

Natasha Synessios

Andrei Tarkovsky – Self, World, Flesh

И Шуберт на воде, и Моцарт в птичьей гаме.
О. Мандельштам

Quality, light, colour, depth, which are there before us,
are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because
the body welcomes them. Things have an internal equivalent in me;
they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty

INTRODUCTION

In *SCULPTING IN TIME* Andrei Tarkovsky writes: „Works of criticism tend to approach their subject in order to illustrate a particular idea; far less often, unfortunately, do they start from the direct, living, emotional impact of the work in question“ (1986, 46). This paper begins from just such a „direct, living, emotional impact“ of Tarkovsky’s films and attempts an intertwining between strands of his art and the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with some reference to Martin Heidegger. I will engage with Tarkovsky’s work from the point of view of our existence as embodied and as flesh of the world – in the modes of reversibility, visibility and invisibility, surface and depth.

Tarkovsky's films changed my life; they were a revolution and an epiphany. My first contact, at seventeen, was with *STALKER*, which impinged on my hermetically sealed adolescent world, baffled, excited and shook me. Soon afterwards, I watched *SOLJARIS*. At the end of the film I was rooted to my seat, physically unable to move, to vacate the space where something extraordinary and unique had revealed itself to me. I had never experienced films like these before. I did not know how to make sense of them, but I knew in my gut they were important, other, necessary.

Then came *ZERKALO* („Mirror“). It shattered my isolation, it connected me to the world, it showed me an intimate, heartbreaking, terrifying canvas of my own inner territory – my longings, fears and desires; the world I inhabited, with its mysteries, ecstasies and shadows. But how did Tarkovsky know?

The frames of the screen move out and the world which used to be partitioned off comes into us, becomes something real ... Everything that torments me, everything I don't have and that I long for, that makes me indignant, or sick, or suffocates me, everything that gives me a feeling of light and warmth, and by which I live, and everything that destroys me – it's all there in your film, I see it as if in a mirror. For the first time ever a film has become something real for me, and that's why I go to see it, I want to get right inside it, so that I can really be *alive*. (Tarkovsky 1986, 13/12)

I returned to experience *ZERKALO* more times than I remember. I returned to live in it – and in myself – more fully. Yes I was young, impressionable, lost, searching; but the experience stuck. It opened up the world to me – and me to the world – in a way nothing else had ever done. Ten years later, still held by that first Tarkovsky experience, I learnt Russian in an attempt to apprehend Tarkovsky's world from within, to experience it anew, to gain new insight. This inaugurated a profound and life-changing relationship to Russia, new friends and intimates, sojourns into the Russian archives, and the practise of writing.

Merleau-Ponty reminds us that ‚every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken‘ (1968, 266). You cross the threshold into a cinema, a book, an exhibition, a relationship, a situation, in your habitual mode, intending, expecting, anticipating, killing time perhaps; and suddenly something comes at you, into you, seizes and holds you, colonises you; it shatters the familiar contours of your world and demands, whispers, hints at something other, new, yet simultaneously intimate, known – *always already there*. This relation exists in the intertwining of viewer and film, as well as in the intricate and often mysterious ‚couplings‘ between Tarkovsky's characters and the surrounding world, expressed in his films as deed, situatedness, culture, history and, most powerfully, as lyrical digressions, or transgressions – sequences of memory, dream, reverie, or documentary ‚fact‘. On the screen Tarkovsky is able to make palpably present

the tension and communion between his heroes' intentions and confusions and the inscrutable forces of life as they impact on our human existence. In his words: „I am recreating my world in those details which seem to me most fully and exactly to express the elusive meaning of our existence“ (Tarkovsky, 1986, 213). Tarkovsky achieves this through the image, ‚unique, indivisible‘ (ibid, 40). It is the quality of indivisibility, as surface and depth, visible and invisible, which Merleau-Ponty elaborates in his philosophy of the flesh. This surface and depth of images filled with the things of the world, is first apprehended through the intertwining of interoception and exteroception in our lived bodies.

EMBODIMENT, AMBIGUITY

The father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl names the body the ‚medium of all perception‘ and ‚the bearer of the zero point of orientation ... of the here and the now out of which the pure Ego intuits space and the whole world of the senses‘ (cited in Welton 1999, 12). This body is both a material thing (*Körper*) and a lived, personal body (*Leib*); in the *leib* dwells ‚the concrete unity of body and soul, the human ... subject‘ (Husserl, cited in Carman 1999, 210); the body is also ‚a thing inserted between the rest of the material world and the subjective sphere‘ (ibid, 212). Husserl acknowledges the tension between the natural scientific description of the body as *körper* and a phenomenological understanding of it as *leib*. Furthermore, as Paul Ricoeur (1967) commenting on Husserl suggests, consciousness – via the body – maintains a relation of perception and incarnation; through the two I am able to transform ‚by analogy‘ (ibid, 126) my perception of the other as *körper* into them as *leib*.

