

[Vimeo link for ALL of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the Fall 2020 BFS](#)

Zoom link for all Fall 2020 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:
<https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/92994947964?pwd=dDBWcDYvSlhPbkd4TkswcUhiQWkydz09>
Meeting ID: 929 9494 7964
Passcode: 703450

Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky
Screenplay by Fridrikh Gorenshtein and Andrei Tarkovsky
Based on the novel by Stanislaw Lem (novel "Solaris")
Produced by Viacheslav Tarasov
Original Music by Eduard Artemyev
Cinematography by Vadim Yusov
Production Design by Mikhail Romadin

Natalya Bondarchuk...Hari
Donatas Banionis...Kris Kelvin
Jüri Järvet...Dr. Snaut
Vladislav Dvorzhetsky...Henri Berton
Nikolai Grinko...Kelvin's Father
Anatoli Solonitsyn...Dr. Sartorius
Sos Sargsyan...Dr. Gibarian
Olga Barnet...Kelvin's Mother
Tamara Ogorodnikova...Aunt Anna
Georgi Tejkh...Prof. Messenger
Yulian Semyonov...Chairman at Scientific Conference
Olga Kizilova...Gibarian's Guest

Cannes Film Festival

1972 Won: FIPRESCI Prize and Grand Prize of the Jury; nominated for Golden Palm

Andrei Tarkovsky (4 April 1932, Zavrazhe, Ivanono, USSR [now Russia]—29 December 1986, Paris, France, lung cancer) wrote 16 and directed 11 films. The films he directed are: *Offret/The Sacrifice* (1986), *Nostalghia/Nostalghia* (1983), *Tempo di viaggio/Voyage in Time* (1983), *Stalker/Сталкер* (1979), *Zerkalo/The Mirror* (1975), *Solyaris/Solaris* (1972), *Andrey Rublyov/Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Ivanovo detstvo/Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Katok i skripka/The Steamroller and the Violin* (1961), *Segodnya uvolneniya ne budet/There Will Be No Leave Today* (1959), *Ubiytsy/The Killers* (1958).

Stanislaw Lem (b. 12 September 1921, Lwów, Poland [now Lviv, Ukraine]—d. 27 March 2006, Kraków, Poland) was a Polish writer of science fiction and essays on various subjects, including philosophy, futurology,

and literary criticism. Many of his science fiction stories are of satirical and humorous character.

Natalya Bondarchuk (10 May 1950, Moscow, Soviet Union [now Russia]—) appeared in 19 films: *Gospodi, uslysh molitvu moyu* (1991), *Lermontov* (1986), *Yunost Bambi/Bambi's Youth* (1986), *Detstvo Bambi/Bambi's Childhood* (1985), *Mat Mariya/Mother Mary* (1982), *Zhivaya raduga/Living Rainbow* (1982), *Vasilii i Vasilisa/Vasili and Vasilisa* (1981), *Yunost Petra/The Youth of Peter the Great* (1981), *V nachale slavykh del/At the Beginning of Glorious Days* (1981), *Krasnoe i chornoe/Red and Black* (1976), *Zvezda plenitel'nogo schastiya/The Captivating Star of Happiness* (1975), *Solyaris/Solaris* (1972), *Prishyol soldat s fronta/A Soldier Came Back from the Front* (1971), *U ozera/By the Lake* (1969); (directed) *Pushkin: Poslednyaya duel* (2006), *Gospodi, uslysh molitvu moyu* (1991), *Yunost Bambi/Bambi's Youth/Junost Bambi* (1986), *Detstvo Bambi/Bambi's Childhood* (1985), *Zhivaya raduga/Living Rainbow* (1982).

