A Historical Analysis of the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky in Relation to the Post-Thaw Soviet Moment

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Abstract

During the latter half of the twentieth century, Andrei Tarkovsky received arguably more critical admiration for his films than any Soviet director. During his filmmaking career, the Soviet Union experienced a tumultuous socio-cultural, as well as political, moment. After the death of Stalin, the Khrushchev Thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s allowed for significantly more freedom of expression. It was at this time that Tarkovsky’s career began. However, through the 1960s and 1970s, a reactionary period in Soviet politics led to a return of stringent censorship, making Tarkovsky’s filmmaking process difficult. In the early 1980s, Tarkovsky emigrated to Western Europe, where he completed his final two films before his death in 1986.

Due to his contentious relationship with the Soviet state, this thesis will attempt to analyze Tarkovsky and assess his relationship to the Russian intelligentsia and the dissident movements of the late twentieth century, as well as his relationship with spirituality and religion. In order to contextualize Tarkovsky’s place in Russian cultural history, this project will first examine the history of the Russian intelligentsia from the early nineteenth century. Next, it will examine Tarkovsky’s early life, film school career, and various influences on his approach to filmmaking. His filmography proper, consisting of seven completed feature films (five in the USSR, two in Western Europe), will then be analyzed for their relationship to the Russian intelligentsia. His theoretical writings, diaries, and interviews will be used as supplementary materials in order to gain further access to his personal opinions and artistic philosophy.
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INTRODUCTION

Andrei Tarkovsky was one of the most popular and well-respected filmmakers in the Soviet Union from the 1960s to the 1980s. After releasing five feature narrative films in the USSR, he left his home country to live as an expatriate in western Europe, where he completed two more narrative films as well as a documentary. The use of religious, spiritual, and artistic themes in Andrei Tarkovsky’s films often conflicted with the state-sanctioned policies on these topics in the Soviet Union. Although he did not label himself a dissident, his tumultuous relationship with the Soviet Union regarding the freedom of his artistic expression inspired him to delve deeper into these themes in his work.¹ The widespread appeal of his films confirms that many people, both in the Soviet Union and abroad, were not as strictly supportive of Soviet policies as the state would have hoped.²

This project will attempt to analyze how Tarkovsky thought of himself as an artist who constantly struggled with the authoritarian powers of his state over art, and consequently how themes of artistic expression manifested in his work. It will also examine Tarkovsky’s spirituality and relationship with religion. The history of the Russian intelligentsia will provide background information into the intellectual and cultural climate in which Tarkovsky operated. Additionally, given his lukewarm relationship with the Soviet state and his eventual expatriation from the country, he will be compared to the more publicly blatant examples of religious and artistic dissidents in the USSR from this period. An understanding of the prevalence of religious rhetoric and non-conformist art in both Soviet and Russian history is also required in order to comprehend how potentially radical the themes in Tarkovsky’s films were in the Soviet Union.

¹ Sean Martin, Andrei Tarkovsky (North Pomfret: Pocket Essentials, 2005), 82-85.
² Martin, Andrei Tarkovsky, 85.
The secondary research for this project can be organized into three clusters. The first deals with Andrei Tarkovsky and Soviet filmmaking as both an industry and an artistic style. The subgroups of this category include sources on Tarkovsky’s life in general, those about his work, others about the contemporaneous state of Soviet filmmaking during the years he was active in the USSR, and broader histories about Soviet film as a discipline ranging from its earliest days until the early 1990s. The second cluster of secondary sources incorporates literature on the history of the Russian intelligentsia. These sources will be used to offer readers a view into the ideological foundations of dissident movements in the Soviet Union, which will allow them to better understand Tarkovsky’s work in that context. The final cluster of secondary sources examines Soviet art and religion, especially during the 1960s through the 1980s. These sources range from general histories on these topics to specific literature on state-sanctioned art, Soviet religious policies, and various dissident and non-conformist movements that existed at this time.

The primary evidence used in this project can also fall into three major categories. The first is the films of Andrei Tarkovsky. Due to the fact that Tarkovsky was a filmmaker, his films offer a direct consideration into his art, and thus his artistic motivations. When the analysis of his films is combined with secondary research, as well as screenplays and his written thoughts, one can come to a more complete understanding of his artistic approaches. The second group includes Tarkovsky’s personal writings, including his diaries and Sculpting in Time, his book outlining his thoughts on film and art. These sources will help complement his films by revealing his personal thoughts about his films, the Soviet state, his spirituality, and a whole manner of other things. The final category is his interviews, which gives a view into his relationship with his audience. By reading how he interacted with journalists and what kind of questions he was asked, his personal opinions on a wide range of matters become more easily understood.
The most obvious primary sources to examine when discussing Tarkovsky are his films. This project will examine his student films, *The Killers* (1956), *There Will Be No Leave Today* (1959), and *The Steamroller and the Violin* (1961). However, the focus of this project will fall on his seven professional, feature length films: *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *The Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979), *Nostalghia* (1983), and *The Sacrifice* (1986).

By studying the production elements of these films, particularly mise-en-scene (visual themes of the film, such as setting, lighting, costumes, and performances of the actors), cinematography, editing, and sound, one can see directly how Tarkovsky’s vision manifested itself on screen, and how religion and art played into his films thematically. In *Ivan’s Childhood*, Tarkovsky used various filmic devices to advance his artistic goals, including nonlinear editing and precise production design that accentuated the film’s themes. One of these themes, that of childhood and lost innocence, is accentuated by dream sequences and magical realist elements that would become commonplace in Tarkovsky’s films and help him convey his personal spirituality on screen. His next film, *Andrei Rublev*, most directly deals with the themes of art and religion, as it follows the life of the eponymous Russian icon painter. The religious imagery in this film is unparalleled in any of his other works, with churches, icons, monks, and other religious symbols being used heavily. In two of his next three films, *Solaris* and *Stalker*, he experimented with science fiction. He used this genre to explore various psychological themes and the nature of spirituality, as well as to refine his films as visual poetry. Between the release of these two films, he made the semi-autobiographical *The Mirror*. This film is also a work of visual poetry, with a nonlinear narrative that is conveyed with stream of conscious dialogue interspersed with

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poetic voiceovers of original works by his father, the poet Arseny Tarkovsky.\(^5\) His final two films, *Nostalghia* and *The Sacrifice*, were completed abroad. *Nostalghia* uses Tarkovsky’s magical realist filmmaking techniques to thematically explore nostalgia as a topic. This is especially poignant as this was his first film produced outside of the Soviet Union, and the nostalgia of the film reflected his own feelings for his homeland.\(^6\) *The Sacrifice* returns to a more directly religious theme that juxtaposes Christianity with a more pagan interpretation of religion.\(^7\)

The primary function in examining the screenplays of Tarkovsky’s films is to understand their literary framework. Although the screenplays to each of these films is a useful source due to giving an English translation of his scripts, the most important ones are those which Tarkovsky actually wrote. Although he worked on the screenplay for most of his films in some capacity (he collaborated with other screenwriters fairly often throughout his career), he did not write *Ivan’s Childhood* or *Stalker*. However, these screenplays, along with that of *Solaris*, help explain Tarkovsky’s approach to adapting written work for the screen. When examining the screenplays that he wrote, it is interesting to look at his formatting choices. Instead of using a typical script format, which concretely separates dialogue and scene descriptions, Tarkovsky writes his screenplays like a dialogue-heavy novel. This would make sense given Tarkovsky’s respect for and his desire to be included in Russian literary traditions, which he admires from an artistic standpoint.\(^8\) In this project, the screenplays will mostly be used to provide clarity to the wider story depicted in the films, but their inclusion is an important step in understanding Tarkovsky’s filmography at an artistic level.

\(^7\) Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky*, 194.  
Due to his opinions on filmmaking as an art form, as well as his regard for his own abilities as a filmmaker, Tarkovsky produced a plethora of written sources during his career that gave readers a more detailed understanding of his personal opinions and ideas than his films ever could. Many of these sources delivered his theoretical thoughts on film as an artistic medium, such as his book *Sculpting in Time* (1986). Furthermore, his translated diaries between 1970 and his death in 1986 allow for a degree of access to Tarkovsky on a personal level unparalleled by the other sources examined for this project.

Tarkovsky’s most in depth theoretical work was his 1986 book *Sculpting in Time*. This source provides Tarkovsky’s musings on filmmaking and art in general, as well as revealing his inspirations for his various movies. The book is organized into chapters focusing on each of his films. A common theme throughout this source is Tarkovsky’s views on artistic forms and art in general. He often discusses how art is used to form a framework for various cultures that can then be built upon by subsequent artists. He uses Luis Buñuel as an example of this idea. Tarkovsky sees Buñuel as creating art steeped in Spanish cultural traditions ranging from Cervantes and El Greco to Picasso and Dalí.9 He also ties himself to this idea, linking himself intrinsically to Russian culture going back to Andrei Rublev’s icons, which he sees as the beginning of a distinctly Russian culture. Tarkovsky also briefly discusses religion at some points in this source. Although he might not have described himself as being as outwardly religious as the religious dissidents of this time, he was a practitioner of Russian Orthodoxy, and thus believed in some higher power.10 This puts him at odds with the atheism of the Soviet state.