This analogy or transfer is also at work in the way we experience a film, in the way we empathise, identify with, project into, or introject its characters and events, as well as in the way we implicate ourselves in its very fabric.¹ The tension and intricacy between the material thing and the lived body, between perception and incarnation, description and constitution, is an underlying structure, visible/invisible, in all of Tarkovsky's films. It gives rise not only to the events unfolding on the screen, but also to the mood of a sequence, the energy of an image, the transition from love to fear, joy to hopelessness, emotion to numbness, experienced both by Tarkovsky's characters and by us, the audience. A tree, a forest, a stream are not merely material things put together to create a pretty picture; they carry an individual life, a voice, a gestural field, an invisible depth. In *ZERKALO* the forest is inhabited by a wind that bursts out of it, evoking a presence, a spirit, to which we impart a sense, emotion or idea according to our

1 For a detailed explication of this aspect of film experience see Barker (2009) and Sobchak (1992).

lived experience, our predilections, or simply our mood at the time of viewing. In *ANDREJ RUBLEV*, the river carries the trace of the life and death of the young icon-painter, Foma, in the residue of white paint that follows his lifeless body downriver (which we had also witnessed in an earlier scene, where Foma – full of life, creativity, hope – is rinsing his paint brushes in the river). The people, living or dead, shown in the documentary footage in *IVANOVO DETSTVO* and *ZERKALO*, or in the episode of the raid of Vladimir in *ANDREJ RUBLEV*, illustrate how individuals and history can, in a flash, turn the leib into körper, the better to diminish or extinguish it, either physically or emotionally and psychologically. Ivan himself hovers between a blind, machine-like existence in the mode of war, loss, hate and a child's joyful, enmeshed, astonished existence expressed in the memories of peacetime and moments of relationship with his comrades. In *SOLJARIS*, Hari exists on the threshold of a material thing, a mould (матрица) as Sartorius calls her, and a beloved, lost wife. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that 'one does not love a person, one does not love a body, one loves a life established in a body' (2010b, 30).

How is a life established in a body? In Hari it is established gradually and painfully through the activation of memories by means of objects – a photograph, a home-movie, a box of earth, a painting. Hari is constantly in a process of becoming, of coming-into-being-again, re-remembering her self and her life; like Euridice she is slowly stepping out of oblivion towards life; then she dies and dies again and finally disappears; 'a flash of light, and a wind' (вспышка света, и ветер) (Tarkovsky, 1999, 182) remarks Snout when Kris wants to know how. In *ZERKALO* we witness the beginnings of the narrator, Aleksej's, life in the scene between Marija and the father at the end of the film, where he asks her, 'who would you like, a boy or a girl?'; she turns to look straight into the camera, and at us, with an enigmatic expression on her face and tears streaming down her cheeks. In fact the whole of *ZERKALO* can be seen as the establishing of Aleksej's life in the world-body, through the memories, reveries and reconstructions of his mother's life, through her embodiment, which permeates the entire fabric – the surface and depth – of *ZERKALO*. *ZERKALO*'s documentary footage contributes to this task, by establishing Alexei within the collective, within the wider reaches of the world-body, the historical and social moment in time. In *STALKER* we can view the journey to and within the Zone as an instance of the evolving institution and elaboration of the Stalker's life, his lived body. His struggles, conflicts and shifting perspectives, played out within the fluid realm of the Zone, permeate and mould him. His wife responds with despair and love to the distillation of what he brings back each time, which constitutes who he is.²

2 We the audience witness the ongoing establishing of the Stalker's life within the Zone, his wife does not. This is part of the mode of visibility and invisibility as flesh of the world, which I discuss later.

In his films Tarkovsky addresses the invisible side of the question of how a life is established in a body by showing us characters in whom, for various reasons, embodied life is dis-established, disrupted or outright destroyed.³ Domenico self-immolates in a public square, giving up his tortured human hypostasis to the flames. In *ZERKALO* („Mirror“), both Asafiev the orphan and Shell-shock (Контуженный), his shooting instructor, have silenced and hidden their lived body through loss and trauma. Asafiev is quietly defiant, his face inexpressive but for the tears which run down his cheek, the only sign betraying the horror of his young existence, an orphan, a Leningrader during the Blockade. The shooting instructor's reflex to cover the grenade with his body betrays his own horrors. In trauma „personal time is arrested“, while „impersonal time continues its course“; the experience survives „as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality“ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 96). According to Merleau-Ponty it is the temporal structure of our experience that makes „the sublimation of biological into personal existence, and of the natural into the cultural world ... both possible and precarious“ (ibid, 97).⁴ Our body, a layered body, is the crucible of this structure.

In *PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION* (1962) Merleau-Ponty explores the intertwining of our personal, pre-personal and impersonal existence, which constitutes our complex and ambiguous relationship with self, others and world. Our objective body is the physiological entity, a surface of flesh and skin containing an invisible mass of functioning organs, sinews, viscera. Our habit-body facilitates our pre-reflective movements in the world; it is a motor intelligence by means of which we take up our daily interactions with the things of our world. Our phenomenal body is our body in the moment, our lived personal body, always inflected by our style of being. And in those instants when we are given over to sensation we enter an atmosphere of generality and anonymity, a pre-personal existence (ibid). Throughout these different modes, or layers, of embodiment – objective, habitual, phenomenal, anonymous – we also exist within time and experience, situatedness, history and culture, therefore we „cannot be transparent to ourselves, so that our contact with ourselves is necessarily achieved only in the sphere of ambiguity“ (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 444). Our body, which „*inhabits* space and time“ (ibid., 161) effects the sublimation of biological into personal existence by combining „physiological facts‘ which are in space and ‚psychic facts‘ which are nowhere“ (ibid., 89).

