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Andrei Tarkovsky as Reader of Arsenii Tarkovsky's Poetry in the Film *Mirror*

In his 1926 article “Literature and Cinema” (“Literatura i kino”), Boris Eikhenbaum states that the undeniable phenomenon of the 1920s is “a rivalry between cinema and literature.”¹ According to Eikhenbaum, “Undoubtedly, the expansion of the film industry might potentially undermine the interest in books, because the success of cinema is related to the diminishing interest of the masses in books.”² Thus, in Eikhenbaum’s view, the fondness of filmmakers for literature might be seen not only as a result of some shift toward syncretic cognition but also as a power struggle. Eikhenbaum lightheartedly compares this power struggle between cinema and literature to marriage, asserting that cinema plays the role of the husband in such a union.

Eikhenbaum’s concerns regarding the survival of the printed word in Russian culture were triggered by the many adaptations in the 1920s of Russian classical texts for the screen, including major works of Tolstoy, Pushkin, Gogol, Leskov, and Chekhov. In any discussion of the relation-

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The author thanks Professor Caryl Emerson, who provided valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper during her stay at the University of Canterbury as Visiting Canterbury Fellow in June 2003.

ship between word and visual image, it is important to bear in mind Eikhenbaum's perceptive observations that literature and film are different forms of expression, and that any use of literary text in film should be understood as a translation into cinematic language. This language is not simply moving photography, notes Eikhenbaum, but a special form of photogenic expression comparable to the visual images of dreams. Eikhenbaum maintains that, in spite of some mimetic qualities, the language used in film is akin to dreams seen during sleep: "The face comes closer to you, then you see only eyes, then only arms; then everything disappears, and you see another face, a window, a street, etc. It is as if you see a novel you've read earlier in your sleep."³ Eikhenbaum suggests that the cognitive processes of film viewers differ significantly from readers' perception of the printed word. According to Eikhenbaum, when one views a film, one's perception moves "from the object, from the linking of various shots toward their cognition, toward the organization of an inner speech."⁴ As Eikhenbaum aptly sums it up, the language used in film is a somewhat transrational language that allows viewers to play with objects with the help of montage and cutting.⁵

Victor Shklovsky, another representative of Russian Formalism, was highly suspicious of the attempts of various filmmakers to adapt works of literature for the screen. In Shklovsky's view, cinema is the product of an unintuitive and analytical cognitive model that leads to a fragmented perception of reality and thus requires an uninterrupted process of visual apperception. He goes on: "As everyone knows, film is comprised of a chain of still shots that follow each other so fast that the human eye lumps them together, creating the illusion of movement out of still objects." Thus, cinema involves the "art of recognition."⁶ Shklovsky believed that cinema inherited from literature an important narrative plot device (*siuzhet*—the events of the story in the order the author presents them) and significantly transformed it. According to Shklovsky, cinema lacks psychological analysis and is oriented toward fast action and tricks.⁷ Shklovsky resents film because it blurs the boundaries between life and art, destroying thereby the illusory qualities of any artifact.

Like the Russian Formalist critics, Andrei Tarkovsky brings to the fore the tension between literature and cinema in his film *Mirror* (*Zerkalo*, 1974). Tarkovsky's desire to see cinema as a completely autonomous form of expression is akin to Shklovsky's definition of cinema as a new cognitive tool that helps us see reality in a new light. In his book *Sculpting*

in *Time*, Tarkovsky predicts that in the future the cinema “will move further away not only from literature but also from other adjacent art forms, and thus will become . . . more autonomous.”⁸ In *Mirror* Tarkovsky questions his identity as a filmmaker who writes with his camera and distances himself from the Russian cultural tradition of privileging the printed word. Indeed, in *Mirror*, Tarkovsky appropriates his father’s poetry not to organize his film’s discourse, but to ascribe to it certain postmodernist qualities in the service of Tarkovsky’s exploration of subjectivity. In the film, Tarkovsky’s dialogue with his father’s poetry evokes a postmodern fluidity of subjectivity that questions the uniqueness and stability of one’s identity. Andrei Tarkovsky uses his father’s voice in the film to define his own self through the other, even as both the self and the other remain unfathomable.

So far the interrelation between Andrei Tarkovsky’s films and Arsenii Tarkovsky’s poetry has received very little attention. The most useful insights into the complex relationship between these artists can be found in Vida Johnson’s and Graham Petrie’s *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*.⁹ Since Johnson and Petrie do not offer an extensive treatment of this topic, the present article examines the existing tension between word and image in Tarkovsky’s *Mirror*, a film both praised and criticized for its surreal qualities.

