

Conclusion

This book has been in the making for several years. Looking back today over the ground it covers, I feel the need to point towards some conclusions. I can see that the book lacks the unity it might have had if it had been written all at one go, but on the other hand it has some importance for me as a record of how my ideas have changed since I first came into cinema: the long-suffering readers of this volume have now witnessed the development of these ideas up to the present time.

Today it seems to me far more important to talk not so much about art in general or the function of cinema in particular, as about life itself; for the artist who is not conscious of its meaning is unlikely to be capable of making any coherent statement in the language of his own art. I have therefore decided to complete this book with some brief reflections on the problems of our time as they confront me now; on those aspects of them that seem to me fundamental, with a bearing beyond the present moment, to the meaning of our existence.

In order to define my own tasks, not only as an artist but, above all, as a person, I found myself having to look at the general state of our civilisation and the personal responsibility of every individual as participant in the historical process.

It seems to me that our age is the final climax of an entire historical cycle, in which supreme power has been wielded by the 'grand inquisitors', leaders, 'outstanding personalities', who were motivated by the idea of transforming society into a more 'just' and rational organisation. They sought to possess the consciousness of the masses, instilling them with new ideological and social ideas, bidding them reform the organisational structure of life for the sake of the happiness of the majority. Dostoevsky had warned people of the 'grand inquisitors' who presume to take upon themselves the responsibility for other people's happiness. We ourselves have seen how the assertion of class or group interests, accompanied by the invocation of the good of humanity and the 'general welfare', result in flagrant violations of the rights of the individual, who is fatally estranged from society; and how, on the strength of its 'objective',

'scientific' basis in 'historical necessity' this process comes to be mistaken for the basic, subjective reality of people's lives.

Throughout the history of civilisation, the historical process has essentially consisted of the 'right' way, the 'correct' way—a better one every time—conceived in the minds of the ideologues and politicians, being offered to people for the salvation of the world and the improvement of man's position within it. In order to be part of this process of reorganisation, 'the few' had each time to waive their own way of thinking and direct their efforts outside themselves to fit in with the proposed plan of action. Thus involved in dynamic outward activity for the sake of a 'progress' that would save the future and mankind, the individual forgot about all that was specifically, personally, and essentially his own; caught up in the general effort he came to underestimate the significance of his own spiritual nature, and the result has been an ever more irreconcilable conflict between the individual and society. Concerned for the interests of the many, nobody thought of his own in the sense preached by Christ: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' That is, love yourself so much that you respect in yourself the supra-personal, divine principle, which forbids you to pursue your acquisitive, selfish interests and tells you to give yourself, without reasoning or talking about it; to love others. This requires a true sense of your own dignity: an acceptance of the objective value and significance of the 'I' at the centre of your life on earth, as it grows in spiritual stature, advancing towards the perfection in which there can be no egocentricity. In the fight for your own soul, fidelity to yourself demands unceasing, single-minded effort. It is so much easier to slip down than it is to rise one iota above your own narrow, opportunist motives. A true spiritual birth is extraordinarily hard to achieve. It is all too easy to fall for the 'fishers of human souls'; to abandon your unique vocation ostensibly in pursuit of loftier and more general goals, and in doing so to by-pass the fact that you are betraying yourself and the life that was given to you for some purpose.

The pattern of social relationships has formed in such a way that it is possible for people to ask nothing of themselves, to feel exempt from all moral duty, and only to make demands of others, of humanity at large. They can invite others to be humble and sacrifice themselves, to accept their role in the building of the future, while they themselves take no part in the process and accept no personal responsibility for what is happening in the world. A thousand ways

can be found to justify this non-involvement and the fact that they don't want to give up their narrowly selfish interests in order to work for the nobler goal of their true vocation; nobody wants, or can bring himself, to look soberly into himself and accept that he is accountable for his own life and his own soul. On the premise that we are all 'together', in other words that mankind is in the process of constructing some kind of civilisation, we constantly turn away from personal liability and, without realising that we are doing so, shift on to others all responsibility for what happens. As a result, the conflict between the individual and society becomes increasingly desperate, and the wall of estrangement between the person and humanity grows ever higher.

The point is that we live in a society that has been structured by our 'concerted' efforts and not by the efforts of anyone in particular, in which the personality claims its rights of other people rather than of itself. Consequently the individual either becomes the instrument of other people's ideas and ambitions, or else he himself becomes a boss who shapes and uses other people's energies with no regard for the rights of the individual. The idea that everyone is responsible for himself seems to have vanished, to have fallen victim to a misconceived 'common good', in the service of which man acquires the right to be treated with a total lack of responsibility.

