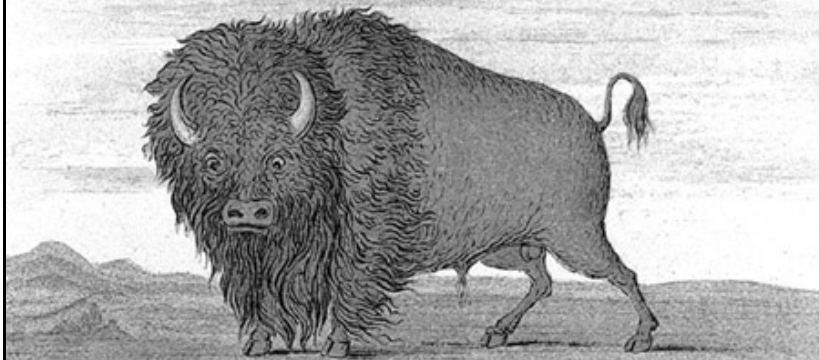


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films with Bruce Jackson & Diane Christian

ANDREI TARKOVSKY. (4 April 1932, Zavrzhe, Ivono, Russia—28 December 1986, Paris lung cancer). Bio from IMDB: “The most famous Soviet filmmaker since Sergei M. Eisenstein, Andrei Tarkovsky (the son of noted poet Arseniy Tarkovsky) studied music and Arabic in Moscow before enrolling in the Soviet film school VGIK. He shot to international attention with his first feature, *Ivanovo detstvo* (1962), which won the top prize at the Venice Film Festival. This resulted in high expectations for his second feature *Andrei Rublyov* (1969), which was banned by the Soviet authorities until 1971. It was shown at the 1969 Cannes Film Festival at 4 o'clock in the morning on the last day, in order to prevent it winning a prize - but it won one nonetheless, and was eventually distributed abroad partly to enable the authorities to save face. *Solyaris* (1972), had an easier ride, being acclaimed by many in the West as the Soviet answer to Kubrick's *2001* (though Tarkovsky himself was never too fond of it), but he ran into official trouble again with *Zerkalo* (1975), a dense, personal web of autobiographical memories with a radically innovative plot structure. *Stalker* (1979) had to be completely reshot on a dramatically reduced budget after an accident in the laboratory destroyed the first version, and after *Nostalghia* (1983), shot in Italy (with official approval), Tarkovsky defected to the West. His last film, *Offret* (1986) was shot in Sweden with many of Ingmar Bergman's regular collaborators, and won an almost unprecedented four prizes at the Cannes Film Festival. He died of cancer at the end of the year.”

SVEN NYKVIST (3 December 1922, Noheda, Sweden) shot 120 films and won Oscars for two of them: *Cries and Whispers* (1972) and *Fanny and Alexander* (1982). Some of his other films are *Curtain Call* (1999), *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993), *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), *Chaplin* (1992), *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Another Woman* (1988), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), *The Sacrifice* (1986), *Agnes of God* (1985), *Star 80* (1983), *Cannery Row* (1982), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), *Pretty Baby* (1978), *Scenes from a Marriage* (1974), *Persona* (1966), *The Silence* (1964), *Winter Light* (1963), *Through a Glass Darkly* (1962), and *The Virgin Spring* (1960).

from *World Film Directors, V. II.* Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co., NY 1988

Son of the distinguished poet Arseniy Tarkovsky and the former Maria Ivanova Vishnyakova. Tarkovsky studied under Mikhail Romm at VGIK, the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. In the course of his studies he made two short films, *There Will Be No Leave Today* (1959), and his diploma piece, *Katok i skripka* (*The Steamroller and the Violin*, 1960).

Tarkovsky graduated in 1960 and has been a Mosfilm

November 16, 2004 (IX:13)



ZERKALO/THE MIRROR (1975) 108 min

Margarita Terekhova...Mother/Natalya
 Ignat Daniltsev...Ignat, Alyosha
 Larisa Tarkovskaya...Nadezha (Wealthy woman)
 Alla Demidova...Lisa, Mother's friend at printing house
 Anatoli Solonitsyn...Forensic doctor/Pedestrian
 Tamara Ogorodnikova...Nanny/Neighbour/Strange woman at the tea table
 Yuri Nazarov...Military trainer
 Oleg Yankovsky...Father
 Filipp Yankovsky...Aleksei age 5
 S. Sventikov
 Tamara Reshetnikova
 Innokenti Smoktunovsky...Narrator (voice)
 Arseni Tarkovsky...Narrator (poetry)

Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky
 Witten by Aleksandr Misharin and Andrei Tarkovsky
 Produced by Erik Waisberg...producer
 Original Music by Eduard Artemyev
 Non-Original Music by Johann Sebastian Bach (1. Coro "Herr, unser Herrscher, dessen Ruhm" from "Johannespassion" BWV. 245); Johann Sebastian Bach (16. "Das alte Jahre vergangen ist" BWV 614, from "Orgelbüchlein"); Johann Sebastian Bach (33. Retitativo - Evangelist "Und siehe da, der Vorhang im Tempel" from "Johannespassion" BWV. 245); Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (12. "Quando corpus" from "Stabat Mater"); Henry Purcell (song "They Tell Us That Your Mighty Powers" from opera "The Indian Queen" Act 4)
 Cinematography by Georgi Rerberg

director ever since. The harsh poetry of his unique vision emerged fully in his first feature film, *Ivanovo detstvo* (*Ivan's Childhood*, 1962).

A sense of almost unendurable tension is built up by the camerawork and editing, in which the grim reality of the present is intercut with flashbacks, so that war and childhood, war and nature, are constantly contrasted. . . . “The film is not disfigured by the unnaturally cheery or the conventionally hysterical. With one blow it annuls a whole *cinémathèque* of the war films of all lands. [Ivor

Montague]

“*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the newspaper of the Communist youth organization, criticized. . . Tarkovsky, a devout Christian, for depicting Rublev, a much-revered fifteenth-century monk, as a suffering, self-questioning artist rather than a native genius who helped bring about a Russian renaissance in the final decades of Mongolian-Tartar rule.”

Tarkovsky has said, “I do not understand historical films which have no relevance for the present. For me the most important thing is to use historical material to express Man’s ideas and to create contemporary characters.” And in fact, although *Andrei Rublev* was beautifully shot on location in the cities where Rublev worked, and period details are meticulously observed, the film’s significance far transcends its localized historical setting. It is a universal political parable, in which the major responses to war, disorder, and oppression are richly dramatized. It is also a meditation on the responsibility of the artist, and one of obvious relevance to Tarkovsky’s own situation in the Soviet Union. . . . Nigel Andrew’s conviction that *Andrei Rublev* was “the one indisputable Russian masterpiece of the last decade.”

Ivor Montague writes: “I do not think that anyone can ‘enjoy’ Tarkovsky’s films. They are too tense, too agonizing, at their best too spellbinding . . . Remember, he comes of a generation that, in the years he was the age of the boy in his first feature, was losing in its homeland twenty million dead. But when one has seen any one of his films once, one wants to see it again and yet again; thoughts chase after one another like hares in March.”

In July 1984, he defected to the West, saying that his application to Moscow for permission to extend his stay abroad had gone unanswered, and that he would not be allowed to make films upon his return to Russia. Discussing his past difficulties with the regime, Tarkovsky said: “I have worked for twenty-four years in the Soviet Union, for the state organization on which all movie activity depends, and I have produced only six films. I can say that in those twenty-four years I have been unemployed for eighteen.” He remained in Western Europe.

His last film *Offret/Sacrificio* (*The Sacrifice*, 1986) was filmed on location on Gotland, in the Baltic, with cinematography by Sven Nyquist. *Sacrifice* tells of an aging intellectual and the act of faith by which he apparently saves the world. Alexander (Erland Josephson), his family, and their friends have gathered at his summer house on a primitive Swedish island to celebrate his birthday. The dinner is a revelation of domestic treachery and spiritual malaise. Exhausted, Alexander has fallen asleep when an unspecified catastrophe—possibly a nuclear accident—occurs. The air grows very cold, and an eerie glow illuminates a landscape transformed to hoarfrost, ooze, and rot. A visiting neighbor, the local postman, tells Alexander that if he spends the night with an island woman, a reputed witch, the world can be saved. Alexander does, and reawakens the next morning to find the landscape restored to its summery beauty. What seems to have been an old man’s nightmare may in fact have been a perilous journey of the spirit, but Alexander cannot tell us—he has lost his reason.

In a 1986 interview, Tarkovsky said of *The Sacrifice*, “The issue I raise in this film is one that to my mind is the most crucial: the

absence in our culture of room for a spiritual existence. We have extended the scope of our material assets and conducted materialistic experiments without taking into account the threat posed by depriving man of his spiritual dimension. Man is suffering but he doesn’t know why. I wanted to show that a man can renew his ties to life by renewing his covenant with himself and with the source of his soul. And one way to recapture moral integrity...is by having the capacity to offer oneself in sacrifice.”

from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Andrew Sarris, Editor. Visible Ink NY 1998 entry by G.C. Macnab

“Tarkovsky is the greatest of them all. He moves with such naturalness in the room of dreams. He doesn’t explain. What should he explain anyhow?” Thus Ingmar Bergman, in his autobiography *The Magic Lantern*, bows down before the Russian director while also hinting at what makes Tarkovsky’s work so awkward to critics: it can verge on the inscrutable. Too opaque to yield concrete meaning, it offers itself as sacral art, demanding a rapt, and even religious, response from its audiences.

