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## Through Christendom and Beyond

### Andrei Tarkovsky and the Global Ethic Project

#### INTRODUCTION

Andrei Tarkovsky considered himself first and foremost an inheritor of the Russian Orthodox spiritual tradition, going so far as to celebrate the role of Russia in saving ‚Christian civilisation‘ from barbarism in the structurally central scene in his autobiographical film *ZERKALO*, in which the young protagonist is asked to read approvingly from Pushkin’s letter to Chaadaev. Later in his career, however, and particularly following his emigration from the Soviet Union to Western Europe, Tarkovsky was forced to confront the fact that the West had strayed even further from its Christian roots than Soviet Russia. In his late interviews and in his final two films *NOSTALGHIA* and *OFFRET* („Sacrifice“) in particular, Tarkovsky’s interest shifts to the East, as solutions to the spiritual problems of modernity – excessive materialism and a lack of willingness to sacrifice for the greater good of civilisation – are sought in the face of apocalyptic threats to the survival of the species.

Tarkovsky’s oeuvre may thus be viewed as an increasingly clear call for a *Weltethos* or Global Ethic of the kind advocated by the likes of Hans Küng and Tu Weiming. This paper explores the ways in which Tarkovsky could be said to offer a contribution to this international project, starting from apparent parallels between Tarkovsky, Küng and the New Confucian philosophers at the heart of the Global Ethic movement, and then charting the spiritual journeys of the central protagonists of Tarkovsky’s final two films – Gorchakov in *NOSTALGHIA* and Alexander in *OFFRET* – and showing how the Global Ethic theme and the con-

cern for the moral development of the human community as a whole become, by the end of Tarkovsky's life, central and urgent. Excerpts from Tarkovsky's diaries and interviews will also build a picture of a man committed to the idea of a Moral Law based on sacrifice for a common, global cause.

## TARKOVSKY AND *WELTETHOS*

The founder of the *Weltethos* movement, the Catholic theologian Hans Küng, was stripped of his *missio canonica* by the Catholic Church in 1979 for his views on the need for radical reform of church institutions and in particular for his views on the need for dialogue with other religious and spiritual traditions. Freed from his obligations to the Vatican, Küng was able to pursue his ecumenical interests with greater gusto from the 1980s onwards, publishing a number of books around the *Weltethos* theme and organising a series of conferences, most famously the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, which culminated in the signing of an ERKLÄRUNG ZUM WELTETHOS („Declaration Toward a Global Ethic“) by a host of religious and spiritual leaders from around the world, including representatives of the Orthodox community. I would like to quote the end of this declaration before turning to Tarkovsky:

Zum Schluß appellieren wir an alle Bewohner dieses Planeten: Unsere Erde kann nicht zum Besseren verändert werden, ohne daß das Bewußtsein des Einzelnen geändert wird. Wir plädieren für einen individuellen und kollektiven Bewußtseinswandel, für ein Erwecken unserer spirituellen Kräfte durch Reflexion, Meditation, Gebet und positives Denken, für eine Umkehr der Herzen. Gemeinsam können wir Berge versetzen! Ohne Risiko und Opferbereitschaft gibt es keine grundlegende Veränderung unserer Situation!<sup>1</sup> (Küng 1993, 15)

The key word to note here for our purposes is *Opferbereitschaft* (‘readiness for sacrifice’). Tarkovsky's entire career can be interpreted as one big push for a ‘transformation of hearts’, one long attack on what he described as the modern Western obsession with the self and the loss of precisely the *Opferbereitschaft* that one finds in plentiful supply in the story of Jesus Christ and also in sev-

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1 „In conclusion we call on all the inhabitants of this planet: Our Earth cannot be changed for the better without a shift in the conscience of individuals. We are arguing for an individual and collective change in conscience, for a strengthening of our spiritual powers through reflection, meditation, prayer and positive thinking, for a transformation of hearts. Together we can move mountains! Without a willingness to take risks and a readiness for sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation.“ (All translations from German and Russian are my own unless otherwise stated.)

eral Eastern religious and spiritual traditions, the very existences of which for Tarkovsky were threatened by the creep of Western modernity.<sup>2</sup> All seven of Tarkovsky's films glorify precisely this lost readiness for sacrifice in the name of civilisation: Ivan gives up his life to resist Nazism in *IVANOVO DETSTVO*; Andrei and Boris fight medieval ignorance and barbarism to spread the word of God in *ANDREJ RUBLEV*; Kris redeems humanity by engaging in civilised dialogue with the Ocean in *SOLJARIS*, even risking his own mental health to do so; the Stalker risks death in order to bring the necessary magic of the Zone to jaded modern meaning-seekers; Domenico burns himself alive in the name of humanity at the end of *NOSTALGHIA*; and Alexander burns his own house down in order to protect his son and the rest of humanity from a nuclear apocalypse in *OFFRET*. And perhaps the most important example of all comes from the central scene in *ZERKALO* in which Ignat quotes Pushkin's letter to Chaadaev on Russia's indispensable role in the history of civilisation and the sacrifices it has made in its name.

One can certainly question how much Tarkovsky actually knew about the major world religions or about the 'Eastern' civilisations he increasingly praised towards the end of his life. It seems, for example, that he knew relatively little, if anything, about Confucianism; although the influence, albeit superficial, of Daoism and Buddhism on Tarkovsky is, as we will see further, particularly obvious in *NOSTALGHIA* and *OFFRET*, there is no apparent mention of Confucius or Confucian thought in any diary entries or interviews. This *lacuna* is noteworthy because Tarkovsky may well have found a closer ally in Confucian thought than in either the Daoist or Buddhist traditions. Consider the 1958 New Confucian MANIFESTO FOR A RE-APPRAISAL OF SINOLOGY AND RECONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE CULTURE signed by the leading Confucian scholars of the day including Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan:

Chinese culture arose out of the extension of primordial religious passion to ethical moral principles and daily living. For this reason, although its religious aspects have not been developed it is yet pervaded by such sentiments, and hence is quite different from occidental atheism. [...] Yet this is precisely what is most neglected and misunderstood by Sinologists.