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Although Tarkovsky reveals a fair amount of his opinions on topics such as religion in *Sculpting in Time*, his diaries provide a much more in depth view into his personal thoughts. Therefore, one of the most important sources for this project will be *Time within Time: The Diaries 1970-1986*. In this collection of his diaries, which span much of his career, he discusses topics ranging from his personal life to the reception of his films by different critics and audiences.\(^1\) He also discusses the reasons why he chose to work on his various films, which he also did in *Sculpting in Time*. One of the more interesting themes of these diary entries is his thoughts on religion. As he did in *Sculpting in Time*, he does not shy away from discussing God or other religious topics, as one would expect someone to do in the atheistic Soviet Union. Instead, he defines God as that which is unknown, as well as being a moral sense of love.\(^2\) His thoughts on religion, and specifically God, as being representative of the unknown provides a certain amount of artistic fuel for his films throughout his career.

The final category of primary sources for this thesis consists of interviews given by Tarkovsky. Although there are a few interviews that remain inaccessible for this project due to the lack of English translations, there is a comprehensive collection of English translations of twenty-two of his interviews throughout the entirety of his professional career (1962-1986) in the book *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews*, published in 2006. There are two major reasons why this source will be important for this project. The first is that, by looking at these interviews, one can better understand how Tarkovsky interacted with his critics, and how these critics thought of Tarkovsky. This point is particularly important because most of the contemporary criticism of Tarkovsky’s work in the Soviet Union is written in Russian and has not been translated. The second reason is that, in many of the interviews in the book, Tarkovsky is asked to explain his

\(^{12}\) Tarkovsky, *Time within Time*, 11.
upcoming film projects. When combined with his retrospective thoughts on his films in sources like Sculpting in Time, this provides a fuller understanding of his artistic process from his earliest thoughts on the proposed films to the finished, distributed products he makes.

The first section of this project will offer background into the history of the Russian intelligentsia. By tracing its social, cultural, and intellectual roots back to the early nineteenth century, a foundational understanding of the history of Russian cultural dissent can be traced through the end of the Russian Empire and earliest years of the Soviet Union, past the Stalinist era, and into the Khrushchev Thaw, during which Tarkovsky’s filmmaking career began. The most useful sources in the initial segment will be secondary literature that explores the histories of the various groups that made up the intelligentsia over the years. An understanding of the cultural climate of the Russian intelligentsia and the early Soviet Union will also show the reader the artistic atmosphere into which Tarkovsky developed his filmmaking style.

The second section will deal directly with the life and works of Andrei Tarkovsky. The initial subsection here will outline his influences, using secondary sources to highlight his personal thoughts and connections to movements like Italian Neo-Realism, the French New Wave, and the golden age of Japanese cinema, as well as using both primary and secondary sources to outline his personal history. Next, close readings of each of his films will reveal the thematic intricacies that relate to the questions posed by this project. Each film will be carefully contextualized based on setting; they will be discussed in the order in which they were released, and their relationship to physical setting will be considered (for example, Ivan’s Childhood was made in the Soviet Union, whereas Nostalghia was filmed in Italy). In order to support the

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14 Martin, Andrei Tarkovsky, 18-19.
findings of the close readings of his films, other primary sources involving Tarkovsky, namely his written theories, diaries, and interviews, will be consulted throughout these sections. Throughout these sections, connections will be made between Tarkovsky and his films and the Soviet dissident movements and the contemporary Russian intelligentsia.

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA AND SOVIET DISSIDENT MOVEMENTS

In order to contextualize Andrei Tarkovsky’s placement within the dissident movements of the late-Soviet era, one must first consider the history of these socio-politically active cultural groups which can be traced back to the intelligentsia class in the early nineteenth century. The Russian intelligentsia preceded the Soviet Union by about a century, and were instrumental in creating it. They initially grew as a reaction to attempts by the Russian Empire to modernize in the model of its Western European counterparts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They can be defined in the most general sense as “distinguishable from both intellectual workers and pure intellectuals, from the former by their concern with ultimate questions, and from the latter by their active commitment to human self-fulfillment.” Various incarnations of the Russian intelligentsia throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century laid the groundwork for the eventual Bolshevik revolutions that led to the development of the Soviet Union in 1917. However, as Lenin and later Stalin solidified dictatorial power in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s, a new intelligentsia manifested itself in order to combat the strict cultural limitations

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imposed by the new state. Under Stalin, until his death in 1953, this movement struggled against stringent censorship and persecution. This changed following Nikita Khrushchev’s rise to power after Stalin’s death, during which cultural expression flourished in a time known as the Thaw. Nonetheless, this period of alleviation from repressive censorship dissipated by the 1960s, after which new dissident movements in the tradition of the Russian intelligentsia developed contemporaneously with the Soviet career of Tarkovsky.

From a political vantage point, the intelligentsia formed as “an unintended consequence of actions taken by Russia’s rulers to establish Russia on an equal footing with other European powers.” Socially, its rise can be attributed to changes in the dvorianstvo, or the gentry, who were given a significant role in the modernization process, but who could not be granted all of the reforms which they desired as recompense. It is important to note that, although its origins can be traced to the dvorianstvo, the Russian intelligentsia was by no means a gentry-centric movement. However, due to their social standing, they had more possibilities to expand their intellectual ideals at this time. The Decembrist revolt, an early clash between the intelligentsia and the state, occurred in 1825 as an uprising aimed with accruing the reduction of Tsarist autocracy, constitutional reforms, and the emancipation of serfs. Although it ultimately failed, the organizational framework established by the movement provided a model for revolutionary and dissident groups throughout both Imperial Russian and Soviet history. Following the Decembrist revolt, and throughout the reign of Nicholas I, the intelligentsia encountered a prolonged period of reactionary policies that lasted until the 1850s. However, this period also marked the early rise of such socialists and anarchists as Herzen and Bakunin, who would continue to play an important role in the pre-revolutionary era intelligentsia later in the

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The model this period set forth for textual and ideological dissemination during a period of reactionary censorship can be seen being mirrored in other points in Russian and Soviet history, including the post-Thaw period during which Tarkovsky was making his films.

The Russian defeat in the Crimean War and the reactionary policies of Nicholas I led to a new movement in the intelligentsia known as Nihilism. This movement was seen as a rejection of the traditional aspects of culture and society, and could cement its doctrine in “materialism, utilitarianism, and scientism.” By the 1870s, a more revolutionary wave of Nihilism, typified by the spread of conspiracies and the use of more violence, particularly assassination attempts (one of which against the Tsar succeeded in 1881), became prevalent, paving the way to the more volatile revolutions to follow in the early twentieth century. With the rise of the Populist movement after Alexander II emancipated the serfs in 1861, theorists such as Peter Lavrov began to define the intelligentsia as distinguishable from amoral intellectuals due to the former’s contemplation of social consequences as opposed to a pure interest in science. The rise of the Nihilist and Populist movements, combined with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and the impending rise of Marxist thought, pushed the intelligentsia to its most radical incarnation yet in what is called the Revolutionary era, which lasted from the late nineteenth century to the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917.

Following the October Revolution of 1917 and the ascendency of the Bolshevik Party to power, the intelligentsia was split in its support of the new political regime. A small minority of

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19 Pomper, The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia, 49-52.
21 Pomper, The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia, 71.
22 Pomper, The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia, 79.
23 Pomper, The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia, 105.
24 Pomper, The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia, 144.
them supported the change. However, a more prevalent subset of the intelligentsia was not as enthused by the evolving socio-political landscape. This group was “gripped with a deep pessimism, taking the collapse of the rule of the bourgeoisie, a class which they considered to be the only bearer of culture, as the death of culture in general.”

However, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, there was little curtailing of artistic expression. In the years following, during which Lenin was in power, artistic movements began to dispel with the more Romantic aspects of art, focusing instead, in the words of Boris Pasternak, on “what mattered most, about how to live and what to live for.” These stripped-down aesthetics laid the groundwork for what would become socialist realism, the state-sponsored artistic style that arose under the premiership of Joseph Stalin. In the early 1930s, Stalin imposed new modes of censorship and literary regulation that solidified socialist realism as the official artistic movement of the Soviet state. 

During the Stalinist era, the intelligentsia experienced drastic limitations on their expressive freedom. However, works that rebelled against socialist realism did exist at this point. Mikhail Bulgakov, for example, wrote his satirical *The Master and Margarita* during the 1930s. However, publishing proved to be difficult. Thus, around this time, modes of self-publication and hand-to-hand dissemination of literature were prevalent, a practice that would continue throughout the history of oppressive Soviet policies towards the arts.

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, relaxed censorship led to a period known as the Thaw, which lasted into the 1960s under Nikita Khrushchev. The driving force of the Soviet intelligentsia that existed around this time has been identified by Vladislav Zubok as “Zhivago’s

27 Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia*, 145-150.
28 Kemp-Welch, *Stalin and the Literary Intelligentsia*, 250-156.
Children,” after the eponymous character in Pasternak’s novel *Doctor Zhivago.* Zhivago’s Children came about from the explosion of higher education in the late 1940s, as well as the shared experiences of living through World War II. The destructive events of the war, combined with a certain sense of patriotism that resulted from the victory, helped shape the worldview of Zhivago’s Children (and, incidentally, Tarkovsky himself, who explored these feelings with his 1962 film *Ivan’s Childhood*). From an artistic standpoint, members of the intelligentsia began to see the revolution as being “betrayed” since under Stalin they “were servants of the repressive regime.” Due to the stringent censorship of the Stalinist regime, the younger members of the intelligentsia pursued their own forms of artistic expression, which developed further following the death of Stalin and the Khrushchev Thaw. Members of the Thaw generation were often influenced by international styles of film, music, and other modes that managed to permeate into the Soviet Union following the collapse of Stalinist policies. Eventually, the freedom of the Thaw experienced by Zhivago’s Children waned in the 1960s. It was into this cultural environment that Tarkovsky made most of his films in the Soviet Union.

