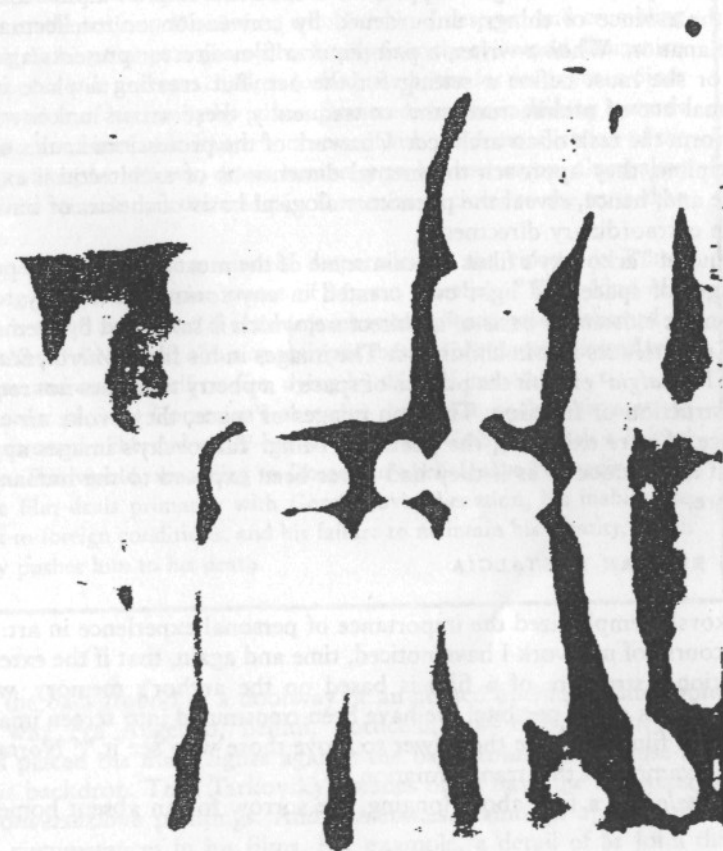


- 28 Ibid., x.xvi.10.
29 Ibid., x.i.5.
30 Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1968), sv. *organikos*; and Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium*, tr. A.L. Peek and E.S. Forster, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1961), 742b10.
31 H. Ling Roth, "Studies in Primitive Looms," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 46 (1916): 284-5. On ancient weaving see also, E.J.W. Barber's recent study, *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1991).
32 See, especially, Vitruvius on the origins of building. The first walls, according to Vitruvius, were *woven*: "And first, with upright forked props and twigs put between, they wove [*texerunt*] their walls." *De Architectura*, 11.1.3.
33 These include the structural models that Gaudí built for the churches of Sagrada Familia and Colonia Güell.
34 Plutarch, as cited in Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, tr. E.J. Minor (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 34.
35 *Kerkis aoida*; see Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1, 1316; cited in Roth, "Studies," 291. An *aoidos* is a bard, minstrel, or enchanter. When used as an adjective, the word means "musical" or "tuneful." The tunefulness of shuttles is referred to twice in Virgil – in the *Aeneid*, VII, 14; and in the *Georgics*, 1, 143, where the Latin adjective is *argutus*, usually rendered as "rattling."
36 Roth, "Studies," 291.
37 Iphigenia, in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Tauris*, speaks of weaving on the *histsis kalliphthongois* – the "lovely-sounding looms" (11, 222-4). See Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles*, 362, fn. 4. Barber thinks the sound referred to is the sound made by the clanking of the warp weights as the warp threads were pulled back and forth.
38 Barber, *ibid.*, 380.
39 As late as the eighteenth century, miniature people were believed to exist, fully formed, in male sperm: "After the discovery by Anthony van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) of the spermatozoa, Hartsoecker and Swammerdam believed themselves to see in protoplasm a tiny human being, a homunculus." Felix Cleve, *The Giants of Pre-sophistic Greek Philosophy* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff 1969), xxix.

Space and Image in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*:

Notes on a Phenomenology of Architecture

Juhani Pallasmaa



In a word, the image is not a certain meaning, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as in a drop of water.

Andrei Tarkovsky
*Sculpting in Time*¹

ARCHITECTURE OF IMAGERY

"Poets and painters are born phenomenologists," wrote J.H. van den Berg.² A phenomenological approach to the artist implies a pure looking at the essence of things, unburdened by convention or intellectualized explanation. When a writer, a painter, or a film director presents a scene, he or she must define a setting for the act. But creating a place is the primal act of architecture, and consequently these artists unknowingly perform the task of an architect. Unaware of the professional rules of the discipline, they approach the mental dimensions of architectural experience and, hence, reveal the phenomenological basis of the art of building with extraordinary directness.

Andrei Tarkovsky's films contain some of the most touching and poetic images of space and light ever created in any form of art. They touch upon the existential basis of architecture, which is saturated by memories and experiences lost in childhood. The images in his films *Mirror*, *Stalker*, and *Nostalgia*³ exhibit the poetics of space – a poetry that does not require construction or function. Through images of space, they evoke an experience of pure existence, the poetry of being. Tarkovsky's images appear fresh and innocent, as if they had never been exposed to the human eye before.

THE RUSSIAN NOSTALGIA

Tarkovsky emphasized the importance of personal experience in art: "In the course of my work I have noticed, time and again, that if the external emotional structure of a film is based on the author's memory, when impressions of his personal life have been transmuted into screen images, then the film will have the power to move those who see it."⁴ *Nostalgia* is an example of this transformation.

