

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Part I – Film Theories	5
Live In The House – And The House Will Stand: The Role Of Autobiography And Lived Experience In Tarkovsky’s Films And Aesthetic, <i>Sean Martin</i>	6
On Tarkovsky’s Aesthetic Strategies, <i>Benjamin Halligan</i>	40
Subjectivity And Sociality In The Films Of Andrei Tarkovsky, <i>Paul Johnson</i>	65
'Sculpting the Time Image': An Exploration Of Tarkovsky's Film Theory From A Deleuzian Perspective, <i>Terence McSweeney</i>	78
<i>Solaris</i> And The ANS Synthesizer: On The Relations Between Tarkovsky, Artemiev, And Music Technology, <i>David Beer</i>	99
The Landscape Of Dreams – Reflections On The Visual Language, Dreams and Realized Mysticism In Ivan’s Childhood, <i>Oddný Sen</i>	117
Part II – Theological Themes..... p.n.	
“Icon And Apocalypse” – Reflections On The Philosophical And Theological Understanding Of Andrei Tarkovsky’s Work, <i>Torsten Kälvelmark</i>	132
Deus Absconditus – Between Visible And Invisible In The Films Of Tarkovsky, <i>Astrid Söderbergh Widding</i>	149
Childhood Lost And The Horsemen Of The Apocalypse: Religious Themes In Ivan’s Childhood, <i>Thorkell Águst Óttarsson</i>	165
Mirrors In The Film About Andrei Rublev, <i>Pétur Pétursson</i>	185
Awake – Faith, Hope And Love In <i>Stalker</i> , <i>Árni Svanur Daníelsson</i>	197
Alienation, Exile And Paradise Lost – Nostalgia Scrutinized From A Biblical Perspective, <i>Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson</i>	216
In Hope And Faith – Religious Motifs In Tarkovsky’s <i>The Sacrifice</i> , <i>Gunnar J. Gunnarsson</i>	235
List of Contributors	257

INTRODUCTION

Obviously a film is never taken in one way only and as signifying only one thing.¹

This book owes its origin to the Icelandic research group *Deus ex cinema*. Its members are interested in religious, theological and ethical themes in films and have come together for weekly seminars since July 4th 2000 to watch movies and discuss these common interests. All of Tarkovsky's films have been watched and analysed by the group and it was at one of the meetings that the idea for a book on Tarkovsky was born - a book that would cover religious themes in his films as well as film theories. We announced our plans on Nostalghia.com and invited interested scholars to join us. The response more than exceeded our expectations. Along the way some of the first ones to join the project had to drop out and others have taken their place. This volume is the result.

The contributors to this book are from various countries and have diverse educational backgrounds, but they are united by one common thing; their love of Andrei Tarkovsky's films. Tarkovsky is one of the greatest film directors of all time and the most famous Soviet film maker since Eisenstein. He died of lung cancer in Paris, December 28th 1986, only 54 years of age. This year, 2006, marks the 20th anniversary of his passing and this volume is our way of commemorating this great master.

The title of the book refers to the following quotation from Tarkovsky: "Anyone who wants can look at my films as into a mirror, in which he will see himself."² Offering a reflection of the inner state of human beings is very characteristic of Tarkovsky's films. The title also refers to one of Tarkovsky's best known movie, *The Mirror*, as well as to the frequent use of mirrors in his films.

Our intention was that anyone interested in Tarkovsky, film studies or theology should be able to understand and enjoy this book without much background knowledge in any of these fields. Since this is a collection of independent articles, they need not be read in the order in which they appear in the book.

This compilation is divided into two parts: The first part is called Film Theories and, as the name suggests, contains papers that touch on film theories.

¹ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 169.

² Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 184.

This applies especially to the papers by Benjamin Halligan and Terence McSweeney, both of whom write about Tarkovsky's aesthetic strategies and film theory. Sean Martin writes about autobiography in Tarkovsky's films, David Beer about the music in *Solaris*, and Oddný Sen analyzes dream-symbolism in the films with an emphasis on *Ivan's Childhood*. Paul Johnson's paper is, perhaps, more on the fringe but he looks at Tarkovsky's films from a sociological perspective.

The second part of the book concentrates on theological themes in Tarkovsky's films. This approach has been seriously neglected by most books and papers written about his films until now. Two of the papers in this part are general in nature whilst five concentrate on specific films.

It is fair to ask why we want to study Tarkovsky's films from a theological perspective. There are many ways to answer that. Firstly, Tarkovsky did not make much distinction between art and religion. In fact, he saw art as a form of religion. In *Sculpting in Time* he wrote:

In art, as in religion, intuition is tantamount to conviction, to faith. It is a state of mind, not a way of thinking. [...] In the case of someone who is spiritually receptive, it is therefore possible to talk of an analogy between the impact made by a work of art and that of purely religious experience. Art acts above all on the soul, shaping its spiritual structure.³

And again: "Art could almost be said to be religious in that it is inspired by commitment to higher goal."⁴ This religious tone is also found in his writings on these "higher goals". Art should "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,"⁵ and it should, further more, "prepare a person for death, to prolong and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to gold."⁶ Tarkovsky likewise saw art as a weapon against materialism and as a path to salvation for oneself and for society as a whole. But even though art has these dynamic powers it does not take away responsibility from the individual who still has to:

...resolve this dilemma for himself, for only he can discover his own sane spiritual life. Resolving it may take him closer to the state in which he can be

³ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 41.

⁴ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 168.

⁵ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 36.

⁶ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 96.

responsible for society. This is the step which becomes a sacrifice, in the Christian sense of self-sacrifice.⁷

Secondly Tarkovsky saw the artist in a religious light, almost as a prophet. He says that an “artist who has no faith is like a painter who was born blind”⁸ and describes his calling as “prophet-like”.⁹ According to Tarkovsky the artist is a slave to his calling. He is “never free,” and lacks freedom more than any other group in society. He can only choose to fulfil his calling or sell his “soul for thirty pieces of silver” as Judas did in the days of old.¹⁰

Tarkovsky frequently invited the audience to interpret his films as they saw fit: “... I can only be glad if it allows for various interpretations”¹¹ and:

[...] 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.
[...] 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.¹²

The authors of the papers in this book have all accepted Tarkovsky’s invitation to interpret his films in various ways, even to their own “advantage”, as Tarkovsky says: “masterpieces are ambivalent and allow for widely differing interpretations.”¹³

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Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson and Thorkell Ágúst Óttarsson
Reykjavík and Drammen, March 2006

⁷ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 218.

⁸ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 43.

⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 51.

¹⁰ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 165.

¹¹ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 168.

¹² Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 118.

¹³ Andrei Tarkovsky. *Sculpting in Time*, p. 109.