**TARKOVSKY’S EARLY LIFE AND RISE TO FAME**

Tarkovsky’s childhood and early adulthood (from his birth in 1932 until his matriculation in the State Institute for Cinematography in 1954) set him up with the appropriate tools to excel as an artist later in life. Both his grandfather and his father were poets. Although his father left

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his family in the late 1930s, the poetic influence he had on his young son remained throughout Tarkovsky’s career. He was also profoundly influenced by his mother, Maria, who worked in publishing. He would retrospectively describe his mother as the primary reason for him developing into the artistic filmmaker he eventually became. He even went so far as to make the character of Maria in his semi-autobiographical film *The Mirror* a central piece to the story. However, despite the large influence both of his parents’ artistic inclinations had on his eventual filmmaking career, Tarkovsky would often rebel as a child, preferring to daydream more often than complete his studies, and could only be calmed by reading. His rebellious, daydream-focused childhood and his affinity for literature led to a development of an interest in dreams as an artistic theme. After briefly enrolling in the School of Oriental Languages to learn Arabic and taking part in a year-long geological surveying expedition to Siberia in the early 1950s, where his interest in the natural environment deepened, he entered the State Institute for Cinematography. Here, he studied under the tutelage of Soviet director Mikhail Romm, whose unorthodox teaching methods allowed Tarkovsky to thrive.

At the State Institute of Cinematography, Tarkovsky not only studied the major figures in Soviet film history, but also important filmmakers from outside the Soviet Union. His studies of directors such as Orson Welles, John Ford, and Jean Renoir introduced him to varying filmic techniques that were not as prevalent in Soviet cinema. Eventually, new cinematic movements, such as the French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, Japanese new cinema, and various other “new waves,” played significant roles in forming Tarkovsky’s filmic language. Directors such as

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Ingmar Bergman of Sweden, Robert Bresson of France, Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni from Italy, and Akira Kurosawa from Japan influenced Tarkovsky’s approach in various ways. His use of long takes, nontraditional musical scores, intensive rehearsal processes to create realistic performances, and ascetic approach are elements common in the cinema of the French New Wave, whereas the heavy use of symbolic natural elements is a frequent device used by Kurosawa.

Tarkovsky’s first three films, completed as a student at the State Institute of Cinematography, offer a glimpse of an artist refining his craft. His first film, *The Killers*, was an adaptation of an Ernest Hemingway short story of the same name. Due to a limited budget and a low supply of equipment, he produced the film as a collaboration with two other students. Stylistically, it contained elements of film noir; this exemplified Tarkovsky’s growing interests in foreign cinema. His next film, *There Will Be No Leave Today*, brought him the closest stylistically of any of his films to socialist realism due to the triumphant imagery of the soldiers. However, it also showed the influence of Italian Neorealism because of the use of actual soldiers and army supplies instead of having a cast made entirely of actors who used props. His final student film, *The Steamroller and the Violin*, reveals a filmmaker coming into his own unique style. Its oneiric imagery and highly poetic feel reverberates throughout the future of Tarkovsky’s filmography.

Tarkovsky’s first student film, *The Killers*, was a nineteen-minute adaptation (at his own insistence) of a short story by Ernest Hemingway. Like some of the pieces in Tarkovsky’s future filmography, the film highlighted the filmmaker’s literary affinity due to its origin as a written work. Due to stringent budgetary restrictions at the school, as well as a lack of equipment needed to complete individual projects, the film was a collaborative effort between Tarkovsky and two
of his classmates, Alexander Gordon and Marika Beiku.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, Tarkovsky did not direct the entire film, but rather co-directed the first scene and the final scene. Although his trademark dreamlike cinematic techniques and use of naturally poetic long takes was not yet apparent, the film earned him the respect of Romm. Stylistically, the film borrowed heavily from Western cinema: besides the fact that it was an adaptation of the work of an American author, it took visual cues from the popular film noir genre due to its black and white coloring, the smooth closeness of the dialogue, and the importance of gangsters to the plot.\textsuperscript{38} The success of this film led to an increase in budget from the school for his following film.\textsuperscript{39}

His second film, \textit{There Will Be No Leave Today}, was far more of a professional production than \textit{The Killers}. This was due in large part to the fact that the State Institute of Cinematography co-produced the film with Russian Television, allowing for both an increased budget and the ability for the filmmakers to hire professional actors. Like with his previous film, Tarkovsky co-directed \textit{There Will Be No Leave Today} with Alexander Gordon.\textsuperscript{40} The film’s style is notable among the works in Tarkovsky’s filmography for being the closest to a Soviet propaganda piece. Its depiction of triumphant soldiers and the masses follows the guidelines of a socialist realist film. However, Gordon has been quoted saying that their intention was not creating a great work of art, but rather on “learning the elementaries of filmmaking.”\textsuperscript{41} Like Tarkovsky’s previous film, the influence of foreign film styles was prevalent in \textit{There Will Be No Leave Today}. Outside of the principal cast, most of the characters in the film were played by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Martin, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky}, 50.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Although the use of black and white can mostly be attributed to budgetary restrictions for students, its stylistic use as a nod to film noir is apparent given the way it plays with shadows in the frame and creates a foreboding mood with its lighting.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Martin, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky}, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Martin, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky}, 53-55.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Martin, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky}, 55.
\end{itemize}
non-actors, which was a commonly used technique in Italian Neorealist film in the 1940s. The influx of foreign films in the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev Thaw was instrumental in allowing Tarkovsky to gain an understanding of these different filmic movements.

For his diploma film, Tarkovsky made *The Steamroller and the Violin*, which was released in 1961. The short film was his first solo project. As opposed to his first two student films, it contained visual elements that would eventually dominate his work, including the use of dreamscapes. Imagery such as water, mirrors, birds, and reflecting lights, which he would use frequently in his future films, figure prominently here. Another common Tarkovskian element is the use of child protagonist, which would occur again in *Ivan’s Childhood* and *The Mirror*.

An important aspect of the film is the emphasis on artistic individuality, the separation of the artist from society, and the intrinsic power of art on people. In the film, the character of Sasha (the child violinist) captivates Sergei (the steamroller) with his musical talents. Tarkovsky would continue to make films that paralleled his view of himself as an artist and used art as a theme throughout his career.

*Ivan’s Childhood*

Following the excellent reception of his diploma film, Tarkovsky was hired to complete production of *Ivan’s Childhood*. The film, based on the short story “Ivan” by Vladimir Bogomolov, was initially going to be directed by Eduard Abalov, but due to underwhelming

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reviews from Soviet officials he was relieved in late 1960 and replaced by Tarkovsky the following year. The film contained many common elements found in the cinema of the Khrushchev Thaw. Firstly, the starkly realistic depictions of war differed greatly from the heroic representation of Soviet soldiers found in socialist realist films. Additionally, the theme of lost innocence due to the harsh conditions of the wartime Soviet Union connected deeply with the Thaw generation, whose members grew up during World War II and its immediate aftermath. Further themes, including memory and dreams, depict a further development of Tarkovsky’s signature filmmaking style. The popularity and positive critical reception of the film effectively launched Tarkovsky’s career as a well-known Soviet filmmaker to both domestic and international audiences.

An important aspect of Ivan’s Childhood as a historical drama set in World War II was its depiction of war on screen. In response to a question about what he wanted to convey in the film, Tarkovsky said, “I wanted to convey all my hatred of war. I chose childhood because it is what contrasts most with war… When the film begins, [Ivan] is in the midst of the war.” The use of a child protagonist allows for a level of separation from the violent plot while at the same time inserting the audience into the frontlines. While Tarkovsky was a child during World War II, he claimed in interviews that the merit of his film came from his lack of an adult understanding of the experience. He described his film as a unique expression as a result:

It is impossible to see the war through the eyes of those who consciously experienced it. In my film, I try to see it through the eyes of a person of my age. I am judging the past from a contemporary point of view. I am illustrating what I could have experienced if I had taken part. I have witnessed how war can mentally cripple someone. And today, the

Tarkovsky and Gianvito, Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews, 3.
problem of war has to be solved again by my generation; it is the most relevant of all
topics, but our new point of view forces us to find new forms for it.46

Visuals of nature were also used to supplement the wartime depictions in the film. The swampy
landscapes of the frontlines created a sense of dread for the viewer on behalf of the soldiers.47

The dialectical nature of wartime realities was also shown, as the bleak frontlines were
contrasted jarringly in the film with the calm natural environment a few miles back.

Expanding upon the use of a child protagonist combined with depictions of war as a
bleak space contrasted with calmer, brighter peacetime scenes, Tarkovsky explored the theme of
lost innocence in Ivan’s Childhood. The birch forest that featured in the film provided a
temporary escape from the realities of war. However, although the characters were able to
separate themselves physically from the frontlines, there was an ever-present idea that the war
still existed directly beyond the boundaries of the woods.48 Thus, the mental strain of the war
weighs heavily upon the characters, especially Ivan, whose reality becomes defined by the
desolate violence around him. Tarkovsky often offered sharply conflicting visuals in the same
frame, contrasting childhood in the foreground of a shot with war in the background.49 This
created a sense of uneasiness in Ivan’s youth, suggesting to the audience that the childhood they
are witnessing is abnormal. Tarkovsky also uses engravings by Dürer to highlight the realities
Ivan is experiencing.50

Tarkovsky’s ability to construct visual dreamscapes and conjure up images of memory
helped him construct Ivan’s Childhood as a filmic poem. In doing this, he eschewed the popular

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46 Tarkovsky and Gianvito, Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews, 7-8.
49 Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky, 71.
50 Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky, 95.
prevalence of plot as a narrative tool in favor of a more visceral feeling: “The film isn’t built upon plot, but rests on the opposition between war and feelings of the child. This child’s entire family has been killed.” Tarkovsky uses nature imagery to create a poetic feeling of physical space. This includes visuals of trees in the foreground around which the characters move with an almost fantastical speed. However, although Tarkovsky embraces the poetic nature of his film, he chooses not to situate himself with contemporary Soviet poets, saying, “Soviet poetry is developing upon a different ground than that of the young cinema … I prefer conciseness, a more concentrated mode of expression.”