Nostalgia is a film about longing, the sorrow for an absent home: "I

wanted to make a film about Russian nostalgia – about that state of mind peculiar to our nation which affects Russians who are far from their native land ... In Italy I made a film that was profoundly Russian in every way: morally, politically, emotionally."⁵ The alienation and confused state of mind of the main character, Gorchakov, a Russian poet, is made clear at the very beginning of the film. He has driven with Eugenia, his Italian interpreter, "through half of Italy" to visit a church that had been important to the subject of his study, Pavel Shosnovski, but he does not even want to enter the church. Gorchakov carries the keys to his home in Moscow in the pocket of his overcoat and constantly fingers the keys as an unconscious indication of his homesickness. The film achieves its intensity because it expresses Tarkovsky's own yearning and nostalgia for home: "It would never have occurred to me, when I started shooting, that my own, all too specific, nostalgia was soon to take possession of my soul for ever."⁶ He also wrote in his diary: "I am so homesick, so homesick."⁷

Tarkovsky suffered from the same nostalgia that countless Russian writers, musicians, and artists have endured and documented both in their correspondence and in their artistic works. More than a century earlier, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who had escaped the wrath of his creditors by fleeing to Milan with his wife in 1868, had reported similar sentiments in a letter: "My heart is very heavy; I am homesick and I am uncertain of my situation; my debts ... make me awfully depressed. In addition I have distanced myself from Russian life to the degree that I find it difficult to write anything at all since I miss fresh Russian impressions. Just think: in six months I have not seen a single Russian newspaper."⁸ In an interview, Tarkovsky defined this Russian illness further: "It is not only a feeling of homesickness. It is an illness because it robs mental strength, it takes away the ability to work and even the desire to live. It is like a handicap, the absence of something, a part of oneself. I am certain that it is a real illness of the Russian character."⁹

SYMBOL, IMAGE, AND POETRY

Tarkovsky stated explicitly that there are no symbols or metaphors in his films; water is simply water, and rain is intended to convey the experience of rain:

Whenever I declare that there are no symbols or metaphors in my films those

present express incredulity. They persist in asking again and again, for instance, what rain signifies in my films; why does it figure in film after film; and why the repeated images of wind, fire, water? ... Of course rain can just be seen as bad weather whereas I use it to create a particular aesthetic setting in which to steep the action of the film. But that is not at all the same thing as bringing nature into my films as a symbol of something else.¹⁰

The many images present in *Nostalgia* are not intended to be symbols but rather emotional miniatures, riddles that vainly seek their own explanation. The imagery that Tarkovsky uses – water, fire, candle, dog, ruined building, and so on¹¹ – is inherently charged with meanings deriving from mythological and religious symbolization, but his films do not follow the logic of symbolic representation. The film director pushes the viewer off the path of convention and placid acceptance into a state of intense curiosity and yearning.

Tarkovsky considers poetry as the true language of film: "There is only one way of cinematic thinking – poetic," he writes.¹² He clarifies his point in another context: "When I speak of poetry I am not thinking of it as a genre. Poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality."¹³ Tarkovsky's films have an extraordinary emotional impact because they carry a pure cinematic expression that cannot be transferred to any other medium. "Poetry is untranslatable, as all art," Gorchakov tells Eugenia in *Nostalgia*.

Tarkovsky also writes emphatically about the importance of restraint in artistic expression. He quotes Paul Valéry: "Perfection is achieved only by avoiding everything that might make for conscious exaggeration." That strategy is also revealed in *Nostalgia*: "I know the great classic romances, no kisses, nothing at all, pure. That is why they are great ... feelings that are unspoken are unforgettable," says the drunken Gorchakov to a young girl in the flooded ruin.

CINEMA AND PAINTING

Tarkovsky's images frequently evoke recollections of paintings, particularly of those from the early Renaissance. "It is a miraculous painting," exclaims Eugenia about the foggy landscape in the opening scene of *Nostalgia*. Tarkovsky's frequent use of symmetrical framing is similar to Renaissance perspective representations. His manner of placing a figure

THE NARRATIVE OF NOSTALGIA

The main character of the film, Gorchakov, a Russian poet, comes to Italy to gather material on the Russian serf composer Pavel Shosnovski (alias Maximilian Beryózovsky). Gorchakov plans to write an opera libretto on the life of the composer. Shosnovski had been sent to study in Italy by his proprietor, who had noted the musical talent of his serf. Shosnovski studied composition at the Academy of Bologna, stayed nine years in Italy, and achieved some fame. Driven by the Russian longing for home, the composer decided to return to slavery, but hanged himself upon his return.

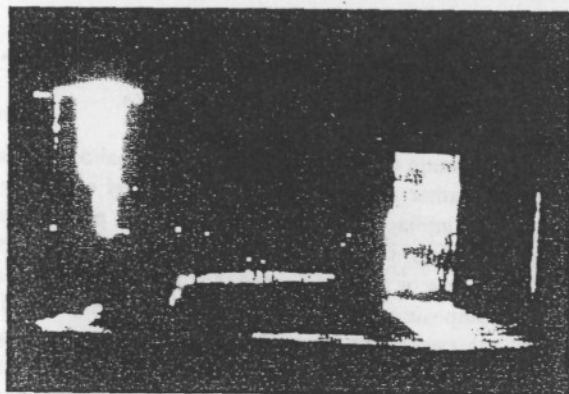
Gorchakov travels with his Italian interpreter Eugenia, a sensual and beautiful young woman. It becomes evident that Gorchakov himself is struggling with his longing, a loss of purpose and identity. He rejects Eugenia's sexual invitation, and his whole behaviour signals a loss of contact with the world. In a small town they meet an eccentric hermit, the former mathematician Domenico, who lives in a deserted and crumbling building. In his attempt to protect his family from the evil world, Domenico had kept his wife and two children locked in a house for seven years. Since the liberation of his family by police, Domenico has been drifting towards a paranoid madness. He is utterly obsessed with the demoralization of the world, which, he believes, drives humanity to its destruction. Gorchakov makes the remark that the madman Domenico is closer to the truth than others.

Domenico delivers a sermon of desperation to the citizens in Rome, standing on the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius: "What kind of a world is this," he cries, "if a madman has to tell you to be ashamed of yourselves?" At the end of his apocalyptic message, he douses himself with gasoline and sets himself on fire, dying by this self-immolation.

