will provide a sufficient if not exhaustive idea of the predominant attitudes toward Tarkovsky and his films. Additionally, the following survey of these four books will help explain why it is important to write about Tarkovsky now.

The first book to consider is the venerable Faber and Faber's contribution to Tarkovsky scholarship, *Cinema of Poetry* by Maya Turovskaya. Hers is a book more of praise and devotion than of critical analysis. Turovskaya's prose is elegant; she describes, with charm, eloquence and a certain grace, what she calls "beauty" and "profundity" in Tarkovsky's films. Yet the book never lives up to what the title suggests it should be. The chapters devoted to the individual films are quite short and each consists largely of an account of the production history of the given film, leaving precious little room for analysis. Granted, Turovskaya writes as if she needs very little space for explication, and is not to be troubled with lengthy argumentation, because too much explanation, she believes, would kill the mystery of the films. It is the mysterious above all else that she wants to preserve in order to encourage viewers to see the films again.

That one is not supposed to analyze art too much is an attitude familiar to Tarkovsky scholars. The latest English language book about Tarkovsky is more of a

reference book than a hermeneutics, and decidedly so. Its author, Sean Martin, explains, "My approach has [...] been only partially concerned with analysis, as I feel that the inherent mystery of Tarkovsky's films speaks for itself, and the films are, ultimately, not solvable" (*The Pocket Essential Andrei Tarkovsky* 11). The reluctance to get into the messy world of explaining meaning must have a firm grip on academia indeed, if a book about one of the major artist of the twentieth century can deliberately eschew interpretation. It should be noted that Martin actually does a great deal of interpreting throughout the book, and some of his ideas are original, salient and insightful. One wonders why he begins his book by apologizing for attempting to find meaning and thereby undercutting the whole project. It seems an attempt to keep Tarkovsky away from the de-bunkers. It is a reaction against the dominant ideas in film theory. In the small world of Tarkovsky studies this attitude indeed seems to be the norm. Martin quotes Natasha Synessios from her book about *Zerkalo*: "when all is said and done, this film works on the heart and soul, not the mind; it is with them, first and foremost, that we must approach it" (*Pocket Tarkovsky* 12).

I sympathize with the desire to keep Tarkovsky's films sacred, but the way in which Turovskaya, Synessios and Martin go about it rests on an untenable ontology. Whatever the heart and soul may be, they experience the world only via the brain. That the heart and soul can perceive or feel directly, without the interference of the nervous system is not an acceptable thesis, especially from a teaching perspective. The brain cannot be removed before art is appreciated. By this rationale a Tarkovsky class would consist of giving the students some production history, assuring them that Tarkovsky was

a genius, and then rolling the film. The heart and the soul are not the intuitive machines they are made out to be in this model. Otherwise, one would have to conclude that all he or she needs to understand Tarkovsky is a pure heart, and I trust no film critic is prepared to do that. The heart and soul need education too, or at the very least, training.

The most serious shortcoming of Turovskaya's criticism is the tendency to arrive at conclusions rather glibly, without citing persuasive evidence or developing arguments. She wants to talk about a cinema of poetry, but she never tells the reader what poetry is. Instead she uses the word, "poetic," to describe, for instance, Tarkovsky's camera movements. Her chapter on Tarkovsky's motifs does little more than name a motif, and then give examples of it from some of the films! In her method there is observation and conclusion, but no argument that might lead the reader to share her belief. One gets the distinct impression that she watches his movies as a spiritual practice and an emotional experience rather than as an intellectual exercise and this attitude would benefit many critics in this discipline. Turovskaya submits to the films, trying always to remain open, and always giving Tarkovsky the benefit of the doubt. She seems to want to be what Umberto Eco calls the "model reader" of Tarkovsky.[i] A great viewer or reader and a great critic are not automatically interchangeable. The trouble with such affective writing is that it gives the reader no sense of the *how* or the *why* necessary for appreciation. Her experience may be one to emulate, but her writing does little to help the reader achieve this.

Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, the authors of *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, have their problems with Turovskaya as well. Though they

frequently cite the problems that result from her methodology, Johnson and Petrie actually seem to eschew outright contention with Turovskaya on any specific point. In many ways, their work systematically and cogently progresses toward many of the very same conclusions that Turovskaya flatly states as the product of her intuition and sensitivity. In other words they take the weakness of *A Cinema of Poetry* to be its lack of proper academism, and they seek to correct that problem in detail. The result is by far the most comprehensive effort aimed at analysis of Tarkovsky's entire body of work to date, and it is the kind of criticism for which Turovskaya, Synessios and Martin feel disdain and suspicion.

The authors divide their book into three sections, a historical part, a part devoted to film analysis and a third sort of catch-all ranging from detailed examination of how Tarkovsky's put his theory of imprinted time into practice in his films, to a lengthy study of his motifs and a brief discussion of his literary and artistic influences. Perhaps more than any other factor it is the exhaustive manner in which they treat such a wide range of subjects that separates Johnson and Petrie from other Tarkovsky scholars. Compare, for instance, their two chapters on motif, "The Image" and "Life as Appearance," totaling about forty-five pages, to Turovskaya's "Andrei Tarkovsky's Motifs and Space" and "Time in Tarkovsky's Work," adding up to eighteen pages. In contrast to the style of *A Cinema of Poetry*, Johnson and Petrie develop cogent points logically and thoroughly. One can see that their approach and the fundamental assumption of Turovskaya, Synessios and Martin are mutually exclusive. The sympathetic group of Tarkovsky disciples insists on being vague in order to keep Tarkovsky's meanings elusive, while the

more rigidly academic pair of author's feel they must demystify his films and reduce the to their intellectual categories. While Johnson and Petrie do well to put the intellect back to work, they also bring too much of their own agenda, leaving little room for Tarkovsky's ideas. Academic style is certainly their chief virtue, but that alone will not rescue inconsistencies in argumentation or errors of fact which contribute to sometimes dubious conclusions.

In a demonstrative sense Johnson and Petrie collect and summarize a consensus about Tarkovsky. They write at length on the subjects I refer to above as "Tarkovsky truisms." The encyclopedic survey is a perfectly justifiable academic task. Not every critic feels the compulsion to put forth new ideas, and the ones that do so will need an exhaustive reference book. What seems disingenuous is that the book only appears to be this kind of reference tool. Beneath its façade of a general survey are some very specific and divisive opinions. The most important idea Johnson and Petrie seem anxious to share is that Tarkovsky is not all that he is cracked up to be. Their contribution to the book *Five Filmmakers*, in which they have the task of writing the Tarkovsky chapter, more or less condenses the contents of *A Visual Fugue* into a long essay. It is telling that the essay begins with a thorough debunking of what Johnson ad Petrie call the "Tarkovsky myth," entitled, "A Martyr or the Darling of Goskino" (Goulding 2-5)?

It is unclear why they think this is such an important issue, but the discussion of it takes up significant space in their book-length study of Tarkovsky as well. Yet it only seems to be of any consequence if one believes that the most interesting thing about Tarkovsky is his nationality. Tarkovsky complained a lot, and he had the right and

probably even the responsibility to complain about the obstacles he faced trying to make films under Soviet rule just like John Cassavetes had the right to complain about commercial bureaucracy of film production and distribution in the United States. Artists everywhere always complain because there are always obstacles between them and their ability to make and exhibit art. Leonardo and Michelangelo, Bruegel, Rembrandt and Vermeer, Rodin, Delacroix, Manet, Eakins, Van Gogh; the list of artists who were subject to the imposition of limitations of one kind or another upon their freedoms and who were thus made to suffer financially, physically, emotionally and spiritually includes many of the great artists in western cultural history.

Why do Johnson and Petrie make it one of their principal aims to expose the myth of Tarkovsky as a martyred artist in both books? Was there really such an overblown impression of Tarkovsky as a messianic figure in 1994, the year *A Visual Fugue* was published, that he needed to be cut down to size so soon after his death? How should the one treat the criticisms of free-born Americans writing ironically about the persecution complex of a Christian artist in Soviet Russia? That Tarkovsky was not sent to the Gulag himself does not so much prove their suggestion that he was delusional as it provides more evidence that he must have lived in constant fear. *The Color of Pomegranates*, the film that landed Tarkovsky's friend and colleague, Sergei Paradjanov, in Siberia, was certainly weird by the standards of the bureaucrats, but Tarkovsky's first major film, *Andrei Rublyov*, was a hagiography! Tarkovsky was lucky to have suffered little oppression from the state beyond problems with funding and distribution, but this is a strangely qualified sort of luck. Tarkovsky's luck was that he was never incarcerated or

tortured. A concentration camp survivor can certainly count himself lucky to have survived, but the fact that he suffered through it in the first place is surely profoundly unlucky. If Tarkovsky was lucky, it was because he *only* had to fight bitterly and often unto physical and mental exhaustion to make exactly five films over four decades in the Soviet Union, while mediocre colleagues had their projects rubber-stamped and fellow poets were occasionally whisked away to the gulags. It may be true that Tarkovsky did not have it as bad as Paradjanov, but this is hardly a race either man wanted to run.

Johnson and Petrie have little sensitivity to Tarkovsky's personal circumstance, but the more significant problem with the book is their lack of sensitivity to the subtlety of the films. *A Visual Fugue*'s chapter on *Offret* demonstrates with particular clarity the authors' tendency toward erroneous interpretation. For reasons which are not made entirely clear, they have decided that *Offret* is the film which will bear the brunt of their commitment to avoid falling into the trap of writing as disciples of Tarkovsky. In a characteristic passage they discuss his mad desire to cling to his aesthetic principles even when the results damage the film:

> Although [the shots] are generally beautifully executed, there is sometimes a sense of strain, a feeling that the action exists for the sake of the shot, rather than the other way around. The incident with the rope in the opening shot is a case in point: it obviously does not work as it was intended to, for the rope comes loose from the bush and would not have caused enough tension to stop the bicycle, with the result that the actor has, rather unconvincingly, to fake his fall (179).

To interpret the scene in this way reveals that the authors are insensitive to tone and, it demonstrates their insistence on reading *Offret* as exhibit A of Tarkovsky's overbearing formalism. My counterargument begins with a simple factual error. First, there is the fact that the rope does in fact tense up and then snap free from the bush as Otto rides

away. It does not loosen causing him to have to fake the presence of tension. Otto surely feels the tension and takes that as his cue to fall off the bicycle, then turn to Little Man and hop up and down in mock anger. The important point that Johnson and Petrie miss is that Otto's performance is for the benefit of Aleksandr's son, Little Man, and not for the amusement of the viewer.

This interpretation also serves as an example of the spectator identification mistake. The viewer is not supposed to be in this scene; he or she is supposed to be observing it. Otto plays along with a joke that unfolds within the context of the film. He notices Little Man tying the rope to his bike, he rides away, feels the rope snap and immediately prat-falls for Little Man's amusement. If Otto is trying to fool anyone, it is Little Man, not the audience. Aleksandr, too, reacts as if he knew how this little gag was going to play out. (I wonder that the authors do not go on to remark that Otto's stomping does not convincingly portray anger, but these mistakes happen when one is dead set on looking for shortcomings.) In fact the entire chapter on *Offret* aims to build a case that Tarkovsky's technical and stylistic strengths can quickly become his faults if he is unable to reign in his impulses to create art for art's sake. Johnson and Petrie are not suggesting anything radical here, but merely conceding *Offret* to Tarkovsky's detractors, allowing that, while Tarkovsky is usually not the cold and calculating perfectionist whose egoistic style overpowers his work, he certainly is with *Offret*.

Where *Cinema of Poetry* deliberately avoids intellectual critique, *A Visual Fugue* moves too far toward the other end of the spectrum, leaving the reader with something purely intellectual. Turovskaya believes that truth is a feeling, and that analysis will only

obscure it. Johnson and Petrie seem to believe that feelings are not appropriate material for academic discourse. This emerges as a bit of a problem since feeling was Tarkovsky's stated aim, specifically the religious feeling that Tolstoy once said had vanished from modern art. The authors commit, in a sense, the very sin for which they judge Tarkovsky: they let their preconceived ideas replace the actual meanings of the films. This is a problem with film theory to be sure, but the specter has been lurking in the halls of academia long before there was Film Studies or Andrei Tarkovsky. In *A Pluralistic Universe* William James calls it "the habit most encouraged at our seats of learning," and talks about cutting oneself off from new experiences by clinging to pre-digested forms of understanding (637). This is precisely what is limited and limiting about most film criticism: critics aren't interested in learning from the films, but in judging them according to some external road map they bring to help make meaning. The problem is not solved by allowing for, as Johnson and Petrie do, multiple varieties of pre-packaged meaning-making. Maybe not everyone has the exact same experience of a Tarkovsky film, so not everyone interprets it in exactly the same way, but the fundamental action is to enter into a specific experience offered by the film, and learn from it rather than decode it with one's own pre-conceived philosophical or, more specifically, aesthetic principles. Of course everyone that would write about art has these principles, but they must be malleable. Aesthetics that cannot be thoroughly revised by profound works is as great a barrier to perception as ignoring the work altogether.

A Visual Fugue seems exhaustive yet it does not contain a single surprise or new suggestion. When Johnson and Petrie survey, for example, Tarkovsky's motifs, they

recite a laborious catalog. For instance, they write about water in all different forms and contexts in which it appears, without offering any interpretation beyond the standards: water = the flow of time, or water = purification. It is not that this is bad criticism, but that it is not really criticism, at least not hermeneutical criticism, at all. *A Visual Fugue* has become the seminal text in Tarkovsky studies probably because it does not exclude any interpretations. One must remember to read it very critically. It is a sometimes provocative overview, but it can steer the inexperienced Tarkovsky viewer in misleading directions.

Mark Le Fanu's criticism tells a different story. Distinct in his tone from both the affective appraisals of the Turovskaya group (though it is interesting to note that Sean Martin has great admiration for Le Fanu's work) and the grudging intellectual respect of Johnson and Petrie, Le Fanu remains simultaneously critical and reverent; he regards Tarkovsky with a deep intellectual and emotional ambivalence. The fact that *A Visual Fugue* has become a canonical text, while Mark Le Fanu's book remains out of print tells us much of what we need to know about the state of the discipline. There is little demand for books that offer singular points of view about specific artists. This accounts at once for the success of *A Visual Fugue* while also demonstrating one of its limitations. The book it totally absorbed in film style and since it never strays too far away from shot-length, composition, sound-design, and visual allusion into interpretation, *A Visual Fugue* is amenable to any number of theoretical approaches. I find books about filmmakers more interesting and ultimately more useful to my own work when the authors express beliefs, whether tenuous or definite, about the meanings of the films and the value of

viewing them. Le Fanu wants to learn what the films teach rather than judge Tarkovsky's personality, and in order to learn he takes risks. Though *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* is occasionally muddled (Le Fanu uses phrases like "poetic cinema" or even "pure cinema"), and though he sometimes comes close to forcing the film in question to mean what he wants it to mean, the book on the whole is articulate, detailed, and full of ideas about Tarkovsky that can still be considered "new."

The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky is not bulky; it essentially consists of one chapter per film, but usually this is because the arguments are direct and concise, not vague or underdeveloped. Sometimes, his interpretations seem a bit off, but Le Fanu's writing is always thought-provoking. Le Fanu does not develop any arguments about other arts or filmmakers very exhaustively, but he opens new doors. He sees connections between Tarkovsky and other directors or painters that other critics do not imagine. The exciting thing about his comparisons is that they extend beyond the obvious and generally accepted, by comparing, for instance, *Stalker* to Cocteau's *Orpheus* and Buñuel's *Nazarin* as well as relating Tarkovsky's general approach in *Stalker* to the work of Cézanne. Le Fanu also has a positive knack for confronting aspects of the films everyone else has either ignored or dismissed. For instance, in his discussion of *Nostalghia*, Le Fanu points out that part of the function of the character of Eugenia is to offer what he describes as a complex critique of Western Feminism. By way of comparison, one may recall the verdict cast by Johnson and Petrie that Tarkovsky's aesthetics in general entails a negative attitude towards women, which again represents not so much their idea as the critical consensus. A later chapter addresses this issue

specifically. The unwillingness of critics to try to think any deeper about Tarkovsky's representation of women and of male/female relationships is simply obnoxious at this point. Sean Martin has nothing new to say in *The Pocket Essential Tarkovsky*, once again quoting the line from Tarkovsky's diary that proves to everyone that his misogyny runs deep, and suggesting that at least he made Hari and Stalker's Wife "strong" characters (43). Even in his introduction to a collection of interviews with Tarkovsky, John Gianvito feels compelled to prepare the reader that he or she may be "disturbed" by Tarkovsky's comments about women (*Andre Tarkovsky Interviews* xvi). Le Fanu's strength in this regard is not that he takes up the opposite position, but that he acknowledges the complications of his assessment instead of ironing out his mixed feelings to create a clean picture.

Also significantly, Le Fanu makes way for the problem of western apperception of Tarkovsky's work. Though he limits the scope of the problem to the fundamental inability on the part of the westerner to take religious questions seriously, the fact that he broaches the question at all helps open up my argument concerning mimesis and poetry. The split between the physical and spiritual, between the aspiration toward the beautiful and seeking the sublime, between the tradition of mimesis and the tradition of poetry is also, in part, the split between East and West. "Do we in the West believe in the divine any longer?" Le Fanu asks, "Is it within the power of art to *revive* belief in it" (52)? Le Fanu suggests that Westerners do not understand the concept of sacrifice, hence the caustic remarks critics often make about Tarkovsky's emigration. It is unfortunate that *Meeting Mr. Andrei Tarkovsky* is not a widely available film, because it contains a

sequence that demonstrates Le Fanu's point saliently. Tarkovsky is in Italy to show *Nostalghia* and to give a talk about the art of film. During the question and answer session an agitated Italian stands up and berates him for betraying his country, citing either Pasternak or Pushkin, who said something to the effect that a Russian belongs in Russia. The fellow goes on to ask where Tarkovsky gets the gall to come to Italy to make a film about Russia. Tarkovsky rather dryly responds, "I'm a Russian in Italy making a film about a Russian who comes to Italy, but spends more time thinking about home than about Italy." He then shrugs as if this explanation was the most self-evident in the world, but the point is that to a westerner it is not.

Methodology

I admire Le Fanu's work above all other Tarkovsky scholarship. I am sympathetic to Turovskaya, Synessios and Martin, but only to a degree. They seem to want to preserve the mysteries of the films at whatever intellectual costs. In my view the intellect is an organ for informing the soul, and it should not be treated with distrust. In Tarkovsky criticism, there is too much suggestion that his cinema and philosophy is an either/or proposition. I reject the binary of hero worship vs. intellectual reality check. I trust that his films are the best way Tarkovsky knew to communicate profound, complex and subtle ideas and experiences. The mystery of these films will remain intact. It is not the critic's responsibility to preserve it; it is my responsibility to interpret the films to the best of my ability, providing as much appropriate context as I can. Among some important critical models are: *Art and Education* by Albert C. Barnes and his fellow pragmatists; D. H. Lawrence's *Phoenix* and *Phoenix II*; John Dewey's *Art as Experience*;

and Ray Carney's books on John Cassavetes, Frank Capra and Mike Leigh. Carney's general approach to film, along with a few essays by Susan Sontag, including "Against Interpretation" and "On Style", Jonathan Rosenbaum's critical reviews and some of Bazin's work, constitute the sum total of "film theory" relevant to the methodology of this dissertation.

I regard my writing as an extension of teaching. When I write about a film, I am trying to teach it to the reader as I would a classroom full of students. Each chapter that follows is in spirit more lecture than literature. Yet the goal is not so much to impart to the reader what the films are about, but rather to help prepare the reader to watch the films more productively. In *Self-Reliance* Emerson says, "[I]n every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this" (19). The following chapters seek to help the reader to recognize his or her "own rejected thoughts" in Tarkovsky's films, rather than tell the reader, what those thoughts are.

Not to belabor a point that will seem obvious perhaps to readers unfamiliar with film theory and criticism, but it should be noted that Emerson's assumption that there are such things as "great works of art" is not one a film scholar can make without resistance. Currently genre theory, semiotics and cultural studies, all three of which are heavily infused with theories of spectatorship, representation and identification, are the heavy hitters in Film Studies. All of them scrupulously avoid value judgments. Since I believe in making value judgments as a fundamental aesthetic principle, I have quite limited use for this kind of scholarship. I find that the best work on cinema does not come from film

professors at all, but from scholars trained in other fields who are able to apply an unusually serious attitude to the material. The attitude of critics like Andrew Horton, Robert Bird, Susan Sontag and Ray Carney and indeed of the older generation of Arnheim and Bazin is closely related to the fact that they received their training in disciplines that take themselves seriously. Consequently, these scholars tend to be more discriminating, writing only about the films which they feel live up to the standards of great literature and great art with which they are more familiar.

The problem with so much contemporary film scholarship is its failure to tell the reader anything about the film that is ostensibly its subject. Today the art is more likely to be regarded as inconsequential than it is to be the locus of meaning, especially if the object is a film. The aesthetics of entertainment has become a self-sufficient theory that can be applied with equal validity to any product of any culture. The manifestations of this are clear in film curricula dominated by mainstream American films and the celebrities who make them, but the problem runs deeper than academia's obsession with Hollywood. While contemporary film scholarship is a radical deconstruction of a particular aesthetics of beauty, it remains trapped within the idiom of that aesthetic. The aesthetics of entertainment is only a decadent form of the aesthetics of beauty; it is a negative response that fails to escape the problems it wants to overcome.

Tarkovsky's own thoughts about the function of art would be much more familiar to the writers listed above than to most contemporary film critics. At times he sounds positively Emersonian:

> Touched by a masterpiece, a person begins to hear in himself that same call for truth which prompted the artist to his creative act. When a link is established between the work and its beholder, the latter experiences a sublime purging trauma. Within the aura

> which unites a masterpiece and audience, the best sides of our souls are made known, and we long for them to be freed. In those moments we recognize and discover ourselves, the unfathomable depths of our own potential, and the furthest reaches of our emotions (*Sculpting* 43).

What could be more out of step with the currently popular state of mind in which the very idea of a masterpiece is radically debunked? I imagine that beyond his somewhat cultish following, Tarkovsky's ideas about cinema are routinely dismissed. The aesthetic concerns of a filmmaker, however well-regarded, are perceived at best as just another theory, to be accepted or rejected with equal validity, as if the whole undertaking were a matter of opinion. Tarkovsky would argue that in order to genuinely understand a work of art the spectator must have faith in the artist who created it. As this survey of Tarkovsky criticism shows, most critics interpret this sentiment as a choice between watching the films with one's intellect held at bay and watching them to deconstruct the ideal of the infallible artist. I believe, by contrast, that I can continue thinking critically while allowing Tarkovsky the benefit of the doubt.

Neither art nor life can be reigned in by such a binary. The best moments in life and the best works of art offer complex experiences in heightened perception that, when properly understood, can leave the spectator with greater knowledge and newfound depths of emotion. More complex and subtle feelings result from more refined ways of thinking. Wisdom may be subtle and quiet, but it is not abstract and antiseptic. Knowledge teaches one how to feel, and feeling opens up avenues to new kinds of knowledge. Tarkovsky made films to give his audience the opportunity for this kind of dialectical experience. There is no pure feeling in these films or direct appeals to the soul. Every emotion is mediated by intellect and every idea is mediated by feeling. If the

soul is alive it must be always changing. If it is ever to grow, the soul must think.

Chapter One: Souls Which are Pregnant: Poetry, Mimesis and Aesthetic Contexts

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth, - the two are one;
We brethren are," he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

---Emily Dickinson

Film as Art

In the introduction I discussed some of the shortcomings of Tarkovsky scholarship, and suggested that these deficiencies result in large part from the fact that the critics lack appropriate terminology and mindset to understand his films adequately. In other words aesthetics and poetics do not match, and this mismatch is so deep-seated that the critical establishments in both the academy and the mainstream are oblivious to the fact. *Film as art* is currently treated as a separate theory, a more or less outdated approach in a discipline brimming with cutting edge methodologies and ideologies. Rarely is it assumed, even in the case of art film, that one needs to bring to it artistic consciousness. This shift happened swiftly; it continues almost unabated and threatens to become total.

As a discipline, Film Theory has yet to address the challenges posed by the Frankfurt School's most notable thinkers: Horkheimer, Adorno and Benjamin. Like

Benjamin, his colleagues Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer readily include all of cinema into the mix as part of their critique of mass culture. As a description of Hollywood their criticisms are perfectly justified. One may readily plug in any popular film genre to provide an example of how "[s]erious art has denied itself to those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness and who must be glad to use the time not spent at the production line in being simply carried along" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 107). The insidious elegance of mercantile capitalism and of wage slavery in what is ostensibly a democracy is that one may have practical freedoms, but the effort spent to hold on to those freedoms leaves one with little time, energy or inclination to use that freedom for anything beyond diversion. Even a film widely credited with raising public consciousness, such as Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, amounts to little more than a momentary diversion. Adorno and Horkheimer unwittingly describe his entire body of work when they say, "Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display" (116).

Benjamin's critique of film in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" suffers from several flaws. To begin with, he imposes upon every aspect of his thinking an overarching and unnecessary notion of *the masses* typical of the Frankfurt School in general. This contrived audience, which I would argue does not exist in any meaningful way, allows Benjamin to revile the cinema as a strictly commercial, money-making medium. By the very process of the mode of production, all films are kitsch in his system, and thus everyone who watches films gets to be an expert on them.

Benjamin, like his Franfurt School colleagues: Adorno and Horkhemier, posits some noteworthy problems faced by the cinema. As I did with the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I take Benjamin's criticism of film to be perfectly applicable, spot-on descriptive of commercial film. The art films that he does not acknowledge succeed precisely at all the points where commercial movies fail. Indeed Benjamin faulted the cinema for exactly the reason the influential Bela Balazcs praised it. According to Benjamin the cinema is symptomatic of "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (223). Balazcs described the ability of the film to bring the viewer into the world shown on screen, to accomplish what he called, "spectator identification," as the great potential of cinema. Benjamin argued that this "potential" was rather a symptom of our culture's loss of true art rather than advancement in the arts.

The mistake both theorists make consist in their belief that the cinema exists solely to encourage spectator identification. Benjamin is one of the most important thinkers of the modern period, even if he systematically dismisses the cinema for having no artistic potential whatever. Yet his thought is too subtle to be reigned in by his own system. His particulars are pregnant, furtive, and suggestive beyond the conclusions to which he believes they lead. This is true of almost all great philosophers, at least those who build systems. For instance, most of us would agree that Plato's model does not work; the hierarchy of forms is elegant indeed, but it leaves out too much empirical reality to encourage strict adherence. Yet Plato remains the greatest philosopher in the

Western tradition. One finds in his writings the seeds of nearly every philosophical train of thought of the past two thousand years. More than just seeds, one gleans out contemporary challenges and viable conclusions. The hierarchy of forms and the blueprint of the ideal state are not the essence of what Plato has to offer. Likewise Benjamin's arguments toward his stated purpose are not always the most interesting facets of a given essay. Especially in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" his Marxist agenda is more of a burden than anything else. Benjamin critiques film only in its commercial form, and he seems oblivious to the fact that he has made a choice to do this, as if there were no such thing as art film.

Benjamin's most substantial challenge to the cinema relates to his formulation of *aura*, the indispensable aspect of a work of art that is destroyed by technological advancements in superficial reproduction. Benjamin is thinking of the photographing and filming of paintings and sculptures when he says, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (220). Since film is the result of advanced technology, is designed to be mass-produced, and never actually exists in any permanent, static way, it is useful to ask whether a film can be said to have an aura.

Obviously, a film does not have an aura like that of a painting, a sculpture, or a building. Film is a special kind of phenomenon, with its own kind of shadow: video. It is worth discussing which aspects essential to cinema are absent from video reproduction so that we might transmute Benjamin's arguments about aura into a dialectic that will not exclude *film as art*. When a person watches a movie in proper, cinematic conditions

which consist of a darkened movie theater and a projecting casting images upon a screen, the images he or she sees are not actually continuous, as the would be when reproduced digitally reproduced in any video format. Celluloid images are projected one frame at a time at a rate of twenty-four frames per second, and they appear to have continuity due to a physiological quirk called persistence of vision. Because the frames appear one at a time, the viewer is physically in total darkness, given the right theater conditions, over half the time he or she is in the theater. In commercial films this fact is merely incidental. In the cinema of spectator identification plots are what matters; they are the mechanism which allows the viewer to be "carried along" as Adorno and Horkheimer put it. Thus one may readily purchase everything by Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Alfred Hitchcock from Columbia House. Plot looks good on video.

What Gilles Deleuze calls the time image, however, does not. Essentially Deleuze contends that cinema is unique in its potential to show time. Tarkovsky certainly shared this belief, and therefore relied heavily on the long take. Mainstream films rarely need a shot to last longer than 5 or 10 seconds. For Hollywood filmmakers and any director who would follow the Hollywood model, a shot is used to convey information, rather than to impart an experience of time. When a viewer is in a darkened theater and relying on persistence of vision for image continuity, shot-length is absolutely crucial; it can determine the very nature of the experience. It is not the same physical experience to watch a movie with twenty or thirty cuts as it is to which one with hundreds and hundreds of cuts. A film with many cuts is frantic; when with fewer cuts is more meditative. Fast-paced editing necessitates the kind of narrative Hollywood manufactures, that which

gives the viewer event after event at a snappy, even hasty tempo. But celluloid has the potential for contemplative and patient narrative, that kind which gives the viewer the responsibility of paying attention rather than simply making it impossible to turn away from the eye candy. Since video is a continuous digital image the persistence of vision does not occur, and it is easy to lose the rhythm of a slow-paced film viewed on video, while that of a face-paced film comes through basically unchanged.

Second, celluloid is a translucent medium. The images appear on the screen because the light source behind the film strip projects them upon a surface. Digital color values are very different from the values of celluloid emulsion. In a film like *Schindler's List* in which all the viewer must do is pick out the red coat from the black and white image, the subtle differences in values are hardly relevant. Take, for example – perhaps a more interesting example – the saturated color symbolism of Douglas Sirk's melodramas. His films are more complex in terms of their color codes, but they are just as obvious. By contrast, the experience of color in a Tarkovsky film requires attention to subtlety and slight movements of light and shifts of color. Tarkovsky's color symbols do not announce themselves with tympanis and trumpets as do Spielberg's and Sirk's. When colors are not meant to stand for something, but rather are to be confronted and lived, to actually alter one's vision, video versions lose or at least alter a key component of the experience.

Proponents of the conviction that the cinema's first and foremost responsibility is to be a great spectacle will vigorously demand that films like those of Spielberg, Sirk, Lucas or Peter Jackson, must be seen in a theater to get their full effect. *Full effect* in this

sense means that these films are meant to be seen very large, overwhelmingly large, in fact, to facilitate the viewer's desire to enter into the film's fictitious world via Balazs's spectator identification. Tarkovsky's films are certainly better seen on a large screen, but not at all for the same reason. In his films many of the shots offer so much that requires attention. In almost every long-shot in a Tarkovsky film, and especially in *Offret*'s final scene, the house-burning, everything has been meticulously choreographed. Everyone on screen is doing something, and all of it is important. One is hard pressed to see all the information watching the film on a television screen. The gestures of figures in long-shot are subtle enough on a big screen; on TV they may be empirically non-existent. The trouble is that important meanings reside in the gestures and movements of the characters in the house-burning scene. The viewer should see how they relate to each other with their bodies in order to understand their relationships.

The essential idea that art cinema abides by rules different from those applicable to mainstream film has yet to gain a foothold in the discipline. The cinema is cursed, because film was discovered and developed as a form of amusement; it was very likely developed by the same kind of minds that sought to put televisions into every home on the planet so that they might attract more customers to consume their products. Despite the efforts of a handful of filmmakers that instead treated the movie camera as the great artistic opportunity of the modern period, the majority of the population of the world continues to view the cinema as a pastime at best, or less enthusiastically, what the Frankfurt school often calls *distraction*.

While people tend to acknowledge that ballet and painting are fine arts and therefore somehow out of their reach whether intellectually or emotionally, cinema is generally regarded as a medium to which everyone has equal access. As Benjamin argues, everyone is an expert (231). Benjamin misunderstands the democratic aspect of cinema. Cinema is democratic because it invites everyone to see its great works. Not so long ago everyone had access to cinema's masterworks, because they were shown in movie theaters. Now they must be rented, but scores of masterpieces are widely available to anyone with an internet connection and an interest in seeing art films. Because anyone can see any film, the ceiling for what is permissible is considerably lower. One expects art in the museum or at the opera; in the movie theater it is often an unpleasant surprise. Many viewers, including film critics, do not acknowledge or understand that there are films as "fine" as ballet, opera or painting. Unfortunately our culture regards anything veering too far from the mainstream as elitist, and such a work is treated with great suspicion. All the more deplorable is the current fashion for scholars and intellectuals in this country to reinforce the view that ignorance is somehow morally superior to knowledge and thus to grant the misconstrued "anti-elitism" a veneer of legitimacy. A great film, the argument goes, is one that can be enjoyed and understood by everyone.

The capacity to move or to inform the greatest number of people is hardly a standard that is useful in a discussion of art film. Some films are made to be amusing commodities and some films are made to be thoughtful, soul-searching works of art, but confusion arises about the difference, because they both appear as "movies." The necessary separation between the mainstream film and the art film has not been

reasonably developed, and the fact that the two are conflated in the mainstream and in the university has made a mess out of film scholarship. Even those within the film culture establishment who claim to talk about art fail to make a meaningful distinction between kitsch and serious art. Most of the films that are both recognized by the general public and written about extensively by scholars as works of art are forms of entertainment. How else to explain the vast crossover from the films that journalists like Roger Ebert and Leonard Maltin praise and the ones that are taught in colleges and universities?

The German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, once advised another young poet to "read as little as possible of literary criticism" because, he says, "such things are either partisan opinions, which have become petrified and meaningless, hardened and empty of life, or else they are just clever word games, in which one view wins today, and tomorrow the opposite view" (*Letter to a Young Poet* 22-23). The problem manifests itself even more acutely in film, because as a young medium, its terms are not so well defined as those of literature and poetry. Therefore it is very easy for critics to play games and make a film mean whatever is dictated by his or her fancy or agenda. Tarkovsky's sentiments echo Rilke's: "Generally people look to familiar examples and prototypes for confirmation of their opinion, and a work of art is assessed in relation to, or by analogy with, their private aspiration and personal position" (*Sculpting* 46). Both speak of the practice of judging a film according to its perceived politics.

The problem of overinterpretion is compounded by the fact that film lacked in Tarkovsky's life, and continues to lack in our time appropriate aesthetics. It is not technical terminology that Film Studies is missing. Indeed, there is rather too much of it,

and often university programs put too much emphasis on mastering what is by and large industry jargon. It is the larger categories of "art film" and "independent film" which are too vague and nebulous to be useful. They do not mean anything substantial. These terms are used either endearingly or pejoratively, but they are always used generically. They suggest no implication of inherent value. Other mediums are resistant to this problem because of their long histories and substantial traditions. Literary scholars tend to know the difference between Edgar Allen Poe and Stephen King. Art historians acknowledge a hierarchy when they teach Edward Hopper instead of Norman Rockwell. One is art; the other is kitsch. One is serious; the other is frivolous. Even revisionists and deconstructionists of the established arts assume a hierarchy of values; it is the very subject of their critique. Film Studies is able to bypass aesthetic values altogether. It is a sort of dream-come-true for the debunkers, because there is no long standing tradition to debunk, and they get to start with a relatively clean slate. Lacking tried and true categories that keep separate kitsch from art, the terms of Film Studies easily conflate a Tarkovsky and the likes of a Spielberg. The Cinema must insist upon a vocabulary which can distinguish a work of art and a work of amusement.

Tarkovsky often commented upon the necessity of developing separate aesthetic terms to talk about art films instead of using the language common to discussion of popular film. He likely felt a responsibility to validate cinema as an art form, but he usually ended up doing so most often by default. He never set out to be a champion of the potential of cinema. Tarkovsky's defense was a practical matter for he was a poet, but he worked in a medium dominated by propagandists and entertainers. He knew very

well that the aesthetics developed to understand film were made for mainstream modes of expression, and not for his idiosyncratic vision. Thus in his writings, lectures and in his travelogue-film, *Tempo di Viaggio*, Tarkovsky is forever explaining that art cinema is a unique entity quite distinct from the more generic term, "film."

The Frankfurt school critique only works for mainstream films. Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin either fail or refuse to recognize the art film, and the rather one-dimensional interpretation of their critique has long impoverished film aesthetics. To find a way for the cinema to redeem the status of film as a legitimate art, one must go back a bit further, oddly enough to some ideas developed long before the invention of the motion picture camera. One must return to the roots of western civilization.