David Miall compares *Mirror* to Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* and suggests that Tarkovsky’s film, like Wordsworth’s poem, “calls into question the meaning and agency of the self: for him it also appears to be an illusion (indeed, a potentially disastrous one), as the historical evidence provided by the film bears witness.”¹⁰ Mark Le Fanu’s first impression of *Mirror* also highlights the intensity of the emotional response the film evokes, rendering the intellectual unimportant: “The film was obscure in its incidents; many episodes were not, by conventional standards, properly explained. Yet even as I watched it, I felt possessed by the sensation that you occasionally come across in dreams, of an understanding so complete that you yourself become part of the dramaturgy.”¹¹ As Le Fanu maintains, the most striking feature of Tarkovsky’s memoir-film is that it “is profoundly intimate” and offers the “freedom of personal reminiscence.”¹² This is because Tarkovsky inserts autobiographical references into his film, drawing himself, the author of the story, into the world of his own creation and blurring distinctions between fiction and reality. In his attempt to discover himself through language Tarkovsky

also uses his father's voice and poetry both as an important framing device and as a means to create a semblance of order and meaning in his life.

In my view, *Mirror* exemplifies Jacques Lacan's assumption that the unconscious is structured like a language.¹³ As I argue below, Andrei Tarkovsky's preoccupation with language in *Mirror* leads to an exploration of the origin of language and reminds us that our subjectivity has had to evolve in a world where language is always already established. In a 1966 interview Tarkovsky stated that "cinema can exist only as an absolute equivalent to images of real life."¹⁴ Yet Tarkovsky's understanding of reality is highly subjective. Sergei Filippov convincingly argues that Tarkovsky's sense of authenticity relates to the expression of the subjective experiences of everyday life: "Tarkovsky views reality not as something significant in its own right, but as something that is transformed in the psyche of the filmmaker and viewers into an image that makes that reality interesting."¹⁵ In *Mirror* Tarkovsky presents reality as a set of fragmented images and distorted memories of which we—as much as the director himself—must make sense. Thus, Tarkovsky puts his viewers in the position of the developing subject of psychoanalytic theory, who must make sense of the chaotic set of signs that constitute the reality around him. Lacan, in particular, is relevant here, for his theory of the mirror stage is an ideal tool for understanding Tarkovsky's own grappling with issues of his childhood.

Lacan defines the mirror stage as the critical phase for the development of subjectivity, occurring between the ages of six and eighteen months. In the mirror stage, Lacan maintains, the child starts to see an image of itself from outside of itself. Visual space plays a crucial role in the development of subjectivity and helps construct a sense of wholeness and totality that replaces fragmentation. According to Lacan, the mirror stage "manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality."¹⁶ Unable to control its body or its environment, the child sees reflected in the mirror a gestalt that promises a future wholeness. During this mirror stage of development the child's psyche finds itself structured in terms of an alienating exteriority. The image of wholeness is perceived as being placed outside of the subject that functions as its internalized correlate: it is produced by identification with something other than the self. Lacan's theory implies that the image of the self has an external source because the subject does not define itself: the subject is the discourse of the other. Lacan

maintains that the mirror stage brings no synthesis that would disperse the contradiction on which it is based. More important, Lacan suggests that the mirror stage does not entirely disappear—it is a phase that occurs in early childhood but remains as a structure that forms the imaginary, understood in terms of human experience. Tarkovsky's *Mirror* illustrates well Lacan's formulations that the unconscious is structured like a language; that the unconscious is the discourse of the other that can be grasped by rhetorical analysis; and that the other speaks through the tropes of metaphor and metonymy.

The complex awareness that the image of the self comes from and remains part of the other, and that the subject's selfhood makes it decentered and alien to itself, is well captured in the opening scenes of Tarkovsky's *Mirror*. To this end, the first poem of Arsenii Tarkovsky used in the film highlights the culmination of the mirror stage, which ends up "in the assumption of alienating identity."¹⁷ Thus, Tarkovsky uses his father's poem "First Meetings" (Pervye svidaniia, 1962), which supposedly hints at the mystery of the narrator's origin as a creative individual, to represent what Lacan calls the symbolic order, or the system of meanings and identities from which the narrator's selfhood arises. It is as if his sense of self is placed outside him and projected at him from an external world which he cannot control. Since the poem is interwoven in Andrei Tarkovsky's own autobiographical narrative, the allusion to first meetings might be seen as the narrator's meetings with the language of self-representation. This is especially true if we take into account that Arsenii Tarkovsky is placed outside the space depicted in the film: viewers do not encounter him in person but hear only his voice. Arguably, it is Andrei, the narrator of the story, who appears to behold and control the voice of his father for the duration of the film.