In Tarkovsky's films the layered, spatio-temporal body, possessed of physiological and psychic features, belongs to both the director and his characters (and,

3 As in the previous footnote, this aspect is also of relevance in terms of the flesh of the world as surface and depth, visibility and invisibility.

4 The existential tension evoked by this sublimation is everywhere evident in Tarkovsky's films, whose base material is time.

by extension, to us as viewers). It extends outwards into the world on the screen before us, and from there into us, through what the director referred to as „poetic connections“ and „associative linking“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 20), which favour an affective, rather than cognitive, level of expression of events on the screen. This is achieved through mood, colour, sound, rhythm, movement and unexpected montage sequences, which do not follow „the usual logic, that of linear sequentiality“ (ibid). Throughout his writings and interviews Tarkovsky (1986, 1991, 1993, 1999 and in Gianvito 2006) describes how some of his films (notably ZERKALO and NOSTALGHIA), have taken an imprint of his inner territory and how cinema as an art form „is able, and even called, to become a matrix of the individual soul, to convey unique human experience“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 204). The sequences of memory, dream or reverie, which often erupt through the fabric of Tarkovsky’s films, can be seen to emerge from – and even be generated by – our layered embodiment (Tarkovsky’s in the first instance) as it is involved in and apprehends both our immediate reality and personal history (in its past, present and future orientation), as well as the wider world with its particular sociocultural and historical dimensions, and its fatedness, aligned to our own. ZERKALO is perhaps the most elaborate and complete expression of this intertwining.⁵ The layered body is wrought large throughout ZERKALO, both within individual bodies (the anonymous, dreaming, habit-body of the very young Alexei, the phenomenal, weeping body of Maria, Alexei’s dying, objective, phenomenal body at the end of the film) and in the body of the film, of which Tarkovsky’s own embodiment is the kernel.

Tarkovsky points out the paradox of the image; that it signifies „the fullest possible expression of what is typical“ yet by doing so „the more individual, the more original it becomes“ (1986, 112); he suggests that the artist tries to grasp the singularity of the events in our lives in an „exhaustive image of the Truth of human existence“ (ibid., 104). Andrei Rublev, as an artist, a creator of images, exemplifies the interplay of the diverse layers of our embodiment. In the mode of sensual anonymity he immerses himself in the unfolding of the pagan feast; in this same way he can align himself to the holy fool, who appears to exist primarily in her objective/physiological and anonymous/sensing body. Rublev’s years of silence and hard physical daily work are lived predominantly in the mode of his habit-body. The act of creation, which he takes up again at the end of his life is the expression of his phenomenal body – the medium of his style of being, his particular voice and vision. It translates his sensual/anonymous and habitual immersion in the world into images in the form of icons (an instance of the sublimation of the natural into the cultural world). These are created as expressions of the divine principle and shared with his contemporaries. That said, our way of being embodied in the world is more intricate and complex than any neat separation into modes or layers; there is always the *more* that we are, which points to our

5 For a detailed discussion of ZERKALO see Synessios 2001.

essential opacity and ambiguity as well as to our intrinsic polyphony. Merleau-Ponty's point is to show that we are „sonorous beings for others and for ourselves“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968,15), both boundless and bounded by means of our embodiment. Self and subjectivity are destabilised and challenged in, and by, the layered body; they fall through gaps, they become both more fluid and discontinuous, visible and invisible. This flux engenders a new way of seeing and experiencing; it implies that the real and the imaginary are the inverse and obverse of each other, two aspects of the same flesh.

Adding to the layered body, Martin Heidegger discusses further dimensions and ambiguities of what he calls the „hidden problematic“ of our „bodily nature“ (Heidegger 1962,143) in the *Zollikon Seminars* (2001), pointing out that there is a problematic between emotions and moods we find ourselves in and certain bodily expressions of these, for example sadness or pain. Sadness may evoke tears, which can be seen and measured, but this tells us nothing about sadness. Are tears somatic or psychic, Heidegger asks (ibid.). Similarly, we feel bodily pain but also pain at the death of a loved one. Can we differentiate pain into somatic and psychic, into pain of *körper* and pain of *leib*? Tarkovsky focuses on revealing the latter, but does so through filming visceral, tangible corporeal expressions of sorrow, pain and confusion: the Stalker's wife writhing on the floor; the holy fool, repeatedly caressing and smelling the smudge of paint on the cathedral wall; Maria, naked, remembering, laughing and weeping in the shower, or wiping away tears as we hear the first poem in *ZERKALO*, which evokes her tragedy and her loss; Hari damaging herself whilst bursting through the aluminium door towards Kris, or writhing back to life after having taken liquid oxygen. These and other instances, coupled with scenes that precede and proceed them, depict suffering and sadness that has its locus in the body but can extend in manifold ways into the world.⁶

Heidegger further asserts that when we make something present⁷ we do so in a bodily manner even though the something may not be part of the here-and-now present, but could be a memory of something experienced; *but where is our body in space and time when we are making something present?* „Is the body in the ‚I‘ or is the ‚I‘ in the body?“ (Heidegger 2001, 86); „Where are the limits of the body? Where does the body stop?“ (ibid., 85). Heidegger speaks of our embodiment, our lived body, as a bodying forth; he suggests that the limits of the body (*leib*) extend beyond those of the corporeal thing (*körper*); „the limit of bodying forth is the horizon of being within which I sojourn“ and „changes constantly through the change in the reach of my sojourn“ (ibid., 87). Heidegger's evocative observations and questions give further insight into Tarkovsky's material and formal imagina-

6 A notable anomaly is Adelaida's outburst in *OFFRET*, which comes across as an exercise in exhibitionism, all surface and no depth.