In order to fulfil Domenico's obsessive desire, Gorchakov attempts to walk across the thermal water health pool of St Catherine with a lighted candle. This would, according to Domenico's belief, save Humanity.

The film deals primarily with Gorchakov's alienation, his inability to adjust to foreign conditions, and his failure to maintain his identity, which finally pushes him to his death.

against the background of a doorway or an arched opening reminds one of the way Fra Angelico, Bellini, Botticelli, and other *quattrocento* painters placed the main figure against the background of an apse or a fictitious backdrop. Thus Tarkovsky's scenes often have the character of *sacra conversazione* paintings. And sometimes, paintings appear under strange circumstances in his films. For example, a detail of St John the



Top right: *Nostalgia*: Gorchakov in his hotel room.

Right: Fra Angelico, predella painting from the San Marco altarpiece (1438–40); from Elsa Morante, *Fra Angelico* (Milan: Rizzoli 1970).



Baptist from the Ghent altarpiece, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, by the van Eyck brothers, appears submerged in water in the pool of the “Zone” in *Stalker*.

Surprisingly, Tarkovsky emphasizes the difference between various art forms:

As it develops, the cinema will, I think, move further away not only from literature but also from other adjacent art forms, and thus become more and more autonomous ... cinema still retains some principles proper to other art forms, on which directors often base themselves when making a film ... One result (of this) is that cinema then loses something of its capacity for incarnating reality by its own means, as opposed to transmuting life with the help of literature, painting, or theatre. This can be seen for instance in the influence brought to bear on cinema by the visual arts when attempts are made to transfer this or that canvas to the screen ... Trying to adapt the features of other art forms to the screen will always deprive the film of what is distinctively cinematic.¹⁴

Although Tarkovsky did not attempt to imitate painting, he utilized similar pictorial means of rendering space in order to achieve his intended emotional impact. We know that Tarkovsky painted for three years in his youth, and his first film to achieve worldwide attention was on the fifteenth-century icon painter Andrei Rublev. His writings refer frequently to a wealth of painters – Carpaccio, Cézanne, Dalí, van Gogh, Goya, El Greco, Picasso, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Giotto, among others.

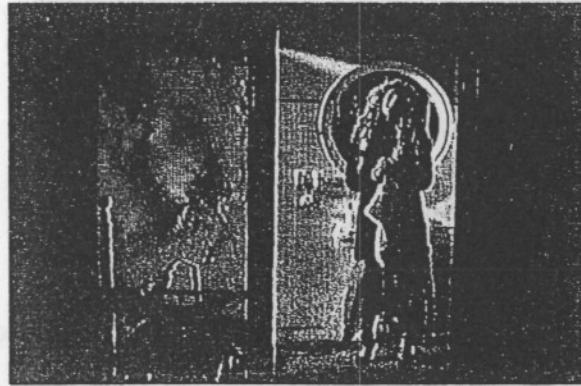
He seems to have been under the spell of Leonardo, in particular. Tarkovsky admires the artist’s amazing “capacity to examine the object from outside, standing back, looking from above the world – a characteristic of artists like Bach and Tolstoy.” Leonardo’s portrait of *A Young Woman with a Juniper Twig* appears in *Mirror*, and in an essay Tarkovsky analyzes the strange duality of the figure – the simultaneous attractiveness and repulsiveness of the woman.¹⁵ Still later in the same film, Aleksei, who portrays Tarkovsky as a boy, studies a book of Leonardo’s drawings; his father reads Leonardo’s instructions for painting a battle scene documented in the Ashbernheim manuscript.

Piero della Francesca also seems to be important for Tarkovsky: Piero’s painting *Madonna del Parto* (*Madonna of Childbirth*) appears in *Nostalgia*; and, indeed, Eugenia could be a woman from one of Piero’s paintings. But she could also be one of the numerous red-haired beauties of Botticelli’s paintings.

As a further example of Tarkovsky’s affinity for painting, *Sculpting in Time* contains illustrations of Dürer’s *Apocalypse*, a painting by Hieronymus Bosch, and Pieter Bruegel’s *January* (*Hunters in the Snow*). A scene in *Mirror* on a snowy hill in which Aleksei takes a bird in his hand resembles the scene in Bruegel’s painting so vividly that it can hardly be accidental. The closing scene, in which Gorchakov’s childhood home in Russia is shown within the ruin of an Italian cathedral, bears close similarity with Caspar David Friedrich’s painting *Ruins of Abbey at Eldena* (1824).

TARKOVSKY’S COMPRESSED SPACE

Tarkovsky’s space is rendered as a frontal perspective with a single vanishing point. This archaism of spatial representation helps to flatten the scene into a two-dimensional image, a painting. The use of one-point perspective also results in the suppression of dynamic effect. Space is



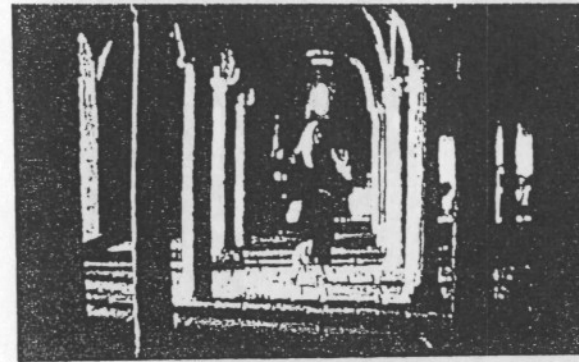
Top right: *Nostalgia*: Eugenia, in Gorchakov's bathroom framed by the doorway and the bathroom mirror in the same manner that Renaissance painters created a focus to the main figure.



Right: Duccio di Buoninsegna, "Appearance of Christ to the Apostles at the Church Door," *Maestà* altar of the Siena *duomo* (1308–11); from Giulio Cattaneo, *Duccio di Buoninsegna* (Milan: Rizzoli 1972).

composed of planes parallel to the screen in the same way as the axonometric technique of Japanese *ukiyo-e*, instead of the dynamic perspective of the modern Western convention of spatial representation.