The poem that Arsenii Tarkovskii reads at the beginning of the film is accompanied by a sequence of images depicting a girl and a boy in a country home. They spill milk over a table. Their mother enters the house and walks slowly toward the window. She finally sits by the window and watches the rain outside the house. She sees an empty bench with some objects on it, and then she observes the sky and the trees. It appears that she mourns her absent partner and the unspoiled beautiful moments of the world of harmony and unity that is now lost forever. Yet the main function of the poem is to introduce the self as an author of the narrative. Tarkovsky also presents the symbolic order, exemplified in the poem, as an object of his narration, too, with the help of montage. As Dziga

Vertov puts it, “Montage means organizing film fragments (shots) into a film-object. It means ‘writing’ something cinematic with the recorded shots.”¹⁸ The female figure is thus experiencing a double framing—she is observed through the gaze of both the poet and the camera. It is as if she is both the subject of the film who expresses her inner self by appropriating her partner’s poem and the object who is gazed upon by her son, a man with a camera who, to borrow Vertov’s definition, acts as a “kino-eye,” a man who sees with a mechanical eye.¹⁹ These scenes that mark the introduction of the mirror image of selfhood reveal the complexity of Tarkovsky’s self-analysis: it appears that Tarkovsky appropriates his father’s words in the film to name the symbolic order that has been imposed on him.

Arsenii Tarkovsky’s poem refers to several archetypal images of life and of the sublime such as water, birds, skies, and woods. The poem deals with the major modernist theme of transformation and life creation (*zhiznetvorchestvo*) achieved through love and poetry. The image of the wet lilac presented as a mirror image—“you have . . . led me through the wet lilac into your kingdom / From the other side of the mirror” (“ty . . . vela/ Skvoz’ vlazhnuu siren’ v svoi vladen’ia / S toi storony zerkal’nogo stekla”)²⁰—evokes several poems of Boris Pasternak that feature similar images of the sublime and substitute metonymically human misfortunes with melancholic images of nature. Tarkovsky’s cinematic writing destabilizes the authenticity of the metonymic descriptions of subjectivity conveyed in Pasternak’s poems “Weeping Garden” (*Plachushchii sad*), “Autumn” (*Osen’*), and the autobiographical poem “Hamlet” from *Doctor Zhivago*, which would be known to viewers versed in Soviet underground literature. Mention of flowers, a jug, eyes, mirage-like images, birds, and hard and thick-layered water found in Arsenii Tarkovsky’s “First Meetings” echoes Pasternak’s lyrical poetry of nature and human suffering. All allusions to poetry in *Mirror* form a part of discontinuous discourse, since poems are seen as primary form, or something of a raw material that might be transformed into another narrative.

Johnson’s and Petrie’s rendering of this scene interprets the use of Arsenii Tarkovsky’s “First Meetings” in *Mirror* in a different vein. “After the doctor leaves, the mother walks toward the house and a different male voice (Arsenii Tarkovsky) is heard reciting his poem ‘First Meetings,’ about the joys and transforming power of love and sexual passion. As the poem continues, the small boy and then the girl are again seen,

first outside, and then inside a dark but warm house which the camera explores, eventually returning to focus on the lonely and vulnerable figure of the mother.”²¹ Johnson and Petrie do not explain the vulnerable appearance of the mother. They fail to identify the camera with the male gaze observing the beautiful female presented here as a person who recites the poem of her lover in her thoughts: it is as if her inner speech remembers and articulates the poet’s own recital of this poem. They also do not identify the mother with the mirror, as suggested by the poem and as implied by the camera’s gaze. Instead, they interpret the scene as a sequence of verbal and nonverbal symbols: “In the poem, the lovers celebrate their meetings and the woman leads the man (the lyrical ‘I’) into her ‘domain, on the other side of the mirror.’ Mirrors and glossy reflecting surfaces will abound in this film, where the whole world . . . is always somehow distorted, refracted, doubled up, seen in a new, more truthful way.”²²

Johnson and Petrie maintain that “Not only will the poetic images provide thematic threads throughout the film, but at times they will be literally visualized”:

As the camera tracks past the mother to the open window to show the garden, a table, rain falling, the voice explains; “everything in the world was transfigured, even simple things like a basin, a pitcher, when between us stood, like a guard, layered and solid water.” Just as love transforms the everyday reality in the poem, so in this film memory bathes the basins, pitchers, vases, tables, the hard, “solid” rain (all frequent images in the film) in the warm, enticingly mysterious glow of another world on “the other side of the mirror,” the world of childhood. The camera tilts up the trees as if following the poem’s invisible lovers. . . . But the love does not last, and the camera cuts to a close-up of the mother, gently wiping tears from her cheeks as the poem ends, perhaps with a comment on the violent historical setting of those past memories, “when destiny tracked us, like a madman with a razor in his hands.”²³

Such a reading notwithstanding, I would argue, however, that the image of a madman with the razor in his hands is given a different twist in the film. If anything, its unpredictable movement represents the motion-picture camera that might be compared to the truth machine that forces viewers to see familiar objects in a new light. In other words, the unexpected rain and wind that surround the house and accompany the poem’s recital invite viewers to consider such postmodern qualities of writing

as indeterminacy, dialogism, polyphony, antimonumentalism, and open-endedness. This is done with the use of cinematographic devices that instill in the viewers' mind a new kind of sensibility.

