



[Vimeo link for this week's film and ALL of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS](#)

[Zoom link for all FALL 2021 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions](#)

The film is available for streaming on Criterion. UB email account holders can access it free via the [UB Library's Kanopy portal](#)

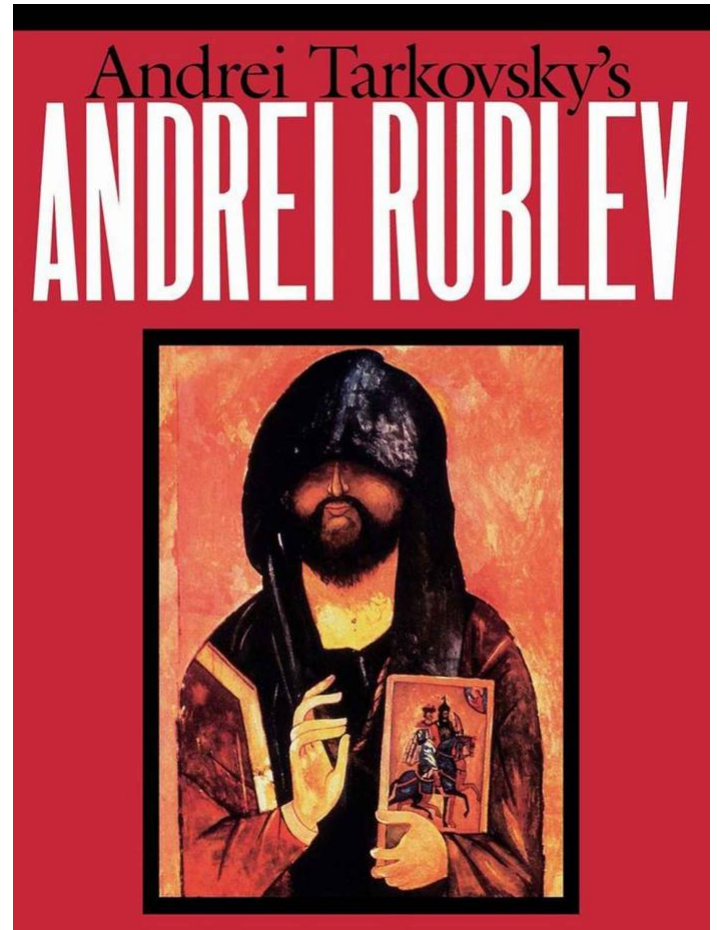
**Directed by** Andrei Tarkovsky  
**Written by** Andrei Konchalovsky and Andrei Tarkovsky  
**Produced by** Tamara Ogorodnikova.  
**Original Music by** Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov  
**Cinematography by** Vadim Yusov

The film won the FIPRESCI Prize at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival.

#### CAST

Anatoli Solonitsyn...Andrei Rublyov  
 Ivan Lapikov...Kirill  
 Nikolai Grinko...Danil Chorny  
 Nikolai Sergeyev...Theophanes the Greek  
 Irma Raush...Idiot girl (Durochka)  
 Nikolai Burlyayev...Boriska  
 Yuri Nazarov...The Grand Prince/The Lesser Prince  
 Yuri Nikulin...Monk  
 Patrikey Rolan Bykov...The jester  
 Nikolai Grabbe...Stepan  
 Mikhail Kononov...Foma  
 Stepan Krylov...Head Bell-founder  
 Irina Miroshnichenko...Mary Magdalene  
 Bolot Bejshenaliyev...Tatar Khan

**ANDREI TARKOVSKY** (4 April 1932, Zavrazhe, Ivono, Russia—28 December 1986, Paris lung cancer). Bio from IMDB: "The most famous Soviet film-maker since Sergei



M. Eisenstein, Andrei Tarkovsky (the son of noted poet Arseniy Tarkovsky) studied music and Arabic in Moscow before enrolling in the Soviet film school VGIK. He shot to international attention with his first feature, *Ivanovo detstvo* (1962), which won the top prize at the Venice Film Festival. This resulted in high expectations for his second feature *Andrei Rublev* (1969), which was banned by the Soviet authorities until 1971. It was shown at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival at 4 o'clock in the morning on the last day, to prevent it winning a prize - but it won one nonetheless and was eventually distributed abroad partly to enable the authorities to save face. *Solaris* (1972), had an easier ride, being acclaimed by many in the West as the Soviet answer to Kubrick's *2001* (though Tarkovsky himself was never too fond of it), but he ran into official trouble again with *Zerkalo* (1975), a dense, personal web of autobiographical memories with a radically innovative plot structure. *Stalker* (1979) had to be completely reshot on a dramatically reduced budget after an accident in the laboratory destroyed the first version, and after *Nostalgia* (1983), shot in Italy (with official approval), Tarkovsky defected to the West. His last film, *Offret* (1986) was shot in Sweden with many of Ingmar Bergman's regular collaborators and won an almost unprecedented four prizes at the Cannes Film Festival. He died of cancer at the end of the year."

**VADIM YUSOV** (20 April 1929, Klavdino, Leningrad province, Soviet Union [now Russia]—23 August 2013, Moscow, Russia) shot 18 films, including: *Kopeyka/The Kopeck* (2002), *Out of the Present* (1995), *Passport/The Passport* (1990), *Boris Godunov/Boris Godunov* (1986), *Krasnye kolokola, film vtoroy - Ya videl rozhdenie novogo mira/10 Days That Shook the World* (1983), *Solyaris/Solaris* (1972), *Sovsem propashchiy/The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1972), *Ne goryuy/Don't Grieve* (1969), *Andrey Rublyov/Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Ivanovo detstvo/Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Katok i skripka/The Steamroller and the Violin* (1961).

**ANATOLI SOLONITSYN** (b. 30 August 1934, Nizhny Tagil, USSR [now Russia]—d. 11 June 1982, Moscow, USSR [now Russia]) was in 35 films, among them: *Ostanovilsya poyezd/The Train Has Stopped* (1982), *Dvadsat shest dney iz zhizni Dostoevskogo/Twenty Six Days from the Life of Dostoyevsky* (1981), *Agoniya/Agony: The Life and Death of Rasputin* (1981), *Shlyapa/The Hat* (1981), *Stalker* (1979), *Voskhozhdeniye/The Ascent* (1977), *Legenda o Tile/The Legend of Till Ullenspiegel* (1976), *Zerkalo/The Mirror* (1975), *Tam, za gorizontom/There, Beyond the Horizon* (1975), *Vozdukhoplavatel/The Balloonist* (1975), *Under en steinhimmel/Under a Stone Sky* (1974), *Posledniy den zimy/The Last Winter Day* (1974), *Solyaris/Solaris* (1972), *Prints i nishchiy/The Prince and the Pauper* (1972), *V ognе broda net/No Crossing Under Fire* (1967), *Andrey Rublyov/Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Delo Kurta Klauzevitsa/The Case of Kurt Clausewitz* (1963).

**NIKOLAY GRINKO** (b. May 22, 1920 in Kherson, Ukrainian SSR [now Ukraine]—d. April 10, 1989 (age 68) in Kiev, Ukrainian SSR, USSR [now Ukraine]) is well known for his roles in the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, including: *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975), and *Stalker* (1979). He acted in 131 films and TV series.