[...] In the first place, the West needs the spirit and capacity of sensing the presence of what is at every particular moment (*Dangxia Jishi*), and of giving up everything that can be had (*Yiqie Fangxia*). [...] These things, [including the idea that ...] the whole world is like one family, are certainly

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2 In recent years the Weltethos movement has increasingly turned its attention to the world of business in a bid to challenge from within the culture of rational self-maximisation which essentially governs the global economy (the so-called '*homo economicus model*'). See for example Küng 2010.

not entirely alien to Western culture. However, we would like to see their seeds bloom into full blossom.<sup>3</sup> (Liu 2012, 105–106)

Confucian scholars have played an active role in the development of the *Weltethos* movement alongside Hans Küng in the last 20 years; Mou Zongsan's disciple Tu Weiming heads the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University (Beida) which contains a sister Global Ethic Institute to the *Weltethos* Institut Tübingen founded by Hans Küng. While Russian enthusiasm for the *Weltethos* project has been somewhat more muted, Tarkovsky, arguably the most prominent Russian high-cultural export of the last 50 years (rivalled only by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky), was firmly on the side of it; by the end of his life, the urgency of a new *Weltethos* had assumed, as it had for the founders of the movement, apocalyptic proportions. Here, first, is an excerpt from the Foreword to the ERKLÄRUNG ZUM WELTETHOS:

Niemand dürfte heute noch ernsthaft bestreiten: Eine Weltepoche, die anders als jede frühere geprägt ist durch Weltpolitik, Welttechnologie, Weltwirtschaft und Weltzivilisation, bedarf eines Weltethos. Das heißt: eines **Grundkonsenses** bezüglich verbindender Werte, unverrückbarer Maßstäbe und persönlicher Grundhaltungen. Ohne einen Grundkonsens im Ethos droht jeder Gemeinschaft früher oder später das Chaos oder eine Diktatur. Keine bessere Weltordnung ohne ein Weltethos!<sup>4</sup> (Küng 1993, i).

And now here is Tarkovsky in 1985:

„Сейчас человечество может спасти только гений – не пророк, нет! – а гений, который сформулирует новый нравственный идеал. Но где он, этот мессия? Вполне закономерен ответ: в роли мессии Тарковский видел самого себя – истинно свободного от материальных стимулов, находящегося на высшей ступени нравственности творца. [...] „Мой фильм называется *Жертвоприношение*. А разве готовность к жертве не должна являться естественным состоянием души? ... Я хочу поднять вопрос о значимости личной ответственности и личной веры человека, способного взять персональную ответственность

3 See Liu 2012, pp. 105–106 for the original quotations and for a discussion of the significance of the 1958 manifesto.

4 „No one today can seriously deny: an epoch which is marked, unlike any before it, by globality – in politics, technology, economics and civilisation as a whole – needs a Global Ethic. This means a baseline consensus on binding values, fixed standards and individual convictions. Without such an ethical consensus every society will be faced, sooner or later, with the threat of chaos or dictatorship. No better world order without a Global Ethic!“ See [http://www.vrijmetselaarsgilde.eu/Maconnieke%20Encyclopedie/FMAP~1/REFORM/s\\_dek1\\_d.htm](http://www.vrijmetselaarsgilde.eu/Maconnieke%20Encyclopedie/FMAP~1/REFORM/s_dek1_d.htm) for the full Foreword to the Declaration.

за судьбы мира в противовес общественной безответственности, царящей вокруг.<sup>5</sup> (Tarkovsky in Bojadžieva 2012, 293)

Against those who would argue that Tarkovsky saw himself in the role of this Messiah, I would simply like to relay his selfless optimism regarding the spiritual resources of his native Russia and his hope that Russia could help global civil society to carve out a muscular middle road between excessive Western ‚selfism‘ and an effete ‚Eastern‘ culture which in his view had largely capitulated to it:

Я очень верю в духовную силу России, способную оказать воздействие на ход всей цивилизации. [...] Я думаю о тех гигантских духовных силах, которые таятся в этой стране.<sup>6</sup> (Tarkovsky in Boldyrev 2002, 324)

Tarkovsky’s films represent a major, if ultimately humble, contribution to this spiritual tradition; although *Nostalgia* and *Offret* are the least obviously Russian of Tarkovsky’s seven films, they are also those most obviously concerned with the Global Ethic theme. We explore the development of this theme across these two films in the following sections.