Tarkovsky achieves such an effect through the use of slow motion that transfigures the female figure seen casually chatting to a stranger into a hysteric who inscribes somebody else's words on her body, as if the camera is used as a razor that reveals the inner self of the person it explores. Tarkovsky's use of the multimedia montage echoes here Jean Epstein's theory of the revelatory power of various cinematic techniques that reinstate the sense of wonder associated with the initial stages of cinema as manifested in his essays from the 1920s. Thus, Epstein explains: "Slow motion brings a new range to dramaturgy. Its power of laying bare the emotions of dramatic enlargements, its infallibility in the designation of the sincere movements of the soul, are such that it obviously outclasses all tragic modes at this time. I am certain . . . that if a high-speed film of an accused person under interrogation were to be made, then from beyond his words, the truth would appear, writ plain, unique, evident; that there would be no further need of indictment, of lawyers' speeches, nor of any proof other than that provided from the depths of the images."²⁴ By the same token, Tarkovsky provides a new context for his father's poem and discovers the true meaning of it, recovered from the depth of the poem's images. Thus, one of the central images of this poem is that of a woman who holds a sphere on the palm of her hand ("i ty derzhala sferu na ladoni"). The significance of this image is obscured in the poem by a whole chain of other images relating to water and glass. In Tarkovsky's film it is translated into the image of Mnemosyne, the rememberer, the Muse of the epic art, since his film tells the story of a dying man. Her sphere, therefore, symbolizes a mnemonic space that the film inscribes.

To describe the role of memory in Tarkovsky's *Mirror*, in which the narrator is given the authority to evaluate various disparate fragments of his life in front of the public, it is helpful to recall Walter Benjamin's commentary on the representation of death in European art. Benjamin considers the thought of death in the general consciousness as less omnipresent, even though "Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one," as expressed in many "medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open doors of the death house."²⁵ Benjamin links storytelling featuring a dying subject with the objectification of

self-identification because one's knowledge of one's own life attains a communicable form at the moment of one's death: "Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expression and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story."²⁶ The authority to communicate personal experiences is at the very core of *Mirror*.

It is not coincidental, therefore, that Le Fanu links Tarkovsky's usage of mirror images to the representation of womanhood in the film. As Le Fanu points out, there is "another, more malign, aspect of mirror imagery."²⁷ He goes on to explain it thus: "The mother and the wife of the narrator are played by the same actress, Margarita Terekhova. Yet we don't need Freud in order to inquire: should a man hanker after his mother (or her image)? The narrator, it would appear, chooses his model of womanhood too faithfully, and his marriage breaks up as a consequence. Repetition, beyond a certain limit, is neurosis—is affliction. The film is replete with the possibility that the present is enchained to the past: modeled on it but somehow also cursed by it, leading to a history of forlorn, nervous, unsatisfied lives."²⁸ Le Fanu's commentary implies that Tarkovsky as the director of the film is alienated from the model he explores. This might be due to the demise of the grand narrative, to which the film testifies. Tarkovsky's association of women with nature, memory, and homeland exemplify his search for transhistorical unity and mythic structures as a way of relocating human experience.

Thus Johnson's and Petrie's assumption that the narrator of the film follows in the footsteps of his father and uses cinematographic techniques only to illustrate his father's poetry seems problematic if we bear in mind that there are numerous factual distortions of the autobiographical material to which the film refers. This extends to the presentation of Arsenii Tarkovsky's poem "First Meetings." First of all, the poem is dated to 1962, so it is more likely that it is associated with the poet's third wife, Tat'iana Alekseevna Ozerskaia-Tarkovskaia. Second, it is important to remember that for Tarkovsky to juxtapose his visual symbolism with the verbal imagery of his father's poetry in the way Johnson and Petrie suggest would be to imply that Tarkovsky is following in the footsteps of Sergei Eisenstein, who linked disparate images to produce

an “intellectual” montage. Tarkovsky, however, sought to establish a different kind of montage, one that linked disparate images in a way that produced a dreamlike inner coherence, one based on poetic reasoning. Stuart Hancock argues, for example, that Tarkovsky aspired to surpass Eisenstein’s authoritarian approach to viewers. In Hancock’s words, “whereas Eisenstein had utilized the theories of montage to create artificial links between images where there were none . . . Tarkovsky felt his task was to unveil relationships between images and events as created and set in motion by God, rather than imposing relationships upon film-goers in order to manipulate the prescribed point of view.”²⁹