Truth and Imitation

The problem I have been discussing is particularly acute in relation to cinema, but at the heart of the matter is a conflation between art-as-truth and art-as-beautiful-imitation. As a result of misreading Plato's "doctrine of mimesis" described in the *Republic*, a long shadow is cast over aesthetics, and proceeds to all but blot out film theory. The interpretation that Plato feared, mistrusted, and ultimately banished art is an assumption behind the lineage of western thought that developed from Vasari to the Enlightenment to Logical Positivism to Freud to Contemporary Critical Theory. In contrast is the position that Plato singled out a certain kind of art for ridicule, and esteemed another kind as highly as any other path to truth. This assumption leads to ideas about art shared by Romantic thinkers and the Russian Symbolists. If it is true that

we are all writing footnotes to Plato, it is of great importance to acknowledge how one understands Plato before proceeding any further.

The western cultural tradition begins with real coherent significance at Plato. It was he who first distinguished between two kinds of art. On the one side is mimesis: art which seeks to imitate the natural world as perfectly as possible. In contrast to mimesis is poetry: art which looks for insight or revelation. Poetry can be imitative, but it may also distort its subject in whatever way it sees fit, because accurate imitation is not, for poetry, an end in itself. Mimetic art must conform to laws deduced from scientific study while poetry is free to explore concerns which are more spiritual than intellectual. These generalizations should not be taken as hard and fast rules. By no means do I wish to suggest that every piece of art is one or the other, mimetic or poetic, amusing or truthful. For instance, though the Renaissance operated officially within an aesthetic of beauty, poetry can and often does emerge from it. This can happen in two ways. Pavel Florensky suggests that the power of Renaissance painters lies in their "mistakes" and "blunders," citing, for instance, Leonardo's *Last Supper* fresco as an example of a work that "acquires aesthetic persuasiveness" by violating, whether intentionally or not, perspectival unity" (*Beyond Vision* 228). Tarkovsky esteems Renaissance artists for different reasons. His belief was that such artists as Piero della Francesca and Leonardo da Vinci succeeded not by virtue of their ineptitude, but by transcending the limitations of the idiom. In addition to the possibility of this *self-overcoming*, each tradition also possesses degrees of value. To acknowledge that a Hollywood movie and Renaissance painting operate within the framework of a shared aesthetic is not to evaluate or judge

either of them; it is certainly not to suggest that they are equal as works of art. Renaissance art often shows the pinnacle of what can be accomplished with mimetic aesthetics, while Hollywood wallows at the nadir. Likewise to call a work "poetic" is not to immediately praise it, though I would contend that the achievements of poetry far outshine the achievements of mimesis.

When Plato writes of the problems with art, it is art obsessed with external representation that is his focus. In the *Republic* Socrates attacks imitation of apparent form. Of imitative poetry Socrates says that "all such things seem to pollute the understanding of those who hear them, unless they possess a knowledge of their real nature […]" (*Republic* X 595). This passage alone complicates the traditional view of Plato. Since it reads, "*unless* they possess a knowledge of their real nature," the implication is that there exist some poets, probably a special kind of poet, who does possess this kind of knowledge. Elsewhere in *Republic* Socrates speaks ambivalently of the imitation of *subtler things*: "the prudent and quiet character, which is always at one with itself, is not easily imitated, nor when imitated is it easily understood" (*Book X* 604). Clearly, he is not talking about apparent form in this context. Something else can be imitated, and it would seem that this aspect is more valuable when imitated truthfully than apparent form when it is imitated accurately. Moreover that which is prudent and quiet possesses greater value because it is more difficult to imitate. While the *Republic* does not expressly praise those who can imitate the "prudent and quiet character" it implies that they are to be admired above the imitators of appearances, because, as *Symposium* teaches, "the beauty of mind is more honourable than the beauty of outward

form" (*Works* 377). Perhaps this beauty of mind can be not *imitated*, but rather *suggested*. What then may suggest it? – The imitation of subtler things, of the prudent and quiet character.

A contemporary reader, Robert Hall, defines two forms of mimesis which he believes led Plato to distinguish between two different kinds of art; he calls them *imitative* and *impersonative* (76). Hall argues that Plato values the artist who presents a *form copy* rather than "exact appearances of appearances" (78). He uses Cezanne to demonstrate this difference, citing the artist's description of his own work: "I do not portray apples, oranges and vases," Cezanne says, "but rather cones, cylinders and spheres" (Hall 79). The form copy Hall describes certainly harkens back to Plato's hierarchy of forms, if one understands it to be the essence of the object. Indeed Plotinus seems to have this in mind when he says that "to admire a representation is to admire the original upon which it was made" (Hofstadter 159). The essential nature of a thing is always internal, that is, inside the thing. The mistake imitators of appearances make is that they reproduce the outside which, though a manifestation of the inside, is always a distortion. The imitator of form, if Cezanne is an example, reproduces the inside. In reference to film one need only think of Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* alongside *King Arthur* or any other film on the same subject whose primary aim is to be epic and spectacular. The Clive Owen action film has better costumes and more realistic battle scenes, but Bresson's work shows complex human interaction and shifting emotional states. In *Lancelot* characters relate to one another like real flesh and blood human beings instead of larger than life mythical figures. While *King Arthur* hits all the major

plot points with serious facial expressions, Bresson worries about what is on the inside of his characters.

Hall makes a second important point that is all the more pertinent when this dichotomy is brought to contemporary film criticism. He argues that impersonative art breaks down the psychical distance that maintains the balance between the viewer and the object that is necessary for proper contemplation. This is a special problem in cinema, because the means of film make it very easy to break down such distance. I discussed this in the first part of this chapter in reference to Bela Balazs. The most influential body of theory yet developed within Film Studies is based upon the idea that spectator identification is the fundamental aesthetic principle of cinema. Balazs argues in *Theory of the Film*: "Hollywood invented an art which disregards the principle of self-contained composition and not only does away with the distance between the spectator and the work but deliberately created the illusion in the spectator that he is in the middle of the action reproduced in the fictional space of the film" (Andrew, *Major Film Theories* 98). Hollywood did not actually invent this aesthetic principle; it merely refined it to its basest stuff. Tarkovsky for one does not consider what Balazs calls an "achievement" to be that exactly. He takes a contrary position, acknowledging that his films must uphold the delicate balance between distance and immersion. Sliding too far toward either side would result in artistic failure. Tarkovsky does not make representations to seduce his viewer, but, in Florensky's words to: "signify symbolically life's deepest reality" (*Beyond Vision* 209). That which is depicted in a work of art must resonate with the

viewer's internal life, and not relate solely to his or her superficial observation of apparent reality.

Aristotle shifted the emphasis of Plato's dichotomy between narrative art and imitative art to arrive at the suggestion that, "the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions" (*Poetics* IX). When one says of a movie that it captures something true to life, he or she is usually referring to the acting. One of the great advantages of a Cassavetes movie or a Mike Leigh movie over anything by Ron Howard or Robert Redford lies in the proximity of their characters to real people; people whose behavior is inconsistent from one moment to the next. The problem with the acting in mainstream movies is that it bears no resemblance to real life behavior or interaction. The poet is more than an imitator of events because he not only puts events into a narrative sequence, but also possesses knowledge of their true nature. Poetry is the ability to impart that truth, and not the ability to put events into a recognizable sequence.

Hans Georg Gadamer argued that Plato recognized separate artistic categories for looking like a thing and revealing the truth about a thing. He points out that Plato ceases to use the word "mimesis" and begins to use instead "methexis" in order to express a more complex idea about imitation. According to Gadamer, Plato uses "methexis" to, "bring out the logical connection of the many to the one" (*Great Thinkers on Plato* Ed. Barry Gross 11). This "thing in common" is the avenue for communion. When Aristotle talks about imitation he is no doubt describing methexis rather than mimesis: "Thus the reason men enjoy seeing a likeness is that in contemplating it they find themselves

learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he'" (*Poetics* IV). This can certainly be understood to refer to the mere recognition of the object that has been copied. But Aristotle means that the act of recognition precludes participation in the first place. *That is he* does not hold the same meaning as *that looks like he* – that "is" shows being a part as opposed to copying an "other."

As ideas concerning imitation develop in subsequent Platonism, art moves toward the exalted space that logic holds in the "allegory of the cave." Especially in Plotinus where all things are imitations insofar as they emanate from the One and art speaks to a transcendent faculty that logic and empiricism cannot reveal. Plotinus is concerned with the development of the soul and develops the idea that all things we perceive are emanations from the One. What is the purpose of creativity in this regard? – "[B]ecome man, he has ceased to be All; ceasing to be man – we read – 'he soars aloft and administers the Cosmos entire'; restored to All he is the maker of the All'" (Hofstadter 158). For Plotinus the creative capacity of the human being is the potential he has to achieve participation in the One. The better the art, the more certainly this communion occurs in the spectator. The best art transforms the viewer, and elevates him, if only briefly, into the All, into an awareness of his participation. As Plotinus says, "To see the divine as something external is to be outside of it; to become it is to be most truly in beauty […]" (162) This participation has long been understood to be a function of art, especially by artists.

Tolstoy absorbed it, and throughout his essay, *What is Art?*, he repeats that the best art is accessible to all men, in order to emphasize that art makes the individual feel a

part of the collective that he calls the "brotherhood of man." Tarkovsky adds another dimension to this picture. He understands that reason is artificial and thus he argues that, however highly subjective it may be, poetry bears a closer relation than logic to the workings of the mind and soul. This is why great art tends to be so idiosyncratic. So, "[The viewer must become] a participant in the process of discovering life, unsupported by ready-made deductions from the plot or ineluctable pointers by the author" (*Sculpting* 20). Recognition of a likeness is not participation. It is rather a game that keeps the viewer on the surface of reality. It is fun and at times it makes one feel smart or emotionally satisfied but it cannot penetrate beneath the surface where truth most often lies.

It is the twentieth-century Hegelian philosopher, Robin George Collingwood, whose assessment of the doctrine of mimesis specifically suggests that Plato made a division between a kind of art that we would today be more apt to call "entertainment" and the kind of art that for purposes of analogy we may call "high" art. Collingwood says the argument against imitative art did not "concern tragedy in its religious or magical form, to which it would be wholly irrelevant," but only "tragedy as a form of amusement" (Gross 266). By this he does not mean the religious or magical function of art in an aboriginal or tribal sense. Religious art is art that helps bring about a religious experience in the viewer. What is religious experience but heightened awareness and the deliberative, attentive process of self re-evaluation? In the centuries that follow Plato's time, art as religious experience is manifest in the western tradition through works of particular religious content: icons, altarpieces, cathedral frescoes and devotional

sculptures, such as the pietá and the *Vesperbild*. Pavel Florensky even suggests that the church service itself is the most fully realized aesthetically and spiritually complete work of art.

In modernity the circumstances have changed, and the Bible stories and biblical characters which populate almost fifteen hundred years of western cultural production remain a source of inspiration to fewer and fewer artists. Thus many of the great artists of the twentieth century, Tarkovsky certainly among them, have been forced to explain that their works are spiritual. Removed from the legitimacy granted by the Church, artists have had to defend the idea that their works have a religious or "magical" function. Many who have worked outside the Church have described their art to be religious as an important part of defining the seriousness of the work.

That the function of art and the function of religion coincide may not be the impression Plato gives in the *Republic*, but in the *Symposium* he suggests as much:

> But souls which are pregnant – for there are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies – conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions? – wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor" (376).

Plato does not condemn art; he warns against art that is merely beauty of form and against inappropriate appreciation of such works. In this sense Plato appears to have a very modern view of art. The argument may seem anachronistic because the art vs. entertainment quandary, being a special problem for the cinema, seems therefore a poignantly contemporary phenomenon. Collingwood points out that this attitude has always manifested itself in human consciousness; it is not merely the result of technology. "Plato lived at a time when the religious art of the earlier Greeks, such as the

Olympian sculptures and the Aeschylean drama, had decisively given way to the new amusement art of the Hellenistic age" (Gross 267). It is not unusual to talk about the Greek ideal of perfection as if flawless imitation of surface appearance were only imaginable purpose for art. Plato, however, envisioned another kind of art that was wholly at odds with the art of copying appearance. His system elevates any and all things that allow one to see the world more clearly. The art Plato wanted banished was that which merely shows the world as one has long known it. In the ancient world this problem manifested itself in the difference between Classical and Hellenistic sculpture. The ideal forms of the Classical artists make vivid the viewer's perception of his or her everyday reality. They teach one to see the perfect form that lies beneath all outwardly imperfect manifestations. The Hellenistic artists revel in their abilities to distort recognizable, naturalistic appearance. Their works do not reveal the essence of forms so much as celebrate the possibilities of apparent representation.

One must remember that in Plato everything in the sensible world is an imitation. Understanding the hierarchy is crucial to understanding the status of art. Another recent commentator, W.J. Verdinius explains that "[T]he degree of reality of anything is dependent upon its degree of approximation to eternal Being. The empirical world does not represent true reality, but is only an approximation to it (*Mimesis* 16). For Tarkovsky the important thing about the Platonic model is not the order of the hierarchy of forms, but the fundamental insight from which the hierarchy is drawn. This leads him to refer to art as *the yearning for the ideal*. It is a common enough notion that the journey is more important than the destination. That an ideal exists in some unknowable realm is less

important than the need to come into contact with it. One of the most important things Plato teaches is that Truth can never be directly experienced. The Ideal can never be actualized. The One can never be sensible. The problem for humanity is to find ways to point toward truth, or to give some sense of the ideal, or to provide an avenue for a fleeting communion with the One. This is the yearning of which Tarkovsky speaks.

The twentieth century American philosopher, John Dewey developed a compelling formulation of the art and entertainment dichotomy. He regarded the act of recognition, upon which aesthetics of beauty are built, as the source of amusement at best. Genuine art, he explained, provides an experience that teaches new perception:

> [R]eceptivity is not passivity. It, too, is a process consisting of a series of responsive acts that accumulate toward objective fulfillment. Otherwise, there is no perception, but recognition. The difference between the two is immense. Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is the beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve development of a full perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some *other* purpose, as we recognize a man on the street in order to greet or to avoid him, not so as to see him for the sake of seeing what is there (*Art as Experience* 52).

Dewey does not acknowledge a debt here to Plato, but this very distinction bubbles up throughout his works. What Dewey called "recognition" and "perception," Plato discusses within the framework of "mimesis" and "poetry." Mimetic art aims at looking like something in the world. Its function is to inspire in the beholder admiration for the artist's technical mastery and marvel at the sheer beauty of the object. In contrast, poetry stirs the inner life of the viewer to provoke spiritual communion and personal change. Beyond mere recognition, poetry elevates the spirit, bringing the spectator, reader or listener into communion with the One which is found internally. Recognition is to see something outside one's self. Participation happens only when truth is revealed and thus

shows the unity of a separate object or individual with the viewer. This fleeting moment of communion is participation in the One.

Let us consider the so-called "Allegory of the Cave," as a parable about the function of art. For it is not only logic, but also poetry which, "Shows that there resides in each man's soul this faculty and the instrument wherewith he learns, and that it is just as if the eye could not turn from darkness to light unless the whole body turned to it; so this faculty and instrument must be wheeled round together with the whole soul away from that which is becoming, until it is able to look upon and endure being the brightest blaze of being…" (*VII* 518). Just before recounting the allegory, Socrates posits four states of the soul: intelligence, understanding, faith, and imagining in that order of importance. Leaving aside the hierarchy for a moment, there is no suggestion that the duality implicit in turning from dark to light applies only to intelligence i.e. reason. In all four aspects the norm is to treat the human soul as a vessel to be filled. Socrates as usual suggests a position contrary to the norm that in all four aspects true insights will only come through clear perception. Art differs from reason, and mimesis is art trying its hardest to be reasonable.

Giorgio Agamben describes what we are left with when all art is understood in mimetic terms and none of it in poetic terms. He argues that we live in an age in which all human activity is reduced to *praxis* (*The Man without Content* 68). Because human production is valued by its practical function, we have come to think of art as impractical, and activity of whimsy and fancy, and thus we have lost a sense of the religious and magical functions of poetry. The mimetic aesthetics casts a long shadow, as evidenced

by a longstanding tradition of attempts to challenge praxis that are doomed to fail because they are locked within praxis. The tradition I mentioned earlier that is currently culminating in contemporary critical theory is but a critique of praxis locked inside praxis. Aesthetics is trapped inside praxis until it employs poiesis. "What the Greeks meant," he writes, "with the distinction between poiesis and praxis was precisely that the essence of poiesis has nothing to do with expression of a will […]: this essence is found instead in the production of truth…" (72). Art is not a pastime; it is the practice of learning how to be human. The notion that art makes us more fully human was perhaps most aggressively asserted throughout the work of Nietzsche, who calls art "the great stimulus to life" (*Twilight of the Idols* 81). This was once a given principle of what used to be called "humanism." These days most people who use the word do so pejoratively to suggest that humanists are people who don't believe in souls. Meanwhile post-modernism has flattened values and standards for all kinds of cultural products so that art no longer holds the special place to which Nietzsche elevated it.

Mimesis measures beauty by the perfection of representation. The beauty tradition shares this fallacy with nearly all attempts to revise it. For instance, feminist art historians typically disagree with Kenneth Clarke's assessment of the nude. For Clarke the nude is idealized beauty of form, while for the revisionist it is an early form of pornography. Both parties take for granted that art is subject to external rules and regulations. Clarke teaches us to judge works by the degree to which they live up to (imaginary) objective standards of beauty. Revisionists merely substitute political correctness for beauty as the objective standard. Perhaps some art can be judged by such

standards; indeed film criticism, especially in its popular form, grades movies according to how well each one accomplishes the objective of looking like a movie is supposed to look. Connoisseurs, usually called "film buffs," using language inherited from the likes of Roger Ebert, Leonard Maltin, A.O. Scott and Pauline Kael, believe they are actually saying something of substance about a film when they describe it as "well-done." All that this phrase means is that the movie looks like a movie in the most generic ways possible. This aesthetic completely shuts out poetry because the films of a poet exceed even the most sophisticated rules or expectations

Tarkovsky's understanding of the origin of art is Platonic. Tarkovsky believes that an artist is supposed to be a medium for what he calls God and what Plato called the Muses. The responsibility of the poet is to recount the message of the Muses or God as accurately and honestly as he or she can. Honesty is the source of variety. Honesty is why all poetry looks different and its absence is why all mimetic art looks the same. "The meaning of an artistic image is necessarily unexpected, since it is a record of how one individual has seen the world in the light of his own idiosyncrasies." (*Sculpting* 169) Idiosyncrasy is exactly what the processes of mimesis strive to eliminate. According to mimetic poetics there is but a single objective standard by which all things are measured, and there is but one goal that can be achieved. Tarkovsky's art is not a representation of the subject, but the relation between the object and the subject (the artist). For instance a van Gogh painting of sunflowers is really a painting of, in the words of D. H. Lawrence, "the vivid relation between himself, as man, and the sunflower, as sunflower, at that quick moment of time." For, he continues, "We shall never know what the sunflower

itself is. And the camera will *visualize* the sunflower far more perfectly than van Gogh." (*Selected Literary Criticism* 108) The last sentence is Tarkovsky's challenge, and it is the challenge for any filmmaker who wants to be a poet.

Chapter Two: Tarkovsky Contra Modernism

> In one form or another all my films have made the point that people are not alone and abandoned in an empty universe, but are linked by countless threads with the past and future; that as each person lives his life he forges a bond with the whole world, indeed with the whole history of mankind…But the hope that each separate life and every human action has intrinsic meaning makes the responsibility of the individual for the overall course of human life incalculably greater.
>
> --Andrei Tarkovsky

In the previous chapter I endeavored to show that Tarkovsky and Plato reject aesthetics of mimesis on the same grounds, both holding that art is capable of much more than accurate copies of the appearance of objects and events. In this chapter I want to contrast Tarkovsky's rejection of mimesis with the modernist rejection of mimesis. My aim is to rebut the widely held notion that Tarkovsky is a modernist, and to suggest ways in which one can be a relevant artist of the modern period without being a modernist. First it is important to note that Tarkovsky is well aware of his place in the western artistic tradition. Little doubt could be raised that Tarkovsky sincerely believed that he had a special role to play in the history of art. It is his intention, often hinted at if not explicitly claimed throughout his books and interviews, to be part of the poetic tradition, and probably to teach, in some way, his viewers and readers about that tradition as well. This tradition, as was stated in the Introduction, includes Shakespeare, Bruegel, seventeenth century Dutch painting, Byzantine and Russian icon painting, the Russian literary tradition from Pushkin to Andrei's father, Arseny Tarkovsky, and German Romanticism from Goethe to E.T.A. Hoffman. This is a rather disparate list. Hopefully the previous chapter has laid the framework through I explore what binds these artists together beyond the desire to make spiritually significant art.

Though he does not mention every single artist from my list by name, it is clear from the painters and writers that he does talk about, and from the way he describes his artistic goals and beliefs, that Tarkovsky puts himself at the end of a long line of artists with whom he feels he has much in common. Consciously and verbally Tarkovsky associates himself with a history of artists and writers who insist that the spiritual function of art is its most important aspect. Sometimes this poetics is radical, reactionary, and often fiercely religious, as it is, for instance, with Tolstoy. He dismissed the creation of the *merely pretty* which describes only the surface of visible things, and instead argued that art should aim to be *genuinely beautiful*, which would impart moral and ethical truth. Tolstoy believed this was Plato's understanding as well, though his penchant for matter-of-fact and didactic phrasing may seem opposed to Plato, who did not believe it was the poet's job to make arguments. By many accounts Tolstoy slips into argument-making too often in even his greatest novels. Tarkovsky for one finds the preachy Tolstoy to be Tolstoy at his worst. The great writer is better, he believes, when he forgets his message and allows the depth of his characters and the breadth of his narrative to do the truth-telling.

The reader must be careful not to mistake this kind of truth-telling for the gathering of right answers. It is rather the experience of vivid perception that plunges one into the wells of personal questioning and re-evaluation. It is experience of Christ's teaching and not the blind submission to the rules set up by organized religion which constitutes salvation for Tolstoy and indeed the whole Tarkovsky tradition leans in this direction. This salvation is not decided by conversion; it is constantly reconsidered and

renewed by each individual. If art can save the world it can do so only person by person and not *en masse*. Tolstoy gets this from his understanding of Christianity, which is, of course, anti-institutional and deeply individualistic. The Brotherhood of Man, which he wants to help bring into being, emerges not from the masses following orthodox rules, but from each person's spiritual relationship with his or her fellow human beings based upon intense devotion to the teachings of Christ. In this view merely pretty things have no spiritual use because they have no moral or ethical dimension.

Meyer Schapiro says that abstract art (he is talking about non-figurative art of the 1930's, 40's and 50's with particular attention to the Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko) acts as a vehicle for spiritual communion in a world bereft of such possibility (see "The Nature of Abstract Art" and "Recent Abstract Painting" in *Modern Art*). But the idea that this can be the function of art is not new to our age. Tarkovsky believes that spiritual communion is the proper function of art. Moreover, spiritual communion through art, like communion through religious practices, has ethical and moral results. A genuine religious experience demonstrably changes the subject for the better. Mark Le Fanu explains:

> In a post-modernist world, where a majority of film-makers disdain certainty in favour of irony and spectacle, he insisted on the importance of values. Truth, for him, existed as a fact; as well as its opposite, lying and falsehood. A proper attention to cinema (his cinema, and the cinema of the great masters) could teach us to live better – better citizens, and deeper human beings. Are such claims preposterous, or can they be put modestly and sensibly?"[ii]

This is the crucial difference between the spiritual function Schapiro attributes to abstract art and the function of art for Tarkovsky. The former transforms the individual's consciousness amorally while the latter has specific ethical and moral aims. Pollock,

Rothko, Kandinsky and other non-figurative painters appeal strictly to the individuality of the spirit; they want to lift the individual out of the mire of what we may call the fallen world. As Schapiro says, this kind of art gives the viewer an alternative to the world (see "The Nature of Abstract Art"). This is not so with Tarkovsky nor with Bruegel nor Tolstoy. They want the viewer or reader to learn something from their art that he or she can take into the world and make it better.

It is often argued that this kind of aim is what properly separates philosophy from art and not one kind of art from another kind. Tarkovsky's critics find fault with his philosophical dialog while many of his fans count it among the most interesting aspects of his work. Yet both misunderstand the function. The dialog never states the lesson we are supposed to learn. Tarkovsky's characters are more Socratic or like characters from a Shakespearean tragedy: they all have opportunity to say profound and eloquent things that don't add up to one singular vision; they all are allowed to suggest equally tenable worldviews without making the viewer feel that one view is the correct one. This leaves one with a contradiction: the problem posed by the sermons given by the protagonists of nearly all of his films. They are speeches made by characters, and they are highly contextualized and complicated by the rest of the narrative. In fact they are usually fully undercut by some negating factor. Even when a character says something that sounds as though it came straight from Tarkovsky's journals or book, the context usually indicates self-critique. Tarkovsky knows that even his own most deeply held beliefs about religion, art, men and women are as tenuous as anything else.

The crucial point of contrast here lies between two spiritual traditions: one which focuses on spirituality *in the world* and thus insists that the function of art is to teach the spectator how to live better and the other which sees art as a vehicle for a temporary, spiritual escape *from* the difficult business of living. Modernism's bent toward abstraction amounts to art for art's sake, what Schapiro describes as art for the purpose of spiritual release from the world. This idea is more exhaustively developed in the aesthetics of Schopenhauer, who argued that the best art takes one to "the painless state which Epicurus prized as the highest good and as the state of the gods; for [in it] we are for the moment set free from the miserable striving of the will" (Hofstadter 457). The great distance between Tarkovsky and the modernists is highlighted by the traditional interpretation of Plato's aesthetics. The modernists, especially their critical spokesmen from Schapiro to Greenberg, stand Plato on his head and take, in their different ways, a position contrary to his. Anyone who has studied the history of painting even a little knows that imitation of appearance has not always been the aim of the artist. When Socrates asks Glaucon if a painter makes a bed "in a manner" (596), I am reminded of the response Matisse is said to have given to a woman who complained that a painting of his didn't look like a woman, because the proportions were wrong: "You are mistaken madam, for this is not a woman after all, it is a painting." There is certainly truth in this witticism, but for the Modernists it is the whole truth and for Tarkovsky such truth is insufficient.

When Renaissance painting and sculpture were held as the standards for artistic achievement, Socrates' critique of mimesis made it seem as though art were un-truth in

the Platonist worldview. Since we now accept numerous aesthetic values outside the aims of the Renaissance Masters, we should be willing to reevaluate Plato's ideas about art. Since Plato does not respect the object as having any reality unto itself, at least not an imitative object, the modernist has to reject his aesthetic system. "Does a bed really differ from itself when you look at it from the side or from straight in front or from any other point of view, or does it remain the same but appear different?" (*Republic* X 598) Plato's implied answer, of course, is to affirm the latter, but the achievements of Picasso and Braque among others has put this certainty in doubt. The Cubists taught us to see the world differently, to disagree with the assumption Plato would have found so basic. Even when painting from nature or from models, the works of Van Gogh, Cézanne and Picasso have little to do with naturalistic imitation. Their genius lies in their ability to transform their subjects. Plato's critique of painters as imitators surely means little to them and their followers.

Gertrude Stein pointed this out on the first page of her book about Picasso: "In the nineteenth century painters discovered the need of always having a model in front of them, in the twentieth century they discovered that they must never look at a model" (1). For the great modern painters the primary object is the painting itself and not the thing they were looking at when they painted. Stein argues that Picasso painted as he did because he did not see the same thing everyone else saw; he saw a different reality (43). If abstract painters represent anything they represent their own idiosyncratic perception. While one may regard this as an inner truth, it is unclear whether or not Plato would have objected. To be fair it seems to me unlikely that Plato's aesthetics can be used either

negatively or positively to assess abstract art as there is little doubt that he could never have imagined such an art as Picasso's.

Abstract art only pushes forward the authority of the painting as the primary object. What could we say Jackson Pollock was looking at when he painted? It doesn't matter what he saw, but what he created. Why? To return to Stein: "The painter does not conceive himself as existing in himself, he conceives himself as a reflection of the objects he has put into his pictures and he lives in the reflections of his pictures" (4). Though she says this to distinguish the writer from the painter, it describes just as well the difference between modern art and any art that insists on a representational poetics. What the art of the modernists has tried so hard to impress upon its audience is the value of personal vision and of the truth of the subjective over the objective standard. The modern artist is the first artist to describe his art as a thing unto itself rather than strictly as a representation of something else.

One idea that emerges out of modernism is that art is a form of play. Art as play is another kind of modernist protest against Plato, and it is developed comprehensively by Sigmund Freud. Freud relies on the traditional interpretation of Plato's *Republic*, namely that Plato has a grudge against art and artists, so he banishes them and their works from his ideal state. Freud formulates his ideas about art within the constraints of amusement terminology. He wonders why Man has the specific need to amuse himself with representations of objects and events. Characteristic of Freud is the conclusion that it amounts to an adult manifestation of wish fulfillment where the artist represents the object as he wants to see it or the event as he wanted it to happen. Johan Huizinga,

Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Stanley Fish add separate and unique nuances, sometimes taking the argument in directions to which Freud would no doubt object. Yet each, at the foundation of his view of art, maintains that art is essentially a form of pretending.

What does it mean to talk about art as play? If it is *divine* play which has the effect of putting one in communion with truth, then it is something quite different than play as conceived by Freud and the philosophers and critics who followed his lead. Play that illuminates the truth is different from play that pacifies the ego. Freud's play, like all the varieties of play discussed by those mentioned above, is the adult version, the mature version of childish wish fulfillment whose purpose is to keep the playing individual mentally healthy. Of course it could be argued that this is equivalent to an emotional or psychic release in the same way that abstract art is a spiritual release, and we again have a terminology problem. At any rate it seems to me more trouble than it is worth to insist on using the word play since we live in a world at once barely conversant in Platonic terminology and rife with Freudian concepts and vocabulary. "Play" would first have to be redeemed from it Freudian limitations. It would have to be removed from one critical lexicon and incorporated into the other, from the beauty aesthetic to the poetic view of art.

Furthermore, there are different kinds of play. Picasso presents an eloquent case for the value and insight of Freud's kind of play, but Tarkovsky demands the weight of Plato's divine play. This is not to say that Picasso is a less important artist or even a less serious artist than Tarkovsky, but he is more "playful" in an important sense. Picasso is

light, childlike and whimsical even if he is very serious about being those things. Tarkovsky is heavy, burdened by his adulthood, and methodical. The attitude with which the viewer confronts their works has to be altogether different. Tarkovsky insists on reverence and patience. You have to be an adult when watching his movies. Picasso wants you to be a child before his paintings – a child who is very serious about being a child – but a child nonetheless.

Tarkovsky shares with many Modernists the proclivity to fill his movies with allusions to art history. *Rublyov* and *Zerkalo* in particular seem especially comparable to the works of James Joyce and Ezra Pound in their desire to tell the story of humanity as the story of cultural production. This is why the annotations to the works of Joyce and Pound are usually much longer than the works themselves, so dense is the forest of literary, philosophical and art historical reference. Yet this practice was not so much invented by Modernism, as driven to its apex. Before *Finnegan's Wake* and *The Cantos* many great artists were adept at distilling their influences and making reference to the longstanding cultural traditions that preceded their own works. Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Bruegel, to name but a few artists important to Tarkovsky, each try to show the world through narratives of a particular cultural history.

The works of those mentioned above, like the films of Tarkovsky, are distinct from the works of modernists in terms of how they use references to other works, because they do not demand that the spectator chase down every reference to every word in order to appreciate the work. Tarkovsky's narrative is a narrative on its own, and the viewer's knowledge of particular reference points will certainly enrich his or her appreciation of

that narrative, but it is not strictly necessary in the sense in which knowledge of the literature and languages of the world are almost indispensable to reading *Finnegan's Wake*. The stories in Joyce's last two seminal works do not matter in the least. Neither do the characters matter. The events do not matter. *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* are all wordplay and reference. They are incredibly complex games of style and erudition. Not so with Tarkovsky. The old pre-modernist concerns of narrative and characterization are indispensable in Tarkovsky's films.

The conflict between the tradition of admiration for beauty which exalts mimesis and the tradition of soul searching that often must reject mimesis in pursuit of spiritual growth and progress is the subject of E. H. Gombrich's *Preference for the Primitive*. The primitive as Gombrich discusses it is quite distinct from the primitivism of modern art. Primitivism as it is commonly understood concerns modernist art inspired by Oceania, Africa, Aboriginal Australians and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. In Gombrich's book, however, such artists as Gauguin, Picasso, Klee and Brancusi turn up as asides when they do turn up at all. It is crucial to understand the difference, because, while Tarkovsky certainly has a preference for what Gombrich calls "primitive," there is not a shred of such modernist primitivism in his films.

Primitivism is the modernism of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, whose cinematic analogue would have to be a Werner Herzog who made three films on Conrad's theme of the lone western who man loses track of his civilized self as he descends deeper into the jungle. Though both directors are interested in it, their attitudes toward nature put them at the opposite ends of a wide spectrum. In Herzog man and nature are always in

conflict, hence his interest in the Conrad myth that puts a modern man in the primeval jungle. The modern man spends too much time with the savages and eventually becomes a more base form of his own self, since he is incapable of becoming a savage. Tarkovsky, by stark contrast, views nature as the temple in which one momentarily steps out of the modern world to commune with God. In nature one aspires to his or her highest self. It is good to stay at the dacha in the country, to chop wood, till a garden and otherwise work with nature in a cooperative way. This is different from the primitivism of the modernist painters who seek to get their humanity back by living "like the savages," because it maintains the importance of knowledge and civilized endeavor. A filmmaker could hardly advocate wholesale dismissal of technology. It contrasts more acutely with the primitivism of modernist writers like Conrad who view modern man fighting a losing battle against nature. If Herzog is his heir, the end of his *Aguirre: the Wrath of God* comes into sharp focus as an image of this doomed destiny: the title character (Klaus Kinski) alone on a boat crawling with monkeys, picks one up and turns it over in his hands, studying it as if searching for himself in its tiny, almost human visage, then throws it down in disgust and fear.

Finding one's self alone in the universe is a familiar enough aspect of modernism even when it is not predicated on a negative view of the primitive. A modernist has three options: He can surround himself with like-minded artists and bohemians, as did the members of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter, the signatories of the Surrealist, Futurist and Dadaist manifestos, and the individuals who came together without the aegis of a title as did Picasso, Camus and Stein in the Paris of the 1920's. The modernist can impose his

self on a culture he considers innocent as did Gauguin in an extreme case. The third option for the modernist is to embrace his loneliness as a necessary condition for his creativity. Van Gogh, Cezanne, James Joyce and Wallace Stevens are only a few of the great artist-as-loner figures mythologized by modernism. As persecuted as he believed himself to be, Tarkovsky never believed he was alone. Indeed a filmmaker cannot indulge in such fantasies, because he cannot retreat to his studio or his study for months at a time to create his work. A filmmaker's work is created on a location or a set with cameramen, sound and lighting technicians, boom-microphone operators, line producers and dozens of other behind-the-scenes personnel in addition to the actors being filmed. Filmmaking is not a lonely vocation.

Beyond the practicalities of his work, Tarkovsky was ideologically opposed to the idea of the individual adrift in an indifferent universe. He insisted on every person's relation to his or her family, and he often spoke with particular enthusiasm about the social responsibility of the artist. Nor are his characters ever alone, not even when they try to be. They are usually part of a family and always, whether they accept this fact or not, they are part of the Brotherhood of Man; their actions have consequences for others, both immediate and at large. Aleksandr swears off contact with his family in order to save them along with the rest of humanity. Yet his refusal to speak fails to sever the ties. The last line of *Offret* is Little Man asking a question of his father even as the ambulance takes him away.

The return to nature must not be underestimated as a key aspect of this problem. The Romantic view anticipates modernism's fascination with touching the void and

exploring the primitive or animal nature of humanity. Tarkovsky on the other hand conceived of nature as a place of everyday worship. In this way Tarkovsky has something very important in common with Renaissance artists: he works from nature. But his way of working from nature is essentially different, both practically and ideologically. The filmmaker never need learn how to copy nature, because the camera does that automatically. Since he records nature directly, Tarkovsky's interest in nature is quite different: he does not worry that the image *looks* like nature; he tries to have the time in the shot *feel* like nature. Tarkovsky achieves this in part, and in the most superficial way, by relying heavily on the footage of nature. *Solaris* begins with several panning shots of water flowing over weeds, grasses, reeds, mosses. The camera tilts up to reveal Kris Kelvin among the vegetation. He does not act, but stands passively as if he were part of the scenery. Tarkovsky then cuts to a patch of weeds swaying beneath the water. The camera zooms in very slowly for approximately half a minute on this subject, with the singular sound of running water on the soundtrack. More footage of nature follows, usually with Kelvin placed in the scene as an observer. Here Tarkovsky seems to play on the viewer's psychological inclination to connect to on-screen characters, as if to say, "Do you see what this man is doing? You should regard nature in exactly the same way." It is analogous to Japanese printmaking in which a tiny human figure is sometimes just barely discernible in a nature scene.