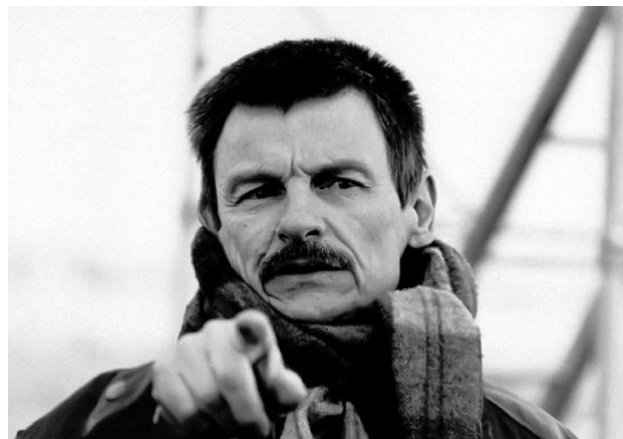
Donatas Banionis (28 April 1924, Kaunas, Lithuania—) acted in 42 films, some of which are *Anastasia* (2006), *Poka ya ne umer/Nero Wolfe I Archie Goodvin: Poka ya ne umer* (2001), *Kiemas/Kiemas/The Courtyard* (1999), *Yatrinskaya vedma/Witches of Yatrinskaya* (1991), *Trinadtsatyy apostol/The Thirteenth Apostle* (1988), *Na iskhode nochii/On the Edge of the Night* (1987), *Zmeyelov/Snake Catcher* (1985), *Andrius* (1980), *Kentavry* (1979), *Vooruzhyon i ochen opasen/Armed and Dangerous: Time and Heroes of Bret Harte* (1977), *Beethoven - Tage aus einem Leben/Beethoven-Days in a Life* (1976), *Solyaris/Solaris* (1972), *Goya - oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis* (1971), *Korol Lir/King Lear* (1971), *Krasnaya Palatka/The Red Tent* (1969), *Myortvyy sezon/The Dead Season* (1968), *Zhitiye i vozneseniye Yurasya Bratchika/The Life and Ascension of Yuras Bratchik* (1968), *Niekas nenorejo mirti/Nobody Wanted to Die* (1966), *Marite* (1947).

Jüri Järvet (18 June 1919, Tallinn, Estonia—5 July 1995, Tallinn, Estonia) was in 48 films, including: *Khrustalyov, mashinu!/Khrustalyov, My Car!* (1998), *Darkness in Tallinn/City Unplugged* (1993), *Vremya vashey zhizni/The Time of Your Life* (1992), *Surmatants/Dance Macabre* (1991), *Khronika Satany mladshogo/Chronicles of Satan Jr.* (1989), *Suvi/Summer* (1976), *Indrek* (1975), *Solyaris/Solaris* (1972), *Korol Lir/King Lear* (1971), *Tuulevaikus* (1971), *Viimne reliikvia/The Last Relic* (1969), *Myortvyy sezon/The Dead Season* (1968), *Jäljed* (1963), *Värav nr. 2* (1955).

Anatoli Solonitsyn (30 August 1934, Nizhny Tagil, USSR [now Russia]—11 June 1982, Moscow, USSR

[now Russia], cancer) 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), *Voskhodzheniye/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).

Vadim Yusov (20 April 1929, Klavdino, Leningrad province, Soviet Union [now Russia]—) shot 18 films, including: *Kopeyka/The Kopeck* (2002), *Out of the Present* (1995), *Pasport/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).



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.