According to Ingmar Bergman, Tarkovsky is an inventor of a new language that allows the director “to seize hold of life as appearance, life as a dream.”³⁰ If an Eisenstein montage is achieved through juxtaposition of images that somehow could be synthesized in the minds of his viewers, Tarkovsky’s films instill a different sensibility. As Tarkovsky explains: “The birth and development of thought are subject to laws of their own, and sometimes demand forms of expression which are quite different from the patterns of logical speculation. In my view, poetic reasoning is closer to the laws by which thought develops, and thus to life itself, than is the logic of traditional drama.”³¹ Here, Tarkovsky reveals a profound understanding of the complex relationship between the self and language that Saussure identifies with a system of circulating signifiers. In this relationship, the word “I” provides an image of the self only when it is related to the system of signification to which the signifier “I” belongs.

In a similar way, Lacan’s theory of language also underscores the paradox of selfhood as realized through language. The subject’s sense of itself disintegrates in the system of signs that helped construct it in the first place. This paradox is felt in Tarkovsky’s representation of the poem “First Meetings.” In the film the narrator appears to forget that the poem does not provide any insights into his origin, or his family’s history. If anything, the sequence of visual images that has its own flow independent of the story line of the poem destroys the central unity of the poem. In the poem, the lyrical hero becomes associated with God, the creator of the Universe: “You woke up and transformed /Everyday vocabulary. / And your speech was filled/ With fully expressed powers;/ And the word *you* revealed to us / Its new meaning; it was “tsar” (“Ty probudilas’ i preobrazila / Vsednevnyi chelovecheskii slovar’ / I rech’ po gorlo polnozvuchnoi siloi/ napolnilas’, i slovo *ty* raskrylo svoi novyi

smysl i oznachalo *tsar*”).³² Arsenii Tarkovsky’s unusual image of the speech that fills his throat to the top (“po gorlo”) evokes the image of a jug that is full of water. The association between water and speech in Arsenii Tarkovsky’s poem stems from the poems of Gavril Derzhavin and Marina Tsvetaeva. Furthermore, the last poem of Tsvetaeva, “You’ve laid the table for six” (“Ty stol nakryl na shesterykh . . .,” 1941)—dedicated to Arsenii Tarkovsky—talks of the immortal flow of speech, suggesting thereby that the poet’s voice continues to live despite the poet’s death.³³

To some extent, Andrei Tarkovsky’s image of spilt liquid from the jug on the table next to the small boy reenacts Tsvetaeva’s poem as a ritual that enables the dead spirit to appear in the form of a free flow of speech. Significantly, it is the little boy who is located next to the jug. Therefore, the film’s opening scene that inscribes the words “I can speak” acts as a rhyme to the representation of free flow of speech and water in the scene. It is important to bear in mind in this context that Arsenii Tarkovsky’s poem situates the image of fate that chased him and his beloved as a madman—“Kogda sud’ba po sledu shla za nami, /Kak sumashedshii s britvoiu v ruke”—firmly in the past. Arguably, the latter image signifies the hysterical discourse that the poet inherits from the past. Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Mirror*, however, brings this image alive and situates it in the present through the juxtaposition of the images that the camera presents. It is as if the living memory of madness continues to threaten and to destabilize the present symbolic order.

According to Lacan, subjects exist only in the tension and interplay between the imaginary and the symbolic. It can be argued that Tarkovsky uses his father’s poem to reinforce this tension, so that language is presented in *Mirror* as a symbolic order that is omnipresent outside the self. In his film Tarkovsky seems to convey Lacan’s understanding of the real order that is not reality but something that can be comprehended only in relation to the imaginary and the symbolic: it lies outside the two domains but is not unattainable by them. To construct the Lacanian real order, Tarkovsky needs to juxtapose these two different languages of the imaginary and the symbolic. Both of them have equal significance to him and exist in the film as two independent discourses. According to Nick Mansfield, in Lacan’s theory of selfhood “the subject’s mature life is dominated by the demands of the symbolic order,” wherein “things appear to make sense, hierarchies of meaning are established, and society functions in a tense but efficient manner.” However, “our involvement in the symbolic order is the result of imaginary identification.”³⁴