## NOSTALGHIA

With *NOSTALGHIA* (1983), Tarkovsky, now an emigrant in Western Europe, turned his attention to a specifically Western form of spiritual crisis, addressing his own alienation from Western culture’s preoccupation with the individual self. Russia, with its long tradition of viewing itself as a ‚bridge between East and West‘ and only reluctantly as part of Europe, is represented in *NOSTALGHIA* by Gorchakov, a Russian poet who feels entirely uneasy about Italy and its ‚beauty‘ even as it comes to form part of him; the film’s memorable closing scene, in which Gorchakov sits with his dog against a half-Russian, half-Italian backdrop, is explained thus by Tarkovsky: „В финале я помещаю русский дом в стены итальянского собора – это сконструированный образ. Смоделированное внутреннее состояние героя, не позволяющее ему жить в гармонии, или его новая це-

5 „Now only a genius can save mankind. Not a prophet, but a genius capable of formulating a new moral ideal. But where is this Messiah? [...] My film is called *Sacrifice*. And indeed should readiness for sacrifice not be the natural state of the soul? I want to raise the question of the meaning of individual responsibility and the faith of an individual capable of taking personal responsibility for the destiny of the world in opposition to the general irresponsibility reigning around her.“

6 „I believe very strongly in the spiritual strength of Russia and its ability to contribute to the advance of civilisation as a whole. [...] I have in mind those gigantic spiritual forces which lurk in our country.“

лостность, включающая холмы Тосканы и русскую деревню<sup>7</sup> (Tarkovsky in Bojadžieva 2012, 265). This new ‚house‘, half-Russian and half-European, is nevertheless, as Tarkovsky intimates, missing something; Daoist music makes its appearance in the film as Tarkovsky openly begins to seek solutions from beyond the confines of Christendom:

В последней своей картине *Ностальгия*, которую делал в Италии, я столкнулся с даосистской музыкой приблизительно VI века до рождения Христова. У меня есть она в фильме. Поразительная музыка! Не будем говорить о ее внешних, формальных качествах. Там, наоборот, весь смысл заключается в том, чтобы исчезнуть, раствориться.<sup>8</sup> (Tarkovskij 1989, 98)

Tarkovsky argues further that there exists

Какая-то интровертность восточной духовности, выраженная в этой музыке. Какой-то духовный коллапс, когда личность втягивает в себя весь мир, который ее окружает. Как бы вдыхает весь этот мир, опять-таки в духовном смысле...<sup>9</sup> (Ibid.)

Tarkovsky, and by direct extension Gorchakov, for all their education in Russian and Western classics, are not fully at home in them, and seek inspiration from the East; as Tarkovsky once told an interviewer,

для меня, например, какой-нибудь Таиланд, Непал или Тибет, Китай, Япония духовно, душевно гораздо ближе, чем Франция, Германия. Как это ни странно.<sup>10</sup> (Tarkovsky in Boldyrev 2002, 323)

Although Tarkovsky „understood“ Western culture and „knew it well“ and was, „at the end of the day, a Westerner myself, educated not only in Russian culture but in Western culture more generally“, there was nevertheless „a common spirit, a deep common creed“ which linked him and other Russians „even

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7 „At the end I put a Russian house within the walls of an Italian cathedral in an artificial montage. This models the internal state of the protagonist, which has not let him live in harmony, or rather, a newfound integrity marrying Tuscan hills and the Russian countryside.“

8 „While making my latest film NOSTALGIA, which I shot in Italy, I met with Daoist music from around the 6th century BC. I have it in the film. What astonishing music! I don't mean its apparent formal qualities; on the contrary, the whole point of it is that it disappears, dissolves.“

9 „A kind of introvertedness in Eastern spirituality which is expressed in this music, a sort of spiritual implosion, where the individual draws the entire surrounding world into herself, as if breathing in the whole world in the spiritual sense.“

10 „for me, for example, countries like Thailand, Nepal, Tibet, China or Japan have always been closer to my spirituality and interiority than France or Germany, as strange as that may seem.“

more intimately with the East“ (ibid.). When asked in 1986 „how have you resolved the problem of your ‚I‘ in the West?“, Tarkovsky was even more explicit: „I haven’t managed to at all yet. For me Eastern civilisation is more attractive, with its focus on interiority and the desire to get beyond oneself, rather than the aggressive Western striving to express one’s feelings as if they somehow mattered“ (ibid.). Without arriving at envy of other cultures – this is the man who quoted Pushkin approvingly on Russia’s irreplaceable role in the history of civilisation in the central scene of his autobiographical film – he had nevertheless „always felt a strong pull from the allure of Eastern culture, where people are ready to offer themselves, so to speak, as gifts to the whole of creation“ (ibid.). In the West, by contrast, another philosophy reigns: „namely, to assert oneself and draw attention to oneself. This always struck me as dreadfully irritating, naive, and animal-like. The philosophy of the East has always had a magical effect on me and with every passing year it grows stronger“ (ibid.).

It is regrettable that Tarkovsky’s main contact with ‚Eastern civilisation‘ came in the form of the Daoism on display in *NOSTALGHIA* and the Japanese Buddhism we will see in *OFFRET* – two essentially marginal (though trendy in the West) brands of Eastern spirituality when compared with the central (but long marginalised in the West) Confucian tradition. Tarkovsky the emigrant’s central concern, however, is Western civilisation’s inability to take the idea of ‚civilisation‘, and sacrifice for it, seriously:

Здесь, на Западе, люди особенно обеспокоены собственной персоной. Если им сказать, что смысл человеческого существования в жертвенности во имя другого, то они, наверное, засмеются и не поверят – также они не поверят, если сказать им, что человек, рожден совсем не для счастья и что есть вещи гораздо более важные, чем личный успех и личное меркантильное преуспевание. Никто, видно, не верит, что душа бессмертна!<sup>11</sup> (Tarkovsky in Boldyrev 2002, 323)

Just as Matthew Arnold’s Victorian England had in his view been consumed by a passion for coal and faith in the power of money over culture as a route to human perfection, Tarkovsky argues that the same philistinism has now conquered the entire Earth: „Восток был ближе к Истине, чем Запад. Но западная цивилизация съела Восток своими материальными претензиями к жизни“<sup>12</sup>