Watching Tarkovsky’s films, his “sculpture in time,” spectators find themselves on a journey every bit as arduous as that undertaken by the pilgrims who headed toward the Zone. [A realm in his 1979 film *The Stalker* where all “desires come true.”] The son of a poet, the director treated film as a medium in which he could express himself in the first person. His six years at the Moscow State Film School, during which he received a thorough grounding in film technique from such luminaries as Mikhail Romm, did nothing to disabuse him of the notion that cinema was a “high art.” He felt he could tap the same vein of poetic intimacy that his father sought in lyric verse. The necessary intrusion of camera crews and actors, and the logistical problems of exhibition and distribution, worried him not a jot. Although all his films are self-reflexive, he does not draw attention to the camera for radical Brechtian reasons. He is not trying to subvert bourgeois narrative codes. He is not even assaulting the tenets of Socialist Realism, a doctrine he found every bit as unappealing as Western mass culture aimed at the consumer (although his ex-partner, Konchalovsky, ended up in Hollywood directing Sylvester Stallone vehicles). What his constant use of tracking shots, slow motion, and never-ending pans—indeed his entire visual rhetoric—seems to emphasize is that he is moulding the images. He is a virtuoso, and he wants us to be aware of the fact.

Tarkovsky’s first two feature length projects, *Ivan’s Childhood* and *Andrei Rublev*, mark a curious collision between the personal and the political. On one level, the former is a propaganda piece, telling yet again the great Soviet story of the defeat of the Nazi scourge during World War II. But Tarkovsky destabilizes the film with dream sequences. The “big questions” that are ostensibly being addressed turn out to be peripheral: the director is more concerned with the poetic rekindling of childhood than with a triumphal narrative of Russian resilience. Similarly, *Rublev*, an epic three-hour biography of a medieval icon painter, is, in spite of the specificity and grandeur of its locations, a rigorous account of the role of the artist in society, as applicable to the 1960s as to the 1300s.

from *Sculpting in Time. Reflections on the Cinema*. Andrei Tarkovsky. University of Texas Press, Austin 2000

There are aspects of human life that can only be faithfully represented through poetry. But this is where directors very often try to use clumsy, conventional gimmickry instead of poetic logic. I’m

thinking of the illusionism and extraordinary effects involved in dreams, memories and fantasies. All too often film dreams are made into a collection of old-fashioned filmic tricks, and cease to be a phenomenon of life.

In any case it is perfectly clear that the goal for all art—unless of course it is aimed at the ‘consumer’, like a saleable commodity—is to explain to the artist himself and to those around him what man lives for, what is the meaning of his existence. To explain to people the reason for their appearance on this planet; or if not to explain, at least to pose the question.

The allotted function of art is not, as is often assumed, to put across ideas, to propagate thoughts, to serve as example. The aim of art is to prepare a person for death, to plough and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to good.

Touched by a masterpiece, a person begins to hear in himself that same call of truth which prompted the artist to his creative act.

Time is said to be irreversible. And this is true enough in the sense that ‘you can’t bring back the past’, as they say. But what exactly is this ‘past’? Is it what has passed? And what does ‘passed’ mean for a person when for each of us the past is the bearer of all that is constant in the reality of the present, of each current moment? In a certain sense the past is far more real, or at any rate more stable, more resilient than the present. The present slips and vanishes like sand between the fingers, acquiring material weight only in its recollection. King Solomon’s rings bore the inscription, ‘All will pass’; by contrast, I want to draw attention to how time in its moral implication is in fact turned back. Time cannot vanish without a trace for it is a subjective, spiritual category; and the time we have lived settles in our soul as an experience placed within time.

What is the essence of the director’s work? We could define it as sculpting in time.

Cinema was the first art form to come into being as a result of a technological invention, in answer to a vital need. It was the instrument which humanity had to have in order to increase its mastery over the real world. For the domain of any art form is limited to one aspect of our spiritual and emotional discovery of surrounding reality.

The function of the image, as Gogol said, is to express life itself, not ideas or arguments about life. It does not signify life or symbolise it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness.’

The dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame.

No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: *it is the film that is the work of art*. We can only talk about its components rather arbitrarily, dividing it up artificially for the sake of theoretical discussion.