Mansfield highlights the importance of the mirror image to the Lacanian approach to selfhood and to the child's development as follows: "It is only when it finds that this image is not its own—that is the play of light on a mirror, the gaze of a completely separate subject or a word in the mouth like 'I' that may seem to represent the self, but is equally the property of others—that it senses its identity as being sucked away from it into a public, shared world of orders and hierarchies."³⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that M.S. Chugunova, Tarkovsky's assistant director for *Mirror*, thinks that the production of this film marked an important stage in Tarkovsky's development as a director. Chugunova attests that, having made this film, Tarkovsky felt free to develop a new approach to filming that would contain a free flow of images, without cuts and without a story line. "I think that *Mirror* might have helped Andrei Arsen'evich to set himself free from many things that tormented him all his life; yet it is likely that this was associated not with his creative method but with something else—I do not know for sure. . . . He wanted to make a different type of cinema altogether, one that excludes framing, two-dimensional imagery (he was very interested in 3-D images at this stage), and plot. He wanted to see nothing conventional."³⁶

In her informative study of Tarkovsky's films, Russian film critic M. Turovskaia suggests that the optic code of Tarkovsky's films deviates from the established norm. Thus, "the conventional law of the usage of voice in film is comparable to musical formats: one motif is introduced first, then another motif resonates with it and develops the former, and then a unity is achieved through their culmination."³⁷ According to Turovskaia, the inner logic of Tarkovsky's films has to do with the shift from storytelling toward associations in which the optical power decreases as the plot diminishes to the extent that inner motives become more justified. Turovskaia suggests that Tarkovsky's method is based on the disintegration of the plot and the increase of inner content. In her view, *Mirror* displays a complex structure wherein the inner content almost displaces the confessions in the movie's framework.³⁸

It would be useful to point out that the poetic language used as a device in Tarkovsky's films shares some properties with Arsenii Tarkovsky's poetry, which was praised in the 1920s, the 1930s, and the 1940s for its cinematic qualities by Dziga Vertov, the poet's close friend. Evgeniia Deich recalls, for example, that "Dziga and Arsenii Aleksandrovich recognized each other's original thinking. . . . Dziga said on many occasions that Arsenii should have become a filmmaker and that he was

made for the cinema. Incidentally, Aleksei Kapler was of the same opinion.³⁹ Undoubtedly, both Vertov and Arsenii Tarkovsky represent the avant-garde artistic outlook that enabled them to ground their art in the technique of montage and insist on the materiality of the object. The new fetishism of the real as expressed in the works of Vertov and Arsenii Tarkovsky matches Andrei Tarkovskii's aspirations to assist the naked eye in perceiving kinetic images and undistorted events.

Indeed, Andrei Tarkovsky's juxtaposition of the image of his mother as and editor at a 1930s Russian publishing house with the second poem that his father reads refers to Vertov's notion of the imperfect human eye. Thus, the scene describes the narrator's mother who goes back to check the galley proofs she has been editing. She believes that she could have seen a typing error that might have severe consequences for her life. It turns out to be a false alarm. While she walks through the corridor Arsenii Tarkovsky's voice is being heard reciting a short poem: "I waited for you for the whole day yesterday, since morning" ("S utra ia tebia dozhidalsia vchera . . ."). Once again the scene depicts a crying woman, whose emotions are objectivized in the poem: "And drops run along the cold branches;/ They cannot be stopped with the help of words, or handkerchief" ("I kapli begut po kholodnym vetviam: /Ni slovom uniat', ni platkom uteret'").⁴⁰ Just as in the previous scene with the mother figure, a woman at a time of distress appears to speak in a male's voice.

Later, in a wartime scene depicting soldiers crossing marshes, we hear Arsenii Tarkovsky's voice acknowledging that everything is immortal: "There is no death./ We are all immortal./ Fear no death at seventeen/ Nor at seventy" ("Na svete smerti net./ Bessmertny vse. Bessmertno vse. Ne nado/ Boiat'sia smerti ni v semnadsat' let, / Ni v sem'desiat"). The poem features a mythical storyteller who is technologically equipped to penetrate all spaces and centuries: "I will call upon any century, /will enter it and build a house in it" ("Ia vyzovu liuboe iz stoletii,/ Voidu v nego i dom postroiu v nem"). The concluding stanzas of the poem identify the speaking subject with a little boy from the future—"And now I am a little boy who gets up and speaks to you from the future"—("Ia i seichas, v griadushchikh vremenakh, Kak mal'chik privstaiu na stremenakh").⁴¹ The ending of the poem is represented literally: the narrator becomes, in a sense, the little boy who has climbed up a hill, covered with snow, and looks directly at the audience. But the whole scene is framed by winter imagery that symbolizes the death of the speaking subject. The scene is followed by various other war scenes

and historical footage that draws on the images of the masses and communist propaganda, representing conformity. The boy turns away from the images of Soviet soldiers that disappear behind him and looks into the future, with the hope that these memories will be left behind him. The boy is identified with the camera, with the immortal kino-eye, as Vertov puts it. The poem provides an important framework that situates the voice in some transhistorical space, yet the gaze of the boy from the future is not ascribed with any particular meaning. He speaks, therefore, through the voice of the father-like figure that he cannot comprehend.