Often Tarkovsky goes even further, submerging a character into nature almost totally. This is different from the peaceful and attentive regard for nature described above, which is all mental, while submergence is a physical encounter. About ten

minutes into *Solaris*, Kelvin stands in a rainstorm while everyone else seeks cover. He stands perfectly still as the thousands of tiny droplets splash off his face and soak into his sweater. The title character of *Stalker* reacts likewise upon reaching the Zone, as he lies amidst the weeds. The camera holds on a full shot for a few seconds as the breeze moves the plants around him. The next shot lasts nearly half a minute and consists of a close-up of the back of Stalker's head surrounded by grasses. These images from *Stalker* and *Solaris* suggest the dissolution of the human character in nature, as Tarkovsky shows the potential for a single human being to be transformed into a part of a larger whole.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp – Art as Such: the Sociology of Modern Aesthetics*, M. H. Abrams discusses the development of an attitude toward art that brings it closer to the religious experience that emerged in the eighteenth century in Germany and England. This was not so much a new attitude as the revival of an ancient one. Referring to Abrams in *Preference for the Primitive* Gombrich stresses, "I do not think it is an accident that throughout the eighteenth century the countries in which the turn towards primitivism occurs were originally Protestant" (49). Their art has always been more primitive, more concerned with spiritual experience than perfect representations of reality. English, German, Flemish and Dutch artists arrived at perspectival representation only after studying the Italians. That they refused to adopt Italian techniques wholesale is evident in the works of Albrecht Dürer who, despite his enthusiasm for the Italian style, remains deeply entrenched in the northern tradition. One need only recall Calvin's newfound enthusiasm for iconoclasm as evidence that the northern spirit could not easily digest naturalistic representation.

During the Renaissance, while the Italians were trying to live up to what they believed were Greek ideals of proportion and perspective, painters in Flanders, the Netherlands and Germany were trying to accurately paint light. Though van Eyck, van Dyck, de Hooch and Vermeer probably would say that their interest lay in accurate representation of reality, few would call what they did "imitation" in the sense that we understand the word today, since they concerned themselves primarily with light instead of naturalistic modeling, linear perspective and volumetric configuration. Additionally, Plato's critique of mimesis can hardly apply to the abstract art created since the end of the nineteenth century. The mimesis of which Socrates speaks applies most directly to naturalistic representation. When the bird pecks at the grapes Zeuxis painted, it does so not because of the psychological effects of light or the emotional associations of color, but because the grapes look real: they appear to be three-dimensional and they have the right texture.

Tarkovsky's preference for Byzantine artists and for artists of the "Northern Renaissance" rather than the Italian tradition is not so idiosyncratic as one may at first imagine. Gombrich and Abrams suggest some of the cultural connections. Russian icon painting is a tradition rooted in Byzantine icon painting. Sergei Bulgakov claims that the origin of Russian symbolism is to be found in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (*Sophiology* 5). Anne Hollander's *Moving Pictures* often suggests that Flemish and Dutch painting are closer to the Russian worldview than to the Latin West. She writes of three fundamental aspects of Netherlandish art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that are helpful toward understanding Tarkovsky's position in the Western tradition. They are interested

in optical effects, in using oil to achieve luminosity and they appeal to the individual eye rather than the "common gaze of a convoked audience" (*Moving Pictures* 5), and they create an impression of narrative. The first two characteristics are part of the fundamental makeup of cinema. Since its beginning, film has been concerned with optical effects; experiments with this led to the invention of the motion picture camera. Luminosity, as well, is a concern of any filmmaker in the traditional sense of the medium. Film, as opposed to video, only works when light shines through celluloid. While most commercial filmmakers take this fact for granted, the best film artists have always consciously manipulated the luminosity of their images.

Sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch painting like the work of de Hooch and Vermeer is meant to be suggestive. The viewer is meant to respond to the movement of light, or the suggestion of movement that has infinite psychological connotations. By contrast Renaissance painting and the earlier Dutch masterworks of Van der Weyden and Van Eyck is iconological – everything in the picture has a denotative meaning. Carl Jung describes this difference in terms of a dichotomy of "symbols" and "signs." A sign stands for something else specific and singular while a symbol recalls something else at the very same time it suggests infinite associations. This is why iconographic language is not poetic language. On the one hand we have signs, mimesis and beauty. On the other are symbol, poetry and truth.

Film can never aspire to mimesis, because it is mimesis by virtue of technology. Therefore, film cannot be iconographic because it is inherently mimetic. The problem artistically is how the filmmaker records reality and what he does with the various chunks

of reality he records. In mainstream Hollywood cinema the filmmaker loads the images with signs. Tarkovsky, like his friend and esteemed colleague, Robert Bresson, sees this practice as evidence of film's unhealthy relation to theatre. Both speak frequently of the problem of treating cinema as a means to merely put scripts onto celluloid. Tarkovsky once described seeing a character in a play clutch a red scarf to his chest to indicate blood. He thought it a brilliant device for the stage, but believed such artifice is redundant to be cinema. One does not need something to stand for something else. That is why the films that do this are usually bad art.

Though he is often referred to as avant-garde (see especially P. Adams Sitney), Tarkovsky fails in every possible respect to live up to the standards of the avant-garde as it is famously defined by, Clement Greenberg. The crucial aspect of avant-garde according to Greenberg is that it be abstract; it must either distort the figure as do the works of Picasso, or must be totally non-figurative like the works of Pollack. Tarkovsky not only stayed away from this in his own work; he reprimanded it in the work of others, most demonstrably as he berates Stan Brakhage for his "scientific" films (nostalghia.com), in response to Brakhage's attempt to convince Tarkovsky that his films were poetry. For Tarkovsky film is narrative. He never thought of it any other way. Even *Zerkalo*, which at first glance seem abstruse, remains fairly straightforward in the respect that it unfolds the story of a man's life with images of his life, albeit somewhat non-linearly. Yet it remains far from a cinematic analogue to *Ulysses*.

In the previous chapter I mentioned that the mimetic and poetic traditions produce both good and bad art; mimetic art is not necessarily bad and poetic art is not essentially

good[iii]. The argument put forth by Schapiro and Schopenhauer that great art can be escapist is important in relation to this point. Popular critics and film scholars often describe mainstream film as escapist. The more populist-minded among both groups may count this aspect as a positive feature, as if *Star Wars* and Pollack's *Autumn Rhythm* had some fundamental value in common. Easy art is always an escape, and some abstract art is easy in this way. I would suggest Barnett Newman stands as a great example of abstract art that really makes no demands on its viewer. This is the stated goal of some abstract artists. The difference between Tarkovsky's aesthetics and Greenberg's resides in their disagreement over what constitutes difficulty. For Greenberg, representation is easy, because it is familiar to the spectator, and abstraction is difficult because it forces the viewer to make sense of something new and strange. Tarkovsky finds abstraction easy, because it is unrecognizable. The spectator can do whatever he wants with streams of paint or arrangement of geometric shapes. Representation, but only representation of a particular sort as we have seen in comparing the Dutch to the Renaissance masters, requires great sensitivity and attention to subtlety that abstraction cannot achieve.

Tarkovsky's solution to the mimetic problem is not the same kind of anti-mimesis that high modernism promotes. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the development of a special kind of anti-mimesis that is out of step with the tradition to which Tarkovsky belongs. Much of the difference between the two may be attributed to the fact that Tarkovsky's tradition developed alongside mimesis for over two thousand years, while modernism emerged in that late nineteenth century, reacting directly against the mimetic one. Yet to be deliberately the opposite of something is in many ways to be

merely the next step in its development. Tarkovsky must have seen it this way, for he was not at all sympathetic to the aims of modernist artists. In his writing, his speeches, and even his films, Tarkovsky speaks negatively of purely abstract art and of the avant-garde in general (though he mentions Cezanne, van Gogh and Picasso in positive contexts). Modernism is too much anti-mimesis; it defines the problem incorrectly, and subsequently takes up a merely opposite position. This is how Tarkovsky comes to view as "science" the work of Stan Brakhage, a filmmaker influenced by the high modernism of Jackson Pollock. This is the crucial point. For Pollock's great champion, Clement Greenberg, amorality and the desire to eschew ethics are precisely what make abstract art spiritual. Tarkovsky, perhaps remembering Tolstoy's demand that art address the real, everyday concerns of ordinary people, could find nothing spiritual in the play of color, line and shape on canvass.

Furthermore, Tarkovksy makes it clear that he does not share the concern of the modern artist to *put something new in the world*. Creation for no reason beyond proving that you can create is not enough. In order for art to be spiritual it must address real concerns of living. Art for art's sake is not spiritual. Art is not the meaning of life as Nietzsche suggests; rather, it is better at telling us about the meaning of life than anything else. "In artistic creation," Tarkovsky explains, "the personality does not assert itself, it serves another, higher and communal idea. The artist is always a servant and is perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle" (*Sculpting* 38). This is Platonic aesthetics pure and simple. The artist is a conduit for the muse, and it is his or her willingness to be this interpreting vessel that Tarkovsky says

modern man has lost. The role of the artist in Tarkovsky's view is to interpret the muse as best he or she can. This interpretation will be colored by the artist's personality, but it should not become a mere expression of that personality. The Modernist movements from Romanticism to Abstract Expressionism are almost totally self-obsessed. Delacroix and Gericault rejected the antiseptic style of the Neo-classicists for more personal means of expression. Cezanne, Van Gogh and Picasso had to paint the world according to the unique ways that each of them saw it rather than the objective way they were trained. Pollock defended the random look of his style by insisting that he had complete, conscious control over his painting process.

Those who would argue that Tarkovsky has a proclivity for self-expression need to understand the difference between idiosyncratic interpretation of the muse and self-involved invention of forms. I would not insist that the reader literally believe in a muse whispering in Tarkovsky's ear. Post-Modernism has a powerful grip on academia, and it has made it very difficult for anyone to understand the comparatively simple proposition that having something to say and saying something that needs to be said are entirely different aims and practices. This is especially true when the self-expression argument is used to take the artist down a notch. Tarkovsky's detractors often complain that his self-expression is too opaque for them to understand, as if he is being deliberately weird in order to mislead them or make them feel stupid. What he really does is quite different; he tries to *show* them as accurately as possible some truth that he thinks he has experienced. Of course such truth is not easily recognizable. A familiar idea or experience only communicates what one already knows. Poetry has to be new; it has to teach the new.

While modernism is rooted in the whole history of western art and in what its practitioners know about eastern art, African art, Oceanic art and the art of other indigenous cultures, Tarkovsky is bound to the poetic tradition. It is an important force in Tarkovsky's work in a general way, and the specific manifestations of singular influences are also often worth noting. Tarkovsky is known to have made efforts to "recreate" the look of icons throughout *Rublyov*. That he abandoned this as a technique indicates that he came to understand an important difference between referring to something meaningful and being something meaningful. At its best the influence of Byzantine and Russian icon painting on Tarkovsky is more nuanced than the kind of recreation of Bruegel that he employs in *Rublyov* and *Zerkalo*.

One does well to avoid the impulse to look for visual evidence of the influence of any painter in Tarkovsky's work after *Rublyov*. Many critics suggest that the way figures are framed in a particular shot in *Rublyov* relates to the formal qualities of the icon, as if Tarkovsky wanted to show us that Andrei Rublyov saw the world as one iconic image after another. Johnson and Petrie even suggest that Solonytsin looks like an icon. This last assertion seems to me to be wishful thinking that helps to grant a symbolic religious significance to both Tarkovsky and his favorite actor that is misleading. It is true that Tarkovsky liked the head and shoulders shot, but it seems like a dead end to connect that to that particular quality of icons, especially since he understood that there are different ways of invoking other arts. In fact, he had rules about how to do it. For example in Stalker, Writer puts on his head a would-be crown of thorns and proceeds to mimic the appearance of an icon with the help of the camera's tight focus. Stalker chides him,

"Don't do that!" Is this admonition directed only at the character or could it be a way for Tarkovsky to reprimand himself for earlier aesthetic choices he has now abandoned? In *Sacrifice* he will no longer evoke icons at all; rather he will show them outright. Alexander leafs through a book of icons, and the camera is angled in such a way that the viewer sees every image full on. He speaks of their beauty and perfection in a way that should remind the reader of *Sculpting in Time* of Tarkovsky's general belief in the purpose of art. Nothing should look like a work of art except the work itself.

If an image in one of the films looks like an icon, it likely has more to do with the fact that the viewer has read too much film criticism about "Tarkovsky's imagery" than with Tarkovsky's own poetic intention. Always striving to explore the limits of the poetics of other arts in filmmaking, Tarkovsky abandoned the recreation of icons after *Rublyov*, a film which is admittedly stark, as icons are, but not at all laden with gold leaf. For all his enthusiasm and reverence, Paul Schrader, in his *Transcendental Style*, forgets this aspect of icons when he compares them to the films of Dreyer and Bresson, and praises their "sparsity of means." In certain formal respects icons are indeed formally simple, ascetic, as many modern artists and critics alike have commented, and celebrated. One should remember the gold leaf and the jewels that often are used to adorn icons, though these riches speak of an aspect of the icon which many critics do not care to address.

Tarkovsky tried very hard to reject anything he considered painterly methods altogether, which is why he evidently concluded that it is better to just show the art. Tarkovsky photographs paintings, drawings or woodcuts (or their reproductions) in every

film, and in the last three films, he abandoned his trick of mimicking his favorite paintings. It is difficult to say whether or not Tarkovsky loved icons for more than their simplicity. He no doubt continued to be influenced by icons beyond his second film, but I would encourage the viewer to think of apparent similarity such as sparseness and head and shoulder shots as coincidence rather than as an effort to create the look of icons. In *Offret* Aleksandr speaks of the "delicacy" of the icon while the pages of their images flip by during a long take. The words of the character may or may not amount to Tarkovsky's own beliefs, but the important matter for the viewer is the suggestion that Tarkovsky understood icons to be about something beyond their formal simplicity.

What may be of interest is the way in which Tarkovsky reconciles himself to the apparent contradiction between Tarkovsky's exaltations of and reverence for a form of art that exists to turn the viewer's eyes away from nature. If this is the case, as just about every scholar whether traditional, revisionist or specifically religious, believes, then it would appear that Tarkovsky exalts an art form at odds with his own beliefs about art. One possible answer could be that in Byzantium or medieval Russia, one would turn away from nature as those of us in Tarkovsky's time may choose to turn away from industry and technology. Both acts amount to the same thing within their respective contexts, which is turning away from the world. A thousand years ago, turning away from the world meant turning away from nature. The legacy of St. Francis, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry David Thoreau is that turning away from the world means precisely to turn toward nature. If icons are supposed to make us turn away from the world then they are early manifestations of the kind of modern art Schapiro talks about as I

mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Here one could begin to see bubble up at least one argument for Tarkovsky-as-modernist. Yet they are more than vehicles for spiritual escape.

Gombrich, Meyer Schapiro, Pavel Florensky and Thomas Mathews have taught recent generations to abandon the notion that medieval and Byzantine painters did not know what they were doing, and we have learned to respect them for working in their own idioms. Florensky even suggests that the Byzantine artists avoided perspective because they understood that it was imitation and therefore antithetical to the purpose of art. Now it is more common for art historians to refer to the spatial flatness of icons as a reflection of their spiritual values rather than their scientific advancement, or to accept that their aesthetics was designed to achieve portraiture rather than perspective. It is not, after all, as if Byzantine painters of icons had imagined Renaissance perspective and decided against it. While this may be true for the Russian icon painters of the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries, and is most certainly true of anyone painting icons today (i.e. Chris Ofili), it seems unreasonable to imagine such an idea in twelfth-century Constantinople.

"We like to assume," Gombrich remarks, "that where there is a will there is also a way, but in matters of art the maxim should read that only where there is a way is there also a will. The individual can enrich the ways and means that his culture offers him; he can hardly wish for something that he has never known possible" (*Preference for the Primitive* 86). The painters of the Renaissance developed naturalistic representation after well over a thousand years of abstract representation. It used to be argued that the

formalized abstraction of painting that preceded the Renaissance resulted from medieval artist's lack of technical proficiency. Gombrich refines that position somewhat, giving the contemporary spectator grounds to appreciate what was previously regarded as underdeveloped art, without suggesting that all things are known to all people at all times as Florensky seems to do. Matthews continues in the same vein as Gombrich when he says, "The system of imperial government allowed little freedom in the public sphere, but in the private sphere, and in the religious the Byzantines developed an art full of pathos and ecstasy, capable of warmth and intimacy" (Matthews 13). Perhaps the Byzantine painter could not legally paint realistic flesh. Indeed the ruling powers would have proscribed against representation of the evil flesh. The painter then had to find a way to be expressive within the limits of his or her idiom. It is the achievement that matters most to us. Whether it was due specifically to rules against bodily representation, the important fact is that the Byzantine painters learned to reveal the soul through abstract portraiture.

In every age the artist has constraints imposed upon him or her. Gombrich wrote about the art of ancient China: "No artistic tradition insists with greater force on the need for inspired spontaneity […] but it is precisely there that we find a complete reliance on acquired vocabularies" (*Primitive* 148). Tarkovsky himself worked under very strict, if vague, guidelines about what his films could say and what they could look like. The authorities that oversaw his work are the same ones who sent Sergei Paradjanov to Siberia on trumped-up charges ranging from homosexuality to surrealism, when the situation really boiled down to the fact that his *Color of Pomegranates* was just too

weird. Paradjanov was not able to do the things Tarkovsky could. He made no effort to appease or placate the authorities. In fact he threw in their faces exactly what they did not want. Tarkovsky was more like the Chinese artists in Gombrich's example and more like the Byzantine icon painters. Though he complained bitterly, more often privately than publicly, he was determined to make films that would get released and that would be watched by people. He found ways to pacify the bureaucrats. It would be unfair to say Tarkovsky compromised. He pushed his own boundaries, and those of his viewers, by finding the range of creative possibility within the limits imposed upon him. He found that those ideological state restrictions were nebulous, but also malleable. All artists go through some version of this. No one can be absolutely uncompromising. There are always limitations, and the truly creative artist will find ways to overcome them.

Chapter Three: The Tarkovsky Style Part One – Narrative

> There are too many temptations on every side: stereotypes, preconceptions, commonplaces, artistic ideas other than one's own. And really it's so easy to shoot a scene beautifully, for effect, for acclaim… But you only have to take one step in that direction and you are lost.
>
> ---Andrei Tarkovsky

In the previous chapter I argued that Tarkovsky is not an avant-garde artist, but a narrative artist. In this chapter I will detail some of his narrative practices and show how his narratives amount to much more than storytelling. "A particular sort of picture," begins Anne Hollander in her book, *Moving Pictures*, "seems to be in motion even while it does not move, seems to be showing a much larger section of time than the frame can contain, and seems to invite our participation in the movement of its potential narrative" (Hollander 4). In this chapter I would like to focus on how Tarkovsky "invites our participation in the movement of narrative" sometimes in ways analogous to those of the master painters from whom he learned about narrative. Also, Tarkovsky more than any filmmaker before him was keenly aware of the narrative possibilities only cinema could offer. There is a relationship between his method and the method of the original filmmakers; those who turned on their cameras to record events in motion for the first time in history. Tarkovsky found that he could maintain the purity of that approach in a narrative form, and he could do it without relying on major events. The camera's ability to record time is almost event enough.

D. H. Lawrence had a word for the kind of narrative in which Tarkovsky was interested. He called it, "the novel," and he describes its function in contrast to philosophy and religion:

> Plato makes the perfect ideal being tremble in me. But that's only a bit of me. Perfection is only a bit, in the strange make-up of man alive. The Sermon of the Mount makes the selfless spirit of me quiver. But that, too, is only a bit of me. The Ten Commandments set the old Adam shivering in me, warning me that I am a thief and a murderer, unless I watch it. But even the old Adam is only a bit of me.
> I very much like all these bits of me to be set trembling with life and the wisdom of life. But I do ask that the whole of me shall tremble in its wholeness, some time or other. (105)

As Lawrence notes later in the same essay, the supreme representatives of this kind of narrative are the works of Homer and Shakespeare as well as the Bible. If the reader will understand Lawrence's idea as an aesthetic concept and not a description only of a certain kind of writing, we could include in this group the paintings of several Dutch Masters such as Rembrandt, De Hooch and Vermeer as well as the works of the earlier Dutch artist, Pieter Bruegel. Most critics agree that Tarkovsky's film version of *Solaris* changes the point of Lem's novel, but few have suggested that these changes are for the better. Some critics suggest Tarkovsky's version is better because he offers a superior vision; a more hopeful and positive view of humanity. I prefer not to judge the value of either artist's ethics, and would point instead to the achievement of greater narrative complexity as the principle advantage Tarkovsky's *Solaris* over Stanislaw Lem's novel. Tarkovsky's film, perhaps ironically given that it is a film, is closer to *what the novel is for* according to Lawrence. Tarkovsky did not learn about narrative from watching Hollywood films, or even from watching Kurosawa or Bresson. He learned about narrative from Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Shakespeare and the Dutch painters. That is why we must study the other arts in relation to Tarkovsky; he is so much more than a filmmaker; much more than a Godard

I recently watched a movie called, *Equilibrium*, a film rather typical of its genre: pseudo-intellectual, "high concept" science fiction (to be distinguished from the self-consciously "low brow" or "populist" drivel like both of Lucas' *Star Wars* trilogies). The concept still serves as an excuse for stylized violence and special effects, but the narrative is much more thoroughly developed in order to appear respectable in the shadow of Asimov and Orwell. The plot of *Equilibrium* is in fact exactly the same as Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*: in a futuristic society that has eliminated war and violence by getting everyone to take some sort of heavy depressant and by eliminating art, music and anything else that could rile up a human being, the hero begins to question the order of things. This is particularly dramatic since his job is to find and kill rebels who secretly horde art and read poetry to one another and concoct other ways to feel. Of course he learns that feeling is really good and so he decides to take down the evil empire by killing the man in charge, which he can do since he is the most lethal killer on the planet. Christian Bale plays the hero, and he leaves hundreds of faceless thought police dead in his wake as he works his way to the leader. Quite unsurprisingly the villain does not live by the principles he preaches to the society he rules, but rather is surrounded by gigantic, gaudy Tintoretto-looking oil paintings in a lavish rococo palatial hall. In terms of what one might call *the moral of the story* Tarkovsky's films are indistinguishable from *Equilibrium* as they are from any science fiction film whose plot concerns the radical dehumanization of humanity as a consequence of our inability to reign in the negative potential of technology. That plot is not the focus for Tarkovsky is exactly what distinguishes his *Solaris* from Lem's *Solaris* and Steven Soderberg's *Solaris*.

The Dutch painters listed above are in part the subject of art historian Anne Hollander's book, *Moving Pictures*, in which she describes the difference between pictures as statement and spectacle and pictures as narrative and personal communion. She argues that the latter kind of pictures look forward to cinema. I would qualify that claim, and say that these pictures look forward to the best cinema. Nothing inherent in the medium endows any random movie with the aesthetic qualities of De Hooch or Bruegel, and certainly Hollander's conceptual framework is more analogous to Lawrence's "novel" than to a Spielberg film. The latter is more like a book by H. G. Wells, whom Lawrence admonishes for his failures at the novel. It is the case with every form of art, so it should come as little surprise to the reader that most of the films that have been made are spectacular, overt and superficial while very few are personal, subtle and complex.

My terminology shifts somewhat in this chapter. I am using several different dichotomies from chapter to chapter, but this should not obscure the premise that there are fundamentally two artistic principles in opposition. On one side is mimetic, spectacular, naturalistic, beautiful, entertaining, idealistic – these qualities and aims are not synonymous, but they engender one another. The same holds true on the other side for the poetic, personal, sublime, narrative, participatory and spiritual. The spiritual is always personal, even in film. Because to view a film means to see it with an audience, a number of misguided and misleading theories have been developed about the socio-psychological aspects of film-going. These theories rest on the foundation that film is inexorably a spectacle, a notion that Hollander helps to break down by her discussion of

the difference between the art of the Renaissance and the contemporaneous art of Northern Europe. "The appeals that artists like Van Eyck or Vermeer make are to the individual eye, not to the common gaze of a convoked audience, as Michelangelo's are" (5). Hollander attributes to Northern Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the development of painting as an optical experience rather than of formal ideas characteristic of the Renaissance. Spectacle invites collective experience. The Sistine Chapel ceiling is an opportunity for a communal event. It is loud and bombastic. Due to its sheer size the spectator must remain aware of the space he or she shares with the other viewers who crowd in and file out, craning their necks and running into one another. By contrast, a Rembrandt portrait has to be taken personally. It invites the viewer to go inside, to shut off from the din of the museum and really concentrate on self-reflection.

Along these same lines are the arguments developed by Pavel Florensky in "Reverse Perspective." Here he adds dimension to the characterization of the Renaissance as a formal, rather than a spiritual pursuit. After, "more than five hundred years of social training to accustom the eye and the hand to perspective," Florensky says, "artists not only have no basis for depicting the world according to a perspectival schema, but [...] they dare not do so, once they admit that their aim is truth to perception" (210). One need not insist on the value judgment implicit in this claim and explicit elsewhere in Florensky's writing. His important insight is that the "truth to perception" is subjective rather than objective, and thus naturalistic representation as an end in itself is wholly inadequate at conveying any truth or relaying any experience of truth. Whatever its stylistic advantages or individual successes, naturalistic art diminishes the amount of

effort required from the spectator; it minimizes his or her participation, because, as Hollander says, "it boils down to the difference between letting us see something and carefully describing it to us" (Hollander 28). Spectacle is linked to naturalism because recognizable representation helps to ensure that each member of the audience has a similar experience. A collective experience in which each person thinks and feels something different is not properly a collective experience. This argument applies equally well to abstract art, but the point is that it applies to any art in which naturalistic representation is neither the end in itself nor the means of communicating a simple position. One is not supposed to get something different from the Sistine Chapel ceiling than one's neighbor. The very opposite is true when viewing a Rembrandt.

In *Sculpting in Time* Tarkovsky recounts an anecdote about Terekhova's performance in *Zerkalo* that shows how his ambivalence about religion and other important questions is secondary to his insistence on the subjective nature of one's own answers to such questions. Tarkovsky tells his actor only that she is waiting for her husband; he doesn't tell her anything about what her character will do in the future, because that knowledge would change her performance. A filmmaker like Kieslowski would not only ask his actor to purposefully perform as if she can tell the future, he would put all sorts of little filmmaking clues to what will happen next as well. Critics love Kieslowski for the same reason that Shamalayan is currently so popular: everything in their movies adds up to one explanation; everything points in one direction. Tarkovsky refuses to put his film together in such a way that the viewer can put it all together once the final explanatory piece is revealed. Thus the viewer of *Zerkalo* is just

as unsure of the future as is the character of the mother. In fact the scene which Tarkovsky recalls, the first or second, third or even fourth time viewer probably has little idea of what is happening at all – he or she may not even know who the characters are in the scene. It would seem in fact that the viewer is not supposed to know right away, because it is only after the scene that the voice of the narrator is heard on the phone with his mother describing a dream of his childhood, and thus informing the viewer what it is he or she just watched.

The difference between Tarkovsky on one hand and Kieslowski, Shamalayan as well as Hitchcock before them, on the other hand, is between the conception of narrative as a series of events and the conception of narrative as a series of conscious experiences, or put another way, the difference between external movement and internal movement. For Hollander the foundation between internal and external movement is the difference between representation of light and perspectival realism. Thus she is led to distinguish between entertainment and poetry as the difference between imagery that, "sets the viewer's psyche in motion, reveals arbitrarily rather than describes thoroughly, disturbs more than it satisfies, and strongly suggests the impossibility of seeing everything at once" and pictures which create, "visions of color and order that make delicious whole sense out of the unpalatable, indigestible world, especially out of our partial and often incomprehensible views of it" (*Moving Pictures* 7). She explains by way of the examples of Vermeer and Rembrandt, the way in which the effects of light upon the eye stirs the inner life, "which," she admits, "used to be called the soul" (9), and "keeps our private feelings on the move" (22). Since Hollander speaks this way in general about cinema, I

must add the qualification that her arguments speak of the potential of the medium only. In any mainstream film from *Schindler's List* to *Wedding Crashers* the movement of light, and its effect on our feelings, our perception of time, our vision and our relationship to material things is wholly incidental and accidental. Only artists like Tarkovsky, Bresson, Bergman or Akerman knows how to use this potential.

We know that Tarkovsky had an exceptionally well-developed theory about the function of time in a film. I would stress that the degree to which he thought and wrote this out is strikingly unusual among film artists. Most filmmakers and viewers alike regard the medium as little more than a means to show a plot unfold to the accompaniment of pleasant music and pleasing photography. But film is essentially a temporal art: its existence is bound up with the duration of each of its shots, which are its building blocks. The cinema does share its temporal nature with music, but unlike music it is in the essence of the materials of film that a chunk of time is preserved. One can go to a concert to listen for rhythm, harmony and discord, volume, tonal variation and all the other things for which a person listens in music, but after the show one cannot get that exact performance back. Compact discs, cassettes, and albums preserve performances, but music exists beyond these things. Music does not exist *because of* a cassette tape. All that is necessary is an instrument, a voice, a noise if you are John Cage. This kind of necessity is what distinguishes cinematic time from musical time. A film is a chunk of time, always the same, imprinted on celluloid so that one may return again and again to the same preserved artifact. The viewer's experience may be different from one time to the next, but that fact owes to the nature of the viewer, not the work.[iv]

Tarkovsky believed that film gave to humanity a precious new artistic potential: "For the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means *to take an impression of time*. And simultaneously the possibility of reproducing that time on screen as often as he wanted, to repeat it and go back to it. He acquired a matrix for *actual time*" (*Sculpting* 63). Throughout his life and career as a filmmaker, Tarkovsky asserted the belief that the passage of time is the most important concern of cinema. It is, in fact, "...the one precious potential of cinema -- the possibility of printing on celluloid the actuality of time" (63).

How should the reader understand Tarkovsky's conception, "actual time?" As he uses the phrase here and elsewhere, Tarkovsky does not refer to time as an objective reality. It is not the job of cinema to *represent* on celluloid the "actuality of time" that exists in the world separately from humanity. It is more likely that time becomes an actuality only when printed on celluloid. This is the "matrix for *actual time*" to which Tarkovsky refers. Time is a man-made construct, and film, perhaps before it is anything else, is a demonstration of this fact. Tarkovsky's task is to figure out how to make use of that fact artistically. He is not the first to point out that, "time is a condition for the existence of our 'I'" (57), and it is true that there is no such thing as an individual without time to measure him or her. The moments of dissolution into nature suggest a conceptual shift in time which seeks to lead us out of the structure of man-made linearity (for this must be the 'time' Tarkovsky speaks of above) and into the timeless flux of nature. Nature knows no history or future. There is only this moment, one after the next. I would hesitate to call it identification, but the viewer is encouraged in the scenes to

mirror the path of Kelvin and Stalker, who each relinquish their respective egos to become part of nature's dynamic. Neither Stalker nor Kelvin show signs of differentiation, or ego; they do not act. They simply *are*. They exist without asserting their respective 'I.'

His conception of time has special bearing upon how Tarkovsky represents the past and the future. He is particularly interested in the nature of memory. Past and future are imaginative events, not measurements of objective time. Tarkovsky's presentation of time reaches back and looks ahead, but he never fails to show that time is a construct albeit such a powerful one that abstract understanding clings readily to it. The rhythms inherent in the images of grass, water and landscapes require no human psychology, no looking backward or forward. Here the work that Tarkovsky's camera does and editing are secondary to what nature does. Tarkovsky's observation that, "time courses through the picture despite editing rather than because of it," (117), saliently describes the act of capturing natural rhythms on celluloid. The function is to let the grass sway, let the water flow, let the wind blow; these things are recorded.

Slow editing and long takes are stylistic devices that Tarkovsky shares with many other accomplished filmmakers. Chantal Akerman relies heavily on lengthy, uninterrupted takes. But her camera is typically static, while Tarkovsky's is fluid. Her structure is also a good deal more rigorous in films like *je, tu, il, elle*, *Jeanne Diehlman*, or *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*; takes are long, and in her shots very little happens in terms of plot driven physical action. She shares these qualities with Tarkovsky, but Akerman's shots are almost all medium and full and nearly always static. Tarkovsky regularly uses

close-up, and the movement of his camera is among his films' most distinctive features. Andy Warhol and Miklos Jancso are among other important figures known for their use of long take. Tarkovsky's criticism of Jancso (and he would have surely said the same of Warhol, had he ever seen *Empire* or *Blowjob*) indicates that he insisted on a narrative motivation for the use of the long take; a long take for the sake of a long take was merely academic.

"Real" time is a term that has been somewhat perverted by popular usage to mean that a film lasting two hours consists of actions that take place over two hours in the lives of its characters. For Tarkovsky, however, real time is only the time that passes from the beginning to the end of a given shot. This understanding of real time seems more appropriate logically, as the other "real" time actually involves intricate manipulations and distortions of time in order to give the impression of reality. Through a relatively slow editing pace (average shot length increases with each successive film[v]) Tarkovsky avoids serious distortions of time by maintaining significantly felt real time in the average shot. Hence the episodic structure of *Andrei Rublyov*. The film is broken up into fifteen to twenty minute episodes in each of which the characters probably live a couple of hours. Between each episode are huge ellipses, totaling some twenty-three years for the entire film.

The pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus, is believed to have said: "One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers, it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs" (Kahn 53). Water is a recurring symbol in Tarkovsky's films in many ways

reminiscent of Heraclitus. It will be helpful to recall a few examples of water as metaphor in the context of revisiting the difference between sign and symbol. In Heraclitus, water is not merely a clever way to describe how he thinks the universe works, but a part of the working universe, and in its various actions, a fundamental principle of life. In the Zone of *Stalker* water flows over all things -- rusty guns and springs, syringes, tiles and an image of John the Baptist.[vi] On one hand this image may suggest the transformative power of baptism. More to the point placing the man-made image under the water creates a more literal, less figurative, baptism. Everything man man-made in the Zone has undergone transformation due to water. The rust, too, is more than metaphor; it is physical evidence of the passage of time and of water over time upon man-made objects. In this scene and throughout the film, the water running over the vestiges of humanity and pooling in the abandoned buildings of the Zone is akin to the vegetation growing inside the various rooms and overrunning the outdoor machinery. These examples exist not only as metaphor, but also as physical, tangible evidence that humanity's attempts to dominate nature will inevitably fail.

Water in Tarkovsky's films often shows that humanity must learn to participate in nature rather than circumvent or control it. The rain in *Solaris* transforms Kris Kelvin physically; he was dry and becomes wet. His facial expression and his posture as he looks toward the sky to meet the rain, as if willingly succumbing to it, indicate that water acts as much more than a mere symbol for baptism. Water is a physical presence with which Kelvin interacts in a non-metaphorical way. The act of baptism itself is in fact not a mere metaphor, but a real, physical change from dry to wet that quickens the blood and

generally has a refreshing effect. Tarkovsky never uses metaphor as mere sign. He uses symbols which arise organically from the practical, physical experience of the characters.

Tarkovsky sometimes immerses the viewer in a particular rhythm precisely in order to disrupt it. In *Rublyov* this disruption and concurrent transformation happens in the final episode. *The Bell* is forty minutes long, whereas the preceding sections average around twenty minutes. Here, difference causes the viewer to feel physically, time being stretched out, as if it were somehow becoming longer. *Rublyov* settles into one slow moving pulse, creating a specific expectation, and continually rewarding it. Forty minutes of *The Bell* keeps moving where the viewer has become physically accustomed to stopping, and in fact, continues to move for twice as long. Imagine listening to someone give a speech, a sermon or a lecture. He or she begins by saying, "I have five main points," and then proceeds to detail the first four points very methodically at five minutes each. Then the fifth point comes. You look down at your watch; ten minutes have passed, and you can tell point five is half way through at best. It ends up taking a half hour. This is akin to the physical effect of *The Bell*.