Tarkovsky diffuses edges of forms, figures, and spaces into mist, water, rain, darkness, or merely an equality of colour and tonal value, in order to abstract the image and weaken the illusion of reality. The naturalistic quality of colour is neutralized as well: "One has to attempt to neutralize colour in order to control its impact on the viewer," he writes.¹⁶ He diffuses landscape into a silvery mist reminiscent of paintings by Camille Corot, to reduce depth and emphasize pictorial flatness. This device activates the process of unconscious peripheral vision and leads the viewer into a hypnotic state, in much the same way as the foggy mountain scenes in Chinese painting or the raked sand in a Japanese Zen garden produce a state of meditation. Figures in Tarkovsky's landscapes are frequently immobile and turned towards the camera in the manner of a still-life, further strengthening the painterly and stylized effect of the image.



Top left: *Nostalgia*: Eugenia in the Church of the Madonna of Childbirth (*Madonna del Parto*).

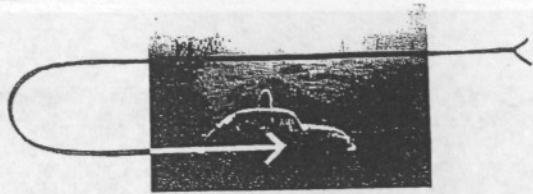


Left: Fra Angelico, "The Presentation in the Temple" (after 1430); from Giulio Carlo Argan, *Fra Angelico and His Times* (Paris: Skira 1955).

SPACE AND MOVEMENT

Tarkovsky's slow and prolonged camera takes move either parallel to the picture plane or along the perpendicular depth direction. As a consequence, the camera never rushes into the depicted space, and the viewer remains at the edge of the painterly image. In the opening scene of *Nostalgia*, for example, a car drives across the foggy landscape to the left of the frame. While the engine sound remains audible, the car makes a loop outside the screen and returns from the left to the front part of the scene. The movement effectively charts the space beyond the screen, just as the edges of Mondrian's squares in his diagonal paintings continue past the frame to activate our awareness of the space beyond.

In the scene in St Catherine's pool, the camera moves parallel to the pool, and an occasional vertical black bar across the screen traces the existence of the arcade columns behind which the camera is located. Towards the end of the film, the movement of Gorchakov's taxi around

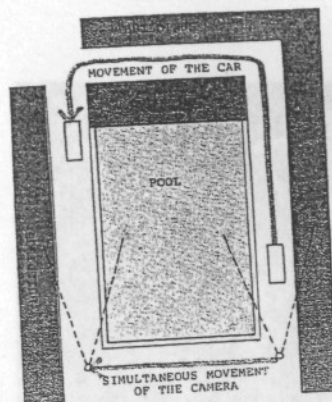


the pool carves its square shape into the space of the screen while the camera moves slowly parallel to the edge to the pool in front.

The prolonged scene in which Gorchakov attempts to leave his hotel when Eugenia unexpectedly calls him from Rome to say that Domenico is making his mad speeches, is another impressive study of architectural space through slowed motion. The camera is placed in a narrow corridor along which it moves imperceptibly to relate three courtyard spaces to one another along this depth direction. The camera carves space directly into the mind of the viewer.

FILMS IN FILM

In *Nostalgia* there are recollections of other film makers as well: people standing frontally as objects in the landscape remind the viewer of Resnais or Antonioni, while the scene with bathers in the steaming pool has a strongly Fellini-like atmosphere. The collection of objects, particularly the image of a broken doll in Domenico's house, recalls Vigo's *L'Atalante*. The frequent appearance of mirrors and the exchanged images of Gorchakov and Domenico in the mirror call forth memories of Jean Cocteau. Not surprisingly, in his diaries Tarkovsky reports having seen Cocteau's



Opposite top: *Nostalgia*: Gorchakov and Eugenia's car arrives at the site of the Church of Childbirth. Movement of the car in relation to the fixed camera view (drawing by Juhani Pallasmaa).

Opposite: Piet Mondrian, "Composition 1A" (1930); from Germano Celant and Michael Govan, *Mondrian e De Stijl* (Milan: Olivetti/Electa 1990).

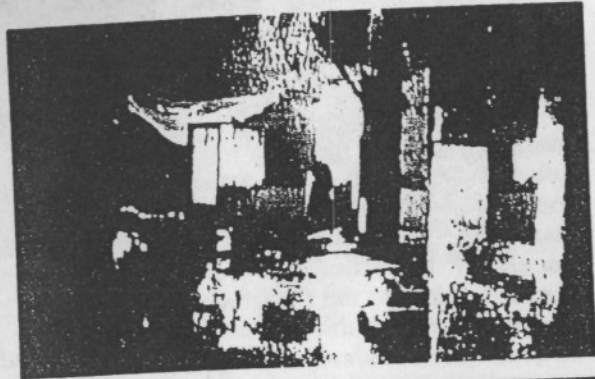
Above: *Nostalgia*: Gorchakov arrives at St. Catherine's pool by taxi. Movement of the car and the camera in relation to the urban space (chart JP).

The Testament of Orpheus on television during the preparatory phase of *Nostalgia*.

Snow falling slowly over the closing scene in *Nostalgia* reflects Tarkovsky's admiration of Ingmar Bergman. He writes about the disturbing scene in Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* in which snowflakes begin to fall on the face of the dying rape victim. The snowflakes in *Nostalgia* fuse the southern and northern elements of the collage into a single coherent image.