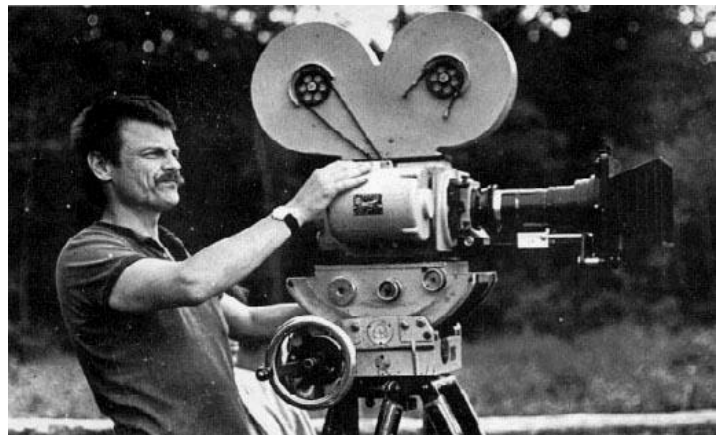
Tarkovsky graduated in 1960 and has been a Mosfilm director ever since. The harsh poetry of his unique vision emerged fully in his first feature film, *Ivanovo detstvo* (*Ivan’s Childhood*, 1962). Ivan, played by Kolya Burlayev, is an orphan working with a group of partisans during the Second World War. 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 blubbery 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 Tatars, 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* (*Nostalgia*, 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 Filminsstru 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.

Philip Lopate, "Solaris" (Criterion disk notes):

Andrei Tarkovsky belongs to that handful of filmmakers (Dreyer, Bresson, Vigo, Tati) who, with a small, concentrated body of work, created a universe. Though he made only seven features, thwarted by Soviet censors and then by cancer, each honored his ambition to crash through the surface of ordinary life and find a larger spiritual meaning: to heal modern art's secular fragmentation by infusing it with metaphysical dimension. To that end he rejected Eisensteinian montage and developed a demanding, long-take aesthetic, which he thought better able to reveal the deeper truths underlying the ephemeral, performing moment.

Since Tarkovsky is often portrayed as a lonely, martyred genius, we'd do well to place him in a wider context, as the most renowned of an astonishing generation—Larisa Shepitko, Alexei German, Andrei

Konchalovsky, Sergei Parajanov, Otar Iosseliani—which effected a dazzling, short-lived renaissance of Soviet cinema. All had censorship problems. In the early 1970s, Tarkovsky, unable to get approval for a script which was considered too personal-obscurantist, proposed a film adaptation of



Stanislaw Lem's novel, *Solaris*, thinking it stood a better chance of being green-lighted by the commissars, as science fiction seemed more "objective" and accessible to the masses.

His hunch paid off: *Solaris* took the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes. Tarkovsky had arrived on the world stage with his most straightforward, accessible work. While hardly a conventional film, *Solaris* is less long-take driven, and stands as a fulcrum in Tarkovsky's career: behind him was his impressive debut, *Ivan's Childhood*, and his first epic masterpiece, *Andrei Rublev*; ahead of him lay *The Mirror* (brilliantly experimental and, yes, personal-obscurantist), *Stalker* (a great, somber, difficult work), and finally, two intransigent, lyrical, meditative pictures he made in exile, *Nostalghia* and *The Sacrifice*. He died shortly after completing this last film, in 1986, at age fifty-four.

We know that Tarkovsky had seen Kubrick's *2001* and disliked it as cold and sterile. The media played up the Cold War angle of the Soviet director's determination to make an "anti-*2001*," and certainly Tarkovsky used more intensely individual characters and a more passionate human drama at the center than Kubrick. Still, hindsight allows us to observe that the two masterworks are more cousins than opposites. Both set up their narratives in a leisurely, languid manner, spending considerable time tracking around the space set; both employed a widescreen mise-en-scène approach that drew on superior art direction; and both generated an air of mystery that invited countless explanations.

Unlike *2001*, however, *Solaris* is saturated in grief, which grips the film even before it leaves Earth. In this moody prelude, we see the protagonist, a space

psychologist named Kris Kelvin, staring at underwater reeds as though they were a drowned woman's tresses. Played by the stolid Donatas Banionis, a Russian Glenn Ford with five o'clock shadow and a shock of prematurely white hair, Kris looks forever traumatized, slowed by some unspeakable sorrow. His father and aunt worry about his torpor, chide him for his plodding, bookkeeper-like manner. He is about to take off the next day for a mission to the space station Solaris, a once-thriving project which has gone amiss: it will be his job to determine whether or not to close down the research station. In preparation, he watches a video from a scientific conference (allowing Tarkovsky to satirize bureaucratic stodginess) about the troubles on Solaris.

