

The Artist's Passion According to Andrei: Paintings in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of
Slavic and Eurasian Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of paintings in four of Andrei Tarkovsky's films: *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), and *Sacrifice* (1986). Through close analysis of these films and the paintings that appear in them, the thesis demonstrates that Tarkovsky's selection and use of paintings reflects his theories and beliefs as a filmmaker and as an individual.

Dedication

For my father, Richard Reiser, and for Andrei Tarkovsky.

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Introduction

If film enthusiasts know one Soviet director, it is usually Sergei Eisenstein, a pioneer of early filmmaking and theory, whose iconic *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) continues to haunt film curricula (and film students) to this day. And if they know two Soviet directors, the other is likely Andrei Tarkovsky, a director whose name so strongly evokes his unique auteurist vision—often expressed in long, lyrical takes in long, lyrical films with sparse dialogue and frequent deviations from conventional narrative—that it was the punch line of a joke about esoteric cinema in a recent episode of the popular American sit-com *Parks and Recreation*.¹

Such a reference, gently chiding though it may be, attests to the continued influence and relevance of Tarkovsky's films nearly 30 years after his final film was released in 1986 and after his death in the same year, and nearly a quarter of a century since the fall of the Soviet Union. American television-comedy writers are, of course, not alone in their recognition of Tarkovsky's particular genius: Ingmar Bergman famously called Tarkovsky the “greatest [filmmaker] of them all,” certainly no small distinction, given Bergman's own considerable cinematic clout.²

¹ Season 5, Episode 16, “Bailout” has the owner of a failing local video rental store proposing to make his selection more accessible to customers by stocking Tarkovsky films *with* subtitles.

² Ingmar Bergman, *The Magic Lantern*, trans. Joan Tate (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 83.

Indeed, throughout his filmmaking career, which spanned three decades, and prior to his official defection from the Soviet Union in 1984, Tarkovsky embodied the Soviet answer to André Bazin's auteur, both domestically and internationally. Despite their difficult tendencies, Tarkovsky's films were quite popular at home in the Soviet Union, and they garnered attention internationally as well, screening at the Cannes and Venice film festivals.

Among academics, theorists, and critics, too, Tarkovsky has become something of a darling, as his dense and intricate films provide seemingly endless fodder for discussion. But, while no dearth of written material exists on nearly any aspect of the life, writings, photographs, theatrical productions, and films that Tarkovsky made, few works address in any great detail one of Tarkovsky's principal interests across his creative pursuits: visual art, and more specifically, painting. Nonetheless, perhaps one of the most striking and unusual aspects of each of Tarkovsky's seven feature films is the emphasis placed on works of art (again, usually and most notably painting). Moreover, the pride of place with which he endows these works within the sculpted time (to borrow Tarkovsky's phraseology) of the film medium is singular. Tarkovsky expends meters of stock to capture the paintings in minute detail, carefully stages the compositions in homage to or as a citation of the original, shoots into a framed and glazed picture as into a mirror.

The paintings that appear in Tarkovsky's films do not simply exist within the film frame but rather frame the films themselves. As Mikhail Romadin, who worked

as the production designer on Tarkovsky's adaptation of *Solaris* (1972), neatly characterizes this phenomenon: "[i]n each of Tarkovsky's films, there is, without fail, present a painting which...expresses the idea of the entire film."³ This thesis aims to delve more deeply into Tarkovsky's selection and use of paintings, to examine these works' effect on the aesthetics and morals of not only the discrete films in which they appear but also of Tarkovsky's oeuvre.

Any in-depth discussion of Tarkovsky's work, as with the work of any artist, invites a word or two about his life and times. Andrei Arsenyevich Tarkovsky was born April 4, 1932 in a village on the Volga, "into an educated family, typically representative of the old Russian intelligentsia."⁴ His father, Arseny Tarkovsky, was a respected poet, whose verse features in a number of Tarkovsky's films, and his mother, Maria Tarkovskaya, née Vishnyakova, worked in publishing (she, too, appeared in her son's films, as an actress).⁵ He died December 29, 1986 in Paris, having spent his last few years working abroad, mostly in Italy, Sweden, and England. For most of his life, Tarkovsky lived in Moscow, eventually studying film at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (Vsesoyuzniy Gosudarstvenniy

³ Mikhail Romadin, "Film and Painting," *Tarkovsky*, ed. Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog Publishing 2008), 392.

⁴ Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*; Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time within Time: The Diaries 1970-1986*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Verso, 1993), viii.

Institut Kinematografii, or VGIK⁶) under the tutelage of his mentor Mikhail Romm, a well-known filmmaker within the Soviet Union.

While at VGIK, Tarkovsky worked on a number of projects, including a 1958 “made-for-television movie..., which made a deep impression on the denizens of VGIK and became a staple of commemorations of World War II.”⁷ On the other hand, *The Steamroller and the Violin* (1961), Tarkovsky’s thesis film for VGIK, met with strong criticism from a council of Mosfilm’s Fourth Artistic Unit, responsible for the production of the work of young directors.⁸ Thus, Tarkovsky experienced early his first taste of creative discord with the state-run film board. This was but the opening salvo in a series of skirmishes between the artist and the system.

Throughout his career in the Soviet Union, Tarkovsky ran time and again against bureaucratic stumbling blocks, censorship woes, and the occasional diabolical technical fluke.⁹ For several years after its completion in 1966, and even after it

⁶ Всесоюзный Государственный Институт Кинематографии.

⁷ Robert Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2008), 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Time within Time: The Diaries 1970-1986*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Verso, 1993), 146. Filming 1979’s *Stalker* proved to be challenging, or, as Tarkovsky wrote in his diaries, a “[t]otal disaster...Everything we shot in Tallinn, with Rerberg, had to be scrapped twice over. First, technically; for a start the Mosfilm laboratory processing of the negative (the last of the Kodak). Then the state of the instruments and the gear.”

received the International Critics' Prize following an unofficial screening at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival, *Andrei Rublev* languished, practically unscreened¹⁰ in the Soviet Union. Tarkovsky found himself in a standoff with high-level officials of Goskino, Mosfilm, and even the Central Committee of the Communist Party, who insisted that *Andrei Rublev*'s blunt depiction of violence verged on "naturalism," proposing (rather forcefully) significant cuts to the film.¹¹ Similarly, he contended with the headaches of the Soviet film system as a matter of course: "each of his films took years to realize...and many projects—potentially his best films—were stonewalled, such as [proposed adaptations of] Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*."¹²

Be that as it may, Tarkovsky still enjoyed relative freedom, both artistically and politically. For instance, unlike his colleague and contemporary Sergei Paradjanov, a fellow alumnus of VGIK, Tarkovsky never did prison time for his professional or personal activities.¹³ Indeed, despite setbacks and frustrations, Tarkovsky, ultimately succeeded in making seven feature films, without significant

¹⁰ Johnson and Petrie 81. A total of three limited premieres—the first two exclusively for those involved in the film industry—of the film took place in the Soviet Union between 1966 and 1971.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 80-83.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ James Steffen, "Parajanov's Playful Poetics: On the 'Director's Cut' of *The Color of Pomegranates*," *Journal of Film and Video* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1995-1996), 19.

pushback from the powers that were, and was granted repeated travel visas “[a]t a time when travel abroad was reserved for specially approved artists,” thus enabling him “to travel widely in the 1970s and early 1980s.”¹⁴ Moreover, one cannot dismiss the impact that the ideological and political environment of the Soviet Union had on Tarkovsky’s own creative ethos, his beliefs in the aesthetic and moral duties of art and artists.

Paradoxically, the characteristics of Tarkovsky’s work that invited the scrutiny and reluctance, if not outright disapproval, of the Soviet film establishment—abstraction, “naturalism,” disengagement with the conventions of socialist realism—were the very same features that allowed him to continue to work more or less unfettered. Because his films gained such international renown, earning him “more awards and recognition abroad, if not at home, than any contemporary Soviet director had attained,”¹⁵ Tarkovsky was an asset to the Soviet Union, “its greatest international star throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, an invaluable advertisement for Soviet art and the source of scarce hard-currency earnings.”¹⁶ Tarkovsky’s inimitable vision, along with his steadfast commitment to his vision, ultimately came in handy, not only for him but for the system that supported (and sometimes hampered) him.

¹⁴ Johnson and Petrie, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Bird, 27-28.

The paintings that occur and recur throughout Andrei Tarkovsky's films and, more importantly, the *ways* in which these paintings occur and recur throughout his films, constitute a prime example of Tarkovsky's exceptional and, admittedly, hermetic style. Exploring the paintings that appear in four of Tarkovsky's films, *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1976), and *The Sacrifice* (1986), this thesis will examine Tarkovsky's theory and practices as a filmmaker as a reflection of his convictions as an artist and as an individual.

1. Pieter and Andrei(s)

“Art symbolizes the meaning of our existence.” –Andrei Tarkovsky,

Sculpting in Time

Cameos offer directors the opportunity to surprise their viewers with unexpected and often comic appearances by well-established actors or celebrities. Many directors have also used cameo appearances to pay homage to directors whom they admire, for instance, when Fritz Lang plays himself in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Mépris* (1963), when John Huston appears in Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* (1974), or when Alfred Hitchcock graces the screen, however briefly, in all but a handful of his films. The films of Andrei Tarkovsky feature cameos of a different sort: at least one major work from the canon of Western art history appears in each of his seven feature films. However, more than the inside joke or simple tribute commonly made with cameos, these pieces serve both to inform the aesthetics of the films themselves and also to reiterate and reinforce the deeply personal, diaristic qualities for which they are known and celebrated.

