

Time and Tarkovsky

An overview of some of the important aspects of time in the works of Andrei Tarkovsky.

The uniqueness of Soviet film director Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986), lies among others things, in the fact that he was perhaps the first in Russian culture to discover a forgotten theme of historicism and realized that the future, and even more so the present, are deeply rooted in the past. The figure of Tarkovsky marked the end of historical teleology. His work outlined the boundary beyond which the concept of the past was re-introduced in its own right, while the concept of the future faded away and disappeared. When talking about Tarkovsky one dares to use such notions as 'depleted future' and 'empowered past'. In this essay I will discuss the above mentioned concept of time in relation to Tarkovsky's films. Additionally, I will examine various aspects of time, its relation to memory and implications of this relation. Furthermore, I will examine the link between Tarkovsky's personal spiritual search and his films. I will relate my arguments to some important thinkers, whose work related to the concepts of time and memory including Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939), Fredric Jameson (1934 –present), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Siegfried Kracauer (1889 – 1966).

During the filming of Andrei Rublev (1966) Tarkovsky was faced directly with the challenges related to the reconstruction of the past. This is how Tarkovsky described the genesis of his interest in history: 'The film is set in the XV century, and it was painfully difficult to imagine how it all happened...I had to rely on any of the following sources: the architecture, verbal legacy, on iconography' (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 182). Tarkovsky was reluctant to use painting as a reference, because painting, according to him, was opposite to cinema, which is based on direct observation of the world. This lead him to conclude that:

'We cannot restore the XV century literally, no matter how much we study its remains. We feel the first century very differently from the people who experienced it. Even Rublev's Trinity is perceived by us in a different manner from its contemporaries. The icon Trinity has lived through ages: it was alive then, it lives now and it connects people from twentieth century with those of the fifteenth' (cited in Volkova, 2002, p.182).

Tarkovsky perceived Andrei Rublev's (1360s – 1427/1430/1428) work as something fundamentally outside of history. He came to realization that reconstruction should not be based on documents from the era, but on the elements that transcend spatial and temporal locality. He often talked of the truth of the direct observation and of physiological truth when he mentioned his film. However, both of these concepts were so to speak unhistorical, even a-historical.

The idea of a-historical time which bears resemblance to Henri Bergson's concept of duration, can be traced to the religious thinkers of so called Russian Religious Renaissance – Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), Lev Shestov (1866-1938), Pavel Florenksy (1882-1937), and Sergei Bulgakov(1871-1944). Nikolai Berdyaev speaks about existential time one which effectively runs as a vertical line from a fixed point (moment) in the physical (linear) time. Existential time in his view is a deeply spiritual property of the human being and it is an act of liberation of the realm of objectifications and a pathway to the realm of spirit. There are many moments in Andrei Rublev where a similar philosophical approach to time is evident.

For instance, the scene 'Russian Golgotha' starts and ends with shots that seem to be chronologically adjacent. The whole scene in between these shots appears to happen within this interrupted moment – it is a depiction of spiritual movement, interior events that take place within and beyond the moment – in existential time. In these lines of thought it is relevant to point out that the concept of eternity as an emancipation from the chains of physical time is one characteristic for the Orthodox Christian pictorial tradition and theological doctrine. According to Pavel Florensky, the Orthodox icon is 'a window to the divine world, pure metaphysics' (Florensky, 1996). It is not a material depiction of the divine, but rather an embodiment of a meditation, an inscription, entrance or exit to and from another internal world (Florensky, 1996).

During his work on the *Mirror* (1975) Tarkovsky continued to explore notion of time this time in relation to memory. What was fundamentally important in this work was the reintroduction of concepts he explored in his previous film: juxtaposition of present and past and creation of cinematic space-time continuum that does not comply with the logic of physical reality. In the plot of the film Tarkovsky deploys these ideas about time, giving this compound entity of past and present a name - memory. *Mirror* is formed of what Tarkovsky described as a chaotic, unorganized mass of episodes, which gained its unity only when all the pieces of this mosaic became subdued to a single principle – the subjective experience of time. Tarkovsky admitted that until the last moment he 'did not see any opportunity to combine all this 'vinaigrette' into a single temporary feeling' (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 250). Tarkovsky's decision to implant his new film into deeply personal memories provoked opposition even among some of his closest friends and associates. Operator Vadim Yusov (1929-2013), refused to work on the film, saying that 'he is sickened, from an ethical point of view, by the outspoken autobiography; confused and annoyed by the lyrical tone of the narrative as well as author's desire to speak only about himself' (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 250).