From the moment when we entrusted to others the solving of our own problems, the rift between the material and the spiritual has been growing. We live in a world governed by ideas which other people have evolved, and we either have to conform to the standards of these ideas or else alienate ourselves from them and contradict them—a position which becomes more and more hopeless.

It is, you will agree, a bizarre and grim situation.

I am convinced that the conflict can only be resolved if individual motivation concords with social movement. What is meant by 'sacrificing yourself to the general good'? Surely it betokens a tragic clash between the personal and the general? If a person's sense of responsibility for the future of society is not based on an inner conviction of the part he has to play, if he merely feels entitled to make use of other people, directing their lives for them and indoctrinating them with the idea of their role in the development of society, then the discord between the individual and society can only become more bitter.

Freedom of will must mean that we have the capacity to assess

social phenomena as well as our relationships with other people; to make a free choice between good and evil. But freedom is inseparable from conscience. And even if it is true that all the ideas developed by the social consciousness are the product of evolution, conscience at least has nothing to do with the historic process. Conscience, both as a sense and as a concept, is *a priori* immanent in man, and shakes the very foundations of the society that has emerged from our ill-conceived civilisation. Conscience works against the stabilisation of this society; its manifestations are often at variance with the advantages—or even the survival—of the species. In terms of biological evolution conscience has no meaning as a category; but for some reason it nevertheless is there, accompanying man throughout his existence and development as a race.

It is obvious to everyone that man's material aggrandisement has not been synchronous with spiritual progress. The point has been reached where we seem to have a fatal incapacity for mastering our material achievements in order to use them for our own good. We have created a civilisation which threatens to annihilate mankind.

In the face of disaster on that global scale, the one issue that has to be raised, it seems to me, is the question of a man's personal responsibility, and his willingness for sacrifice, without which he ceases to be a spiritual being in any real sense.

I mean that spirit of sacrifice which must constitute the essential and natural way of life of potentially every human being: not something to be regarded as a misfortune or punishment imposed from without. I mean the spirit of sacrifice which is expressed in the voluntary service of others, taken on naturally as the only viable form of existence.

And yet in the world today personal relationships are all too often based on the urge to grab as much as possible from the next person as we jealously protect our own interests. The paradox of such a situation is that the more we humiliate our fellow-men, the less satisfied we feel and the greater our isolation becomes. Such is the price of our sin in failing to turn, of our own free choice, to the heroic path of our own human fulfilment, accepting it with our whole heart and will as the one true way and the only thing we desire.

Anything less than such total acceptance will exacerbate the conflict between the individual and society; a man will see society as the agency of a violence done to him.

For the moment we are witnessing the decline of the spiritual

while the material long ago developed into an organism with its own bloodstream, and became the basis of our lives, paralysed and riddled with sclerosis. It is clear to everyone that material progress doesn't in itself make people happy, but all the same we go on fanatically multiplying its 'achievements'. We have reached the point where, as Stalker says, the present has essentially merged with the future, in the sense that it contains all the preconditions for imminent disaster; we recognise this and yet we can do nothing to stop it happening.

The connection between man's behaviour and his destiny has been destroyed; and this tragic breach is the cause of his sense of instability in the modern world. Essentially, of course, what a man does is of cardinal importance; but because he has been conditioned into the belief that nothing depends on him and that his personal experience will not affect the future, he has arrived at the false and deadly assumption that he has no part to play in shaping his own fate.

Our world has seen such a disruption of all that should bind the individual to society that it has become supremely important to restore man's participation in his own future. This requires that man should go back to believing in his soul and in its suffering, and link his own actions with his conscience. He has to accept that his conscience will never be at rest as long as what he does is at variance with what he believes; and recognise this through the pain of his soul as it demands he acknowledge his responsibility and his fault. This precludes self-justification through convenient and easy formulae about the fatal influence of other people—never of ourselves—upon what is happening. I am convinced that any attempt to restore harmony in the world can only rest on the renewal of personal responsibility.

Marx and Engels say somewhere that history chooses for its own development the worst of the existing variants, and this is true enough if one approaches the question from the point of view of our material existence. They reached that conclusion at a time when history had squeezed out the last few drops of idealism, when man as a spiritual being had ceased to be of significance in the historic process. They observed the situation as it was then, without analysing its causes: namely, man's failure to recognise that he was responsible for his own spirituality. Once man had turned history into a soulless and alienated machine, it immediately started to require human lives as the nuts and bolts that would keep it going.

Consequently man has come to be regarded first and foremost as a socially useful animal. (The only question is how to define social usefulness.) By emphasising the social usefulness of someone's activity to the point where the rights of the personality are ignored, we commit an unforgivable mistake and create all the preconditions for tragedy.