While each of the artworks included in a Tarkovsky film transcends the function of set-dressing and decoration, paintings play a more significant role in some of his films than in others. *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975), and *Andrei Rublev* (1966) address paintings—specifically, the visually rich, sweeping paintings of 16th-Century Dutch painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder and, in *Andrei Rublev*, the icons of the 15th-Century eponymous Russian icon painter—in great depth and detail. This chapter will

examine the role of Brueghel and Rublev's paintings in each of these films and their wider significance within Tarkovsky's theory and practice of filmmaking.

As the earliest of the three films discussed here, *Andrei Rublev* provides a logical and conventional jumping off point. However, Tarkovsky's two subsequent films, *Solaris* and *Mirror*, both make extensive—though wholly distinctive—reference to Pieter Brueghel's 1565 painting *Hunters in the Snow*. That Tarkovsky addresses this particular work in two consecutive films in two very different manners offers an irresistible entrée into exploration and analysis of the significance of painting in these three films.

Even beyond the films' shared interest in *Hunters in the Snow*, *Solaris* and *Mirror* relate closely to one another, with respect both to their position within Tarkovsky's career and to their thematic content. For instance, Tarkovsky embarked on the task of getting production approval for both *Solaris* and a germinal version of *Mirror* in the same year, 1968.¹ Additionally, each film centers on the idea of replication, reflection, doubling: the mysterious titular ocean-planet of *Solaris* generates duplicates of people and places familiar to the researchers on board the space station; the same actors portray two generations of a family in *Mirror*. The

¹ Igor' Evlampiev, *The Artistic Philosophy of Andrei Tarkovsky* (Saint Petersburg: Aletheia Press, 2001), 119. «В один и тот же год (1968) [Тарковский] подал заявки на съёмку сразу двух фильмов—«Соляриса» и «Исповеди.»» “In one and the same year (1968) [Tarkovsky] submitted proposals at once for the production of two films—*Solaris* and *Confession* [the first incarnation of what would become *Mirror*].”

compelling ties between the films invite close comparison. Consequently, chronological considerations notwithstanding, *Solaris* and *Mirror* will be discussed first and *Andrei Rublev* later on in the chapter.

For its role in *Solaris*, *Hunters in the Snow* portrays itself; that is, it appears as a framed reproduction hanging in the space station's cozy library. The camera passes incidentally over the painting, hung alongside the other works comprising Brueghel's *Four Seasons* series, in the course of the scene's establishing shots. Then, abruptly, the film cuts to a close-up detail of *Hunters in the Snow*, launching a lyrical sequence that lasts nearly two minutes, in which the camera, ostensibly independent of the diegesis, roves over the picture plane.² A series of scrupulous pans and tilts reveals the intricacies of the painting—the expression on the face of a hunting dog, a bird perched on a snowy branch. However, thanks to the sequence's editing, marked by heavy cross-fading, much of the exquisite detail of Brueghel's tableau is obscured. Moreover, in spite and because of the tight focus of each shot in the sequence, the viewer never apprehends the “big picture” (excuse the pun) and instead misses the forest for the stark, snowy trees.

² Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, “Painting and Film: *Andrei Rublev* and *Solaris*,” *Tarkovsky*, ed. Nathan Dunne (London: Black Dog Publishing 2008), 155. Johnson and Petrie refer to the unconventional narrative function of this sequence as *non sequitur*, although it is consistent with the action of the movie.

The shots immediately preceding the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence show Hari, the “embodied simulacrum”³ of the protagonist Kris Kelvin's deceased wife, staring fixedly (though apparently absently) in the direction of the painting; the sequence that follows reveals Hari's perception of the painting. Tarkovsky elides the “eye” of the camera with that of Hari and also of the viewer, as the camera both “imitate[s] the movement of the human eye and...underscore[s] the potential of the moving 'mechanical eye'.”⁴ By reflexively calling attention to the presence and agency of the camera, Tarkovsky reifies the power and potential of the cinematic medium. Thus, Tarkovsky again highlights the tension between the fundamentally interrelated and yet radically divergent media of painting and cinema.

Moreover, Tarkovsky stresses the importance of seeing, not just as a mechanical process, but as a defining component of human experience. Hari's close encounter with *Hunters in the Snow* marks a turning point for her character, according to Nariman Skakov's analysis. Upon materializing in the space station, Hari appears to be little more than an incarnate hallucination, a specter of Kris Kelvin's dead wife: Skakov notes that she “does not recognize her own photographic image upon arrival” and expresses the feeling that she's forgotten something.⁵ Dr. Snaut, one of two other

³ Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 90.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵ Skakov, 86.

scientists aboard Solaris, explains that through human interaction, “visitors” (of which Hari is the latest) become, themselves, more human. For this reason, Hari resorts to panic and violence when left alone. That is, until she is alone with the painting.

Alone in the library, Hari's “phantom nature does not manifest itself in a feral manner: the woman calmly smokes and does not experience an uncontrolled urge to haunt her 'victim husband.' ”⁶ Instead, she *studies* the painting, as if to learn by rote the memory, emotion, and lived experience that make up real human life. Indeed, *Hunters in the Snow* offers Hari a kind of short-cut to reclaiming her humanity “by developing an ability to appreciate art,” and the work affects her so profoundly that “she starts to hear the authentic sounds of Earth: human voices, dripping water, birds...and so on.”⁷ Hence, the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence may be read as a simple celebration of this specific work and also as a commentary on the capacity of visual art generally to exert an emotional and psychological effect on the viewer. That the sequence ends with a quick but seamless cut to filmed footage of a snowscape (previously introduced in the film as a home movie from Kris's childhood), supports this latter reading in particular.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Tarkovsky once again turns to *Hunters in the Snow* in his next film, *Mirror*, to further explore the relationship between painting and memory, as well as the tension between painting and filmmaking.

Whereas, in *Solaris*, the camera takes a deconstructive approach to the image, effectively dismantling the whole into component parts through close-up framing and cross-fading, in *Mirror* the camera tenderly recreates the composition, rendering a visual paraphrase of Brueghel's work. Here, both the camera and the film medium behave in a manner more appropriate to the tradition of the "moving picture": the filmmaker, as if by magic, takes the inert *Hunters in the Snow* and sets it in motion.

In fact, structurally and technically, *Hunters in the Snow's* appearance in *Mirror* is nearly antithetical to that in *Solaris*. Where in *Solaris* the camera's motions alone produce a sense of movement, in *Mirror*, the camera is stationary, panning only very slowly to track the trajectory of the scene's central figure. Where *Solaris* offers only piecemeal views of the painting's details, *Mirror* offers only a wide view of the scene. Even the soundtrack accompanying each sequence distinguishes one from another. Conventionally diegetic sound accompanies neither sequence; however, in *Solaris*, the world contained within the painting entrances Hari so deeply that it produces its own sounds, whereas in *Mirror*, the atmospheric sounds concomitant with the actualized painting are subordinate to a voiceover track. Nonetheless, each instance challenges the already taxed notions of realism and verisimilitude within its respective film and, as Robert Bird asserts, "underscores...that there is no simple way

out from imaginary space and time”—either the imaginary space and time of a painting or that of a film—“into 'reality.'”⁸

Beyond its role as a stylistic device, *Hunters in the Snow* acts as a kind of talisman, allowing the films' characters and, by proxy, the audience, access to memories and emotions central to the themes of *Solaris* and *Mirror*. In *Solaris*, the painting serves as a window to another world, a world separate, both in sheer cosmic distance and in cinematic style, from that of the characters. Ostensibly, *Solaris* fits into the science fiction genre: a significant portion of the film's action transpires on a space station in the indeterminate future, and the film itself is an adaptation, however liberal, of Stanislaw Lem's science fiction novel of the same name. Nonetheless, the film in many ways resists this categorization, offering Tarkovsky's reaction—if not outright polemic—to the glossy, high concept ethos so often characteristic of science fiction films. Interviewed for a 1971 issue of *Isskustvo kino*, Tarkovsky expresses a general distaste for science fiction films and, specifically, for Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), widely regarded as the exemplar of science fiction film. Tarkovsky objects to the film on moral and aesthetic grounds, questioning the sterility and vacancy of *2001*'s set as well as its story, both of which he conceives as a showcase for technological achievements:

(Вопрос Тарковскому:) А как вы вообще относитесь к фильмам научно-фантастическим?

⁸ Bird, 87.

Тарковский: Как правило, они меня раздражают. Например, «Космическая одиссея» Стэнли Кубрика мне кажется совершенно неестественной: выморочная, стерильная атмосфера, будто в музее, где демонстрируются технические достижения. Но кому интересно произведение, где технические достижения сами по себе стоят в центре внимания художника? Ведь искусство не может существовать вне человека, вне его нравственных проблем.

(Interviewer to Tarkovsky): And how do you feel about science fiction films generally?

Tarkovsky: As a rule, they bother me. For example, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* seems absolutely unnatural to me: the vacant, sterile atmosphere, like a museum where technological achievements are displayed. But who is interested in a work where technological achievements themselves stand at the center of the artist's attention? Art cannot exist beyond humankind, beyond its moral problems.⁹ (Except where otherwise noted, all translations are mine.)

Mikhail Romadin, the film's production designer, reiterates this sentiment.

Recalling the experience of watching *2001* along with Tarkovsky and the cinematographer, Vadim Yusov, while working on *Solaris*, Romadin says that they found Kubrick's film lacking for its simple reproduction of an “illustration from a science fiction magazine,” and “suddenly wanted to do something completely contradictory to it.”¹⁰

This goal reflects Tarkovsky's desire not to outdo nor to criticize Kubrick, but simply to make a science fiction film according to his own values, to restore humanity to science fiction while also addressing his perennial themes of metaphysics

⁹ Olga Surkova, *With Tarkovsky and on Tarkovsky*, (Moscow: Rainbow Press 2005), 45.

