



Existential themes and motifs in Andrei Tarkovsky's films: The notions of space and transcendence

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Abstract

In this article Andrei Tarkovsky's films are studied through the lens of existential philosophical traditions. At the heart of Tarkovsky's narratives lies a yearning for authenticity, a need for freedom and an intention to communicate with otherness in its various manifestations. Whereas spirituality is clearly an important factor in Tarkovsky's aesthetic explorations, we focus on materiality and corporeality: a violent sensuality, associated to what Albert Camus perceives as a revolt of the flesh, plays a crucial part in Tarkovsky's seven films. A desire to escape oppressive aspects of everyday reality in order to approach an ideal location (mostly related to memories of childhood) gives rise to the urgent need for transcendence described in Tarkovsky's body of work. The two key terms, the notions of transcendence and space, are closely related to one another. The importance of poetry, not as a literary term, but as a way to interpret and challenge everyday reality, will be a key factor in the reading of this process.

Keywords: film philosophy, existentialism, material reality, transcendence, space

This article explores the relationship between Andrei Tarkovsky's visual themes and motifs and architecture, in its broader sense, as a way for the individual to actively redefine space, create new realities through this process and, most importantly, establish a link between artistic production and everyday life. The philosophical connotations of this search echo various ideas familiar to us from existentialism; Powerful images throughout Tarkovsky's body of work attempt to reorganize reality through subjective experience and perception, taking into consideration even irrational¹ or ritualistic aspects of life: the constant use of dream images, products of fantasy and desire, or the tendency to actively replace either a person or a location from the past with another in memories, notably the relocation of Harri (Natalya Bondarchuk), the lost woman of the past, as Mother, in the house of infancy, in the climax of *Solaris* (1972), are illustrative examples of the director's expressed distrust for scientific objectivity as the only valid way to perceive reality².

¹ Tarkovsky's irrational tendencies have been explored by various thinkers. Luca Governatori describes a "redemptive irrationality" (Governatori, 2002, p. 15) as his most defining feature. Gilles Visy (Visy, 2005, p. 58) will use the same in term in relation to Tarkovsky's 1976 film *Stalker*.

² "By means of art man takes over reality through a subjective experience. In science man's knowledge of the world makes its way up an endless staircase and is successively replaced by new knowledge, with one discovery often enough being disproved by the next for the sake of a particular objective truth. An artistic discovery occurs each time as a new and unique image of the world, a hieroglyphic of absolute truth". (Tarkovsky, 1987, p. 37).



This view, defined by a priority given to poetic subjectivism and a preference of intuition over rationality, as a safer way to interpret reality and human relationships, follows a theoretical tradition familiar to us both from western and Russian existential philosophers; notable are the cases of Søren Kierkegaard, Lev Shestov, and Nikolai Berdyaev.

While it is tempting to suppose that what these thinkers share with Tarkovsky is a metaphysical view of the world, it is actually their existential focus on the individual that really serves as point of reference for our purposes. It is notable that Tarkovsky was also deeply influenced by the writings of Albert Camus; among other unrealized projects, he expressed, in his diaries, interest for a possible adaptation of Camus' memorable 1947 novel *The Plague* (Tarkovsky, 1988, p. 21). Interestingly for a thinker that constantly expresses metaphysical concerns, Tarkovsky's images never negate everyday life, on the contrary, even when they attempt to visualize inner situations, they always seem to do so through an emphasis on materiality. As we shall see, throughout the films, an undeniable priority is given on material space, and by extension on the human body.