Nor can I accept the notion that editing is the main formative element of a film, as the protagonists of ‘montage cinema’, following Kuleshov and Eisenstein, maintained in the twenties, as if a film was made on the editing table.

Art affirms all that is best in man—hope, faith, love, beauty, prayer. . . . What he dreams of and what he hopes for. . . . When someone who

doesn’t know how to swim is thrown into the water, instinct tells his body what movements will save him. The artist, too, is driven by a kind of instinct, and his work furthers man’s search for what is eternal, transcendent, divine—often in spite of the sinfulness of the poet himself.

What is art? Is it good or evil? From God or from the devil? From man’s strength or from his weakness? Could it be a pledge of fellowship, an image of social harmony? Might that be its function? Like a declaration of love: the consciousness of our dependence on each other. A confession. An unconscious act that none the less reflects the true meaning of life—love and sacrifice

Let us look at Leonardo’s portrait of ‘A Young Lady With a Juniper,’ which we used in *Mirror* for the scene of the father’s brief meeting with his children when he comes home on leave.

There are two things about Leonardo’s images that are arresting. One is the artist’s amazing capacity to examine the object from outside, standing back, looking from above the world—a characteristic of artists like Bach or Tolstoy. And the other, the fact that picture affects us simultaneously in two opposite ways. It is not possible to say what impression the portrait finally makes on us. It is not even possible to say definitely whether we like the woman or not, whether she is appealing or unpleasant. She is at once attractive and repellent. There is something inexpressibly beautiful about her and at the same time repulsive, fiendish. And fiendish not at all in the romantic, alluring sense of the word; rather—beyond good and evil. Charm with a negative sign. It has an element of degeneracy—and of beauty. In *Mirror* we needed a portrait in order to introduce a timeless element into the moments that are succeeding each other before our eyes, and at the same time to juxtapose the portrait with the heroine, to emphasize in her and in the actress, Margarita Terekhova, the same capacity at once to attract and repel. . . .

If you try to analyze Leonardo’s portrait, separating it into its components, it will not work. At any rate it will explain nothing. For the emotional effect exercised on us by the woman in the picture is powerful precisely because it is impossible to find in her anything that we can definitely prefer, to single out any one detail from the whole, to prefer any one, momentary impression to another, and make it our own, to achieve a balance in the way we look at the image presented to us. And so there opens up before us the possibility of interaction with infinity, for the great function if the artistic image is to be a kind of detector of infinity. . . . towards which our reason and our feelings go soaring, with joyful, thrilling haste.

Such feeling is awoken by the completeness of the image: it affects us by this very fact of being impossible to dismember. In isolation each component part will be dead—or perhaps, on the contrary, down to its tiniest elements it will display the same characteristics as the complete, finished work. And these characteristics are produced by the interaction of opposed principles, the meaning of which, as if in communicating vessels, spills over from one into the other: the face of the woman painted by Leonardo is animated by an exalted idea and at the same time might appear perfidious and subject to base passions. It is possible for us to see any number of things in the portrait, and as we try to grasp its essences we shall wander through unending labyrinths and never find the way out. We shall derive deep pleasure from the realisation that we cannot exhaust it, or see to the end of it. A true artistic image gives the beholder a simultaneous experience of the most complex, contradictory, sometimes even mutually exclusive feelings.

It is not possible to catch the moment at which the positive goes over into its opposite, or when the negative starts moving

towards the positive. Infinity is germane, inherent in the very structure of the image. . . .

I am always sickened when an artist underpins his system of images with deliberate tendentiousness or ideology. I am against his allowing methods to be discernible at all. I often regret some of the shots I have allowed to stay in my own films; they seem to me now to be evidence of compromise and found their way into my films because I was insufficiently singleminded. If it were still possible, I would now happily cut out of *Mirror* the scene with the cock, even though that scene made a deep impression on many in the audience. But that was because I was playing 'give-away' with the audience.

When the exhausted heroine, almost at fainting-point, is making up her mind whether to cut off the cockerel's head, we shot her in close-up at high speed for the last ninety frames, in a patently unnatural light. Since on the screen it comes out in slow motion, it gives the effect of stretching the time-framework—we are plunging the audience into the heroine's state, putting a brake on that moment, highlighting it. This is bad, because the shot starts to have a purely literary meaning. We deform the actress's face independently of her, as it were playing the role for her. We serve up the emotion we want, squeeze it out by our own—director's—means. Her state becomes too clear, too easily read. And in the interpretation of a character's state of mind, something must always be left secret.