In this doubling of male figures in the film, the son's identity resonates with the identity of his father. In many ways in his movie, Andrei Tarkovsky attempts to understand the character of his father, an emotionally evasive man of no apparent center and of many surfaces. It seems that the director immortalizes his father in order to repay the debt to the man who enabled him to develop a poetic vision of reality. The film is thus both biography and autobiography, a discourse that accepts and recognizes the fragmentary and essential mysterious nature of its subject.

According to Johnson and Petrie, in the final poem in the movie, "Eurydice" (Evridika), "Tarkovsky makes no effort to match his father's extremely unusual imagery and elliptical, difficult syntax, but shares the poem's idea of a soul imprisoned in a body it cannot live without; the poem's image of a 'burning' soul traversing the earth is clearly connected with the frequent fire imagery in *Mirror*."⁴² The poem evokes a dream about another soul that runs like a flame across the table and imprints the image of a lilac. Once again, the poem might be read in Lacanian terms—as an illustration of Lacan's claim that the unconscious is the discourse of the other. Arsenii Tarkovsky's poem links the theme of creativity to the fluidity of the subject's identity and to the perpetual renewal of the self. Thus, it seems significant that the narrator of the poem addresses a child, urging him to keep running, and not to feel nostalgic for a lost identity. Here, the discourse on artistic freedom and self-identity that the film expresses evolves around the idea of constructed identities. The use of poetry in the film recited by Arsenii Tarkovsky makes problematic the representation of the authenticity of any historical experiences or communicative strategies.

The juxtaposition of spoken word and image in *Mirror* highlights playful aspects of self-representation. It relies on doubling and mockery, bringing to the fore its metatextual qualities. As Johnson and Petrie observe, Tarkovsky "clearly had a contradictory relationship with words,

expressing his suspicion of verbal communication."⁴³ His parodic language extends to visual art and music. The film incorporates the postmodernist notion of the subject as a wandering, displaced entity, who does not know his place in space and time. In this respect the negative representation of Arsenii Tarkovsky in the film might be seen as a rejection of the discourse based on transhistorical models still felt in the political rhetoric of the 1970s. Tarkovsky replaces the modernist project of his father, modeled on the vision of the moral superiority of poetry, with the celebration of creativity and improvisation. His notion of creativity is linked to the plurality of discursive contexts and frames.

Most important, Tarkovsky's *Mirror* aims to subvert attempts at transcendent ordering (as embodied in Arsenii Tarkovsky's poems) as subjective, and aspires to restore the world outside the subject in all its inaccessibility, materiality, and mystery, instilling a radical ontological doubt into the dialogue with the past. Tarkovsky's film exemplifies what can be defined as intellectually responsible postmodernism and points to historical and cultural causes that are responsible for the loss of objective reality. Arsenii Tarkovsky's poetry is used in the film as part pastiche and part eclectic mixing of various cultural codes, ranging from references to Dostoevsky, Pasternak, Chekhov, and Pushkin and including allusions to Pieter Breughel, Leonardo da Vinci, and William Shakespeare. Tarkovsky understands poetry as a special cognitive process of thinking in images, but even more as an act of remembering various images from the past. Prior to Andrei Tarkovsky, the view of poetic discourse as a mnemonic act was expressed in the works of the Russian Formalists.⁴⁴ Due to its mnemonic qualities, Arsenii Tarkovsky's poetry makes perfect material for the process of sculpting in time in Andrei Tarkovsky's film-memoir *Mirror*. Yet Tarkovsky develops Lacan's exploration of the slipperiness of signification in terms of metaphor and metonymy. To this end, Tarkovsky revitalizes Eikhenbaum's definition of film viewing as a cognitive process that enables viewers to see a novel they have read earlier in their sleep. In the words of Karsten Witte, the dreamlike quality of writing with the camera is a hallmark of Tarkovsky's language: "If the camera sees dreams while it is fully open; if it finds the path around ruins while it is difficult to see the world in its shiny glory because of the overwhelming darkness; if everything around you seems both complex and simple at the same time; it means only one thing. It means that you are entering the world of Andrei Tarkovsky."⁴⁵ The present article has attempted to show, with the help of Lacanian concepts, that