Humans seem in thrall to machinery and TV images, cut off from the nature surrounding them (underwater reeds, a thoroughbred horse, a farm dog). In his haunting shots of freeways, Tarkovsky disdains showing any but contemporary cars, just as Godard did with the buildings in *Alphaville*: Why bother clothing the present world in sci-fi garb, when the estranging future has already arrived?

At Solaris, Kris finds a shabby space station, deserted except for two preoccupied if not deranged scientists, Snaut and Sartorius. A colleague Kris had expected to meet has already committed suicide, leaving him a taped message warning of hallucinated Guests who have "something to do with conscience." Sure enough, Kris' dead wife Hari materializes at his side, offering the devoted tenderness for which he is starved. Kris, panicking, shoves her into a space capsule and fires it off; but Hari II is not slow in arriving. As played by the lovely Natalya Bondarchuk, this "eternal feminine" is the opposite of a femme fatale: all clinging fidelity and frightened vulnerability. We learn that the real Hari had committed suicide with a poison Kris had unthinkingly left behind when he left her. The hallucinated Hari II, fearing Kris does not love her, takes liquid oxygen and kills herself as well. By the time Hari III appears, Kris will do anything to redeem himself.

Solaris helped initiate a genre that has become an art-house staple: the drama of grief and partial recovery. Watching this 169-minute work is like catching a fever, with night sweats and eventual cooling brow. Tarkovsky's experiments with pacing, to "find Time within Time," as he put it, has his camera track up to the

sleeping Kris, dilating the moment, so that we enter his dream. As in Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, to fall asleep is to risk a succubus' visit. However, this time the danger comes not from any harm she may do the hero. True horror is in having to watch someone you love destroy herself. The film that *Solaris* most resembles thematically is not *2001*, but Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: the inability of the male to protect the female, the multiple disguises or "resurrections" of the loved one, the inevitability of repeating past mistakes.

The real power of the film comes from the anguish of Kris' reawakened love for Hari—his willingness to do anything to hold onto her, even knowing she isn't real. (Like Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu*, this is a story about falling in love with ghosts). The alternation between color and black and white conveys something of this ontological instability, while the jittery camera

explorations over shelves and walls suggest a seizure. Hari wonders aloud if she has epilepsy, and later we see her body horrifically jerking at the threshold between being and non-being. A gorgeous, serene floating sequence, when Kris and Hari lose gravity, offers another stylized representation of this transcendence borderline.

Meanwhile,

Tarkovsky peppers the dialogue with heady arguments about reality, identity, humanity, and sympathy, buttressed by references to civilization's linchpins—Bach, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Brueghel, Luther, and Cervantes. The Soviet censors, who demanded that the filmmaker "remove the concept of God," may have been mollified by the absence of the G-word; but Tarkovsky took the standard science-fiction theme of spacemen establishing "contact" with other forms of intelligence, and elevated it implicitly to Contact with Divinity (the planet's ocean, granted sentient powers.)

Both the Eastern European Lem and Tarkovsky were critical of what they saw as Western science fiction's shallowness, and wanted to invest the form with intellectual and emotional depth. Tarkovsky took much directly from Lem's book, but he also expanded, reordered, and beclouded it. As it happened, Lem did not much care for Tarkovsky's elliptical reworking of his material, and now looks forward to a remake by Steven Soderbergh. No matter. Just as Tarkovsky sought to



reverse Kubrick and ended up extending him, so Soderbergh's version cannot help but honor his majestic predecessor. Such would be a fitting, if Freudian, coda to Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, which concludes with the claustrophobic concavities of the space station yielding to the rain-sodden beauty of this island earth, and the returning Kris embracing his father's knees.



from Criterion *Solaris*. “Tarkovsky and *Solaris*” by Akira Kurosawa

Solaris—many feel this film is too long, but I disagree. It may seem that the nature scenes that introduce the film are too lengthy, but the layering of these scenes that depict a certain farewell to nature on Earth creates the emotional basis of the story after the main character is sent up to the space station, and tortures the viewers with an incredible nostalgia for Earth's nature, a feeling akin to being homesick. Without this long introduction, you cannot make the audience experience the actual desperation felt by the people trapped in the Solaris station.