To quote a more successful example of a similar method, again from *Mirror*: a few frames of the printing-press scene are also shot in slow motion, but in this case it is barely perceptible. We made a point of doing it very delicately and carefully, so that the audience would not be aware of it straight away, but just have a vague feeling of something strange. We were not trying to underline an idea by using slow motion, but to bring out a state of mind through means other than acting. . . .

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

The function of the image, as Gogol said, is to express life itself, not ideas or arguments about life. It does not dignify life or symbolise it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness.

Time, rhythm and editing

Turning now to the film image as such, I immediately want to dispel the widely held idea that it is essentially 'composite'. This notion seem to me wrong because it implies that cinema is founded on the attributes of kindred art forms and has none specifically its own; and that is to deny that cinema is an art.

The dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame. The actual passage of time is also made clear in the characters' behaviour, the visual treatment and the sound—but these are all accompanying features, the absence of which, theoretically, would in no way affect the existence of the film. One cannot conceive of a cinematic work with no sense of time passing through the shot, but one can easily imagine a film with no actors, music, décor or even editing. The Lumière brothers' *Arrivée d'un Train*, already mentioned, was like that. . . .

You will remember that the film has no editing, no acting and no décor. But the rhythm of the movement of time is there within the frame, as the sole organising force of the—quite complex—dramatic development.

No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: *it is the film that is the work of art*. And we can only talk

about its components rather arbitrarily, dividing it up artificially for the sake of theoretical discussion.

To refer again to my own experience, I must say that a prodigious amount of work went into editing *Mirror*. There were some twenty or more variants. I don't just mean changes in the order of certain shots, but major alterations in the actual structure, in the sequence of the episodes. At moments it looked as if the film could not be edited, which would have meant that inadmissible lapses had occurred during shooting. The film didn't hold together, it wouldn't stand up, it fell apart as one watched, it had no unity, no necessary inner connection, no logic. And the, one fine day, when we somehow manages to devise one last, desperate rearrangement—there was the film. The material came to life; the parts started to function reciprocally, as if linked by a bloodstream; and as that last, despairing attempt was projected onto the screen, the film was born before our very eyes. For a long time I couldn't believe the miracle—the film held together. . . .

Time itself, running through the shots, had met and linked together.

There are about two hundred shots in *Mirror*, very few when a film of that length usually has about five hundred; the small number is due to their length.

Although the assembly of the shots is responsible for the structure of a film, it does not, as is generally assumed, create its rhythm.

The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and the rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them. Editing cannot determine rhythm, (in this respect it can only be a feature of style); indeed, time courses through the picture despite editing rather than because of it. The course of time, recorded in the frame, is what the director has to catch in the pieces laid out on the editing table.

Time, imprinted in the frame, dictates the particular editing principle; and the pieces that 'won't edit'—that can't be properly joined—are those which record a radically different kind of time. . . .

How does time make itself felt in a shot? It becomes tangible when you sense something significant, truthful, going on beyond the events on the screen; when you realise, quite consciously, that what you see in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity; a pointer to life. Like the infinity of the image which we talked of earlier, a film is bigger than it is—at least, if it is a real film. And it always turns out to have more thought, more ideas, than were consciously put there by its author. Just as life, constantly moving and changing, allows everyone to interpret and feel each separate moment in his own way, so too a real picture, faithfully recording on film the time which flows on beyond the edges of the frame, lives within time if time lives within it; this two-way process is a determining factor of cinema.,

The film then becomes something beyond its ostensible existence as an exposed and edited roll of film, a story, a plot. Once in contact with the individual who sees it, it separates from its author, starts to live its own life, undergoes changes of form and meaning.

I reject the principles of 'montage cinema' because they do not allow the film to continue beyond the edges of the screen: they do not allow the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them on film. 'Montage cinema' presents the audience with puzzles and riddles, makes them decipher symbols,

take pleasure in allegories, appealing all the time to their intellectual experience. Each of these riddles, however, has its own exact, word for word solution; so I feel that Eisenstein prevents the audience from letting their feelings be influenced by their own reaction to what they see. When in *October* he juxtaposes a balalaika with Kerensky, his method has become his aim, in the way that Valéry meant. The construction of the image becomes an end in itself. And the author proceeds to make a total onslaught on the audience, imposing upon them his own attitude to what is happening.

If one compares cinema with such time-based arts as, say, ballet or music, cinema stands out as giving time visible, real form. Once recorded on film, the phenomenon is there, given and immutable, even when the time is intensely subjective.

Artists are divided into those who create their own inner world, and those who recreate reality. I undoubtedly belong to the first—but that actually alters nothing: my inner world may be of interest to some, others will be left cold or even irritated by it; the point is that the inner world created by cinematic means always has to be taken as reality, as it were objectively established in the immediacy of the recorded moment.