The end of *Nostalghia* is similar, but the effect is achieved purely through the lengthening of shots rather than episodes. After two hours of shots ranging from twenty seconds to five minutes, a single tracking shot follows Andrei back and forth across St. Mary's Pool for almost nine minutes. Were each shot in the film nine minutes long, the viewer's body would be adjusted to that rhythm, and the entire film may seem much longer than it is. By withholding the longest take -- the longest chunk of real time -- until the film's end, Tarkovsky makes that end seem unreachable. Thus the effect of relief at

the conclusion of the film (and the completion of Andrei's act), the experience of catharsis, is *real*. It is symbolic too, but the viewer feels it physically. A lived symbol is a quite different kind of thing from an abstract one.

Tarkovsky's camera movements also help to root the viewer in experience more than concept. A viewer is capable only of moving through time and never space. Any talk of space within a film relates to mise-en-scene and never to the actual spatial experience of the audience, which is not physically altered. In fact these films try to release the viewer from space, and focus his or her attention inside. One thinks about space without inhabiting it. Tarkovsky's construction of space must, therefore, be understood as it relates to time. How, for instance, is time different in a thirty second static close-up than in a nine minute back and forth panning long shot?

In many cases the movement of figures within an uninterrupted time frame is just as important as shot length alone. Tarkovsky often employs intricate blocking combined with excessively mobile camera work. In *Andrei Rublyov*, for instance, there is a scene in which Andrei's fellow monk, the envious Kiril, discusses icon painting with Theophanes the Greek. In one particularly long take the camera alternates between the movements of both men, following one and then the other as they shift positions. The effect of shifting the blocking so much within a single shot is similar to that of the very mobile camera, and indeed they are working together here. Tarkovsky keeps everything in flux so that the viewer must keep readjusting. Because the image refuses to be static, the viewer is allowed, even provoked, to see new-ness at each moment. In a Tarkovsky film the viewer follows character movements in time. In *Rublyov*, Theophanes and Kiril walk

back and forth in a single take, starting and stopping on cue almost as if the scene were bound to a time signature. It is this sense of deliberate order and rhythm which keeps the scene from being any old scene from any given movie in which characters move and talk. Not to overuse musical terminology, but the two men are quite carefully shown in counterpoint to one another. Theophanes' gait is steady and measured. He gazes indistinctly as he speaks abstractly. Kiril walks nervously and unevenly. He moves suddenly, often appearing to sneak up on the old master. Since the camera mimics the movements of each, it helps to impart a physical sense of the personality and motives of Kiril and Theophanes.

For cinema "the problem is to manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style" (Panofsky quoted in Hollander 77). The words of the art historian, Erwin Panofsky, could have come just as readily from Bresson's *Notes on the Cinematographer*. Bresson and Tarkovsky share the belief that the central problem for cinema is how to use a device designed for perfect mimesis to appeal to the spiritual aspect of their viewers. Some filmmakers, Paradjanov for instance, manage to get artistic results from stylized reality, but they are rare exceptions. The Hollywood tradition is steeped in highly stylized reality, and its practitioners employ this device with a completely lack of self-consciousness. From Welles and Hitchcock to Lucas and Spielberg, these filmmakers erroneously stand the problem on its head without acknowledging they are doing so. They stylize reality then photograph and edit it with professional acumen. The Russian formalists may have failed in many respects, but at least they knew that film style happened elsewhere. They manipulated the images in the

editing room rather than in front of the camera. Tarkovsky certainly had objections to the supposedly un-stylized reality of the formalists as well. He found it to be quite insidiously stylized, in fact. Yet it must be noted that, though he proceeds in a different direction, Tarkovsky emerged from a national tradition that did seek to solve the problem in the manner it is defined by Panofsky. This is crucial because most other national traditions, especially the American tradition, wanted only to solve the mystery of how to get more bodies in the seats of movie theaters.

Chapter Four: The Tarkovsky Style Part Two - Dreams and Symbols

If I were asked, what about the vagueness, the opacity, the improbability of a dream? - I would say that in cinema 'opacity' and 'ineffability' do not mean an indistinct picture, but the particular impressions created by the logic of the dream: unusual and unexpected combinations of, and conflicts between, entirely real elements. These must be shown with the utmost precision. By its very nature cinema must expose reality, not cloud it.

--Andrei Tarkovsky

Rich as they are in dream imagery, Tarkovsky's films may easily be mistaken for wholly dream-like experiences, as if his aim were analogous to that of the Surrealists who wish to unearth all that lies hidden in the depths of the unconscious. Like Hoffmann's stories, the psychic parameters of Tarkovsky's films are quite opposed to the scope within which most of us live day to day. Much of what happens in a Tarkovsky film is unmistakably dream, vision, memory, and possibly hallucination, but all unconscious representation is consistently interwoven with conscious representation. Tarkovsky understands that the experience of living involves the entire psyche; both conscious and unconscious aspects are equally important, so his films involve piecing together all things that make up the two.

Tarkovsky is by no means the first filmmaker who believed that movies have a unique potential to explore the unconscious. Bergman and Fellini, to name two of the best known, each developed unique ways of representing dreams, so that they could use dreams in their narratives in important ways. Yet some of the ways in which their dreams are different from Tarkovsky's expose their limitations. In *Fellini's 8 1/2*, for instance, Marcello's unconscious is almost always the store-house of repressed desire and wish fulfillment. In Bergman's film dreams, especially the early ones, his use of

archetypes seems more than a little intellectualized. At times the appearance becomes even somewhat antiseptic, as in Isak's dream of his own death in *Wild Strawberries*. When he looks in the casket and sees himself, the effect is quite heavy-handed. These kinds of dreams closely resemble Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* inserted into narrative. They seem to reflect what the directors have apparently read about Jung or Freud rather than their own dream experiences. This is what sets apart Tarkovsky from the rest: he does not use cinema to explore some great thinker's ideas about dreams, he uses it to explore his own ideas. Fellini and Deren in particular are caught up in Freudian imagery and consequently their dream sequences come off as academic. Rather than taking the opportunity to release his own repressed fantasies, Tarkovsky offers a far more expansive view of the psyche that blurs the lines between conscious and unconscious life. He wants to remind the viewer of his or her own dreams, by describing his own in detail, rather than composing archetypes of supposed universal dream images.

Tarkovsky does seem to believe that the cinema has a unique potential to help us understand our dreams. His first feature-length film, *Ivan's Childhood*, begins with a dream; images of the young Ivan running and laughing. Amidst trees he keeps running, and suddenly he begins to rise up. He is kept upright in the frame, and is only photographed from the waist up. This is not a typical image of flight, for Ivan does not stretch out his arms like bird's wings or hold his body parallel to the ground in Superman fashion. Yet the boy is obviously flying. In one sense Tarkovsky is working here within the technological limits of the day, but he is also rejecting the so-called universal for the particular. It is only through the particular and specific that the universal is revealed. I do not mean for that to be a riddle. There are no universal symbols, but that accepting

them as universal sometimes makes them seem so. To the extent that it can be represented by a generalized image, the archetype is a false construction. The dream is to fly, to be free, to look down on the earth, and feel the joy of having left it behind. It has nothing to do with putting on a cape, or flapping arms, or conforming in any other way to the images that our culture associates with flight. It is culture and not nature that has imprinted the particular flight image that Tarkovsky avoids. There is something of Bergman in the flight archetype of Ivan's dream, but the point I would emphasize is that Tarkovsky presents flight as an imaginative act instead of representing the "reality" of it.

In *Rublyov*, Tarkovsky takes on the subject of flight again, though this time not in the context of a dream. Again he eschews a familiar representation, and in *Sculpting in Time* he explains his desire to "destroy the plastic symbol on which the episode was built" (80). Thus, even when experienced as an actual event, flight requires only the emotional essentials. The prologue to *Rublyov* shows a man taking a homemade balloon on a test run. As he rises, dangling below his make-shift floating device, all visual evidence indicates that the man is only capable of hovering. But from his point of view, the ground speeds along below (a shot obviously taken from a helicopter or plane). Even in conscious experience, emotion -- new and overwhelming joy and freedom -- is more important than realism. Whether actual or dreamed, flight need not be expressed in any familiar or realistic terms. More importantly, representing flight in unconventional ways allows Tarkovsky to blur the boundary between the conscious and unconscious, suggesting that an image that doesn't look like "realistic" flight must be a dream image. That the flight image is a dream image in *Ivan* but not in *Rublyov* only makes the case stronger.

Finding a way to explain symbolism in Tarkovsky's work can trip up even the most astute critic. Because of Tarkovsky's use of a "Russian symbolist aesthetic," Le

Fanu argues, "there is always a residue of pure imagery" (83). Not only does such a statement betray a lack of understanding of Russian symbolist aesthetics, it also relies on impossible logic. How could any symbol simply be? Does not a symbol always symbolize? Along these lines Le Fanu offers the tree at the end of *Offret*, which he says has been unjustifiably beset with all kinds of symbolic readings. While the observation is attractive, his conclusion that it is "also 'only' a tree" is inadequate. For that tree figures most importantly in the narrative. Little Man planted that tree with his father at the beginning of the film, in the first shot. In the beginning Little Man could not speak and his father appeared sane to the rest of the world. In the film's final shot, the camera pans away from the ambulance that carries away an Aleksandr that his loved ones believe has gone mad, and stops on Little Man leaning against that tree. Now he can speak: "In the beginning was the Word; Why Papa?" Then the camera tilts up to the branches above him. Surely this is not "only" a tree any more than it is the "tree of Jesse," as Le Fanu suggests. There are really no symbols of the latter kind in Tarkovsky's films All would-be symbols are predicated upon some character's perception of them. It is often suggested that Tarkovsky makes symbolic use of the works of painters in his films. But these paintings are only symbolic to the character that beholds them. With few exceptions, most notably the epilogue of *Andrei Rublyov*, a painting appears in a Tarkovsky film when a character is looking at it: Hari looks at Bruegel, Eugenia looks at Piero, and Aleksandr looks at Leonardo.

The crux of this problem is how one defines "symbol." Tarkovsky uses symbols in a Russian Symbolist sense or in a Jungian sense, but he does not use what Jung calls "signs" in distinction from "symbols." This means that one cannot read Tarkovsky's films iconographically as one would read a religious painting from the Renaissance. Most critics of Tarkovsky seem to know this, but their phrasing is often misleading.

When Johnson and Petrie discuss Tarkovsky's motifs they tell us some of the things water, fire, wind and earth *can* mean as if it were up to the viewer to choose from among these equally viable options. This kind of symbolism does not work that way. The tree Le Fanu describes from *Offret* is not *possibly* or *potentially* the Tree of Jesse, the Tree of Life or any other literary tree; rather it is suggestive of all these trees and more, as well as of everything else "tree" means culturally and anything else it means to the viewer personally (keeping in mind it is first and foremost a tree with a specific narrative function as noted above). A sign is a specific coded reference and a symbol is infinite. It is not infinite sign potential but the infinity of meaning in as much of its totality as the viewer can grasp. "The whole matter," argues Pavel Florensky, "comes down to the fact that the representation of an object is not the same object in its representational capacity, it is not a copy of a thing, it does not duplicate a little corner of the world, but points to its original as its symbol" (Florensky 253). Thus even though they occasionally have names like "Writer" and "Professor" Tarkovsky's characters are not merely symbolic or allegorical. Even in *Stalker* it is the stalker that names the other two men. They have names, and would even like to share their names with one another, but Stalker wants to maintain a degree of anonymity. Tarkovsky almost always provides a narrative excuse for any would-be "pure" symbol.

In almost all of Tarkovsky's films the borders between conscious and unconscious experience are uncertain. He often structures clear distinctions in order to show that there is a cleavage of some kind, but then he shifts where the line is. Only in *Ivan*, his earliest feature and as such merely beginning to point in the direction of his mature poetics, is the waking world clearly separated from the dream world. Conventional devices indicate the dreamer: a jarring cut to Ivan waking suddenly upon dreaming of hearing a gunshot, a dissolve from a dream image to his blurry face then

slowly brought into focus. The content of the dreams is also conventional, and overly Freudian. Ivan's happy, carefree dreams contrast harshly with the bitter war-zone in which he lives his waking hours. In his dreams, the sun shines, Ivan laughs, and his mother is always present. These dreams tend to end abruptly and somewhat cataclysmically with the conscious world intruding on the unconscious. A gunshot rouses Ivan from his first dream. His second dream perhaps recalls some memory of youth with Ivan and his mother together, talking peacefully, at the top of a well. With a cut Ivan is suddenly down in the well, trying to find the star his mother promised would be there. He yells to the top of the well to show her he has found the star, but she is not there. Ivan screams for his mother. Back at the top of the well, she lies face down on the ground. In slow motion a bucketful of water splashes down on the Mother's back. Ivan awakens.

The content of these dreams and the clunky way in which they connect to the dreamers is as unsophisticated as it is common; one sees it in everything from *Caligari* to *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*. When dreams are presented in this way, and the viewer identifies the dream state as quite distinct from waking, it appears that the two aspects of consciousness work in opposition to one another. In the films that follow *Ivan's Childhood*, Tarkovsky tries to put all states of consciousness in a single continuum. Though *Andrei Rublyov* contains no dreams as such, it does have moments of extra-conscious activity, most notably Andrei's visions of the Passion and of Theophanes after the sack of Vladimir. This is indicated not by rack focus, or a slow dissolve, but by an L-cut in an early example of how he appeals to the ear rather than strictly to the eye (more on this later).

The films after *Rublyov* use color and black & white stock to explore the dual effects of narrative representation and viewer experience. Beginning with *Solaris*

Tarkovsky, with varying degrees of success, plays with the potential he discovered at the end of *Rublyov*, almost as if he realized that he did not have to save it up for the end of the film, but could utilize switching from one film stock to another throughout. This accounts for the seemingly inexplicable moves from black & white to color used in *Solaris* during the car ride through the city (Tokyo). In this five-minute sequence, colored stock and monochromatic stock are spliced together, arranged in no discernible order. The former cosmonaut and old friend of the Kelvin family, Berton, rides away from the Kelvin's dacha with his young son. Who is in the car, and when this takes place in the narrative, does little to grant meaning to the color shift. More likely, this is Tarkovsky's first attempt to sustain a lengthy section of film with pure perceptual reorientation. No words are spoken, no human figures are relied upon to communicate ideas, and the consistency of the image is denied. This draws attention to forms – the shifting film stocks. The unusual nature of this film is now undeniably felt, leaving the audience with certain albeit, vaguely defined expectations from this dream-like world.

It has been widely noted that the shifting film stocks (back and forth between black and white and sometimes sepia to color) has something to do with representing different states of consciousness. The complex color coding and structuring of these dreams, memories and visions is largely responsible for the immediate effect that the films have on the perception of the viewer. In *Rublyov* Tarkovsky utilizes the shift from black & white to color film for the first time. He uses color stock at the end of a black & white film to show the viewer the fruits of Andrei's new-found awareness and acceptance of his purpose. In an important sense all the stock changes are done to keep the viewers on their toes. Again, it is both symbolic and experiential, but with emphasis on the experiential aspect. In *Rublyov*, for example, the color epilogue functions in part as metaphor for the monk's spiritual achievement, but for the viewer it is a real experience,

hopefully of an exalted state brought about by the unexpected shift away from the formal familiarity of the previous two and one half hours of the film. This shift has not been prepared for the viewer; it is completely unexpected, so the viewer must reorient himself or herself in a sudden and radical way.

It is in *Solaris* that Tarkovsky begins to use alternating film stock as a code for conscious and unconscious events. The film's central character, Kris Kelvin twice dreams his dead wife, Hari, into existence. Both events are marked by a change in film stock that occurs between Kelvin going to sleep without her and waking up to find her in his room. The color coding alternates from the first appearance of Hari to the second, perhaps only because Tarkovsky is still at an experimental stage, and thus he is unsure of where he wants to set the boundaries. The car ride with Berton would certainly help to make a case for that. Yet if the viewer gives Tarkovsky the benefit of the doubt, the difference may underscore the contrast between the two experiences for Kris. The first time Kris is terrified to see her. The second time he dreams her up intentionally, regretting that he blasted the last Hari into space.

The disparity between his two experiences provides certain cues for the viewer's accumulating perception. The same action has been repeated in the narrative, but the two instances of its appearance are differentiated visually. This keeps the viewer constantly reevaluating what would otherwise appear to be a repeated event. One gets used to the idea that dreams are signaled by black & white, though the viewer must wait until Kelvin's third dream, that of his mother comforting him, to see an extended dream sequence in black & white. Moreover, since all the dreams come after black and white stock has already been used both for the archive footage of Berton's interview with the authorities and alternately during the car ride back home with Berton and his son, the viewer has a good deal more to interpret. Dreams are indicated by black and white, but

so are other things: sometimes states of consciousness and sometimes pragmatic circumstance.

Within the three dreams nothing is fixed about the operation of the color codes that yields exact meanings. For instance, a monochromatic image does not signify gladness just because one of Kris' dreams focuses on maternal love. Regarding the two dreams that create Hari, the viewer's attention should be drawn to the fact that the two moments are differentiated by their coloring. Achromatic images do not necessarily make a person happy, but *Solaris* steers the audience toward that presumption by means of multiple dream sequences in which comforting and reassuring events happen in black & white. Still, the experience remains important consideration over and above meaning. Tarkovsky does not work with any kind of static symbolism. His films follow their own internal logic to encourage the viewer to think differently. He does not want just new thoughts, but unfamiliar ways of thinking. Color shifts need not *equal* or *mean* specific emotional responses. Just as Kelvin reacted differently the second time he saw Hari, so Tarkovsky shot it differently, and consequently the viewer experiences it differently.

In *Nostalghia* Andrei has two dreams that are set off by their appearance in black & white, and even more so than in *Solaris* is there far too much other black & white activity for the viewer to accept the use of the film stock as strict code for a dream. Andrei dreams of Eugenia twice, but he also has memories of home in black & white. The sequence showing the evacuation of Domenico's family is also in black & white, except for the last shot, and the final shot of the film is black & white as well, in which Andrei is seated before his dacha transplanted into the central ruins of a cathedral. Both of these sections of the film present special interpretive problems for critics. Is the sequence with Domenico a memory of his? Is it a collective memory? Is it an invention of Andrei's based on the story he has pieced together from second-hand accounts? Is the

final shot representational of Andrei's consciousness? The consensus seems to be that it shows Andrei after he has died. If this is the case, then is the final shot a direct address to the audience that flatly shows the resolution of the narrative outside the world of the narrative itself? If so, why does he use his code for dream imagery in this instance?

In addition to confusing the boundaries which set dream and waking life apart, Tarkovsky, in his later films reflects ideas about dreams quite distinct from those seen in *Ivan* and *Solaris*. The dreams of the earlier films are Freudian; they are dreams as wish fulfillment. This point is made explicit in *Solaris* where the ocean causes the wishes of the dreamer to materialize. This probably owes more to Lem than to Tarkovsky, because the dream scenarios that the latter writes are much messier. One of the dreams in *Nostalghia* begins with Eugenia watching over Andrei as he sleeps. There are faint musical notes, indiscernible whispers, and sighs on the soundtrack along with water trickling throughout. A second woman appears whom the viewer will eventually conclude is Andrei's wife. She moves her head to Eugenia's other cheek so that now Eugenia's face is visible. The dream ends with Andrei's wife stretched across the bed in a full shot. Her large, pregnant belly shimmers almost white in the surrounding darkness. Chimes ring on the soundtrack as the camera begins to track back. The name "Andrei" is whispered by a disembodied voice. Then a cut returns to a color shot of Andrei lying face down on his bed, just as before the dream. Eugenia is soon heard knocking at his door.

This muted, muffled fantasy relates to no conscious wish that Andrei has expressed in the narrative. For Tarkovsky, dreams are not the ideals that one may secretly wish could come true. They are as complicated as consciousness, but their content has a more pure aspect as they are not tainted by the rules imposed by rational conscious life. Whatever Andrei may say to Eugenia, the dream must contain his true

feelings, or a *true-er* feeling. Consciousness allows human beings to set up all kinds of barriers and rules of conduct. In dreams all this construction falls away, as Jung says, "the dream does not conceal, it teaches" (32). This does not mean that cinema or the dream must be easily understood. The dream image does not reveal the truth plainly. Rather the nature of this truth is to resist being obvious no matter how carefully it may be explained or how vividly it is shown. Andrei's dreams of Eugenia may not prove beyond a shadow of doubt the nature of his true feelings, but they do help the viewer to read his waking interaction with her. One does not know that he secretly or unconsciously wants her when he refuses her advances, but one does know that Andrei is being disingenuous by acting uninterested.

From *Solaris* to *Offret* Tarkovsky establishes a color code and then proceeds to dismantle it. Tarkovsky claimed throughout his career that monochrome is closer to the psychological reality in which we live. He argued that people don't really see colors in daily life as much as they take them for granted. Again, this is the difference between perception and mere recognition. He believed that making films in color was a mere commercial convention that has the effect of desensitizing the viewing public to truly masterful, constructed and controlled uses of color by a few film artists (*Sculpting* 138). In *Stalker* the banal world is sepia; the Zone, lush color; and dreams, black and white. The setting consists mostly of sparse interiors and run-down industrial exteriors. The monochromatic world is indeed what the three men hope to escape by venturing off to the Zone, a forbidden, mystical place that has religious significance to Stalker (and Tarkovsky). For nearly forty minutes, the film carries on in dulled hues of the bleak world in which its characters live. Upon entering the Zone, the film stock shifts to a rich color dominated by the greens of the landscape. The way in which this new palette suddenly reorients the viewer's perception is astonishing. It is quite akin to the last

minutes of *Andrei Rublyov*, in which the colorless endurance of life is transcended by the artistic experience -- the religious experience. In the sepia world one sees the dark metals cutting across a landscape, but in color the green swallows the colorless metal. Two shots of Stalker's daughter, Monkey, are in color as well, but only after he returns from the Zone. The religious nature of the Zone is suggested in narrative terms, as she is the Stalker's daughter and therefore has been altered by the residue of the Zone. It is also shown structurally, by filming her as the sacred Zone is filmed: in color. Monkey clearly breaks down the color code, because she should be monochromatic according to her geographical placement.

Though it seems at first to be a mere reversal of the color coding of *Stalker*, in *Offret* we find further development of Tarkovsky's efforts to break down his own system. In his last film the color code breaks down before it is even established, as if Tarkovsky relies on the viewer's prior knowledge of how his films work to thwart their expectations. More than in any of his previous films, the changing film stock in *Offret* never lets the viewer identify a particular aspect of consciousness; it simply indicates a change. Though it is book-ended by color sequences that would seem to represent waking life were it not for the impossible time that transpires in the last shot, color coding is not so exact, making it useless to look for clear separations. Thus in *Offret* it is as difficult to decide who is dreaming as it is to say when the dream starts or ends. Should the viewer feel led to believe that Aleksandr has awoken from a dream, he or she will have to ask when the dream began. Is it a dream that begins just after Aleksandr prays for deliverance and promises to sacrifice everything he has if God spares the world? Is the viewer witness to his unconscious as Aleksandr crawls to the sofa in his den, and the screen fades to black? It would seem so, because the next image is a close-up of Marta, Aleksandr's stepdaughter accompanied by soft sound of gentle running water. Her

behavior is odd enough to be dreamlike; Marta removes her dress and walks, naked, to the back of the room to the other side of a bed. She calls to her husband, Victor. This image is colored with the same washed out palette that has been on the screen since the news of the nuclear attack, emphasizing the pinkness of skin and rendering most other objects dull and grayish. In other words, there is no change in film stock from Alexander lying on the couch to Marta in the bedroom, so there is no color-coded clue that Aleksandr has entered a dream state. The next shot makes the familiar shift to monochromatic film stock, and it shows a figure, apparently Otto, the postman, fleeing down a hall of Alexander's home. Certainly this event is inexplicable enough to represent dream logic.

I will not continue with this shot-by-shot analysis of this scene to make the point that the change in film stock has a more complex function than setting off a dream. Here it would seem that the stock changes *within* the dream, so it is futile to attribute the change to Aleksandr's representational consciousness. Instead this is an effort to expressly shift the attention to the viewer. In Tarkovsky's films it is the viewer's mind that is ultimately at stake, not Ivan's or Kelvin's or Andrei's. The viewer has not only come to associate the monochromatic images in *Nostalghia* and the dream scenes in *Ivan* with a different kind of mental activity; his or her physical body has been conditioned to react in a particular way. This is visceral response of a quite complex variety, just as it was with examples already mentioned in this chapter including "The Bell" episode and the Theophanes and Kiril scene in *Rublyov*, the "pool" scene in *Nostalghia* and the shift from black & white to color upon reaching the Zone. Tarkovsky shows that visceral responses are not limited to the kind one sees in horror movies and comedies.

If Tarkovsky's interest in dreams is at all analogous to that of the Surrealists the similarity lies in their shared desire to elicit an ineffable something by unlocking and

removing the shackles of everyday, conscious experience. This unwarranted stock change is clear proof of how he tries to put the focus back on the viewer in the seat from the character on the screen. The change is significant only to the viewer it represents nothing in the world of the character. Since the viewer is not given enough information to crack the code, one must make sense of the change in more personal ways. Other critics call this sloppiness, but it is in fact quite the opposite: it is one of the major achievements of Tarkovsky's last film. He wants the film to be about the viewer, no matter how much he or she may resist it, so he sets up a structure that resists the more facile decoding of previous films.

Chapter Five: The Tarkovsky Style Part Three - Sound Design

Noises must become music

--Robert Bresson

Tarkovsky's use of sound is tightly interlaced with his use of different film stocks and his temporal poetics. The construction of sound design in most films, whether popular, foreign or independent, has become so standardized and bereft of imagination that most films run their course without the viewer ever really noticing the slightest quirk or embellishment on the soundtrack. Such commonly accepted stylistic devices as the use of score music to accentuate and cue particular responses to the images on the screen and synchronized sound are expected to the degree that their acceptance is virtually unconscious for most viewers and indeed most filmmakers. Even in experimental films and short documentaries, rarely does a moment pass without mood music. Does every film school in this country teach that music must play on the soundtrack for every second that passes between lines of dialogue whether the film is a narrative feature or an experimental short or a documentary? One needs look no further than the Wes Anderson genre. It is largely thanks to him that so many young independent filmmakers these days must believe that there is little difference between making a narrative film and stringing together several music videos for their favorite bands (I am thinking particularly of *Garden State* and *Lost in Translation*). While Tarkovsky does use music, and though he tends to pick music from his favorite composers, he uses music far more sparingly and with far greater subtlety than most filmmakers.

Tarkovsky considered sound to the extent that he developed a working method regarding the use of noises and music in film. Only filmmakers at the artistic level of Ozu, Paradjanov, Antonioni, Bresson, Bergman, make such an effort. Yet in a sound film

noise is fifty percent of what the artist has control over. Part of the strangeness of Tarkovsky's films results from the experience of aural displacement. These films do not just look different; they sound weird and unfamiliar, even to viewers who seek out alternatives to Hollywood and the mainstream. In a Tarkovsky film a particular sound may be too loud; the music may sound random or inappropriate; one may hear water but not see it anywhere. The fact of the matter, however, is that Tarkovsky's soundtracks play as important a role in the narrative as dialogue, shot length and image. This thwarts the expectations of those viewers whose reflexes are conditioned by industry standards. Most of us forget that the soundtrack is not obligated to merely flesh out the images. Tarkovsky shows that the soundtrack can also be used as an additional source of information from which the viewer must draw and to which he or she must pay close attention in order to put the narrative together.

"Not only does silence exist in a world full of speech and other sounds," writes Susan Sontag, "but any given silence has its identity as a stretch of time being perforated by sound" (11). Sontag was probably thinking of John Cage when she wrote this passage in 1967. The essay in general focuses on modernism, particularly the way in which many of its representative artists present art which deliberately frustrates the expectations and sensibilities of their audience. Yet it is easy to see how her observation applies to Tarkovsky as well, albeit in a rather different sense than Sontag probably intended. One cannot imagine a silent Tarkovsky film, for it would not be a Tarkovsky film at all. By carefully editing his soundtrack, Tarkovsky takes control of an aspect of filmmaking most directors leave to a sound designer. Tarkovsky, on the other hand, includes sound design in his aesthetic vision, and he works specifically with those perforations of which Sontag writes.

Those perforations are largely responsible for the heightened sense of the passage

of time the viewer can experience watching a Tarkovsky film. Especially in the last three films this amounts to long periods of silence through which faint sounds and soft voices momentarily manifest, echo, and then disappear back in the quiet. This is how he makes the passage of time feel so visceral. It can't be done with appeals to sight only. Our eyes are too used to being open and observant all the time. Long, unbroken shots, can do only so much. Attentive viewers scan for important information trying desperately to keep their brains active with visual information. If these shots were totally without sound, they could easily seem dull. But if they have sound, just a few carefully selected sounds that are subtle and quiet, the scene comes to life, and the viewer has to be ever attentive to information from two different senses instead of just one. Tarkovsky makes a film as much for the ear as the eye. If the viewer will listen he can more easily enter into the meditative state required to appreciate the film. The sound design keeps the viewer patient and attentive rather than restless and eager.

Tarkovsky's films, especially *Stalker*, *Nostalghia* and *Offret*, are lessons in listening. They emphasize the artifice of the medium instead of taking the viewer's mind off it. Among the most significant sound devices that Tarkovsky employs are the L-cut, the minimizing of essential sounds, the layering of noises and music that includes unexpected, non-diegetic sound and refrain. Through these devices Tarkovsky keeps the viewer alert for the unexpected. The soundtrack of a Tarkovsky film is not designed to help the viewer to suspend his or her disbelief. He eschews room tone and turns the viewer's ear to sounds that have been deliberately singled out. These sounds are obtrusive to the ear; they do not blend or mesh into a comfortable, predictable whole. Rather they demand reconciliation. This approach relies heavily on dubbing, which can be very distracting to viewers accustomed to synchronized sound, but by allowing the filmmaker complete control over the input of sounds, many more interesting possibilities

open up beyond the satisfaction of having lips match words.

Tarkovsky chooses his sounds sparingly. Especially in the last four films, the soundtrack will rarely include more than two or three sounds at once. His impulse to pair down the number of sounds stems from the observation that in daily life, we seldom order what we hear and see. Rather we order what we hear, but unconsciously. To a certain extent, the eye can choose what it wants to see; it can focus on particular objects, and look beyond a particular depth. But the ear cannot choose what it wants to hear. There is a maelstrom of sounds going on around us all the time, but we can only tune in to a few of them at once. Tarkovsky makes the viewer conscious of these, because he selects the sounds instead of letting the viewer's brain stem do it. Recalling his or her impressions of a Tarkovsky film, one no doubt remembers sounds as much as images: the echo of Writer's footsteps and the faint gurgling water as he slowly makes his way through the "Meat Grinder" in *Stalker*, the loud heavy breathing and loud splashing of the German shepherd in one of Andrei's memories of home in *Nostalghia*, the crunching of the snow beneath Alexander's feet, and the wind blown doors slamming into the side of the barn in *Offret*. The specificity of attention differentiates these from sound films that ask the viewer simply to *look*, and regard sound as merely unavoidable background. There is no such thing as filler in a Tarkovsky film. It is difficult to say what crunching footsteps mean or why they are more important than, for instance, the rustling of leaves which can also be seen in the aforementioned scene from *Offret*. This is another case of the meaning residing in the experience instead of the experience imparting meaning.

Part of the way Tarkovsky's movies work against the viewer's expectation and familiarity with cinema is to use non-diegetic sound. Often the viewer will hear noises and music that cannot be attributed to anything he or she can see. An especially helpful example is the sequence in *Nostalghia* in which Domenico's family is freed from his

captivity. First the viewer hears the sound of dripping water in which most droplets sound as though they were accumulating into puddles but a few produce a metallic ring. An L-cut on this sound moves from a color segment of Domenico walking around his house to a monochromatic segment of the day his family was liberated. The following shot brings the viewer back to Andrei and Domenico in long-shot as a car has arrived to retrieve Andrei. The sound here appears to be synchronous, as Andrei's distant footsteps get louder as he approaches the car, which is the closest object to the camera. The driver speaks, car doors slam, and the engine starts up. As the car drives away, the engine gets fainter and another source-less sound creeps onto the soundtrack: the mumble of a crowd.

An L-cut on the mumbling returns to a monochromatic image, apparently more from the same day (the liberation of Domenico's family), though neither Domenico nor his family are seen. A crowd is gathered around his home and the murmuring, incomprehensible mumbling provides an aural backdrop for other sounds. Two distinct voices are heard at separate times. Three distinct sounds are heard one after the other, and none of them have any visual source. Beginning with the ringing of a bell as if from a bicycle (Domenico is seen on a bicycle the first time Andrei and Eugenia go to his house), then something vaguely slamming -- perhaps car doors, maybe boxes hitting the ground -- and finally a braying donkey. All these sounds are not precisely non-diegetic, because they can be imagined as part of the world the image comes from, but the viewer will note that they have no direct visual source. Why the donkey? Is it a joke about Domenico being an ass? Is it a vague Christian symbol? Perhaps it is better to ask what it does instead of what it means. Primarily it keeps the viewer active just as the shifts in film stock do. It is the obtrusive, out of place thing in a clear memory of some event in

which everything is extremely important. It may be comforting to think that in our own clearest memories almost everything will add up to the important outcome, but often we remember something inappropriate that undercuts the seriousness of the event and makes it seem a little silly. This is the thing that makes one aware of the insignificance of his or her personal drama in the scope of the universe.

Many directors show their audience confusing images, but Tarkovsky may be the only major filmmaker to utilize sound as a way of keeping the viewer busy questioning and reevaluating the narrative. In the first post-credit shot of *Stalker*, there is no sound for twenty or so seconds, a very long time to hear nothing in a sound film. Then a distant train whistles. A zoom continues for roughly a half minute, a palpably slow movement by any standard, through double doors to the bed where the family lies. The whistle blows again. The next sound is the faint rattle of a glass against metal. An L-cut on this sound reveals a bird's eye view of a nightstand. Near the top of the frame, a glass holding a bit of water (the apparent source of the rattling noise) jiggles forward. The camera tracks from the nightstand across the family lying in the bed, then back. The approach of a train can be heard along with the glass as the track begins. As the camera moves to the other side of the bed, from Stalker's Wife, across Monkey (Stalker's daughter), and finally to Stalker, the train becomes louder. The sound of a march (Ravel's *Bolero*) blends into the swelling volume of the train and the glass. As the track moves back to the nightstand, the sounds dissipate, and disappear one by one, leaving only the intermittent rattle of the glass. The sound of the glass on the nightstand ceases about ten seconds into the next shot. What just happened? Do these people live directly

on the tracks? Why are they unresponsive to the noise all around them? Was someone listening to Ravel on the train?

The end of this scene repeats the onslaught of combined sounds that the viewer heard during the track across the bed. When Stalker finally leaves his wife, she falls to the floor screaming. As she writhes and wails, sounds are added. One by one the viewer hears the train, another piece of music (Wagner), and something new: the sound of a diving plane. This time the combination of sounds builds to a large volume, then cuts off completely, all at once, with a cut to Stalker in an exterior long-shot. The sounds become as before, a train whistle or a foghorn here and there, footsteps, voices. Even from the previous aural combination the structure has been revised, so the viewer cannot have the same kind of experience. This time two more sounds, the wife's wailing and the plane engine, are included, and the image seems more cooperative with the sounds. Repeating the act of layering, even if it is not the exact same sounds layered each time, creates a cumulative experience whereby memories and associations from the first experience are brought to bear on the second.

Art should never be hermetically sealed. Other arts use improvisation to avoid utter finality. Tarkovsky's kind of art, in which everything is so meticulously planned and rigidly executed, requires the conscious choice of the artist to avoid the sterility of perfection. Here the hand of the artist intrudes upon the world the viewer has chosen to accept for the duration of the film. This is what separates Tarkovsky from Kurosawa, whom he loved, and Kubrick, whom he detested. They would never include the braying donkey because it wouldn't make sense, and this is precisely why Tarkovsky puts it in.

Kubrick and Kurosawa would not understand that it makes a different kind of sense. Art like theirs, in which everything points in one direction, is something Tarkovsky, as much as he may have admired Kurosawa, was not capable of making.