In *Mirror* two concepts were of paramount importance. The first was associated with the reconstruction of the house from Tarkovsky's childhood. The second, with the buck wheat field, once located in front of the house, but at the time planted with clover and oats. This is how Tarkovsky recalls the work on this field:

'Once we, at our own risk, rented the field and planted buckwheat, local farmers did not hide their surprise, once they noticed the appearance of first sprouts. We read this as a good sign. It was akin to what we hoped our future film would illustrate - special properties of our memory - its ability to penetrate behind the veils, hidden by time. Such was our concept. I do not know what would have happened to the film, if buckwheat field would not have bloomed. But it did!' (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 247).

Tarkovsky was referring to the ability of our memory to come into contact with reality. He believed that what one remembers is so deeply enrooted within the reality, that it has an ability to grow 'sprouts' on the actual field. This rootedness, materiality, physicality of memory was very important for Tarkovsky, who was trying to overcome a purely mental image of the past.

On this matter, Bergson wrote that our perception is always intermixed with memory and affects. Therefore, perception has a strong bond to physical reality, which is fundamental for the experience of time as duration. Tarkovsky was confident that similar affective experience can allow the audience as well as the production team to literally penetrate the memory and experiences of another person.

One could argue that this desired effect of communication or even communion between filmmaker and spectator is conducted by means of disclosure of what Maya Turovskaya (1924 –present) calls the individual stream of time (Turovskaja, 1989). This intimate `chronotope` might be seen as a manifestation of one's experience of his own self which is somehow independent of the will and reason of that self. Such an expression of the interior realm could be seen as an invitation of the spectator to enter his own flow of consciousness and encounter his personal phantoms of the past. Tarkovsky shared the following observation:

`When the set was build on the place of the house that was destroyed by time, all members of the crew came there early in the morning to greet the dawn, to experience this place at different times of the day, to feel its features, and study it during different weather conditions. We tried to feel the feelings of those people who once lived in this house forty years ago and looked at the same sunrises and sunsets, rain and mist. We all were charged by the common mood of reminiscence and a sense of holiness from our unity, so much so, that when the work was completed, we were hurt and annoyed - it seemed that now was the perfect time to begin: we finally became imbued with each other's presence` (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 243).

In this case, the immersion in another person's memory, as well as the ability to `became imbued with each other's presence` was connected to particular place. However, for Tarkovsky the ability to live through each other's time was the main priority, therefore, he insisted on the continuous of filming, the importance of time capture and criticised montage. For *Mirror* a key aspect was the discovery of archival footage that depicted the Soviet Army passing through Siwash. It stunned Tarkovsky, because in front of him stood a physical artefact of imprinted time.

`I could not believe that such a huge amount of film stock was spent on capturing and fixating in time a single object just for the sake of observation. Clearly, shot by an intuitive, talented man` (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 243).

The duration of the episode was truly the magical force that provided the viewer with an entrance into the visual and emotional experience of the operator, who as Tarkovsky found out later, died on the day of this unique shooting. Tarkovsky interpreted it very personally noting that `on the screen there was a striking image of strength, power and drama - and it all belonged to me : private, worn-out and sore` (cited in Volkova, 2002, p. 244).

At this point it is important to note that the idiosyncratic understanding of the temporal element in cinema is evident in all components of Tarkovsky's films. The intentional annihilation of a stable spatial and temporal entity in cinematic world is achieved through a subjugation of cinematography, editing and sound to the emotional impetus of the filmmaker. Rational constructs give way to poetic intuition.

The space-time realm in both *Mirror* and *Stalker* (1979) is an artistic portrayal of the immaterial and the transcendental layers of reality. The dream sequences in all Tarkovsky's works are a clear example of his disinterest in emulation of physical reality and the creation of Euclidean worlds where logic and reason set the rules.