I saw this film late one night at a screening room in Moscow, but while I was watching it, my heart was aching from an incredible longing to return to Earth. Just where is scientific progress leading mankind? The film manages to capture perfectly the sheer fearfulness. Without it, science fiction becomes mere fancy.

A shy smile

Tarkovsky was sitting in the corner of the screening room watching the film with me, but he got up as soon as the film was over, and looked at me with a shy smile. I said to him, “It’s very good. It’s a frightening movie.” He seemed embarrassed, but smiled happily. Then the two of us went to a film union restaurant and toasted with vodka.

Tarkovsky, who does not usually drink, got completely drunk and cut off the speakers at the restaurant, then began singing the theme of *Seven Samurai* at the top of his voice. I joined in, eager to keep up.

At that moment I was very happy to be on Earth.

Its ability to induce this feeling in its viewers proves *Solaris* to be no ordinary science fictions film.

There is something truly frightening about it. And Tarkovsky's deep insight managed to capture this.

Unknown to humanity

In this world, there are (and there should still be) many things unknown to mankind. The abyss of the galaxy peered into by humanity—the strange visitor at the space station-time going backwards from death to life—the strikingly moving sensation of zero gravity—the home for which the main character at the station pined is dripping with water. This seemed to me to be the sweat or tears the main character squeezes out of his body from sheer agony—and what made me shudder was the shot on location in Akasakamitsutake [in Tokyo.] By using a mirror with great skill, he multiplied the flow of the headlights and taillights of the passing cars, creating a veritable vision of a futuristic metropolis. Every shot in *Solaris* bears witness to the dazzling genius of Tarkovsky.

Many find Tarkovsky difficult to grasp, but I disagree. Tarkovsky just has a keener sense of intuition than the rest of us. [Originally published May 13, 1977.]

Sculpting in Time Reflections on the Cinema. Andrei Tarkovsky. University of Texas Press Austin, 1986.

It would perhaps be superfluous to mention that from the very start cinema as American-style adventure movie has never held any interest for me. The last thing I want to do is devise attractions. From *Ivan's Childhood* to *Stalker*, I have always tried to avoid outward movement, and have tried to concentrate the action within the classical unities. In this respect even the structure of *Andrey Rublyov* strikes me today as disjointed and incoherent....

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

In a world where there is a real threat of war capable of annihilating mankind; where social ills exist on a staggering scale; where human suffering cries out to heaven—the way must be found to reach another. Such is the sacred duty of each individual. An author's poetic principle emerges from the effect made upon him by the surrounding reality, and it can rise above that reality, question it, engage in bitter conflict; and, moreover, not only with the reality that lies outside him, but also with the one that is within him. Many critics consider, for instance, that Dostoevsky discovered yawning abysses

within himself and that his saintly characters and villains are equally projections of him. But not one of them is completely him. Each of his characters epitomises what he sees and thinks of life, but not one could be said to embody the full diapason of his personality....

I should not want to impose my views on cinema on anybody else. All I hope is that everyone I am addressing (in other words, people who know and love the cinema) has his own ideas, his particular view of the artistic principles of film-making and film criticism.

A mass of preconceptions exists in and around the profession. And I do mean preconceptions, not traditions: those hackneyed ways of thinking, clichés that grow up around traditions and gradually take them over. And you can achieve nothing in art unless you are free from received ideas. You have to work out your own position, your individual point of view—subject always, of course, to common sense—and keep this before you like the apple of your eye, all the time you are working.