In the color footage of Domenico at home in *Nostalghia*, water is visible, but the rain pouring through the roof does not match the calm dripping sound. Johnson and Petrie say that Tarkovsky uses dripping water as code for memory, and that is in part the case, but as this example demonstrates, that function is not so clear cut. It is unclear whether this event is Domenico's memory or something else, and to hold to the maxim of dripping-means-remembering conflates the issue. One should not assume that what works once in a Tarkovsky film becomes the rule. The viewer would be inclined to link dripping water to memory in this scene only because it does so more clearly in other scenes. This scene, in other words, would not be used as exemplary evidence to make the case that dripping water indicates remembering, because such a conclusion leaves too much other information unaccounted for. It only works when brought in piggy-back on more clear-cut examples. In other words it is a fallacy. In one scene dripping water precedes a dream sequence. Perhaps this happens in two scenes or even three. Still, one must wait for the completion of the fourth scene that begins with dripping water before immediately assuming that it is a dream. Because Tarkovsky constantly shifts his own rules and denies sure footing, attempts to interpret the films as if those rules were static are ill-advised.

Another technique he often uses is to introduce suddenly a loud burst of noise to disrupt a lengthy stillness. His use of the Ninth Symphony in several such instances hints

that Tarkovsky may have learned this principle from Beethoven. That which would already have been plenty loud becomes all the louder when set in contrast with the surrounding silence. This aural shift will likely cause a visceral reaction of the viewer. It does not matter whether this affect is particularly musical. Extreme contrast creates a very useful tension. A viewer will listen harder to a quiet movie. A loud movie slowly becomes tolerable. But a quiet movie with three or four or five bursts of volume never lets the viewer get comfortable. One gets accustomed to the stillness in *Nostalghia* or *Offret*. It seems that one is supposed to listen closely, to get lulled into the tranquility of it, and then, "BANG!" the viewer is jarred into some other state of consciousness. It is analogous to the bell or the gong employed in certain kinds of meditation.

A crucial scene in *Offret* which changes the tone and narrative direction of the film utilizes this technique. Inside the house the day is relatively calm; some footsteps and a few voices are audible here and there. There is a cut to an exterior long-shot of a person that appears to be Maria crossing a field. Near the end of the shot the clinking together of glasses begins faintly on the soundtrack. An L-cut returns to the interior as the camera tilts down to the jittering glasses whose clinking is becoming louder. Faintly at first come the low rumblings of distant jets. Footsteps of the women, both servants and family, running back and forth are heard along with the glasses, but soon the jets passing over the house wash out everything else. The camera pans left and right following the moving figures. Then it zooms quickly in to a pitcher of milk resting on a shelf in an open bookcase. The glass pitcher crashes to the ground, and the sound of the breaking glass is heard within the roar of jet engines. As the jets recede slowly into stillness, an L-

cut shows Aleksandr out in the snow. Only his faint footsteps and the distant call of a bird are audible.

Tarkovsky is the supreme master of the L-cut. His ability to endow it with significance and meaning is perhaps the single aspect of his film style that could be taught to other filmmakers. Like the first-time viewer the characters in this scene have no idea what just happened. It will be explained later. The sound and the L-cut intensify the uncertainty because they make the instant seem so significant despite the lack of visual information. The whole event is chaotic. It is more than a matter of finding out why the milk tipped over. Already in doubt about the sound of jets, the unexpected succession of images leads one to wonder what Maria has to do with the sound, if Aleksandr heard the milk hit the wood floor, and where both of them were when the jets flew over.

Tarkovsky uses this technique in reverse as well, by using silence to disrupt sustained noise. The entire sequence in which the men escape to the Zone, in *Stalker*, is marked by the intermittent roar of the jeep engine or of the patrolling motorcycle, or the clatter of the train. Moments of quiet are broken up by the shouts of guards, gun fire, hurried footsteps, and the echo of boots kicking glass and metal within vast industrial ruins. Stalker anxiously yet tentatively spits out orders to both Writer and Professor throughout the escape. As the men approach the Zone on the handcart, the clanking of the cart across the railroad tracks remains constant. The persistent rhythm of the handcart and metallic echo that follows the three travelers on their journey establishes a rhythm that is almost meditative, as the viewer studies the faces and heads of the three men. An L-cut on these sounds brings the image to a color tracking shot.

All the sounds stop rather abruptly as the track halts, and the camera pans to the right. The soundtrack is completely empty for a few seconds. The Stalker's heavy anxious breathing begins and his subsequent words explain what is happening on the soundtrack. "How still it is. This is the quietist place on Earth." Indeed it is, and this fact is not only communicated to the viewer via Stalker's dialogue, but also made palpable by the change in film stock from sepia to color and the sharp contrast from noise to stillness on the soundtrack. The sounds of the men hopping off the metal handcart are barely audible and short, as if the vibration was trying to escape from a vacuum. Professor and Writer, who could not shut up before, are speechless, and Stalker, who has looked worried and miserable for forty-five minutes, is having trouble containing his excitement. One can make out the smile on his face even in long shot. The stillness is sacred to Stalker, as it no doubt is to Tarkovsky. Sepia changes to color, and the viewer can plainly see that something is now very different. Again, the L-cut brings the viewer to the change aurally before the cut does it visually. The sound of the cart connects sepia to the color stock so there is a transition instead of an abrupt change. Quiet must be reached gradually. Stillness has to come about as commotion decreases little by little. Without the L-cut Stalker's words would be merely expository, but because of it, the viewer knows exactly what he means.

It took time for Tarkovsky to fully realize the ideal use of music in film that he expresses in *Sculpting in Time*. The soundtrack of *Ivan's Childhood* is so burdened by its traditional score, relying on obvious emotion-cuing "mood" music, that a viewer familiar with Tarkovsky's mature works may be tempted to turn the sound off. *Andrei Rublyov* is

less dependent on the score, but when it appears, the effect is of little consequence. His more mature films adhere closer to the following:

> I find music in film most acceptable when it is used like a refrain. When we come across a refrain in poetry we return, already in possession of what we have read, to the first cause which prompted the poet to write the lines originally. The refrain brings us back to our first experience of entering that poetic world, making it immediate and at the same time renewing it. We return, as it were, to its sources (*Sculpting* 185).

This is how Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" works throughout *Nostalghia*. The music is first heard in Domenico's home, as Andrei wanders through alone. Just as the pitch and pace of the singing increase near the end of the fourth movement, the music stops with a scratch, causing Andrei to whirl around in surprise. The music is diegetic, its source is Domenico's record player, but it serves no narrative purpose. So the viewer does not hear the music in order to interpret its use. Rather Domenico simply left the record player on. The viewer can be fully cognizant of this fact even as it fails to help him or her interpret the scene meaningfully.

When used as a refrain, however, Beethoven's symphony begins to accumulate meaning. Thus, the *Ninth* heard in Domenico's home is important for its introductory role in setting up a particular musical motif. When this refrain is heard a second time, in the square in Rome during Domenico's macabre performance, much of the information from the scene in his house is repeated. The sound is diegetic, as it is once again Domenico's record player that is producing the music. Also, Domenico himself is present, but it is his double that starts the record. The other differences are more striking. The music abruptly stops in both scenes; in the first presumably as Domenico lifts the needle, while in the second scene the needle screeches across the disc to the accompaniment of an especially violent image of Domenico on fire and toppling from a tall statue. All excess sound is eliminated to keep the ear attentive to the music as Domenico bursts into flames, and falls from atop the equestrian monument of Marcus

Aurelius. This juxtaposition forces the viewer to fuse together Domenico's act of violent sacrifice with the joyous burst of singing. It would be quite different if, for instance, Mozart's *Requiem Mass* were used instead of the "Ode to Joy." The unexpected, perhaps even perverse, blend of seemingly contradictory sound and image allows us to see something new by actually thinking in a new way, by feeling joy and horror at once.

If the viewer knows Beethoven's Ninth, the music helps to disorient the sense of time, because the later scene plays an earlier section of the same symphony. Even if one is unfamiliar with the work the effect is similar. The music facilitates the dissolution of time by echoing the aural experience, at a point where the narrative, as far as it concerns Domenico, has come full circle from the decrepit house to the venerable antiquity of the Roman square. Another layer is added when Andrei completes his final act, carrying a burning candle across Saint Mary's Pool, to the accompaniment of the Ninth. Here the non-diegetic music must surely recall the first meaningful exchange of thought between Domenico and Andrei (that occurred immediately after the moment the *Ninth* was introduced). Simultaneously the music connects Domenico's death, seen just minutes before, to Andrei's own spiritual release. The use of music as a refrain stirs all this information in the mind of the viewer at once, allowing him or her to connect present and the past. It helps Tarkovsky to create memories within the scope of a two-hour plus film, and these memories are necessary to the narrative.

Chapter Six: Art Makes Us Human - Tarkovsky and Bruegel

In all my films it seemed important to me to remind the audience of the fact that they are not alone, lost in an empty universe, but that they are connected by innumerable threads with their past and present, that through certain mystical ways, every human being realizes the rapport with the world and the life of humanity

---Andrei Tarkovsky

It seems conspicuous that Tarkovsky never wrote about Bruegel and never had a character utter his name on screen. He filled *Sculpting in Time* with discussions of other painters such as Andrei Rublyov, Leonardo da Vinci, Piero della Francesca and Raphael. Bruegel is not mentioned by name in *Solaris* even though characters look at his paintings in a pivotal scene. By contrast paintings and painters are addressed by characters in both *Nostalghia*, when Eugenia and Andrei discuss Piero's *Madonna of Childbirth* and *Offret* when Aleksandr and Otto discuss Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi* and Byzantine and Russian iconography. One can surmise from the ways in which the director uses references and uses Bruegel, and from comparing their artistic styles that Pieter Bruegel the Elder is the artist above all others to whom Tarkovsky felt a close affinity. In a 1969 interview for *Positif*, he explains that for him there is something Russian about Bruegel (Gianvito 26), but whatever the case it is clear that Tarkovsky is engaged in serious dialogue with the master painter.

Bruegel's work appears throughout the films, sometimes as artifact as in *Solaris* which features several of his best known masterworks. The diligent viewer of Tarkovsky's movies will also notice the influence of Bruegel in the mise en scene, especially in *Rublyov* and *Zerkalo*; in both films he recreates specific landscapes by the painter, something he does with no other artist. Tarkovsky uses Bruegel in a variety of

ways, the earliest of which amounts essentially to homage. In his second film, *Andrei Rublyov*, the title character has a vision, a daydream of Calvary that is noticeably similar to Bruegel's painting of the same subject. Christ is positioned in the middle of the frame, in almost exactly the same spot in the painting and the shot. The essential difference is that Tarkovsky has transformed the subject into a winter scene as if he had combined two Bruegel paintings, the Calvary procession and any of his famous winter landscapes. The formal and thematic concerns that the two artists share are numerous: circuitous unfolding of narrative, slow pacing, attention to nature and human relationship to it, insistence on the individual dignity of each character so that no one becomes a face in the crowd or an abstraction and deliberate injection of lightness into a reverent context. I will not argue that Tarkovsky learned all of these qualities directly from studying Bruegel's paintings, but their stylistic similarities are well worth considering.

While I am hesitant to attribute any element of style to circumstances of history and biography, one biographical aspect Tarkovsky and Bruegel share seems unusually significant. It is not just the fact that religious conviction and Christian mythology shapes their works, but that they were both interested in marginal interpretations of Christianity at times and places when such interests aroused suspicion at the very least and could easily result in outright persecution. Both Tarkovsky and Bruegel have been called mystics by contemporaries, modern day historians and critics, atheists and "fellow" Christians. While it is almost always dangerous to be a mystic in any time, the cultures of these two artists made it especially precarious. Tarkovsky was a Christian in Soviet Russia, always deflecting the religious implications of his subject matter at the

committee meetings of Goskino, while Bruegel, a protestant during the most violent of counter-reformation actions, the Inquisition, had to conceal carefully the criticisms he made of the state religion and the Spanish occupation of his country. Bruegel is known to have associated with reformers who practiced transcendentalist mysticism quite at odds with official Catholic dogma (Moxey 30). This mysticism is largely analogous to Tarkovsky's own, insisting on the contemplation of nature as an essential avenue to communion with the divine.

Bruegel is of paramount importance as a figure to stand in stark opposition to Renaissance values. The difference between the Renaissance pursuit of beauty and the poetic tradition's pursuit of truth are worth repeating with reference to Bruegel. As one commentator puts it, Bruegel "shows none of that brilliant Italian narcissism, so delectable in Raphael's paintings, so imposing in Michelangelo's" (Gibson 107); instead all his figures exist in interaction with one another, "for Bruegel's characters are not centered on their ego: seduction is not their chief concern" (109). The key difference between *the* Renaissance and the "Northern Renaissance" rests upon what Gibson calls narcissism and seduction. These are the very things Tarkovsky found so repulsive in the High Renaissance. Bruegel's genre pictures make important statements about how to decode content. In typical Dutch genre paintings every object means something, but in Bruegel a loaf of bread is just a loaf of bread, a glass of beer is only what the peasant in drinking, etc; it is life and nothing more. Hollander could well be describing a Hollywood movie when she explains that in Steen's pictures, "textiles, flesh and furnishings are actual; but the behavior is slightly overdone, and some excessively.

Everyone acts true to character stereotype" (*Moving Pictures* 126), and further, "a great many things are visible just in order to be so, and only some have direct pertinence to the theme" (127).

It is important, in conjunction with this observation, to understand the difference between a Tarkovsky film or a Bresson film in which everything seen has direct pertinence to the theme and a Hitchcock, Welles or Kieslowski film in which everything seen is overly determined by literary meaning. In fact Steen's picture seems to be of this variety. *The Doctor's Visit* is artificially busy, and every object has some meaning outside of its practical function. All this adds up to a narrative which is general; it's a stilted and clunky gloss without any of the truth of specificity. Contrasting a High Renaissance master, Raphael, with a lesser known Venetian, Carpaccio, Tarkovsky writes:

> In [Carpaccio's] painting he solves the moral problems which beset people of the Renaissance, dazzled as they were by a reality filled with objects, with people, with matter. He solves them by painterly means, quite different from the quasi-literary treatment which gives the Sistine Madonna it sermonizing, fictional tone. The new relationship between the individual and external reality he expresses with courage and nobility – never falling into sentimentalism, knowing how to conceal his bias, his quivering delight in the face of emancipation (49).

Of course, Carpaccio was an Italian, but the aspect of his work that Tarkovsky draws our attention to is more akin to the Netherlandish tradition. In fact to cite Carpaccio as a greater artist than Raphael is surely an act of heresy to the traditional art historian and must again recall Florensky. Raphael is a textbook example of all that the Renaissance sought to achieve, and is often considered to be its greatest artist. Carpaccio is a minor figure, a painter far beneath Raphael in terms of technical facility. Yet Tarkovsky holds

that the greater truth is in Carpaccio's work, suggesting in fact that Raphael means to deceive the viewer.

Dissatisfaction with Renaissance masters is not limited to Tarkovsky and Florensky. Indeed twentieth-century Russian scholars made a bit of a tradition around reassessing the Renaissance. Alongside Florensky, Nicholai Berdyaev is largely responsible for advancing this trend. Tarkovsky would have certainly known of his work, but the issue of whether or not he was directly influenced by Berdyaev's ideas is not a straightforward one, because his own position diverges from Berdyaev's at crucial points. On the one hand is Berdyaev's description of Raphael as "the most impersonal artist in the world," and as an artist who "displays great virtuosity without any original substance" (*The Meaning of the Creative Act* 235), which is echoed by Tarkovsky's criticism of the Sistine Madonna. Tarkovsky may well have been offended by Berdyaev's promotion of the pagan aspect of the Renaissance. For Berdyaev the greatest artist of the Renaissance was Botticelli, because he was the most classical. Tarkovsky had little interest in classical beauty, because its mathematical harmony didn't ring any truer for him than the scientific accuracy of the Renaissance. Tarkovsky is compelled toward the very tension that leads Berdyaev to the brink of outright dismissal. "In the Quattro cento certain unhealthy artists appear," Berdyaev wrote, "men divided against themselves, with a secret infirmity which hindered them from realizing their great purpose" (232). Tarkovsky could never believe in such a definitive statement. His ambivalent feelings about Leonardo make this evident enough in *Zerkalo* and especially *Offret*. Tarkovsky may wish he could agree with Berdyaev, but his films and writings

make it clear that he is compelled by the tension in the work of an artist like Leonardo, who is pulled apart by the opposing forces noted in Berdyaev's criticism.

Anne Hollander suggests that the emergence of film has helped the contemporary viewer to recognize Bruegel as a great painter. I find this thesis tenable in part, but I would add and emphasize that it is the emergence of film *as art* which helps us to recognize Bruegel's genius (*Moving Pictures* 98) not simply the invention of motion picture technology. Tarkovsky helps to expose the limitations of such abstract reference to cinema. Bruegel's paintings are not, as Hollander describes, like tracking shots (98). A painting is always still. It is the viewer's eye that roves over the image at its own speed, focusing on particular details at his or her own whim. While there is some room for that in a deliberately long take in which the camera never moves, it makes little sense in relation to a tracking shot. A tracking shot is in motion. If the viewer does not follow the camera's focus, he or she sees only a blur. It is precisely the opposite of seeing detail when looking closely at a painting. In a tracking shot whatever the viewer may choose to look at disappears more or less quickly depending on the speed of the camera movement. In a painting the viewer's focus uncovers detail. This is why Tarkovsky has close-ups of nature. Detail does not show up in a landscape shot. A filmmaker who wants to show a landscape and the tiny details of the trees, bushes and grasses in the landscape has to use two kinds of shots, whereas the painter needs to make only one kind of painting. Tarkovsky's close-ups draw the viewer's attention to what ideally he or she would find eventually in a Bruegel upon close inspection. What Bruegel can do simply by painting it somewhere on his panel, Tarkovsky must show in close-up. The long shot that captures

the landscape cannot show detail, so Tarkovsky has to fragment the image to a degree, in order to realize the same impulse. This is demonstrated almost literally when Tarkovsky shows close-ups of *Hunters in the Snow*.

When Bruegel paints a crowd, he often does so in order to lose the focal point within its teaming mass. The viewer then must look for the subject. Along the way one learns that everything else in the picture is also important. Tarkovsky and Bruegel and Tarkovsky strive to find value and dignity in the faces of the crowd. In *Zerkalo* Tarkovsky celebrates the real-life subjects of newsreel footage. Earlier I argued that Bruegel's works contain numerous distinct characters. Hiding the heroes in this manner is a device to get the viewer to notice all the other players.

The Bruegel quote from *Zerkalo* does make the viewer look for the boy, but there is a more general analogy to draw. The crowd is more than camouflage. As one critic puts it: "It is communication, relationship, context, and the shape a gesture imposes upon the space between figures" (Gibson 107). This relationship implies more than compositional acuity; it speaks of a belief that a person is defined by his or her relationships rather than his or her essence. "[R]eality does not reside in any *thing* taken by itself. No, *reality resides in the relationship*" (107).

To be sure both artists deride personages they deem worthy of ridicule. Bruegel especially is wont to attack figures of power as he does with the Magi in his early interpretation of their visit to the Christ child. Yet they never demonize the masses. Bruegel celebrates peasant life in two of his best known works. No one is a mere caricature, but rather all are individuals with a unique importance in the whole picture.

As Hollander puts it, "The viewer is roused in his fundamental sympathies and in his sense of humor, not soothed in his sense of comfortable superiority" (114). It took close to four hundred years, however, before anyone perceived that Bruegel's paintings of peasants were meant to celebrate them rather than poke fun at them. There is humor in his painting, but not at the expense of his "common" subjects. Bruegel uses drollery in the same way Tarkovsky uses what can be best described as slapstick: to inject lightness into a serious context in order to disrupt the uniformity of the film's heaviness (which most critics take for granted as Tarkovsky's ultimate goal). Sometimes it actually lightens the tone, and at other times it adds tension. Peasants dance under the gallows in *Magpie at the Gallows*. Otto pretends to be upset by Little Man's prank in *Offret*. Eugenia sprints up the stairs suddenly like a track star in *Nostalghia*.

There is no more striking similarity in their works than in the way Tarkovsky and Bruegel meditate upon nature. Before he makes specific reference to Bruegel in *Solaris*, Tarkovsky introduces him thematically. In an attempt to relate to the simulated image of his dead wife, Kelvin shows Hari a home movie he has brought to the space station from Earth. The footage allows a glimpse of life on Earth for those who are physically so far from it. The images are typical Tarkovsky, close-ups of fire and leaves juxtaposed against landscapes. All these features are equally characteristic of Bruegel's pictures, especially since the scene is covered in snow. Whereas Renaissance painters emphasized the differences between humanity and the natural world, Bruegel more often drew connections between the two. The materials of divine creation may not be as important as the creative act, but for Bruegel they were important enough to celebrate in their own

right (Hagen and Hagen 74). This is why the document Kelvin has brought to space to remind him of earth is full of nature. That it is a snowy winter scene emphasizes the mutual connectedness of humanity and the natural world. Snow on clothing and on hair places the human being within the snowy landscape; he or she is in it rather than treading on it. The same kind of thing happens before Kelvin leaves earth. Instead of retreating indoors when it begins to rain on him, he lifts his face to the sky and welcomes the rain, letting it soak his clothes and wet his hair and face.

Later in the film, Tarkovsky once again considers the place of the human being in nature, this time with explicit help from Bruegel. The scene takes place in what is physically and symbolically the space station's most earthly room. The library is paneled with wood and carpeted. It is the only room that doesn't look like a space station. Instead it looks cozy, like a country house, albeit the country house of an artist or philosopher. In addition to the numerous books scattered about, the room contains candlesticks, a grandfather clock, china and glassware, and numerous art objects. There is a stained glass window, a classical bust, and a small reproduction of the Venus de Milo. Most important are the five Bruegel reproductions which hang side by side. These include the "little" *Tower of Babel*, *The Corn Harvest*, *The Return of the Herd*, and most importantly *Hunters in the Snow*. The function of this painting must be understood within the context of the library as the most earthly room narratively, not just in appearance. It is here that the scientists quote from Cervantes and expound upon the nature of Man. It is as if the room has the psychological effect on the scientists of turning their mind to philosophical questions. When Hari chimes in with her ideas about how

Kelvin is nobler than they are, Sartorius explains to her that she is in no position to ponder the nature of something she is not. Her argument is that she is indeed human, because she loves Kelvin. The interchange is all basic humanist stuff, whereas outside the room, the topics of concern are more strictly scientific, at least superficially. In other words the subtext of Kelvin coming to terms with the appearance of his dead wife may be something to do with the nature of Man, but it is the explicit topic of conversation in the library.

Hunters in the Snow remains visible throughout the scene, but the camera turns careful attention on it when Kelvin returns from a brief talk with Snaut outside the library. The forgetful Kelvin left Hari alone in the library. This mistake has produced disastrous results before. Upon his return, however, instead of finding Hari dead, he finds her smoking a cigarette, something she has never done before. Smoking is also an activity from which only a human could derive pleasure. She is also gazing at the paintings. Here the close-ups begin of *Hunters*. The camera tracks across various sections of the painting using dissolves rather than cuts to change views. Just before Kelvin finally gets Hari's attention there is an inserted shot of a little boy in the snow, a memory of the film she had watched earlier. Hari has made a connection, a connection between the natural world she saw in the film and the natural world in the painting. The soundtrack helps to blend the two perceptions consisting of indistinct voices, birds chirping, dogs barking – sounds that match up with either Bruegel's images or the images from the home movie.

Hari seems to be learning from Bruegel precisely what Nancy Huntting describes when she says, "The world in all its richness is not an interference -- it is a completion, an affirmation of ourselves."[vii] There is undoubtedly a sense that through contemplation of art Hari is developing a reflective connection with the natural world, and thus learning what it means to be human. In essence this scene shows how art can make something a person has never known seem inextricably linked to her inner most being. This is powerful art indeed, and Tarkovsky chose Bruegel among all others to act as the catalyst of Hari's transformation and growth.

Only a minute or two after Kelvin's arrival in the library, the two begin to float and the viewer sees more close-ups of *Hunters in the Snow*. There are occasional instances of weightlessness on the space station. For a moment at the end of this scene the two lovers are weightless before the image, looking at one another then at the painting. The scene suggests the intimate relationship between love and art. What beyond love and art makes one human? Hari learns how to love because art has opened her up emotionally, and she learns to have a feeling for art because her love for Kelvin has awakened other perceptual faculties.

In Tarkovsky's next film, *Zerkalo*, Bruegel's imagery is again used less directly as it was in *Andrei Rublyov*. This time the part of Hari is played by the viewer. *Zerkalo* is a poem not just to Russia but to the great achievements of humankind and the arts. I have discussed the scene in which the Bruegel landscape in the chapter about Zerkalo. This is the scene in which Asafyev from climbs the hill with his sled. By quoting Bruegel in a recognizable way Tarkovsky sets him alongside several other important

influences and touchstones that appear in this film: Leonardo, Bach, Andrei Rublyov, Pushkin and Dostoevsky. It is significant to note that all of these artists show up in other films but are all brought together only in this film as if Tarkovsky intends for the film to actually demonstrate his pantheon. At the same time the poem Tarkovsky's father reads resonates perfectly with the impulse shared by Tarkovsky and Bruegel that simple, everyday things which we take for granted, can be made into the most profound. "With a surveyor's chain I measured time" (Tarkovsky 143). In addition to all the arts Tarkovsky shows images of the major events of the twentieth century. The world is changing all around Asafyev. Art continues to be produced all around him as well. Tarkovsky positions his rendering of the Bruegel landscape at a crossroads in Russian history and the history of the world. To do this forges a deep connection between two subjects that are often treated as separate worlds: art and politics. This film, this brief instance in particular, shows how art and politics are inextricably linked.

Tarkovsky is not the only filmmaker who tries to show this, but it is worth distinguishing between his aesthetics and a more fashionable sort. His way of breaking through the façade is not the same as, for instance, Godard's well-known dictum that every cut in the editing room is a political act. Nor is Tarkovsky's way similar to the path taken by so many of his critics who insist on finding political messages in his films. Especially with the onset of cultural studies, critics want to be able to find a lucid and consistent political stance or position in Tarkovsky's movies. Since academics tend to hold liberal political ideologies, or at least what they construe to be such, they often judge artists based on how liberal the message that comes through his or her works. One

consequence of this practice is that shrewd, exploitative multi-billionaires like Steven Spielberg reap praise for regularly saying the "right" things. Godard represents the most direct critique of this quasi-ethic. When he says that every cut is a political act he draws attention to style as the locus of political subversion. The point he illuminates is that filmmakers like Spielberg, Ron Howard and Robert Redford, to name the most egregious, may say the right things, but their facile style only re-inscribes the status quo they ostensibly wish to critique (and, it is crucial to note, makes them absurdly rich in the process).

Tarkovsky does not differ with Godard on this point, for he too would say that style is the most articulate expression one's "position." What makes Tarkovsky's view distinct from Godard's is the latter's emphasis on the socio-political dimension of human existence at the expense of the spirit. For Godard every cut is political because every *thing* is political. Everything a person does either supports or subverts the status quo. Every individual action is either an act of defiance or an act of obedience. Thus every move one makes is construed as a choice between subservience and revolution. This belief, though it is rooted in critical thinking beyond the level of critics who demand positive messages from artworks, still reduces the human person to his or her socio-political function. This dimension is not at all exhaustive for Tarkovsky. It is exactly the paradigm against which he battered himself at the state-run film studio. The human being is not primarily a political animal. We are spiritual beings, and everything else emanates from the well of spirit. Art and politics are connected for Tarkovsky, not

because art is a useful political tool, but because both are attempts to answer spiritual needs.

Though this chapter has dealt more with Tarkovsky's films and less with Bruegel's paintings, the examination of the influence of Bruegel upon Tarkovsky helps one to understand the work of both artists. Expert knowledge of the fine arts may not be an essential part of appreciating Tarkovsky's films. Still, the more experience one has with art, the better one is at viewing it. Northrop Frye calls this the *educated imagination*. In his essay, "Verticals of Adam," Frye puts it this way: "It is hardly possible to understand what the imagination is doing in words without seeing how it operates with some of these other units" (*The Educated Imagination* 120). Of course he is talking not about movies, but literature. Frye compares words to, "numbers or tones or colors or bricks or pieces of marble" (120). Tarkovsky shows that one may also want to know something about the *shot*, *camera movement* and the *L-cut*. When watching his films, it does help to know how to listen to Bach and it helps to know how to look at a painting. The more familiar one is with the artists from whom Tarkovsky has learned the better one will be able to learn from Tarkovsky. By the same token the films allow one to learn about Bruegel's paintings in ways that would not have been possible without them.

Chapter Seven: How the Personal Reflects the Universal

> To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your own private heart is true for all men, -- that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, -- and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment.
>
> ---Ralph Waldo Emerson

Of his film *Zerkalo*, the work largely regarded as his most avant-garde, Tarkovsky wrote, "in this film, for the first time, I would use the means of cinema to talk of all that was most precious to me, and do so directly, without playing any kind of tricks" (*Sculpting* 133). *Zerkalo* attempts direct contact with the filmmaker. By blending past with present, dream with waking reality and memory, and newsreels, and by relying on the disembodied voices of the protagonist/narrator interacting with visible characters and of Arseny Tarkovsky reading several of his own poems, *Zerkalo* thoroughly displaces character and, by extension, narrative. Italian filmmaker and poet, Pier Paolo Pasolini, talks about this in his 1964 essay, *The "Cinema of Poetry"*. His writing is obtuse but his discussion of the "free, indirect point-of-view shot" helps to illuminate what Tarkovsky does in *Zerkalo*:

> It may be irregular and approximate - very free, in short, given that the filmmaker makes use of the "dominant psychological state of mind in the film," which is that of a sick, abnormal protagonist, in order to make it a continual *mimesis* which allows him great, anomalous, and provocative stylistic freedom.
> Beneath this film runs another film, the one that the filmmaker would have made even without the pretext of the *visual mimesis* of his protagonist - a film whose character is completely and freely expressive/expressionistic (Pasolini 182).

Pasolini digs beneath the ubiquitous mimetic premise that haunts so much of film criticism to suggest, with a measure of both subtlety and opacity, that it is expression and not mimesis that should be the aim of cinema, for expression is the true task of poetry. In *Zerkalo* Tarkovsky tries to remove plot as if it were mere adornment to the film of which

Pasolini speaks. To watch it is figuratively and literally akin to looking through the director's eyes. Sometimes his eyes are looking out at the world, but more often Tarkovsky turns his gaze inward.

Zerkalo presents greater interpretive challenges than most films, including those by Tarkovsky himself. It is not that *Zerkalo* defies thematic discussion, but its unusual structure forces critics into situations they normally try to avoid. For instance, Johnson and Petrie express regret that they must develop their analysis by following a chronological progression of events shown in the film. Their worry is that this method is too linear, something academics must guard against in a discipline overwhelmed by Post Modernism. However, to proceed chronologically through *Zerkalo* is not at all linear. The very structure of the film provides ample space for the viewer's own critical development of ideas and even encourages a careful analyst to skip sections of the film while pursuing these ideas. In some significant way the critical form should reflect the artistic form. One may wish to focus more on themes than on plot development, but one must show how a theme is developed from beginning to end, especially since film is always perfectly linear in it method of presentation. The job of the critic is precisely to show how the narrative works. The unfolding of narrative is full of complexity and richness that less attentive and less experienced viewers and readers miss. Criticism is best when it addresses how the film works instead of saying what it means. To concern oneself only with themes is to limit the scope of narrative art. One loses the experience for the meaning. It is crucial that the critic and viewer do not make this mistake with Tarkovsky. His films are not message films. I mentioned in a previous chapter that Tarkovsky's aesthetic advantage of Stanislaw Lem lies not in his ethical or moral superiority, but in his greater narrative complexity. The same holds true in this case as well. The process of making meaning is more important than the meaning produced.

The Tarkovsky style is evident in *Zerkalo*, but it is guided entirely by the impulse for internal exploration with little pretense of story or plot. This is what Pasolini meant by "free, indirect point of view." The shifting of colors has no diegetic basis. Memories appear in color and monochrome. The present appears in color and monochrome. Newsreels appear in black and white. The visual shifting is done purely in the interest of reorienting the viewer. There is no character in the traditional sense for the viewer to cling to and live vicariously. If the narrator's voice is what one relates to, it is a very dubious relation indeed. He speaks infrequently and often unexpectedly. He rarely explains what has been shown. Tarkovsky reflects his own inner world to the effect of obliterating certain conceptions of time and psychic categorization; "the inner world we try to reproduce on screen; not just the author's inner world, but what lies within the world itself, what is essential to it and does not depend on us" (*Sculpting* 159). Tarkovsky's view is distinguished from Pasolini's on this point. Pasolini wants absolute self-expression, while Tarkovsky goes to his personal depths in order to find universal humanity.

Organ music plays as the first post-credits image appears; it is the back of a woman leaning on a fence, a vast green field spread before her, with something of a road in the distance. The sound of the organ is cut off by a train whistle. The viewer is given no visual evidence that this woman lives near a train station. I recall once in an Ozu course the professor asked us, "What does a train whistle mean?" Ozu is a filmmaker absolutely fascinated with trains, so this was an important concern for the class. It is indeed a sound that has many connotations and associations, and when it rings out with no visual correlative, the viewer is encouraged to bring up all of them at once. The train's whistle signals departure and arrival. It is the sound of technology, but technology that once was cutting edge and has now become obsolete. The train changed the world,

and it changed it fast, yet now tracks lie unused, in disrepair. Thus the train whistle simultaneously evokes the future and the past and is therefore a most articulate sound to begin this film about memory.

Shifting states of awareness

Before the credits roll, an unnamed boy turns on a TV and the viewers, both the boy and the film audience, watch a folk healer cure a young man of a stutter. A first-time viewer would have no idea what just happened, and in terms of the narrative, inasmuch as it is the story of the unseen protagonist, indeed nothing has happened. The first shot of the film shows Ignat, the son of Alexei who is the film's narrator. The viewer will have to wait a while, however, fifteen minutes to half an hour, depending on his or her deductive powers, to find out whom either Ignat or Alexei is. The viewer may immediately guess, since the first shot is in color and the healing episode is in black and white that the film has moved from a narrative character to extraneous characters, but he or she would have little idea to what end this has been done. For Tarkovsky states of consciousness are more important than storytelling. In a narrative film the development of theme is also always the development of narrative. Therefore it is not just the development of an idea which relates strictly to theme, but the development of perception that is bound to narrative cues. A shift in narrative is a shift in consciousness; it is an altered perception. Themes are what one talks about when the experience is over. The meanings one is left with at this point are uncertain and tenuous, and as such are problematic indeed.

Thus it is dubious to suggest that the "folk healer" episode *means* something in the static sense of the word. Perhaps the boy who turned on the television sees the image that the audience sees, though from the audience point of view, he appears to be looking at a blue screen. An L-cut connects the images of the boy and his television to the healer

and her patient, yet it does little to neutralize the disorienting effect of the cut. Normally the L-cut would help establish a more cogent if subtle link between images. Here the juxtaposition is jarring if not altogether disorienting. Even after viewing the film dozens of times, one should not be able to readily accept such bold rejection of a basic principle of film continuity.

Introducing Ignat before the healing episode is an attempt to plant a memory. The viewer will learn later that Ignat, like the stuttering Yuri Zhary, has trouble expressing himself though he ostensibly has a vast imaginative world that he keeps inside. This will in turn be connected in various ways to his father's childhood and Alexei's memories of his own struggles with self-expression and his first forays into creativity. One may even be tempted to call the problem of speech, i.e. cogent, justifiable action the central concern in all of Tarkovsky's films. Andrei Rublyov cannot paint or speak until he is inspired, a moment that takes years happen; Chris Kelvin struggles to make peace with the apparition of his dead wife created by his unconscious desire; Stalker fails to make himself understood to his traveling companions; Domenico is capable only of absurd acts of faith, and throughout most of *Nostalghia* Andrei is reluctant to share even the tiniest bit of himself; and, finally, Aleksandr's bargain with God requires that he forever give up the opportunity to explain his thoughts and motives even as those who love him would desperately seek such an explanation.

Voiceover describes the first post-credit scene. A tiny figure turns at a distant bush, and begins to walk toward the camera. "If he turns right at the bush," says the narrator, "it is father." It turns out that this man is not Alexei's father, but a physician ostensibly looking for the town of Tomshino. He proceeds to flirt with a woman seated on the fence next to the house, and after some uncomfortable banter, he joins her on the fence for a cigarette. The fence crashes to the ground beneath their combined weight,

and the doctor begins laughing loudly. Suddenly he becomes contemplative, the blow to his head apparently causing him to stop thinking about sex, and begin to wonder if plants perceive. The subtitles are poor, but he says something to the effect that, "we do not trust our inner natures due to doubt and haste." We have no time, and perhaps we fear having time to "stop and think."