When it comes to the relationship between Tarkovsky's film narratives and the notion of "lived space" or "existential space"³ there are, we note, at least three ways to understand the dynamic between Tarkovsky's characters and their surroundings, three ways that are to be understood in their interrelation rather than read as factors separate from one another:

1. First, we have space as a thematic motif referring to the individual's need to approach an ideal location, to understand and influence, even transform, what is conventionally perceived as an outside reality. Both the Ocean in *Solaris* and the Zone in *Stalker* (1979), in their ability to create new realities based on inner motivations, are fictional entities that seem to depict, to literally visualize, such needs. In *Mirror* (1975) and *Nostalghia* (1983), films that lack the science fiction aspect of *Solaris* and *Stalker*, this ideal location is described quite literally as the place of birth, linked with the past, therefore defined by a loss. Such a location cannot be approached without some form of transcendence—I use the term in its existential rather than spiritual connotations⁴, a dynamic process that soon comes forward and becomes the moving factor of the plot of the films in question.
2. Then there is a constant interest in space as an aesthetic element. Tarkovsky's films are built not only on narrative lines but also on evocative, and often ambiguous, visual structures. Images that often choose to ignore Euclidean space and even the strict logic of cause and effect, in its broader sense, in a conscious attempt to recreate outside reality; the most obvious example here is the various flight scenes, found throughout Tarkovsky's body of work.
3. Finally, the same emphasis can be mirrored in the non-linear structures of the films themselves. We have, as a result, an existential conception of space, that dominates Tarkovsky's films even as a structural element. *Mirror* seems to be the most obvious example of this tendency, but even *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), Tarkovsky's first feature film that seems at first glance to evolve more conventionally, as a coming-of-age story, follows the same poetic pattern; the narrative challenges the way space and time are traditionally perceived, through the intervention of Ivan's dreams. As already mentioned, these three ways to approach filmic space (thematic, aesthetic and structural) are clearly interlinked, and should be understood only in relation to one another.

There is also a notable connection between the corporeal element, the emphasis on the human body and architecture. Locations are, arguably, perceived by Tarkovsky as natural extensions of the

³ A term used, between others, by the Finnish architect and theoretician Juhani Pallasmaa (Pallasmaa, 2008).

⁴ For a brief examination of the term Transcendence and its long "lineage in the history of western metaphysics", (Rolli, 2004, p. 50) Marc Rolli's analysis is of special interest. The term is also thoroughly examined by Jean Wahl (Wahl, 2017).

human body. Whereas an undeniable distrust and bitterness is often connected with urban civilization (the Sisyphian city of the future in *Solaris*, shot in Tokyo, in a memorable sequence) locations are accepted as a natural part of reality and never used as symbols- there is after all, a persistent distance from symbolism in Tarkovsky's films, consistent with his theoretical views as expressed in *Sculpting in Time*⁵ and other writings. Geographical areas are perceived by Tarkovsky, in the context of each film, as actual entities, even when they reflect subjective desires, fears or other inner conditions; an aesthetic choice that brings in mind phenomenological ideas about the experience of the world of perception, primarily through the body. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004)

Interiority, fears and desires according to such a world-view are always understood in relation to the world of senses. And when this natural communication between human bodies and their surroundings is threatened by outside forces, the filmic narratives focus on the need for an intended reconciliation between the individual and the outside world: a notable depiction of such an event is the crisis the painter Andrei (Anatoly Solonitsyn) faces during the threat of a historically defined crisis, the attack of the Tartars, in *Andrei Rublev* (1966) and the way he chooses life and artistic production over bitterness and self-isolation. It is in this regard that Tarkovsky's understanding of the relation between the individual and the world around it, the lived or existential space, leads to a call for action; and by extension proves to be both powerful and liberating.