11 „Here in the West, people are particularly concerned about their own selves. If you tell them that the meaning of human existence lies in sacrifice for something higher, they will probably laugh and not believe you, just as they won’t believe you if you tell them that people are not born to be happy and that there are much more important things than personal success or individual material prosperity. No one, it seems, believes that the soul is immortal!“

12 „The East was closer to the Truth than the West, but the West has eaten the East with its material claims to a better life.“

(ibid., 324). Western ‚romanticism‘, Tarkovsky argues, is partially responsible for this:

Сравните восточную и западную музыку. Запад кричит: „Это я! Смотрите на меня! Послушайте, как я страдаю, как я люблю! Как я несчастлив, как я суетлив! Я! Мое! Мне! Меня!“ Восток ни слова о самом себе! Полное растворение в Боге, Природе, Времени. Найти себя во всем! Скрыть в себе все! Таоистская музыка, Китай за 600 лет до рождения Христа.<sup>13</sup> (Ibid.)

Tarkovsky then asks himself the difficult question: „Но почему же не победила в таком случае, но рухнула величественная идея? Почему цивилизация, возникшая на этой основе, не дошла до нас в виде какого-то завершенного исторического процесса?“<sup>14</sup> (ibid.). His only response is to say weakly that „борьба же по восточной логике греховна по самой своей сути“<sup>15</sup> (ibid.).

Gorchakov in *NOSTALGHIA* is utterly uninterested in his beautiful Italian translator Eugenia, who struggles to understand why she cannot find a man to satisfy her; instead, he is fascinated by Domenico, who ends up burning himself alive in the name of humanity. Eugenia has completely failed to understand that there are „things more important“ than her own happiness, whereas Domenico, for all his appearance as a madman – for Tarkovsky, such believers could only appear mad in the West in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – has found something that Gorchakov, a Russian in Europe with a largely European education, is struggling to find within himself: the courage of his civilisational convictions. Gorchakov’s carrying of the candle for Domenico represents an act, however trivial and symbolic, of sacrifice, a ‚crossing over‘ to the house of truth – half-Western (Italian) and half-Eastern (Russian) – in which he can finally, with his timeless dog, enjoy a moment of symmetry and harmony. Indeed, for all Tarkovsky’s embrace of the Far East, in the end it is Russia which comes to stand in for an Eastern civilisation which has, in our time, largely capitulated to Western materialism. As Nikolai Boldyrev argues,

Тарковский мечтал о ‚третьем пути‘ для России, Он видел, что сущность России и русского человека на Западе мало кто понимает, да и

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13 „Compare Eastern and Western music: the West cries, ‚This is me! Look at me! Listen to how I suffer, how I love, how unhappy I am, how discerning I am! I! My! To me! Me!‘ The East [meanwhile] doesn’t say a word about itself! Complete dissolution in God, Nature, Time. Finding oneself in everything! Hiding everything within oneself! This is what Daoist music and China gave us 600 years before the birth of Jesus.“

14 „But why, then, did this grand vision not win out? Why has it collapsed? Why has the civilisation founded on this base not reached us in the form of a completed historical process?“

15 „physical resistance is sinful by the very essence of Eastern logic.“



не хочет понимать. Запад слишком самодоволен в материалистическом истолковании ‚духовной жизни‘, чтобы интересоваться любым ‚третьим путем‘.<sup>16</sup> (Ibid.)

Gorchakov, then, is a kind of universal man and an idealised self-portrait of Tarkovsky himself, a man Western enough to appreciate the best of European art, architecture and (Christian) civilisation, but also a standard-bearer for the kind of cosmos-embracing values which have been lost in the West and which were once embraced in the East but which now risk being lost there as well. For Boldyrev,

В ‚Ностальгии‘ это и есть, в сущности, главная тема и главный конфликт – противостояние Востока и Запада в душе героя и тихое его, грезяще-сновиденное продвижение в ‚трансцензус‘ восточного направления: самопожертвование материально-плотским (в братском единении с ‚юродивым‘ Доменико) ради невидимого града и мира.<sup>17</sup> (Ibid., 322)

Although there is plenty to like about living materially well or standing up for the rights of individual people – Tarkovsky himself was keen on both and does not in any way celebrate Domenico’s selfish imprisonment of his family, for example – when such concerns with utility and rights are merely self-centred, they cannot lead to human fulfilment. When asked Eugenia’s ‚How can I be happy?’ question by an audience member at an American lecture, Tarkovsky unambiguously replied:

Меня просто смешит заданный вопрос! Чувство счастья не может быть абсолютным, как не может быть абсолютной свободы. Сначала надо задуматься – для чего вы живете на свете? Какой смысл в вашей жизни? Почему вы появились на земле именно в это время? Какая роль вам предназначена? Разберитесь во всем этом. Поймите, что человек рожден вовсе не для счастья. Я считаю, что мы рождены для тяжелой работы. Жизнь дана нам для духовного роста, духовного совершенствование. И вообще, я не понимаю, кто сказал, что мы должны быть счастливыми? Человек не может жить только прагма-

16 „Tarkovsky dreamed of a ‚third way‘ for Russia. He saw that few in the West understood, or even wanted to understand, the essence of Russia and Russian people. The West was too complacent in its materialistic interpretation of ‚spiritual life‘ to be interested in any ‚third way‘.“

17 „this is, in essence, the main theme and the main conflict in NOSTALGHIA: the opposition between East and West in the protagonist’s soul and his quiet, daydream-like edging towards Eastern ‚overcoming‘, fleshly material self-sacrifice (through his brotherly union with the ‚exemplary‘ Domenico) for the sake of the invisible city and the world.“