Of course Tarkovsky's films make the time for precisely this thinking and feeling, and it is typical that Tarkovsky would make such an otherwise dubious character echo his own beliefs. So far there is really nothing to like about this doctor, unless the viewer happens to find him more charming than the mother character does. He is not the father the poem indicated he should be. Rather he is a bit of a philanderer trying to pick up a strange woman on a country road – moreover, a woman whom the viewer will soon learn is the narrator's mother who has been left alone with her children while her husband is at war. This context makes his actions questionable to say the least. It is easy for the writer to make his characters one-dimensional, and Solonytsin's character could easily have been made despicable either by the actor or the director. Since film schools from Moscow's state system to UCLA teach their students that simple characters are the kind that involve an audience, it must be tempting for the filmmaker to write easy characters; characters without contradictions. A father who says the right things is easily contrasted with a usurper who says the wrong things, but a father who says nothing and a usurper who utters wisdom are much harder to understand. Tarkovsky often puts opposites together within his characters. In the hands of another filmmaker this could come off as an intellectual exercise, as if the director meant only to test the Hegelian dialectic. Tarkovsky's usage is organic to the nature of the film, he shows opposites within a single character, because conflicted is what people are in essence.

During the phone call from his mother, it is noteworthy that Alexei speaks of

dreams and memories without clear distinction between them as categories. The viewer is given no indication that there is a clear division between the external and internal world of the character, at least in part because he is not visible. The way the scene is shot may remind one of an extended point-of-view shot familiar to the film noir, in which the sequence ends by revealing the unseen character in a mirror. But the scene here is quite judiciously not that. The shot contains no images of people or phones. All the interaction is provided in voiceover. There are no sounds of footsteps. The filmmaking process is intentionally obtrusive, for there is no encouragement to suspend one's disbelief. It is instead a self-conscious tracking shot through a flat with a voiceover narration.

Showing a space instead of a man in this scene shifts attention from the external to the internal world. This must sound strange, but consider the alternative: if one sees a man on screen one looks at that man, and waits for him to act. If one instead watches objects pass by in a tracking shot, one must, among other things cued by the dialogue, think about the objects and the unseen characters' relationship to them. So rather than getting to know a character through his physical appearance, the audience becomes acquainted with his spaces and his perceptions. Having his voice intrude on this particular shot indicates his waking present tense consciousness, but his physical absence breaks down faith in the notion that the psyche and time are divisible. The viewer has to think about the character instead of looking at him.

The conversation ends abruptly. Alexei seems little interested to hear that Liza, a former co-worker of his mother's, has recently died. She apparently hangs up on him, and an L-cut on the sound of a train moving across the tracks links to the next sequence which begins with a monochromatic shot from behind a running woman. Her heavy breathing is turned up on the soundtrack, and is accompanied only by footsteps. This

distortion cues the viewer that he or she is again witnessing something other than the character's experience of waking consciousness. Monochromatic images, slow-motion photography and very spare sound selection often add up to a dream state in a Tarkovsky film. Tarkovsky creates confusion here, because the qualities that construct a dream state in order to be able to follow the leakages of those qualities into other states. As *Zerkalo* continues it is less and less clear what is conscious representation and unconscious representation; what is present and past, memory and dream.

The psychic origin of the printing house episode is uncertain. The narrator is wholly absent from what seems to be an anecdote about his mother and her tenuous friendship with Liza. The plot of this episode is that the narrator's mother, Masha, needs to find out if she has made a copy editing error. Masha shares her relief with Liza after she discovers that there is no misprint, but then Liza suddenly changes her tone and lashes out quite violently, telling Masha, "Your husband was lucky to escape when he did," and "I swear you'll make your children miserable." In part this is an unspoken suggestion of the tension everyone in Russia must have felt living under the rule of Stalin. He is never mentioned by name, but there are framed pictures of him in the printing house, so Stalin's presence is evident. This would suggest that Liza's anger results from fearing for her friend rather than from bearing her any ill will.

There is a structural issue here as well. Liza's sharp change in tone echoes the doctor's change in tone from before. In fact, the film contains many unexpected and jarring tonal shifts. Already the doctor has abruptly changed his tone from flirtatious to curiously ponderous due to a blow to his head; a pleasant conversation between the narrator and his mother has taken a sharp turn when he unexpectedly asks, "Why are we forever quarrelling;" and now Liza attacks Masha without obvious provocation. Such abrupt tonal shifts may seem sloppy if one must characterize Tarkovsky's work as

somber and monotone. Many critics either do not notice or simply choose to ignore the fact that *Zerkalo*'s tonal variations are extremely complex. As soon as Liza's attack does its damage, she is immediately apologetic to Masha. A phone rings, prompting Masha to leave. Liza follows her down the hall calling after her, but Masha does not answer. She slams the door and tells Liza to go away. As Liza walks down the hall in long shot, she starts skipping after quoting the first Canto of the *Inferno*. Skipping in a Tarkovsky film would be very strange indeed, were it not for the fact that there is always humor threatening to upset the seriousness of almost every scene.

There is a scene which begins with a phone call from Alexei to Ignat. The father asks his son if he has any girlfriends, and proceeds to recount a memory of his first love, a red head from military school that always had chapped lips. In this brief narrative, Alexei's drill instructor tries unsuccessfully to get a boy named Afasyev to do an about-face properly. Next Afasyev throws a grenade onto the firing range. All sound stops except for heavy breathing, as the instructor lies on the grenade. From the distance a boy calls, "It was a dummy." After the grenade is discovered to be a dummy an image flashes of the young girl touching her blistered lip. This narrative seems to be a dummy of sorts as well. The viewer should expect a story about the red-head and Alexei, instead of the troubles of the hapless and unfortunate Afasyev. In fact, the storyteller, Alexei, disappears altogether just as he did in the Masha and Liza episode. As this interlude runs its course, the narrative diverges almost completely from Alexei and his family.

Newsreels

Zerkalo first includes extensive use of newsreel footage in the scene at the flat as Natalia's Spanish guests reminisce about their country's revolution. There are images of a bullfighter and of what appears to the evacuation of a city, while Natalia and Alexei

argue in the next room. Later in the scene are images of a Soviet weather balloon and of a ticker-tape parade for the aviator, Chkalov, upon his return to Moscow from the North Pole (Martin 123). The weather balloon appears in silence. A few seconds pass before soft music begins and proceeds to a bit of chorus from Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*. I am able to refer to the historic events in these newsreels because I have done research, not because Tarkovsky makes any of this clear in the film. The best resource for this kind of information is Martin's *Pocket Essential Tarkovsky*, and I refer the reader to this book to satisfy these curiosities. Yet the specific history behind this footage is not the most important nuance of this scene. One should be able to conclude that when the Spaniards are talking, pictures of Spain are shown. (The more pertinent question might be: Why are the Spaniards there in the first place?) As for the weather balloon and the aviator, it seems unlikely that Tarkovsky is interested in them specifically as especially important events.

To identify the specific historic referents of this newsreel footage is not necessarily of any great consequence to the viewer's understanding. A Russian viewer may have a lot more personal history that coincides with Tarkovsky's history, but the structure of the narrative that weaves personal memory and cultural memory shows every viewer that he or she not only exists in the world the film talks about, but takes part in this world daily, changing with it and being changed by it. Newsreels interject a sense of collective experience whether or not one is at all familiar with their content. Newsreels are assumed to be seen by a public, which gives us an instinctive feeling of a shared experience. Tarkovsky is careful to weave strands both visual and aural from one sequence to the next in order to maintain the formal indivisibility of the film.

Tarkovsky employs the newsreel most significantly at the conclusion of the Asafyev episode. It is almost the middle of the film, and scope of the film has moved

beyond the narrator's personal attachments and into Russian history, and then the history of the world. A brief insert of found footage shows soldiers loading equipment on to rafts. Splashing sounds and voices are dubbed in. A return to the firing range shows Asafyev slowly ascending the steps. Extended footage of soldiers marching through water, dragging boats and equipment, follows for a few minutes. A distant drumming is heard, sometimes swelling, and then receding. The soundtrack also includes dubbed in sounds of splashing and barely audible singing. Near the middle of the sequence Arseny Tarkovsky begins a poem in which he states that, "there is no death. We are all immortal," juxtaposed against images of soldiers, which links directly to the children being forced to learn how to be soldiers. Asafyev climbs a snowy hill, pulling a sled in a long shot famously modeled on Bruegel's snowy landscapes.[viii] When Tarkovsky finishes his poem, only the boy's whistling remains on the soundtrack. The camera holds on a close-up of his face. More newsreel footage begins. This time explosions are dubbed over images of tanks firing, the dead Hitler, skies lit with tracers, airplanes and mushroom clouds. This vision of violence lasts a couple of minutes before returning to the boy. Afasyev stands before a tree, as soft non-diegetic singing becomes louder on the soundtrack. In slow-motion a bird flies from the tree to land on the boy's head.

More newsreel footage cuts in on this quiet, dream-like moment. Russian soldiers hold back a crowd of vigorous Chinese, waving Mao's red book in their faces. The music swells to accompany a huge Maoist rally. The film has drifted from the family for the past few sequences to deal with soldiers and wars. But the links are always present, however subtle. In a color shot the familiar woman kneels on the hardwood floor of her home. She turns upon hearing a man's voice, to see a soldier in uniform looking back at her. The man in uniform is the father from the monochrome childhood dream that follows the doctor episode in the beginning of the film. The father as a soldier connects

to Alexei's memory of military schooling even if he is never shown. In the following shot the adolescent Alexei bullies his young sister in the woods outside the dacha. Suddenly the father's voice calls out to her, "Marina!" Both children run through the woods, leaving behind a book on a table, which the camera tilts and zooms to, revealing that it is a collection of Leonardo images. This is the same book Ignat was looking at earlier, and the visual refrain of the same boy with the same book again brings about the sense of circularity to the family's generations. The object is the same, and the person with the object is the same, but they exist at different times. Tarkovsky reminds the viewer that he is talking about one family. The history of the world matters only as it comes into contact with them.

Tarkovsky was certainly impressed by Tolstoy who cast royalty and peasants alike on the grand stage of History. This model has been followed by numerous other Russian novelists, and is in fact a narrative standard from the early storytelling to contemporary filmmaking. Everything from the wise and profound myths of Homer to the syrupy ersatz movies of Steven Spielberg hinge their stories upon people taking part in great events. The characters may be extraordinary or mean, but the events in which they take part are always those that changed the history of the world. Instead of telling the stories of crucial turning points, great battles and major political changes Tarkovsky shows how the big events trickle down and effect the most miniscule of players in life's great narrative. If all the world is a stage, it is a stage because everything in it is worthy of being exalted; it is because the history is not at all defined by broad strokes. The drama of Masha at the printing press is evidence of the long arm of Stalin, and it shows the viewer the far-reaching ramifications of a moment in Russian history. The way Tarkovsky edits the Asafyev sequence brings this idea into even sharper focus, for he is not only an adolescent who cannot follow simple instructions; he is a person confronting

history. Amidst the Maoist Revolution, the end of World War Two and Alexei's reunion with his father is a lonely boy trying to fight back his tears by whistling.

Family Resemblances

A black and white dream sequence shows the Mother in her pregnancy, floating above a bed, as the Father, who appears for the first time in this scene, rubs her belly. Near the end of the sequence the Mother walks over to a mirror and instead of her youthful reflection, she sees an old woman. This woman will reappear several times throughout the film, and it is worth noting that she is played by Tarkovsky's own mother. In these first fifteen minutes, bringing the audience from the first appearance of the as yet unnamed Ignat through the first dream sequence, Tarkovsky introduces his internal, imaginative space. He lays the groundwork to explore generational circularity, the dissolution of conceptual time into a natural flux, and the obliteration of the 'I' even as he relies on his own subjectivity and memory to build the film. This last point is not paradoxical. The memories and dreams in *Zerkalo* may be Tarkovsky's own, but they could be anyone's dreams. Thus the protagonist is carefully constructed as an ephemeral entity who only posits himself through speech. Without the familiar face of a hero through which one can live vicariously, Tarkovsky forces the viewer into a more immediate interaction with the images and sounds.

Margarita Terekhova plays two roles in the film: the Mother and the Wife. Here the viewer must resist the impulse to reach for the handy Freudian interpretation. This is not a Fellini movie. The image of this woman persists, as if she were the only woman he can imagine. Terekhova's dual roles do not indicate a sexist worldview or a strictly mythological one. The first time the woman appears she is the mother, smoking and fending off the doctor. The second time she appears running through a rain storm after Alexei has had a curt discussion with his mother on the telephone. In both cases the

viewer will not learn which character the actress plays until well into the scene. By withholding that information, the artist puts the emphasis on viewing her face rather than upon identifying her character. *Zerkalo* does not seek to investigate Oedipal conflicts. The conflation of Wife and Mother is one of the ways in which Tarkovsky confuses temporality, to show that time is subject to the creative impulses of the psyche, and to maintain a generational circularity in which one becomes the other. Angelopoulos does something similar in *Ulysses' Gaze*, in which Maia Morgenstern plays all three important women Harvey Keitel's character meets in the film. Angelopoulos' purpose, however, is essentially sexual; he wants to project a classical idealization of Woman. Tarkovsky is more concerned with the simple fact that many people find spouses that remind them of a parent. The fact that Ignat and the young Alexei are likewise played by the same boy indicates that Tarkovsky is also interested in the fact that children look like their parents. This may not seem noteworthy at first, but Tarkovsky uses this simple conceit to create uncertainty about which character is which throughout the film, especially in the beginning of scenes.

After the Liza episode, which ends with Masha in the shower laughing ruefully, as the pipes have gone dry, is a shot of the same woman looking at her reflection in a mirror. This time she is in color. Alexei's voice says, "I always said you look like my mother." Glimpses of earlier images such as the burning barn and other bits of Alexei's childhood flash, and then he speaks, "whenever I remember my childhood, she always has your face." In this scene Alexei and Natalia (the first time the viewer has seen Terekhova as the wife rather than the mother) argue about their son. The shots focus on Natalia and her reactions just as they focused on Masha's reactions in tight close-up in the previous scene. Also recognizable is the boy from the very first shot of the film, and a larger context opens as the viewer recognizes this must be Alexei's son.

The scene with the Spaniards in the flat ends with a montage of newsreel footage. Pergolesi's choral music links the final image of Chkalov's parade to the adolescent Alexei, as an L-cut to a close-up of a book of Leonardo reproductions with text shows the boy's hands turning the pages. The music fades out with another L-cut as Natalia begins to speak to Ignat. She drops her purse on the floor, spilling its contents. While he's helping her to pick the stuff up, Ignat says he feels like this has happened before, "but I know I've never been here." Indeed, it is unclear until dialog is spoken whether this mother and son are indeed Ignat and Natalia rather than Masha and Alexei. A flash of the burning barn burning barn of Alexei's childhood memory reminds the viewer of the possibility that they are in some sense both.

Before she leaves Natalia tells Ignat that Maria Nikolayevna may stop by the flat. Maria is Masha from Alexei's childhood memories. She is Alexei's mother whom Natalia looks like, and she is grandmother to Ignat who looks exactly like the younger Alexei. She does indeed drop in. Ignat answers the door to find the old woman who first appeared as the reflection of Alexei's mother in the first dream. She checks the number on the door, and then inexplicably apologizes to Ignat for coming to the wrong door, though he is the spitting image of her own son. This moment is fleeting, even insignificant to Ignat who is anxious to get back to his imagination, yet it is crucial because it shows all the strands of the generations of the family coming together and again separating. Using the same actors to play different roles is the only way to achieve this precise effect.

While looking through some photographs of Alexei's aged mother, Natalia comes across a very strange picture. The old Masha and the young Masha (clearly not Natalia, because of the dress she wears) stand side by side. Perhaps this overstates the subjectivity of experience, but it cannot be denied that the appearance of the photograph

has no realistic impetus. These pictures must have been taken when Tarkovsky's mother was on the set of the dacha scenes. The internal world of Alexei has bled into the aspect of the film which seemed at first to represent present, waking reality. Now this space has been destabilized and subjected to imaginative whims. Mother, as Alexei's memory of his own mother, but also very significantly as the Mother archetype, is divided into two entities: one that ages and one that returns. Regarding this photo, Natalia exclaims, "She and I really are alike." "Not at all," Alexei answers, leading Natalia to put her head down. Alexei's conversation with his ex-wife, ostensibly about Ignat, but really about their failed relationship, echoes the conversation Alexei has with his mother at the beginning of the film, because it is supposed to be about Alexei's childhood, but ends up being about the strained relationship between mother and son. Natalia and Alexei's mother are very alike indeed.

Masha and her husband lie amidst the tall weeds; apparently they have just had sex. The camera pans and zooms to her face as she leans up. The husband's voice is heard, "Do you want a boy or a girl?" Masha considers as the music swells. She fights back tears and smiles. The young Alexei – the one still younger than Ignat - and his sister walk with the old woman through the open field. The time is all out of joint in this sequence. It is impossible time. Masha and the Father discuss their unborn son, and she apparently looks off in the distance at her two children accompanied by the older version of herself! The camera tracks until it reaches the old woman and the young boy, together in the same shot. First by extending the narrative to a point at which there was no Alexei, then by pairing the youngest version of the boy with the old version of his mother, *Zerkalo* indicates to a vast generational and temporal continuum.

A Creative Life

Following another dream sequence, which again weaves together strands of the

viewer's previous experience to amount to a nebulous consideration of Alexei's mother and Natalia, there is an extended memory in which the adolescent Alexei travels with his mother to a rich woman's home to sell a pair of earrings. They enter the house, and the two women disappear in back, leaving the boy by himself, in a darkened room. Faint music begins over a close-up which details milky fluid dripping into a puddle. In the next shot the camera is placed over the boy's shoulder as he regards his reflection in the mirror. What happens next is an echo of Ignat's moment alone at home with his imagination. The adolescent Alexei regards his reflection as the camera zooms in to the image in the mirror. To the viewer the boy is not just looking at his own reflection, but at the image of his unborn son, Ignat. One will become the other, and since they are the same actor, one *is* the other. The generational circle is connected in this shot. To further draw this out, the next cut puts the camera in the mirror's position, still zooming in to a close-up of the boy's face, as the music swells – it is the same music played during the earlier scene with Ignat. The shift in perspective emphasizes the dual nature of a reflective surface. A mirror is a means of self-evaluation and self-exploration, but it is also a projection of a surface appearance. Here Tarkovsky shows that there is no hard line between inside and outside. One learns about the inside from carefully studying the outside.

This episode is also about how exploring the inside opens up the creative, artistic consciousness. Beginning with the reflection, the scene unfolds Alexei's imagination, running wild and drifting among memories that the viewer has come to share. It recalls an earlier scene in which Ignat imagined visitors at the flat, and thus draws a connection between the creative capacity of father and son. In the scene of Ignat's reverie real time is maintained in an uninterrupted shot in which the mother leaves the boy in an empty house, and the camera pans right, from the door to the kitchen, to a strange woman seated

at a the kitchen table and being waited on by a maid. This is demonstrative statement about the persistence of imagination. In one instant there is a boy talking to his mother in everyday waking reality; then with the mere use of blocking from the door and the unedited take, the viewer enters Ignat's private fantasy.

At the rich woman's house, the bedroom door creaks open, and she and Masha emerge. The woman asks Alexei why he has been sitting in the dark. They exchange a few words, and he tells her his name is Alyosha, which marks the first time the protagonist has pronounced his own name. This act serves as a transformative point for Alexei -- for the artist. It recalls the film's beginning in which Yuri Zhary is healed of his stutter. For Tarkovsky, the metaphor of the word is a particular aesthetic concern. In connection to the healing of Yuri Zhary, I have previously noted the last words of *Offret*: "In the beginning was the Word," but the beginning of what? For Tarkovsky, it is the beginning of metaphor, or creativity, of imagination. This is applicable not just to the artist that Alexei will become, but to the cured stutterer. *Mirror* conveys this shift toward imagination as fundamental to all forms of expression. For Yuri, to speak is to create. His matter-of-fact, "I can speak!" couples with the young Alexei's rather diminutive and hesitant, "Alyosha." The creative impulse begins with a declaration or with the act of naming one's self.

The next scene begins with a color shot of two women in a room with a doctor. These are the two women that appeared to Ignat when he was alone in the flat waiting for his grandmother to stop by. The camera moves around the room to reveal the protagonist, Alexei, but only from the shoulders down. His image, though partial, signals another end point, another completion of a circle. Alexei is the patient, and the four people are all arguing about the cause of his illness. While the others carry on, the hand of Alexei reaches out to pick up a small bird that lies motionless next to him on the

mattress. He cups it gently, and then releases it. As a motif, some resonance is suggested with the scene in which the bird lands on the boy's head. There is an argument among critics about whether or not the release of the bird symbolizes the release of Alexei's soul, i.e. does Alexei die at that moment? As with the end of *Nostalghia* I maintain that this is a misleading question. Alexei lets go of a bird. What does it mean? What does the bird symbolize? These questions are for those who want to practice Freudian dream analysis on Tarkovsky's dream imagery. Maybe the bird is his soul. Maybe hope is the thing with feathers as Emily Dickinson wrote. For this viewer the way that Tarkovsky again blends the waking world with the unconscious is more interesting. The shot is at least in part a fantasy unless the viewer is to believe that someone has brought the sick Alexei a very docile little bird to keep him company in his convalescence. Tarkovsky's symbols resist being read as simple signs. The bird can mean so many things, why does it have to mean that the narrator dies? If we are all immortal as his father wrote, and Tarkovsky certainly believes this, what consideration could be of less importance than the fate of the narrator?

Memories, dreams, and waking perceptions all exist in the same temporal plane, the pattern of their placement in the film from beginning to end having nothing at all to do with their objective sequence. This is precisely because Tarkovsky wants to suggest that there is no such thing as an objective sequence. All creation is within the psyche, and any talk of an objective world is only the propping up of particular metaphors that at one time a given society or culture has decided to value above certain others. The soul of Tarkovsky -- the collective psyche of humanity -- has no ego, as it knows no time. Time passes for the viewer; that time that is imprinted forever on the celluloid, but in so far as time has a beginning and an end as human life does, and as we measure ourselves by it; this time is absent from *Zerkalo*. Everyone is eternal in as much as each person is part of

humanity. This film takes that notion beyond mere platitude and shows it actually happening.

Chapter Eight: Stalker and Shakespeare

Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe

---Hamlet

Tarkovsky began shooting *Stalker* in February of 1977. At the same time he was also directing a stage production of *Hamlet* in Moscow. Unfortunately, no film exists that records his adaptation of Shakespeare for the Russian stage. Some entries from *Martyrolog* constitute the sum of Tarkovsky's statements directly concerning *Hamlet*. Curiously and provocatively, theses notes are from 1983 and 1986 respectively. In 1983, Tarkovsky was in Monument Valley, considering it as a location for shooting scenes for a film version of *Hamlet*, when he lamented, "It's astonishing that in places like this, where one ought to talk to God, Americans make westerns like John Ford used to do."[ix] It is especially noteworthy that Tarkovsky continued puzzling over Shakespeare's masterpiece almost up to his dying day. On the twenty-fifth of September, 1986, he wrote about the nature of sacrifice in *Hamlet*; Tarkovsky died two months later. It is clear that Tarkovsky saw in *Hamlet* many of the themes he pursued in his own work, especially in the last three films, and it is *Stalker* that is particularly close to Shakespeare's play. In this chapter I would like to consider this film, at least in part, as Tarkovsky's dialogue with Shakespeare.

Madness

The problem of Hamlet's mental health has long been among the most important concerns for critics, readers, teachers, students, actors and directors. The most rewarding

approach to the play entails that one makes no definite decisions about Hamlet's sanity, whether one is playing him, watching him or reading him. Hamlet's psychological state peaks and falls wildly; sometimes he is having fun at the expense of Polonius, sometimes his anger leads him to irrational action, sometimes his conversation with Horatio is lucid and thoughtful, and then, as if dark cloud comes over his reason, he leaps into a pit with his dead lover and weeps over her body. It is one of Shakespeare's great achievements that one cannot finally judge Hamlet. Part of the method to attain this end precludes surrounding him with people who are trying in vain to figure him out. Though the plots are quite dissimilar, the plight of the title character is strikingly alike in *Stalker* and *Hamlet*. Stalker, too, lives and works among people who cannot grasp what motivates him. Even Stalker's wife is at a loss.

Stalker's mad characteristics are often attributed to his status as "holy fool." The holy fool is revered because the faithful give him or her credit for being in touch with God in a way that they could never be. Since he insists that the spiritual life has to intertwine with the social life, Tarkovsky has no such reverence. The only holy fool in all of his work is the mad woman who survives the sack of Vladimir with Andrei Rublyov. The way she is portrayed indicates not reverence for the holy fool, but contempt. Though Rublyov insists that the other monks should treat her respectfully, because she is a holy fool, they do not go along with it. They pay no heed to Andrei's admonitions, and it takes little time before Rublyov himself is out of patience for his holy fool. The mute is clearly more foolish than holy. She is ineffectual, non-sensical, unaware of any moral obligation; she runs off with the Tartars who deride her, because

they put a crown on her head and feed her raw horse meat. Tarkovsky, rather uncharacteristically, is not the least bit ambivalent about her character. He condemns her utterly.

In contrast to her idiocy are the three characters most often called "holy fool:" Stalker, Domenico and Aleksandr. All three are somewhat holy, but not one of them is foolish. A holy fool is inarticulate, because he or she has been struck dumb by God. This holds true for none of the three men. Aleksandr is a teacher. He has an articulate professorial demeanor, refined taste and appreciation for art. He gives up speech of his own volition as part of a pact with God. God does not decide his fate, and God does not take anything from him; Aleksandr makes theses decisions for himself. Domenico is more like the E.T.A. Hoffmann of Tarkovsky's screenplay about the writer's life; he lives in a world of his own creation. He is desperate and tragic, admirable in his moral struggle, but incapable of reaching those he seeks to help. Yet he gives the impression of a saint more than a fool.

Tarkovsky's characters are rarely static abstractions. They change throughout the film, and as they do, so too does the viewer's perception of them. Stalker is introduced as a character that has an understanding of the Zone that was imparted to him as if by divine gift. Yet his authority over the mysteries of the Zone is undermined as the three men make their way through it, until it begins to look like he is just as lost as the two he is supposedly guiding. Should one identify Stalker as a holy fool the end of the film presents some rather unsettling information. He is supposed to be a vessel of faith, and in the last shot in which he appears, Stalker lies prostrate in front of an enormous,

overflowing bookcase. Books cram into the shelves from end to end, and those which do not fit properly lie in stacks scattered about the shelves, the floor, the top or the bookcase. The books are worn and disheveled; they lie open; pages are dog-eared and bindings are cracked. These are well read books. It doesn't look like the bookshelves of a person who has anything at all in common with the idiot in *Rublyov*; it looks rather like the bookcase of Joseph Campbell or Harold Bloom. The Stalker is quite the opposite of a holy fool; he seems more like a familiar characterization of Hamlet: a misunderstood genius in a world of fools. Of course Stalker is in this respect something of a stand-in for Tarkovsky as he saw himself, the poet, against the communist bureaucracy.

Words, Words, Words

In her essay, "The Aesthetics of Silence," Susan Sontag speaks of how verbosity reduces the meanings of the words being said. Banging meaning into one another at a heightened level until the viewer is unsure of any meaning is of course not something invented by modernism. Shakespeare at his best, especially in *Hamlet*, in *Antony and Cleopatra* and in *Tempest* is masterful at this, and it is from Shakespeare and not any modern playwright that Tarkovsky learns how to do this in *Stalker*.

One would fall victim to one's own intellectual inclinations should one find the "true" message of *Stalker* in the ideas expressed by the characters. Writer and Professor in particular say many intelligent things. Much of Writer's dialogue seems as though it could have been culled from the transcript of one of Tarkovsky's lectures or interviews. If Writer resembles Tarkovsky, it is to allow him an avenue for self-criticism. In fact, all three characters represent aspects of Tarkovsky's personality that he is unable to resolve:

the creative aspect, the skeptical aspect and the faithful aspect. On one level the point seems to be that neither the Writer nor the Professor, who have opposing viewpoints, has achieved intellectual satisfaction or spiritual fulfillment. Writer makes this clear from the beginning; he is going to the Zone to find "inspiration." The Scientist is much less forthcoming about his attraction to the Zone, but it becomes clear during his telephone call from the Room, that the professor has problems his science cannot address.

It is reasonable to suggest that Stalker is the alternative to the mutually exclusive views held by Professor and Writer. He is the guide, after all, and the success or failure of the venture is predicated upon the willingness of the other two men to follow his instructions. Stalker may speak the truth, but that truth is mediated in a number of ways. There is the fact that beyond the instructions he gives as a guide through the Zone, many of his words are not his own. If Stalker is Tarkovsky's Hamlet, it is crucial that his "to be or not to be," and his "what a piece of work is a man," are bible verses and poems by Tarkovsky's father, Arseny. Like Hamlet, Stalker's words fall on deaf ears. Writer and Professor are somewhere between the dimwitted Polonius and the earnest yet uncomprehending Horatio (in fact they are much closer to Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). Their failure to grasp Stalker's profundity demonstrates the weakness of words as a vehicle for transmitting truth – a trait shared by Hamlet as well, who saves all of his best poetry for the moments when he is alone. If anyone should understand the meanings of Stalker's speeches, surely it would be the Professor and the Writer.

Dumb Shows

Tarkovsky must have known he had a slight advantage over Shakespeare in the following aspect: Shakespeare had to use words to communicate the futility of speech, while Tarkovsky uses dialogue in strict relation to the image and the rhythm. This is not to say that Shakespeare wrote literature; obviously he meant for his words to be performed, but such a performance is the interpretation of words. Shakespeare's poetry is in those words, and the actor and director must bring it out through the performance of the play. Tarkovsky's poetry is in the shot. Thus the way the actors are photographed and the ways Kaidenovsky, Solonytsin and Grinko perform physically become far more important than the delivery of dialogue.

Sontag's essay on silence in art suggests at least one possibility for adapting the dumb show to film. She credits silence for "furnishing or aiding speech to attain its maximum integrity or seriousness. Everyone has experienced how, when punctuated by long silences, words weigh more; they become almost palpable" (20). This is true of Tarkovsky in a general way, but it is only the first step toward the explanation we are looking for. In *Stalker* Tarkovsky does something more; he makes the silences weigh more, and he makes muteness palpable. Sontag continues, "when one talks less, one begins feeling more fully one's physical presence in a given space."(20) It is the physical presence that is Tarkovsky's concern.

Tarkovsky achieves meaning-rich physicality primarily by using two kinds of shots. The function of the long shot is often to show body language. The close-up has numerous functions: it frustrates continuity, it disrupts space and, most importantly, it turns the head into an expressive surface. Writer's body language is almost always at

odds with his verbal bravado. Every time Stalker gives him an order to go forward he proceeds slowly and tentatively, repeatedly looking back as if to make sure Stalker meant for him to go this particular direction. It is as comic as it is suspenseful. One may compare it to the "retrieving the ice skates" scene in Vitaly Kanievsky's *Freeze, Die, Come to Life*. Writer's trepidation becomes more comic as the viewer begins to realize that Stalker is quite fallible and uncertain.

The close-up helps to confuse the space, particularly in the scene immediately after Stalker and Writer come upon Professor, who has supposedly returned from where they have just come to fetch his knapsack. The narrative already puts coherent space in serious doubt, because Writer and Stalker had only moments before realized that they had left behind the Professor only to discover him waiting for them further along their path. From here on the situations get even stranger. Most of the shots are in close-up, save for one full shot of Stalker huddled in a fetal position as if on an island in the middle of the muck. The three men are talking to one another in this scene, but the shots always show only one of them, and the character in view often looks in a different direction from shot to shot. Stalker, for instance, while talking to the other two is shown first facing the camera, then with his back to the camera, and finally with his face straight down into the ground and the camera above him for a birds-eye shot. It is difficult to tell how far away they are from one another. It would seem as though Writer has moved a few yards down from Professor, with Stalker at least the same distance beyond him. Yet they talk to one another as if they are in a huddle, barely raising their voices. At the end of the scene, after an indeterminate amount of time in which Stalker either dreamed or heard a voice in

his head reciting from the book of *Revelation*, Writer has somehow managed to end up with his head in Professor's lap. Rather than discuss how on earth they got in this position, the two are listening to Stalker recite the story of the apostles who met the risen Christ on the road. Stalker does not see them. He is looking away, but he asks them if they are awake.

As Stalker continues to speak, Writer and Professor sit up, and they are photographed in one of those heads-together shots that are something of an earmark for Tarkovsky's late films. He seems to have developed this practice from watching Bergman, but he uses it to achieve different ends. One may recall, for instance, the shot in *Persona* in which Bibi Andersson and Liv Ulmann both look forward at the camera as if into a mirror. In Bergman's films it is evident that they look at one another and at themselves simultaneously. This is straight-forward psychology motivated by the plot of the film. Tarkovsky's shot is less psychologically certain, and thus becomes more dynamic. The shot of Writer and Professor is one of the most famously reproduced film stills in all of Tarkovsky: Professor is in the left foreground facing the camera but looking off to the left (his right); Writer sits in the right background (to Professor's left) and faces the right frame but looks forward, though not directly at the camera. What are they looking at? What are they thinking? These questions are less important considerations than the fact that Tarkovsky can distill the overall style of the film into a single shot. Everything is reduced to the single principle, action without movement.

Where Shakespeare has dumb shows, Tarkovsky relies on close-ups on the back of the head to invest the dumb body with spiritual eloquence. Many filmmakers are very

good at doing this with the face. Carl Dreyer's *Passion* relies on the face almost exclusively to convey meaning. But the face is to the filmmaker what words are to the playwright. To develop an analogue to Shakespeare's dumb shows, Tarkovsky must have looked to painting. The great tradition in Western art of the back-of-the-head view is found in the Netherlands and Holland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. De Hooch, de Witte and Vermeer are its most notable masters. Often in their pictures one sees two people in conversation, where one face is visible and the other is turned away from the spectator, forcing one into the position of completing the narrative. It is not this specific function but the simple idea that the back of the head can be as expressive and meaningful as the face and the body that Tarkovsky borrows from the Dutch masters.

The heads of Stalker, Writer and Scientist are evenly juxtaposed against their faces by Tarkovsky's camera throughout the film. The head is precisely the opposite of the most expressive part of the body, the face. Yet it is also part of the same. The back of the head is the other side a duality, and most artists don't pay a lot of attention to it. It does not invite much attention to be sure. The hands are expressive. Many painters have made pictures that hinge on a twist of the torso. Dance, above all the arts, has explored the expressive capabilities of the body down to the toes. But the expressive potential of the head is largely untapped.

The other duality of the head is that of appearance vs. the thought beneath it. The expression on the face often acts as an indication of the thought in the head. *Stalker* is Tarkovsky's most intellectually verbose work and the most Shakespearean; it is only one of his films populated by articulate characters, each of whom stands ready to deliver

discourse upon the mysteries of life and death and the meaning of existence. All the while, this heavy intellectual air is visually disrupted by drawing the viewer's attention to the mute, opaque back of the head, the dumb skull in which all the profound thinking originates.

The use of the head in *Stalker* is indicative of an aesthetic shift that marks the style of the film in general. Consider the back of Stalker's head in contrast to the back of Andrei's in *Andrei Rublyov*. Preceding the "Russian Calvary" sequence is a shot of the back of Andrei's head. The most common interpretation of this fantasy is that it belongs to Andrei. Though the suggestion has been made that it is actually Foma's daydream, the point is that it is a visual representation of something happening in some character's imagination. Tarkovsky struggled with this conceit throughout his career, from the dream sequences in *Ivan*, to the free stream of consciousness of *Zerkalo*, to the uncertain states of imagination, dream and memory in the final two films. *Stalker* is especially remarkable, because it is the only film in which he is able to abandon altogether the urge to show different states of consciousness or different *realms of being* in Rudolph Steiner's phrase. Tarkovsky refuses to show what is going on inside the head in *Stalker*. It is left to the viewer to figure out. Hopefully, the viewer will comprehend Tarkovsky's dumb show as lucidly as Claudius understands Hamlet's.

Tone

When Writer decides he has had enough of Stalker's attempt to complicate their path to the room, the tone changes often and the changes are sharp. One second Writer decides to stop taking Stalker seriously, carelessly pulling up weeds to spite him.

Suddenly Stalker throws a tire iron at him. This action is at once comic and threatening; it's the first time Stalker has lost his cool, but he throws like a little girl. Stalker asks Writer for a drink from his flask, and proceeds with deadpan concentration, to pour it out. Writer brashly declares that he will head straight for the room. Professor, who has been shooting disapproving looks at Writer throughout this episode, shrugs his shoulders. He struts off toward the room, but progresses only a few steps before he becomes tentative again. When a voice calls out stopping him, he turns and walks briskly back to the other two. The tone fluctuates from comic to tense, and it is often unclear whether the moment is funny or scary. This is another lesson learned from Shakespeare who knew how to conceal the hint of death lurking in otherwise comic scenes and who likewise threw jokes into serious exchanges and soliloquies. For a lesson in tone, one need only remember how quickly Hamlet goes from bantering with the gravedigger, to waxing poetic over Yorick's grave, to throwing himself into the grave of Ophelia.