1. Corporeality and Revolt: Tarkovsky's theoretical traditions and opposition to western positivism.

As we begin our exploration of the existential themes and motifs that lie at the heart of Tarkovsky's films, in order to define, as their natural extension, the intended relationship between the individual and the space around it that they suggest, we focus on the corporeal element. In Tarkovsky's films human bodies are constantly depicted as entities that tend to revolt, or even to rebel, against the existing order: sometimes they are seen suffering (the crown of thorns worn by the Writer in *Stalker*) making love (the pagan celebration in *Andrei Rublev*) or even elevated in religious ecstasy: the latter is suggested in the evocative erotic flight scene between Alexander (Erland Josephson) and Maria (Guðrún Gísladóttir) in *Sacrifice* (1986). For Tarkovsky, the image of the human body becomes a perfect visualization of what Camus describes as the "revolt of the flesh" (Camus, 1942, p. 20). Indeed, the realization of the absurd, a notion that, contrary to popular beliefs, isn't mutual exclusive with the anxiety described by certain religious philosophies-as Camus' focus on Christian existential thinkers, like Kierkegaard (Camus, 1942, p. 27) or Shestov (Camus, 1942, p. 42) makes clear- proves to be closely related with this priority of the material world, depicted in Tarkovsky's body of work.

Transcendence towards otherness, the natural culmination of the revolt of the body, is to be found in this link between artistic creation (in all of its forms) and everyday experience. By otherness here, we refer to the material world as well, seen as an object of desire, a space that needs to be approached through lived experience. This priority of the senses and the subsequent emphasis on corporeality are both in communication with the already mentioned broader theoretical tradition of disbelief towards western positivism as the only safe way to approach reality.

This neo-romantic view is expressed notably in Berdyaev's philosophical work *The Russian Idea* which suggests that two contradictory principles lay at the foundation of the structure of the Russian soul "the one a natural, dionysian, elemental paganism" (Berdyaev, 1948, p. 3) and the other an ascetic monastic orthodoxy. Lev Shestov's memorable essay *Athens and Jerusalem*, that reads suspiciously the Apollonian Athenian spirit and its influence on western civilization (Shestov, 1966) expresses similar ideas. The main concern of both thinkers, mirrored in Tarkovsky's fiction, is

⁵ The purity of cinema, its inherent strength, is revealed not in the symbolic aptness of images (however bold these may be) but in the capacity of those images to express a specific, unique, actual fact (Tarkovsky, 1987, p. 72).

positivism's indifference towards the less easily defined needs of the subject as an individual, needs that cannot be easily approached through empirical knowledge or general axioms.

It is in this light that Tarkovsky's heroes keep returning to the transformative and expressive qualities of art, in order to approach otherness whereas the representatives of the pursuit of knowledge in itself, a mentality that echoes the doctrines of scientific positivism, like Dr. Sartorius (Anatoly Solonitsyn) in *Solaris*, Kyrill (Ivan Lapikov) in *Andrei Rublev*, and the unnamed Professor (Nikolai Grinko) in *Stalker* are all depicted in a negative light. Especially the Professor gives a clear manifestation of this idea, as he enters the miraculous Zone, the idealized space, with the sole intention of destroying it, being afraid of its possibilities.

It becomes apparent that what motivates Tarkovsky is not a desire to escape from a deeper knowledge of the world, on the contrary western scientific positivism is seen suspiciously by him, exactly because by focusing on general ideas, it tends to lose sight of individual aspects of reality and hidden possibilities of everyday life. In contrast to what is usually expected from the platonic and neo-platonic traditions that Tarkovsky's metaphysical world-view is obviously influenced by, we note that there is no sign of disbelief towards lived experience in itself. On the contrary Tarkovsky's depicted struggles always take place in the realm of everyday reality, even when the desired outcome is transcendence, achieved through religious ecstasy, poetry or artistic creation. It is exactly a tendency to reconcile irrationality with everyday life that defines Tarkovsky's understanding of architecture and space in general.

Lived experience for Tarkovsky is of the utmost importance, echoing both the existential, Sartrean emphasis on action (Sartre, 1965) and Henri Bergson's suggestion of developing a conscious, sensitive relationship with reality, a process that the philosopher calls "attention to life" (Bergson, 2004).