Tarkovsky does little to set the characters and the action in a clear and objective space and time, resulting in sequences where adjacent shots have no objective mechanical bond between them. One could argue that *Mirror* is his most radical work in a sense that the whole film in its fragmented structure is reminiscent of a dream sequence. The camera often wanders through space in what appears as a subjective gaze of the invisible protagonist. The sound design often includes speech that is neither non-diegetic voice over nor anyhow objectively related to the characters on screen.

Perhaps, Chion's notion of *acousmetre* most accurately defines the nature of the off screen speech in *Mirror*. Quite often certain sounds remain in the liminal realm between off-screen and non-diegetic, almost as if they are an acoustic manifestation of this which cannot be shown – the ethereal presence, the spiritual realm. In this respect one could argue that sound is also temporally and spatially abstract and does not conform to the conventions of continuity. The cause-effect principle so fundamental for narrative cinema is shattered to pieces in *Mirror*.

Montage phrases are composed of shots, which have no objective relation – they do not add to each other in the construction of time and space but rather what joins them is a sort of emotional congruity and overall tonal harmony. The film is something of a personal confession or a cinematic self-portrait similar in this respect to Federico Fellini's (1920-1993) *8 ½* (1963) or Yuri Norstein's (1941 –present) *Tale of Tales* (1979).

It can be argued that *Mirror* possesses two large temporary layers - the time when the invisible protagonist recollects – just before his death, and the time of these memories. Those are not just captured still moments from the past but oneiric memories – the fire, the little sister, the mysterious recurring dream of the wind blowing in the forest shaking the trees and the table with a vase on it. Russian people believe that the dream is a mirror of the soul and its deepest, most mystic and incognizable aspects. One might argue that these memories are in a way a-temporal as they are not an actual reappearance of past things but rather a peculiar amalgam of seemingly incongruous images that transcend the concreteness of chronological time. These childhood memories overlap and intersect with dreams and memories of the mother.

The mother–son relation is presented almost as union of two beings in one consciousness. One of the first episodes, a mystical dream in which the mother washes her hair in a dim dilapidated room with water dripping on the walls and pieces of plaster falling from the ceiling is not purely personal, but also imbued with national symbolism: an image of a collapsing house mirrors the dying state and the war. The traumatic element is arguably present even in the brightest memories and this is evident in Tarkovsky's work. Memory in *Mirror* is nostalgic, it's always comprised of opposites – presence but also absence –loss. Time is the element that binds the act of remembrance and the remembered but it is also what separates them acting as both the bridge and an abyss.

According to Tarkovsky's own understanding of 'pure cinema', a true film is not focused on the future and belongs entirely to a nostalgic perspective. In principle this is harder than it appears. Sigmund Freud argued that perception and its realization in the memory processes are incompatible in the same system (Freud, 1991, p.156). If the system of perception would record all the traces of the perceived, meaning, if they would be directly fixed into the memory of such system, mnemonic traces would soon block our ability to perceive new things. A film in Tarkovsky's opinion can solve this dilemma– the incompatibility of perception and memory. In a film, the viewer perceives what is fixed in the memory of another. But such designation of roles where one remembers and the other one sees, did not satisfy Tarkovsky. He aspired towards the mixing and fusion of the two systems in one singular experience. Not just to see, but to drown in and interiorize the memory of another.

Fredric Jameson argued that technical communication is an adaptive mechanism that protects against traumatic experiences imprinted in memory, but not allowed in the perceptual-conscious region. Jameson reckoned that there is a whole series of mechanical substitutes which intrude between consciousness and its objects, protecting us and at the same time depriving us of the opportunity to assimilate what is happening to us, or transform our feelings into a truly personal experience (Jameson, 1971). Tarkovsky believed in the possibility of such assimilation through film. Jameson's position, however, seems fair. The film is not a neutral prosthetic of memory, but has a special role, which Tarkovsky perhaps failed to recognize.