Professor decides to go back after Stalker gives a speech in which he concludes that only "the most wretched" make it through the Zone. Stalker advises him against this, and the three get up to leave with no protest from Professor. Each man wavers, and the manifestation of their inconsistencies is telling: Writer repeatedly changes his *attitude*, while Professor, on the other hand, changes his *mind*. This speaks of the kind of people they are. Professor vocalizes his change of plans, while Writer vocalizes his change of mood. Sometimes he does this as if he is just trying out an idea. When Writer says, "Give up your empiricism, Professor," is he making fun of Professor, of Stalker, or trying to find sympathy for Stalker's mysticism? That he just muttered to Professor a snide

comment about Stalker's "sermonizing" seems to indicate he is being sarcastic, but his mood changes so often and so thoroughly that it is difficult to be sure.

Stalker's demeanor also oscillates. He is fearful, neurotic and mincing, and then at once he can become rugged and intense. He wants his companions to be weak in one sense, and in another Stalker is too weak to help them. His personality is indeed the source of much the film's humor. There are times when the other men are serious and Stalker is not: Stopped in front of cascades of rushing water, Stalker tells Writer that they are about to enter the "dry tunnel." "The dry tunnel," Writer remarks somewhat questioningly, somewhat exasperated. Stalker smiles, "It's a local joke." There are jokes even in the Zone! In many instances Stalker's seriousness and reverence plays comically against the nonchalance of Writer and Professor. Having made it to The Room and wondering what will happen next, Writer begins a harangue. The phone rings, which he takes as an annoyance because he has something to say. Exasperated, Writer picks up the phone: "Da! No, this isn't the clinic," he shouts and slams down the receiver. He's about to continue, but all three of them actually do a double take in the direction of the phone. There is a palpable moment of awe, because *the Phone just rang in the Zone!* Stalker's wide-eyed response of "Don't touch it!" only makes the situation funnier; because we have seen Writer and Scientist repeatedly ignore his cryptic warnings and come to no harm. In a final comic flourish, the Scientist picks the phone right up and begins dialing. Even the escape scene at the beginning has some of this comic tone, because Stalker really doesn't seem to know what he is doing. It appears as if they are just getting lucky rather than skillfully sneaking into the Zone.

Another comical them is the constant bickering between Writer and Professor. For instance when they stop to rest, after having, in Stalker's view, narrowly avoided a trap, the two bicker in an unmistakably comic tone. Writer is too tired to realize it is time to stop talking; he blabbers deliriously. His opposite, the Professor has ceased to instigate argument with Writer and finally stopped talking so he can sleep, but the talker will not let him. It is probably a very familiar situation, but presented in a wildly unfamiliar context.

Like Shakespeare's characters those in *Stalker* each has a turn to say something important without any of them ever emerging as the lone voice of truth. Writer is the most thoroughly critiqued and dubious of the three men, but when he says, "Mankind exists to create works of art," you can be sure Tarkovsky believes it. Later when Stalker explains music to Professor and Writer he says it has no ideas yet it is the most meaningfully felt art. This belief suggests a principle that underlies Tarkovsky's own poetics. These statements, particularly the one by Stalker, are analogous to those made by Solonytsin's Country Doctor in *Zerkalo*. Who is Stalker to have ideas about art? Is he a holy man or a philosopher?

Marjorie Garber notes that *Hamlet* represents three worlds, what one may again refer to as three *realms of being*: "the world of Hamlet's mind and imagination; the physical, political and 'historical' world of Denmark; and the world of dramatic fiction and play," which, she says, "are parallel and superimposed upon one another" (*Shakespeare After All* 470). This is true enough for *Stalker* as well, in which the three realms are Stalker's imagination, Russia and narrative, coupled with the unique

possibilities offered upon the film screen. She suggests that the play is essentially about how the boundaries within and between these worlds are constantly shifting. The same holds true for *Stalker*, and I would specify where Garber does not about both *Hamlet* and *Stalker*, that the fluctuation of liminality is achieved primarily by tone. All of the manifestations of content follow from the back and forth turns of heart, unexpected shifts in demeanor, revelations, outbursts and palpable changes in the subtext of conversation. In this sense it does not even matter what they are saying so long as the tonal experience comes across.

The subject of a given dialogue is not nearly as important as the manner in which the verbal exchange is presented. Tarkovsky allows one character in this film to speak plainly. Indeed Stalker's wife is the only character in all of his work to speak in the way she does. She does not talk about man's need for faith or humanity's search for meaning in a cruel, cold universe. She talks about herself, about her husband and about how difficult it is to love him. She speaks directly to the camera in what is often considered a direct address to the viewer. This speech is one of the most precious in all of Tarkovsky's films, at least in part because he shows everyday drama between a man and a woman, and it does this without being dressed up in the grand philosophical yearnings that burden most of the characters in his films.

This disruptive scene, which Tarkovsky believed conveyed his conviction in the supreme power of love (*Sculpting* 200), plays a key role in understanding the function of dialog for a number of reasons. That she addresses the audience suggests that we are to *believe* what she says, to regard it as the truth in the way that we should not do with the

other three characters in the film. Her matter-of-fact style is appropriate, because she does not speculate or ruminate upon anything so other-worldly; she does not ask about the secrets of the universe, vent her existential angst, or preach about the downfall of mankind. Stalker's wife just wants to tell the viewer that love is hard. Her appearance raises many questions, because her candor and the way that she seems to shun the artifice of cinema seem to contradict much of Tarkovsky's aesthetic. Is this character an artistic failure? Does she represent an ideal Tarkovsky could not express artistically, so that he had to just come out and say it? I will say – No, for the following reason: all at once she supplants Stalker's tragedy, and suddenly the quest for truth becomes less important than the struggle to love someone who insists on searching for truth. A great many things are said about Tarkovsky's misogyny, because he once or twice stated that men should create and women should sacrifice. Is it simple traditional values when the greater good is sacrifice?

One of the last passages Tarkovsky wrote in his diary addresses *Hamlet* and the nature of sacrifice. He viewed Hamlet's revenge killings as ultimately sacrificial acts, writing that the prince, "avenged to join 'the broken link of times,' or rather realize the idea of self-sacrifice." He continues:

> Odd, absurd moments of necessity, of propriety of sacrifice which the materialist Freud would call "masochism." A religious person—'obligation.' Dostoyevsky called it "desire to suffer." Without a religious system such desire to suffer may turn into psychosis. Ultimately, it is love that hasn't found form. But this is spiritual love, not a Freudian one. Love is always a gift made of oneself to others. And although generosity, readiness to make sacrifice, carries within itself as it were a negative, ostensibly destructive meaning (naturally, in its vulgar understanding) in relation to the individual who makes the sacrifice of himself, the essence of this act is always love, and therefore a positive, creative, divine act.[x]

Neither Hamlet nor Stalker can make a sacrifice. They are both trying to express *love that hasn't found form*. Only the Wife of Stalker is capable of this love. If one is attracted to the biographical reading of *Stalker's* conclusion, then one must conclude that Tarkovsky admired Tarkovskaya, more than he admired himself. More than that, as he understood the world, Tarkovsky must have believed his wife was a superior human being in comparison to him. The seeker of truth is a noble sort of person, but the one who loves him *or her* is nobler still.

Chapter Nine: Tarkovsky and Women

I'm very concerned about the depiction of women on the screen. It's related to their being either high- or low-class concubines, and the only question is when or where they will go to bed, and with whom or how many. There's nothing to do with the dreams of women, or of woman as the dream, nothing to do with the quirky part of her, the wonder of her.

--John Cassavetes (*Adventures in Insecurity* 35)

The director's task is to recreate life: its movement, its contradictions, its dynamic and conflicts. It is his duty to reveal every iota of the truth he has seen – even if no everyone finds that truth acceptable.

---Andrei Tarkovsky (*Sculpting in Time* 188)

Christianity separates the feminine into two aspects. On the one hand is the virginal aspect. Virginity is a metaphor for spiritual perfection. Following Plato the Church Fathers indoctrinated the spirit realm as the seat of good. In contrast to the virginal is the promiscuous aspect. This is a metaphor for every pleasure of the flesh, and it extends to cover all earthbound virtue and desire. Earth is the house of evil. The doctrine of the Church is a sort of stripped down Platonism, but without the delineated hierarchy of Plato, that allows for the huge grey area, in which humans actually live. The Bible sets the forces of good and evil against one another through the allegorical figures of the Virgin Mother and the Whore.

Traditionally the situation is no more complicated than this, and it seems that good Christians are rarely led to wonder why both characters would be given the same name. Tarkovsky treats this binary as a Janus-faced femininity and he exploits the tension in *Offret*, endowing his Maria with the qualities of both biblical Mary figures. This combination produces a witch-like character, thus ceasing to be wholly Christian. Though the two aspects of the feminine, creation of life and carnal desire, are attributable to these two Christian figures, putting them together in one person may, for some, come

close to blasphemy. Nor is there a way to sugar-coat the narrative necessity of having a man to have magical sex with an allegorical Mary in order to save the world. For all of Tarkovsky's reverence for icons and particular Renaissance depictions of the Virgin, he cannot put something on screen that he does not feel is truthful. The world cannot be saved by praying to Mary; Aleksandr has to have sex with her. This duality should be unsettling regardless of what one's particular Christian affinities or lack thereof may be. It is troubling because it leaves an inconsistency in the work. Abstract faith is not enough to save anyone; only through the flesh can the world be redeemed. Tarkovsky never stated this explicitly, though he has shown it in his films a number of times. Tarkovsky is not praising his own work, but rather he is stating a general aesthetic principle when he says, "A true artistic image gives the beholder a simultaneous experience of the most complex, contradictory, sometimes even mutually exclusive feelings" (*Sculpting* 109).

In *Nostalghia* Tarkovsky encourages the viewer to associate Eugenia in some ways with the *Madonna del Porto*, but only as a reference point to her sexually charged relationship with Andrei. Her connection to the painting is drawn in a pragmatic way: she goes to see it and has an argument about it. The symbolic connection between the meaning of the painting and the role of women in modern society is then secondary to the practical manifestations of this conflict which is played out in the sexual conflict between Eugenia and Andrei. In *Offret* Tarkovsky takes his gender study to a grand scale. It is an allegory, but an allegory that is destabilized in ways that are typical of his style. Still the symbolic reference points are there, and they are worth exploring.

I should note that the weighty subject matter of western mythology is not what makes Tarkovsky important. The value of myth lies solely in his treatment of it, specifically in the fact that he upsets the typical balance, and re-writes the familiar stories. One need only compare the mythology of *Offret* or *Stalker* to the *Star Wars* movies or the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Both popular film series are often praised by reviewers like Roger Ebert and Leonard Maltin, as well as by scholars with PhD's in Humanities and Fine Arts, specifically, because they abide by the rules of myth as we know them. George Lucas actually made sure of this; he read Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and built his narrative out of it, like a child learning to draw cartoon characters from a how-to sketch book. I do not bring up this point facetiously. Accolades have reigned upon these movies in the mainstream and in the academy, because Lucas' and Peter Jackson's mythological fineries supposedly add great depth to what most people would otherwise regard as B-movie science-fiction and B-movie action-adventure, respectively. The crucial matter is not that the director utilizes myth, but that he works with it and works it over; that he examines it, pulls it apart, rejects it, comes back to it, refines it and offers up new insight into our old ways of thinking. When F.W. Murnau and other early filmmakers proclaimed that cinema would make the new myths, the latter is what they were talking about. Tarkovsky is making the new myths; Lucas and Jackson are milking the old ones for fame and fortune.

The Marian symbolism of *Offret* is complicated and disorienting precisely in order to deconstruct the symbolic order with which most viewers associate the Virgin. The two characters named Mary in the Bible have long been taken to be symbolic of the

dual aspect of Woman: the mother and the whore; the virgin and the sinner. Tarkovsky's previous films have been roundly criticized for their sexual politics and for their reliance on gender stereotypes. In his final film Tarkovsky begins his reconsideration of Mary by first putting the Magdalen and the Virgin together in the same woman. Woman is not one or the other, pure or spoiled, virgin or whore, loving mother or reckless lover; she is both, or at least she always has the potential to be both. Whether or not this is an empirical fact of life, the duality holds true for Alexander. He stands before the reproduction of Leonardo's unfinished *Adoration of the Magi*, and the camera slowly zooms in on the face of the Madonna. The subsequent cut leads to the house of Maria, the servant and, according to Otto, the Witch who can save the world through magical coitus. The power to save the world through her sexual body is a trait Maria shares with the Virgin, but that she would use her body for sex can only be a Magdalen quality. Maria's part in saving the world is not to give birth to a great and prophesied man. Rather she helps to save the world by having sex with a rather insignificant and mundane man. It is not with the benefit of a miraculous sexless pregnancy that she transforms the fate of humanity, but through her own magical sex.

Combining the attributes of the Madonna and Magdalen in the character of Maria is not Tarkovsky's final revelation. It is part of a thorough reevaluation of the viewer's relationship to Marian symbolism. To do this the viewer has to get below the conceptual world, and into what D. H. Lawrence would call "blood consciousness." Maria brings to mind conflicting concepts of womanhood, but she is also a woman. Most of his viewers do not look for men and women in Tarkovsky's films; they look for allegories and

symbols despite Tarkovsky's insistence that his work contains neither of these. Because it has been widely agreed upon that Tarkovsky adheres to mystical misogyny, critics tend to close their eyes and ears when it looks or sounds like he might be trying to say something about male/female emotional/sexual relationships. But Tarkovsky has things to show us about these kinds of relationships that are every bit as subtle and nuanced and profound as what we see in Bergman or Cassavetes.

There are three characters in Nostalghia, and two of them, whether their words indicate it or not, are a man and a woman whose every conversation is about their feelings for one another, and these feelings are entrenched in their conflicting ideas about appropriate and inappropriate behavior for a person of one or the other gender. The superficial review of *Nostalghia* provides only a facile interpretation of the two principle characters. Eugenia is a Jezebel, an unrepentant temptress who does not understand spiritual matters because feminism has corrupted her into abandoning them to pursue earthly rewards. Andrei is the misunderstood and long-suffering noble artist who is unaffected by her advances because of the strength of his spiritual convictions. This characterization supposedly reveals Tarkovsky's own deeply held beliefs, in which Man, the argument goes, will play the role of the suffering artist and Woman will be the Mother to their Child or be spiritually lost. Tarkovsky says as much in his diaries, "What is the purpose of Woman? Humiliation in the service of Love." (89) Since it comes from his journals, many interpreters assume it must be true, and this fact makes every characterization of a woman in Tarkovsky's work as an embodiment of his sexism.

Armed with this information the figure that emerges from the carpet is misogyny, and the critic can neatly conclude that Tarkovsky hates women.

There are two problems with using diaries as evidence. First, they are not necessarily indicative of the artist's beliefs. I often write in my journal ideas and notions that I only believe for a fleeting moment. I find sometimes that writing it down helps me decide whether or not a thought is true or even viable. I would allow Tarkovsky the same freedom to his journaling that I allow myself. Second, perhaps it was true when Tarkovsky wrote it in 1974, but when he made *Nostalghia* between 1979 and 1981, the possibility that he had changed his mind should be considered. Both of these facts amount to the same thing: trust the tale and not the teller. If we are going to use Tarkovsky's diaries as the key to understanding his films, we are going to be left with some fairly commonplace insights and some very convoluted and vague meanings.

Tarkovsky's films are enjoying a good deal of critical interest right now, and a great deal of the new scholarship gives the impressions that the subject of women in his films embarrasses scholars who otherwise praise Tarkovsky's genius. His "attitudes" about women, it would seem, are not what one should watch his movies for. Jonathan Rosenbaum, in an essay on *Solaris* actually calls Tarkovsky's "sexual politics… Neanderthal" (*Movies as Politics* p.282), while in *A Visual Fugue*, Johnson and Petrie simply add "the inevitable emotional sterility (and threatening sexuality) of a woman who has neglected her 'natural destiny' of motherhood and submissiveness" (163) to a long list of concepts Eugenia is overly burdened to represent.[xi]

Tarkovsky is probably not a feminist, but the important thing is that even if he were one in life he would never espouse that position or any other ideological position in his work. Characters in a Tarkovsky film are never right or wrong in any strict sense. Consider the exchange between Eugenia and the sacristan at the beginning of the film. "Why is it women that pray so much?" Eugenia wishes to know. "How should I know," responds the sacristan, "You should know." Eugenia is already getting upset. "Because I'm a woman?" she replies indignantly. Without wasting any more time the sacristan cuts to the chase, "A woman is meant to have children." "Is that all?" Eugenia wants to know. "I don't know," he shrugs. Venomously she replies, "Thanks, you've been a great help." The sacristan maintains his tone, "You asked what I think." To interpret this exchange armed with the previously mentioned passage from Tarkovsky's diary, it is easy to conclude that Tarkovsky is on the side of anti-progressive, traditionalist patriarchy. Because at some point in the 1970's Tarkovsky wrote that he thinks women are supposed to have babies, critics often expect Tarkovsky to take sides with one of the two speakers in a given confrontation. Read this way, a given character acts as a voice-box for Tarkovsky's ideological convictions, and one would conclude that Tarkovsky believes every word the priest says to Eugenia, and they assume he thinks that dialogue is in the film to put her and all of western feminists in their place.

This scene, however, like so many other of Tarkovsky's, functions effectively only by virtue of its ambivalence and not by the rightness or wrongness of either character's viewpoint. The dialog is meaningful not for the admonition of the priest, but for Eugenia's reaction. As the viewer will learn in the course of the film, Eugenia's

feminism fails utterly to help her with exactly those aspects of her life that it should address, namely her role as a woman and the nature of her emotional and sexual relationships with men. In fact part of Eugenia's problem is that feminism only addresses the physical aspect of sex and not the emotional one. She has gained some socio-political agency and some intellectual self-respect, but Eugenia's feminism has left her spiritual and emotional needs unsatisfied. In Tarkovsky's view feminism makes certain practical gains possible, but it fails to address the fundamental problems of existence, i.e. the real issues.

Of course, a feminist critic may respond that Tarkovsky would be able to ignore such things as socio-political agency and intellectual equality as the real concerns of living, because, being a man, he has never had to fight for basic rights. Thus he can freely turn his heart and mind to the more abstract concerns of the spirit, just as the dominant class has always done. Those in power find it easiest to talk about the spirit while they hold down the basic physical liberties of those they oppress. So goes an important argument that has been ringing out loud and clear from a number of progressive camps for well over a century. More recently, and of greater consequence, is the fact that this view has laid claim to vast portions of the humanities and fine arts in the academy in only the last fifty years. For the past fifty years the canon has been thrown out with the bathwater in curriculums of literature and fine arts in colleges and universities in America. We should proceed more carefully than we have been. If it is indeed the case that only those in power can afford the luxury and leisure of pondering

the meaning of life, then let us revel in the fact that social progress has allowed for the participation of everyone in this mystery, instead of dismissing the questions altogether.

Art is not among Eugenia's concerns. Must the conclusion follow that she is an unsympathetic character? If we judge Tarkovsky by his journals then Eugenia is a feminist dreamt up by a man who thinks a woman's role in life is bearing and rearing children. If, on the other hand, we address this question through his art, we will find a more nuanced and subtle Eugenia. To create a character whose only purpose is to stand for something disagreeable to him would have embarrassed Tarkovsky who sought to give all his characters complexity and emotional depth. Ideology of any kind, whether Tarkovsky agrees with it or not, denies complexity and depth; it projects an image of a human as adherent to static truths that do not bend with the shifting winds of emotional life. Tarkovsky knew that truth was not static. As much as he may want to believe in it himself, Tarkovsky's films show over and over again that this kind of Truth is an impossibility. Ideology turns human beings into abstractions. Perhaps Eugenia's appropriate response to the sacristan, according to the most basic feminism, should be, "Women do not need to bear children. We are equal now, and thus we can do everything that men can do." But she cannot say those words, because citing a political stance as an excuse for having no children must have a dismally hollow ring to her ears.

Maybe Eugenia would like to give such a response, but the sacristan's interrogation takes her off her guard and flusters her. This is of course something that happens to real people with feelings regardless of their belief in particular ideals. Eugenia is hurt by the words of the priest and by the tone in which he addresses them to

her, and thus she fails to counter-attack. Why she is hurt so deeply, Eugenia does not reveal, but Tarkovsky suggests that it is because she is fighting against her own desire. This is not about biological essentialism; it is not that all women want to have babies and feminism interferes with the natural order of things by teaching women they don't have to have them. For that view consult any fundamentalist Christian politician, not an artist. *Nostalghia* is about Eugenia's body and mind and not the bodies and minds of all women everywhere. It is about an individual woman who wants to have a child, but who feels as though doing so would make her a fool. Eugenia is actually much like many of Tarkovsky's male characters in this way: she compromises her feelings rather than her intellect and she suffers for it, just as Andrei does in the very same film. Tarkovsky's critique of feminism is that it is all intellect and no soul, and without the soul, the individual, male or female cannot solve his or her problems.

Eugenia is more than just a character who is ideologically conflicted. With Andrei she comprises the most probing study of the difficulty and absurdity of communication between the sexes Tarkovsky ever undertook. If Eugenia were only a critique of feminism, however nuanced, the Tarkovsky-as-misogynist interpretation of *Nostalghia* would still be accurate. She is of course much more, and her attempt to seduce Andrei and subsequent tirade against him is indicative of how much more. Nothing brings to bear the complexity of this conflict quite so eloquently as Eugenia's exposed breast. "What do you want?" she asks. "This?" she continues and pulls her breast from beneath a transparent robe. Then she scoffs, "No, you're too noble for that," and leaves her breast exposed until she is finished verbally pounding him to dust. Given

the context, should the viewer interpret the exposure of her breast as a seductive gesture? At first glance she can look like an unrepentant Magdalen to the Virgin counterpart found in the fresco by Piero. Tarkovsky invites the comparison by juxtaposing the two images, but pitting them in strict opposition leads to misunderstanding. By exposing her breast Eugenia invokes an image, not only of seduction, but also of another type of Marian iconography. That there is no Messiah suckling at her breast adds another layer of meaning to the already rich image, for in the scene, it is Andrei who is meant to suck her breast. In other words, Eugenia's exposed breast taunts not only Andrei's sexual hang-ups, but prods at his messiah complex as well. Eugenia hates Andrei because he wants her to be Madonna *and* because he wants to be the savior.

For a filmmaker who has so much in common with his hero and namesake in *Nostalghia*, this is an astonishingly ruthless self-critique. The ability and willingness to question his own motives and assumptions is precisely what many critics find lacking in Tarkovsky's films. Johnson and Petrie find Andrei difficult to sympathize with, and they argue this is one of the films shortcomings (171) – why should we care about the plight of a repressed bigot who brings all his torment on himself? Yet this is precisely Tarkovsky's point. In his view the artist is a deeply flawed person. With spiritual insight often comes inability to interact with humanity in daily activity. Understanding the problems men and women have in communicating with one another does not necessarily make a man good at communicating with women. Andrei is incapable of talking about whatever feelings he may have for Eugenia with her. He is eloquent on the subject of the difficulty of reading poetry in translation, but the fact that he would choose to give an

aesthetic lecture, which is rather more like a rant, when Eugenia wants to talk to him about poetry is indicative of the way he constantly hides his emotions behind his intellect. Andrei may in some respects be admirable as a seeker of truth or an artistic visionary, but often Tarkovsky invites the viewer to side against him, particularly during the confrontation that follows Eugenia's final attempt to seduce him. His response to her tirade is literally to run away: he leaves the room. Eugenia chases him out for one last insult in which she brings up his wife, and Andrei quite surprisingly slaps her on the behind! Nothing could be less appropriate and simultaneously show the viewer Andrei's powerlessness against Eugenia's attack. She's right, and he has nothing to say, so he resorts to a physical attack which, however sexually non-threatening, is certainly meant to be debasing. And all it earns Andrei is a bloody nose.

Even in his dreams, inaccurately described as mere wish fulfillment by Johnson and Petrie (165-7), Eugenia will not be reduced to what Andrei wants her to be or mistakenly believes her to be. Though the two women embrace one another briefly, the tear that remains on Eugenia's faces suggests that the problems Andrei attributes to her cannot be resolved by any kind of harmony between her and Andrei's wife, Maria. It is typical of Tarkovsky's dream imagery that the viewer can only deduce from the pregnancy and from having seen her in the context of the dacha and the children that this Maria is Gorchakov's wife. No character ever verbalizes that fact. It may be, in fact, that the unconscious union of the two women produces quite the opposite result of Andrei's desire. The women are together, but they are at a distance from Andrei. Aloof and unattainable, it is as if they have decided to handle the matter themselves, without the

interference of the man who created the problem in the first place. Moreover, it becomes clear that Eugenia, at least in Andrei's imagination, harbors no ill will toward the wife to whom Andrei chooses to remain faithful. It is he and only he that is the object of her anger.

Tarkovsky admitted being embarrassed by the dream sequence in which Eugenia and Maria meet, in large part because he found it too derivative from Bergman (*Sculpting* 205). Whatever its drawbacks, this dream serves the positive function of showing the viewer Andrei's inner turmoil. Andrei's unconscious seems to confuse the two women in his life. He desires to see them in harmony only to end up with a pregnant wife – an image of woman as she is supposed to be, but not as he wants her. Tarkovsky does not judge Andrei, Eugenia, Man-as-such or Woman-as-such in this scene; he shows the frustrating psychological reality that men will often produce unwanted responsibilities when they insist on living by ideals. A pregnant wife, in other words, is the messy and troublesome manifestation of the lofty ideals Andrei may or may not hold that a woman's role on this planet is to produce and rear children. Tarkovsky shows us that men and women are much more complicated than their ideas of themselves. This is part of why he often takes the viewer into the unconscious of his characters in the first place. Filmmakers like Cassavetes and Mike Leigh are masterful at showing how behavior rarely adds up to the ideas people have of themselves. Tarkovsky takes the viewer inside, and shows that contradiction begins in the mind, especially the unconscious where one cannot keep in check notions that contradict and complicate the ones we consciously prefer.

All an artist can be is honest, and Tarkovsky was very good at showing conflict between men and women. One of the best things a truthful artist can do is leave his misunderstanding in the work in all its battered uncertainty, as if to say, "I've done what I can; the rest is up to you." This is indeed the attitude of the sacristan who maintains his belief in traditional values as a matter of personal opinion, retreating to the unassailable position: *you asked me what I think and I told you*, instead of trying to argue a case for his philosophy. Tarkovsky does more. He makes Eugenia a real person. She is not just the woman humbled by the sacristan and venomous toward Andrei. Eugenia displays a range of emotion, much wider, it could be argued, than Andrei. After the pair meets Domenico for the first time, they stop and a ray of sun catches Eugenia. "You're prettier in this light," observes Andrei and Eugenia beams. He is finally acknowledging some kind of attraction to her. "I'm beginning to understand," he continues, and Eugenia is piqued. She, like the viewer, must be anticipating some discussion of romance, which never materializes. "Why do you think he locked up his family?" The color fades from her cheeks and her look hardens. "How should I know?" she spits out, and exits. Eugenia does more acting in this scene than Andrei does in the entire film. The entire exchange happens with the camera focused on Eugenia's face with only the back of Andrei's head intruding occasionally. Again Eugenia, not Andrei, and her emotions are the subject of the scene.

"Certainly [Tarkovsky's] views on women hinged on notions of complementarity rather than sameness," Mark Le Fanu explains. "Men and women spiritually weren't the same creatures, and never could be. That led naturally, in life and art, to

misunderstanding and conflict."[xii] I have already discussed some of the misunderstanding and conflict. Now I suggest that the way these characters are imagined is rooted in Tarkovsky's *notions of complementarity*. Where Oleg Yanofsky (Andrei) must portray a melancholy artist, and not so much *be* a man, Tarkovsky gives Domiziana Giordano the character of Eugenia and the space to *be* a woman as she understands that role. This is the only way a male artist can successfully "be fair" to women. Like his friend and much admired colleague, Michelangelo Antonioni, Tarkovsky gives his female characters emotional depth and lets the actor provide the rest. This kind of "feminism" plays a crucial role in the works of some of the cinema's greatest directors: Fassbinder, Cassavetes, Bergman and Ozu as well as Antonioni and Tarkovsky. The very best a man can do as a writer/director is to provide a character for his female actor to perform her naked, honest self. Anything more articulate about a woman's experience has to be written and directed by a woman. One can find it in the works of Chantal Ackerman, Gillian Armstrong and Su Friedrich. Their films demonstrate the point about paying attention to women once they have entered the arena instead of going out and finding mediocre art made by women to hold up as representations of the culture of the oppressed. Just as no quilt is worth a late Rembrandt self-portrait or Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*, neither is it worth Akerman's *Jeanne Diehlman*, Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career*, or Friedrich's *Rules of the Road*. I am sure it was and continues to be very hard for each of these women to work in a field dominated by men, to say nothing of the difficulty of just being an artist (and indeed human!) in the first place. We should give them the respect they deserve, and talk about them as great filmmakers in the

company of Tarkovsky, Ozu, Bergman and Cassavetes. In criticism we do not care about great men and great women; we care about great artists.

Chapter Ten: Last Works, Unfinished Works, and Dialectical Aesthetics

> If I am a poet crowned with this threefold crown of melodious power, yet, despite this threefold charm, am still unable to compel the very soul of the listener to sing together with me in a voice different than my own, not in unison of its psychological surface but in the counterpoint of its innermost depths, to sing of what is deeper than the depths I show and higher than the heights I disclose, if my listener is but a mirror, but and echo, only accepting, only accommodating; if the ray of my *word* does not seal my *silence* and his silence with the *rainbow* of a secret *covenant* then I am not a *symbolic* poet
>
> ---Viacheslav Ivanov (*Selected Essays* 51).

The last film Tarkovsky would make before his untimely death is *Offret*. In it he pays homage to many of his most important teachers, from Byzantine icon painting and Bach to Ingmar Bergman. This amounts to more than his characteristic use of references to other works, whether to paintings or films. Tarkovsky knew this would be his last film, and thus he paid final homage to several of his most important artistic influences. His first great cinematic achievement was a film about an icon painter and in *Offret* Tarkovsky gives the viewer another look at Byzantine and Russian icons as Aleksandr flips through the pages of a birthday gift from his son-in-law. The soundtrack is even more significant than in the previous films because the long excerpt from *St. Matthew's Passion* links the sacrifice made by the hero of the Gospel with the sacrifice that will be made by the hero in Tarkovsky's film. The credit sequence that Bach's music accompanies is by far the longest uninterrupted section of music in all of Tarkovsky, and it speaks of his desire to at once pay homage to one of his greatest influences and to make a final suggestion that art on the level of Bach's genius is what the cinema should aspire to. The links to Bergman are numerous. The film was shot on an island where Bergman frequently worked. Bergman's director of photography, the great Sven Nykvist, was the

cinematographer and one of his most important actors, Erland Josephson, plays the protagonist, Aleksandr. All of this underscores the fact that, though Tarkovsky most admired Bresson, it was always Bergman, the Bergman of *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Cries and Whispers* and *Winter Light*, whom Tarkovsky resembled most in style, theme and temperament.

Tarkovsky takes the opportunity in his last film to engage once more with a master whose teachings he could never fully accept. Leonardo may not be the greatest artist in the director's pantheon, and he is certainly one to whom Tarkovsky's own aesthetics seem irreconcilable. Perhaps this is why Tarkovsky's struggle with Leonardo proves to be so much more furtive than his alliances with similar minded artists. *Solaris*, Tarkovsky's great ode to Bruegel, is immature and transparent compared to the great achievement of *Offret*. Tarkovsky wrote in *Sculpting in Time* that truth is not something agreed upon; it is arrived at through argument (11). Indeed this seems to be what draws him to Leonardo as if to battle. In Leonardo perhaps Tarkovsky has found an antipode against whom he believes he can arrive at some truth. We shall see, however, that this does not work out very tidily. *Offret* arrives at no synthesis. It rather seems to point beyond itself into a never-ending chain of synthesis and antithesis.

In the beginning of *Offret*, the credits run over a close-up detail of Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi* to the sounds of J. S. Bach's *Passion of St. Matthew*. The detail shows a man kneeling with his face upturned; a vase of some kind rests tenderly at his cheek as a tiny hand extends from beyond the frame. The hand hovers above the vase, perhaps grasping for it. After the credits the shot slowly dollies up to reveal that the hand

belongs to a baby in his mother's arms. He is reaching out to accept a humbly offered gift. The camera continues upward, passing over the faces of the mother and other onlookers, finally reaching the central tree where it rests, for the remaining seconds of this lengthy take, on the image of the foliage-covered branches. The next shot presents the film's protagonist, Aleksandr, in a long shot, planting a barren tree.

Maya Turovskaya notes that the scene in which Aleksandr plants the tree contains "the knot of motifs out of which the film is going to develop" (*Cinema of Poetry* 138), but surely the first scene tells only half the story. The "knot of motifs" really begins to develop in the credit sequence and the subsequent camera movement that surveys the painting, before any live action characters appear on screen. The basic outline of the film's narrative is indeed in the painting: acceptance of a gift which may signify the acceptance of destiny, the tree which will become a symbol of regeneration through faith, the figure of Mary who will become important as a sexual being as well as the mother of salvation, and the uncomprehending bystanders who bear witness to two distinct redeemers. These are Tarkovsky's narrative and symbolic building blocks, and it is essential for him to lay them out at the very beginning, almost in raw form, as yet undeveloped within the context of the film. The first acts as counterpoint to the picture in the credits sequence; it acquaints the viewer with the ways in which Tarkovsky's narrative will differ from Leonardo's.

Turovskaya continues "The detail from the picture [is] of the child, who seems to be accepting from the magi's hands his unique and terrible future (expressed in counterpoint with Bach's *Passion [of St. Matthew*]" (*Cinema* 138). While this may be an

accurate reading of the Leonardo's painting, it does not quite work perfectly within the context of the film because Tarkovsky uses it differently than the painter most likely intended. The image does contain a knot of symbols, but Tarkovsky extensively revises the traditional associations of all those symbols. It is not the child in this film who will become the savior. Aleksandr's son, Little Man, is only a marginal character. Instead, *Offret* has a pair of saviors. Maria is analogous to the Virgin in the painting, but it is her flesh and not that of her child (indeed she has no child) which has the power to redeem the world. Further, it is not her body alone that can save the world, but only her body in communion with Aleksandr's body. Like Christ, Aleksandr must accept a terrible future which he chooses for himself, but he does not have to suffer physical tortures. Nor is Aleksandr's sacrifice analogous to that of Christ; he does not bear the sins of the world as the fulfillment of his preordained and much prophesied destiny. Rather, faithful to a divinity he does not know directly, Aleksandr makes God an offer and then has the answer given to him in the form of explanation from yet another party, Otto the postman, for whom the most likely biblical reference point would be the Archangel Gabriel.

Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi* evokes two important contexts: the official, Vatican approved Biblical interpretation and Leonardo's personal mythmaking. If Tarkovsky merely needed a painting with a tree to make his match cut on Aleksandr's tree, he could have chosen from any number of paintings that have a single tree in them. In some way it would make more sense to show a Japanese or Chinese print, since Aleksandr compares his tree to a Japanese tree and since he is obsessed with Eastern culture, listening to Japanese flute music and wearing a robe with the yin-yang on it.

Tarkovsky chooses Leonardo's painting over all other Eastern and Western pictures. His reasons for doing so are worth considering.

One of the painting's functions is purely formal: it connects episodes in the second half of the film, particularly when a dream episode leads into a waking one, and vice versa. In fact, as the representation of these two states of consciousness become harder and harder to distinguish, the *Adoration* may serve as the only clue that the film has moved from one to the other. As a painting of the Virgin it also provides an important symbolic reference point to Maria, the witch who will play an important role in saving the earth from nuclear holocaust. Tarkovsky also uses the piece to engage closely, and I would say, personally, artist to artist and soul to soul, with Leonardo. This is the most mysterious use of the work; the way it is acknowledged and discussed *as a painting by Leonardo*. This concern even crops up in the dialogue when Otto tells Aleksandr that he finds the *Adoration* sinister and prefers Piero della Francesca. So while the knot of motifs is important, the *Adoration* also affords one the opportunity to explore Tarkovsky's complex and ambivalent relationship with Leonardo, especially to the extent that it has a bearing on the meaning of the film.