A notable difference, though, between Tarkovsky's perception of lived experience and Sartre's understanding of action in the world, leaving aside Tarkovsky's metaphysical beliefs, is the latter's emphasis not on the future but on the past, when it comes to his heroes' attempts to redefine reality; the motif of a lost idealized time period closely related to infancy keeps returning in Tarkovsky's films.

Sometimes this need is expressed through dreams or religious mysticism, (most notably in Tarkovsky's earlier films, *Ivan's Childhood* and *Andrei Rublev*), others through memory (the most evocative visual representation of memory probably can be found in *Mirror*). It is notable that in the two cases when Tarkovsky's films specifically take place on future worlds they either evoke past times (the iconography of *Stalker*) or prove to be cold and deserted, as if the domination of the technological civilization over nature and the subsequent isolation caused by this advancement has brought distress (*Solaris*). For this reason, they are both seen by Tarkovsky as anti-romantic, if not openly oppressive realities.

Again, the concept of a beloved person as a place becomes the only possible solution: both Hari in *Solaris* and *Stalker's* daughter are identified with places that bring comfort and offer sanctuary from the oppressive outside forces in quite a literal sense. Hari becomes herself a manifestation of the mother figure, the place of birth and, most impressively for our purposes, the house of infancy through the redemptive powers of the Ocean of *Solaris*, in the evocative climactic sequence. Whereas *Stalker's* daughter is clearly a manifestation of the healing powers of the Zone, a geographical area able to offer material reality to desires and other unapproachable inner situations. It is important at this point to note that the concept of giving material reality to inner feelings, in many ways crucial for existentialists and of the utmost importance for architecture in its broader sense, becomes for Tarkovsky a priority. A variation of the same theme is the main plot point of both *Solaris* and *Stalker*. The very same need, the desire for a character to see an inner condition materialized, becomes the main philosophical concern of most of his films, notably *Nostalghia*, once more a narrative centered on the idea of finding points of reference and ideal locations, in order to exist.

2. Attempts to recreate Reality. Embracing the Absurd.

The way these needs, already linked to existentialism and irrationality, are dealt with, in Tarkovsky's films, is recreation of reality. Poetry in itself, not as a genre of literature but as a way to experience, interpret, redefine and eventually alter everyday life, is of the utmost importance, exactly because of its expressive overtones. Self-expression indeed is a vital need, rather than an abstract concept in Tarkovsky's fiction; as already mentioned the way to give rise to such a poetic way of life and material reality to what, at first glance, might seem like a theoretical concept is the films' visual emphasis on the human body.

The idea of human flesh (and corporeality more general) as the perfect vehicle for self-expression and communication with an equally expressive, dynamic in itself rather than passive, outside world has both phenomenological and existential roots. Camus, when describing some archetypal "absurd heroes", focuses on the actor, the person that redefines and re-invents itself, through performance, every night (Camus, 1942, p. 73). In Tarkovsky's *Sacrifice*, Alexander, the main character and the one that manifests the idea of the "suffering body" in the most direct way, is also a former actor. The title's action, the destruction and sacrifice of the beloved house as a present to a God only he can approach, through subjective experience, is an action of both self-destruction and creation. Such contradictions are closely linked to the existential concept of transcendence: the thematic connection to Kierkegaard's reading of the biblical story of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, that draws Abraham as another notable existential absurd hero (Kierkegaard, 1983), is clearer than ever.

In *Andrei Rublev*, we also have the depiction of an actor, in this case a medieval folk singer or jester, that manifests similar ideas and, in many ways, serves as a predecessor of Alexander. The jester (Rolan Byko), whose tongue is later ripped out as a punishment for his heretic song mirroring in a dark way Andrei Rublev's vow of silence, seems to embody pre-Christian ideas in a Christian world, to give expression to secret, sometimes even menacing, yearnings through his Bacchic dance. At the same time the jester is an undoubtedly modern creation, echoing once more Camus' ideal of the artist as the perfect manifestation of the absurd.