¹⁰ Mikhail Romadin, “Film and Painting,” *Tarkovsky*, 388.

and nostalgia. To this end, Tarkovsky and Romadin collaborated to create an atmosphere at once familiar and uncanny for the space station's interior, in some ways following Romadin's suggestion to “[transfer] Earth's conditions to outer space.”¹¹ Hence, while the space station has its share of futuristic control panels and spectral visitors, it also features a library as warm as it is opulent, replete with timeless terrestrial luxuries: wood paneling, candelabras, a chandelier, and, of course, Brueghel's *Hunters in the Snow*.

Unlike the other items in the library, which remain mere decorative objects, *Hunters in the Snow* becomes central to the library scenes as well as to the film overall. Tarkovsky privileges *Hunters in the Snow* because of its double significance: the painting serves not only as a memento of a life left far and indefinitely behind, but it also introduces an element of “Earth into the sterile environment of the space station.”¹² With its meticulous portrayal of the interaction between the natural world and the human one, *Hunters in the Snow* reifies Kris Kelvin's yearning for his home planet and, indeed, his home country so poignantly that the painting evokes or perhaps induces in the viewer an aural experience of the work to complement the visual. Tarkovsky expounds this idea, explaining:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 389. According to Romadin, his idea originally went much further than what is presented in *Solaris*, but Tarkovsky and Yusov feared that “comic effects might arise” if the space station appeared, as Romadin proposed, like a “Moscow apart with square rooms, . . . bookshelves . . . [and] windows with *fortochkas* and icicles on the outside.”

¹² Johnson and Petrie, 251.

Мне необходимо, чтобы у зрителя возникло ощущение *прекрасной* Земли. Чтобы, погрузившись, в неизвестную ему дотеле фантастическую атмосферу Соляриса, он вдруг, вернувшись на Землю, обрел возможность вздохнуть свободно и привычно, чтобы ему стало щемяще легко от этой привычности. ...Тут-то и нужна мне Земля, чтобы зритель полнее, глубже, острее пережил весь драматизм отказа героя от возвращения на ту планету, которая была (и есть) его и нашей прародиной.

It is imperative to me that the sensation of *beautiful* Earth arise in the viewer. That, having been immersed in the hitherto-unknown fantastical atmosphere of Solaris, he suddenly, upon returning to Earth, discovers the ability to breathe freely, as he is accustomed, that breathing becomes achingly easy for him out of habit...This is why I need the Earth: so that the viewer more fully, deeply, sharply experiences the whole drama of the hero's refusal to return to that planet that was (and is) his and our native home.¹³

In this way, the painting becomes a primary tool in Tarkovsky's quest to convey the beauty and preciousness of Earth in such a way that its absence will be as palpable and profound to the viewer as it is to Kris Kelvin.

Furthermore, the diegetic transition from the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence to a snippet of a home movie from Kelvin's childhood reaffirms the painting's role as a portal to nostalgia and memory. Understanding the sequence as a series of point-of-view shots documenting Hari's study and contemplation of the painting, one then understands the subsequent cut to the home-movie footage, which Kelvin had previously shown Hari shortly after her reappearance aboard Solaris, as Hari's *recollection* of the movie clip. By making the cognitive association between the painting she sees before her and a movie she has seen before, Hari, a space

¹³ Surkova, 46.

phenomenon, successfully assimilates a key aspect of human experience, memory, thereby further refining her mimetic abilities. Hari demonstrates her new mastery of human behavior not only through this feat of associative thinking but, even more significantly, through the approximation of empathy: that the painting reminds her of Kelvin's memories, as captured on film, suggests an awareness, if not a comprehension, of the mental and emotional experiences of others.

Mirror's quotation of *Hunters in the Snow* echoes *Solaris's* elision of the painting with Kelvin's real lived experience, as established in the cut between the painting and the home movie. Though one of his shorter films (one of only two of his feature films under two hours in length), *Mirror* is perhaps Tarkovsky's most abstract work, a stream-of-consciousness exploration of the memories of a dying man.

Hunters in the Snow appears in its cinematic incarnation as Aleksei, the protagonist/narrator (in the film's present-day, he remains off camera, appearing only as a child throughout the narrative's many flashbacks), recounts an anecdote from his childhood to his son, Ignat, who is alone in his father's apartment. From a shot of Ignat on the telephone with his father, the film cuts to the scene Aleksei describes, a snowy day during the war.

In this sequence, as in other sequences depicting this period in Aleksei's life, the actor who plays the role of Ignat also plays the role of Aleksei. Consequently, whether this is a true reenactment of Aleksei's memory or simply Ignat's own interpretation of his father's story remains ambiguous. This resulting ambiguity

illustrates an idea that is essential to *Mirror* and to Tarkovsky's films in general: the concurrent emotional power and inevitable fallibility of memory. By unmistakably reconstructing *Hunters in the Snow* over the course of this scene, a flashbulb memory of a school military exercise intercut with newsreel footage from the Second World War, Tarkovsky elegantly characterizes the cognitive and emotional processes involved in the recollection and retelling of past events. As much as the careful allusion to *Hunters in the Snow* is an artificial construction, so, too, are Aleksei's memory of this scene and his son's own conception of it.

In his second feature film, the 1966 epic *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky films paintings, both with the literal but deconstructive sense seen in *Solaris* and with the more abstract and reconstructive sense seen in *Mirror*. Although paintings permeate the world of Tarkovsky's films, the very act of painting plays an unusually central role in *Andrei Rublev*. Portraying the life and times of the titular protagonist, a 14th-Century icon painter widely considered to be among Russia's finest, *Andrei Rublev* addresses many of Tarkovsky's recurrent themes through the experiences of a visual artist and craftsman. Despite the fact that *Andrei Rublev* “is well known to be a film about a painter, ...it never actually shows him painting and never shows any of his finished work as a whole.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, painting offers context and subtext for the film, and paintings—Rublev's own works and yet another Brueghel piece—appear in the film.

¹⁴ Johnson and Petrie, 149.

While Rublev's finished works are never shown in full during the film, nearly all of the film's final eight minutes are devoted to shots, ranging in length from close-up to extreme close-up, meticulously detailing Rublev's paintings. As in the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence of *Solaris*, cross-fades, this time very gradual, pervade the sequence's editing, at once highlighting and obfuscating the intricacies and craftsmanship of the icons and frescoes. And, as in the case of *Solaris*, the icon sequence of *Andrei Rublev* presents a break in the film's narrative, a departure from otherwise linear—albeit perhaps oblique or episodic—storytelling.

Aesthetically, too, the final sequence of *Andrei Rublev* departs dramatically from the rest of the film: of the film's roughly 205 minutes, all but the last eight are filmed in black and white. The sudden switch to color, much less the rich and saturated color of Rublev's paintings, stuns the viewer, provoking a kind of involuntary visceral awe. Thus, the use of color photography in this final sequence at once heightens the dramatic impact of this moment, when, after more than three hours of watching a painter do practically everything but paint, his works are revealed, and underscores the singular beauty and skill evinced by the paintings. More importantly, the shift between black-and-white and color photography brings into focus Tarkovsky's views of the distinction between cinema and other art forms, e.g., painting.

Tarkovsky opted for black-and-white not because of convenience, cost, or necessity; rather, he made this decision in order “to heighten the sense of reality and

avoid the 'falseness' and 'picturesqueness' that [he] associated with colour in films."¹⁵ By including the eight-minute "epilogue" in full and vibrant color, Tarkovsky draws attention to the irreality and fundamental artifice of painting, especially painting that pretends to naturalism, as the works most favored by Tarkovsky do. In addition to Rublev and Brueghel, Tarkovsky admired painters like "Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Georges de Latour and even the Surrealists,"¹⁶ as well as Leonardo.¹⁷ These artists represent a range of styles, traditions, and time periods, but their attitudes toward pictorial realism—even in the case of the Surrealists—unite them. Though far from abstract in their representational styles (i. e. figures, however stylized or fantastic, remain easily recognizable to the viewer), these artists demonstrate a reflexive awareness of the limitations of art in conveying "truth" or "realism." Rather than purporting to convey the objective reality of the three-dimensional world, these artists instead depict the subjective reality of the worlds created within their two-dimensional works.

Andrei Rublev's paintings provide a prime example. Icons bear a dual significance, serving at once as aesthetic and sacred objects. Because of their sanctity (Orthodox believers understand icons to embody rather than merely to visually represent the holy figures depicted within), stringent, often proscriptive rules overlay

¹⁵ Johnson and Petrie, 150.

¹⁶ Romadin, 389.

¹⁷ Tarkovsky, 108.

all aspects of icon production, from the artist's own faith to the painting's composition.¹⁸ Among the most striking of these conventions, from an aesthetic as well as a theoretical standpoint, is the use of inverse perspective in the compositions. From its inception in the early days of the Italian Renaissance through the advent of the avant-garde, Western artists upheld the principles of linear perspective as the gold standard method to achieve the illusion of three-dimensional pictorial depth. That is, linear perspective enabled the artist to fabricate *real space* within the two-dimensional confines of the picture plane. This effect depends on the presence of a point or points (the vanishing-point(s)) within or contiguous to the picture plane where all “parallel” lines appear to converge.

Just as the Orthodox Church prohibits statues “because their realism and...materiality could be an excuse for idolatry,” so, too, does it proscribe such legerdemain, which might “allow the beholder to imagine that a three-dimensional reality was appearing on a two-dimensional surface,” in the creation of icons.¹⁹ Hence, icon composition flouts the tenets of linear perspective, transferring the vanishing-point beyond the picture plane such that all parallels within the composition converge in front of the work, and “the icon finds its vanishing-point” in

¹⁸ Mark Patrick Hederman, “Cinema and the Icon,” *The Crane Bag* 8, No. 2 (1984), 93.