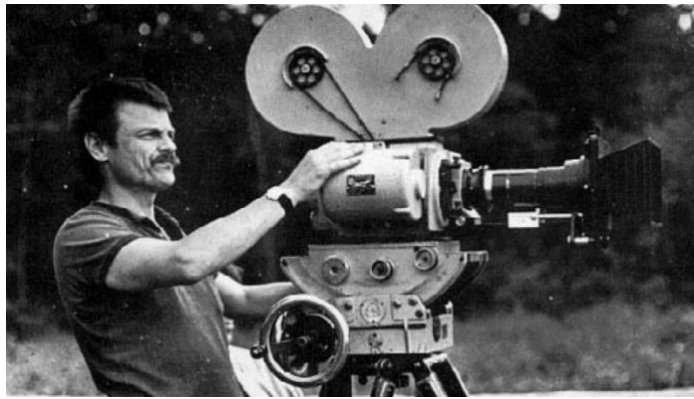
**IRINA TARKOVSKAYA** (b. April 21, 1938 in Saratov, Russian SFSR, USSR) is a director and actress, known for acting in Tarkovsky's first two films, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) and *Andrei Rublev* (1966), as well as a film she directed *Krestyanskiy syn* (1975). She was previously married to Andrei Tarkovsky.

**ANDREI TARKOVSKY, from *World Film Directors, V. II*. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co., Inc NY, 1988**

Russian director, born in Laovrazhe, Ivanova district,

Soviet Union. He is the son of the distinguished poet Arseniy Tarkovsky and the former Maria Ivanova Vishnyakova. Tarkovsky studied under Mikhail Romm at VGIK, the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. In the course of his studies he made two short films, *There Will Be No Leave Today* (1959), and his diploma piece, *Katok i skripka (The Steamroller and the Violin, 1960)*. The latter, which won a prize at the New York Film Festival, is about the friendship that develops between the tough driver of a steamroller and a frail boy violinist who as a consequence is drawn out of his comfortable but claustrophobic little world into one that is wider and more challenging. The story is told very delicately and imaginatively through the eyes of the child, with a "masterly use of soft lighting and ...subtle gradations of atmosphere." The photography is Vadim Yusov, a fellow-student who has been Tarkovsky's cameraman on all his films, and the script is the work of Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky, another of Tarkovsky's contemporaries at VGIK and himself among the most promising of the young Soviet directors.

Tarkovsky graduated in 1960 and has been a Mosfilm director ever since. The harsh poetry of his



unique vision emerged fully in his first feature film, *Ivanovo detstvo (Ivan's Childhood, 1962)*. Ivan, played by Kolya Burlayev, is an orphan working with a group of partisans during the Second World War. We first see this twelve-year-old waif returning from a

scouting expedition, crossing no-man's-land, peering through mist and barbed wire, studying the swiftly flowing river that he has to cross to get back to his own side. His parents have been killed, his village has been destroyed, he has escaped from a Nazi concentration camp, and he lives only for revenge. He does not live long; years later in Berlin after the victory, his comrades find a folder recording his capture and fate.

A sense of almost unendurable tension is built up by the camerawork and editing, in which the grim reality of the present is intercut with flashbacks, so that war and childhood, war and nature, are constantly contrasted. The same sort of story has been told hundreds of times before, but Ivor Montague, pointing out that this is generally true of Tarkovsky's

plots, goes on : “It is how they are presented that becomes a commentary on man, his experience and the universe....The tragedy here, however, is much worse because more inescapable. Ivan’s fate is sealed before ever the film begins....From the moment we see the wide-eyed creature in the mist, the contrast between the skinny, hungry, sometimes blubbering boy and the expert spy, professional, authoritative, competent, indispensable, the two bound into a single being—a soldier who had known torture and triumph alike, a child on whom grown men depend—we know he cannot survive....The

film is not disfigured by the unnaturally cheery or the conventionally hysterical. With one blow it annuls a whole *cinémathèque* of the war films of all lands.”

*Ivanovo detstvo* won fifteen awards at international film festivals, including the Golden Lion at Venice and the Grand Prize in San Francisco.

It was followed by *Andrei Rublev*, a film about the medieval monk who became the greatest of all icon painters. Tarkovsky wrote the film in collaboration with Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky and shot it in black and white, except for the coda in which Rublev’s icons are displayed in all their richness. Completed in 1966 and shown at Cannes in 1969, it was not released in Russia until 1971, by which time it had acquired an enormous underground reputation. It is not clear why the film was shelved for so long—the religious-philosophical issues that may have worried the Soviet censors remain intact at the center of the picture, while the criticism that it “does not correspond to historical truth” (the excuse for its withdrawal from the 1971 Belgrade Festival) is unconvincing, since almost nothing is known of the life of the real Andrei Rublev. Although Walter Goodman has pointed out that “*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the newspaper of the Communist youth organization, criticized Tarkovsky, a devout Christian, for depicting Rublev, a much-revered fifteenth-century monk, as a suffering, self-questioning artist rather than a native genius who helped bring about a Russian renaissance in the final decades of Mongolian-Tatar rule.”

The film consists of ten loosely connected episodes covering the most prolific years of the



painter’s life, 1400-1425. Russia had not still been freed from the yoke of the Tartars, and the world Rublev knew was a brutal one of feudal violence and casual cruelty. The church itself was engaged in a ruthless campaign against the vestiges of paganism. The film dramatizes the conflict in the artist between revulsion and compassion toward the suffering around him. In one episode Rublev is invited by the venerable icon painter Theophanes the Greek to assist him in painting a new church, and we see that their professional rivalries are colored by religious

differences. Against the traditional icon-painter’s emphasis on original sin, Rublev asserts his belief in the human being as the dwelling-house of God—a belief increasingly threatened by his own disgust at the horrors he sees around him.

Later, as he paints new murals for the cathedral, the Tatars and their Russian allies raid the town. They batter in the doors of the cathedral and slaughter everyone who has taken refuge there. Rublev, with his murals wrecked, at last takes violent action to protect a deaf-mute girl. He saves her life but cannot save her sanity, and she is born away by the Tatars. Taking a vow of silence, Rublev resolves to paint no more. His wanderings take him to a devastated village. The prince’s guard arrives, seeking a craftsman capable of casting for their master’s glory one of those gigantic bells that were considered the mystical voices of Russia. The village bell-founder has died of plague, but his son Boriska boasts that he knows the secret of casting. In fact, his only secret is a half-crazy belief that the task can be accomplished, but he drives everyone relentlessly until the new bell is triumphantly rung. This achievement restores Rublev’s faith in humanity and art, and he goes on to affirm that faith in the paintings that form the dazzling color montage at the end of the film.

Tarkovsky has said: “I do not understand historical films which have no relevance for the present. For me the most important thing is to use historical material to express Man’s ideas and to create contemporary characters.” And in fact, though *Andrei Rublev* was beautifully shot on locations in which Rublev worked, and period details are



meticulously observed, the film's significance far transcends its localized historical setting. It is a universal political parable, in which the major human responses to war, disorder, and oppression are richly dramatized. It is also a meditation on the responsibility of the artist, and one of obvious relevance to Tarkovsky's own situation in the Soviet Union. David Thomson praised the film for its portrayal of a world that is "as teeming a hell on earth as a Breughel—and quite as vivid and authentic," but dismissed Tarkovsky's thesis as "threadbare." This was not the view of most critics, many of whom shared Nigel Andrew's conviction that *Andrei Rublev* was "the one indisputable Russian masterpiece of the last decade."