*Ivan’s Childhood* received rave reviews from both contemporary critics in the Soviet Union and throughout the international cinematic world. Perhaps its greatest achievement was the fact that it was awarded the Golden Lion, the highest prize at the prestigious Venice Film Festival, in 1962. While *Ivan’s Childhood* received positive reviews from Tarkovsky’s contemporaries, it received further acclaim from across the Soviet Union as a whole, such as from the older generation of Russian filmmakers, much to his surprise. Due to the positive reception of the film, Soviet critics attempted to argue that Tarkovsky represented a “Soviet New Wave” of cinema, but he rejected this label: “In terms of a special trend in the USSR, there is no ‘New Wave.’ Being in my thirties, I simply belong to the youngest generation of Russian filmmakers. My generation tries very seriously to explore the relationship between form and content. This issue was never addressed thoroughly enough in Russian cinema, and my generation is the first to really think about the fact that it can lead to vulgarization if the topic has

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too much influence on the form.” He in part attributes what he sees as the lack of a Soviet New Wave to the artistic possibilities brought about by the Khrushchev Thaw. He argued that, due to the lessened restrictions on artistic expression, filmmakers could create a personal style. Thus, his film could not fall into a grouping of several Soviet directors as they each differed from each other stylistically, allowing for him to explore filmmaking techniques not frequently used by others in the USSR.

**ANDREI RUBLEV AND ITS CONNECTION TO DISSIDENT ARTISTIC AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

Andrei Tarkovsky’s 1966 film *Andrei Rublev* was the second feature film he directed. For the film, Tarkovsky wished to explore the artistic process of an individual in a repressive Russian society, which he felt mirrored his own career as a filmmaker; he wished to portray Rublev “as the incarnation of the humanistic and nationalistic yearnings of the Russian culture of the times.” Due to its subject matter, the film covers a wide variety of themes, including religion, art, and the cultural history of Russia. This film serves as a focal point that can be used to contextualize Tarkovsky among the contemporaneous religious and artistic moods of the Soviet Union. After the success of his first feature film, *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962), he wished to push his filmmaking talents further by exploring the complex and controversial themes stated above. However, by doing this, he drew the ire of the Soviet state, who refused to release *Andrei Rublev* in the USSR until 1971 in a censored version. Throughout the remainder of his career, he would

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have a contentious artistic relationship with the Soviet state, often fighting over what content should be included or cut.58 This strife would eventually lead Tarkovsky to depart the USSR in 1982 in order to complete his final two films outside of the restrictions of the Soviet film industry.

One of the most controversial themes in *Andrei Rublev* is that of religion. Although Tarkovsky appeared to be more interested in exploring Rublev’s role as an artist in Russian society, the fact that he chose an icon painter meant that the film includes heavy use of religious imagery and various religious devices. This theme accounted for a major deviation from the state-sponsored atheism of the Soviet Union. The film marked a stark contrast to the socialist realism that could be found in most Soviet films and art at this time. The use of religious themes during this post-Thaw era tended to be used more heavily in nonconformist art. Additionally, although practicing religion was frowned upon by the Soviet state, there were several religious dissident groups that continued to practice their faiths underground.

An early example of religious imagery in *Andrei Rublev* is the high quantity of characters in the clergy. The main character, as well as many of his peers, are monks; many of these monks play important roles in the first few chapters of the film.59 Besides Andrei Rublev, the two most prominent monk characters are Daniil and Kirill, who also happen to be icon painters. Tarkovsky envisioned each monk to represent a different type of artistic character: Rublev the humanist, Daniil the self-reflective, and Kirill the ambitious.60 In the first chapter, “The Jester,” a fool character disparages the three monks for their religious profession. This is reminiscent of a typical Soviet response to religion. Tarkovsky uses this scene to highlight how different artists

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59 The film follows an unorthodox plot structure organized around chapters, rather than acts and scenes.
can be disparaged by a system such as the Soviets (represented by the fool) even though they represent different ideals. Tarkovsky, the humanist, differs radically in his artistic approach than Kirill, who wants to become famous more for personal reasons than artistic ones. However, they are both treated with the same indignation by the jester.

In addition to the prevalence of members of the clergy in *Andrei Rublev*, religious buildings and spaces are prominently featured. The prologue features a man named Yefim launching a rudimentary hot air balloon from the top of a church tower as a multitude of angry people attack the church to prevent him from taking off. The balloon symbolizes the attempt to achieve artistic greatness; the mob views Yefim’s attempt to launch off a church as an assault on their culture, whereas Tarkovsky would rather it be viewed as an advancement to a new cultural state like that achieved later in the film by Andrei Rublev. In the first chapter, the three monks depart from the Andronikov Monastery in order to seek new work. This situates their preexisting culture as being centered around the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution. Rublev is later commissioned to assist a famed icon painter named Theophanes the Greek at the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow. Although the cathedral remains unseen, Rublev’s journey to Moscow comprises several of the film’s chapters. Later, when Rublev is working in a church in Vladimir, the city is attacked by a Tatar force that causes widespread damage and suffering. He gives up painting and takes on a vow of silence after killing a man in the raid, but eventually is convinced to not squander his natural talents at another church. The various church settings not only give *Andrei Rublev* a place to work, but also a place where he can contemplate the spirituality and meaning of his various artistic endeavors.

In order to understand the significance of Andrei Rublev as a historical figure, one must contemplate the characteristics of icons. Russian icons developed from the iconographic tradition of the Byzantine Empire. Thus, “among graphic arts, the icon took first place in Russian life …
we may call the icon the chief expression of religious thought and popular feeling [in Russia]."61

By using an icon painter as his film’s subject, Tarkovsky wanted to depict the life and experiences of an artist in a distinctly Russian setting: “The issue [with Andrei Rublev] is not to make a historical film, but to reveal the talent of a painter whose work has acquired enormous importance over time. I am trying to make the fuga temporum palpable, to show the relationship between time and the artist.”62 The life of Rublev as depicted in the film are thus reminiscent of Tarkovsky’s own experience as a Russian artist.

By illustrating the life of a prominent figure in the history of Russian Orthodox iconography, Tarkovsky revealed his interest in a faith that had undergone extreme repression in the Soviet Union. Orthodox intellectuals in the first decade of the twentieth century were influenced heavily by the greater Russian intelligentsia, and thus hoped to distance the church from the perceived corruption of the higher clergy and the imperial government.63 In the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, although Orthodox believers were not immediately pressured to forego their faith, the longstanding structure of the church received heavy criticism and was ultimately dismantled. Many believers simply abandoned their faith, which they had treated with indifference but continued to follow due to its political connections with the Empire.64 Eventually, the young Soviet state attempted to manipulate a revival in Orthodox belief in the 1920s in order to undermine their resurging influence among the people. As Stalin came to power, the state tried to suppress the remaining power of the church due to its

64 Alexeyeva, Soviet Dissent, 246.
poor standing following this failed resurgence. Under Stalin, many practitioners of Russian Orthodoxy, especially members of the clergy, were persecuted. The state also became responsible for organizing the structure of the Orthodox clergy during the war, as they reestablished the Patriarchate. This system of state dominance over the church held throughout the Thaw. As the Thaw generation began to subside, however, Orthodox believers and clergy members sought more control over their religious practices. Thus, around the time that Tarkovsky was producing most of his films in the Soviet Union, religious sentiment was growing more heated due to the rise of these dissident movements.

Tarkovsky’s main goal in making *Andrei Rublev* was to explore a specific type of artistic process, specifically the humanistic approach of the eponymous character. He wished to reflect Rublev’s artistic process with his own by exploring “the personality of the artist in relation to his time.” By comparing himself to Rublev, Tarkovsky could depict the life of an artist living in a culturally repressive state. He also examined the importance of autodidactism for those under authoritarian rule. In order to accentuate the artistic themes in which he was interested, Tarkovsky employed several unconventional filmmaking techniques, such as a literary structure, which also validated his comparison of Rublev to himself as influential artists. The film’s epilogue and its irregular filmic approach offer the most apparent example of this correlation between Tarkovsky and Rublev.