7 Making present is Heidegger's reinterpretation of Husserl's concept of intentionality.

tion, as it is incarnated and expressed in his films. Whose memory, revery, action, image, desire, thought, utterance, emotion, transcendence, immanence is at work in Tarkovsky's films (including ourselves as their witnesses)? And how is Tarkovsky able to make present, body-forth his personal experience and precise observations of life into images capable of lodging themselves inside us, speaking to us of the truth of our lives?

At the end of *SCULPTING IN TIME*, Tarkovsky asserts that we are born with inner freedom but have to „summon the courage and resolution to use it“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 222); art is called to express this freedom. In his memoirs, Andrei Konchalovsky says of Tarkovsky, „он стал головокружительно свободен“ – he became giddily free – (Končalovskij 1998, 141) and this speaks to the form as well as the content of his films. We can regard this freedom as embodied and intimately connected to the limits of Tarkovsky's lived body, as well as to the change in the reach of his sojourn; it is equally connected to the limits and the reach of the sojourn of our own lived bodies, in the act of viewing and beyond, in the way a film can impact on our lives (and here we might speak of the transformative or cathartic aspect of art). *ZERKALO*, with its freely associative structure, its collapsing of categories of time, its intertwining of the personal and the historical, its nuanced, heightened emotional register, which permeates every aspect of the frame and the world depicted within it, can be said to be the exemplary and pinnacle of this giddy freedom; its characters' lived bodies extend far and wide, traversing time and memory, nature and history, life and death. *ANDREJ RUBLEV* also contains aspects of this freedom, in its unusual episodic structure, in the way it subverts biography into a diachronic discourse on artistic perception, faith, expression and ethics within a social context; and not least, in Tarkovsky's audacity in being able to persuade an atheist state to fund a film about an icon-painter monk.⁸

Tarkovsky extends this embodied freedom to his films' characters, bestowing upon them moments of respite through, amongst others, (kin)aesthetic, auditory and affective means. Maria levitates above her bed in an ambiguous sequence of love, loss and longing. Ivan breaks through the dark folds of history by way of his lyrical dreams of peacetime, the musical chords which describe his sensibility, his fearless, unrelenting dedication to his mission – which is a way of relieving pain and horror through experiencing them over and over, of overcoming death by rushing headlong towards it. We can view Alexander's burning of his house in *OFFRET* („The Sacrifice“) as another expression of this radical freedom – exorcising fear, terror, madness by repeating them, re-creating them;⁹ Domenico's

8 It is important also to consider this freedom within the context of that time and place, both within the evolving history of cinematic language and expression, as well as within the specific historico-cultural moment.

9 Elsewhere I have taken a very different view of Alexander's actions, see Tarkovsky (1999).

self-immolation in *NOSTALGHIA* is born of that same spirit. Tarkovsky has always wanted to speak of people „possessed of inner freedom“, and of those „who can't adapt themselves to life pragmatically“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 181, 207). There is about the Tarkovskian hero an incorruptibility and a quality of being possessed. Efim, as he mounts his balloon made of hides in order to experience the earth from a great height, irrespective of the risk; Boriska as he goes about single-mindedly casting his bell, knowing, and disregarding the fact, that his life is at stake; Andrei Rublev as he renounces convention and canon in painting, or follows his sensual/sexual curiosity in the episode of the pagan feast, or foregoes speech until he finds reason to return to it; Stalker, as he furtively traverses the spaces of the zone, making his way to the Room; Asafiev, executing an about turn of 360°; Gorchakov, attempting the length of the empty pool with a lit candle, as a gesture of resistance and sacrifice. Present in the defiance and exertions of these and other Tarkovskian characters, is the operation of imagination and leaps of faith, within complex spatio-temporal flows and fields. These often begin as stirrings in the body (the director's, his heroes', our own) as the Husserlian zero point of orientation, and come into being through an intricate communion and transfiguration of matter, memory, nature, culture, emotion, and more, into powerful texts about – and of – our worldly existence, sojourning far and wide across the horizon of being.