Tarkovsky's screenplay for *Solaris* (1971) was adapted from a science fiction novel by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem—one that concentrates not on gadgetry but on psychology. Scientists in a space station circling a remote planet find themselves subjected to an agonizing process of self-exploration, for the planet's strange ocean has the capacity to punish intruders by materializing people and episodes out of their past lives, forcing them to relive their most painful mistakes and sins. Penelope Houston called this film "Russia's answer to 2001, not in its display of space hardware but in the speculative quality of its ideas," and Gavin Millar praised it as "an absorbing inquiry into the cause of love and the links between time, memory, and identity." This "very beautiful and mysterious film" received the Special Jury Prize at Cannes.

The film (unlike the book) opens in a Russian country estate with lakes and gardens like a Turgenev setting, where the astronaut-psychologist Kris Kelvin (Donatas Banionis) is visiting his parents. From there we follow this rather stolid hero on his journey to the space station hovering above Solaris. The arrival has been widely described as masterly—the space station, seemingly derelict, is in fact inhabited by two scientists, each of whom is insanely absorbed in his own resurrected tragedy. Kelvin is himself soon confronted by his wife Hari (Natalya Bondarchuk), long dead by suicide, but now apparently alive again. Faced with the woman he has already failed, Kelvin at first tries to exorcise her. But since she is alive in his mind, from whence *Solaris* has conjured her, he can



no more destroy her than he can help her. Tarkovsky himself has explained that "the point is the value of each piece of our behavior, the significance of each of our acts, even the least noticed. Nothing once completed can be changed.... The irreversibility of human experience is what gives our life, our deeds, their meaning and individuality."

It might be argued that this is also the theme of *Zerkalo* (*The Mirror/A White, White Day*, 1975). This controversial film is presented as a work of autobiography, showing Tarkovsky himself at different ages up to and including the present, but concentrating on his boyhood during the Stalinist terror in Peredelkino, the artists' village near Moscow. Tarkovsky's mother is portrayed by several actresses as she was at various ages, and his father's poems play an important role in tying together a film of great complexity. It is, as Herbert Marshall wrote, "many-layered, jumping back and forth in space and time, from objective to subjective visualisations." The material it draws upon ranges from the director's memories and dreams to newsreels of the Spanish Civil War and the Soviet-Chinese confrontations on the Ussuri river. It cuts without warning from black and white to color, from passages with background music to others with none.

Herbert Marshall sees the film as "a kind of inverted mirror reflection of *Ivan's Childhood*, that being an objective biography of a boy in the Stalin days." Marshall finds it often puzzling and enigmatic—"several films intertwined." In Russia, where its indictment of Stalinism caused great anxiety, it was harshly attacked by party critics as an elitist film. Even the veteran director Sergei Gerasimov, who recognized it as "an attempt to analyze the human spirit" by "a man of very serious talent," complained that "it starts from a subjective evaluation of the surrounding world, and this inevitably limits the circle of its viewers." It was released in Russia in 1975 but relegated to the "third category," which means that only a few prints were made for showing in third-class cinemas and workers' clubs, thus denying the filmmakers any financial reward.

Ivor Montague writes: "I do not think that anyone can 'enjoy' Tarkovsky's films. They are too tense, too agonizing, at their best too

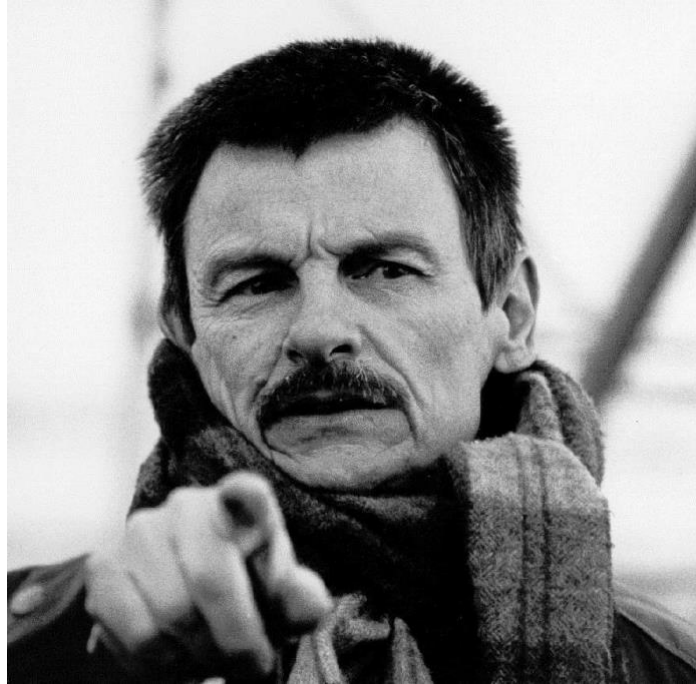
spellbinding....Remember, he comes of a generation that, in the years he was the age of the boy in his first feature, was losing its homeland twenty million dead. But when one has seen any one of his films once, one wants to see it again and yet again; thoughts chase after one another like hares in March. David Thomson is one of a minority who think Tarkovsky is overrated—"the grandeur of Tarkovsky's films should not conceal the gulf between his eye for poetic compositions and any really searching study of people or society." But for the young Ukrainian director Sergei Paradjanov "Tarkovsky is a phenomenon... amazing, unrepeatable, inimitable and beautiful....First of all, I did not know how to do anything and I would not have done anything at all if there had not been *Ivan's Childhood*....I consider Tarkovsky the Number One film director of the USSR....He is a genius."

Turning once again to science fiction with social and psychological underpinnings, Tarkovsky made *Stalker* (1979), which was loosely adapted from a 1973 novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. The setting of the novel had been North America, but Tarkovsky transferred the story to a gulag-like industrial wasteland that, although the actual locale is never specified, is clearly meant to be in the Soviet Union (the film was shot on location in Estonia). The story unfolds in a mysterious realm known only as the "Zone," where there is a "Room" in which one's wishes or fantasies are fulfilled. However, the hazardous zone can be traversed only with the aid of a "stalker," who illegally guides travelers through the forbidden area.

Tarkovsky's first film to be made largely outside of the Soviet Union was *Nostalgia* (*Nostalghia*, 1983). Filmed near the Vignoni thermal baths in the Tuscan hills, *Nostalgia* is about exile, in part, and chronicles the life of a Russian who has gone to Italy to study the life of a Russian who lived there in the seventeenth century."Gortchakov (Oleg Yanovsky)," wrote Vincent Canby in his New York *Times* review, "does very little research and a lot of musing, which often takes the form of lovely flashbacks [and] fantasies ....Loveliness, I'm afraid,

is really what this movie is all about....Tarkovsky may well be a film poet but he's a film poet with a tiny vocabulary. The same images, eventually boring, keep recurring in film after film—shots of damp landscapes, marshes, hills in fog and abandoned buildings with roofs that leak."

Although critical of Tarkovsky, Yvette Biro in the *Village Voice* was more open to the film's beauty.



"*Nostalgia*," she wrote, "is sumptuously—sickeningly, as mentioned in the film itself—beautiful, but partly for that very reason, suffers from disproportion and embarrassingly loses its way in the desperate hunt for beauty." John Coleman asked in the *New Statesman* "whether the difficulty of [Tarkovsky's] work is justified by its rewards, whether all the enigmatic angst on display here is much more than the exteriorisation of a private depression...those mists, those pools, above all that

obsessive driving rain....? The film won a special prize at Cannes.