A piece of music can be played in different ways, can last for varying lengths of time. Here time is simply a condition of certain causes and effects set out in a given order; it has an abstract, philosophical character. Cinema on the other hand is able to record time in outward and visible signs, recognisable to the feelings. And so time becomes the very foundation of cinema: as sound is in music, colour in painting, character in drama.

Rhythm, then, is not the metrical sequence of pieces; what makes it is the time-thrust within the frames. And I am convinced that it is rhythm, and not editing, as people tend to think, that is the main formative element of cinema.

Obviously editing exists in every art form, since material always has to be selected and joined. What is different about cinema editing is that it brings together time, imprinted in the segments of film.

Scenario and shooting script

Between the first and last stages of making a film, the director comes up against such a vast number of people and such divergent problems—some of them all but insuperable—that it almost seems as if circumstances have been deliberately calculated to make him forget why it was that he started working on the picture.

I have to say that for me the difficulties connected specifically with the conception of a film have little to do with its initial inspiration; the problem has always been to keep it intact and unadulterated as the stimulus for work and as a symbol of the finished picture. There is always a danger of the original conception degenerating in the turmoil of producing the film, of being deformed and destroyed in the process of its own realisation.

The film's progress from its conception to its eventual printing is fraught with every kind of hazard. These have to do not only with technical problems, but also with the enormous number of people involved in the process of production. . . .

It is no exaggeration to say that at every turn the director is beset by the danger of becoming a mere witness, observing the scriptwriter writing, the designer making sets, the actor playing and the editor cutting. That is in fact what happens in highly commercialised productions: the director's task is merely to coordinate the professional functions of the various members of the team. In a word, it is terribly difficult to insist on an *author's* film,

when all your efforts are concentrated on not letting the idea be 'spilt' until nothing is left of it as you contend with the normal conditions of film-making. One can only hope for a satisfactory outcome if the original conception remains fresh and vivid.

I should say at once that I do not look on scenario as a literary genre. Indeed, the more cinematic a script, the less it can claim literary status in its own right, in the way a play so often can. And we know that in practice no screenplay has ever been on the level of literature.

I do not understand why anyone with literary talent should ever want to be a script writer—apart, obviously, from mercenary reasons. A writer has to write, and someone who thinks in cinematic images should take up directing. For the idea and purpose of a film, and their realisation, have finally to be the responsibility of the director-author; otherwise he cannot have effective control of the shooting.

When I finished the first version of the *Mirror* script, originally entitled *A White, White Day*, I realised that cinematically the conception was far from clear; a simple piece of recollection, full of elegiac sadness and nostalgia for my childhood, was not what I wanted. It was obvious that something was missing from the script, and that what was missing was crucial. Even when the script was first being considered, therefore, the soul of the film had not yet come to dwell in the body. I was acutely conscious of the need to find a key idea, that would raise it above the level of lyrical memoir.

Then a second version of the script was written: I wanted to intersperse the childhood episodes of the novella with fragments of straight interview with my mother, thus juxtaposing two comparative perceptions of the past (mother's and narrator's) which would take shape for the audience in the interaction of two different projections of that past in the memories of two people very close to each other but of different generations. I still think that way could have led us to interesting, unpredictable results.

However, I do not regret now that I subsequently also had to abandon that structure, which would have been too direct and unsubtle, and replace all the proposed interviews with the mother with acted scenes. I never really felt that the acting and documentary elements came together dynamically. They clashed and contradicted each other, and putting them together would have been a formalistic, intellectual exercise in editing: a spurious unity founded on concepts. The two elements carried quite different concentrations of material, different times, and time-pressures: on the one hand the real, documentary, exact time of the interviews, and on the other the narrator's time in the memories, recreated through acting. And the whole thing was somehow reminiscent of *Cinéma-Vérité* and Jean-Rouch and that was not at all what I wanted.

The transitions between fictional, subjective time and authentic documentary time suddenly struck me as unconvincing—artificial and monotonous, like a game of ping-pong.

My decision not to edit a picture filmed on two different time planes does not mean at all that acted and documentary material can never, by definition, be combined. Indeed, I think that in *Mirror* the newsreel and the acted scenes come together perfectly naturally; so much that I have more than once heard people say that they thought the newsreels were reconstructions, deliberately made to give the impression of actual newsreels: the documentary had become an organic part of the film.