Although this theme of creating art under a repressive regime can be applied to Tarkovsky’s own experience making films in the Soviet Union, there are stark differences between his processes and the techniques employed by nonconformists. They did share certain

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elements, including the themes of “a profound tendency toward mysticism, a belief that the artist must fulfill a mission, and a willingness to submerge individuality and external beauty in the quest for moral truth” that had persisted throughout the history of Russian art since the time of Andrei Rublev.\(^{69}\) Additionally, the Thaw allowed for an increased flow of internationally-acclaimed art into the Soviet Union. To Tarkovsky, the films of the French New Wave, Italian Neorealism, and the golden age of Japanese cinema were highly influential due to their unconventional stylistic and editing choices, including the use of long takes and natural imagery as a visual metaphor. Nonconformist artists were likewise affected by the works of Modernist masters that they could suddenly access without Stalin’s stringent policies.\(^{70}\) In addition to their artistic influences abroad, both Tarkovsky and nonconformist artists were influenced by certain elements of traditional Russian art:

For nonconformist artists determined to declare their independence from imposed rules, the icon tradition might have seemed a dubious model. But the character of Rublev, as portrayed in Andrei Tarkovsky’s film of the same period (1965), offers a peculiarly Russian explanation of the demands of art. Originally entitled *The Passion according to Andrei*, the film showed, in Tarkovsky’s words, “that creation demands the sacrifice of one’s entire self.” A number of films produced in the post-thaw, pre-*glasnost* period by Tarkovsky, Tengiz Abuladze, Sergei Paradjanov, and other directors use religious symbols, above all images of the sacrificed Christ, in ways that confirm the close identification of religious and artistic experience.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{71}\) Hilton, “Icons of the inner world,” 261.
Thus, Tarkovsky and nonconformist artists were similar in the intrinsic Russian nature of their products. However, whereas their artistic motivations may have been similar, their practical executions differed drastically. Nonconformist artists relied on the financial support of their families, particularly their wives or more well-off friends such as successful scientists, in order to purchase the necessary supplies.\textsuperscript{72} Oftentimes, they could not find or afford an adequate amount of material, and were forced to use everyday objects such as toilet paper rolls as their surfaces instead of paper or canvas.\textsuperscript{73} Tarkovsky was not as desperate in his search for equipment. Although he often had a contentious relationship with the Soviet state, he did have access to substantial budgets and supplies by working with Mosfilm.\textsuperscript{74}

Throughout the film, Andrei Rublev is confronted by numerous socio-political obstacles that attempt to repress his art. The jester from the first chapter represents the social repression of Russian culture; he mocks the monks for their religious ties without seeking to understand their artistic goals. This social repression also manifests itself in the character of Kirill, who feels his artistic endeavors have not yielded him the praise he desires, and subsequently returns to secular life. The political repression of art is embodied by the Tatars. The constant Tatar attacks prove stifling to many of the artists featured in the film, including Rublev, who takes a vow of silence for many years after one such raid. Additionally, a group of Pagan worshippers is oppressed in the film, adding an outright religious level to the repressive nature of the society Tarkovsky depicts. These social and political forms of cultural repression mirror those experienced by Tarkovsky in the Soviet Union, who at times felt silenced by a system that often sought to censor his films.

\textsuperscript{73} McPhee, \textit{The Ransom of Russian Art}, 30.
\textsuperscript{74} Johnson and Petrie, \textit{The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky}, 8-9.
Due to the cultural repression of the artists in *Andrei Rublev*, many of the characters develop a sense of autodidactism in order to produce successful art. Andrei Rublev’s status as an observer, rather than an active protagonist in the traditional sense, allows him to view his surrounding world and create art that reflects what he sees. This comes across in the epilogue, which reveals a number of icons painted by the actual Andrei Rublev. The audience can finally see how his environment shaped his art. Rublev’s autodidactism is similar to Tarkovsky’s, who was forced to look beyond the scope of Soviet cinema to bring in various filmic elements from around the world, such as those of the Italian realists, the French New Wave, and the Japanese Golden Age of Cinema, in an attempt to create a new Russian film style focused on the poetic nature of an image due to the use of long takes and natural imagery.\(^7^5\)

The story’s literature-inspired structure reflects the various religious and artistic themes of the film. Like a novel, it begins with a prologue, as discussed above. The film is then separated into eight clearly defined chapters, organized linearly throughout various parts of Andrei Rublev’s life ranging from approximately 1400 to 1424.\(^7^6\) The bulk of the film follows these snapshots of different points in the artist’s story. To conclude the film, Tarkovsky includes a short epilogue. Whereas the prologue and the eight chapters that make up the majority of the film are shot in black and white, the epilogue dramatically shifts to color film and gives viewers a visual of many of Andrei Rublev’s most famous icons. By showing his audience the final product of Rublev’s artistic endeavors, Tarkovsky attempts to depict *Andrei Rublev* as an artistic success on the same level as the paintings of the titular character. In using a literary structure for his film, Tarkovsky reveals the influence great Russian novelists had on his work. Perhaps his

\(^7^6\) The chapters, in order, are “The Jester,” “Theophanes the Greek,” “The Passion According to Andrei,” “The Feast,” “The Last Judgment,” “The Raid,” “The Silence,” and “The Bell.”
most influential literary role model was Dostoevsky, whom Tarkovsky discusses at length in his diaries and interviews. In an interview following his appearance at a London film festival during his emigrant years in 1984, Tarkovsky discussed Dostoevsky at length and admitted that this was because, “I am Russian and I love Dostoevsky.”

Through its use of religious and artistic themes and imagery, *Andrei Rublev* depicts a cultural environment that can be identified by two major characteristics. First, the culture being depicted is exclusively and definitively Russian. Second, the film’s setting occurs simultaneously with a shifting cultural climate in Russia. Historically, Andrei Rublev lived during the fifteenth century in what is now Russia. During that time, Russia was little more than a collection of small states situated between the remnants of the Mongolian Empire and the various kingdoms of medieval Europe. However, by the end of the century, the Grand Duchy of Muscovy grew in power, allowing for a more centralized power in Russia that would allow for stability, and thus a foothold with which to explore the international world. Both of the characteristics mentioned above allow the film to be seen as a mirror of Tarkovsky’s own place in the contemporary Soviet Union. Whereas he depicts Andrei Rublev as being a herald of a new, more centralized Russian culture at the end of the Middle Ages during the tumultuous time of the Tatar invasions, Tarkovsky visions himself as ushering in a new Russian art that more closely resembled the films of the neorealists or the new wave cinemas of Western Europe and Japan than the socialist realism prevalent in the Soviet Union at the time. Additionally, these themes connect him to contemporary movements such as nonconformist art and Russian Orthodox dissidents. While his artistic approach carries certain similarities to artists and writers of the Russian intelligentsia, his political reliance on the Soviet state for funding and equipment do not allow for him to be

perceived completely as a dissident filmmaker. However, his rejection of socialist realism for more metaphysical themes did put him at odds with the state; this artistic friction with the government would ultimately drive him from the Soviet Union in the 1980s so that he could pursue making films in Western Europe.

TARKOVSKY IN THE 1970s: THE FINAL SOVIET YEARS

In the 1970s, Tarkovsky directed the final three films he would produce in the Soviet Union. He chose to switch his attention away from the historical settings of his first two features and tackled a new genre with his 1972 film Solaris: science fiction. Although the genre of this film was new, the themes he explored in Solaris were similar to those of Andrei Rublev. Whereas that film focused on the life of an artist, and explored his mentality through his relationship with art, the main character of Solaris, Kelvin, is a psychologist whose mental state is examined in relation to science. While the theme of science was new to Tarkovsky’s filmography, the humanistic approach he uses to deal with it are in line with his previous work. He is less interested in the scientific accuracy of the film, but rather how science can be used to reveal poetic truths about his characters. In 1975, Tarkovsky released the Mirror, one of his most complex and least accessible films. The film is a loosely autobiographical account of his life, ranging from his childhood during World War II to the 1970s. Its major theme is that of memory; the film has a stream-of-conscious plot structure that is chronologically nonlinear, and makes

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78 The fact that the film was not screened in the Soviet Union until 1971 in censored form supports his classification as a dissident, but he continued to receive funding from the state for films for over a decade after producing Andrei Rublev.
heavy use of oneiric imagery such as physics-defying events like levitation and psychedelic images on the planet surface. His final Soviet film, *Stalker*, was released in 1979. It marked a return to the science fiction genre, although its dystopian setting differed drastically from the space station of *Solaris*. The recurrent Tarkovskian theme of art is explored, most notably in the character of the Writer, who is contrasted with the Professor, who represents the theme of science. The film marked a notable shift in focus towards the Aristotelian dramatic unities of time, space, and action.

While Tarkovsky directed these three films during the 1970s, the Soviet Union experienced an era of political, economic, and socio-cultural stagnation under the premiership of Leonid Brezhnev. Although Brezhnev had been in power since 1964, this stagnation hit its zenith during the 1970s. Artists and religious figures who did not adhere to the state mandated norms, and had experienced a wider level of freedom during the Khrushchev Thaw, experienced harsher regulations and were often persecuted. As a reaction to this, dissident groups became more organized. By the end of the decade, as well as the beginning of the 1980s, many important cultural figures who were either associated with dissident movements (such as writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn) or sought to produce more artistic work with less political impediments (such as Tarkovsky) emigrated from the Soviet Union. Although he was not explicitly associated with Soviet dissident groups, he worked at the same time as them and eventually emigrated as many of their members did. These similarities warrant a parallel analysis of Tarkovsky and Soviet dissidents in order to judge how closely his work can be associated with these movements.
Following the release of *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky decided to adapt Stanislaw Lem’s novel *Solaris* as a film. After trying to secure a release for *Andrei Rublev* for almost five years, he chose to adapt the novel as both an artistic and a commercial choice, as Lem, a Pole, was a popular and critically well-received author in the Soviet Union.\(^7^9\) As Tarkovsky told Naum Abramov in a 1970 interview:

> My decision to adapt it to the screen is not at all the 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.\(^8^0\)

The film follows Kris Kelvin, a psychologist living in the distant future, who is dispatched to a space station meant to scientifically engage with Solaris, the ocean-covered planet it orbits. Kelvin is tasked with overviewing the station and its three remaining inhabitants to decide whether or not the scientific mission to Solaris should continue. On the station, he learns that one of the scientists has committed suicide. When he begins to see and interact with his late wife Hari, it is revealed that Solaris is seemingly sentient and has the power to bring someone’s memories to life.