Later in 1983 Tarkovsky directed a production of *Boris Gudonov* at Covent Garden in London. Then in July 1984, he defected to the west, saying that his application to Moscow for permission to extend his stay abroad had gone unanswered, and that he would not be allowed to make films upon his return to Russia. Discussing his past difficulties with the regime, Tarkovsky said: "I have worked for twenty-four years in the Soviet Union, for the state organization on which all movie activity depends, and have produced only six films. I can say that in those twenty-four years I have been unemployed for eighteen." He remained in Western Europe.

His last film, *Offret/Sacrificatio* (*The Sacrifice*, 1987), was filmed on location on Gotland, in the Baltic, with cinematography by Sven Nykvist. *Sacrifice* tells of an aging intellectual and the act of faith by which he apparently saves the world. Alexander (Erland Josephson), his family, and their friends have gathered at his summer house on a primitive Swedish island to celebrate his birthday. The dinner is a revelation of domestic treachery and spiritual malaise. Exhausted, Alexander has fallen

asleep when an unspecified catastrophe—possibly a nuclear accident—occurs. The air grows very cold, and an eerie glow illuminates a landscape transformed to hoarfrost, ooze, and rot. A visiting neighbor, the local postman, tells Alexander that if he spends the night with an island woman, a reputed witch, the world can be saved. Alexander does, and awakens the next morning to find the landscape restored to its summery beauty. What seems to have been an old man's nightmare may in fact have been a perilous journey of the spirit, but Alexander cannot tell us—he has lost his reason.

In a 1986 interview, Tarkovsky said of *The Sacrifice*, “The issue I raise in the film is one that to

my mind is most crucial: the absence in our culture of room for a spiritual existence. We have extended the scope of our material assets and conducted materialistic experiments without taking into account the threat posed by depriving

man of his spiritual dimension. Man is suffering, but he doesn't know why. I wanted to show that a man can renew his ties to life by renewing his covenant with himself and with the source of his soul. And one way to recapture moral integrity...is by having the capacity to offer oneself in sacrifice.”

*Sacrifice* was produced by Svensk Filminstitutet with additional funds from Swedish and American television and from a French company. A visually beautiful, slow, and intensely personal work, it is also extraordinarily resistant to any purposes but its own: it could not possibly be exploited for either commercial or propagandistic ends.

A few months after *Sacrifice* opened at the New York Film Festival, Tarkovsky died in Paris of lung cancer. He had been married twice. He had a son by his first marriage to Trina Rausch, and one by his 1970 marriage to Larissa Tégorkina.

**From *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews*. Edited by John Gianvito. University of Mississippi, Jackson, 2006.**

**“Andrei Tarkovsky: I Am for a Poetic Cinema”**

## Patrick Bureau / 1962

He's thirty years old. He was born on the shores of the Volga, but his family is from Moscow. A family of poets, of intellectuals, preoccupied with painting and music. Tarkovsky can be classified within the ranks of what we call “the Soviet New Wave.” But how is it that he came to cinema?

“After having studied for a time the problems of Eastern civilization, I spent two years as a worker in Siberia in the field of geological research and then returned to Moscow. There I enrolled in the Moscow Cinematographic Institute where I was the student of Mikhail Romm. I received my diploma in 1961. I had

directed two shorts, one of them was *The Steamroller and the Violin*. In summary it was an exercise in eclecticism before going to work at Mosfilm and directing *Ivan's Childhood*.

PB: *What did you want to express in your first film?*

AT: I wanted to

convey all my hatred of war. I chose childhood because it is what contrasts most with war. The film isn't built upon plot, but rests on the opposition between war and the feelings of the child. This child's entire family has been killed. When the film begins, he's in the midst of the war.

PB: *Have you put into the film some part of your own personal experience?*

AT: Truly no, since I was very young during the last war. I therefore translated the feelings that I had experienced because this is a war we are unable to forget.

PB: *What were your shooting conditions?*

AT: I shot four months during the summer of 1961 and devoted nearly two months to editing. The film cost 2.5 million rubles which is a medium-sized budget.

PB: *Can it be said that you are part of the new wave of Soviet filmmakers?*

AT: It's possible but I hate these schematic definitions.



PB: *I dislike then as much as you but I am trying to situate you in the stream of Soviet production. If you prefer, can you tell me what Russian cinema represents for you? And in what ways do you feel most connected to it?*

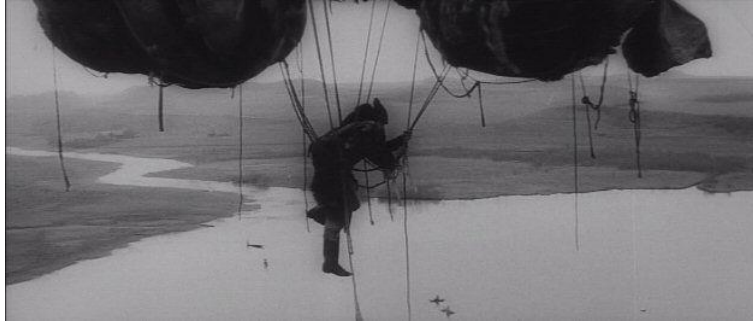
AT: There are nowadays in the USSR diverse tendencies which pursue parallel paths without upsetting one another too much, and in terms of this I am able to position myself. For example, there is the “Gerasimov” tendency that looks, above all, for truth in life. This tendency has had a great deal of influence and a large following. Two other tendencies are beginning to define themselves and appear to be more modern. One can trace their origins to the period of the 1930s. But it was only after the Twentieth Congress that they were able to free themselves and to develop, that their locked up energies were able to be released. What then are these two tendencies? On one side, it is “poetic cinema,” illustrated by Chukrai’s *Ballad of a Soldier* and *The Man who Followed the Sun* by Mikhail Kalik, which one could compare to *The Red Balloon* by Lamorisse but which in my opinion is far superior. I believe I could be situated within this tendency of poetic cinema, because I don’t follow a strict narrative development and logical connections. I don’t like looking for justifications for the protagonist’s actions. One of the reasons why I became involved in cinema is because I saw too many films that didn’t correspond to what I expected from cinematic language.

On the other hand, there is what we in the USSR call the “intellectual cinema” of Mikhail Romm. In spite of the fact that I was his student, I can’t say anything about it because I don’t understand that kind of cinema.

All art, of course, is intellectual, but for me, all the arts, and cinema even more so, must above all be emotional and act upon the heart.

**from *Sculpting in Time. Reflections on the Cinema.***  
**Andrei Tarkovsky. University of Texas Press,**  
**Austin 2000**

There are aspects of human life that can only be faithfully represented through poetry. But this is where directors very often try to use clumsy,



conventional gimmickry instead of poetic logic. I’m thinking of the illusionism and extraordinary effects involved in dreams, memories and fantasies. All too often film dreams are made into a collection of old-fashioned filmic tricks, and cease to be a phenomenon of life.

In any case it is perfectly clear that the goal for all art—unless of course it is aimed at the ‘consumer’, like a saleable commodity—is to explain to the artist himself and to those around him what man lives for, what is the meaning of his existence. To explain to people the reason for their appearance on this planet; or if not to explain, at least to pose the question.

The allotted function of art is not, as is often assumed, to put across ideas, to propagate thoughts, to serve as example. The aim of art is to prepare a person for death, to plough and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to good.