Directing starts not when the script is being discussed with the writer, not during work with the actor, or with the composer, but at the time when before the interior gaze of the person making the film and known as the director, there emerges an image of the film: this might be a series of episodes worked out in detail, or perhaps the consciousness of an aesthetic texture and emotional atmosphere, to be materialised on the screen. The director must have a clear idea of his objectives and work through with his camera team to achieve their total, precise realisation. However, all this is no more than technical expertise. Although it involves many of the conditions necessary to art, in itself it is not sufficient to earn for the director the name of artist.

He starts to be an artist at the moment, when, in his mind or even on film, his own distinctive system of images starts to take shape—his own pattern of thoughts about the external world—and the audience are invited to judge it, to share with the director in his most precious and secret dreams. Only when his personal viewpoint is brought in, when he becomes a kind of philosopher, does he emerge as an artist, and cinema—as an art....

Every art form, however, is born and lives according to its particular laws. When people talk about the specific norms of cinema, it is usually in juxtaposition with literature. In my view it is all-important that the interaction between cinema and literature should be

explored and exposed as completely as possible, so that the two can at last be separated, never to be confused again. In what ways are literature and cinema similar and related? What links them?

Above all the unique freedom enjoyed by practitioners in both fields to take what they want of what is offered by the real world, and to arrange it in sequence. This definition may appear too wide and general, but it seems to me to take in all that cinema and literature have in common. Beyond it lie irreconcilable differences, stemming from the essential disparity between world and screened image; for the basic difference is that literature uses words to describe the world, whereas film does not have to use words: it manifests itself to us directly....

Why do people go to the cinema? What takes them into a darkened room where, for two hours, they watch the play of shadows on a sheet? The search for entertainment? The need for a kind of drug? All over the world there are, indeed, entertainment firms and organisations which exploit cinema and television and

spectacles of many other kinds. Our starting-point, however, should not be there, but in the essential principles of cinema, which have to do with the human need to master and know the world. I think that what a person normally goes to the cinema for is *time*, for time lost or spent or not yet had.

He goes there for living experience, for cinema, like no other art, widens, enhances and concentrates a person's experience—and not only enhances it but makes it longer, significantly longer. That is the power of cinema: 'stars', story-lines and entertainment have nothing to do with it.

What is the essence of the director's work? We could define it as sculpting in time. Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not part of it—so the film-maker, from a 'lump of time' made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image....

Cinema should be a means of exploring the most complex problems of our time, as vital as those for which centuries have been the subject of literature, music and painting.



from *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky A Visual Fugue.*/
Vida T. Johnson & Graham Petric. Indiana
University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1994.
Naum Abramov: “Dialogue with Andrei Tarkovsky
about Science-Fiction on the Screen,” 1970.

Abramov: *And, finally, why have you turned to science-fiction, a genre which is so new to you?*

Tarkovsky: The questions you’re asking, as far as I understand, are connected on the one hand with filmmaking and on the other hand with the viewer. But first, I want to explain why I decided to adapt Lem’s novel, *Solaris*. Whether or not my first two films are good or bad, they are, in the final analysis, both about the same thing. They are about the extreme manifestation of loyalty to a moral debt, the struggle for it, and faith in it—even to the extent of a personality crisis. They are about an individual armed with conviction, an individual with a sense of personal destiny, for whom catastrophe is an unbroken human soul.

I’m interested in a hero that goes on to the end despite everything. Because only such a person can claim victory. The dramatic form of my films is a token of my desire to express the struggle and the greatness of the human spirit. I think you can easily connect this concept with my previous films....

As for *Solaris*, my decision to adapt it to the screen is not at all a result of some fondness for the genre. The main thing is that in *Solaris*, Lem presents a problem that is close to me: the problem of overcoming, of convictions, of moral transformation on the path of struggle within the limits of one’s own destiny. The depth and meaning of Lem’s novel are not at all dependent on the science-fiction genre, and it’s not enough to appreciate his novel simply for the genre.