*Solaris* was unique among Tarkovsky’s work at the time of its release due to the fact that it was adapted from a novel. Whereas *Ivan’s Childhood* was adapted from a short story by an

\(^7^9\) Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 98.
\(^8^0\) Tarkovsky and Gianvito, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews*, 33.
independent screenwriter, Tarkovsky (along with Friedrich Gorenstein) worked on the script himself. Thus, the film version of Solaris differs thematically from Lem’s original novel due to both the subtle changes Tarkovsky and Gorenstein made and the cinematographic choices Tarkovsky made with his cinematographer, Vadim Yusov. Although Lem was frustrated by these changes, Tarkovsky explained his thought process behind creating a screenplay in Sculpting in Time:

“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 major difference between Lem’s and Tarkovsky’s versions of Solaris is that the novel’s main theme is the inability for science to allow for interaction with an alien race due to its drastic dislocation from human experience, whereas the film is more interested in the psychological impact experienced by Kelvin.

While Tarkovsky was hesitant to embrace the genre as “science fiction” as a simplified description of his film, he did use its elements to explore the psychologies of his characters. One important concept that is frequently involved with the genre that Tarkovsky makes heavy use of is that of the nature of reality. The driving force behind Kelvin’s mission is to discover the reality of the situation on the Solaris space station. Although scientists on Earth had been receiving transmissions from the station, the messages were incomprehensible; thus, Kelvin was

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81 Tarkovsky, Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema, 125.
dispatched to discover the truth. The nature of reality is called into question mostly due to the Solaris-induced projections. While they are not the same physical bodies as the people they imitate, these visions are constructed from the memories of those on the space station. As such, the projections serve as a reflection of reality. The dichotomous nature of these visions highlights another common theme utilized in science fiction: foreignness. Since they are mere projections of a character’s memories, they are not entirely human, and thus appear alien to the viewer. However, since they come from memory, they also convey a sense of nostalgia that the viewer can sense through the performance of the human characters in the film. Expressing these emotional realities are Tarkovsky’s main goals in using science fiction as a genre: he wishes for the audience to connect more personally with their own realities by showing the nostalgic attempts of Kelvin to interact with his memories. The theme of exploration is also used in the film, but this too is utilized by Tarkovsky to convey a sense of human memory. Before Kelvin leaves Earth, he adopts an escapist mindset and burns most of his personal belongings; however, by the end of the film, he chooses to accept the nostalgic pseudo-reality of Solaris.

As in Andrei Rublev, Tarkovsky uses artistic themes and imagery to convey his film’s meaning. Whereas his previous film relied on the prevalence of Russian icon painting, specifically that of the titular character, Solaris uses Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s painting “the Hunters in the Snow” as a recurring image in the film. The painting elicits a nostalgic response from Kelvin, who is reminded of the life he left behind on Earth. It also uses the works of other famous painters, such as Rembrandt, as a visual basis for certain scenes. Additionally, the use of photographs allows Kelvin’s memories to be accessible to the viewer via a visual art form.

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82 Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky, 123.
83 Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky, 122-124.
84 Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky, 121.
85 Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky, 122.
However, *Solaris* differs from *Andrei Rublev* in that its main character is a psychologist, rather than an artist. The difference between Andrei Rublev and Kelvin is that Rublev is an observer who is content with his own humanity, whereas Kelvin is not. Tarkovsky is therefore commenting on the difference between the intrinsically humanistic nature of art as opposed to the objectivity of science.

Although the theme of religion is visually less apparent than it was in *Andrei Rublev*, it does appear in *Solaris* as well. An icon by Andrei Rublev appears in Kelvin’s room on the space station.  

Additionally, the unexplained nature of Solaris takes on certain divine roles. While this relates closely with the themes of Lem’s novel, as Solaris was meant to become an unexplainable character with whom humans could not communicate, when its power to create projections are combined with Tarkovsky’s humanistic approach, the planet becomes a God-like link to the human psyche. The revival of dead individuals from the characters’ past mimics biblical resurrection miracles. A further biblical connection is the last shot of Kelvin. His arrival at his father’s door is reminiscent of the parable of the Prodigal Son. This frequent, if subdued, religious subtext in *Solaris* prompted criticism from Soviet officials. Their main issues were the concepts of God and Christianity that appeared throughout the film.

Following the release of *Solaris*, Tarkovsky enjoyed a period of both critical and economic success. However, he was not entirely satisfied with his relationship with the Soviet state, particularly Goskino, the State Committee on Cinematography. He felt as though they had asked him to make too many changes to the film’s screenplay. Thus, in addition to the changes Lem insisted he make, he felt that the film did not quite capture the full artistic scope that he

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intended to achieve.\textsuperscript{89} He was also frustrated with Goskino’s inability to comprehend his script of \textit{The Bright Day}, which would eventually be produced as \textit{The Mirror}. Also after releasing \textit{Solaris}, Tarkovsky travelled with the film to many locations in western Europe, including Italy, Belgium, and France. His connection to the artistic histories of these sites is revealed through his diaries from this time.\textsuperscript{90} His love for these countries would play into his eventual decision to emigrate to Italy in the early 1980s.

\textit{The Mirror}

In 1975, Tarkovsky released \textit{The Mirror}, a project he had long been preparing to produce. His original script had been rejected prior to his production of \textit{Solaris}, but he eventually received permission to make it following the success of that movie.\textsuperscript{91} The film offered a semi-autobiographical account of his life and followed a nonlinear narrative structure. The use of long takes, varying chromatic schemes, and poetic voiceovers contribute to the oneiric imagery of the film and tie it into the theme of memory. Of the project, he said in a retrospective interview in 1978 with Claire Devarrieux:

The subject of my film is a man who unites women and children. However, he is not accomplished as a son or a husband, and the children lack a man, a father. So, he’s the storyteller, he says offscreen. We only see him when he is six, and then when he is twelve, during the war. Relationships have been broken and the storyteller has to renew

\textsuperscript{89} Bird, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky}, 116-117.
\textsuperscript{90} Tarkovsky, \textit{Time within Time}, 60-62.
\textsuperscript{91} Johnson and Petrie, \textit{The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky}, 98.
them, in order to find his moral equilibrium, but he is unable to do so. He lives with the hope that he will be able to pay his love debt back, but that debt is one which nobody can get rid of … *The Mirror* is not a casual title. The storyteller perceives his wife as the continuation of his mother, because wives resemble mothers, and errors repeat themselves—a strange reflection. Repetition is a law, experience does not get transmitted, everyone has to live it.\(^92\)

As with *Solaris*, a common theme throughout *the Mirror* is that of memory. Tarkovsky gives the viewer a sense of memory by breaking the narrative structure up nonlinearly. In doing this, he offers images and sounds that reflect the thought process of a person who is remembering their own life. He does this intentionally; when discussing film editing and narrative structure, he says, “I see it as my professional task then, to create my own, distinctive flow of time … and to one person it will seem one way, to another, another … the distortion of time can be a means of giving it rhythmical expression.”\(^93\) The semi-autobiographical nature of *The Mirror* allows Tarkovsky to fully embrace the sense of time and rhythmic expression he wishes to give. Another way Tarkovsky utilizes the theme of memory is by the repetition of his cast in different time periods in the movie. The narrator, Alexei, appears only as a child on screen. However, his adult voice is present throughout the film as well. Alexei’s mother Maria and wife Natalia are portrayed by the same actress, Margarita Terekhova, who inhabits the screen as these two characters independent of one another, depending on the chronological point of the narrative. These choices lead the viewer to view these characters as memories; in reality, they would not look like the same person, but their visual resemblance is a product of remembering them.

\(^{93}\) Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 120-121.
Tarkovsky makes heavy use of oneiric imagery in *The Mirror*. In one sequence, shot in a single long take, Alexei the child watches with his family from their country house as their barn burns down. During the sequence, a bottle falls off a table without being touched. The barn is also burning while it is raining, making the scene visually striking in a way that reflects the visuals of a dream. Another famed dreamlike sequence occurs when Maria washes her hair. The black and white chromatic scheme of the scene makes the image seem foreign to the viewer, as does Terekhova’s performance. She keeps her head down with her hair covering her face, creating an alien appearance. Eventually, the room around her begins to literally disintegrate, as pieces of the walls and ceiling begin to fall around her. These images recur throughout *The Mirror*, and help progress the theme of memory.

The film has also been described as being influenced by Modernist literature, as well as by the literature of the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century. Its structure, as well as its use of first person narration, creates a sense of stream of consciousness. This Modernist technique allows Tarkovsky to engage with the individual’s mind, in an introspective approach not uncommon in the work of Dostoevsky. However, he intersperses the film with archival footage from the various time periods he covers, which adds a layer of objectivity to the subjective stream of consciousness his other scenes convey. These documentary-esque images reflect the external, socially-aware point of view of Tolstoy’s work. An additional literary influence on his film is the work of his father, the poet Arseny Tarkovsky, who provides the voice for adult Alexei and wrote many of the poems that his character narrates.