FLESH OF THE WORLD, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

Already in *PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION* Merleau-Ponty demonstrated that the perceived is inseparable from the perceiver „because its articulations are those of our very existence“ (1962, 373). He spoke of our body being „in the world as the heart is in the organism“ (ibid., 235) and of our corporeal and linguistic gestures as „intermingled with the structure of the world“ (ibid., 216). When Merleau-Ponty writes: „Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself“ (ibid., 474) he is already anticipating (and articulating) his ontology of the flesh of the world, brute or wild Being – „the common tissue of which we are made“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 203). The flesh is not a substance, it is neither matter nor mind, but „an ‚element‘ of being“ (ibid., 139), „the formative medium of the object and the subject“ (ibid., 147), collapsing forever that duality. Our body and the things, our inside and outside – visible and invisible – are connected into a common reversibility through the flesh of the world; our body takes us to the things and the things call us to themselves. It is the things which have us, language which has us, not we who have the things or who have language; it is „being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being“ (ibid., 194). Being is beyond essence and existence; both are in it, of it. Our carnal being, consisting of depths and several faces, or leaves, is a „prototype of Being“ and our body is a variant of this, „the surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being“

(ibid., 136). We palpate the world, the things and others with our gaze, and they palpate us; we pass into them and they pass into us (ibid.). Within this intertwining/interlacing (*entrelacs*), this chiasm (Greek for intersection, cross-piece, X), „we no longer know which sees and which is seen“ (ibid., 139). We are given over to a visibility that is anonymous and primordial, but also individual and particular; we are part of an „intercorporeal being“ (ibid., 143), which is the flesh of the world. We are possessed by flesh.¹⁰

In his Sorbonne lectures on child psychology and pedagogy (1949–1952) Merleau-Ponty describes our intercorporeality at length, showing how we begin our life undifferentiated, enmeshed in others, and how we sense and mimic them (interoceptively, exteroceptively) through our body schema, postural impregnation and transitivity (1964a, 2010a). Through our body schema we organise ourselves spatially, sensorially and proprioceptively in order to take up our concrete life in the world (ibid.). Through transitivity and postural impregnation we mimic, transfer movements, gestures and intentions intercorporeally (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 2010, Diprose 2002), thus aligning ourselves to others, sensing them through a concrete bodily exchange. This concrete bodily exchange also exists in the act of viewing, where our own interoception and exteroception gear into those of the film’s and we become part of the reversibility of the flesh (ours, the film’s, its characters’ and the world’s), its folds and leaves, as seers and as seen, as surface and as depth.

We are open, given to each other always, by virtue of existing in a common perceptual, sensual, intercorporeal field, which constitutes part of the flesh of the world. Postural impregnation and transitivity do not end with childhood but continue throughout our lives, via a primordial corporeal generosity (Diprose 2002). In Tarkovsky this corporeal generosity, this primal embodied openness and responsiveness towards other people and the world is expressed in images and sequences of great intricacy, complexity and detailed observation of the realms, textures and movements of nature, culture, history and the human beings immersed within them. Tarkovsky, clearly speaking about himself, writes in *SCULPTING IN TIME* (1986, 41, 42): „A poet has the imagination and psychology of a child, for his impressions of the world are immediate, however profound his ideas about the world may be ... The poet does not use ‚descriptions‘ of the world; he himself has a hand in its creation“. Tarkovsky’s colleagues have often described his meticulous orchestration of the *mise-en-scène*, his predilection for assembling and laying out the objects that have gone into some of his signature tracking shots such as that of the underwater debris in *STALKER*; his attention to detail such as creating several versions of the same dress for Maria in *ZERKALO* in order to capture the changing light of day, or spending days discussing the type of plant that would best compliment the author’s childhood home in the same film; paint-

10 I will address this notion of possession, of the things having us, later on in the paper.

ing individual leaves on trees in order to achieve the right tone and atmosphere in a shot; scouting for locations that convey a particular mood and emotional pitch; introducing unusual elements into a shot, such as the geese flying towards the earth during the Tartar raid in *ANDREJ RUBLEV* (Rostotskaia 1994, Surkova 1991, Tarkovskaya 2002, Turovskaia 1991). There are countless examples and accounts of some of the processes of bringing a film into being, many given by Tarkovsky himself in his writings and interviews (1986, 1991, 1993), and illuminated further in books and articles about his work. All convey Tarkovsky's profound sensual, visceral, perceptual, intuitive attunement to the world and – by means of his concrete bodily involvement in it – his careful translation of its diverse elements into richly-textured, emotionally charged observations and renditions of phenomena flowing, or suspended, in time.

Time for Tarkovsky is the central pivot of human existence, „a condition for the existence of our ‚I‘“ (1986, 57), as well as the central element of cinema, which is able „to take an impression of time“, „in its factual forms and manifestations“ (ibid., 62, 63). Time is intimately linked to memory, „a spiritual concept“ (ibid., 57). Without memory a person falls out of time and the world; memory creates the past, which, for Tarkovsky, is „more real ... more stable, more resilient than the present“ (ibid., 58). Merleau-Ponty points out that, from the point of view of our body as the medium of our communication with time and space, memory is not merely „the constituting consciousness of the past, but an effort to reopen time on the basis of the implications contained in the present“ (1962, 210).¹¹ Time as duration, as kinesis and synaesthesia, and as nature, renders the flesh of the world both intimately visible and mysteriously invisible in Tarkovsky's films. Everything that appears on the screen – nature, people, buildings, objects, sounds, music, words – is bound by the spatio-temporal field, which Tarkovsky augments by his unrelenting, dedicated enmeshment with the world. He achieves this through elaborate master shots and long takes, extended, slow pans and tracking shots and occasional simultaneous forward tracks and reverse zooms, all of which interfere with our habitual experience of the spatiotemporal field and consequently with our habitual sense of ourselves in relation to the world and others. By means of a radical slowing down, extending and folding back of time-space Tarkovsky is able to reopen time in the present, moving from perception to incarnation, description to constitution, from beings to Being.