¹⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 95.

the viewer.²⁰ Similarly, while the the figures represented in icons exhibit an unmistakable naturalism in their forms and poses, they are nonetheless stylized: flat and rigid, with synthetic postures and disproportionate features. What is more, as Mark Patrick Hederman notes, “no hint of a shadow” can be seen in icon painting like that of Andrei Rublev.²¹ That icon painters, among whom Andrei Rublev stands out to this day as an exemplar, make no attempt to replicate three-dimensional space and objects as they appear in the everyday world betrays neither a dearth of skill or training nor an ignorance of the accepted rules of linear perspective. Rather, it delineates the artists' goal not to try in vain to reproduce the natural world but to characterize an alternate spiritual reality separate from the truths and precepts of human existence.

This suspension of reality is visible to greater and lesser extents in the oeuvre of the painters Tarkovsky cites as influential in his work, and, moreover, it is integral to an understanding of Tarkovsky's filmmaking theory and practice. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky expounds at length on his views on “realism,” “naturalism,” and the moral and aesthetic imperatives of art generally and cinema specifically in human existence. Tarkovsky dismisses realism and naturalism in any art, even the beguilingly objective art of the cinema, concluding that “the term 'naturalism' can have no real meaning” when applied to film or to any other art form, as “nothing can

²⁰ Hederman, 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*

ever be reproduced totally naturalistically.”²² Accepting this limitation as a given in art, Tarkovsky strives to “tell people the truth about...common [human] existence as it appears to [him] in the light of [his] experience and understanding” in lieu of “falsify[ing] [his] own purpose behind the façade of a cinematic spectacle in itself apparently 'true to life' and therefore convincing in its effect on the audience.”²³ In other words, Tarkovsky's approach to filmmaking rejects the objectivity and honesty historically ascribed to the photographic (and, by extension, cinematographic) process, a perception French film critic and theorist André Bazin attributes to the medium's unique ability to produce “an image of the world...automatically, without the creative intervention of man” and thus, one reasons, without distortion or manipulation of reality.²⁴ Rather than perpetuating the myth of photographic credibility and the supposed verisimilitude of filmed events, Tarkovsky exploits the movie camera's inherent proclivity for deceit, i.e. its amenability to artifice and its facility for manipulating the laws of time and nature.

This idea is central to Tarkovsky's work and manifests to varying degrees and in various ways throughout his films. As compared with his subsequent films, *Andrei Rublev* can be read as an almost-conventional biographical-historical drama, unusual

²² Tarkovsky, 184-185.

²³ Tarkovsky, 186-187.

²⁴ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 13.

perhaps only for its exceptional length and for its understated protagonist. After all, the film, though visually exquisite, lacks the lyricism and overt surrealism of his later films—for instance, no one levitates. However, the epilogue sequence, like the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence in *Andrei Rublev's* successor, manipulates the supposedly objective lens of the camera to present an impossible, atemporal view of Rublev's work.

Rublev's works are not the only paintings Tarkovsky refers to in *Andrei Rublev*, despite their privileged—if highly choreographed—position in the film. As in his next two films, Tarkovsky invokes Pieter Brueghel the Elder, marking the end of the film's third chapter, *Theophanes the Greek: Summer-Winter-Spring-Summer 1405-1406*. Much of this chapter follows Andrei Rublev and his apprentice, Foma, as they make their way to Moscow, where Rublev has been called to assist Theophanes the Greek, a master of early icon painting, in adorning the walls of the Cathedral of the Annunciation. Walking through the forest, Foma and Andrei happen upon Theophanes, and the latter two delve into a philosophical discussion of the sins and plight of humanity and, in particular, of the Russian people. At the onset of this dialogue, which continues for several minutes, Theophanes and Andrei stand beside a stream in the forest. The season is likely spring: although the men dress warmly, the stream flows and the surrounding ground appears to be thawed. With no apparent antecedent or cause, the action cuts to another stream in another time. Now, snow

thickly covers the treeless countryside, and Theophanes and Andrei are nowhere to be seen, despite the fact that their conversation persists in a voice-over.

Thus begins a four-or-five-minute-long sequence depicting a provincial calvary reenactment distinctly reminiscent of that captured in Brueghel's 1564 painting *The Procession to Calvary*. Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie highlight the marked differences between the original and Tarkovsky's interpretation of the composition, noting that whereas Brueghel's "Christ—though placed at the very centre of the picture—is almost lost in the bustling crowd surrounding him, Tarkovsky's Christ is seen in a bleak, snow-covered Russian landscape."²⁵ Additionally, Tarkovsky's Christ emphasizes the pathetic humanity of the scene, appearing "barely recognisable as he trudges at the head of a line of around a dozen peasants (one of them carrying his cross), while a few other peasants continue their everyday procession."²⁶ Nonetheless, this scene unequivocally hearkens back to the Brueghel painting in aspects both of its composition and of its intent.²⁷

Aesthetically, notwithstanding the relative sparseness of Tarkovsky's scene as compared with the density of *The Procession to Calvary*, the "Russian Calvary"

²⁵ Johnson and Petrie, "Painting and Film: *Andrei Rublev* and *Solaris*," 158.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Michel Ciment, *Film World: Interviews with Cinema's Leading Directors*, trans. Julie Rose (New York: Berg Publishers, 2009), 335. Tarkovsky confirms that the "Russian Calvary" scene is an intentional allusion in an interview with Michel Ciment, stating, "[t]hat was in fact inspired by Bruegel [sic], who I really love."

sequence (so dubbed by Johnson and Petrie)²⁸ of *Andrei Rublev* closely mimics the mood and composition of the Brueghel painting. The initial shots of the sequence evince a dramatic depth of focus showcasing the members of the procession, including the central Christ figure, in the distance, while a pair of women occupy the foreground. Details of the women's appearance—the drab shawl covering one woman's head, the anguished expressions on each of their faces—echo distinctly those of the women (among them the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene) in the foreground of *The Procession to Calvary*. And although the snowy countryside of Tarkovsky's reimagining deviates significantly from the vernal (though admittedly bleak) atmosphere of Brueghel's work, the severe contour of a cliff bisecting the frame in one of the first shots recalls the irregular landscape and diagonal bent evident in the composition.

As the sequence progresses, more affinities between film and canvas reveal themselves. The presence of wooden carts, horses, birds, livestock, and scrubby fauna unite the “Russian Calvary” scene with Brueghel's painting, distinguishing the work as not only an aesthetic but also an historical reference. Of course, the life of *Andrei Rublev* predates the completion of Brueghel's *The Procession to Calvary* by 150 years. Still, both works depict the realities of medieval life; significantly, with the exception of Christ, the multifarious figures populating Brueghel's painting “wear

²⁸ Johnson and Petrie, *Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 252.

contemporary dress.”²⁹ Herein lies an even more significant resonance between the works, each of which depicts an event in the distant past—the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the life of Andrei Rublev, respectively—using a contemporary vernacular, thereby teasing out the “sacred themes in common experience” to render “a creative modernization of something very old.”³⁰

Despite its various relevant functions within the film, one cannot overlook the singularity of this sequence. Though, in *Mirror*, Tarkovsky implemented similar filmmaking techniques to create another “art 'quotation,”³¹ the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence, albeit undoubtedly stylized, nevertheless pursues the film's narrative progression. That is, when the film cuts from Ignat talking on the telephone in his father's apartment to the snowy hillside, the audience easily infers the relationship between these two scenes. The transition between *Solaris's* *Hunters in the Snow* sequence and the events immediately preceding and following it is perhaps more unconventional; still, thanks to certain cues (Hari's eyeline, editing) the audience perceives it as a continuation of the film's narrative.

²⁹ Gustav Glück, *Pieter Brueghel the Elder*, trans. Eveline Byam Shaw (London: Commodore, 1937), 5.

³⁰ Anne Hollander, *Moving Pictures* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 97-98.

³¹ Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, 253. Although less overtly than *The Procession to Calvary*, *Hunters in the Snow*, too, reflects Christian themes and traditions. *Hunters in the Snow*, along with the other paintings in Brueghel's *Seasons* cycle, works within the tradition of calendar cycle painting.

By contrast, the Brueghel interlude in *Andrei Rublev* bears no clear relationship to the film's overall story, nor even to the tangential conversation underway between Rublev and Theophanes. Robert Bird proposes that the scene represents a deviation from the narrative into Foma's imagination, a “momentary flash of inspiration” for an icon, triggered by his washing paintbrushes as Rublev and Theophanes talk.³² Even if one accepts this interpretation, the sequence ties more abstractly and tenuously to the diegesis than do Tarkovsky's other allusions to Brueghel works. In this way, “Russian Calvary” exists largely as a rhetorical device, a kind of meta-historical allusion allowing Tarkovsky “to universalize his record of one particular historical period from the past,”³³ while further flouting the specious concept of objective truth or realism in art.

Of course, each of Tarkovsky's allusions to painting has its own stylistic idiosyncracies. Compared with Tarkovsky's immediately and incontrovertibly striking allusion to *Hunters in the Snow* in *Mirror*, for example, his quotation of *The Procession to Calvary* is decidedly more subtle and oblique. And more than the Brueghel-inspired sequences of either *Mirror* or *Andrei Rublev*, the *Hunters in the Snow* scene in *Solaris* resembles the Brueghel-less epilogue of *Rublev*. However technically and thematically disparate these films' portrayals of the paintings of Pieter

³² Bird, 82.

³³ *Ibid.*

Brueghel the Elder, they share important similarities that illuminate the artist's particular significance to the director.