тическиими целями, даже в очень хорошо организованном стаде. Он просто вырождается. Христианская любовь начинается с любви к самому себе. Но такая любовь к себе означает не эгоизм, а способность к жертве ради ближнего. [...] Конечно, Нелепо предположить, что к страданию можно или нужно стремиться. И жертва вовсе не должна ощущаться самим человеком как ЖЕРТВА, на которую он решается. Речь идет о готовности к жертве как естественном состоянии души.<sup>18</sup> (Tarkovsky in Bojardžieva 2012, 278–279)

For Vera Šitova, Gorchakov and his ‚Teacher‘, Domenico, succeed in this self-overcoming and in identifying with a ‚collective entity which brings them into contact with Truth. While modern Europe endures

со старыми камнями ее культуры, с ее комфортом, с напряженным тонусом ее идейных и политических борений [...] и с] человеком, надорванным безверием и ужасом перед атомным Апокалипсисом [...] а есть обнаженность нервов, усталость от самого себя, одиночество, скрежещущая сложность контактов с другими,<sup>19</sup> (Šitova 2012, 203)

Gorchakov ‚carries and carries his candle‘; and in Rome, in front of the statue of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius on his horse, Domenico,

прокричав равнодушной толпе свои предупреждения-пророчество, призыв к единению (за кадром звучит финал Девятой симфонии Бетховена, могучий хор ‚Обнимитесь, миллионы!‘), обливает себя из канистры бензином и вспыхивает, как факел.<sup>20</sup> (Ibid., 204)

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18 „I find your question simply laughable! [...] For a start, you need to ask yourself why you're alive in the world. What is the meaning of your life? Why have you appeared on Earth at precisely this time? What role has been set aside for you? Sort all this out. Understand that human beings were not born for happiness at all. I think we were born to bear the burden of hard work. Life was given to us for spiritual growth, so that we could perfect ourselves morally. I don't understand at all who said we ought to be happy. People can't live with only self-centred pragmatic goals, even if they live in a very well organised state. If they do, they simply degenerate. Christian love begins with love for oneself, but such love entails not egoism but rather a capacity to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the next person. [...] Of course, it would be absurd to suggest that one could or should make suffering her goal. Sacrifice as such should not feel like a conscious giving up of something; it's a matter of achieving readiness for sacrifice as a natural spiritual state.“

19 „with the old stones of its culture, its comfort, the constrained tone of its ideological and political struggles, its people broken by unbelief and horror in the face of a nuclear apocalypse [and left merely with] the exposure of nerves, tiredness of oneself, loneliness, the grinding complexity of relations with others.“

20 „shouting his words of prophetic warning at the indifferent crowd, a call for unity (to the sound of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, with the powerful refrain ‚Unite, millions!‘), douses himself in gasoline before burning like a torch.“

„Strange people, strange acts?“ Šitova asks. „Да, но всякий раз за ними – нестерпимая мука от причастности к бедам всего нашего мира, желание хоть что-то в нем и в себе изменить, преодолев отчуждение от самого себя“<sup>21</sup> (ibid., 206). Šitova puts in this same category of strange self-overcomers the hero of Tarkovsky's final film, OFFRET.

## SACRIFICE

According to Šitova, „Александр, герой *Жертвоприношения*, тоже осуществит свой ритуал – спокойно, несуетно подготовит к поджогу красивый большой дом, отдаст его как жертву, которая должна спасти от атомного пожара мир“<sup>22</sup> (ibid., 204). „Is he mad?“ she asks. „И да, и нет, потому что преодоление истерзавшего его ужаса – некий поступок, приносящий освобождение“<sup>23</sup> (ibid.). Although Alexander himself will soon die, he leaves behind „сына, который преодолеет свою немоту, скажет ‚в начале было Слово‘ и будет поливать то самое сухое дерево, которому должно зазеленеть“<sup>24</sup> (ibid.). Just as Gorchakov finds more to interest him in Domenico and his sacrifice than in Eugenia and her self-centredness, so too is Alexander's young son attracted more by his father's mixture of respect for Christian tradition („in the beginning there was the Word“) and samurai warrior spirit (not least evidenced by Alexander's choice of costume for his act of ritual sacrifice) than his mother's hysterical egoism. In stark contrast to the spiritual purity – old-fashioned Christianity with some dashes of Eastern flavour – enshrined in the tree by the water where father and son commune and exchange the flame of civilisation, we have the house, its merely ornamental Western high cultural contents and the decadent, self-centred behaviour of its inhabitants, most notably of Alexander's wife Adelaide. In his bid to the Swedish Film Institute, Tarkovsky explained his central goal thus: „В фильме будет речь идти о следующем: если мы не хотим жить как паразиты на теле общества и питаться плодами демократии; если мы не хотим стать конформистами и идиотами потребления, то мы должны от много отказаться“<sup>25</sup> (Tarkovskij in Bojadžieva 2012, 290). Without a readi-

21 „Yes, but behind each of them lies an intolerable agony of involvement in the woes of our wide world, a desire to change even a symbolic something in it and in oneself by overcoming alienation from oneself.“

22 „Alexander, the hero of OFFRET, also carries out a ritual of his own: he calmly, almost supernaturally prepares the destruction of his big, beautiful home, offering it as a sacrifice in an effort to save the world from fiery nuclear annihilation.“

23 „Yes and no, because the overcoming of the terror which had disfigured him is a move which brings him liberation.“

24 „a son who overcomes his inability to speak by saying ‚in the beginning there was the Word‘, and who continues to water the parched tree which will one day be green with health.“