Even if, at first glance, the secondary character of the jester is depicted as an alternative to Rublev, there is something striking similar between his performance and Andrei's need for artistic production and spiritual peace, a struggle that continues even in troubled times, during a destructive foreign invasion of the Tartaric army.

The reassuring words, spoken by Andrei himself to Boriska, a crying young boy, during the memorable closing scene ("I will paint and you will construct bells"⁶) makes the connection between the two artists more apparent than ever. Rublev himself, not unlike the jester, in a way embraces the absurd in order to give material reality (through painting icons) to inner needs: artistic creation, trust in intuition, expressiveness through dance are all equally important ways, for Tarkovsky, to exist and communicate with the outside world. Once more the relationship between the individual and the world around it, based on the concept of poetry as creation, is depicted in an optimistic way; the absurd and irrational aspects of reality prove to be empowering in themselves.

3. Absurd Creation and poetic living.

The link between Andrei Tarkovsky's philosophical existential connotations and architecture, in the broader sense of existing in space as an individual person by establishing a dynamic relationship with otherness, with a location, or even through the dynamic gradual construction of a new reality, a reality more satisfying than the oppressive one that preceded it, becomes evident. The concept of "absurd creation" is defined by Camus as the ability to create oneself through an acceptance of life in its contradictions, a possess that inevitably has the character of a violent act of revolt in itself,

⁶ Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev*.

rather than a reassuring self-awareness. A return to the world of everyday life is clearly the way to approach spirituality for Tarkovsky and in this priority of the flesh there is something fundamentally creative.

The ways to actually give form to inner needs varies: In Ivan's childhood the concept of absurd creation is approached through dream, in *Mirror* through memory, the power that structures the narrative, in *Andrei Rublev* through artistic creation and spirituality. What all of these narratives have in common is the fact that they are structured on a loss, experienced by the main characters. Loss of time period, but most importantly loss of a location that used to offer comfort. In *Nostalghia*, one of the visually more impressive works of Tarkovsky the feeling of abandonment is carefully linked with the absence of a desired geographical entity, the place of origin in itself. Absurd creation, as a process, attempts to bravely bridge the loss of authenticity experienced by Tarkovsky's heroes with the already existing outside reality.

There is a notable difference between the world view expressed by Camus and the poetic narratives that take place in Tarkovsky's films. Tarkovsky, following a Russian mystical cultural tradition, as well as an iconography of the suffering body familiar to us from Kierkegaard's existential readings of Christianity, gives special emphasis on the concept of passion, in both of its connotations: passion as expression of personal feelings and emotions; and passion in the etymological, literal sense as a synonym for suffering. Camus obviously is concerned with anxiety as well, when examining the absurd and its influence on everyday life, but in Tarkovsky's films suffering is not so much a state of being, as it is a sensual reality, a lived experience of the body. A visual emphasis on natural violence (like the blinding of the masons and the already mentioned ripping of the tongue of the jester in *Andrei Rublev*) can be read as a notable example of the above. Such acts of violence narratively serve as cathartic acts, mirroring the need for artistic creation that lies at the heart of the film (the eyes and the tongue of the jester closely correspond to Andrei's visual exploration of life through painting, a form of art that in many ways evokes cinema) and indicating subtly an interrelation between notions like the artistic creation (in itself an absurd action), the experience of horror and the revolt of the human body.

Materiality and the corporeal element, in Tarkovsky's body of work, is to be found in cinematic depictions of human figures (with a consistent emphasis on suffering bodies), as well as in the depiction of locations. People are actually identified with places, in a rather literal sense. The Zone in *Stalker*, the Russian earth and the Church that needs to be constructed in *Andrei Rublev* and Alexander's house that (in interesting symmetries) needs to be destroyed in *Sacrifice* are all to be seen as alive entities, rather than conventionally chosen locations and pieces of scenery where events occur.