In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky commends the late-15th- and early-16th-Century Italian painter Vittore Carpaccio that “*each* of the characters in [his] crowded composition is a centre” around whom the rest of the composition becomes “mere context, background, built up like a kind of pedestal for this 'incidental' character”.³⁴ Citing aesthetic congruity between Carpaccio and Brueghel, Johnson and Petrie argue that the “qualities Tarkovsky admired in Carpaccio—his use of space and composition—are largely found in Brueghel as well.”³⁵ Indeed, this compositional polyphony can be observed in *The Procession to Calvary* as well as in *Hunters in the Snow*, creating simultaneous dissonant impressions of community and alienation among the subjects of these compositions. The idea of discrete individuals within a crowd plays an essential role throughout Tarkovsky's films, in particular, *Andrei Rublev*, *Solaris*, and *Mirror*, which share not only references to Brueghel works but also a common sense of emptiness and isolation.

Andrei Rublev's Russian Calvary scene exemplifies this concept, thanks in large part to its divergence from the painting to which it alludes. The very first shot of the sequence shows the Christ figure kneeling to drink from a stream, his cross visible on the ground behind him. The camera tilts up, as the procession passes, leaving the

³⁴ Tarkovsky, 50.

³⁵ Johnson and Petrie, 251.

Christ figure behind. For the duration of the procession, this figure remains apart from his followers, who, in turn, proceed solemnly behind him, scarcely interacting with one another, oblivious or perhaps indifferent to their fellow participants. Just before the crucifixion, the woman portraying Mary Magdalene throws herself in agony at the feet of the Christ figure, who walks away from her, unresponsive. The accompanying voice-over, Rublev's refutation of Theophanes's cynical views of humankind and ruminations on Christ's crucifixion, loosely correspond with the action transpiring onscreen. Overall, a deep sense of the intrinsic and inescapable solitude of human existence characterizes the scene, and, indeed, the film as a whole.

As much as *Andrei Rublev* is the story of medieval Russia and its people—of Theophanes and Rublev's fellow monks and artists, of jesters and pagans and princes and Tatars—it is also the story of a single man. While Andrei Rublev is surrounded by other characters, other centers in the larger composition of the film, he is alone, cloistered from the rest of society by vocation, by choice (later on in the film he takes a vow of silence), and by the very nature of human existence, according to Tarkovsky.

Similarly, Kris Kelvin in *Solaris* and Aleksei, the practically faceless protagonist of *Mirror*, each encounter and interact, at times even closely, with others, but they nevertheless represent extremes of isolation, Kelvin because of his physical circumstances and Aleksei because of his mental and emotional disposition. Kelvin inhabits the space station Solaris along with two other scientists, Drs Snaut and

Sartorius, and, of course, with Hari. His shipmates are cold and withdrawn; in spite of the close quarters implicit in such a living arrangement, the scientists barely cross paths. In fact, prior to Kelvin's arrival on Solaris, a third scientist, Dr. Gibarian, kills himself, certain that he alone experiences the hallucinatory phenomenon of “visitors,” like Hari.

With unfathomable distances separating them from their homes, their loved ones, their history (not only their personal histories but also the whole history of humankind), the residents of Solaris, as so poignantly illustrated in Dr. Gibarian's suicide, desperately need human contact, a sense of connection. Yet, they remain, in Tarkovsky's words, “dogged by disappointments,” unable to find “the way out...offered them...in dreams, in the opportunity to recognise their own roots—those roots which forever link man to the Earth which bore him. But even those links had already become unreal for them.”³⁶

Although the social and political circumstances of Andrei Rublev's life and times, not to mention the sheer magnitude of Solaris and its inhabitants' detachment from civilization certainly compound the sense of alienation pervading these films, this feeling resonates throughout *Mirror* as well. In fact, the very title of *Mirror* echoes a pronouncement made by “the drunken Snaut in *Solaris*; what humanity

³⁶ Tarkovsky, 199.

needs is not the Cosmos, but a mirror for himself: 'What Man needs is man.'³⁷ To say nothing more of the singular social dynamic aboard *Solaris*, such a statement rings somewhat paradoxical, if not cruelly ironic, given the strained manner in which the characters in *Mirror* relate to each other. Despite the advantage (at least, in theory) of being closely related both socially and spatially—the film loosely follows three generations of the protagonist's family—the main characters of *Mirror* are just as helplessly alone as those in Tarkovsky's prior films.

In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky adverts to the crippling emotional faults of *Mirror*'s protagonist Aleksei, a “weak, selfish man incapable of loving even those dearest to him.”³⁸ The film, arguably Tarkovsky's most personal,³⁹ shows scenes from Aleksei's life, from his early childhood up through the end of his life. Through these episodes, presented with a dizzying disregard for linear chronology, intercutting newsreel clips with often dreamlike flashback sequences, the viewer becomes

³⁷ Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 64. Evlampiev, 119. “[С]амо название...[*Зеркала*] и его главный символический образ явно ассоциируются с одним из размышлений Снаута из «Соляриса»: «Мы вовсе не хотим завоёвывать никакой космос. Мы хотим расширить Землю до его границ...нам нужно зеркало. Человеку нужен человек!» “The very name of [*Mirror*] and its main symbolic image evidently relate to one of Snaut's reflections in *Solaris*: “We absolutely do not want to conquer any cosmos. We want to expand Earth to its limit...we need a mirror. Man needs man!”

³⁸ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 208.

³⁹ Tarkovsky, *Time within Time*, 367. During a talk at the Building Institute in April 1975, Tarkovsky answers the question “What, in my view, is *Mirror* about?” by saying that it is “an autobiographical film. The things that happen are real things that happened to people close to me. That is true of all the episodes in the film.”

acquainted with the members of Aleksei's close family: his mother and ex-wife (both played by Margarita Terekhova) and his son (played by the actor who, as previously mentioned, also portrays Aleksei in childhood flashbacks).

In the absence of a more conventional film scenario (Tarkovsky mentions that, thanks to the relatively fluid nature of the film's structure, he edited together “some twenty or more variants” before landing on the right one)⁴⁰, the evolution of these “complex relationships...substitute[s] for a narrative thread.”⁴¹ Still, despite the fact that the film concerns the closest of human relationships and the “deep, eternal, abiding human feelings” that come along with them, “these feelings [are] a source of bewilderment and incomprehension for the hero, who could not grasp why he [is] condemned to suffer perpetually because...of his own love and affection.”⁴² Again, Aleksei's plight stems from his self-perpetuating isolation: after all, even the most cursory look at art and literature throughout time reveals that few human experiences are more universal than suffering for love.

Albeit aesthetically exquisite, rife with shots unparalleled elsewhere in cinema for their dreamy and ethereal beauty, *Mirror's* is a wistful story, illustrating the inescapable timeliness not only of close romantic relationships but also of their declines. By documenting failed or faltering family life throughout three generations

⁴⁰ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 116.

⁴¹ Turovskaya, 66.

⁴² Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 199.

and by doubling the characters, such that Aleksei's mother/former wife and son/childhood self are exact mirror images of one another (referencing not only its own title but also *Solaris's* preoccupation with doubles), Tarkovsky conveys the inevitability of decline in personal relationships. Maya Turovskaya explains that the love portrayed in *Mirror* is “always fragile, and always likely to leave a woman alone in life, with children to bring up and a bond of love for them that will also let her down when the children grow up and she grows old. Each generation, while undergoing its experience, is brought face to face with the same accursed and eternal questions.”⁴³

Here, Turovskaya approaches an idea central to understanding not only the fascination with solitude exhibited in *Andrei Rublev*, *Solaris*, and *Mirror*, but also Tarkovsky's views on filmmaking, art, and life more generally. Interviewed in the 1983 Italian documentary *Andrei Tarkovsky: A Poet in the Cinema*, Tarkovsky expounds on the importance of personal experience, on the fundamental impossibility of learning how to live second-hand, for example, through “the experience of our fathers.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Tarkovsky's artistic practice revolves around personal

⁴³ Turovskaya, 66.

⁴⁴ *Andrei Tarkovsky: A Poet in the Cinema*, Donatella Baglivo, 1984 (documentary film). “Невозможно преподать опыт, нельзя научиться от другого как жить. Можно только прожить жизнь...Нельзя передать другому. Мы часто говорим, 'Ну же воспользоваться опытом наших отцов.' Это было бы очень просто. К сожалению, мы должны прожить свои собственную жизнь...”

experience, as crystallized in *Mirror*. He emphasizes the importance of the personal in art, and particularly in film, since, unlike in literature, one “can't use the audience's experience..., allowing for an 'aesthetic assimilation' to take place in the consciousness of each reader” and must, therefore “impart [one's] own experience with the greatest possible sincerity.”⁴⁵

Beyond the context of art and filmmaking practice, however, Tarkovsky stresses self-reliance and an embrace of solitude as important tools to cope with living. While he credits the younger generation for their refusal to heed the lessons of their fathers, he goes on to advise youth (in answer to the question, “What would you like to tell young people?”) to spend more time alone, not to despair in solitude, but to enjoy it.⁴⁶ In this way, Tarkovsky betrays an ambivalence to solitude: he extols its virtues and underscores its necessity both for art-making and for living more broadly, yet he laments the desolation of contemporary existence—indeed, of human existence throughout all history and into even a wildly conceived future like that of *Solaris*.

“It is impossible to teach experience, one cannot learn from another how to live. One can only live life...One cannot transmit it to another. We often say, 'Well, let's take advantage of our fathers' experience.' That would be so simple. Unfortunately, we must live out our own lives...”

⁴⁵ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 183.

⁴⁶ *Andrei Tarkovsky: A Poet in the Cinema*.

2. A Mirror on the Modern

This conception of Tarkovsky's ideas about solitude, life, and film offers a kind of tangent point leading into a more in-depth discussion of his theory and practice, as evinced in the paintings that appear in his films. Throughout these films, paradoxical tensions arise from Tarkovsky's use of paintings: tension between the seen and the unseen, between the part and the whole, between the dynamic, temporal, and modern film medium and the static, atemporal, and ancient medium of painting. Although Tarkovsky addresses these diametric pairs throughout his films, he focuses in particular on this latter—old versus new, ancient versus modern—bringing the two into direct confrontation.