This result was due to my having found some outstanding material. I had to look through thousands of metres of film before hitting on the sequence of the Soviet Army crossing Lake Sivash;

and it stunned me. I had never come across anything like it. ... Here was a record of one of the most dramatic moments in the history of the Soviet advance of 1943. It was a unique piece; I could hardly believe that such an enormous footage of film should have been spent on recording one single event continuously observed. It had clearly been filmed by an outstanding camera-man. When, on the screen before me, there appeared, as if coming out of nothing, these people shattered by the fearful, inhuman effort of that tragic moment of history, I knew that this episode had to become the center the very essence, heart, nerve of this picture that had started off merely as my intimate lyrical memories.

There came onto the screen an image of overwhelming dramatic force—and it was mine, specifically my own. As if the burden and pain had been borne by me. (Incidentally, it was precisely this episode that the chief of State Cinema wanted me to take out of the film.) The scene was about that suffering which is the price of what is known as historical progress, and of the innumerable victims whom, from time immemorial, it has claimed. It was impossible to believe for a moment that such suffering was senseless. The images spoke of immortality, and Arseniy Tarkovsky's poems were the consummation of the episode because they gave voice to its ultimate meaning. The newsreel had aesthetic qualities that built up to an extraordinary pitch of emotional intensity. Once imprinted on the film, the truth recorded in this accurate chronicle ceased to be simply like life. It suddenly became an *image* of heroic sacrifice and the price of that sacrifice; the image of a historical turning point brought about at incalculable cost.

The film affected you with a piercing, aching poignancy, because in the shots were simply people. People dragging themselves, knee deep in wet mud, through an endless swamp that stretched out beyond the horizon, beneath a whitish, flat sky. Hardly anyone survived. The boundless perspective of these recorded moments created an effect close to catharsis. Later I learned that the army camera-man who had made the film with such extraordinary penetration into the events taking place around him, had been killed on that same day.

When we had only four hundred metres of film to go on *Mirror*, in other words some thirteen minutes of screen time, the film still did not exist. The narrator's dreams had been decided and filmed, but even these did not give the film a unified structure.

The film in its present form only came into existence with the introduction of the narrator's wife into the fabric of the narrative; she had not figured either in the original plan or in the script.

We very much liked Margarita Kerekhova as the mother, but felt all the time that the role allotted her in the original script was not sufficient to bring out, or make use of, her tremendous potential. Then we decided to write some additional episodes, and she was given the role of wife. After that we had the idea of interspersing the episodes of the author's past and present in the editing.

To begin with, my brilliant co-author—Alexander Misharin—and I intended to bring into the new dialogue a statement of our views on the aesthetic and moral basis of artistic work; mercifully, however, we thought better of it. I trust that some of these reflections do in fact now run imperceptibly through the whole film.

This account of the making of *Mirror* illustrates that for me scenario is a fragile, living, ever-changing structure, and that a film is only made at the moment when work on it is finally completed. The script is the base from which one starts to explore; and for the entire time that I am working on a film I have the constant anxiety that perhaps nothing may come of it.

Mirror offers an obvious example of how some of my working principles regarding scenario were carried to their logical conclusions. A great deal was finally thought out, formulated, built up, only in the course of shooting. The scripts of my earlier films were more clearly structured. When we started work on *Mirror* we made it a deliberate point of principle not to have the picture worked out and arranged in advance, before the material had been filmed. It was important to see how, under what conditions, the film could take shape as it were by itself: depending on the takes, on contact with the actors; through the construction of sets, and in the way it adapted to the places chosen for location.

We drew up no prescriptive plans for scenes or episodes as complete visual entities; what we worked on was clear sense of atmosphere and empathy with the characters, which demanded, then and there on the set, exact plastic realisation. If I 'see' anything at all before shooting, if I envisage anything, then it is the inner state, the distinctive inner tension of the scenes to be filmed, and the psychology of the characters. But I still do not know the precise mould in which it will all be cast. I go on to the set in order to understand by what means that state can be expressed on film. And once I have understood that, I start shooting.

Mirror is also the story of the old house where the narrator spent his childhood, the farmstead where he was born and where his father and mother lived. This building, which over the years had fallen into ruins, was reconstructed from photographs just as it had been, and on the foundations which had survived. And so it stood exactly as it had forty years earlier. When we subsequently took my mother there, whose youth had been spent in that place and that house, her reaction to seeing it surpassed my boldest expectations. What she experienced was a return to her past; and then I knew we were moving in the right direction. The house awoke in her the feelings which the film was intended to express. . .

