

## Andrey Tarkovsky on *Nostalgia*

“At an RAI press conference in Rome to announce the start of productions, Tarkovsky had this to say: ‘*Nostalgia* is about the impossibility of people living together without really knowing one another, and about the problems arising from the necessity of getting to know one another. It’s very simple to make acquaintances, much more difficult to arrive at a deeper knowledge of another person. Then there is an aspect of the film which is less evident on the surface, concerning the impossibility of importing or exporting culture, of appropriating another people’s culture. We Russians claim to know Dante and Petrarch, just as you Italians claim to know Pushkin, but this is really impossible—you have to be of the same nationality. The reproduction and distribution of culture is harmful to its essence and spreads only a superficial impression. It is not possible to teach one person the culture of another.”

In the film, the interpreter Eugenia asks, ‘What do you have to do to understand another people?’ And Andrei replies, ‘Destroy the borders.’ It’s a complex global problem which is either resolved on a simple level or not at all. On a simple level it can be resolved by a child, but on a more complex level it involves self-understanding. Andrei tries to unload these problems on his alter ego the madman. Andrei is searching for the truth and at times feels it is useless to teach something he doesn’t know at first hand. In the madman he finds someone who is convinced about his actions, who claims to know how to save the world and acts accordingly. Domenico is like a defenceless child who acts without reflection, and so in a way represents what is missing in Andrei.”

(“Tarkovsky in Italy” by Tony Mitchell, 1982 p. 74)

“We know so little about the soul, we’re like lost dogs. We feel comfortable when we’re speaking of politics, art, sports, love of women. As soon as we touch upon spirituality we lose our way, we’re no longer cultured, we lack any preparation in this domain. We’re no longer civilized. We become like men who don’t know how to clean their teeth. If we come back to *Nostalgia*, one could say this film expresses the nostalgia of spirituality. For example, the concept of victim, we can no longer relate it to ourselves, it exists only for others. We’ve forgotten what it means to be a victim. It’s the reason why the argument of my film is grounded principally on the problem of the victim, less through its subject than through its unfolding.”

(“Nostalgia’s Black Tone” by Herve Giubert, 1983 p. 86-87)

“I am convinced that “time” is no objective category, since time cannot exist without man. Certain scientific discoveries tend to reach the same conclusion. We do not live in the “now.” The now is so short, so close to zero without being zero, that we have no way of perceiving it. The moment which we call “now” immediately becomes past, and what we call future becomes present and then at once it becomes past. The only possible present is our fall into the abyss which exists between future and present. That’s why “nostalgia” is not regret for the past but sadness for the lost span during which we did not manage to count our forces, to marshal them, and to do our duty.

“The nostalgia of my film is a fatal illness suffered by someone who is far from his own origins and cannot return there. But in film, things are not so linear; it is important to remember that no character has the right to speak directly for the author or to express, in a linear way, the author’s ideas.”

“Quite unexpectedly to me, *Nostalgia* conveyed my own state of mind about this conflict between spirit and matter. More than that: For the first time, I suddenly felt that the cinema is capable of going a

long way toward expressing the author's spiritual state. I had not expected to be capable of such clear embodiment in a film."

. . . .

"Ever since art has existed, mankind has always strived to influence the world through it. But on the whole it has always failed to have much social or political effect. I think now, looking around me and also looking back, art cannot really affect social development. It can only influence the development of minds. It can work on our intelligence and on our spirit. But for changing things, there are greater social forces than art. After all, practically all human endeavor has as its aim the changing of the world."

("Between Two Worlds" by J. Hoberman and Gideon Bachmann, 1983 p. 94-95)

"Home is the country in which one was born, where one grew up, with whose culture one is connected where one is rooted. I spent time in the USA and that country astonished me—a land without roots. Rootlessness is so visible there! On one hand it makes the country dynamic, free of prejudices. On the other hand, spirituality is missing. People start a new life somewhere else and break the bonds with the past. This is a deep issue. In America I found reassurance for the thoughts I am concerned with in *Nostalgia*. It is unbelievably hard to live like that. All the problems begin with stepping out of the historical context. This is what the movie is about. How can someone live normally, fully, if he breaks with his roots? In Russian, "nostalgia" is an illness, a life-threatening disease."

("An Enemy of Symbolism" by Irena Brezna, 1984 p. 119)

*"Q: In The Mirror and Stalker one senses the theme of freedom and a feeling of unsteadiness in the surroundings. What connection is there with the inner freedom, of which you spoke, and the correlation with weakness, which you have contrasted with force?"*

T: When I say "weakness," I have in my mind first and foremost the absence of aggression. This is really the ability to sacrifice oneself. Because in the end...

*Q: Do you have in mind weakness or the acceptance of something?"*

T: Acceptance, yes, yes.

*Q: Weakness is probably not the most appropriate word. For aggression is opposite. Acceptance would probably be more accurate.*

T: I agree. But this is a problem of translation, and not my problem. I did understand you. But the fact of the matter is that in principle humans have grasped that they first and foremost want to demand something from others, to teach others how to express their desires. Just as I am interested in people who direct all of this toward themselves. Only from that moment on, from that point on, can humankind call any movement optimistic. Everything else can only lead us to catastrophe. This is what I wanted to say in all the films about which I have spoken. Humans are the center of the world, the center of the universe. Yet not in the sense that you consider yourself more important than someone else, but in fact the opposite."

("The Twentieth Century and the Artist" by V. Ishimov and R. Shejko, 1984 p. 1310)

## Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to have faith? How do you know if you have it?
2. Are the birds that fly out of the Virgin Mary a miracle?
3. Why does the translator's face resemble that of the Madonna of Childbirth on the wall?
4. What role does homesickness (*nostalgia*) play in Andrei's decisions? What role does memory play?
5. How important are the shifts between color and various patinas of cinematography?
6. What role do rain and fire and earth play in the film?
7. Is art translatable across national and cultural borders? Why or why not?
8. What is the meaning of dreaming in this film? What do Andrei's dreams signify?
9. Why does Andrei identify with Domenico the mad mystic?
10. How much is Andrei like Sosnovsky?
11. Why does Eugenia desire Andrei? Why does he not return her feelings? Why does she respond in the way she does? Why does his nose bleed after she leaves?
12. What are we to make of what happens to Eugenia?
13. Is it possible to verbalize the meaning of the objects, sounds, and events where Domenico lives?
14. Why does one plus one equal one?
15. Why does Domenico choose Andrei to complete his task?
16. Would we know what to do with real freedom?
17. Is Angela an angel?
18. What are we to make of the demonstrations of the mad? Is Domenico speaking truth in anyway? Why doesn't the music work?
19. Does Andrei possess faith? Why does it take him so long to cross the pool? Will crossing St. Catherine's pool save the world? Would we know the end of the world when it came?
20. What is the significance of the final shot?