Through time, space and the senses we can trace the flesh – as indivisibility, reversibility and chiasm – in different expressive modalities and diverse threads running through each of Tarkovsky's films and also between films. A musical theme first resounds in *IVANOVO DETSTVO*, then, pared down, migrates to *ANDREJ RUBLEV* and later, fainter, to *SOLJARIS*. Bach moves from *SOLJARIS* through

11 This connects to the layered body I discussed earlier, as well as to the formal and material expression of time and memory in Tarkovsky's films, especially in *MIRROR*.

ZERKALO to OFFRET. Paintings by Bruegel appear in the library in SOLJARIS and are incarnated in the landscape of ANDREJ RUBLEV's Russian Golgotha scene and in the snow-clad landscape of the shooting range episode in ZERKALO, especially in the scene where Asafiev walks up the hill and tiny human figures move slowly in the valley below. The end of SOLJARIS is a visual representation of the flesh of the ocean, or the world, folding over upon itself. Is the earth itself a phantom of the Ocean, is Kris dead and merged with the Ocean, which gives him back the earth and the paternal home, as it once did Hari? „The world and I are within one another ... there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 123).

Tarkovsky's characters also echo, mirror, double or merge into each other through a chiasm of their sensibilities, histories or ideals. Gorchakov looks into a mirror to find Domenico looking back at him, Rublev finds resonance and creativity again through Boriska, Ivan maintains a relation with the lost part of himself through dreams or reveries of peacetime; Alexander and Otto conspire to save the world, Stalker, unable to find a kindred soul to take into the zone with him appears to have, unbeknownst to him, consolidated the Zone's energy into his daughter, whose invisible powers flood STALKER's final sequence. In ZERKALO Tarkovsky takes a further step by having the same actors play characters linked by role (Maria/Natalia, both mothers, both wives, joined by Tarkovsky's real mother, another Maria, who embodies past, present and future), generation (Alexei and Ignat, father and son) and a common fate. Hari has several versions of herself, sometimes also occupying the same space (in the scene where Kris hallucinates in his sleep), a favourite Tarkovsky device, also used in ZERKALO, conveying simultaneously the indivisibility of time and space and a reality of multiple I's/selves. In the rich doctor's house Alexei stares at his reflection in the mirror and the image which stares back at him out of the mirror is emotionally and qualitatively altered, another himself. A common fate, passion and vision allows these characters to resonate deeply with each other, to carry forward and evolve aspects of each other: „In all my films it seemed to me important to try to establish the links which connect people (other than those of the flesh), those links which connect me with humanity, and all of us with everything that surround us“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 192–193). These links also speak to the way Tarkovsky's characters permeate and intertwine with the world of nature, which both incorporates and reflects them.

Nature expresses her various faces throughout all seven films. She is by turns consoling, ecstatic, ominous, indifferent, fecund, overwhelming, devastated, embracing. When he first reaches the Zone Stalker sinks into her, as into a lover's body; Ivan traverses her joyfully, euphorically, in his memories of peacetime. In ANDREJ RUBLEV she is overwhelming and containing in her vastness, protective, abundant, indifferent. She witnesses Efm's flight, is traversed by the beating hooves of Tartar and Russian horses, provides shelter to the three monks, offers

her clay flesh to Boriska for his bell, absorbs blood and corpses from the raid and the blinding of the stonemasons. In *ZERKALO* she is resonant, sonorous, ominous; in *NOSTALGHIA* and *OFFRET* she appears mute, retiring, receding.¹² Nature in Tarkovsky carries on her own silent conversation with us, through her elements – wind, water, fire, earth; she is visible and invisible, surface and depth, sighted and blind. In Tarkovsky's early films nature constitutes the erotic flesh (otherwise missing from the director's films) – the camera caresses her in languorous close-ups, tracks along her roots and trees, her puddles, rivers and lakes; it waits expectantly for her to erupt in rain, or wind, or fire; it admires her at a distance when she is covered in snow; it follows her rhythmic breathing, her heaving, shedding, rustling. We follow in its wake, enter the frame, the world of the film, and find ourselves situated in the wind, in the sounds, in the fires, in the waters. „Perception is not first a perception of *things*, but a perception of *elements* (water, air ...) of *rays of the world*, of things which are dimensions, which are worlds, I slip on these ‚elements‘ and here I am in the *world*, I slip from the ‚subjective‘ to Being“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 218). This erotic fascination is muted in Tarkovsky's European films, where the „Olympian calm of form“ (1986, 78) begins to dominate both time and space and Tarkovsky's camera becomes more stately and static. In *NOSTALGHIA* nature folds back into herself, into the inside, in the form of a miniature landscape inside Domenico's room – mountains, a river and valleys; in *OFFRET* another fold, another miniature appears – the family house, surrounded by puddles, a gift to Alexander from his son.