Given his proclivity for “classical traditions over romantic ones,” and among more contemporary artists, “those...who, in their works, conduct a sort of dialogue with the old masters: Salvador Dali, René Magritte, Henri [sic] Moore,”¹ one scene in *Andrei Rublev* stands out in particular for its reference—whether intentional, coincidental, or something in between—to mid-20th-Century modernist painting. During the “Last Judgment” chapter, as Rublev and his crew struggle against “the summer heat and the idleness caused by [Rublev]'s inability to begin the painting of *The Last Judgement* [sic],” Rublev suddenly splashes the stark-white, bare wall of the

¹ Romadin, 388.

cathedral interior with dark paint.² Notwithstanding the geographic and temporal distance separating Andrei Rublev's studio from the New York School, this gesture, borne of frustration and stultification, evokes Jackson Pollock, “the most publicized modern artist of his generation in America, and in many ways, the most influential.”³

Beyond his formidable reputation, equal parts genius and desperado, Pollock was best known for his distinctive style of applying paint to canvas by slinging paint from sticks, dowels, or straight from the can onto a vast canvas laid out on the floor. This approach took painting by storm: a characteristic description of Pollock's contribution to contemporary art and, indeed, to art history as a whole credits him with “explod[ing] the traditional unities of easel painting,” dispensing both with brushes and with easels in favor of “delirium and rapture.”⁴

By the 1950s, Pollock had become a sensation, at home and abroad. And in 1959, Pollock's 1947 painting *Cathedral* hung for six weeks as part of the “American National Art Exhibition that was sent to Moscow...to implement the U.S.-USSR cultural exchange agreement signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in

² Bird, 63, 82.

³ Sam Hunter, “Jackson Pollock,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 24, no. 2. (1956-1957), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

1958,” introducing Pollock's brand of “action painting”⁵ to a Soviet audience.⁶ Three years later, Pollock's work appeared again “at a United States chemical exhibition in Moscow.”⁷ Considering the enormous impact of the American National Art Exhibition (for which tens of thousands of people lined up daily) on the Soviet public, to say nothing of its impact on Soviet artists more specifically, it is hard to imagine that Tarkovsky was not aware of the Pollock phenomenon.⁸ Consequently, one can scarcely dismiss Rublev's feverish dalliance with action painting, particularly since this act of anger and impotence constitutes the sole episode in all 205 minutes of *Andrei Rublev* in which Rublev actually paints.⁹ The following discussion intends to propose this reference to Pollock not as incontrovertible historical fact but rather as a new and useful lens through which to consider art as it appears in *Andrei Rublev* and, by extension, throughout Tarkovsky's films.

⁵ This phrase was introduced by Harold Rosenberg, in his 1952 essay “The American Action Painters.”

⁶ Marilyn Kushner, “Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2002), 6, 16.

⁷ Amei Wallach, “Censorship in the Soviet Bloc,” *Art Journal* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 1991), 80.

⁸ Kushner, 18. In her article, Kushner cites the astonishing figure of 20,000 to 30,000 viewers per day lined up to see the exhibition.

⁹ Johnson and Petrie, “Painting and Film: *Andrei Rublev* and *Solaris*,” 149.

This scene showcases the creative struggle so strongly associated with the mythical figure of the artist, who must contend not only with himself¹⁰ but also with a host of hostile external factors. On top of the languorous heat, the nature of Rublev's commissioned icon, "an admonitory icon of the *Last Judgement*," hampers his creative process.¹¹ Compounding his discomfort with the dark and violent subject matter of his assignment, the visiting Grand Prince's guards "blind the stonemasons," who have deserted their post in protest of the project's slow progress, "in gruesome fashion."¹² At this horrific sight, Rublev's disgust and defeat reach critical mass, and he sullies the wall. Ironically, this single gesture of unbridled emotion, "a seeming desecration" in which Rublev displayed mastery over neither his medium nor his senses, "actually marks Andrei's overcoming of his painter's block: if only in the most abstract sense, [he] learns to give form to evil."¹³ In order to express his frustrations with and objections to his creative and moral milieu, Rublev breaks with all aesthetic and formal convention, freeing himself and his work, albeit only for an instant, from the tyranny of the Grand Prince, of the Church, of icon painting.

¹⁰ The mythical artist is gendered and is, of course, male. (See Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?").

¹¹ Bird, 82.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

Thus, the affinities between Rublev and Pollock transcend the aesthetic; much of Pollock's legend rests on the sea change he effected in painting, breaking with practically all precedent to create a new lexicon. In a world well over sixty years post-Pollock, a world that has long since inducted Pollock into the art historical canon, the notion that Pollock's work once stood in the very vanguard of modern art—at a previously unimagined frontier—can be difficult to appreciate. Allan Kaprow, a fellow New York artist and contemporary of Pollock elegantly summarizes Pollock's impact on the art world of his age, identifying in his work “the embodiment of our ambition for absolute liberation and a secretly cherished wish to overturn old tables of crockery and flat champagne.”¹⁴ Kaprow goes on to describe the ante-Pollock state of modern art as “dull and repititious,” lamenting the “large numbers of formerly committed contemporary painters...defecting to earlier forms.”¹⁵ Like Tarkovsky's Rublev, Pollock, bored and disillusioned with the existing possibilities in painting, broke with tradition (embracing the physical as well as the ideological connotations of such an act) to create a new mode of expression.

What meaning can a viewer derive from this allusion to abstract expressionism, the trend in contemporary painting that had so captivated American

¹⁴ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and Soviet audiences¹⁶ alike? The scene that immediately follows Rublev's expressionist outburst further complicates this question.

As Rublev stands motionless next to his nascent fresco, a holy Fool wanders into the cathedral and makes her way over to it. The black smear draws the Fool to the wall where she stands transfixed, at once attracted and repelled. After moments of vexed and bewildered consideration, the Fool bursts into tears and casts a pleading look in turn at the wall, at Rublev, and the camera. Robert Bird remarks that, as the holy Fool beholds the smear, it “has a different shape [than in the previous shot], suggesting that it speaks in distinct ways to each pair of eyes.”¹⁷ Here, Bird endows what might otherwise be explained as a continuity error, resulting from the editing together of multiple different takes, with a meaning complementary to the proposed abstract expressionist reading. Absent any figural representation, abstract painting invites the viewer to project his or her own interpretation onto the work; moreover, the Fool's strong emotional reaction demonstrates the visceral power of abstract painting like that of Pollock or Tarkovsky's Rublev.

Of course, if Tarkovsky intended this scene as a commentary on contemporary modernist art, he leaves little room for interpretation of his feelings on the matter. In

¹⁶ The influence of Pollock and his peers is evident in the work of countless unofficial Soviet artists of this and later time periods. See Hilton Kramer, “Soviet Art: A Return to Modernism.”

¹⁷ Bird, 83.

his final interview, published in April 1987, Tarkovsky expresses these ideas more explicitly, denouncing:

идею эксперимента, поисков в сфере искусства. Любой поиск в этой области, всё, что помпезно именуют «авангардом», — просто ложь.

the idea of experimentation[, and] exploration in the sphere of art. Any exploration in this field, everything that they pompously label “avant-garde”—it's simply a lie.¹⁸

As the experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage (whose own work was significantly influenced by Jackson Pollock, among other abstract expressionist painters)¹⁹ discovered firsthand, Tarkovsky's feelings about experimentation and the avant-garde included art of cinema. According to Brakhage's account of his meeting with Tarkovsky to show him some films:

He ran, in the course of an hour and a half, through every argument against my work and any other individual's work that I have ever heard, from the Emperor's New Clothes argument through this-is-too-rapid-it-hurts-the-eyes, through “this is sheer self-indulgence,” to “film is only a collaborative art.” And in detail, “the color is shit” and “what is this paint? Why do you do this?”²⁰

¹⁸ “Krasota—Simvol Pravdy,” trans. L. Tokareva, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, no. 15 (1987), 8.

¹⁹ Scott MacDonald, “The Filmmaker as Visionary: Excerpts from an Interview with Stan Brakhage,” *Film Quarterly* 56, No. 3 (2003), 5.

²⁰ Stan Brakhage, “Brakhage Meets Tarkovsky,” *The Chicago Review* 47, no. 4 (2001-2002), 43.

Suffice to say²¹ that Tarkovsky held firmly entrenched aesthetic preferences.

But even beyond a simple aesthetic aversion to envelope-pushing in the name of artistic progress, which he found not only frivolous but also misguided, Tarkovsky held deep moral convictions about the role of art—and of artists—in society. More properly put, Tarkovsky argued for the artist's duty to serve humanity, in some way. Citing art's function as “an expression of human aspirations and hopes,” he argues that “it has an immensely important part to play in the moral development of society,” a part that transcends “purely utilitarian and pragmatic objectives.”²² Although in this distinction, Tarkovsky refers in particular to the problems of filmmaking, with its unmatched and concurrent capacities for generating revenue and advancing ideology, one can conceivably expand this principle to any form of art.

Returning once again to the example of Jackson Pollock, one finds notable instances in which Tarkovsky's morally-driven conception of art presents a counterpoint to, if not an outright denunciation of, the modernist *enfant terrible* and his peers. For instance, Tarkovsky deplores the “hubris of modern artists [as compared], say, to the humble builders of Chartres Cathedral whose names are not even known. The artist ought to be

²¹ Based on Brakhage's traumatic account, as well as Tarkovsky's extensive critical writings and diaries as cited throughout this thesis.

²² Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 182.

distinguished by the selfless devotion to duty.”²³ Certainly, even among the most-touted and best-known names in 20th-century art, Pollock constitutes a prime example of just the kind of “hubris” that Tarkovsky so trenchantly denounces.