The novel is not only about the human mind encountering the unknown, but it is also about the moral leap of a human being in relation to new discoveries in scientific knowledge. And overcoming the obstacles on this path leads to a painful birth of a new morality. This is the “price of progress” that Kelvin pays in *Solaris*. And Kelvin’s price is the face to face encounter with the materialization of his own conscience. But Kelvin doesn’t betray his moral position. Because betrayal in this situation means to remain at the former level, not even

attempting to rise to a higher moral level. And Kelvin pays a tragic price for this step forward. The science-fiction genre creates the necessary premise for this connection between moral problems and the physiology of the human mind.

From *Andrei Tarkovsky Interviews.* Edited by John
Gianvito. University of Mississippi, Jackson, 2006.
Patrick Bureau: “Andrei Tarkovsky: I Am for a Poetic
Cinema,” 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.

COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, FALL 2020, SERIES 41:

Nov 3: Werner Herzog, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God/Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972)

Nov 10: Richard Rush, *The Stunt Man* (1980)

Nov 17: Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire/Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987)

Nov 24: Krzysztof Kiesłowski, *Three Colors; Red/ Trois couleurs: Rouge/ Trzy kolory. Czerwony* (1994)

Dec 1: Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* (1940)

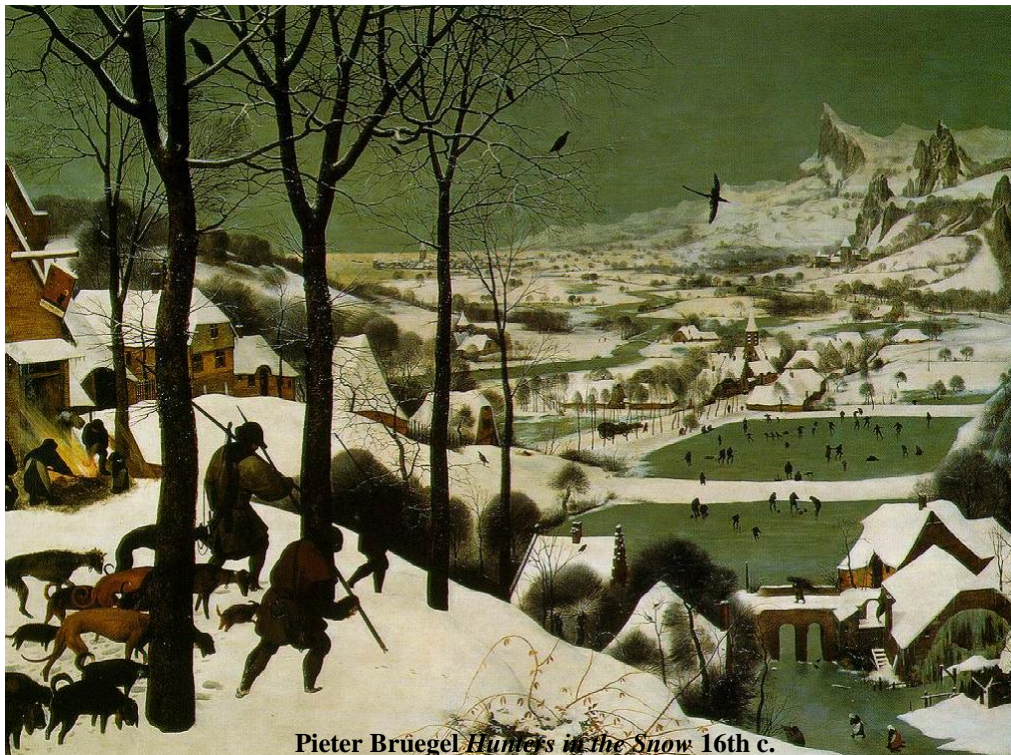
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Pieter Bruegel *Hunters in the Snow* 16th c.