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| Andrei Tarkovsky (1943 – 1986) |
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| The cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky stands at the zenith of high-modernist cinema. Amongst the many technical achievements that characterize Tarkovsky’s total art approach to cinema, a few stand out: the fragmented and free floating diegeses of his films, which often defy the teleology of metanarratives; a wide array of poetry and paintings, grafted onto the plot as philosophical subtext; long takes, intricately choreographed, with many optical illusions; an insistence on reducing the role of color in order to enhance the ‘expressiveness’ of the image (Johnson 188); and finally, a spare cinematic score that is often mainly a ‘refrain’ to accentuate emotional climaxes (Tarkovsky 158). Thematically, a number of key metaphysical, autobiographical, and historical motifs also recur in his films. The ethical crisis of the human in a universe devoid of humanistic faith, the playful authority of memory over subjectivity, the simultaneous and conflicting alterity and interiority of Nature, and the dilemma of the instrumentality of technology and reason to the capitalistic *ratio*, exemplify some of his main concerns. |
| The cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky stands at the zenith of high-modernist cinema. Amongst the many technical achievements that characterize Tarkovsky’s total art approach to cinema, a few stand out: the fragmented and free floating diegeses of his films, which often defy the teleology of metanarratives; a wide array of poetry and paintings, grafted onto the plot as philosophical subtext; long takes, intricately choreographed, with many optical illusions; an insistence on reducing the role of color in order to enhance the ‘expressiveness’ of the image (Johnson 188); and finally, a spare cinematic score that is often mainly a ‘refrain’ to accentuate emotional climaxes (Tarkovsky 158). Thematically, a number of key metaphysical, autobiographical, and historical motifs also recur in his films. The ethical crisis of the human in a universe devoid of humanistic faith, the playful authority of memory over subjectivity, the simultaneous and conflicting alterity and interiority of Nature, and the dilemma of the instrumentality of technology and reason to the capitalistic *ratio*, exemplify some of his main concerns.  Tarkovsky’s career as an artist can be divided into two distinct stylistic approaches to the cinematic medium. In all his earlier films, up to and including his autobiographical feature, *The Mirror* (1975), Tarkovsky saw cinema as a sculpture in time: a temporal plurality that can modify and structure the spectator’s relationship to linear scientific time and thereby allow for a metamorphosis of perspective, subjectivity and history. However, from his existential commentary on human nature *Stalker* (1979) onward, his films served as explorations of the ‘Aristotelian dramatic unities’ (Guerra). This overtly modernist concern with aesthetic self-reflection compelled Tarkovsky to avoid public friction with the Soviet cultural authorities. Nevertheless, after the enormous success of his early masterpiece *Andrei Rublev* (1966) he ran into a host of problems with the bureaucratic machine due to the subject matter of his films, such as screening boycotts, shortages in budget and equipment, and extensive censorship. These pressures, at last, drove him to making his films in exile, first in Italy and then in Sweden, culminating in his last feature *The Sacrifice* (1896). His career as a director is therefore also divided between the five films he made inside the Soviet Union, the first of which was the orphaned WWII feature *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962), and the final three that he made outside the union, starting with his diasporic rememoration of home in *Nostalghia* (1983). Throughout this influential career, two films stand out as the archetypes of the ambiguous relationship of Tarkovsky’s cinema to the modern. The science fiction *Solaris* (1972) depicts the potentially disastrous dimensions of technological alienation and celebrates a somewhat romantic vision of Nature as the authentic human home. This is in contrast to Stanislaw Lem’s namesake novel that inspired the script and promotes the eminent triumph of technology. The other film is Tarkovsky’s biographical tribute to his mother, *The Mirror*, in which the everyday rhythms of life, the evanescence of memory, and the eruptions of historical traumas intermingle to give a non-linear account of subjectivity that simultaneously disrupts and subverts the dialectical. In the end, Tarkovsky died of cancer, while still in exile in Paris, France. List of Major Works *The Sacrifice* (1986)  *Nostalghia* (1983)  *Stalker* (1979)  *The Mirror* (1975)  *Solaris* (1972)  *Andrei Rublev* (1966)  *Ivan's Childhood* (1962)  *The Steamroller and the Violin* (1960) |
| Further reading:  (Bird)  (Kovacs)  (Green)  (Johnson)  (Tarkovsky)  (Guerra) |