Water, Tarkovsky's favourite element, is also a visual evocation and a binding constituent of the flesh of the world; water appears in many incarnations in all the director's films. There are rushing rivers and streams in the early films, carrying life, death, joy, love, ritual; a motionless, dispassionate sea surrounds the family house in *OFFRET*; puddles abound. Snow and rain do not just permeate Tarkovsky's frames as expressions of nature, they also penetrate human dwellings and shrines – nature encroaching on culture, the exterior conquering and colonising the interior, or simply coupling with it. In *NOSTALGHIA* water floods an abandoned cathedral, in *ZERKALO* water falls through the ceiling of the „weeping room“ (Synessios 2001, 12) onto Maria's spectral frame; in *SOLJARIS* it drips onto Kris's father's shoulders, in *STALKER* it penetrates the inner sanctum, the room of desires. Snow falls inside the ravaged, burnt cathedral in *ANDREJ RUBLEV* and Domenico's room is overcome by the presence of water – a plastic sheet hanging from the ceiling in the shape of a womb pregnant with water; puddles, wetness and mould abounding. The strange equation on a wall, $1+1=1$, speaks to the mystery and indivisibility of water; Tarkovsky (in Gianvito 2006, 182) calls water „a monad“, which „can convey movement and a sense of change and flux“ (ibid., 75). In *SCULPTING IN TIME* Tarkovsky relates water to different

12 I have discussed in more detail the changing faces of nature in Tarkovsky in Synessios 2008.

time-pressures: „brook, spate, river, waterfall, ocean“ (1986, 161); joined together they constitute the film’s ‚unique rhythmic design which is the author’s sense of time‘ (ibid.). This is expressed in editing, which Tarkovsky calls the director’s ‚handwriting ...‘, ‚the ultimate embodiment of his philosophy of life‘ (ibid.). As Paul Claudel reminds us: ‚water is the gaze of the earth, its instrument for looking at *time*‘ (quoted in Bachelard 1983, 31).

FLESH AS POSSESSION

Claudel’s words return us to a gaze which is not our own and which compels us. In *EYE AND MIND* (1964a) Merleau-Ponty reminds us that painters speak of things looking at them, quoting André Marchand saying: ‚In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me ... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it ...‘ (ibid., 167); Merleau-Ponty, commenting on this, writes: ‚my activity is equally passivity‘ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139) and suggests that what this achieves is ‚to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen‘ (ibid.). The ocean of *Solaris* is that phantom, as is the disembodied voice which silently commands the three men to stop whilst they are slowly making their way to the Room in *STALKER*. All Tarkovsky’s characters are in a sense possessed by this alienating, captivating phantom. In *ZERKALO* nature, tragedy, history is the phantom, but so is the wind escaping out of the forest, or the invisible force which makes objects fall off tables; so is the lingering trace of love in and around the dacha, peering behind the words of Arsenii Tarkovsky’s poems, permeating Maria, his wife. She is simultaneously gripped by them in the here-and-now present (that is also our present, as we watch her and hear Arsenii’s voice reciting the poems) yet dislocated in time and space from them and from him, inwardly hearkening for both: ‚time and space extend beyond the visible present, and at the same time they are behind it, in *depth*, in hiding‘ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 113). The depth of Maria’s memory/emotion/experience rises to the surface (the world we see and hear on the screen), folds upon it, and the surface folds back into her depth (her unspeakable pain, her shattered future as it reveals itself to us in the present). This entire early sequence of *ZERKALO*, in and around the author’s childhood home, is a visual incarnation of Merleau-Ponty’s thought ‚that our love extends beyond *qualities*, beyond the body, beyond time, even though we could not love without qualities, bodies and time‘ (1964a, 27). This movement of reversibility and chiasm between us and the things, between the world and us, bespeaks the fact that ‚[t]he performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata

sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must ‚dash on his bow‘ to follow it“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 151).

Tarkovsky himself writes and speaks of this many times. Despite his numerous thoughts about the artist’s/poet’s/director’s intentions, Tarkovsky believes that the artist is a vessel, a channel and a conductor of a force beyond himself, which expresses itself through him. The artist does not look for his subject, „the subject grows within him like a fruit, and begins to demand expression. It’s like childbirth ... The poet ... is not master of the situation, but a servant“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 43). Andrei Rublev cannot paint to order, there comes a point where he is no longer willing or able to follow convention, the canon. He grows still and waits for something to stir inside him, to speak through him, to align itself with him and flow through him so that he can take up his brush and his vision again. Boriska knows nothing about casting a bell but he burns with youth, audacity and desperation; an orphan, he has nothing left to lose. So he bluffs knowledge of his father’s bell-casting secret and goes about constructing the bell like a hound, or a blind man – smelling, touching sensing, listening, improvising, intuiting. Rublev, observing him from a distance, is stung, gripped by the boy’s passion and commitment, his labour and his terror just lurking under the surface. Both these characters become possessed by something beyond themselves, which draws them along an inexorable path.