25 „The film will be about the following: if we do not want to live like parasites off the body of

ness for sacrifice of the kind made by Alexander, Tarkovsky argues, a vibrant democratic order is impossible: „Лишь когда знаешь, что готов пожертвовать собой, можно добиться воздействия на общий процесс жизни. Цена – это, как правило, наше материальное благосостояние. Нужно жить так, как говоришь, дабы провозглашенные принципы перестали быть болтовней и демагогией“<sup>26</sup> (ibid.). By the end of Tarkovsky’s life, the apocalyptic nature of the nuclear threat in particular made this readiness for sacrifice and moral self-cultivation all the more urgent: „Мы живем в важнейший период истории нашей планеты и должны осознать, что это переломная эпоха. Многое зависит от самих людей. Сейчас решающее время, надо действовать и понимать, почему это необходимо“<sup>27</sup> (ibid., 292). Such understanding is achievable only through art, the main task of which is „the resolution of the spiritual crisis reigning all over the world“; Tarkovsky describes art as „the most selfless of all human activities“ because it responds to society’s need for „что-то такое, что стимулировало бы духовное развитие и развивало бы в человеке чувство собственного ‚я‘, побуждало бы его стремиться к индивидуальности и гуманности“<sup>28</sup> (ibid.).

The self-evident proposition that co-existence on a crowded, nuclear-capable planet will only be possible if everyone comes to regard the survival of life or civilisation beyond herself as more important than her own physical survival, and that this will only be possible if we are willing to sacrifice at least some of our material well-being all of the time and even all of our material well-being some of the time, will paradoxically require a commitment to moral self-discovery and painful truth-finding that no one, unaided by „the best that has been thought and said in the world“, can be fully ready to undertake on her own. Alexander confronts the material and cultural excess with which he has surrounded himself and comes to see his privilege for what it is – a call to responsibility and sacrifice – whereas Adelaide, for all her bourgeois comfort, has never enjoyed a true humanistic education, and is utterly incapable of even beginning the path to self-cultivation, consumed as she is by her hysterical fear of personal annihilation. At the very least, we can say that Tarkovsky understood, and was deeply preoccupied by, the direct link between the state of our intimate personal

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society and enjoy the fruits of democracy, if we do not want to become conformists and blindly consuming idiots, then we are obliged to give up a lot.“

- 26 „Only when you know that you are ready to sacrifice yourself can you have an impact on the overall process of life. The price, as a rule, is our material wealth. One must live as one says [one should], in order that the principles one expounds become more than idle chatter and demagoguery.“
- 27 „We live in a crucial period in the history of our planet and should recognise that this is a pivotal era. A great deal depends on people themselves. Now is a decisive moment, and we must act and understand why this action is necessary.“
- 28 „something which stimulates spiritual development and develops a sense of self within the individual, encouraging her to strive for distinction and humaneness“.

relationships and the perilous state of the nuclearised Cold War world; the solution to the latter could only be arrived at by hard work on the former, which in turn could only happen if individual moral self-cultivation, culminating in the recognition of the ultimate spiritual goal of readiness for sacrifice, were to become the global norm. „Мой фильм называется *Жертвоприношение*. А разве готовность к жертве не должна являться естественным состоянием души?“<sup>29</sup> (ibid., 293).

In the film, as we have seen, Tarkovsky raises „вопрос о значимости личной ответственности и личной веры человека, способного взять персональную ответственность за судьбы мира в противовес общественной безответственности, царящей вокруг“<sup>30</sup> (ibid.). Something extraordinary is now required to oppose this ‚general irresponsibility‘ before it is too late: „Сейчас человечество может спасти только гений – не пророк, нет! – а гений, который сформулирует новый нравственный идеал“<sup>31</sup> (ibid.), one which calls for self-cultivation and which could, in principle at least, convince everyone. „Where is this Messiah?“ Tarkovsky asks; Lyudmilla Bojadžieva uncharitably argues that Tarkovsky saw himself in the Messiah’s role, when it is clear that the only possible Messiah would somehow have to come from future generations (hence the dedication of the film „to my son Andryusha, in faith and hope“).<sup>32</sup> For Maya Turovskaya, nevertheless, OFFRET marks the end of Tarkovsky’s evolution „from confession to sermonising, from sermonising to sacrificial action“. Although the old Tarkovskian themes – „home, family, intergenerational identity“ – recur, for Turovskaya there is in OFFRET a new and open determination to „влиять на реальность и даже изменять ее, подобно слову и делу мессии“<sup>33</sup> (Turovskaja 1991, 181); the film itself is on this account best understood as a ‚magical‘ attempt to effect this spiritual change.<sup>34</sup> I would argue, however, that this desire to be useful is nothing new in Tarkovsky, is present in all his earlier films and need not, indeed should not, be regarded as a manifestation of any latent megalomania or desire to play a messianic role in human history.