The issue of freedom raises the question of experience and upbringing. Modern man in his struggle for freedom demands personal liberation in the sense of license for the individual to do anything he wants. But that is an illusion of freedom; and man will only be heading for disenchantment if he pursues it. It takes a long, hard struggle on the part of the individual to liberate his spiritual energies. Upbringing has to be superseded by self-discipline; otherwise he will only be capable of understanding his newly acquired liberty in terms of vulgar consumerism.

In this respect, the situation in the West gives us ample food for thought. Incontrovertible democratic freedoms exist side by side with a monstrous and self-evident spiritual crisis affecting 'free' citizens. Why, despite the freedom of the individual, does the conflict between the person and society exist here in such an acute form? I think that the experience of the West proves that freedom cannot be taken for granted, like water from a spring that doesn't cost a penny and demands no moral effort from anybody; if that is how he sees it, man can never use the benefits of freedom to change his life for the better. Freedom is not something that can be incorporated into a man's life once and for all: it has to be constantly achieved through moral exertion. In relation to the outside world, man is essentially unfree because he is not alone; but inner freedom he has from the start, if only he can summon the courage and resolution to use it, accepting that his *inner* experience is of *social* significance.

The man who is truly free cannot be so in a selfish sense. Nor can individual freedom be the result of communal effort. Our future depends on no one but ourselves. Yet we have become used to paying for everything with other people's toil and other people's suffering—never our own. We refuse to take into account the simple fact that 'everything is connected in this world'; nothing can ever be fortuitous since we are endowed with free will and the right to choose between good and evil.

Naturally the opportunities for asserting your free will are limited by the will of others, but it must none the less be said that the failure



to be free is always the result of inner cowardice and passivity, of lack of determination in the assertion of your will in accordance with the voice of conscience.

In Russia people are fond of repeating Korolenko's²⁸ dictum to the effect that 'man is born for happiness like a bird for flight.' It seems to me that nothing could be further from the basis of human existence than those words. I can never see what meaning the concept of 'happiness' as such can actually have for any of us. Does it mean satisfaction? Harmony? But a person is never satisfied, for his sights are never ultimately set on specific finite ends, but on infinity itself. . . . Not even the Church can quench man's thirst for the Absolute, for unfortunately it only exists as a kind of appendage, copying or even caricaturing the social institutions by which our everyday life is organised. Certainly in today's world which leans so heavily towards the material and the technological, the Church shows no sign of being able to redress the balance with a call to a spiritual awakening.

In this situation it seems to me that art is called to express the absolute freedom of man's spiritual potential. I think that art was

Nostalgia
Memories of home.



Nostalgia
'the angel under the water.'

always man's weapon against the material things which threatened to devour his spirit. It is no accident that in the course of nearly two thousand years of Christianity, art developed for a very long time in the context of religious ideas and goals. Its very existence kept alive in discordant humanity the idea of harmony.

Art embodied an ideal; it was an example of perfect balance between moral and material principles, a demonstration of the fact that such a balance is not a myth existing only in the realm of ideology, but something that can be realised within the dimensions of the phenomenal world. Art expressed man's need of harmony and his readiness to do battle with himself, within his own personality, for the sake of achieving the equilibrium for which he longed.

Given that art expresses the ideal and man's aspiration towards the infinite, it cannot be harnessed to consumerist aims without being violated in its very nature . . . The ideal is concerned with things that do not exist in our own world as we know it, but it reminds us of what ought to exist on the spiritual plane. The work of art is a form given to this ideal which in the future must belong to mankind, but for the moment has to be for the few, and in the first instance for the genius who made it possible for human awareness, with all its limitations, to be in contact with the ideal incarnate in his art. In that sense art is by nature aristocratic; it differentiates between two levels of potential, thus ensuring progress from the lower to the higher as the personality moves towards spiritual perfection. Of course I am not suggesting any kind of class connotation when I use the word

'aristocratic', rather the contrary: since the soul seeks for moral justification and for the meaning of existence, and moves towards perfection in the course of that search, everyone is in the same position and all are equally entitled to be numbered among the spiritual elect. The essential division is between those who want to avail themselves of this possibility and those who ignore it. But again and again art invites people to re-evaluate themselves and their lives in the light of the ideal to which it gives form.

Korolenko's definition of the meaning of human existence as the right to happiness reminds me of the Book of Job, where exactly the opposite view is expressed: 'Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards.' In other words suffering is germane to our existence; indeed, how, without it, should we be able to 'fly upwards'. And what is suffering? Where does it come from? From dissatisfaction, from the gulf between the ideal and the point at which you find yourself? A sense of 'happiness' is far less important than being able to confirm your own soul in the fight for that freedom which is, in the true sense, divine.

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.