Touched by a masterpiece, a person begins to hear in himself that same call of truth which prompted the artist to his creative act.

Time is said to be irreversible. And this is true enough in the sense that ‘you can’t bring back the past’, as they say. But what exactly is this ‘past’? Is it what has passed? And what does ‘passed’ mean for a person when for each of us the past is the bearer of all that is constant in the reality of the present, of each current moment? In a certain sense the past is far more real, or at any rate more stable, more resilient than the present. The present slips and vanishes like sand between the fingers, acquiring material weight only in its recollection. King Solomon’s rings bore the inscription, ‘All will pass’; by contrast, I want to draw attention to how time in its moral implication is in fact turned back. Time cannot vanish without a trace for it is a subjective, spiritual category; and the time we have lived settles in our soul as an experience placed within time.

What is the essence of the director’s work? We could define it as sculpting in time.

Cinema was the first art form to come into being as a result of a technological invention, in answer to

a vital need. It was the instrument which humanity had to have in order to increase its mastery over the real world. For the domain of any art form is limited to one aspect of our spiritual and emotional discovery of surrounding reality.

The function of the image, as Gogol said, is to express life itself, not ideas or arguments about life. It does not signify life or symbolise it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness.`

The dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame.

No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: *it is the film that is the work of art*. We can only talk about its components rather arbitrarily, dividing it up artificially for the sake of theoretical discussion.

Nor can I accept the notion that editing is the main formative element of a film, as the protagonists of 'montage cinema', following Kuleshov and Eisenstein, maintained in the twenties, as if a film was made on the editing table.

Art affirms all that is best in man—hope, faith, love, beauty, prayer. . . What he dreams of and what he hopes for. . . When someone who doesn't know how to swim is thrown into the water, instinct tells his body what movements will save him. The artist, too, is driven by a kind of instinct, and his work furthers man's search for what is eternal, transcendent, divine—often in spite of the sinfulness of the poet himself.

What is art? Is it good or evil? From God or from the devil? From man's strength or from his weakness? Could it be a pledge of fellowship, an image of social harmony? Might that be its function? Like a declaration of love: the consciousness of our dependence on each other. A confession. An unconscious act that none the less reflects the true meaning of life—love and sacrifice.

I am always sickened when an artist underpins his system of images with deliberate tendentiousness



or ideology. I am against his allowing methods to be discernible at all. I often regret some of the shots I have allowed to stay in my own films; they seem to me now to be evidence of compromise and found their way into my films because I was insufficiently single-minded. If it were still possible, I would now happily cut out of *Mirror* the scene with the cock, even though that scene made a deep

impression on many in the audience. But that was because I was playing 'give-away' with the audience.

When the exhausted heroine, almost at fainting-point, is making up her mind whether to

cut off the cockerel's head, we shot her in close-up at high speed for the last ninety frames, in a patently unnatural light. Since on the screen it comes out in slow motion, it gives the effect of stretching the time-framework—we are plunging the audience into the heroine's state, putting a brake on that moment, highlighting it. This is bad, because the shot starts to have a purely literary meaning. We deform the actress's face independently of her, as it were playing the role for her. We serve up the emotion we want, squeeze it out by our own—director's—means. Her state becomes too clear, too easily read. And in the interpretation of a character's state of mind, something must always be left secret.

To quote a more successful example of a similar method, again from *Mirror*: a few frames of the printing-press scene are also shot in slow motion, but in this case it is barely perceptible. We made a point of doing it very delicately and carefully, so that the audience would not be aware of it straight away, but just have a vague feeling of something strange. We were not trying to underline an idea by using slow motion, but to bring out a state of mind through means other than acting. . . .

In a word, the image is not a certain *meaning*, expressed by a director, but an entire world reflected as in a drop of water. . . .

The function of the image, as Gogol said, is to express life itself, not ideas or arguments about life. It does not dignify life or symbolise it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness.



### *Time, rhythm and editing*

Turning now to the film image as such, I immediately want to dispel the widely held idea that it is essentially 'composite'. This notion seems to me wrong because it implies that cinema is founded on the attributes of kindred art forms and has none specifically its own; and that is to deny that cinema is an art.

The dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame. The actual passage of time is also made clear in the characters' behaviour, the visual treatment and the sound—but these are all accompanying features, the absence of which, theoretically, would in no way affect the existence of the film. One cannot conceive of a cinematic work with no sense of time passing through the shot, but one can easily imagine a film with no actors, music, décor or even editing. The Lumière brothers' *Arrivée d'un Train*, already mentioned, was like that. . . .

You will remember that the film has no editing, no acting and no décor. But the rhythm of the movement of time is there within the frame, as the sole organising force of the—quite complex—dramatic development.

No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: *it is the film that is the work of art*. And we can only talk about its components rather arbitrarily, dividing it up artificially for the sake of theoretical discussion.

To refer again to my own experience, I must say that a prodigious amount of work went into editing *Mirror*. There were some twenty or more variants. I don't just mean changes in the order of certain shots, but major alterations in the actual structure, in the sequence of the episodes. At moments it looked as if the film could not be edited, which would have meant that inadmissible lapses had occurred during shooting. The film didn't hold together, it wouldn't stand up, it fell



apart as one watched, it had no unity, no necessary inner connection, no logic. And the, one fine day, when we somehow manages to devise one last, desperate rearrangement—there was the film.

The material came to life; the parts started to function reciprocally, as if linked by a bloodstream; and as that last, despairing attempt was projected onto the screen, the film was born before our very eyes. For a longtime I couldn't believe the miracle—the film held together. . . . Time itself, running through the shots, had met and linked together.

There are about two hundred shots in *Mirror*, very few when a film of that length usually has about five hundred; the small number is due to their length.

Although the assembly of the shots is responsible for the structure of a film, it does not, as is generally assumed, create its rhythm.

The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and the rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them. Editing cannot determine rhythm, (in this respect it can only be a feature of style); indeed, time courses through the picture despite editing rather than because of it. The course of time, recorded in the frame, is what the director has to catch in the pieces laid out on the editing table.

Time, imprinted in the frame, dictates the particular editing principle; and the pieces that 'won't edit'—that can't be properly joined—are those which record a radically different kind of time. . . .

How does time make itself felt in a shot? It becomes tangible when you sense something significant, truthful, going on beyond the events on the screen; when you realise, quite consciously, that what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity; a pointer to life. Like the infinity of the image which we talked of earlier, a film is bigger than it is—at least, if it is a real film. And it always turns out to have more thought, more ideas, than were consciously put there by its author. Just as life, constantly moving and changing, allows everyone to interpret and feel each separate moment in his

own way, so too a real picture, faithfully recording on film the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame, lives within time if time lives within it; this two-way process is a determining factor of cinema.

The film then becomes something beyond its ostensible existence as an exposed and edited roll of film, a story, a plot. Once in contact with the individual who sees it, it separates from its author, starts to live its own life, undergoes changes of form and meaning.



I reject the principles of 'montage cinema' because they do not allow the film to continue beyond the edges of the screen: they do not allow the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them on film. 'Montage cinema' presents the audience with puzzles and riddles, makes them decipher symbols, take pleasure in allegories, appealing all the time to their intellectual experience. Each of these riddles, however, has its own exact, word for word solution; so I feel that Eisenstein prevents the audience from letting their feelings be influenced by their own reaction to what they see. When in *October* he juxtaposes a balalaika with Kerensky, his method has become his aim, in the way that Valéry meant. The construction of the image becomes an end in itself. And the author proceeds to make a total onslaught on the audience, imposing upon them his own attitude to what is happening.