Nikolai Boldyrev comes closer to the novelty of OFFRET when he suggests that „дом, в котором Александр хотел укрыться от всего мира, оказался хрупкой иллюзией“; the hero makes a breakthrough, „достигая нового качества своей души“, and is no longer a victim of „the circumstances of a mad world“

29 „My film is called *Sacrifice*. And shouldn’t readiness for sacrifice indeed be our natural spiritual state?“

30 „the question of the importance of personal responsibility and personal faith, a faith which takes responsibility for the destiny of the world and opposes itself to the general irresponsibility reigning everywhere.“

31 „Now only a genius can save humanity – not a prophet, but a genius who formulates a new moral ideal.“

32 Bojadžieva 2012, 293.

33 „influence reality and even to change it, as with the words and deeds of a Messiah.“

34 See Filimonov (2011, 417) as well as Turovskaya’s own 1991, 181.

but rather a „spiritual warrior“: thus does Alexander „save his young boy, whose destiny defines the tone of the film ...“<sup>35</sup> (Boldyrev 2002, 329). Even here, however, there is little which distinguishes Alexander from Tarkovsky’s Rublev, or even his Ivan; if there is any discernible change in theme from *IVANOVO DETSTVO* to *OFFRET*, it is only insofar as Tarkovsky’s awareness of the apocalyptic threat facing humanity in the nuclear age, and of the even greater urgency of the need for spiritual transformation towards moral truth, in which he had more or less from the beginning believed, has grown. This faith has nothing whatsoever to do with revelation, Christian or otherwise, but rather with action: as Tarkovsky himself says, „Я думаю, что человека, готового пожертвовать собой, можно считать верующим“<sup>36</sup> (Tarkovskij in Filimonov 2011, 418). For the others in the house, Alexander „is a broken man, although in fact it is utterly clear“, Tarkovsky adds, „что как раз он-то и спасен. [...] Александер жертвует собой, но в то же время вынуждает к этому и других“<sup>37</sup> (ibid.).

Viktor Filimonov offers arguably the best analysis of Tarkovsky’s final film, even going so far as to suggest that *OFFRET* was the final nail in the coffin of Soviet tyranny and its creator the ‚final communist‘:

Последний поступок Тарковского отливается в символ конца времен, сурово помеченных бездомьем отечественного социализма. Возникает мысль, что именно нашим сиротством художник был послан в мир искать духовное пристанище, объединяющее природу и человека.<sup>38</sup> (Filimonov 2011, 422)

Filimonov laments that „ничего похожего совершить в постсоветский период уже не представлялось возможным – в такой простодушно откровенной до гениальности форме. [...] Тарковский оказался последним ‚коммунистом‘, наследником именно русских гениев, подобных Достоевскому и Толстому“<sup>39</sup> (ibid., 422–423), who, like Matthew Arnold in *CULTURE AND ANARCHY* and at around the same time, „were able to feel the force of the religious idea at a time when it appeared of dubious relevance“ (ibid., 423). Filimonov, indeed, praises *OFFRET* for the ‚nakedness‘ of its religious feeling, „существенного

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35 „the house in which Alexander wanted to hide from the world appears as a fragile illusion [...] finding a new quality in his soul.“

36 „I think that a person who is ready to sacrifice herself can be considered a believer.“

37 „that it is precisely he who is saved. [...] Alexander sacrifices himself, but at the same time calls on others to do likewise.“

38 „Tarkovsky’s final act [of creation] appears as a symbol of the end of decades of homelessness for Russian socialism. It raises the idea that the artist was sent into the world, on the back of our orphanhood, to search for a spiritual home uniting nature and human beings.“

39 „nothing similar has been possible in the post-Soviet period in such a simple and brilliantly frank form. Tarkovsky was the last communist, a successor to precisely those Russian geniuses, such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.“

для нескольких поколений наших соотечественников, познавших соблазн идеи ‚счастья для всех“<sup>40</sup> (ibid.). In OFFRET,

Остается лишь безумный подвиг ничем фактически не подтвержденной веры в недоступный именно тебе смысл подступающего именно твоего небытия на земле. И тогда в нашем кинематографе, может быть, впервые в его истории обретает вселенские масштабы личная драма одного-единственного человека, как если бы это была трагедия целого народа.<sup>41</sup> (Ibid.)

This is why, Filimonov concludes, „преодолевая всю ‚глобальную проблематику‘ этой картины, следует прочесть ее именно как интимный дневник Андрея Тарковского, как завершающие (земные) страницы его духовной автобиографии“<sup>42</sup> (ibid.).

Filimonov also reproduces, in full for effect, Alexander’s plea to Heaven, in which he begs God to save his „children, friends, wife, Victor“ and „all those who feel the coming of the end, and are afraid not for themselves, but for those around them“ from a war after which there will be „no winners and losers, no cities, no villages, no grass, no trees, no water in the springs, no birds in the sky. [...] I will give You all that I have, only make everything as it was before, like this morning, make the war go away. [...] Help, God, and I will do all that I have promised“, Alexander begs (Tarkovsky, 1985). Even if humanity contains armies of blind, self-centred Adelaides, Tarkovsky argues, the show simply must be allowed to go on; Alexander burns down his house, in all its high-cultural decadence, in a bid to avert the looming tragedy of an aborted global civilisation. To do so, he calls on all the civilisational resources he possibly can in a bid to recapture its monotheistic essence in a context where it can no longer survive on its own:

Переплетение языческой магии и христианства – от переживания исчерпанности высокой европейской культуры, так или иначе пытающейся евангельским мифом. Герою, как и его создателю, не только молитвой, но еще и магией необходимо заговорить ужас, обуявший его.<sup>43</sup> (Ibid.)

40 „meaningful for several generations of our countrymen who embraced the temptation of the idea of ‚happiness for all.“

41 „all that remains is a mad act of unverified faith in a meaning which will be unavailable precisely to you as you contemplate your own approaching non-existence on Earth. And then, perhaps, we have for the first time in the history of our cinema an individual drama of universal scope, as if it were the tragedy of a whole nation. [...]“

42 „beyond the whole ‚global problematic‘ of this film, we should see it as part of Tarkovsky’s intimate diary, the final (earthly) pages of his spiritual autobiography.“

43 „The interweaving of pagan magic and Christianity is born of the feeling of the redundancy of [contemporary] European high culture and the need somehow to recover the evangelical myth.“

The participatory knowledge of culture is precisely what provides this ‚magic‘ unattainable by other means: in his desperate bid to save humanity, „Тарковский призывает на помощь всю сотворенную за тысячелетия исторической и доисторической жизни мировую культуру, начиная с ее обрядово-мифологических истоков“<sup>44</sup> (ibid.).