Why, as we look back, do we see the path of human history punctuated by cataclysms and disasters? What really happened to those civilisations? Why did they run out of breath, lack the will to live, lose their moral strength? Surely one cannot believe that it all happened simply from material shortages? Such a suggestion seems to me grotesque. Moreover I am convinced that we now find ourselves on the point of destroying another civilisation entirely as a result of failing to take account of the spiritual side of the historical process. We don't want to admit to ourselves that many of the

misfortunes besetting humanity are the result of our having become unforgivably, culpably, hopelessly materialistic. Seeing ourselves as the protagonists of science, and in order to make our scientific objectivity the more convincing, we have split the one, indivisible human process down the middle, thereby revealing a solitary, but clearly visible, spring, which we declare to be the prime cause of everything, and use it not only to explain the mistakes of the past but also to draw up our blueprint for the future. Or perhaps the fall of those civilisations means that *history* is waiting patiently for man to make the right choice, after which history will no longer be driven into an impasse and forced to cancel out one unsuccessful attempt after another in the hope that the next one may work. There is something in the widely held view that no lessons are learnt from history and that mankind takes no notice of what history has done. Certainly each successive catastrophe is evidence that the civilisation in question was misconceived; and when man is forced to start all over again, it can only be because up till then he has had as his aim something other than spiritual perfection.

In a sense art is an image of the completed process, of the culmination; an imitation of the possession of absolute truth (albeit only in the form of an image) obviating the long—perhaps, indeed, endless—path of history.

There are moments when one longs to rest, to hand it all over, to give it up, along with oneself, to some total world-view—like the Veda, for instance. The East was closer to the truth than the West; but Western civilisation devoured the East with its materialist demands on life.

Compare Eastern and Western music. The West is forever shouting, ‘This is me! Look at me! Listen to me suffering, loving! How unhappy I am! How happy! I! Mine! Me!’ In the Eastern tradition they never utter a word about themselves. The person is totally absorbed into God, Nature, Time; finding himself in everything; discovering everything in himself. Think of Taoist music.

. . . China six hundred years before Christ . . . But in that case, why did such a superb idea not triumph, why did it collapse? Why did the civilisation that grew up on such a foundation not come down to us in the form of a historic process brought to its consummation? They must have come into conflict with the materialistic world that surrounded them. Just as the personality comes into conflict with society, that civilisation clashed with



another. It perished not only for that reason, but also because of its confrontation with the materialist world of ‘progress’ and technology. But that civilisation was the final point of true knowledge, salt of the salt of the earth. And according to the logic of Eastern thought, conflict of any kind is essentially sinful.

We all live in the world as we imagine it, as we create it. And so, instead of enjoying its benefits, we are the victims of its defects.

Finally, I would enjoin the reader—confiding in him utterly—to believe that the one thing that mankind has ever created in a spirit of self-surrender is the artistic image. Perhaps the meaning of all human activity lies in artistic consciousness, in the pointless and selfless creative act? Perhaps our capacity to create is evidence that we ourselves were created in the image and likeness of God?

Nostalgia
Final shot: 'the inside the Ital

ANDREY TARKOVSKY



SCULPTING IN TIME

THE GREAT RUSSIAN FILMMAKER DISCUSSES HIS ART

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
KITTY HUNTER-BLAIR

"The most important director of our time."
—INGMAR BERGMAN

FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES: DIRECTORS AND STARS

"If *Sculpting in Time* could be distilled to a single message, it would be this: Content and conscience must come before technique—for any artist in any art form." —*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

ANDREY TARKOVSKY, the genius of modern Russian cinema—hailed by Ingmar Bergman as "the most important director of our time"—died an exile in Paris in December 1986. In *Sculpting in Time*, he has left his artistic testament, a remarkable revelation of both his life and work. Since *Ivan's Childhood* won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1962, the visionary quality and totally original and haunting imagery of Tarkovsky's films have captivated serious movie audiences all over the world, who see in his work a continuation of the great literary traditions of nineteenth-century Russia. Many critics have tried to interpret his intensely personal vision, but he himself always remained inaccessible.

In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky sets down his thoughts and his memories, revealing for the first time the original inspirations for his extraordinary films—*Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrey Rublyov*, *Solaris*, *The Mirror*, *Stalker*, *Nostalgia*, and *The Sacrifice*. He discusses their history and his methods of work, he explores the many problems of visual creativity, and he sets forth the deeply autobiographical content of part of his oeuvre—most fascinatingly in *The Mirror* and *Nostalgia*. The closing chapter on *The Sacrifice*, dictated in the last weeks of Tarkovsky's life, makes the book essential reading for those who already know or who are just discovering his magnificent work.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS
www.utexaspress.com
800.252.3206

ISBN 978-0-292-77624-1 US \$29.95
52995
9 780292 776241

Printed in USA