In his day, Pollock was a celebrity. Camera crews filmed him as he worked in his studio; *Life* and *Time* ran photographs and stories featuring Pollock and his work. Following his death, he transcended household name to become a legend; mini-series, documentaries, and even a Hollywood feature (*Pollock*, 2000) further immortalize Pollock's life and work. And all of this about a painter.

But throughout Pollock's work, as throughout his biography, from its beginnings in the wild west²⁴ to its end in a drunken car crash, runs an irrepressible freedom, a steadfast commitment to self-determination at whatever cost. This kind of freedom strikes Tarkovsky as paradoxical, since “if [one has] chosen artistic work [one finds oneself] bound by chains of necessity.”²⁵ Tarkovsky refutes the very possibility of complete creative or, indeed, personal freedom, regarding such a condition as foreign and even deleterious to a person, who would “be like some deep

²³ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

²⁴ Pollock was born in Cody, Wyoming.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

water fish that had been dragged up to the surface.”²⁶ He further notes that Andrei Rublev, despite his undeniable genius and artistic innovation, nonetheless painted within and according to the strict traditions of icon painting. To Tarkovsky, the seemingly insatiable quest for freedom in contemporary art—“[f]reedom to take drugs? To kill? To commit suicide?”—is not freedom at all, but “an extraordinary egoism.”²⁷

Moreover, Tarkovsky goes on to question the “idea of creating atmosphere for its own sake,” giving as an example the work of the Impressionists, “who set out to imprint the moment for its own sake, to convey the instantaneous.”²⁸ To an extent far greater than that exhibited in the paintings of the Impressionists, who, though quite progressive and controversial in their day, worked within the tradition of figural representation, Pollock's paintings simply “imprint” a moment. In fact, unlike the Impressionists, who painted scenes from quotidian life, Pollock's paintings fabricate the very moments that they memorialize. By their nature, these works not only embrace Tarkovsky's argument that this kind of strategy may be a means in art, but not an end,” but they also conflate the means and ends of art. The name “action painting” says it all: with absolutely no reference to the figural, these paintings ostensibly commemorate nothing more than their own production.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

In this way, the rather unlikely figure of Jackson Pollock provides a kind of artistic foil to the humble Andrei Rublev and all that he stands for, in Tarkovsky's imagining. Pollock's histrionic style, in his life as in his work, he epitomizes what Tarkovsky calls the “wrong turn” taken in modern art's trajectory, “abandoning the search for meaning of existence in order to affirm the value of the individual for its own sake.”²⁹ Such an exercise overlooks the role of the artist as a “servant...perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle,” and ignores the centrality of sacrifice, through which “true affirmation of self can only be expressed,” to art and to human existence in general.³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

3. *The Sacrifice*

Tarkovsky treats the theme of sacrifice in depth in his final film, appropriately titled *The Sacrifice* (1986), which was released just before his death. This film represents the culmination of Tarkovsky's filmmaking theory-cum-practice, crystallizing the idea of sacrifice in art and life while also synthesizing the other principal tenets of his oeuvre more cogently and definitively perhaps than any of its predecessors.

As with *Mirror*, *The Sacrifice* turns once more to scenes of domestic life to examine broader themes and problems in human existence. Family and friends gather at the home of the film's protagonist, Alexander, to celebrate his birthday. News of a brewing international conflict breaks during the evening, interrupting the festivities. Facing the sudden but imminent threat of nuclear war, Alexander decides that he must perform certain sacrifices—first, sleeping with a woman alleged to be a witch and then ultimately burning down his own house—in order to avert global disaster.

Describing in *Sculpting in Time* his impetus for making the film, Tarkovsky asserts his interest in the “theme of harmony which is born only of sacrifice, the twofold dependence of love,” which he defines as “total giving.”¹ He further explains his interest “above all in the character who is capable of sacrificing himself and his way of life—regardless of whether that sacrifice is made in the name of spiritual

¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

values, or for the sake of someone else, or of his own salvation, or all of these things together.”²

In fact, while the Alexander of the realized film renounces his life and happiness in order to save his family and, in particular, his beloved young son, affectionately dubbed “Little Man,” an earlier iteration of the character acted only to save himself from cancer, having received a grim prognosis from his doctor.³ Tarkovsky thus envisioned the film as “not only a parable about sacrifice but also the story of how one individual is saved,” both physically and spiritually.⁴

The film documents Alexander's turmoil as he countenances with increasing resolve the need to offer the sacrifice anticipated in the film's title. At the beginning of *The Sacrifice*, Alexander is “a weak man in the vulgar, pedestrian understanding of the word. He is no hero, but he is a thinker and an honest man.”⁵ Thanks to these latter characteristics, Alexander “turns out to be capable of sacrifice in the name of a higher ideal...ris[ing] to the occasion, without attempting to shed his responsibility or

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* It bears mention that Tarkovsky began work on this idea shortly after the death of his close friend and collaborator, the actor Anatoliy Solonitsyn. Like Solonitsyn and the prototype of *The Sacrifice*'s Alexander, Tarkovsky himself fell ill and died of lung cancer.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

trying to foist it onto anyone else.”⁶ Whereas such grappling and inner conflict strike one as natural and inevitable in the context of a personal calamity, like the cancer diagnosis Tarkovsky had originally conceived for Alexander, in the face of the monumental, worldwide disaster—the nebulous but pressing threat of a third world war—Alexander's decision takes on an extraordinary dimension of heroism that verges on the delusional. Indeed, Tarkovsky concludes, Alexander “is in danger of not being understood, for his decisive action is such that to those around him it can only appear catastrophically destructive: that is the tragic conflict of his role.”⁷

For its 142-minute length, *The Sacrifice* uses dialogue sparingly and often somewhat bathetically: for example, moments after Alexander's friend Otto advises him to borrow his bicycle to visit Maria, the suspected witch, he warns that a spoke on one of the wheels is broken such that he once got his pants-leg caught in it and fell into a puddle (despite this warning, Alexander himself falls). Consequently, much of the film's exposition comes either through soliloquy, as in Alexander's prayer, or through careful blocking, affective lighting, and the recurrence of visual motifs. These motifs include some of Tarkovsky's “greatest hits”—mirrors, trees and other natural imagery, works of art, appearing on the walls of the house as well as in books. Of these signs, a reproduction of Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi* (1481), glazed and framed, bears particular influence not only on the film's tone, as the Brueghel and

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Rublev paintings featured in *Solaris*, *Mirror*, and *Andrei Rublev* do on their respective films, but also on its very plot.

The appearance of *Adoration of the Magi* throughout *The Sacrifice* constitutes Tarkovsky's most extensive and unusual citation of a work of art in the whole of his career. *The Sacrifice* distills the functions of filmed painting as homage, as mirror, and as epigraph, according to Mikhail Romadin's conception of paintings in Tarkovsky's films (as quoted in the introduction to this thesis).

From the very beginning of the film, *Adoration of the Magi* plays a central role; the opening credits roll over a static detail shot of the painting in close up. As the credits conclude, the camera tilts slowly up over the work, following the long trunk of a tree that anchors the composition, separating foreground from background. This presentation of the work echoes that in *Solaris*'s examination of *Hunters in the Snow* and *Andrei Rublev*'s icon sequence. As is the case in *Solaris* and *Rublev*, the camera moves over the painting painstakingly, foregoing a view of the work as a whole in favor of extremely close shots. However, this first shot of *Adoration of the Magi* offers a more restrained introduction to the painting than do *Solaris* and *Rublev*; for most of the uncut shot (more than four minutes with none of the crosscutting and fading seen in *Solaris* and *Rublev*) the camera remains fixed on the face of one of the magi, who kneels beside the infant Christ, extending a gift to him.

The opening sequence of *The Sacrifice* can be considered a kind of prologue to the film, equal and opposite in its purpose to the the epilogue of *Andrei Rublev*.

Tarkovsky argued that the epilogue sequence in *Andrei Rublev* was

indispensable to us [Tarkovsky et al.] in getting the viewer's attention, in stopping him from leaving the movie theatre straight from the last black and white images, and giving him time to detach himself from Rublev's life, to reflect, so that in listening to the music we've imposed on him, a few general notions about the film as a whole can go through his head, and then he can fix, retrospectively, on certain moments of the story.⁸

Similarly (and also conversely), the credit sequence of *The Sacrifice* allows the audience an opportunity to ruminate on the film that they are about to watch, to consider the film's title, the relationship of the painting to the film. In short, where *Rublev's* epilogue keeps the viewer engaged past the end of the film's narrative, the opening sequence of *The Sacrifice* engages the viewer before the narrative begins to unfold.

In his selection of *Adoration of the Magi*, Leonardo's conception of the arrival of the three Magi to honor the newborn infant Christ, Tarkovsky invites the viewer to contemplate the meaning of sacrifice. As in the opening sequence, the painting most often appears throughout the film in a tight detail shot focused specifically on the composition's lower right quadrant, where the Magi cluster around Christ, in his mother's arms, and offer their gifts. Otto's arrival at Alexander's birthday

⁸ Ciment, 333.

party, though less momentous than that of the Magi, nevertheless evokes the Epiphany: he comes bearing a present for Alexander, an unwieldy 16th-Century map of Europe brought over on his bicycle. When Alexander expresses his gratitude and admiration for the grandiose gift, Otto demurs, insisting that “every gift involves a sacrifice.”⁹

At the conclusion of the prologue, the film cuts to a wide shot of a man, standing at some distance from the camera, supporting (perhaps planting, perhaps just staking) a tree. This cut from painted tree to filmed tree recalls the cut that follows the *Hunters in the Snow* sequence of *Solaris*, eliding the world of Brueghel's composition with the terrestrial world, as captured in Kris Kelvin's childhood memory. Likewise, this moment in *The Sacrifice* establishes the first tie (of many) between the world glimpsed in Leonardo's painting—itsself a world of fable, full of imaginative detail¹⁰—and the world of *The Sacrifice*.