Another part of what makes Leonardo's *Adoration* such an interesting choice is that it is an unfinished work. What exists of this would-be altar-piece is brown ink and yellow ocher groundwork; the under-drawing with a bit of principal shading. Many artists leave behind unfinished works: paintings that lack details of shading, symphonies in which only the primary motif has been completed and sculptures that have been abandoned because of an irreparable mistake. Some of these pieces are put on display,

and some unfinished symphonies are performed. In such cases the unfinished works often have great influence over other artists, occasionally even more so than properly finished works. Rodin is known to have admired Michelangelo's unfinished sculptures above all others finished or unfinished among his predecessors. Such is indeed the case with Leonardo's highly regarded *Adoration*. Despite its incompleteness this under-drawing is widely thought of as his first masterpiece; it shows Leonardo at last moving beyond the teaching of Verrocchio and coming into his own in terms of technique and theme.

Leonardo is one of the artists with whom Tarkovsky consistently engaged throughout his career in his films, writings on aesthetics and personal diaries. It is easy to note the affinities in form and ideology between Tarkovsky's works and the paintings of Bruegel, the novels of Dostoevsky and the music of Bach. However, his relationship to Leonardo is much more ambivalent than to these other artists. "The painter is lord of all types of people and all things," says Leonardo, "If the painter wishes to see beauties that charm him it lies in his power to create them, and if he wishes to see monstrosities that are frightful, buffoonish, or pitiable he can be lord and god thereof…" (*Notebooks* 195) Tarkovsky never goes this far, for his devotion to nature was more Franciscan, that is, submissive and humble. He was looking for the path to God which he believed led away from crowded cities, away from technology and toward a very subjective relationship with the natural world. It is true enough that "if Leonardo had a religion, it was a kind of nature-mysticism, accessible through sight, and it was this only partly expressed conviction that united his art and his science" (Hartt 430), but surely it is a very different

thing to seek divinity through nature than to worship nature outright. In fact, Hartt's description of Leonardo's "spirituality" cuts to the heart of Tarkovsky's fear of Leonardo. Tarkovsky seems to believe that Leonardo is spiritually corrupt, yet it is precisely this corruption, manifested in Leonardo's belief in the perfection of the physical world, that accounts for his peculiar genius.

In fact, Leonardo's nature worship and elevation of the human being is fundamentally at odds with Tarkovsky's views. For Tarkovsky the artist is indeed the final authority over his creation, but he is not lord over all things. Rather he, like nature, is a vessel through which the divine communicates with humanity. He viewed the pronounced degree of Leonardo's humanism as aggressive if not outright blasphemous, preferring the perfection and unity of Piero della Francesca. In Tarkovsky's journals, he often mentions Piero, describing his works with words like "beautiful" and "perfect." While Leonardo is described as a genius and his works are masterpieces, it is clear that Tarkovsky's personal connection to these paintings is more ambivalent. Tarkovsky never describes Leonardo's works as "beautiful" or "perfect," but rather as "terrifying" and "sinister." As mentioned above, the latter is the very word Otto uses to describe the *Adoration* before he tells Aleksandr that he prefers Piero della Francesca. The allusion to Piero is interesting, because Tarkovsky makes it very clear in his journals that he also prefers Piero to Leonardo. He speaks often of being afraid of Leonardo, and this assessment is actually written into the script. "Goodness, how terrifying it is," (549), is Otto's line in the screenplay (as opposed to, "sinister" in the film). A few lines later Tarkovsky writes, "Mr. Aleksandr looks at the dark glass of the *Magi*. The picture really

is terrifying" (549). Is this Aleksandr's thought, or is it the narrator's? Does one conclude that it is Aleksandr who finds the picture terrifying or Tarkovsky?

There are many parallels in the works and aesthetic statements of Tarkovsky and Leonardo. They have similar interests but the ideologies which inform those interests are quite at odds. Take their shared love of nature for example. "Unlike a gregarious animal," Tarkovsky states, "a person must live in isolation, close to nature, to animals and plants, and be in contact with them" (*Time Within Time* 145). Expressed as such, his view of nature and the artist's relationship to it appears quite similar to Leonardo's, who insisted in his notebooks that the study of nature was of paramount importance to the development and maintenance of a painter's skill. Moreover, Leonardo believed one must live and work in self-imposed isolation in order to begin to see nature clearly. During the scene in which Aleksandr calls on Maria, Tarkovsky seems to make a specific reference to Leonardo. Sitting in the witch's living room, Aleksandr tells her a story of how he ruined his mother's garden that recalls Leonardo's instruction that a painter must learn to depict nature accurately rather than manipulate it at the whims of subjective impulses: "I looked out of the window, prepared for delight and saw – what a sight! I can't begin to describe the whole thing, where had it all gone? All the beauty, nature…" Aleksandr fails to obey Leonardo's rules. Instead of imitating nature he distorts it to suit his tastes and thus ends up with something detestable.

Leonardo is after all a Renaissance artist, and his interest in nature amounts ultimately to the desire to master its forms. Tarkovsky, as I have argued in previous chapters, is much more like Thoreau. He believed that one must retreat to nature as if to

the well of life. One goes to nature to be spiritually rejuvenated. This is another kind of dialectic. One does not retreat to nature to hide away from society, playing a glass bead game for the remainder of one's days. Such a life is for a monk, not for Tarkovsky. For him nature is where one may commune with one's own self. A person learns who he or she is when they are alone, "living deliberately" in Thoreau's phrase. The process has an important second step that the monk does not make: after spending time alone, the pilgrim returns to the social world and tries to live among his fellows as the same person he was when in communion with nature.

Though he certainly admired Thoreau very much, Tarkovsky did not learn this from reading his essays. To go to nature as to the well of life is the purpose of the *dacha*, a longstanding cultural tradition among city-dwelling Russians. This religious attitude toward nature is evident throughout *Offret*, as it is in all of Tarkovsky's films. Aleksandr often echoes Tarkovsky's own views in his rambling monologues, soliloquizing for the benefit of his son on the subject of Man's loss of connection to nature and the destructive faith that people put into technology. It was Thoreau's teacher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said one is most one's self when alone. Tarkovsky went to nature for the same reasons these early American philosophers did: he wanted to learn about the human spirit, not the forms of nature. Ultimately the difference between Leonardo and Tarkovsky is the difference between the between external, observable beauty and internal, personal truth.

Prior to *Offret* Leonardo's work appeared in *Zerkalo* in a book of prints, with special attention drawn to his portrait of Ginerva de Binci. Given that he represents the

opposite of nearly every aesthetic quality associated with Tarkovsky's tradition, Leonardo is a puzzling choice, particularly in *Offret* where the work is so crucial, just as important if not more so than was Bruegel's painting in *Solaris*. If Tarkovsky knew this was his last will and testament as an artist, it is curious that he would choose the work of a Renaissance artist to play such a significant role in the film. To begin to answer this vexing question one must view Leonardo as a duality of reciprocal, opposing forces. Tarkovsky may not have expressed his thoughts on Leonardo in exactly the way I describe him, but one can surmise my conclusion from his account of Leonardo's portrait of Ginerva de' Binci:

> If you try to analyse Leonardo's portrait, separating it into its component parts, it will not work. At any rate it will explain nothing. For the emotional effect exercised on us by the woman in the picture is powerful precisely because it is impossible to find in her anything that we can definitely prefer… to achieve a balance in the way we look at the image presented to us. And so there opens up before us the possibility of the interaction with infinity, for the great function of the artistic image is to be a kind of detector of infinity […] And these characteristics are produced by the interaction of opposed principles, the meaning of which, as if in communicating vessels, spills over from one into the other: the face of the woman painted by Leonardo is animated by an exalted idea and at the same time might appear perfidious and subject to base passions. (*Sculpting* 108-9)

The door open to infinity is an important aspect of the appreciation of the unfinished work. Rodin saw this infinity in works Michelangelo had abandoned. He began to replicate Michelangelo's "mistakes" on purpose often making figures that look like they are either emerging from or falling into a great opaque void.

Likewise, Tarkovsky wants to show that no work is ever perfectly harmonious. This is what Florensky has in mind when he suggests that the power of Renaissance painters lies in their "mistakes" and "blunders," pointing to Leonardo's *Last Supper* fresco as an example of a work that "acquires aesthetic persuasiveness" by violating,

whether intentionally or not, perspectival unity (228). Florensky continues, "And do such mistakes in perspective show at times not the weakness of the artist, but on the contrary his strength, the strength of his authentic perception, breaking from the fetters of social pressure" (252)? This is dialectical thinking, and it is quite at odds with the way Vasari would have described the same works at the time they were created. In Tarkovsky's view the work that is self-consciously opposed within its self, instead of relying on the conceit of abstract unity, is closer to the truth. The dialectic that underlies this conclusion is indeed at the root of much of what I have argued in previous chapters. The notion that a work of art could embody such abstract unity is perhaps the very lie that Plato feared. Nothing in experience is unified, and if art is to tell us something about life then it must preserve this truth. If art is to reveal truth, it must not seek to express harmony, but rather, contradiction. Striving for unity would be striving to tell a lie about life, for everything we know from life experience informs us that truth is not at all monolithic. A great work of art must contain not just its opposites, but as many complications and contradictions as the artist can think to include.

The greatest artists are the ones that the spectator cannot digest, because their works contain tensions that he or she cannot resolve. Tarkovsky, whether or not he fully articulates this view, is just such an artist. Bruegel is another, and Tarkovsky's use of him in earlier films as opposed to his use of Leonardo in *Offret* demonstrates another kind of tension only the more mature artist can employ. In *Solaris* Tarkovsky uses Bruegel to help the viewer understand his film style. In *Zerkalo* Leonardo and Bruegel are referenced separately in such ways that show tension in the story of Western art

history. In *Offret* Tarkovsky no longer needs to create this tension by pitting one artist against another, or himself against another artist; he finds it in Leonardo alone. Leonardo becomes the exemplary artist in a film in which reciprocal opposing forces are in constant tension. *Offret* foregrounds dialectical relationships from the master-servant power struggle between Maria and Aleksandr's wife, which takes on a sexual dimension late in the film, to the yin-yang on Aleksandr's robe.

The sacrifice itself, while it does not necessarily have an internal contradiction, has a curious dual nature. On the one hand, Aleksandr must first have sex with the witch in order for the miracle of salvation to occur; on the other hand he must then be willing to give up his family when the world is saved. This was the case even in the *Witch* scenario which eventually became the screenplay for *Offret*, though originally the stakes were somewhat lower (*Sculpting* 219-20). After he has sex with the witch, to cure his cancer, the man in the *Witch* returns to his wife and family only to leave with the witch a few months later when she shows up at his door. It is worth noting that the miraculous sacrifice always had two parts. Johnson and Petrie mistake this duality for what they allege to be Tarkovsky's haphazard combination of two separate scenarios (*Visual Fugue* 172). This criticism is, in fact, a significant part of their ultimate dismissal of *Offret*'s messy narrative. What saves the world, they wonder, his silence or sleeping with the witch? To insist that the viewer choose between the two is to misunderstand the nature of an answered prayer in Tarkovsky's mythology. Aleksandr's silence is an offering. God's acceptance is to provide a way: sex with the witch. Moreover, all of this

bargaining is mediated by the fact that the viewer never knows whether God is actually involved in this process; it could all very well be the working of Aleksandr's imagination.

The conclusion of this narrative is certainly the most dissatisfying of Tarkovsky's films. Of course it is deliberately so. His final message to his audience is that life is completely unsatisfactory. I am using the words "dissatisfying" and "unsatisfactory" as purely descriptive terms and not in any sense evaluative. Life is trial and tribulation. One can be happy about it; one can be dejected, but life is a struggle either way. For some it is a struggle to have enough to eat and to avoid gunfire. All of humanity participates in the struggle to make sense of the universe and one's position in it and relation to it. For those who accept the challenge, for the artistic soul, life is a struggle to live truthfully in a social world built upon illusion – what Baudrillard famously dubbed the *simulacrum*. All of history's visionaries have seen through the illusion, and they have spent their lives dedicated to the struggle to find ways to show us how to see through it. Tarkovsky and Leonardo achieved this through art. Jesus Christ did it through what we might today call "activism."

In *Offret* it seems that Tarkovsky uses Leonardo and his ambivalent feelings about him as an avenue to explore his conflicted ideas about the very nature of sacrifice and the apogee of the sacrificial act, Christ. If Christianity possesses any great truth it resides in proximity to the meaning of self-sacrifice. What is the connection of sacrifice to truth? According to Christian mythology, one must relinquish the things one believes are necessary to be happy. The problem, as *Offret* so clearly indicates, is that one's fellows and family are likely to be made utterly miserable by one's sacrificial act. Certainly none

of the disciples thought Jesus was doing the right thing when he offered himself to the authorities. Indeed, what can one say that Aleksandr has achieved at film's end? There is no happiness, no peace, no harmony, no beauty. It is all discord, confusion, anger and frustration. The family and friends never even get to know, nor do would they even suspect, that his action was the result of reflection and deliberation – of a deep soul searching. At best they may regard him as a holy fool, someone touched by God in a way they could never understand. Perhaps he has a truth, but he could never share it with them. The riddle is that his abrupt silence is his way of sharing it with them. His condition is something with which they must now struggle each day, unless they ignore it or "move on." To understand Aleksandr now requires self-sacrifice. To do this is the path to truth. It is a deliberative and arduous road, but one is not touched by God willy-nilly. Revelation is a process and not a moment. The truth is for those who seek it.

In the beginning was the word. Why? – Because there is no organ that appeals directly to the soul. Truth is mediated constantly by intellect, by human communication. Another mystery arises: how does one arrive at truth through reflection if the truth remains unintelligible? These questions go on and on as one struggles to resolve *Offret*. This is not a movie to help the viewer arrive at a conclusion. It raises questions instead of answering them. Ultimately, Tarkovsky's testament becomes the belief in creating the opportunity for a film viewer to have an aesthetic experience, which he would certainly say is no different from a religious one. A great work of art should rap one's attention and ask him or her to reconsider questions already answered. *Offret* should devastate the viewer; it should shatter his or her confidences.

Conclusion: Belief and Being

> It is the old vexed question of intention, become so dull to-day, when we know how strong and influential our unconscious intentions are. And why a man should be held guilty of his conscious intentions, and innocent of his unconscious intentions, I don't know, since every man is more made up of unconscious intentions than of conscious ones. I am what I am, not merely what I think I am.
>
> ---D.H. Lawrence

In the introduction I suggested that everything in human experience develops a dual nature in the reflective process of conceptualization. Every concept includes its opposite, but in truth as it is experienced, all things have a multiple nature, which is perhaps a way to say that they have no nature at all. To speak of things in terms of dualities can be misleading. Western thinking tends toward two options: rejecting one duality in favor of another, or synthesizing both sides to arrive at a medium truth. Both of these acts mistake the purpose of conceptual thought, which is only a tool for talking about experience and not the essence of experience. To be faithful to experience one must be able to embrace contradiction. Understanding this is why the Buddhist notion, that all things have Buddha nature, is a more accurate way of thinking about experience than western dichotomies. Tarkovsky often spoke of his feeling that the eastern soul was superior owing to a culture closer to nature and a mindset capable of living with contradictions. Coincidentally, this brings up the problem that Tarkovsky also held that it was impossible for an individual from one culture to understand the culture of another. Nevertheless, the important fact of this for the purposes of my argument is that Tarkovsky believed it was the duty of art to acknowledge and truthfully reflect these contradictions. In Tarkovsky's view, this is precisely the achievement of the artists I have discussed in this dissertation in relation to his films and philosophy.

I have suggested alternate dichotomies; it is true, especially in the first two chapters. My intention is that the dichotomies I propose would break down the standard models, if only by the

virtue of their self-consciousness. I do not aim to replace one dichotomy with another. As one reader has pointed out, to say that dichotomies are inaccurate is merely to take up one side of another dichotomy. In my view the conceptual realm is an inaccurate guide to the realm of experience. It is the only guide one really has, but one must choose models that acknowledge and preserve its limitations. I suggest alternate dichotomies as an exercise in exploring alternative modes of thought. Ultimately neither the systems I call "inaccurate" or "false" nor my own system can describe what matters most in a work of art. In the case of Tarkovsky the concepts I refute actually lead *away* from the meanings of his films and are a hindrance to experiencing the works truthfully. The concepts I propose instead are not so much answers to the films' questions, but preparation for watching them, and for helping the viewer think about them.

Tarkovsky believed he lives in a time more and more bereft of spirituality, and saw it as the purpose of his art to bring spiritual concerns back into cultural and individual consciousness. In interviews and lectures his discussion of spirituality often confused Tarkovsky's audience, most of whom insisted on asking him questions about his Christian beliefs in this context. Tarkovsky always replied that this is the wrong question. When he spoke about faith and spirituality Tarkovsky did not have in mind Church doctrine. Yet this point remains lost on both the faithful and the skeptical, and I would like to address it as a means to conclude this dissertation by examining one last dichotomy.

This dissertation is, in large part, an exploration of various aspects of Tarkovsky's body of work that have been overlooked and dismissed by previous scholars and critics. I shall focus my remaining comments to a discussion of what is for many viewers the single most divisive ingredient in Tarkovsky's art: his religion. Secular American intellectuals hate to talk about Christianity. Until I became a serious film student, I was no different. It was not until I was a graduate student watching films by a number of

Christian directors that my resistance to Christianity began to break down. Tarkovsky would play a major role in changing my attitude and in developing a newfound understanding of what, I have come to understand, is the aesthetic universe of Western culture.

Christianity is our mythology. It is the imaginative groundwork of the Western cultural tradition. Nearly every one of our great artist works within a Judeo-Christian idiom. Whether their works deal explicitly with Biblical characters and stories, as do the majority of paintings from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century; whether they suggest specifically Christian morals, as do the majority of all novels and poems written before the twentieth century; whether they ostensibly indict faith like a Bunuel or a Dali; or whether they champion faith through totally abstract means like a Rothko or a Brakhage, most western artists are implicitly or explicitly talking about Christianity. Even in the last century when the older arts of painting, musical composition, architecture, poetry and literature each moved away from Christian subjects and attracted fewer and fewer Christian practitioners, the cinema was dominated by believers of all stripes. From Murnau and Dreyer to Bresson, Tarkovsky and Rossellini to Sokurov and Angelopoulos, many of our great filmmakers are Christians making what they believe to be Christian films.

Because the academy and popular culture like to think of themselves as secular, teachers and critics tend to gloss over the conspicuous relationship between the cinema and Christianity. I have mentioned in previous chapters that the standard-bearer of Tarkovsky scholarship, Johnson and Petrie's *A Visual Fugue*, acknowledges Christianity

as a problem in Tarkovsky's work – a preoccupation which threatens to become an albatross around the director's neck, particularly in the last two films. Never do they suggest that his perspective on Christianity, his reevaluation of the cultural mythology, is one of Tarkovsky's great achievements. Tarkovsky's interest in his religion fares even worse in popular film criticism. The Eberts and Kaels of the world, true to their calling of championing secular values, complain that Tarkovsky forces his religious values upon them. For this transgression against their intellectual superiority their votes are cast against his films altogether. Both of these camps, the serious film scholars and the popular reviewers, condemn Tarkovsky's works for the same reason his disciples praise them.

I would suggest to any viewer who chooses to condemn or praise Tarkovsky based on the proximity of his religious convictions to one's own, that he or she review the introduction to Northrop Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible as Literature*. Here Frye describes the challenges he would pose to two separate groups of students in his Bible courses. The faithful would be made to think about the Bible as literature, to consider its narrative structure and symbolic framework – a practice some would no doubt find blasphemous. Non-believers would be made to take the ideas in the Bible as seriously as they would take those from any other work. They would have to consider the Bible as a source of profound psychological, moral and philosophical ideas, instead of dismissing it as merely the sacred text of a religion in which they do not believe. In other words, everyone needs to be shaken up. Everyone needs to reevaluate his and her worldview. On the one hand faith is silly; it is both anti-intellectual and counter-intuitive and it leads

to a great many bad decisions, often producing violent outcomes, while offering only a modest level of emotional comfort in return. On the other hand, as Frye says, "a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads" (xii), and this holds true for the Western art in general. We are living at one end of a two thousand year history of cultural production in which Christianity has been the symbolic order. It is therefore not a matter of belief or of rejecting belief, but a matter of what one does with the symbols of the culture into which one was born.

How does a person live in a Christian world? Are there only two options: acceptance or rejection of faith? These questions present many problems which are sometimes insurmountable for Tarkovsky's critics. First, the vision of Christianity which so many critics find problematic in Tarkovsky's films is essentially that of the Latin world and its lineage. Tarkovsky, however, is neither a Catholic nor a Protestant. He certainly knew, and could have been influenced by masterworks of the Latin tradition, but his Christianity comes from quite a different place. The western critic who discusses Tarkovsky within a Catholic or Protestant context projects his or her own culture upon Tarkovsky's. Tarkovsky was steeped in Russian orthodoxy, a tradition much close to Gnosticism than to Western Christianity. Sergei Bulgakov explains the differences in his study of Sophiology. He notes that the Western Church emphasizes personal salvation, grace and faith. All of these fundamentals are necessary when one lives in a universe in which he or she may choose between only Manichaeism and materialism. The opposition becomes salvation *from* the world vs. salvation *of* the world. Bulgakov, in the context of

drawing a line from Hagia Sophia to Dostoyevsky, acknowledges that Eastern Christianity looks for the Kingdom of God *in the world* (*Sophia: the wisdom of God* 5-10). As descendants in the lineage of the Latin Church, our cultural collective unconscious seems ill-equipped to grasp the difference between these two concepts. The predisposition of the Latin westerner is to think immediately of God-in-the-world as a form of materialist apologetics; a way for people to have it both ways. This hardwiring requires great concentration and deliberation to overcome.

Tarkovsky is a Christian of a tradition one must get to know much better, before attacking it. The tradition of Bulgakov, Dostoyevsky, Florensky, Ivanov and Tolstoy, is not the tradition of Augustine and Aquinas. It cannot be subject to the criticisms made by humanists whether of the Renaissance variety or the English Enlightenment variety. For instance David Hume, the father of modern skepticism, knows nothing about the Eastern Church. His criticism is applicable enough to Catholics and Protestants, but he is grossly unqualified to address Russian Christianity. Perhaps Bulgakov has Hume in mind, when he writes of the Western intellectual tradition as if it were comical to him: "We Russian Europeans," he says, "when watching the manifestations of European thought, are often struck by the fact that trends of thought which appear to us elementary, of small importance, and, to be frank, entirely devoid of originality, acquire the significance of historical events and lead to the formation of "schools," producing in time a whole literature" (11). This observation also accounts for the past two hundred years of modern art's struggle to define itself outside of the purview of the Church. Agamben warns that just as all critique of praxis is trapped within praxis, so too are the alternatives to

Christianity offered by Modernism and Skepticism merely the other side of the same coin.

The problem with so many secular American intellectuals is that they have to reject the spiritual wholesale in order to be properly secular, and thus they are suspicious of and condescending toward all manner of Christian representation. Jonathan Rosenbaum's assessment of *Solaris* makes this perfectly clear.[xiii] Even Mark Le Fanu falls into this false dichotomy, failing to see the self-critique and internal conflict suggested in the characters' assessment of their faith. "On the surface," he says, "the matter of belief (I mean religious belief, belief about the truth of Christianity) could not be more cut and dried: for one either believes or one doesn't."[xiv] By "surface" Le Fanu must be referring to the films, because he goes on to explain how the diaries reveal a man struggling with his faith. Here I must admit to reading Tarkovsky diaries differently than the critics who use them to reveal the hidden truth. I maintain that Tarkovsky, like any other artist is most himself, or is his truest, most noble self in his art. Moreover, the films are anything but celebrations of the conviction of one's Christian faith. *Offret* is a deeply ambiguous, emotionally shattering, intellectually ambivalent exploration of the questions Le Fanu thinks Tarkovsky sees as "cut and dried."

In Western Christianity values are definite; they are attained by either/or propositions, by choices between good and evil. What values can be certain in such deliberately ambivalent works of art as Tarkovsky's films? Le Fanu suggests that, "certitude […] exists, rather, as an affirmation of the value of art itself, and the power of art to transform men's lives for the better."[xv] Religious conviction is a constant internal

struggle, but aesthetic conviction is an objective truth. The soul does not turn to truth by making one life-changing decision. The central figures of these films are artists who give up their art to perform superficially meaningless tasks in order to save the world. Is the world saved by their actions? What is Tarkovsky saying about the role of artists in the world? If they cannot save the world, what can they do? How do the ambiguous endings of these films address these questions? Coming to terms with his ambivalent, confusing and often contradictory endings is crucial to understanding Tarkovsky's films. To live in truth the soul must learn to think.

Perhaps it comes down to a difference between symbolic thought and literal thought. American culture is hopelessly literal and extremely religious. This dubious partnership makes it difficult for us to watch religious films. In general Europeans do not believe in the literal reality of heaven and hell the way many Americans still do. The Russian Christian tradition in particular encourages symbolic interpretation of sacred texts. I cannot go so far as to suggest that Russians do not worry about going to heaven. I have no evidence to conclude that Russians know that Jesus was talking about the earth and not about some unknowable realm beyond the clouds, when he spoke of the Kingdom of God, but their cultural tradition certainly fosters the idea more than our Latin tradition. Tolstoy, for one, certainly wrote about it extensively in *What is Art?* and in *The Kingdom of God is within You*! Tarkovsky knew it too, whether the result of his national heritage, or of his good fortune to have read Tolstoy. His films are testimonials to Heaven on Earth. Hence the lengthy sequences of nature photography in all his films and

especially the preachy-ness of the heroes in the late films in which the sermons are always about saving this world.

In Christian cultures aesthetics are influenced by religious symbols. The striving toward the "Brotherhood of Man" was for Lev Tolstoy the central message of the Bible and the aim of all true art. Tarkovsky shared the view in at least one important aspect: for him the relevant concern of Christianity is not belief in God but belief in Man. His characterization and narrative style make evident the fact that it is humanity and not God that Tarkovsky serves. It is never only his or her soul that is at stake for Tarkovsky's heroes. Stalker wants to show truth to Writer and Professor, Aleksandr wants to save his family and Domenico wants to save the world. It is not God that saves anyone in any of these situations, but human action and understanding.

It is true that many of his characters wonder about the existence of God, but they never conclude anything. It is the questioning, the process, what William James would call the *praying* that matters most. What is prayer? I recall once having read a passage from William James in which he explains that it is wrong to ask to whom one prays or for what one prays, because the metaphysical and ethical aspects of prayer are not the crux of the matter. Instead, ask, why does one pray? – because he or she must. Since James uses words like "psychology" and "pragmatism," contemporary readers with different connotations for these words can get confused by these words, even though James wrote extensively to reevaluate and ultimately destroy the line commonly drawn between the psyche and the spirit. Still the tendency is to think of James as if he were some sort of American Freud. According to such a materialist model, one prays to fill a psychological

void. The reality is much more complicated. One prays to find one's self. One prays to live in the present and be part of the universe. If one prays to an entity in the clouds, and one asks this being to give him or her things, then it is true enough that one should not pray. This is prayer as pathology; Freud can go a long way to help us understand why this is unhealthy. However, this is not prayer as James understands it or as Tarkovsky uses it. Prayer is like meditation or yoga practice or certain kinds of art. This is why Tarkovsky's characters do it.

For some viewers this answer is quite unsatisfactory. The western viewer wants the prayer to be answered as a revelation and a resolution instead of another step in a series of decisions and actions. Again this is merely the secular adaptation of the Church blueprint. Western Christians think that the important thing in life is to have a transformative moment in which one turns his or her life over to Christ and everything is better henceforth because the soul has been saved. Tarkovsky's Christianity does not follow this model. His faith is described better by the words of D. H. Lawrence: "One can save one's pennies. […] One can only *live* one's soul (8). As is often the case the western viewer must turn to a so-called "secular" writer like Lawrence for lessons familiar to the Eastern Church. The Western Church has been so successful at dictating the terms of discussion that any idea which falls outside its framework has historically been viewed as radical. Again it is Agamben's paradox: how does one critique the structure from within the structure? Part of the answer is to find intersections with other structures. For instance, one may turn to Eastern or Arabic cultures and explore the different answers they give to shared questions.

Tarkovsky shows us another way. His films show us that there are other traditions already within our overarching tradition that have splintered into different directions. He shows us that some of these paths lead to greater visions than the ones that currently hold sway in our social worlds and religious institutions. His films try to free us from the burden of the fallacies of our age. Most of all, the Tarkovsky masterworks give us the opportunity to experience time as inexhaustible, so that we may have some sense if not an altogether satisfactory understanding, of the eternal.

Works Cited

Andrew, Dudley. *Concepts in Film Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

---*The Major Film Theories*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. Mineola: Dover, 1997.

Art and Education. Ed. Albert C. Barnes. PA: Barnes Foundation Press, 1947.

Balazs, Bela. *Theory of Film*. New York: Dover, 1970.

Berdyaev, Nicholai. *The Meaning of the Creative Act*. Trans. Donald A Lowrie. New York: Collier, 1962.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. USA: Penguin, 1977.

The Bible. King James Version. New York: American Bible Society.

Brakhage, Stan. "Brakhage Meets Tarkovsky," *Chicago Review*. Vol. 47/48: Winter2001/Spring 2002, Issue 4/1.

Bresson, Robert. *Notes on the Cinematographer*. Trans. Jonathan Griffin. Kobenhavn, Green Integer, 1997.

Bulgakov, Sergei. *Sophia: The Wisdom of God; An Outline of Sophiology*. Trans. Rev. Patrick Thompson et. al. New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1993.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* Ed. J. T. Boulton. London: Routledge, 1958.

Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy. Ed. A.A. Long. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: the time-image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn Books, 1958.

---*Experience and Education*. New York: Free Press, 1997.

Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Selected Essays*, New York: Penguin, 1982.

Evdokimov, Paul. *The Art of the Icon: a theology of the beautiful*. Trans. Fr. Steven Bigham. Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990.

Five Filmmakers: Tarkovsky, Forman, Polanski, Szabo, Makavejev. Ed. Daniel J. Goulding. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Florensky, Pavel. *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*. Trans. Wendy Salmond. Ed. Nicoletta Misler. London: Reaktion, 2002.

---*Iconostasis*. Trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

---*The Educated Imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964.

---*The Great Code: the Bible and literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986.

Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Pantheon, 2004.

Gianvito, John. *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2006.

Gibson, Michael Francis. *The Mill and the Cross: Pieter Bruegel's "Way to Calvary"*.

Trans. by the author. Lausanne: Acatos, 2000.

Gombrich, E. H. *Art and Illusion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

---*Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art*. London: Phaidon, 1979.

--- *Norm and Form: studies in the art of the Renaissance I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

---*The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art*. London: Phaidon, 2002.

Great Thinkers on Plato. Ed. Barry Gross. New York: Capricorn, 1968.

---Collingwood, R.G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1938, pp.46-52.

---Heidegger, Martin. *Plato's Doctrine of Truth*, Trans. John Barlow from *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit mit einem Brief uber den Humanismus* in *Philosophy in the 20th Century* Vol. 3. Ed. William Barrett and Henry Aiken, New York: 1962, pp. 251, 254-58, 261-70.

---Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Max Muller, 1888.

Hall, Robert W. "Plato's Theory of Art: a Reassessment," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 33, Issue 1: Fall, 1974, pgs. 75-82.

Hegel, G.W.F. *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*. Trans. J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper Torch books, 1970.

Hollander, Anne. *Moving Pictures*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.

Huizinga, J.H. *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century and other essays*. Trans. Arnold J. Pomerans. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1968.

---*Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Trans. not acknowledged. New

York: Roy, 1950.

--- *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance*. Trans. James S. Holmes and Hans van Marle. New York: Meridian, 1959.

Huntting, Nancy. "How can we be composed? Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow*." http://www.nancyhuntting.net/Bruegel-Talk.html

Ivanov, Viacheslav. *Selected Essays*. Trans. Robert Bird. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2003.

James, Henry. *Major Stories and Essays*. New York: Library of America, 1999.

James, William. *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

---*Writings: 1902-1910*. New York: Library of America, 1987.

Johnson, Vida T. and Graham Petrie. *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Jung, C. G. *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. New Jersey: Princeton UP 1990.

---*Dreams*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1974.

Kahn, Charles H. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Lawrence, D.H. *Phoenix II*. Ed. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore. New York: Viking, 1968.

---*Selected Literary Criticism*. Ed. Anthony Beal. New York: Viking, 1966.

Le Fanu, M. "Christianity, Sacrifice and Submission: the Social and Philosophical Thought of A. Tarkovsky." *The Independent*. 30, December 1986.

--- *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*. London: BFI, 1987.

Lem, Stanislaw. *Solaris*. Trans. Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox. San Diego: Harvest, 1987.

Leonardo Da Vinci. *The Notebooks*. Ed. Irma A. Richter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

MacDonald, Scott. "The Filmmaker as Visionary: Excerpts form an Interview with Stan Brakhage," *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 56: Issue 3, pgs. 2-11.

Mathews, Thomas F. *Byzantium from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.

Michelis, P. A. *An Aesthetic Approach to Byzantine Art*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1955.

Moxey, Keith. *Peasants, Warriors and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols*. Trans. Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Heretical Empiricism/Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988.

Philosophies of Art and Beauty: selected readings in aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger. Ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. A. D. Lindsay. New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1992.

--*Parmenides*. Trans. R.E. Allen. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

--*Works*. Ed. Irwin Edman. New York: Modern Library, 1956.

Schrader, Paul. *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1972.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*.

Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Doubleday, 1966.

--- *Style of Radical Will*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1969.

Steiner, George. *Real Presences*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.

Tarkovsky, Andrei. *Collected Screenplays*. Trans. William Powell and Natasha.

---

[i] In *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* Eco argues that a text prompts its reader to interpret it in a specific way, i.e. the way the author intended. See chapter 2: "Overinterpreting Texts" especially pps. 63-65.

[ii] www.andreitarkovski.org/articulos/lefanu2.html

[iii] Likewise it should be evident at this point that Modernism takes many forms which may well be virtually irreconcilable. Probably no modernist ever existed who was a primitivist, a moral relativist, and insisted on erudition from his audience. My point is not to define Modernism once and for all, but to demonstrate that Tarkovsky is not a Modernist by any of these three definitions.

[iv] Spectator theories, which have an important analogue in Stanley Fish's reader response theory, maintain that the difference in the viewer makes the static object for any empirical purpose different, and so we should conceptualize it thus. This overstates the situation, however, for there are arts which are always different – music, theatre, dance – and arts which remain constant – literature, painting – and their differences must be maintained in order to think clearly about how each works. This difference is of special interest when we come to film which is by its nature both and neither.

[v] See Johnson and Petrie, pps. 194-195. Here they provide a detailed description of how Tarkovsky moved from average shots of 30 seconds in *Zerkalo*, to one minute in *Stalker* and *Nostalghia*, to well over a minute in *Offret*. Also, they point out the lengthiest takes from each film, which also gets progressively longer; just under four minutes in *Zerkalo*, almost seven minutes in *Stalker*, almost nine minutes in *Nostalghia* and nine minutes 26 seconds in *Offret*.

[vi] That this image is a fragment of the Ghent Altarpiece of Jan van Eyck has been duly noted in the works of Turovskaya and Johnson and Petrie, though both fail to address the connotations of the water-working saint.

[vii] http://www.nancyhuntting.net/Bruegel-Talk.html

[ix] http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/%7Etstronds/nostalghia.com/TheDiaries/hamlet.html

[x] http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/%7Etstronds/nostalghia.com/TheDiaries/hamlet.html

[xi] It should also be noted that in the index of *Visual Fugue*, under the listing "Women" is a subheading, "negative attitudes toward and Tarkovsky's aesthetics of cinema."

[xii] http://www.andreitarkovski.org/articulos/lefanu2.html

[xiii] It is telling indeed that one the handful of genuinely important living film critics absolutely refuses to acknowledge the spirit as a viable subject of art criticism. Rosenbaum thinks

Tarkovsky's faith only gets in the way. Similarly, Dreyer, Ozu and Rossellini only succeed despite their spiritual preoccupations. He actually has convinced himself that Bresson was an atheistic filmmaker! See Rosenbaum's essay on *Solaris* in his collection *Movies as Politics* and his *The Last Filmmaker* in James Quandt's collection of Bresson essays entitled, *Robert Bresson*.

[xiv] www.andreitarkovski.org/articulos/lefanu2.html

[xv] www.andreitarkovski.org/articulos/lefanu2.html