The realization of the concept of "Russian nostalgia" as a corporeal experience in itself, a violent realization of an absence that takes place in the body and expressed through dream, fantasy and other manifestations, a call for action rather than the bittersweet, somehow comforting sentimentality that we have come to associate with nostalgic feelings in various western works of art is also illuminating for our purposes. The yearning for an ideal location is also a yearning for otherness, a desire to return in an irrevocably lost place or time period. The only way to achieve such a relocation is through the absurd or, similarly, through artistic production. What should be taken into consideration, at this point is that artistic creativity for Tarkovsky is not to be distinguished from the world of everyday life, on the contrary artists in his films, like Alexander and Andrei, are perceived as existential subjects⁷ that struggle on a daily basis, in order to interpret reality through art and give expression to their experience through the same liberating procedure that, in his theoretical writings, Tarkovsky defines as poetry⁸.

⁷ Kierkegaard uses the poetic term "Knight of faith" (Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 38) to describe the same condition.

⁸ "But to return to our theme: I find poetic links, the logic of poetry in cinema, extraordinarily pleasing. They seem to me perfectly appropriate to the potential of cinema as the most truthful and poetic of art forms. Certainly, I am more at home with them than with

4. Flight Motifs. Tarkovsky's Yearning for Otherness.

The intended escape from the oppressions of outside reality is visually expressed in many subtle ways but one of the most powerful aesthetic choices is the flight motif that keeps returning in Tarkovsky's films. Sometimes the flight depicted is logically explained, like the flight of Yefim (Nikolay Glazkov), the villager in the introductory scene of *Andrei Rublev*, who attempts metaphorically to become a bird, to fly on a hot air balloon, as he tries to escape from the invading army, before collapsing into the earth.⁹ The evocative flight scene in *Solaris*, while poetic in nature has also a rational basis, as the film follows conventions of science fiction: an absence of gravity in the atmosphere of the planet where the action takes place. In other flight scenes the actions depicted are related to aspects of life where subjective impressions are crucial like the experiences of dreaming (*Sacrifice*, *Ivan's Childhood*) and perceiving life through infancy (the memory of the mother that elevates in *Mirror*). The narrative function of these, often enigmatic, scenes remains the same: a desire for self-fulfillment and communication with Otherness, however one chooses to define it. Notably, in *Sacrifice*, the flight scene is at the same time both an erotic scene (Alexander makes love to Maria and the couple flight above the bed in a way that echoes the 1924 painting *Audessus de la Ville* by Marc Chagall), and a visual expression of the religious, spiritual transcendence he seeks.

A visual clue towards a possible interpretation of Tarkovsky's concept of existential space can be found in the very similar *Solaris'* flight scene: among other objects we see an edition of *Don Quixote*, illustrated by Gustave Dore. Authenticity is preferred over rationality and fantasy is subtly but clearly glorified, through the implications of the presence of the familiar figure of *Don Quixote*, as a safer way to deal with reality, over strict analytical positivism.

To sum up, when it comes to Tarkovsky's depiction of passionate relationships between individuals (in existential terms, subjects) and objects of desire (either objects of yearning, beloved persons, time periods or geographic locations) we can observe the following common themes: first, emotional strength is described as an expressive force, expressive in the poetic (in the literal meaning of the word, that is creative) sense of developing a sensitivity towards the surrounding reality, a sensitivity through which a more conscious relationship with outside reality is achieved. Secondly, Tarkovsky's perception of existential space and of the way it should be approached by the individual, according to the narratives in his body of work, appears to be closely related to the philosophical notion of transcendence and by extension has ecstatic connotations; while keeping in touch with materiality, at the same time. Finally, the same relationships are dominated by the shadow of the past, to the extent that even locations belonging to the natural environment are approached with an intensity that could be characterized as a nostalgic yearning.