If one compares cinema with such time-based arts as, say, ballet or music, cinema stands out as giving time visible, real form. Once recorded on film, the phenomenon is there, given and immutable, even when the time is intensely subjective.

Artists are divided into those who create their own inner world, and those who recreate reality. I undoubtedly belong to the first—but that actually alters nothing: my inner world may be of interest to some, others will be left cold or even irritated by it; the point is that the inner world created by cinematic means always has to be taken as reality, as it were objectively established in the immediacy of the recorded moment.

A piece of music can be played in different

ways, can last for varying lengths of time. Here time is simply a condition of certain causes and effects set out in a given order; it has an abstract, philosophical character. Cinema on the other hand is able to record time in outward and visible signs, recognisable to the feelings. And so time becomes

the very foundation of cinema: as sound is in music, colour in painting, character in drama.

Rhythm, then, is not the metrical sequence of pieces; what makes it is the time-thrust within the frames. And I am

convinced that it is rhythm, and not editing, as people tend to think, that is the main formative element of cinema.

Obviously editing exists in every art form, since material always has to be selected and joined. What is different about cinema editing is that it brings together time, imprinted in the segments of film.

### *Scenario and shooting script*

Between the first and last stages of making a film, the director comes up against such a vast number of people and such divergent problems—some of them all but insuperable—that it almost seems as if circumstances have been deliberately calculated to make him forget why it was that he started working on the picture.

I have to say that for me the difficulties connected specifically with the conception of a film have little to do with its initial inspiration; the problem has always been to keep it intact and unadulterated as the stimulus for work and as a symbol of the finished picture. There is always a danger of the original conception degenerating in the turmoil of producing the film, of being deformed and destroyed in the process of its own realisation.

The film's progress from its conception to its eventual printing is fraught with every kind of hazard. These have to do not only with technical problems, but also with the enormous number of people involved in the process of production. . . .

It is no exaggeration to say that at every turn the director is beset by the danger of becoming a mere witness, observing the scriptwriter writing, the

designer making sets, the actor playing and the editor cutting. That is in fact what happens in highly commercialised productions: the director's task is merely to coordinate the professional functions of the various members of the team. In a word, it is terribly difficult to insist on an *author's* film, when all your efforts are concentrated on not letting the idea be 'spilt' until nothing is left of it as you contend with the normal conditions of film-making. One can only hope for a satisfactory outcome if the original conception remains fresh and vivid.

I should say at once that I do not look on scenario as a literary genre. Indeed, the more cinematic a script, the less it can claim literary status in its own right, in the way a play so often can. And we know that in practice no screenplay has ever been on the level of literature.

I do not understand why anyone with literary talent should ever want to be a script writer—apart, obviously, from mercenary reasons. A writer has to write, and someone who thinks in cinematic images should take up directing. For the idea and purpose of a film, and their realisation, have finally to be the responsibility of the director-author; otherwise he cannot have effective control of the shooting.

When you read a play you can see what it means, even though it may be interpreted differently in different productions; it has its identity from the outset, whereas the identity of a film cannot be discerned from the scenario. The scenario dies in the film. Cinema may take dialogue from literature, but that is all—it bears no essential relation to literature whatsoever. A play becomes part of literature, because the ideas and characters expressed in dialogue constitute its essence: and dialogue is always literary. But in cinema dialogue is merely one of the components of the material fabric of the film. Anything in the scenario that has aspirations to literature, to prose, must as a matter of principle be consistently assimilated and adapted in the course of making the film. The literary element in a film is

*smelted*; it ceases to be literature once the film has been made.

Once the work is done, all that is left is the

written transcript, the shooting script, which could not be called literature by any definition. It is more like an account of something seen related to a blind man.

**J. Hoberman:**  
**"Andrei**  
**Rublev: An**



### **Icon Emerges" (Criterion Essays)**

When Andrei Tarkovsky's dark, startling *Andrei Rublev* first materialized on the international scene in the late 1960s (the film first showed in the Soviet Union in 1966 but was withheld from international release until a few years later), it was an apparent anomaly—a pre-Soviet theater of cruelty charged with resurgent Slavic mysticism. Today, Tarkovsky's second feature seems to prophesy the impending storm.

Its greatness as moviemaking immediately evident, *Andrei Rublev* was the most historically audacious production made in the twenty-odd years after Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*. Tarkovsky's epic—and largely invented—biography of Russia's greatest icon painter, Andrei Rublev (circa 1360–1430), was a superproduction gone ideologically berserk. Violent, even gory, for a Soviet film, *Andrei Rublev* is set against the carnage of the Tatar invasions of Russia in the Middle Ages and takes the form of a chronologically discontinuous pageant. The otherworldly hero wanders across a landscape of forlorn splendor—observing suffering peasants, hallucinating the Scriptures, working for brutal nobles until, having killed a man in the sack of the city of Vladimir, he takes a vow of silence and gives up painting.

At once humble and cosmic, *Rublev* was described by Tarkovsky as a "film of the earth." Shot in widescreen and sharply defined black and white, the movie is supremely tactile—the four classical elements appearing here as mist, mud, guttering candles, and snow. A 360-degree pan around a

primitive stable conveys the wonder of existence. Such long, sinuous takes are like expressionist brushstrokes; the result is a kind of narrative impasto. From a close-up recording the impact of a horse's hooves on the surface of a turbid river, Tarkovsky's camera swivels to reveal a Tatar regiment sweeping across a barren hill. Other times, the camera hovers like an angel over the suffering terrain. The film's brilliant, never-explained prologue shows some medieval Icarus braving an angry crowd to storm the heavens. Having climbed a church tower, he takes flight in a primitive hot-air balloon—an exhilarating panorama—before crashing to earth.

Tarkovsky began production on *Andrei Rublev* in September 1964, two years after his first feature, *Ivan's Childhood*, won the Golden Lion at Venice and one month before Nikita Khrushchev was deposed. By the time principal photography stalled because of weather in November 1965, the cultural thaw had frozen over. When *Rublev* was finally completed in July 1966, the state film agency demanded extensive cuts. The film was too negative, too harsh, too experimental, too frightening, too filled with nudity, and too politically complicated to be released—especially on the eve of the Russian Revolution's fiftieth anniversary. After a single screening in Moscow (the Dom Kino cinema supposedly ringed with mounted police), this version, titled *The Passion According to Andrei*, was shelved. Trimmed by a quarter of an hour, a cut Tarkovsky would later endorse, *Andrei Rublev* was scheduled for the 1967 Cannes Film Festival only to be yanked by the Soviets at the last minute. Two years later, thanks in part to the agitation of the French Communist Party, *Rublev* was shown at Cannes, albeit out of competition. Although screened at four o'clock in the morning on the festival's last day, it was nevertheless awarded the International Critics' Prize. Soviet authorities were infuriated; Leonid Brezhnev reportedly demanded a private screening and walked out midfilm.

With questionable legality and over strenuous objections by the Soviet embassy in France, *Andrei Rublev* opened in Paris in late 1969. Ultimately, the

Soviet cultural bureaucracy relented, releasing the film domestically in 1971. Two years later, *Rublev* surfaced at the New York Film Festival, further cut by its American distributor, Columbia Pictures. *Time* compared the movie unfavorably to *Doctor Zhivago*; those other New York reviewers who took note begged off of trying to explicate the film, citing *Rublev*'s apparent truncation.