Filimonov is also right to weave into his analysis Andrei’s acute guilt at having ‚sacrificed‘ his own family to pursue his art both at home and, in the end, abroad: „Андрей фактически отказался от дома материального, земного. Он весь был поглощен ‚домом культуры‘, своим творчеством, пожертвовав для этого и общением с сыновьями, с кровными родственниками“<sup>45</sup> (ibid., 432). Still, without wanting to give up his broader mission and instead doing his absolute best to incorporate his children into the intergenerational civilisational struggle, Tarkovsky sought „спасение в поступке – выйти навстречу своим страхам как субъекту жертвоприношения, заявив об этом публично и за вещательно покаявшись перед сыном, но утвердив: ‚В начале (все-таки) было Слово““<sup>46</sup> (ibid.).

Tarkovsky is not the Messiah, but rather a man who recognises that he represents a culture and civilisation in crisis, a man who must sacrifice himself and his home to make room for a new generation which, instead of closing itself off within the self-regarding walls of decaying Western high culture, will rediscover ‚the Word‘ by looking outward from Europe and creating a new global cultural synthesis for a new century:

Век этой, условно говоря, декорации [дома], по логике фильма, исчерпался. Она подошла к кризисному рубежу, за которым ее ожидают смерть, погребение и возрождение в каком-то новом, неведомом качестве. Вместе с ней должен умереть и преобразиться Александр как носитель высоких духовных ценностей европейской культуры. В этом суть жертвоприношения перед лицом мировой катастрофы. [...] Это и есть законы, художником над собой признанные, по которым мы и обязаны были бы его, судить.<sup>47</sup> (Tarkovskij in Filimonov 2011, 433)

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For the hero of the film, as for its creator, not only prayer but also magic are needed to stave off the terror which is engulfing him.“

44 „Tarkovsky marshals the support of a world culture created over thousands of years of history and prehistory, starting from its mytho-ritualistic origins.“

45 „Andrei effectively abandoned his material earthly home; he was entirely absorbed with the ‚house of culture‘, with his own art, and sacrificed his relationships with his sons and blood relatives for it.“

46 „salvation in an act – meeting his fears and turning the meeting into a sacrificial act, a public declaration of repentance before his son, all the while affirming his choices: ‚In the beginning (after all) was the Word‘.“

47 „The century which gave rise, so to speak, to the décor [of the house] is, according to the logic of the film, exhausted. It has reached a crisis point, at which death, burial and rebirth in some



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The *Weltethos* or Global Ethic movement remains a young movement faced with the particular challenge of bridging the religious world which gave birth to it at the 1993 Parliament of World Religions and the secular world which must also embrace it if it is to play a meaningful role in 21<sup>st</sup>-century global public life. No *Weltethos* worthy of the name could exist without Russian contributions of some sort; the goal of this short paper has been to show that Andrei Tarkovsky offers a worthy and suitably contemporary example of a Russian voice on the side of the idea of a Global Ethic. The whole thrust of Tarkovsky's oeuvre, even when he is talking about Russia, is Russia's contribution to human civilisation considered as a global whole; Tarkovsky's earlier films, not discussed here, each explore the oneness of that civilisation and collapse the distinction between sacred and secular which the *Weltethos* movement, led by the pioneering work of Hans Küng, is also busily trying to overcome.

The central pillar of Tarkovskian civilisation, as we have seen, is *Opferbereitschaft* or 'readiness for sacrifice', which also features prominently in the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic and in the work of *Weltethos* pioneers Hans Küng, Karl-Josef Kuschel, Tu Weiming and others. We are not born with an oversupply of this *Opferbereitschaft*; while Küng and Kuschel describe the need for „reflection, meditation, prayer and positive thinking“ in order to refine our capacity for it, they also recognise that art and literature play a vital role in this civilising process.<sup>48</sup> The films of Andrei Tarkovsky surely do represent a rich fount of inspiration in this regard, but my main argument in this paper has been that Tarkovsky *intended them precisely as such*. The very *raison d'être* of Tarkovsky's final two films, *NOSTALGHIA* and *OFFRET*, consists in the fact that Tarkovsky's quest for a Global Ethic already transcended, by the 1980s, the boundaries of the Soviet Union and even of Western Europe to include the world as a whole. The primacy of the Global Ethic theme for Tarkovsky – the urgency of the need for a 'new moral ideal' in the face of the nuclear threat among others – may even chiefly explain his painful decision to emigrate in order to make these two films and to make them available to a global audience. Alexander's *kimono* is far more than the „nod to Kurosawa“ that Tarkovsky jokingly said it was; it was also Tarkovsky's way of inviting the entire 'East', as he reductively conceived of it, to the table of a truly global high culture, to be built by us in a new house on the ruins of Alexander's sacrifice.

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new unforeseen form now await it. Along with [the décor] Alexander, as the bearer of the high spiritual values of European culture, must also die and be transformed. This is the essence of his sacrifice in the face of a global catastrophe. [...] And these are the very laws, recognised by the artist himself, by which we ought to judge him.“

48 See for example Jens 1986, a collection of contributions to the Tübinger Theologie-Literatur-Symposium organised at the University of Tübingen in May 1984.

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