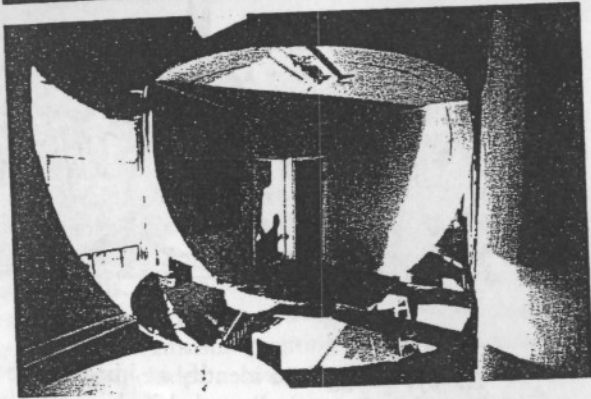
POETICS OF SPACE AND LIGHT

Windows and doors play an essential role in Tarkovsky's films: windows and doorways for looking out or into, and openings for light to enter, as much as for people to pass through. When Gorchakov first enters his hotel room, the spatial configuration of the setting is breathtakingly expressed as an abstract counterpoint of spaces, alternating in darkness and light. As the writer enters the dark room, light seeps into the darkness through the edges of shutters; he opens the shutters to reveal a tiny courtyard, and daylight floods into the room; he closes the shutters and switches on a lamp, which does not function properly; he quickly turns



Top right: *Nostalgia*: interior of Domenico's house.

Right: Gordon Matta-Clark, "Circus or the Caribbean Orange" (1978); from Mary Jane Jacob, *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art 1985).



off the blinking light bulb and turns on a table lamp instead; through the open door he enters the bathroom, which reflects a blue natural light; he turns on the electric light of the bathroom and the small space is suddenly flooded by bright white light.

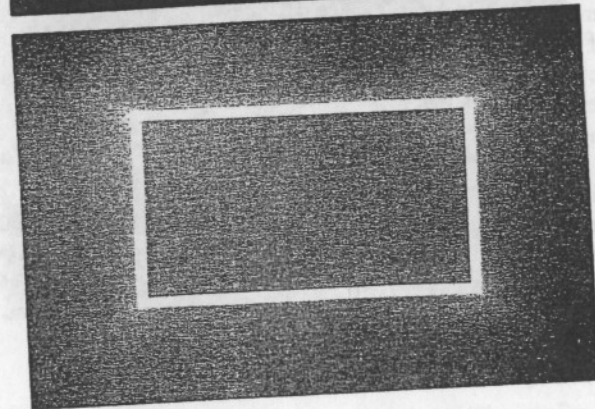
Tarkovsky's music of light and space creates a sequence of astonishing metaphysical beauty and power. These are images of space and light so magical and radiant with poetic essence as to compare with paintings by Fra Angelico or the mysterious light works by the contemporary artist James Turrell.

IMAGES OF MATTER AND RUINS: BUILDING AND MEMORY

In *Water and Dreams*,¹⁷ Gaston Bachelard distinguishes between two kinds of imagination – material and formal. The imagery in Tarkovsky's films clearly belongs to the category of material imagination; his expression is based on images and dreams of matter. Spaces in *Nostalgia* are



Top left: *Nostalgia*: frame from the sequence with Gorchakov in his hotel room.



Left: James Turrell, "Raemar" (1968), fluorescent light; from Craig Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press 1982).

scenes of time and erosion, and surfaces are covered by a skin of traces and scars. The eroding surfaces feed dreams in the same way that a Rorschach figure in a personality test invites figural interpretation. The stimulating impact of eroding surfaces on imagination was observed by Leonardo. Following an ancient Chinese instruction, he advised artists to stare at a crumbling wall to reach inspiration:

When you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes ... or, again, you may see battles and figures in action, or strange faces and costumes, or an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well-drawn forms. And these appear on such walls promiscuously, like the sound of bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine.¹⁸

Ruins have a special hold on our emotions because they challenge us to imagine their forgotten faith. We are moved by them more readily than

with new structures, because ruins have been stripped of their mask of utility and rational meaning. The ruin has ceased to play the role of a building; it represents a skeleton of memory, a sheer melancholy presence. Tarkovsky's leaking and flooded buildings recall Gordon Matta-Clark's dramatic revelations, in which he deliberately dissected buildings to expose the tragic sentiments hidden behind the utilitarian face of architecture.

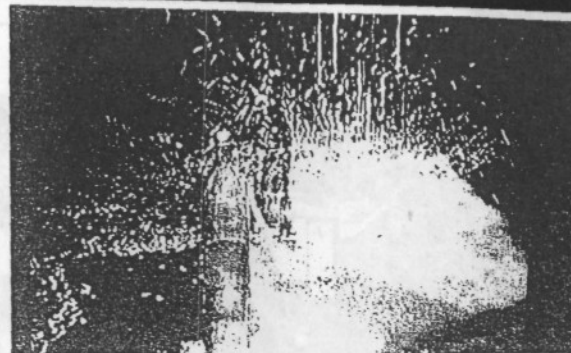
Tarkovsky quotes an image from Marcel Proust – “raising the vast edifice of memories” – which he regards as the calling of film.¹⁹ The association of buildings and memory is strong. Recall, for example, the mnemonic method of Greek orators who imagined themselves placing the individual themes of their speech within a building and, while delivering the speech, moving about in the building and picking up the themes one after another from their temporary storage places. It is clear that architecture and cities provide the most important stage of collective memory. “The house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind,” wrote Bachelard.²⁰ In similar fashion, experiencing a Tarkovsky film is an act of active remembering, discovering the immense edifice of both collective and personal memories.

MEANING OF OBJECTS AND DETAILS

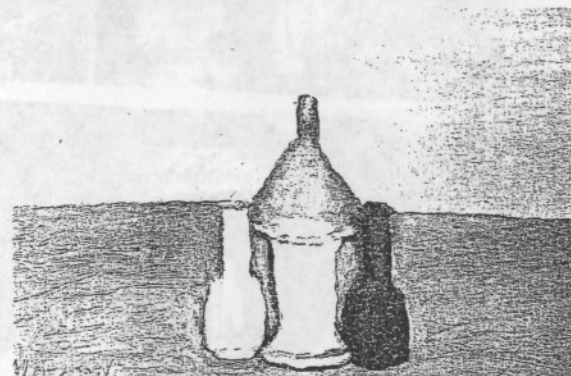
In Tarkovsky's films, objects are frequently seen submerged in water as vague fragments of the tissue of memory, torn beyond recognition by time.