All Tarkovsky’s characters are possessed in this way, displaying a singular freedom and incorruptibility, which compel them to take a stand against the norm, the everyday. Of the all-consuming vision and actions of Alexander in *OFFRET* Tarkovsky says: „he is not master of his fate but its servant“ (1986, 209). In his previous incarnation as Domenico, Erland Josephson sets himself alight; In *OFFRET* he sets his home alight. Neither of these men is able to change the course of his actions, they are both given over to their situation and their personal truth, which always emerges from the fabric of the world they inhabit. *SOLJARIS*’ Kris is a dry scientist who goes on a very specific mission to the planet. No sooner has he arrived there than his habitual understandings and structures are challenged and ultimately invaded by the presence of his dead wife. The planet, the Other, has its way with him – not arbitrarily, but through sensing, extracting and fleshing out a core essence and experience of his being, which is his dead wife, Hari. Kris is possessed by the Ocean and by Hari. Similarly, as *Stalker* tells his fellow travellers, the Zone’s room of desires will not necessarily give you what you wish for. Instead, it will reach into your very heart and gut and grant you your most invisible, unspoken, unknown desire. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, „the things have us, and ... it is not we who have the things ... [i]t is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being“ (1968, 194).

This principle also extends into the flesh and fabric of the film. Tarkovsky (1986) describes *ZERKALO* finally coming together after countless edits. He believes that it is the time pressure in each shot which dictates how they ultimately

combine. One needs to track and obey this deep, invisible sense of rhythm and follow it to its final configuration – the *gestalt* of the film (ibid.). At this point, will and intention are given up and the material itself, carrying in its folds, layers and leaves the materiality and breath of the world, speaks to the film-maker and guides his final actions. When he first watched all the material shot for *NOSTALGHIA*, Tarkovsky was surprised and pleased, albeit in a bittersweet way, that „the camera was obeying first and foremost my inner state during filming“ (1986, 204). This had not been Tarkovsky’s original intention, nonetheless his mood of gloom and nostalgia permeated the frames and movement, the flesh of the film.

NOSTALGHIA’s final image, of the Russian landscape situated inside the ruins of an Italian cathedral, is an incarnation both of the reversibility of the flesh of the world and of a possession – of time present by time past and vice versa, of death by life, of reverie and longing by nature and the elements. Snow falls in the background, in the Russian landscape, in Russian time; it also falls in the foreground, in the Italian landscape, in Italian time and also in our own present time, since it falls right before our eyes. Gorchakov is dead, Tarkovsky tells us, but he dies „in this new world where those things come together naturally and of themselves which in our strange and relative earthly existence have for some reason, or by someone, been divided once and for all“ (1986, 216). In his diary of 1985 Tarkovsky writes: „The one important thing is to find TIME within TIME“ (1991, 343). And Merleau-Ponty, from another time and context, speaks to us of the „primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal“ (1968, 142). Merleau-Ponty’s words are a fitting description of the quality of indivisibility in Tarkovsky’s images.

This primal reversibility, of surface and depth, of singularity and generality, of visible and invisible unfolds before our eyes as seers and folds upon us again as seen. At the end of *STALKER* the Stalker’s wife turns to address us directly, to tell us of her life with him. We, on this side of the frame, have been witnesses to a vital aspect of Stalker’s experience, his sojourn into the Zone and his ongoing relationship to it, which remain invisible to her.¹³ Each of us – spectator, characters, film-maker – intertwines with the other and with the film itself through the countless folds of „an intercorporeal being“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 143); the possibilities of this intertwining are infinite, like the ebb and flow of a vast body of water, each molecule of which is its own orientation within the whole and constitutes the whole. At the end of *ZERKALO*, Maria turns to look straight into the camera lens and, through it, into our eyes; her response to her husband’s question ‚who would you like, a boy or a girl?‘ is a mysterious smile and tear-filled eyes. Behind her visible reaction is an invisible but palpable world of emotion, thought and experi-

13 See the paragraph beginning ‚How is a life established in a body?‘

ence. Her expression and reaction simultaneously reveal and conceal the thought of her heart. This ambiguity, in her and in us, serves to open up „before us the possibility of interaction with infinity“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 109), infinity here being the reversibility of the flesh of the world.

CODA

„Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world since the world is flesh?“ (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 138). Inherent in Merleau-Ponty’s phrasing of his question is, for me, the quality of being possessed. If world-flesh-I-you-we, are one, then what of agency, intentionality, volition, freedom, choice? What has us and what moves us? Whilst writing this paper I have been finding myself increasingly possessed and re-possessed – by Tarkovsky’s images, by Merleau-Ponty’s vision, by their interlacing and chiasm and by my own with them, such that I cannot pull back from my own words, take a view, conclude, stop. As Tarkovsky puts it, „So much, after all, remains in our thoughts and hearts as unrealised suggestion“ (1986, 22). What do we do with this abundance?

In *ELEMENTS OF CINEMA* Robert Bird writes evocatively, „Tarkovsky never forsook the image, but he recognised that its singular power is highest on the verge of failure, when the invisible stuff of existence becomes palpable in its resistance to imaging“ (Bird 2008, 209). I would add that, alongside failure, it is also its obverse – excess, abundance, the unassailable abundance of the world – which fuels Tarkovsky’s desire to render in images „the deep complexity and truth of the impalpable connections and hidden phenomena of life“ (Tarkovsky 1986, 21). For Merleau-Ponty it is the flesh of the world that sheathes this abundance.

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