It can be argued that film not only possesses duration, which, according to Bergson and Deleuze, constructs an external model of consciousness, but it really functions like memory, a disposable memory, so to speak. It captures the traces of light reaching the film material and irrevocably transforms it from a system of perception into a system of memory. The imprint on the celluloid, perfectly in line with Freud's reasoning, makes further perception impossible. Furthermore, the image, as Deleuze noted, unlike human perception and memory, is independent of the body. It is not incarnated. Despite the fact that the picture is taken from a certain angle and depends on a personal choice – point of view, according to Deleuze, it is not centred enough to be truly subjective and related to a truly subjective experience. Deleuze speaks about the film image not as something analogous to subjectivity or something intrinsically personal. He sees film images as something like an object that is a physical manifestation of vision (Deleuze, 1983 (2004)).

The film image, though not quite an object, is closer in nature to objects than to perception, although the latter itself is a special type of object. So the film can serve as a shock absorber. Shocks are then converted from an objective to a subjective experience. Deleuze defines the object: 'The object exists as a visual entity and as such it perceives itself according to the way it perceives other objects and the way it reacts to them with all its facets and all its parts' (Deleuze, 1983 (2004), p. 115). Film is such type of object – one that reacts to the world. Deleuze writes: 'In short, the perception of objects and objects themselves are self-comprehension; the comprehension of the object alone is total and objective, while the comprehension of perception-partial and subjective' (Deleuze, 1983 (2004), p. 115). Deleuze claims that film never focuses on the subjective mode of perception, rather it is characterized by extensive a-centric and decoded zones that separate it from subjectivity (Hansen, 2004). The cinematic memory in this case appears not to be a human memory, but memory of objects that reacts to the world around and keeps traces of its influence.

In *Sculpting in time*, which was written between 1977 and 1984, i.e. after the completion of *Mirror* and mainly during the work on *Stalker*, Tarkovsky refers to the concept of 'sabi' which he discovered in the *Branch of Sakura* written by Vsevolod Ovtchinnikov. Tarkovsky quotes Ovtchinnikov:

It is considered that time, per se, helps to make known the essence of things. The Japanese therefore see a particular charm in the evidence of old age. They are attracted to the darkened tone of an old tree, the ruggedness of a stone, or even the scruffy look of a picture whose edges have been handled by a great many people. To all these signs of age they give the name, saba, which literally means 'rust'. Saba, then, is a natural rustiness, the charm of olden days, the stamp of time (Tarkovsky, n.d. cited in Volkova, p 158). Further on Tarkovsky notes that what the Japanese did effectively is 'try to master time as the stuff of art' (cited in Volkova, p 159). The imprints of time are cinematic because the film material, just like other physical objects, captures them. These imprints are usually seen as indexical and their fixation refers to what Deleuze indicates as object images – 'a-centric' images without any subjectivity. Mossiness and decrepitude do not anyhow relate to subjective memory. It's characteristic that Ovtchinnikov indicates as 'sabi' that carries through the connection between art and nature. The mossiness of the stone, regardless of any aesthetic aspects, makes this stone a natural phenomenon. There occurs a gradual destruction of matter and immersion in nothingness. Leonard Koren, elaborates on the subject, describing 'sabi' as 'fragile traces of evidence disappearing at the edge of nothing' (1994). These traces of time cover objects and get imprinted on the celluloid film material equally independent of any intentionality or subjectivity – outside of the memory's system.

The turning point for Tarkovsky and appearance of the rupture between imprints and memory, was during the transition from *Solaris* (1972) to *Stalker* (1979). In *Solaris* the mysterious ocean has the ability to recreate three-dimensional simulations of images from the memory. This trace of time is still rooted in memory, though is shifted towards natural, objective indexicality and alienated from the memory. Tarkovsky himself spoke about the film:

`As far as the alienation of the outlook is concerned it was important to put a transparent glass between the image and the viewer-to look at it a little bit as if not with my own eyes, as if to try to get into an objective position, which is usually colder. This often comes not from the cinematographer's manners but from our desire to see not what I personally like as an author but what could become a symbol of what is beautiful for man in nature` (Tarkovsky, 1992).