the gaze of Tarkovsky's camera situates the viewer in the post-Stalin and postmodern world of a constructed reality in which the conscious subject is decentered. The present analysis of the dialogue between Andrei Tarkovsky and Arsenii Tarkovsky embedded in *Mirror* supports Filipov's view that word and image in Tarkovsky's films do not imbue each other but exist in parallel with each other.⁴⁶ Tarkovsky presents his father's poetry as a historical document that highlights the life-creating qualities of his film and reinforces the authentic aspects of the narration to complement the images from various documentary reports used in *Mirror*. Arsenii Tarkovsky's poems are used in the film as an important framing device that testifies to Lacan's understanding of the subject that is always governed by linguistic structures. Yet in the Lacanian vein, Tarkovsky's ultimate subject in *Mirror* is the split subject that desires language to achieve self-realization even as it is simultaneously obstructed by language in its quest for wholeness.

Notes

1. Boris Eikhenbaum, "Literatura i kino," in his *Literatura: teoriia, kritika, polemika* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1927; 2d ed., repr. Chicago: Russian Language Specialties, 1969), p. 300.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 297.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 298.

6. Viktor Shklovskii, "Iz knigi *Literatura i kinematograf*," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, no. 61 (2002), pp. 141–42.

7. Ibid., p. 145.

8. Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 22.

9. Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

10. David S. Miall, "The Self in History: Wordsworth, Tarkovsky, and Autobiography," *The Wordsworth Circle*, no. 27 (1996), pp. 9–13; available at www.arts.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/Mirror/Tarkovsky.htm.

11. Mark Le Fanu, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), p. 69.

12. Ibid.

13. See Jacques Lacan, *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 1–7; and Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1979).

14. "Ia stremlius' k maksimal'noi pravdivosti . . .," *Put' k ekranu*, 11 December

1987, quoted in Sergei Filippov, "Teoriia i praktika Andreia Tarkovskogo," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, no. 56 (2002), p. 43.

15. Filippov, "Teoriia i praktika," p. 43.

16. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in his *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), pp. 5–6.

17. Ibid.

18. Vertov, quoted in Annete Michelson, "Introduction," in Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annete Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. xxix.

19. Thus, Dziga Vertov's statements include such phrases as "I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it"; and "I am kino-eye, I create a man more perfect than Adam." See Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, p. 17.

20. Arsenii Tarkovskii, "Pervye svidaniia," in his *Stikhotvoreniia; Poemy; Perevody (1929–1979)* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1982), pp. 168–69.

21. Johnson and Petrie, *Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, p. 117.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., pp. 117–18.

24. Jean Epstein, "Une conversation avec Jean Epstein," *L'ami du peuple*, 11 May 1928, quoted in Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, p. xiv.

25. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 93.

26. Ibid.

27. Le Fanu, *Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, p. 73.

28. Ibid., pp. 73–74.

29. Stuart C. Hancock, "Andrei Tarkovsky: Master of the Cinematic Image," *Mars Hill Review*, 1996, no. 4, pp. 136–46; available at www.leaderu.com/marshill/mhr04/tark1.html.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Tarkovskii, "Pervye svidaniia," pp. 168–69.

33. See the analysis of this poem in Alexandra Smith and Anna Lisa Crone, "Cheating Death: Tsvetaeva and Derzhavin on the Immortality of the Poet," *Slavic Almanac*, vol. 3 (Johannesburg: University of South Africa Press, 1995), pp. 1–30.

34. Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (St. Leonards, UK: Allen and Unwin, 2000), p. 45.

35. Ibid.

36. Quoted in M. Turovskaia, *7 1/2, ili fil'my Andreia Tarkovskogo* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1991), p. 55; available at <http://moshkov.rsl.ru/lat/cinema/kinolit/tarkovskij/turtarkovskij.txt>.

37. Ibid., p. 98.

38. Ibid., pp. 99–100.

39. Evgeniia Deich, "Shtrikhi," in M. Tarkovskaia, "Ia zhil i pel kogda-to . . .": *vospominaniia o poete Arsenii Tarkovskom* (Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo "Vodolei," 1999), p. 24.

40. Tarkovsky, *Stikhotvoreniia; Poemy; Perevody*, p. 41.

41. Ibid., pp. 190–91.

42. Johnson and Petrie, *Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, p. 259.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
44. See, for example, Viktor Shklovskii, "Iskusstvo kak priem," in his *Gamburgskii shchet: stat'i, vospominaniia, esse* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 58–72.
45. Karsten Witte, *Im Kino. Texte vom Sehen und Hören* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), pp. 163–64. Quoted from Karsten Vitte, "Chelovek v pal'to," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, no. 56 (2002), pp. 86–88.
46. Filippov, "Teoriia i praktika Andreia Tarkovskogo," p. 69.

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