What was there to say? The artist Rublev is introduced, along with two brother monks, taking refuge from a storm in a stable where some peasants are being entertained by a bawdy jester. Such



buffoons, one monk observes, are made by the devil; the sequence ends with the clown being arrested. In the next sequence, two monks discuss aesthetics while outside the church a prisoner is tortured on the rack. (Eventually, in a fit of jealousy, one of

the monks will leave his monastery, cursing the devotion to art that has corrupted his brothers.) Later, Rublev refuses to terrorize the faithful by painting a Last Judgment scene. His principles harm his career; the irony, surely not lost on Tarkovsky, was that, a century after the painter's death, the Orthodox Church accorded his icons absolute authority, a standard "to be followed in all perpetuity."

The first (and perhaps only) film produced under the Soviets to treat the artist as a world-historical figure and the rival religion of Christianity as an axiom of Russia's historical identity, *Andrei Rublev* is set in the chaotic period that saw the beginning of the national resurgence of which Rublev's paintings would become the cultural symbol. Indeed, it was precisely the veneration of the West. As the Renaissance gathered momentum, sacred images were transmuted into secular works of art; Russian paintings, however, remained less representations of the world than embodiments of the spirit.

On one hand, *Rublev* is founded on the conflict between austere Christianity and sensual paganism—whether Slavic or Tatar. On the other, it puts the artist in the context of state patronage and repression. When he stumbles upon the mysteries of



Saint John's Eve—celebrated by an alien rite, delicate and strange, with naked peasants carrying torches through the mist—the monk himself is captured and tied to a cross. One wonderful touch: Andrei inadvertently backs into a smoldering fire and has his robes set, momentarily, aflame.

More than this, though, the film projects an entire world—or rather the sense that, as predicted by André Bazin's essay "The Myth of Total Cinema," the world itself is trying to force its way through the screen. Undirectable creatures animate Tarkovsky's compositions—a cat bounds across a corpse-strewn church, wild geese flutter over a ravaged city. The birch woods are alive with water snakes and crawling ants, the forest floor yields a decomposing swan. The soundtrack is filled with birdcalls and wordless singing; there's always a fire's crackle or a tolling bell in the background.

*Andrei Rublev* is itself more an icon than a movie about an icon painter. (Perhaps it should be seen as a "moving icon," in the same sense that the Lumière brothers made "moving pictures.") This is a portrait of an artist in which no one lifts a brush. The patterns are God's, whether seen in a close-up of spilled paint swirling into pond water or the clods of dirt Rublev flings against a whitewashed wall. But no movie has ever attached greater significance to the artist's role. It's as though Rublev's presence justifies creation.



**Andrei Rublev. Robert Bird. bfi Publishing. London 2004**

"For us the story of Rublev is really the story of a 'taught' or imposed concept which burns up in the atmosphere of living reality to rise again from the ashes as a fresh and newly discovered truth." Andrei Tarkovsky

*Andrei Rublev* is the most Russian of films, emblematic of what everyone finds so fascinating and so maddening in the way Russians do things. In the case of *Andrei Rublev* the challenges to our complacent preconceptions are extraordinarily strident. For over three hours, the main protagonist does little more than observe. One of his most drastic actions is to take a sixteen-year-long vow of silence, not an auspicious premise for a movie. Its religious subject matter and flaunting of narrative convention bathe *Andrei Rublev* and its director Andrei Tarkovsky in a rarefied aura of sanctity or sanctimony. It is seen by its fervent admirers as the 'film of films', putting it in the same category as the book of books—the Bible. But how can a film which promises so much possibly succeed—while remaining a movie?

For its first viewers, by contrast, *Andrei Rublev* was an eagerly anticipated forbidden fruit and a courageous intervention in contemporary ideological discourse. Its miraculous aura stemmed less from the film itself than from the very improbability of its existence in the atheist USSR, and it was the stubborn controversy over its release which contributed most to Tarkovsky's image as a suffering artist. In 1970, after five long years of struggle with the authorities over *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky began a diary which he entitled 'The Martyrology'....

While it has ended up deflecting attention from *Andrei Rublev* as a work of art, the film's aura of sanctity originated precisely in its aesthetic impact, and the controversy was caused more by Tarkovsky's startling manner of storytelling than by his ideological position. Tarkovsky's formal innovations established him as one of the most distinctive young artists in world cinema and as a major threat to the standard artistic discourse in the USSR. While Tarkovsky invariably displayed a pragmatic flexibility in his public statements about his films, the success of *Andrei Rublev* confirmed his fiercely independent approach to his art. For him, any compromise was a profanation....

Another decisive discovery in *Andrei Rublev* was the cinematic potential of the Orthodox icon, which would be a mainstay of Tarkovsky's films right up to the last one, *The Sacrifice* (1986). One of the 'synchronicities' of Solonitsyn's casting [as Rublev] was his physical similarity to the image of Christ in Rublev's icon, *Saviour in the Wood*. The three angels in Rublev's *The Old Testament Trinity* provided the pattern for the mysteriously inseparable

threesomes in *Andrei Rublev* and Tarkovsky's later films, *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979).

Rublev's *Trinity* is deceptively simple and transparent. The three figures bow to each other in graceful acknowledgment of their shared majesty. Theologians tell us that the angels (based on Genesis 18) prefigure the revelation of the triune God in the New Testament, united in love because their shared nature *is* love. Artists tell us that space itself, bending obediently around the figures, confirms them as the centre of creation and draws the viewer into their world. Historians treasure Rublev's image as the jewel which glistened amidst the embers of Russia's historical bonfire and expressed the nation's silent spiritual vision.

Tarkovsky took inspiration from the icon in all of these respects: in the film's thematic structure, in its visual composition, and also in his aspiration to give voice to a silenced culture. The central subject of Tarkovsky's camera is not the threesome of monks, nor even Andrei Rublev himself, but rather the elusive force which holds their world together: compassion, care, vision...

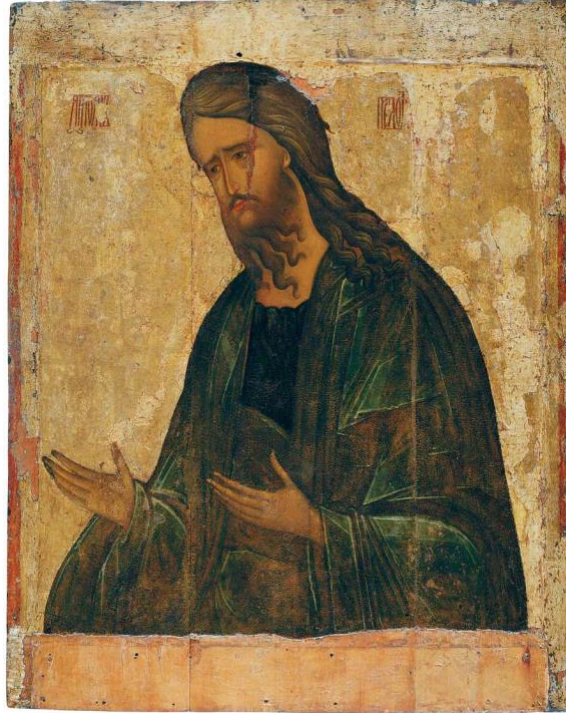
In an essay written during the production of *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky coined the term 'imprinted time' for the invisible medium which unites his films in lieu of a clear linear narrative.