While producing *The Mirror*, Tarkovsky grew increasingly frustrated with the Soviet film establishment for what he saw as their attempts to impede upon his filmmaking process. In a

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diary post from March 2, 1975, he posited numerous questions, including “why did Yermash [the head of Goskino] not let Mirror go to Cannes, despite Bessy’s request and the decision of the special committee … why am I not told about invitations from foreign firms to make films … why is Mirror not being distributed?" Tarkovsky’s refusal to release The Mirror to the Cannes Film Festival infuriated Tarkovsky. Of Filipp Yermash, Tarkovsky said, “a coward and a creep! Of course if it were given the prize, Mirror could bring in foreign currency—but that is of no interest to Yermash. All he cares about is having his arse in a comfortable chair, and to hell with the interests of the nation!” The Mirror had been receiving near unanimous critical praise, and he viewed the Cannes debacle as an affront to his filmmaking acumen.

**Stalker**

When choosing a project to succeed The Mirror, Tarkovsky returned to the genre of science fiction, telling Tonino Guerra in 1979:

I had recommended a short novel, Picnic on the Roadside, to my friend, the filmmaker Giorgi Kalatozishvili, thinking he might adapt it to film. Afterwards, I don’t know why, Giorgi could not obtain the rights from the authors of the novel, the Strugatsky brothers, and he abandoned the idea of this film. The idea began to turn in my head, at first from time to time and then more and more often. It seemed to me that this novel could be made into a film with a unity of location, time and action. This classic unity—Aristotelian in

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my view—permits us to approach truly authentic filmmaking, which for me is not action film, outwardly dynamic.98

The film follows the journey of three men (the eponymous Stalker, the Writer, and the Professor) into the Zone, an area quarantined and guarded by the military due to unexplainable occurrences that befall those who visit it. Stalker came about at an important point during Tarkovsky’s career. It was his last film produced in the Soviet Union before he went abroad in the 1980s. Additionally, it was seen as many to be a continuation of many of the themes he used in Solaris, with many believing Stalker to be the superior film. Recurrent themes from Tarkovsky’s greater filmography such as the nature of art, the relationship between art and science, and religion are prevalent in this film as well.

Due to the similarity in their genres, it is important to compare and contrast Stalker with Solaris to view the evolution of Tarkovsky’s approach to filmmaking. One prominent similarity between the two films is the fact that they were both adaptations of novels. While Solaris was adapted from the Stanislaw Lem novel of the same name, Stalker was based on the novel Roadside Picnic by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky. Whereas Tarkovsky had an artistically strained partnership with Lem over several changes he made to the screenplay of Solaris, his relationship with the Strugatsky brothers was far more productive. He worked closely with them throughout the production of Stalker, and both of them received screenwriting credits on the film.99

However, although he had a congenial relationship with the authors of the source material, Tarkovsky still changed much of the content between the novel and the film. While the novel dealt with the nature of knowledge and an individual’s capacity for thought (much like Lem’s

98 Tarkovsky and Gianvito, Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews, 51.
99 Johnson and Petrie, The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky, 137.
version of *Solaris*), he shifted the underlying philosophies in the film to focus on the nature of spirituality.\textsuperscript{100}

The opportunity presented by working in science fiction allows Tarkovsky to explore the theme of spirituality in *Stalker*. The main way the science fiction genre presents itself in the film is the futuristic society that creates the foundation for the plot. Set in the distant future, the alien-like nature of the Zone allows Tarkovsky to explore a rigid society that lacks almost all semblance of faith.\textsuperscript{101} The Stalker alone among the characters maintains any sense of spiritual faith. Conversely, the Professor represents an adherence to mechanical scientific restrictions and the Writer’s slow realization about the nature of the Zone leads to his loss of what little faith with which he may have started. During the production of *Stalker*, Tarkovsky revealed his own fear of the future in his diary: “I am afraid of the future … I am afraid for the children and for Larissa [his wife]. God, give me strength and faith for the future, give a future in which to glorify you.”\textsuperscript{102} By exploring his anxiety of the future, Tarkovsky hints at his dissatisfaction with the current state of artistic spirituality in the Soviet Union, as well as a desire to escape the increasingly oppressive political regime in Russia that developed in the 1970s.

Branching off of the use of science fiction as a genre, the struggle between science and art is employed by Tarkovsky to explore the state of spirituality in this futuristic society. An early scene in the film depicts a conversation between the Writer, the Professor, and the Stalker in a bar before they leave to explore the Zone. The Writer discusses the rigid nature of the Professor’s work as a physicist. This contrasts with the Writer’s own work, which he describes

\textsuperscript{100} Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 141.
\textsuperscript{101} Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 140-141.
\textsuperscript{102} Tarkovsky, *Time within Time*, 159.
as “digging for the truth.”\textsuperscript{103} However, his search has thus far been futile, as he says that, “instead of discovering the truth, I dig up a heap of, pardon … I better not name it.”\textsuperscript{104} Tarkovsky described the writer as someone “with a spiritual activity.”\textsuperscript{105} Nonetheless, his inability to understand the Zone leads to the undermining of this “spiritual activity,” as the Writer himself explains in the antechamber of the Room in the Zone. Contrasting with the Professor and the Writer is the Stalker, who is “a prophet who believes that humanity will perish for lack of a spiritual life. Actually, this story is about the crisis of one of the world’s last remaining idealists.”\textsuperscript{106} As such, the Stalker represents the piece of Tarkovsky that searches for the spirituality of humanity in order to create what he views as good art, a theme which Tarkovsky explored throughout most of his oeuvre.

Perhaps the most prominent theme in \textit{Stalker} is that of the nature of spirituality and its degradation in an oppressive society. For Tarkovsky, a key element of spirituality is faith. He says, “Faith is faith. Without it, man is deprived of any spiritual roots. He is like a blind man. Over time, faith has been given different content. But in this period of the destruction of faith, what’s important to the Stalker is to light a spark, a belief in the heart of people.”\textsuperscript{107} As stated above, the Stalker represents a prophet-like character who wishes to lead a search for spiritual meaning. When discussing spirituality and faith in the context of \textit{Stalker}, it is impossible to ignore the religious influences and images Tarkovsky employed. The very nature of faith carries inherently religious connotations. This is especially true due to the occurrence of religious icons in the Room’s antechamber. The use of religious icons, which had been a prevalent image


\textsuperscript{104} “Stalker (1979) Movie Script.”

\textsuperscript{105} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 61.

\textsuperscript{106} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 59.

\textsuperscript{107} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 57.
throughout Tarkovsky’s work (especially in *Andrei Rublev*), ties the themes of spirituality and faith to a religious foundation.

Tarkovsky’s criticism of the Soviet Union in *Stalker* is not direct. Although he depicts a militaristic, seemingly dictatorial regime that restricts access to the Zone, he does not fault the actual governmental system with the problems of this fictional society. Rather, he says that it is a matter of maintaining the status quo: “It’s probably the instinct for self-preservation. It’s natural, and furthermore every society has an interest in maintaining its own stability.”\(^{108}\) He views children as the key to remedying the degradation of spirituality. In the film, this is conveyed through the character of the Stalker’s daughter, who “represents hope, quite simply. Children are always something hopeful. Probably because they are the future.”\(^{109}\) This idea mirrors the generation of Russian intelligentsia members known as Zhivago’s children, who rose to prominence in the early years of Tarkovsky’s career. The Stalker’s daughter’s inexplicable powers represented, “‘new perspectives, new spiritual powers that are as yet unknown to us, as well as new physical forces.’”\(^{110}\) However, while his criticisms of the Soviet Union in the film itself were subtle, his private writings suggest a deep dissatisfaction with the quality of life he experienced in Russia. On New Year’s Eve of 1978, he wrote in his diary, “Another New Year. And one more appalling year has gone by. There is nothing in the shops on New Year’s Eve. In Ryazan meat is rationed; 300 grammes per head per month. Life is becoming impossible.”\(^{111}\) His rising annoyance with Goskino, and particularly Yermash, also affected his opinion on the Soviet Union. He wrote that the possibility of winning an Oscar for *The Mirror* following its


\(^{111}\) Tarkovsky, *Time within Time*, 161.
distribution in the United States in 1978, “would be one in the eye for that idiot Yermash.”\textsuperscript{112} His growing correspondence with Tonino Guerra throughout the production of \textit{Stalker} furthered his desire to work abroad in Italy as soon as the film was completed.

THE EMIGRANT YEARS: TARKOVSKY IN THE 1980s

In a retrospective interview from 1984, Tarkovsky opined about his expatriation from the Soviet Union to Western Europe and his thoughts on the differences between the two:

You probably noticed that I am not that inclined to criticize the country in which I lived for some fifty odd years. I don’t belong to that group of people who immediately begin to clip coupons, zealously criticizing something and extolling something else. This question of the interrelation of two worlds [East vs. West] is incredibly important. I would even say vitally important. This is not simply a problem of coexistence, for one could be even more catastrophic and exclamatory in describing it. I’m keeping away from any hasty conclusions. These ideas and problems have my constant attention. And I think about them all the time.\textsuperscript{113}

Tarkovsky’s conflicted mentality over the benefits of the Soviet Union versus those of Western Europe, as well as his unwillingness to directly address the issue, reveals a displaced artist trying to produce his best work wherever he was allowed to make films. From his emigration from Russia in 1982 to his death in 1986, this conflict between Tarkovsky’s attachment to his

\textsuperscript{112} Tarkovsky, \textit{Time within Time}, 161.
\textsuperscript{113} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 153.
homeland and his desire to produce work outside of it manifested throughout his two final narrative films, *Nostalghia* and *The Sacrifice*.