A field lay in front of the house; I remember buckwheat growing between the house and the road leading to the next village. It is very pretty when it is in blossom. The white flowers, which give the effect of a snow-covered field, have stayed in my memory as one of the distinctive and essential details of my childhood. But when we arrived to decide where we would shoot, there was no buckwheat in sight—for years the *kolkhoz* had been sowing the field with clover and oats. When we asked them to sow it for us with buckwheat, they made a great point of assuring us that buckwheat wouldn't grow there, because it was quite the wrong soil. Despite that, we rented the field and sowed it with buckwheat at our own risk. The people in the *kolkhoz* couldn't conceal their amazement when they saw it come up. And we took that success as a good omen. It seemed to tell us something about the special quality of our memory—about its capacity for penetrating beyond the veils drawn by time, and this was exactly what the film had to be about: it was its seminal idea.

I do not know what would have happened to the picture if the buckwheat had not grown. . . I shall never forget the moment it started to flower.

As I began work on *Mirror* I found myself reflecting more and more that if you are serious about your work, then a film is not the next item in your career, it is an action which will affect the whole of your life. For I had made up my mind that in this film, for the first time, I would use the means of cinema to talk of all that was most precious to me, and do so directly, without playing any kinds of tricks.

I had the greatest difficulty in explaining to people that there is no hidden, coded meaning in the film, nothing beyond the desire to tell the truth. Often my assurances provoked incredulity and

even disappointment. Some people evidently wanted more: they needed arcane symbols, secret meanings. They were not accustomed to the poetics of the cinema image. And I was disappointed in my turn. Such was the reaction of the opposition party in the audience; as for my own colleagues, they launched a bitter attack on me, accusing me of immodesty, of wanting to make a film about myself.

In the end we were saved by one thing only—faith: the belief that since our work was so important to us it could not but become equally important to the audience. The film aimed at reconstructing the lives of people whom I loved dearly and knew well. I wanted to tell the story of the pain suffered by one man because he feels he cannot repay his family for all they have given him. He feels he hasn't loved them enough, and this idea torments him and will not let him be.

Once you start to speak of things that are precious, you are immediately anxious about how people will react to what you have said, and you want to protect these things, to defend them against incomprehension. We were worried about how future audiences would receive the picture, but at the same time we went on believing, with maniac obstinacy, that we would be heard. Our decision was vindicated by later developments. . . . I could not have hoped for a higher level of understanding, and such an audience reaction was supremely important to me for my future work.

Mirror was not an attempt to talk about myself, not at all. It

was about my feelings towards people dear to me; about my relationship with them; my perpetual pity for them and my own inadequacy—my feeling of duty left unfulfilled.

The episodes the narrator remembers at an extreme moment of crisis cause him pain up to the last minute, fill him with sorrow and anxiety. . .

When you read a play you can see what it means, even though it may be interpreted differently in different productions; it has its identity from the outset, whereas the identity of a film cannot be discerned from the scenario. The scenario dies in the film. Cinema may take dialogue from literature, but that is all—it bears no essential relation to literature whatsoever. A play becomes part of literature, because the ideas and characters expressed in dialogue constitute its essence: and dialogue is always literary. But in cinema dialogue is merely one of the components of the material fabric of the film. Anything in the scenario that has aspirations to literature, to prose, must as a matter of principle be consistently assimilated and adapted in the course of making the film. The literary element in a film is *smelted*; it ceases to be literature once the film has been made. Once the work is done, all that is left is the written transcript, the shooting script, which could not be called literature by any definition. It is more like an account of something seen related to a blind man.

Join us next week, Tuesday November 23, Stanley Kubrick's BARRY LYNDON 1975. Then it's just two more in the Fall 2004 Buffalo Film Seminars: Martin Scorsese's **RAGING BULL** (1980) on November 30 and Orson Welles's **CITIZEN KANE** (1941) on December 7.

At the Amherst Theater, Monday November 29, 7:00 p.m.: Diane Christian hosts Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's 1946 technicolor masterpiece **A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN)**.

The spring 2005 Buffalo Film Seminars schedule:

- January 18 Carl Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* 1928
- January 25 Alfred Hitchcock, *The 39 Steps* 1935
- February 1 Howard Hawks, *His Girl Friday* 1940
- February 8 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Le Corbeau* 1943
- February 15 John Huston, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* 1948
- February 22 Vincente Minelli *An American in Paris* 1951
- March 1 Ingmar Bergman *Wild Strawberries* 1957
- March 8 Andrzej Wadja *Ashes and Diamonds* 1958
- March 22 David Lean *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962
- March 29 John Frankenheimer *The Manchurian Candidate* 1962
- April 5 Sergio Leone *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* 1966
- April 12 Robert Bresson *Lancelot of the Lake* 1974
- April 19 Larisa Shepitko *The Ascent* 1976
- April 26 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985

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