Typical pattern of the Rorschach personality test.



Top left: *Nostalgia*: frame from the sequence in Domenico's house.



Left: Giorgio Morandi, "Natura morta" (1958); from Marilena Pasquali, *Giorgio Morandi* (Milan: Electa 1990).

The eye struggles to identify an image washed by water – a white marble statue of an angel, discarded junk – and after the visual recognition, the mind attempts to reconstruct its history and meaning.

The surrealist still-life that is Domenico's room tends to project a specific meaning on each object present in the room. Domenico passes through a door hinged to a detached doorframe suspended in space; the scribbled “ $1+1=1$ ” on the wall reminds one of Domenico, the mathematician gone mad. Every image layers meanings and recollections; the sign of a cross within a circle painted in red on the wall of the flooded ruin of Gorchakov's drunken monologue is a symbol of Christ, but it is also the Egyptian hieroglyph *nywt* for town, as well as the Roman sign for *templum*. The astonishing architectural miniature of two bottles, green and brown, on the flooded floor of Domenico's room, over which rain water sprouts while lit by bright light, has the silent monumentality and sacred radiance of a Morandi still-life. The miniaturized image is curiously contrasted by Domenico's line: “One needs bigger ideas.”

Objects collected from the bottom of St Catherine's pool – the fragment of a doll, a white bicycle, a light bulb, bottles, rags – refer to lost and forgotten secrets being recovered from the bottom of repressed memory. There is an element of suspense and fear because one can never be certain what the repressed memory may reveal. "Hideousness and beauty are contained within each other," writes Tarkovsky.²¹ But collecting drowned objects from the pool also makes an association with the Venetian legend of the recovery of the True Cross, depicted memorably, for instance, by Gentile Bellini.

The film contains other images that border on the surrealistic: the comb with a tangle of hair between the pages of a worn-out bible in Gorchakov's hotel room; the floor of one of the rooms of Domenico's house, turning into a landscape. But these images serve Tarkovsky's cinematic poetry and lose their conventional surrealistic tension.

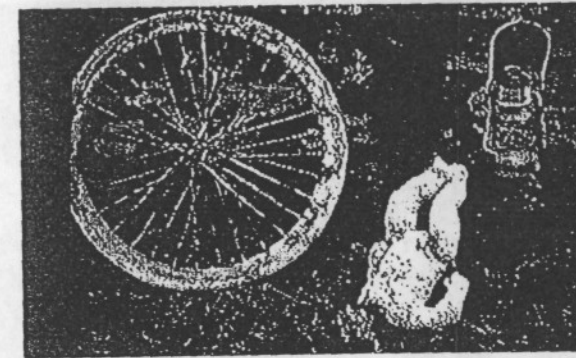
The quarrel between Gorchakov and Eugenia in the hotel lobby is heightened by accidental interruptions by outsiders: an old man carrying a child; a woman and a dog; Chinese music being heard from the upper floor; the sound of distant bells. This effect bears close similarity with that created by painters who, in the depiction of a legend, included prosaic scenes of everyday life. In his monumental painting *The Presentation of the Virgin*, Titian, for instance, included a countrywoman selling eggs, a young boy playing with a dog, and a woman with a child talking with a monk. It is this fusion of meaningful and meaningless, significant and accidental, sacred and profane that reinforces the experience of truth in works of art. The interaction of deliberate design and purposeless chance keeps the viewer's entire emotional channel receptive.

ARCHITECTURE OF SOUND

Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory: qualities of space are measured equally by the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, and muscles. Every place or space has its characteristic sound of intimacy or monumentality, rejection or invitation, hospitality or hostility. But Tarkovsky makes it clear that he rejects a naturalistic duplication of the audible world in his films: "If there is no selection then the film is tantamount to silence, since it has no sound expression of its own."²² A subtle articulation of the sense of sound shapes the experience of space



Top left: *Nostalgia*: desire for recognition – marble statue of an angel buried in water.



Left: *Nostalgia*: fragments of memory – objects recovered from St Catherine's pool.

in his films just as much as vision does. The cavity of space is sculpted by the faint sound of a falling coin, a glass being moved casually on the stone floor by Gorchakov's dream dog, or the sudden distant whistle of a train or ship in the middle of a silent country scene. Tarkovsky's sounds activate the viewer's sense of space and scale.

Domenico's scenes, for example, are coloured by the barely audible, yet aggressive and disquieting, sound of a circular saw that shapes the space beyond the screen and makes the viewer unconsciously sense the blade cutting into the innocence of wood. The music that accompanies the image of Domenico on fire suddenly slows down as if the tape had caught in the tape recorder. The effect both adds an extra element of terror and brings a welcome dimension of distance from the emotionally unbearable scene. In Domenico's house the arrhythmic beating of rain drops creates an impressive sense of dense volume. A distant telephone ringing in the hotel scenes hints at the reality outside the screened image.

IMAGES OF WATER AND FIRE

In his films Tarkovsky frequently uses images that have the highest charge for our imagination – fire and water. Flame has a dramatic role in *Nostalgia*, and it appears in various forms, from a candle to a burning book, and finally, a man set on fire. A scene in which a flock of birds miraculously bursts into flight from the belly of the *Madonna of Childbirth* is also related to the image of a flame. The altar itself in the scene is flooded with candles as an introduction to the Purgatory at the end of the film. The images of fire and water have, of course, a multitude of symbolic meanings, but Tarkovsky rejects explicit psychological as well as religious symbols, as we have seen.

Bachelard, who devoted the latter half of his life to a penetrating phenomenological analysis of the elements and imagination, wrote two books on images of fire²³ and one on images of water. His views throw light on the experiential dimensions of Tarkovsky's scenes. Bachelard speaks of "a poetics of water" and "water poets."²⁴ "Perhaps more than any other element," he writes, "water is a complete poetic reality."²⁵ He goes on to state: "One cannot dream profoundly with *objects*. To dream profoundly, one must dream with *substances*. A poet who begins with a *mirror* must end with the *water of a fountain* if he wants to present a *complete poetic experience*."²⁶

The most essential poetic tension in *Nostalgia* between the contradictory images of fire and water is explained by Bachelard: "In the realm of matters, no two can be found which are more opposed than water and fire. Water and fire give what is perhaps the only really substantial contradiction."²⁷ Balzac's cryptic declaration, "Water is a burned body," and Novalis's sentence, "Water is a dampened flame,"²⁸ further explain the power and strange unity of Tarkovsky's fused imageries of water and flame.