**Tarkovsky in Italy: *Nostalghia***

Prior to commencing production of *Nostalghia*, Tarkovsky took two trips to Italy in 1979 and 1980. During these visits, he became enamored with the possibility of producing his next film in that country.\(^{114}\) At the same time, he grew frustrated with Soviet film regulations. Commenting on the reception of his films by Soviet officials, he said, “the official viewpoint is that they are difficult to understand. Sergei Bondarchuk expressed this idea in Italy during a press conference. Nevertheless, young people especially view my films with enormous interest. I would even say that there’s a contradiction between that which Bondarchuk declares and the truth.”\(^ {115}\) Ultimately, Tarkovsky decided to eschew the Soviet Union so that he could make *Nostalghia* in Italy. However, producing the film abroad created a few complications in Tarkovsky’s life. Fearing that he would defect if his wife and son accompanied him on his travels, Soviet officials refused to allow his family to travel with him.\(^ {116}\) Additionally, working under a capitalist system forced Tarkovsky to look for private financial support for his project, which he did not have to worry about in Russia.\(^ {117}\)

The plot of *Nostalghia* centers around a Russian writer going abroad to study the life of an eighteenth century Russian composer in Italy. It is impossible to examine this film without

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\(^{114}\) Johnson and Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 156.

\(^{115}\) Tarkovsky and Gianvito, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews*, 82-83

\(^{116}\) Tarkovsky, *Time within Time*, 220-221.

making parallels between this character, appropriately named Andrei, and Tarkovsky as emigrant artists. Discussing why he made this film, Tarkovsky stated:

I wanted to speak about that which is called “nostalgia,” but I mean the word in its Russian sense, that is to say, a fatal disease. I wanted to show psychological traits typically Russian, in the tradition of Dostoevsky. The Russian term is difficult to translate: it could be compassion, but it’s even stronger than that. It’s identifying oneself with the suffering of another man, in a passionate way.\textsuperscript{118}

His connection to Russia persisted in his mind and his films throughout the 1980s. The nostalgia he felt for his home presented him with an emotional influence on his work. He further defined nostalgia as “a complex sentiment, one that mixes the love for your homeland and the melancholy that arises from being far away.”\textsuperscript{119} He further described the importance of a national identity to one’s personal existence. In an interview with Hervé Guibert in 1983, he emphasized the defining characteristics of having a Russian identity as opposed to an Italian one.\textsuperscript{120} This further developed in a sense of national cinematic language.\textsuperscript{121} In his work, Tarkovsky embraced the egocentrism of Russian culture, which differed from the norms of Western culture.\textsuperscript{122}

Due to the loneliness experienced by the characters in \textit{Nostalghia}, Tarkovsky reflects his own solitude being in a foreign country. The two best examples of this in the film are Andrei and Domenico. As stated above, Andrei is a Russian writer studying abroad in Italy. Domenico, on the other hand, is an Italian outcast whose beliefs led him to be ostracized from his community. Both of these characters mirror the image Tarkovsky had of himself. Besides being an emigrant

\textsuperscript{118} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 80.
\textsuperscript{119} Johnson and Petrie, \textit{The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky}, 159.
\textsuperscript{120} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 81.
\textsuperscript{121} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 98.
\textsuperscript{122} Tarkovsky and Gianvito, \textit{Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews}, 154.
artist, he felt separated from the popular artistic community of the time. He saw art as decreasing in spirituality due to the overriding effects of commercial interests. Thus, he felt as if he was in an artistic minority. In the film, Tarkovsky employed a vocabulary of doubles, using words like “mirror” to create a connection between characters like Andrei and Domenico as well as between himself and the characters.

Tarkovsky’s trademark use of dreamlike sequences highlighted his personal nostalgia in the film. Of his attempt to create a visual representation of dreams, he said:

I am seeking a principle of montage … which would permit me to show the subjective logic—the thought, the dream, the memory—instead of the logic of the subject … To show things which are not necessarily linked logically. It is the movement of thoughts which makes them join together inwardly.

In Nostalghia, different visual cues represent a dreamlike state. One is the change in color schemes, shifting between color film and black and white. Additionally, Tarkovsky uses natural images and sounds, such as running water and barking dogs, to signify dreams. This is because “They convey a largely static, timeless world of eternal values—love of family, home, nature, and country—but also an estrangement created by the virtual immobility of the figures, and by the music.”

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123 Tarkovsky and Gianvito, Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews, 149-150.
126 Johnson and Petrie, The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky, 165.
Final Years: *The Sacrifice*

The theme of solitude is further explored in Tarkovsky’s final film, 1986’s *The Sacrifice*. The protagonist, Alexander, is an artist who decided to focus on the theoretical aspects of art in a remote landscape filmed in Sweden. Tarkovsky said, “I look forward to work in Sweden now because I found an amazingly beautiful place. It gives the impression of complete emptiness.” By using this desolate location, Tarkovsky could successfully depict the artist as an outcast character, much like Domenico in *Nostalghia*. The fact that Alexander is a theorist further connects Tarkovsky himself to the theme of solitude in his films, as he was also a film theorist, culminating with the publishing of his theoretical book *Sculpting in Time*.

Tarkovsky’s apprehension for the future manifested itself throughout *The Sacrifice*. The character of Alexander is depicted as a spiritual savior from the threat of nuclear war. This allowed Tarkovsky to explore his own view on nuclear war and apocalyptic disasters:

“Spiritually man is not ready to survive his bombs. He’s not mature enough. Mankind needs to study history. If there’s one thing we’ve learned from history it’s that it’s never taught us anything. This is a very pessimistic conclusion.” The decline of the spiritual relevance of the past is also explored, particularly through the final line of the film, during which a character quotes the Bible in order to misuse the Gospels. In addition to outlining his views on future disasters, Tarkovsky also described his ideal future: “The most important thing is freedom of information; mankind should receive information without limits. It’s the only positive tool. Unlimited truth is the beginning of freedom.”

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mind, is the root of spiritual revival that can also lead to a period of artistic improvement. The burning of Alexander’s house represents the destruction of his own past due to his burgeoning spirituality. On a more personal level, Tarkovsky’s considerations of a destructive future could have represented his own illness, a rare form of lung cancer believed to have been caused on the industrial set of *Stalker*, which claimed his life at the end of 1986.

*The Sacrifice* accounted for an interesting place in Tarkovsky’s filmography due to its outwardly religious themes. Not since *Andrei Rublev* had he made a film with such direct religious imagery. The use of a Bible passage to end the film is perhaps the clearest example of this.131 The structure of the film, which is constructed as a visual parable, also mirrors a religious text.132 Perhaps due to his knowledge of his impending death, Tarkovsky publicly acknowledged his spirituality and adherence to the Russian Orthodox faith in 1986: “Being Orthodox I consider Russia my spiritual home. I would never renounce it, even if I were never to see it again.”133 Tarkovsky’s following of the Russian Orthodox Church presents him as a deeply spiritual artist who eventually connected to a religion with which he had a strongly historical and nationally-focused relationship.

**CONCLUSION**

Tarkovsky represents an interesting moment in the cultural history of the Soviet Union since his career began during the Khrushchev Thaw. Due to this, he began making films while

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experiencing greater artistic freedom than most had encountered in the USSR both previously, under the Stalinist regime, and in the years that followed under Leonid Brezhnev. Tarkovsky’s artistic approach to filmmaking had already been developed in his earliest films by the time Brezhnev came to power. As such, Tarkovsky learned to create films that were both of artistic merit and could be produced within the strict guidelines of the Soviet Union. By doing this, his filmmaking style could be seen as an attempt to subvert the artistically repressive Soviet system of the 1970s.

Tarkovsky should not be defined as a dissident, but rather as an artist committed to his craft. He tolerated the conditions of the Soviet Union while they more or less allowed him to create the films that he wanted to make. However, the restrictions he experienced eventually became too much for him to adequately produce artistically progressive works. Thus, he decided to emigrate to Western Europe, where he spent the last few years of his life. The influence of the Russian intelligentsia emanates throughout his filmography. Although he may not have been as vocally political as many of its members, even taking subdued stances to the Soviet regime at times, his view of himself as an artist remained his main unwavering characteristic throughout his professional life. As such, his life can be described as a microcosm of the experience of an artist trying to produce groundbreaking work in a repressive political environment. His eventual emigration from the Soviet Union highlights this. It was his drive to create films of artistic merit that convinced him to go abroad, rather than a specifically political motivation that forced him to leave.

Tarkovsky’s work revealed a deep sense of personal spirituality. His frequent and noticeable use of religious and spiritual themes and imagery in his films are at odds with the atheistic policies of the Soviet Union. However, although these themes may suggest that his films are subversive in nature, he is less interested in their political implications. Rather, he uses
spirituality as a means to explore people in a humanistic sense. He viewed an individual’s personal struggles as the most important conflict one could address artistically:

One country is fighting another, one group is fighting against the development of missiles, another group fights something else, and so we all fight something, instead of fighting the fight with ourselves. We are our worst enemy. This is where the fight has to take place. I am also my most terrifying enemy and I keep asking myself if I will besiege myself or not. This is the meaning of my life.134

By exploring people’s intrinsically spiritual natures, Tarkovsky created a unique film style not only in its rejection of Soviet norms, but in its artistic value as well. As such, he is regarded as one of the premiere figures in both Soviet and international film history who has influenced many filmmakers throughout the world.

134 Tarkovsky and Gianvito, Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews, 118.
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