This alienation of the gaze suggests a gradual departure from the position of seeking a bond between identification and memory, as was the case in *Mirror*. Now the director no longer sought to immerse the viewer or the crew in the place and time of the past, removing the distinction between their own experiences and those of others. Tarkovsky's aim changed and he postulated the need to see the world not with one's own eyes, but with the detached gaze of absolute objectivity – which in his case carried the idea of a celestial perspective.

Speaking about the conflict of the film, the director noticed that Calvin (Donatas Banionis) realizes that the physical manifestation of the phantom from his memory –Hari (Natalya Bondarchuk)- is a purely external object, but he cannot separate himself from it. A trace which is external and still seen by Tarkovsky as internal. *Solaris* is built on all this confusion of memory and traces of time.

But in *Stalker* world of memory gradually retreats as the Japanese `sabi` comes into play with almost no restrictions. Olga Surkova wrote during the filming of *Stalker*: `In the editing room together with Tarkovsky and Lusja Feiginova we were watching frames developed in black and white - extremely interesting in terms of texture and atmosphere. It seems that the whole day spend by Rishad1 , half naked in rubber boots, texturing the columns paid off. Even Tarkovsky was pleased (everything was done according to his own sketches) with how he (note: Rishad) by applying the paint and gluing the moss has created ripped and abandoned feeling. The dump, splatters, slippery pathways, backwater – everything was done in greyish-brown, and green tones` (2002). And even though it seems that *zona* in *Stalker* has some kind of mystical psychological abilities, they are not related to memory anymore, but to the alienated traces of time. From now on, Tarkovsky was oriented towards reproduction of such traces. Surkova wrote in her diary:

`Today I was in the pavilion (filming location). Two pipes were elevated, with the water reservoir in between. Pipes were ragged, stained with pitch...Three weeks ago I was in two other pavilions, which were created according to Andrei's design. One – stagnated pool, with sunken chaotically converters, test tubes, and other garbage. Other – strange, desert landscape. ..With sand dunes made from some kind of strange white material...Everywhere the feeling of erosion, raggedness, decay, desolation after the collapse of civilization` (2002).

Details, which make up object's temporal texture, cannot be remembered and recreated as a matter of principle. Memory selects from the outside world *gestalts*2 , equivalent to the names and shapes, and is not able to fixate a huge amount of textural traces, which now engulfed Tarkovsky's attention. Surkova wrote down eloquent conversation between director and director of photography, Vladimir Knjaginskii, on this topic:

Andrei: Texture in pavilion should be reminiscent of stone and plaster over the stone. Plaster should look like it has been painted, and now the paint is peeling off. Volodja (note: colloquial for Vladimir): I am against this, Andrei. If you want to feel such set with 'detail' you ought to bring ten elephants! (note. The set is too big) Andrei: But if this set is not going to have details, then everything will look fake (cited in Surkova, 2002).

In *Nostalgia* (1983), as in *Stalker* ruins appear as a central theme. In these ruins artificial gradually coalesces with the natural and indexicality almost completely fuses with the notions of memory, duration and corporeality. The famous picture of *Nostalgia*, where the house of the Russian village, that is a house of the memory of the hero Andrei Gorchakov (Oleg Yankovsky), manifests itself in the ruins of a Gothic Cathedral, which could be seen as a depiction of the full absorption of memory by the time traces. *Nostalgia* is entirely permeated with the conflict between the foreign traces of time and history and the loss of ground of individual memory.

One could note another aspect of the presence of ruins in Tarkovsky's films with relation to the concept of eternity. Berdyaev writes that the 'attractiveness and beauty of ruins arises from nothing but the victory of eternity over time' (Tarkovsky, 1986, p. 59). He continues that 'nothing creates such a sense of imperishability as ruins' (Tarkovsky, 1986, p.59). In these lines we can note the pivotal in the Russian Religious Renaissance (and in Orthodox theology generally) understanding of time – that it is bound to the terrestrial while being eternity outside of it.

The question of the infinity of time was triggered in Tarkovsky's most likely by his interest in negative (apophatic) Christian eschatology, where the characteristics of infinity in principle cannot be applied to the material world and, in particular, to time. The Apocalypse is the end, but at the same time-the preservation of the world's history beyond the threshold of physical reality beyond time and space. The text is perceived by Tarkovsky as 'the greatest poetic work created on earth' (1984).