In his fascinating book on Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even)*, Octavio Paz also discusses the imageries of water and fire.²⁹ He refers to the common ritual of throwing torches or candles into rivers or lakes, and the Catholic ritual of blessing the baptismal bowl by dropping a burning candle into the water. Paz also recalls that the neo-Platonists associated fire and water.

The perfect visual and mental congruence of the scenes at St Catherine's thermal bath in *Nostalgia* and the significance of flames is explained by



Above left: Piero della Francesca, "Madonna del Parto" (about 1640); Cappella del Cimiterio, Monterchi (Arezzo); from Oreste del Buono, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Rizzoli 1967).

Above right: *Nostalgia*: a flock of birds bursts into flight from the belly of the Madonna of Childbirth. Piero's painting behind the sea of candles which serves as an introduction to the theme of flames in the film.

Bachelard's observation: "Thermal water ... is imagined first of all as the immediate composition of water and fire."³⁰ As well, after his apocalyptic sermon, Domenico burns himself with gasoline while standing on the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius. The saviour scene has stunning mythical power. Paz's observation that "the mixture of water and fire is explosive"³¹ gives a hint at the psychological logic of Domenico's violent end. His suicide by fire arouses recollections of the wall of fire in Dante's Purgatory, a symbolic baptism through which all who seek salvation must pass. In his desperate deed, the former mathematics teacher and private philosopher also re-enacts the fate of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles, who threw himself into the flames of Mount Etna. But he also repeats the fate of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Russian religious dissidents who often burned themselves to death.

Domenico represents the image of a holy madman – a well-known one in the orthodox religious tradition in Russia and, consequently, a popular motif in Russian art and literature. In the sixteenth century, holy madmen – a figure exemplified by the character of Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* – even had an influence on the Czar.³²

After Domenico's death, Gorchakov fulfils the madman's desire to transport a burning candle across St Catherine's pool. The sequence of Gorchakov's successive attempts and failures is almost painful in its prolonged duration. As soon as Gorchakov reaches the opposite side of the pool with the barely burning candle, he collapses from a heart attack.

(In earlier scenes he had taken pills from his pocket, thereby suggesting he had heart problems.)

Throughout this scene, Tarkovsky makes the viewer experience time as a dense and heavy material presence. The extraordinary power of the sequence of the transportation of the feeble candle flame across the emptied pool is explained by the wealth of meanings that the image of flame suggests. "Of all images, images of flame ... bear the mark of the poetic. Whoever dreams of a flame is a potential poet,"³³ writes Gaston Bachelard. The curious sense of empathy felt by the viewer in the scenes with Gorchakov and the candle becomes understandable through the association of flame and life. As Bachelard notes, "the flame is an image of life ... a living substance, a poeticizing substance ... an image of life which consumes but surprisingly rejuvenates itself."³⁴ His statement, "where a lamp once reigned, now reigns memory,"³⁵ serves to explain the strength with which Tarkovsky's scene invites personal memories. And the experience of extreme solitude is understandable through Bachelard's observation: "The flame of a candle is, for many dreamers, an image of solitude."³⁶

THE FINAL SCENE

An image of home appears throughout the film in the dual image of Gorchakov's and Domenico's dog. But it is significant that Tarkovsky uses a wolfhound, a breed combining contradictory images of safety and threat (dog *and* wolf), fidelity and savageness. In the final scene, Gorchakov is seen sitting with his dog in front of his house in Russia, which is, however, viewed within the ruin of an Italian cathedral. The scene is a deliberate collage, which strikes one as being somewhat too literal and fabricated, given the context of the film and Tarkovsky's general intent. The film maker himself acknowledges: "I would concede that the final shot of *Nostalgia* has an element of metaphor, when I bring the Russian house inside the Italian cathedral. It is a constructed image which smacks of literariness (and hence it is against my own principles) ... All the same, even if the scene lacks cinematic purity, I trust that it is free of vulgar symbolism."³⁷

Tarkovsky goes on to explain the relation of theoretical principles and creative work: "Clearly I could be accused of being inconsistent. However, it is for the artist both to devise principles and to break them ... artistic



Top left: *Nostalgia*: Domenico on fire after his mad speech.

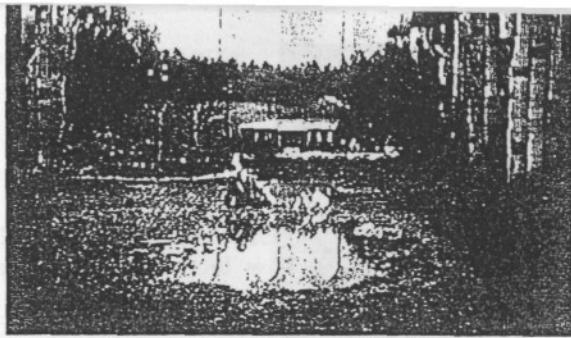
Left: *Nostalgia*: Gorchakov transports a candle across St Catherine's pool.

texture is always richer than anything that can be fitted into a theoretical schema."³⁸ In another context, he elaborates: "A film is bigger than it is – at least, if it is a real film. And it always turns out to have more thought, more ideas, than were consciously put there by its author."³⁹ Here, Tarkovsky shares Milan Kundera's view that a great novel is always wiser than its writer.