Subsequently, the painting appears several times throughout the film, more frequently than any work of art in any other of Tarkovsky's films. To an extent that far surpasses paintings in Tarkovsky's other films, *Adoration of the Magi* becomes a palpable presence in *The Sacrifice*, taking on a persona that changes

⁹ *The Sacrifice*, Andrei Tarkovsky, Argos Films, 1986 (film).

¹⁰ Charles Sterling, “Fighting Animals in *The Adoration of the Magi*,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 61, No. 10 (1974), 355-356. Sterling notes that, like other painters of such scenes, Leonardo includes seemingly out-of-place elements in the composition: men on horseback, tussling beasts, buildings in ruin.

throughout the film. In the film's most pivotal moments—when Alexander first hears news of the impending war; when he makes his urgent prayer to God vowing to give up all his possessions that his family may be saved; when Otto convinces him to go to Maria; when, the following day, he wakes up to find that peace and order have been restored—without fail, the painting is present and, moreover, *has a strong presence* with him. More significantly, *Adoration of the Magi*'s last onscreen appearance in the film marks Alexander's resolution to set his house on fire, effectively fulfilling his promise to God: as Alexander prepares himself for the sacrifice, the mirrored door of the wardrobe before which he stands swings open, catching the edge of the painting in its reflection.

Capturing the final interior scene, in which Alexander leaves his now-burning house for the last time, the camera shoots from roughly where the painting hangs. Although the painting does not appear in this scene, its occurrence and recurrence throughout the rest of the film leaves the viewer with a strong sense of its position in the house and in the room Alexander leaves. Thus, even in its absence, one nonetheless *senses* its presence; that the painting is never shown in this scene only further reifies its power and influence on the film and its characters.

This power manifests, too, in the way in which the camera portrays the piece throughout the film. For photography in *The Sacrifice*, which was filmed in Sweden, Andrei Tarkovsky worked with Sven Nykvist, best known for his close association

with Ingmar Bergman and for his inimitable mastery of light.¹¹ As a result, the film has an unmistakably Bergmanesque quality to it, an aesthetic distinct even from the rest of Tarkovsky's already-distinctive films. Even so, the use of lighting and color in shots of the painting merit particular attention.

Diffuse light and dreary tones pervade the first half of the film, including the first shots of *Adoration of the Magi*. The painting has such a tenebrous quality, in fact, that, upon seeing it for the first time, Alexander's friend (and local postman) Otto remarks on it, further adding that he has “always been terrified of Leonardo.”¹² The muted colors and low contrast of the painting work well both with the subdued atmosphere of the rest of the film and, more broadly, with Tarkovsky's complicated views on color photography.¹³ Admittedly, in reproduction, the painting's colors are staid, relative to, for example, *Ginevra de Benci*, an earlier Leonardo (referenced in *Mirror*). However, in *The Sacrifice*, *Adoration of the Magi* appears as though it were a monochrome or a charcoal drawing.

¹¹ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 226. Tarkovsky gives Nykvist the awed epithet “that brilliant master of light.”

¹² *The Sacrifice* (film).

¹³ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 138. Ciment, 333. Tarkovsky considered color photography in cinema to be more artificial than black and white, which he felt “translated” real life more satisfactorily (even exclusively). He proposed a solution, to which he resorted throughout his films since *Ivan's Childhood*, to “[neutralise] colour by alternating colour and monochrome sequences, so that the impression made by the complete spectrum is spaced out, toned down.” Generally and, given his rubric, somewhat perplexingly, Tarkovsky turns to black-and-white photography for dream sequences and favors unobtrusive use of color.

The deep, sepia tones of the filmed painting seem even to darken throughout the film until, as Alexander seeks the witch's counsel, the film cuts suddenly and briefly to a close, detail shot of the painting, still dark but now brighter. When he awakes the next morning (on a sofa directly below the painting), Alexander finds that all is right in the world. Otto's suggestion worked: the electricity, having gone out the day before, has returned, and lamps illuminate the room. Sunlight, too, streams through an adjacent window, bathing *Adoration of the Magi* with light and revealing, for the first time in the film, the warm yellows and greens of the composition. No longer the solemn and portentous object of Otto's nonplus, *Adoration of the Magi* now takes on a strikingly different aspect, renewed, redeemed from the grips of age and decay. Once again and yet more cogently, Tarkovsky illustrates the thematic connection between painting and life.

He reaffirms this connection repeatedly during the course of *The Sacrifice*, using the painting as a device, in the mechanical as well as the artistic sense. Tarkovsky and Nykvist construct multiple shots in the film so that some action—a tree's branches moving in the breeze, Alexander walking through the room or contemplating the painting alongside Otto—is captured in the reflection of the painting's glazed surface. Tarkovsky not only films the painting, as he filmed *Hunters in the Snow* or Rublev's *Trinity*, but he also films *into* the painting and *by means of* the painting. Thus, *Adoration of the Magi* now serves yet another crucial function in

the film, reflecting the film's tone through its appearance, the film's theme through its content, and finally, the very action of the film through its physical surface.

In shots of this type (of which there are no fewer than three throughout the film), Nykvist often racks focus between the figures in the painting and those merely *reflected* in the painting. The effect is such that as, for instance, Alexander's face materializes in the glass, the *Adoration* scene vanishes, and vice versa. By means of this visual mechanism, Tarkovsky blurs, in the most literal fashion, the division between the world of Leonardo's painting and that of his own creation. At the same time, Tarkovsky cannily conveys the notion, ingrained in all of his films, that life and art are interdependent each upon the other, and hence, must be considered and understood relative to each other.

Finally, these singular, virtuosic reflected shots concretize Tarkovsky's quote in *Sculpting in Time*, the essence of his artistic credo:

Anyone who wants can look at my films as into a mirror, in which he will see himself. When the conception of a film is given forms that are life-like, and the concentration is on its affective function rather than on the intellectual formulae of 'poetic shots' (in other words shots where the set is manifestly a vessel for ideas) then it is possible for the audience to relate to that conception in the light of individual experience.¹⁴

¹⁴ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 184.

Conclusion

Considering the means by which and ends to which Tarkovsky's films utilize paintings, as well as the aesthetic resonances between the paintings appearing in his films, the question remains: why did Tarkovsky consistently turn to works by artists of the 14th through 16th Centuries?

Of course, the most immediate answer is that Tarkovsky admired these artists. When asked about the Russian Calvary scene during an interview with Michel Ciment, Tarkovsky readily admits his allusion to Brueghel, confessing:

We chose it [Brueghel's *The Procession to Calvary*], my cameraman and I, because Bruegel [sic] is close to Russians and makes a lot of sense to us. There's something very Russian about the way the planes are arranged in tiers, the way [Brueghel's] pictures always have parallel action, with numerous characters each busily going about their own business. If Bruegel's manner didn't reverberate in the Russian soul, we would never have used him in our film – it just wouldn't have occurred to us.¹

Although such an explanation does little to demystify Tarkovsky's fascination with painting, it does provide insight into his artistic ethos, that is, his unwavering commitment to his aesthetic ideals. In his final comments to Michel Ciment, Tarkovsky describes this conviction that “a man sustained by an idea passionately

¹ Ciment, 335.

seeks the answer to a question and goes as far as you can go to understand reality. And he understands this reality thanks to his experience.”²

This pronouncement recalls Tarkovsky's beliefs on the moral imperative of art and artists to enrich and edify humankind. In Tarkovsky's view, the “artist has no right to an idea to which he is not socially committed,” even if such a commitment would “bring pressure down on [an artist], or...bring [him/her] into conflict with our milieu.”³ Put even more strongly, “[t]rue artistic inspiration,” according to Tarkovsky, “is always a torment for the artist, almost to the point of endangering his life. Its realisation is tantamount to a physical feat.”⁴ Essentially, Tarkovsky's exhortation requires the artist to subjugate him/herself to creative work, to sacrifice him/herself in the interests of the artwork, and, by extension, of the greater human good.

Hence, although Tarkovsky's choice to reference painters and paintings in his films is not unique in and of itself—nor even is his choice of painters and paintings (Luis Buñuel's 1961 film *Viridiana*, for instance, quotes Leonardo's *Last Supper*⁵)—the various means and ends to which he employs these citations is. And while, certainly, this use of painting cannot be entirely credited with Tarkovsky's perennial

² *Ibid.*, 339.

³ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 188.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵ Vernon Young, “Of Night, Fire and Water,” *The Hudson Review* 15, no. 2 (1962), 279.

relevance to and veneration by filmmakers and cinephiles, it offers an apt example, a kind of microcosmic glimpse, of the particular aesthetic and thematic features distinctive to Tarkovsky's work.

This thesis, with its very specific focus on only *some* of the paintings references in only *some* of Tarkovsky's films, barely scratches the surface of Andrei Tarkovsky's remarkable style and depth as an auteur, but it offers a new way to consider these and other facets of his work, his philosophies, and his persona. Even the insufficiency of this (or of any) consideration of Tarkovsky's work goes to demonstrate further the astonishing capacity of his films to permit and withstand seemingly endless analysis, interpretation, and celebration.

In her memoir, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Collector of Dreams*, Layla Aleksander-Garrett relates a conversation she had with her young daughter about the nature of the past, which the girl likens to the miraculous, gift-filled sack of Ded Moroz (the Russian analog to Santa Claus): “ В нем всего много, а мешок большой–большой, и чем больше берешь, тем больше остается.

In it there is so much, but the sack is very big, and the more you take out of it, the more remains.”⁶ The same is true of Tarkovsky's films: the more one considers them, the more there is to consider.

⁶ Leyla Aleksander-Garrett, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Collector of Dreams* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Astrel', 2009), 13.

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