Furthermore, Tarkovsky found the significance attached by the Christianity to the idea of historical time, relevant to his own searching as an artist. According to Christianity, time does not become an illusion or a vicious circle (as in some Eastern doctrines), and has a different orientation relative to the level of temporal state prior to creation of the material world-a-synthesis of earthly, temporal and spiritual(eternal) life. In Tarkovsky's mages and artistic statements one can detect a direction of thought in harmony with these ideas. The hope for personal immortality so central in his works is consonant with this sense – it finds, according to Christian teaching, life of the soul beyond its physical existence, not dissolved completely, without losing its shape. The notion of constant correlation between earthly time and the timeless spiritual realm, as well as reinforcement of moral significance of individual actions and historical events, became an important point of convergence of Tarkovsky with Christian tradition.

Tarkovsky's interest in religious and philosophical teachings was not limited by national borders and this allows us to talk about a synthesis of spiritual experience. The belief in the preservation of personal qualities outside temporality of human existence is akin to treatment of memory as a spiritual reality. This in turn is connected with the opposite tendency to dissolve in the sphere of timelessness, which appears in this case not as a process of synthesis and preservation, but as nothingness. This combination of opposition between the subjectivist orientation of Western culture and traces of Eastern philosophical tradition, became the property of the spiritual world of the artist not so much directly as through their reflection in art.

We must also note the dualistic nature of Tarkovsky's position regarding the possible knowledge of another reality: on one hand, the desire to penetrate beyond the visible, on the other – apprehension to present a simplified vision of this inconceivable for us timeless state. The realization of the limitations of human ideas is manifested in the climax of the Apocalypse - when the angel stopped John in his desire to candidly reveal the entirety of the state of the world, when 'time is no longer' (New Testament, 1992, p. 282). According to Tarkovsky, an attempt to put in words the unfathomable, the unattainable, is to 'defile infinity'. In this area our 'knowledge is vulgar' (Tarkovsky, 1984).

The transition of the world into the state of timelessness, elusive to the comprehension of logic, was given a poetic, figurative expression in Andrei Rublev, which as noted by Tarkovsky himself, is not subjected to any specific interpretation. Attempting to instill his imagery with spiritual essence, Tarkovsky sought to create not so much a concrete representation but detachment from the habitual ties and usual stereotypes. The experience of going beyond the limits of the material world is intensified in the climactic moments of *The Mirror* and *Nostalgia* which precede the scenes of the characters' death.

One of the most expressive metaphor in *Mirror*: the bird, lying lifeless in the hand of the dying Alexei (Ignat Daniltsev) then suddenly soaring to the sky, gives the moment an emotional impetus and makes one forget about the physical part of existence (note: there may be semantic parallels with Christian symbolism). Mother appears in three different ways in a following scene, filmed in a single long take – as a young woman, as a woman expecting her first child, and as an old woman. The past does not disappear, but is resurrected in another dimension. Tarkovsky comments with regard to this sequence: 'the emotion and spirit remain forever, because the mother you remember, is still the same. It was important to me to prove the soul of the mother is immortal' (Tarkovsky, 1985).

The preservation of the candle flame in the hand of the dying hero in *Nostalgia*, as a symbol of eternal communion with the pervasive spiritual fire, prepares for the perception of the last shot in which the incompatibility of reality and the human mind - the subject Gorchakov's torment-merges into a single image of the universe: we hear a Russian song, we see falling snowflakes and a Russian hut under the arches of a ruined Gothic church.

Rising to the level of philosophical generalization, Nostalgia expresses immanent attraction towards the unity of spiritual experience: longing 'for those worlds that cannot be united', and at the same time, for 'our spiritual identity' (Tarkovsky, 1989).