The characters in *Andrei Rublev* represent various types of spirituality, from the stern but spineless intellectualism of Kirill (brilliantly played by Ivan Lapikov, in a vastly underrated performance) to the pagan revellers' exuberant carnality, to Rublev's humanist questioning. Andrei's point of view is privileged only insofar as he remains a spectator alongside the viewer, immune to the allure of action. We are never quite sure what he sees and how he sees it, and so we can neither be sure that we are seeing properly either. Nonetheless we feel an almost ethical imperative to *keep watching*. Perhaps this is the key to Tarkovsky's personal aura: that he encouraged beaten and distracted people to *look*, both at the world outside and at their inner selves. It reminds us of the original meaning of the word

'martyr', the one Tarkovsky may really have had in mind when he began his diary: 'witness'. Tarkovsky's films bear witness to his world and posit the spectator as *witness*.

Tarkovsky boasted of the way his films educate their viewers. After the eventual release of *Andrei Rublev* in the USSR, he was heartened by numerous phone calls and letters: 'Of course

audiences understand the film perfectly well, as I knew they would'.



Ostensibly *Andrei Rublev* is the story of Russia's most renowned icon painter, who died in 1430 and is conjectured to have been born between 1360 and 1370. Rublev's life coincided with the beginning of the end of Mongol-Tatar domination and the rise of the modern Russian state, in which the upstart city of Moscow was asserting its primacy among its peers.

It was Rublev's name alone which became the standard for traditional Moscow-school icon painting. In

1551, in the face of growing Western influence, the Russian church mandated that icons be painted 'from the ancient standards, as Greek icon painters painted and as Andrei Rublev painted along with other famous icon painters'. Rublev's exclusive reputation was confirmed in 1988, when he was canonised as a saint on the occasion of the millennium of Christianity in Russia. Today, one can find Rublev mentioned as Russia's premier theologian in the medieval period, which underscores the experiential and visual nature of Russian spirituality.

Between 1551 and the twentieth century, Rublev's work and Russian icon-painting generally, fell into oblivion. The key factor in the rediscovery of the icon, and by extension, of Rublev, was the theological aesthetics of Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) a polymath scientist, philosopher and priest who taught at the Moscow Theological Academy in the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery, where Rublev had created his masterpiece five centuries earlier. Florensky penned a series of essays on the icon immediately following the revolution of 1917. Some



of his work was part of the process of converting the Trinity-St Sergius Monastery into a museum, which saved many of its cultural riches from the Soviet government's anti-religious campaign. On 11 April 1919, Soviet officials presided over the desecration of the relics of St Sergius, an event that was captured on film by the 'cine-chronicler' Dziga Vertov. Fearing for the relics, Florensky took part in a plot to hide St Sergius' skull in the garden of a local house; it was restored to the sarcophagus only after the official reinstatement of the monastery in 1946. Under Stalin, the ideological emphasis shifted from Marxism (and atheism) to official patriotism, and by the mid-1930s some pre-communist personages had been restored to the cultural pantheon, as illustrated by Vladimir Petrov's 1937 epic, *Peter the Great*, or Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 film, *Alexander Nevsky*. In this context Rublev, whose work had only recently been recovered, was also appropriated for



patriotic purposes. One example of this was the mention of Rublev in a 1941 poem by Arsenii Tarkovsky, the director's father, entitled 'My Rus, my Russia, Home, Earth, and Mother!' In 1943, in a bid for national unity, Stalin restored the Church as a national institution, and postwar Soviet culture witnessed a further legitimisation of religious personages as national heroes who has contributed to the rise of the unified Russian state.

Voznesensky even conscripts Rublev to the cause of communism:

*Names and numbers disappear.  
Genius changes its clothes.  
Genius is the spirit of the nation. In this  
sense,  
Andrei Rublev was Lenin.*

Tarkovsky's response to Voznesensky's syncretism was to give the role of Efim to the fringe poet Nikolai Glazkov. Glazkov had parodied Voznesensky in a 1962 ditty.

Tarkovsky dwelled more on the film's innovative narrative structure: "I think this picture

will help us to depart from literary discourse, which is still very strong in our cinema. And although the great artist Rublev lived in the fifteenth century, our cine-story about him should be contemporary. After all, the problem of talent, the question of the artist and the nation are not obsolete in our own day.

In this work we want to reject a unified plot and narrative. We want the viewer to see Rublev with 'today's eyes'."...In typical fashion, the issue was addressed at the highest levels of the Soviet government.

Tarkovsky's prickly temperament was both a constant hindrance to his career and a main condition of his success. He strove to control everything, from the tiniest detail in the *mise en scène* to the weather conditions. The difficulty of such a meticulous approach was multiplied by his characteristic, long-duration tracking shots, which

required immaculate choreography in order to produce the necessary 'rhythm' while avoiding any anachronistic features in the landscape and conserving precious film stock.

A related decision was the use of black and white for the narrative and colour for the Epilogue displaying Rublev's icons. In an interview, Tarkovsky claimed that black and white communicated reality, while colour imbued everything with an aura of fictionality. This curious reversal of the usual view of things shows that Tarkovsky understood 'reality' in his picture to mean reality as portrayed in accordance with cinematic convention. By extension, although they are Rublev's only *real* historical traces and are shown in their current state, the icons are placed beyond the limits of normal filmic reality, and therefore qualify as 'fiction'. The narrative grounds the icons in a temporal reality, in a life, without which they are impossible incursions of the supernatural into our world. The rare cinema trick sticks out, as when blood spurts flamboyantly from an arm wound

during the sack of Vladimir. But we almost welcome these lapses into obvious cinema convention because they assure us that Tarkovsky acknowledged himself master of his own fiction, not of history or reality as such, and was happiest as storyteller, not as prophet.

Tarkovsky's desire to achieve both authenticity and distance dictated the use of authentic locations, which was fraught with legal and aesthetic hazards. During the shoot, a small stir was caused by a fire which occurred at the historic Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir; it was awkward that a film advertised as recovering the historical Andrei Rublev might endanger his only surviving frescoes.

There is no consistent point of view for the narration, even when the titular hero is present in the shot. The camera may seem to *sympathise* with a

character for a time, but it invariably switches to another character or takes on a life of its own. There are also few establishing shots to give a



sense of the objective space in which the viewer can array events and characters. Instead, the meaning of a shot is liable to remain suspended until the viewer ascribes it to a particular subject and places it precisely in

the narrative. The screen acts as a locus of exchange on which the characters' and viewers' gazes run like alternating current through the tense, pensive images. The viewer is encouraged to acknowledge a manifold of possible plots and interpretations and to avoid reducing the film to a tighter story. The screen is not a transparent window on objective reality, but the material basis of a narrative form which takes shape only with the viewer's active participation.

### **COMING UP IN THE FALL 2021 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS 43:**

- October 12 Stanley Kubrick BARRY LYNDON (1975)
- October 19 Roman Polanski CHINATOWN (1974)
- October 26 Roland Joffé THE MISSION (1986)
- November 2 Mike Nichols CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR (2007)
- November 9 Asghar Farhadi A SEPARATION (2011)
- November 16 Hsiao-Hsien Hou THE ASSASSIN (2015)
- November 23 Chloé Zhan NOMADLAND (2020)
- November 30 Rob Reiner THE PRINCESS BRIDE (1987)

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