5. Towards Transcendence: Tarkovsky's existential notion of Space.

Tarkovsky's films describe a reconciliation between the struggling individual and their surroundings, a desire to rise and fight against oppressive aspects of everyday life, not by escaping the world of perception but, on the contrary, through the gradual cultivation of a conscious relationship to otherness. In contrast to a broader theoretical tradition that tends to read Tarkovsky's films as pessimistic at heart¹⁰, the existential connotations of such a reading indicate a liberating intention.

traditional theatrical writing which links images through the linear, rigidly logical development of the plot. That sort of fussily correct way of linking events usually involves arbitrarily forcing them into sequence in obedience to some abstract notion of order. And even when this is not so, even when the plot is governed by the characters, one finds that the links which hold it together rest on a facile interpretation of life's complexities." (Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, 1987, pp. 18-20)

⁹ Notably in the original screenplay, published in English in 1991, Yefim attempts to fly in wooden wings, like the mythical Icarus (Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev*, With an introduction by Philip Strick, 1991, p. 7)

¹⁰ Mark Le Fanu reads in Tarkovsky a "contemporary pessimism" (Le Fanu, 1985). Slavoj Žižek's reaming in *The Parallax View* moves along similar lines (Žižek, 2009, p. 85).

Even if in Tarkovsky's first two films the cause for the heroes' anxiety is to be found in outside forces (both Ivan's Childhood and Andrei Rublev depict the impact of the invasion of a foreign army on the main characters) a poetic subtext, a need to approach an inner freedom is carefully associated with their outside condition. In Solaris and Stalker, the same freedom is to be determined in spatial terms¹¹ as the product of certain locations (Solaris' Ocean and the Zone, respectively). Mirror and Nostalgia identify the idealized location, the object of the search, as the place of birth. In Sacrifice, the same search culminates in a violent, apparently self-destructive act. And yet Alexander's sacrifice is not fruitless. The unexpected final image of the lonely tree that takes life again is to be read quite literally as an optimistic, hopeful resolution.

Taking into consideration these factors, we conclude in four notable aspects, which define the relation between interiority and Tarkovsky's notion of space:

1. Interiority for Tarkovsky is closely related to the world of everyday life. Tarkovsky's characters always deal with history and the impact that outside forces have on them. Their tendency towards an intended flight or act of transcendence is not to be understood as a desire to escape from the present time. On the contrary, it stems from their need to experience it even further. The undeniable inclination towards the past expressed through memory (the main theme in Mirror, Nostalgia and Solaris) is to be understood as part of their existential search, their attempt to redefine reality; a search that remains creative in nature.
2. Trust in the world of nature and, by extension, an interest in the material world is constantly reaffirmed. Tarkovsky's optimism that sometimes appears to be ambiguous, if not contradictory (the tree that blossoms unexpectedly after the destruction of the family house in Sacrifice) is actually the product of this trust.
3. Poetry, in all its variations, mostly read as a synonym for a conscious creative attitude towards life, defines Tarkovsky's notion of space. The outside world is to be understood creatively, rather than passively, through a dynamic stance.
4. Freedom from oppressive aspects of life is of the utmost importance: Tarkovsky's emphasis on creativity, in order to achieve this freedom, gives rise to a cry for reconciliation between human experience and human environments.

As already stated, this need for authenticity, freedom and relocation of self is not to be understood as a strictly spiritual experience, on the contrary it takes place as a procedure on the human body, on the world of flesh. The revolt of the flesh, described by Camus, combined with feelings of an often-violent nostalgia define Tarkovsky's notion of space. Most importantly, as is often the case in phenomenological traditions, Tarkovsky's experience of lived space is to be understood as a sensual experience.

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¹¹ In Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie's book-length analysis of Tarkovsky's body of work the importance of visual construction of areas, as part of the iconography and the thematic concern of the films is noted in detail. (Johnson, 1994). Similarly, Robert Bird gives priority to the natural environment as an extension the human body, as he structures his book around the use of the four elements of nature. (Bird, 2008)

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Resume

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