As can be seen, the imagery in the final episodes of *Mirror* and *Nostalgia* are emptied of temporal concreteness, they are not fixed in the linear chronotope. The figurative imagery aspires towards a cinematic vision of the eternal - an embodiment of the spirit as memory- conservation and synthesis of phenomena separated by time and space. Siegfried Kracauer wrote an excellent essay on photography, in which he contrasted the photograph and memory. According to Kracauer, memory retains only that which has meaning and significance for man and that which can be seen as a bearer of some truth. The photograph retains the time traces without discrimination, without any sense of orientation. From this perspective, a picture appears as something partly consisting of debris. The photograph is a threat to memory, as it keeps for itself the meaning of the world and its truths. This chaos of captured traces and the unlimited expansion of archival details leads to the disappearance of images connected to memory. As a result, according to Kracauer, 'all mnemonic imagery will be reduced to this kind of image (carrier of the truth), which rightfully can be called the last image' (Kracauer, 1993, p.426). Everything appears as if an endless and chaotic accumulation of traces of truth leads to a peculiar apocalypse, that is an experience of the final image, in which the meaning and the memory are fixed. Kracauer believed that the accumulation of temporal traces and the growth of photographic archives would lead to the decline of memory and would 'impose a ban on the remembrance of death, which is an integral part of every mnemonic image' (Kracauer, 1993, p.433). These traces accumulate in an endless present, which becomes apocalyptic reality.

The world of traces in which all subjectivity disappears refers to paradise, the only state of humanity, which precedes knowledge and ubiquitous symbolization in the world. Paradise is also a place where there is no memory as memory results from the expulsion from paradise and is bound to an infinite nostalgia for this loss. By defending the right of reality to be imprinted on film without any interference or symbolic organization, we are trying to save the world, doomed to extinction. That's why the world of traces is tightly connected to the aesthetics of ruins. As Chantal de Gournay noted with regard to this notion: 'there is no art or creativity worthy of the name which does not integrate in itself the virtuality of death' (de Gournay, 1993, p. 130).

It seems to me that the later films of Tarkovsky fit quite well to the description of Kracauer. In April 1981 Tarkovsky gave an interview in which he shared his views on the changing nature of time and his understanding of these changes. He spoke about the disappearance of the temporal perspective, the collapse of the future in the present, which really becomes infinitely spread beyond the present moment: 'Before the future was somewhere far, far beyond the horizon. Today it has merged with the present. Can we say that people are ready for this? Our time is different from the time of the past in that the future is now directly in front of us, it is in our hands' (Tarkovsky, 2002 (1981)).

This cessation of the temporal flow, this exhaustion of time gives it a kind of a-historical, apocalyptic character, which becomes the central motif of *The Sacrifice* (1986). Yet, this end of time in the eyes of Tarkovsky is not associated with death: 'The problem of death doesn't interest me and I do not care about it, because I don't believe in death. Today, the main problem is that people do not trust nature' (Tarkovsky, 2002 (1981)). Nature is just a symbol for the dissolution of the historical in the eternal, in the a-historical, in the infinite space of traces. 'Sabi' finally destroys memory and imparts a special dramatic charge to Tarkovsky's worldview in last years of his life. Memory finally loses subjectivity, man disappears or undergoes a deep crisis and the zone of a-centric indexicality devours the entire world in which man disappears and is replaced by objects.

Conclusively, Tarkovsky's films take us on the journey that challenges our understanding of time, memory and spirituality. At the end of his journey Tarkovsky's artistic focus shifted entirely on the question of man's spiritual crisis, his problematic relationship with nature and above all the eschatological aspects of the approaching end of time. In this essay I attempted to provide an outline of some of the functions of time in Tarkovsky's work and trace the alterations in his understanding of time throughout his career. Tarkovsky's films can be seen as a profound material for the study of time, its relationship to memory and faith. There are infinite possibilities in studies related to his films and one way might be by examining the works of the his so called 'heirs' - names such as Alexander Sokurov, Sharunas Bartas, Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

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1 Surkova could not recall the full name.

2 From German gestalt – shape, form. This principle maintains that the human mind considers objects in their entirety before, or in parallel with, perception of their individual parts; suggesting the whole is other than the sum of its parts. Gestalt psychology tries to understand the laws of our ability to acquire and maintain meaningful perceptions in an apparently chaotic world.