TARKOVSKY'S LESSON IN ARCHITECTURE

In architecture we are rarely confronted with rooms through which rain pours or rooms that are flooded with water. In Tarkovsky's films, however, these images have a dramatic power. That impact is based on the fusion of the exclusive imageries of building and water, protection and exposure, shape and shapelessness, definite and infinite. In this connection, Tarkovsky recalls Paul Valéry's view that "the real is expressed most immanently through the absurd,"⁴⁰ and he also quotes Goethe: "The less accessible a work is to the intellect, the greater it is."⁴¹

Nostalgia: collage of
Tarkovsky's home in
Italy fused within Italian
architectural.



Nostalgia's images of Domenico's rooms with rain pouring through the roof, along with similar scenes in *Stalker*, are among the most fascinating architectural images ever created. Although they are scenes of erosion, they radiate an astonishing beauty and purity of feeling. They possess an almost sacred or ecclesiastical presence. The wealth of details, images, and associations, and the fusion of figure and ground in these images bring to mind Balthazar Neumann's Baroque church of Vierzehnheiligen. Architecture today rarely seems to enter the realm of poetry or to awaken the world of unconscious imagery. The sheer poetic radiance of Tarkovsky's architectural images brings into relief the contemporary language of architecture, which is one-dimensional in terms of the scope of notions evoked by its imagery. Architecture tends to be engaged with visual effects, and it lacks the tragic, the melancholy, the nostalgic, as well as the ecstatic and transcendental tones of the spectrum of emotions. As a consequence, our buildings tend to leave us as outsiders and spectators without being able to pull us into full emotional participation.

Architecture must again question its functionality and existence on the level of materiality and practicalities in order to touch the deeper levels of consciousness, dream, and feeling, as revealed by Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*. Ingmar Bergman has aptly chosen architectural metaphors – room, door, keys – to describe Tarkovsky's contribution in creating an authentic cinematic language that is new and ageless at the same time:

Tarkovsky's first film was as a miracle to me. Suddenly I stood at a door, the keys to which had never before been given to me. I had always wanted to enter that room and there he was, moving about freely and unaffectedly. I was encouraged and excited. Someone gave an expression to what I had wanted to say, not



Caspar David Friedrich,
"Ruins of the Abbey at
Eldena" (1824); from
Helmut Börsch-Supan,
Friedrich (Milan: Rizzoli
1976).

knowing how. For me, Tarkovsky is the greatest. He created a new, authentically cinematic language. It catches the reflection of life, the dream of life.¹²

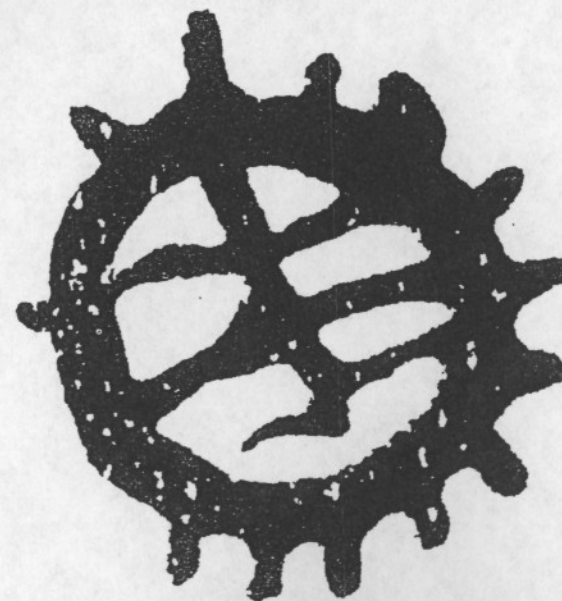
NOTES

- 1 Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, tr. K. Hunter-Blair (London: Bodley Head 1986), 110.
- 2 J.H. van den Berg, *The Phenomenological Approach in Psychology* (Springfield, Ill.: C.C. Thomas 1955), 61; quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, tr. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press 1969), xxiv.
- 3 *Nostalgia*, Tarkovsky's first film made abroad, was completed in 1983. His last, *The Sacrifice*, was shot in Sweden and completed in May 1986. He died of cancer later that year at the age of fifty-four.
- 4 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 182–3.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 202.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 216.
- 7 Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martyrologia: Diaries 1970–1981* (Joensuu, Finland: Kustannus Oy Mabuse 1989), 342.
- 8 Anders Olofsson, "Nostalgia," in *Tanken på en Hemkomst*, ed. M. Bergh and B. Munkhammar (Stockholm: Alfa Beta Bokförlag 1986), 150.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 152.
- 10 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 212.
- 11 See, for example, George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press 1961); and James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper & Row 1974).
- 12 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 150.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 21.

- 14 Ibid., 22.
- 15 Ibid., 108.
- 16 Ibid., 138.
- 17 Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, tr. E.R. Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute 1983).
- 18 Quoted in Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames & Hudson 1980), 225.
- 19 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 59.
- 20 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 6.
- 21 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 38.
- 22 Ibid., 161-2.
- 23 Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, tr. A.C.M. Ross (London: Quartet Books 1987); and *The Flame of a Candle*, tr. J. Coldwell (Dallas: Dallas Institute 1988).
- 24 Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 5.
- 25 Ibid., 15.
- 26 Ibid., 22.
- 27 Ibid., 98.
- 28 Quoted in *ibid.*, 97.
- 29 Octavio Paz, *Suuri lasi* [The Large Glass] (Hämeenlinna, Finland: Karisto, 1991); and Marcel Duchamp, *Appearance Stripped Bare*, tr. R. Phillips and D. Gardner (New York: Seaver Books 1973).
- 30 Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 97.
- 31 Paz, *Suuri lasi*, 155.
- 32 Olofsson, "Nostalgia," 161.
- 33 Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, 45.
- 34 Ibid., 45.
- 35 Ibid., 11.
- 36 Ibid., 9.
- 37 Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 213-14.
- 38 Ibid., 216.
- 39 Ibid., 118.
- 40 Ibid., 152.
- 41 Ibid., 47.
- 42 Peter von Bagh, *Elämää suuremmat elokuvat* (Helsinki: Otava 1989), 611.

The Momentary Modern Magic of the Panorama

Stephen Parcell



Chora