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THE POETRY OF APOCALYPSE:

THE FILMS OF ANDREI TARKOVSKY

THE SACRIFICE

"Tarkovsky for me is the greatest, the one who invented a new language, true to the nature of film, as it captures life as a reflection, life as a dream."

—Ingmar Bergman

This retrospective dedicated to Andrei Tarkovsky, the first in Toronto since our last over a decade ago, marks the seventieth anniversary of his birth. Featuring several new and rare prints, the series offers an exceptional opportunity to encounter a body of work celebrated for its gravity and grandeur—one of the few that "leave us our freedom," in the words of his admirer Chris Marker. Given the many requests we have had for this retrospective, and the long unavailability of Tarkovsky's films in this country, we have scheduled several repeat screenings.

Andrei Tarkovsky (1932 - 1986) is generally considered the greatest director of postwar Soviet cinema. Though his spiritual and ecological concerns often lapse into anti-rationalist cant, one cannot help but be transfixed and shaken by the bewildering beauty of his films. Simultaneously stark and sumptuous, elemental and metaphysical, they place Tarkovsky alongside those he called the "poet geniuses" of the cinema: Bresson, Mizoguchi, Dovzhenko, Bergman, Antonioni. (He also esteemed Kurosawa, Fellini, and Buñuel.)

Over two and a half decades, Tarkovsky made only seven feature films—a canon more sparse than that of Robert Bresson, the director Tarkovsky admired most. (He cited *DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST* as the greatest film he had seen, and idealized the intractable austerity of Bresson's style. Bresson returned the

appreciation, serving on the board of the Tarkovsky Institute in Paris until his death.) Tarkovsky shared Bresson's themes—spiritual anguish, the search for grace and oblivion, and the conflict between the spiritual and the material, between faith and the barbarity of the world. Both made the mystical or ineffable inhere in the materiality of objects, colours, textures. Like Bresson's last film, *L'ARGENT*, Tarkovsky's final work, *THE SACRIFICE*, is a magisterial summation of his life's work, a compendium of signature images, methods and themes. There are many other similarities between the two directors: the ecological warnings of *LE DIABLE PROBABLEMENT* and *STALKER*, for instance; their shared aversion to genre—"colder than the tomb," in Tarkovsky's words—and similar interest in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. But, as their respective collections of *pensées* on film

—Bresson's epigrammatic *Notes sur le cinématographe* and Tarkovsky's discursive *Sculpting in Time*—indicate, in most ways they are worlds apart. Bresson's films are dry, clipped, and elliptical, their reliance on montage at odds with Tarkovsky's partiality for the long take and the flowing of his water-gorged world, and the sense of immersion these imply. (His films baptize one in time as much as in the elements, particularly fire and water.)

Tarkovsky's use of the long take, increasingly attenuated with each film until its apotheosis in the house burning at the end of *THE SACRIFICE*, carried a moral, even spiritual import for the director. Montage, at least in its classic formulation by Sergei Eisenstein, profaned the world by fragmenting it and forcing meaning: "I am radically opposed to the way Eisenstein used the

frame to codify intellectual formulae," Tarkovsky wrote. "My own method of conveying experience to the audience is quite different. . . . Eisenstein makes thought into a despot: it leaves no 'air,' nothing of that unspoken elusiveness which is perhaps the most captivating quality of all art." Tarkovsky's search for wholeness, for the *integrity* of the world, might be read in reductive psychological terms; the separation of his parents deeply marked him, and such films as *THE MIRROR* and *SOLARIS* reveal his yearning for a reassembled family. (His concern with memory, both private and ancestral, is largely reconstitutive.) More importantly, it reflects his preoccupation with spiritual and psychic renewal, dependent in his view on a series of vital connections: with nature, with the past, with originating cultures, including that of pre-revolutionary Russia.

So imbued with the mystical notion of Mother Russia are Tarkovsky's films that even those he directed in exile, after leaving the Soviet Union in 1983, seem to remake their respective settings into visions of his homeland. The final, heart-stopping image of *NOSTALGHIA* conflates Russia and Italy, east and west, in the image of a snowy Russian country house walled within the ruins of the abbey of San Galgano. The spare, pristine house of *THE SACRIFICE*, shot in summer dusk on the Swedish island of Gotland, is another of the dachas that summon up the lost Eden of family and mother country in *THE MIRROR* and *SOLARIS*. Even the American setting of the novel on which *STALKER* is based was transformed by Tarkovsky into a Zone reminiscent of a Soviet gulag. (As many have noted, the shaven, derelict Stalker resembles a *zek*, or political prisoner.) With its holy madmen, saints and seers, its Dostoevskian themes of apocalypse and imprisonment, loss of spirituality and hope, and of atonement, Tarkovsky's cinema has its origins in 19th-century Russian culture.

"In the beginning was The Word. Why is that, Papa?," asks Little Man in his first faltering speech at the end of *THE SACRIFICE*. Muteness, from Andrei Roublev's retreat into silence to Alexander's vow of silence in *THE SACRIFICE*, and a mistrust of words are defining motifs of Tarkovsky's cinema. "Words are too inert to express emotions" says the narrator in *THE MIRROR* (which opens with the curing of a stutterer) and they are often used as weapons, to coerce or misinform. This suspicion of speech, no doubt influenced by Tarkovsky's experience with Soviet doublespeak and Stalinist censorship—one thinks of the single misspelt word and its political repercussions in *THE MIRROR*—finds an attendant emphasis on symbolically charged imagery, as though pictures were somehow more direct and truthful: ruins and desolate landscapes, Edenic dachas, trees, (green) apples, milk, horses, mirrors, dogs. (Like Michael Powell, Tarkovsky was a connoisseur of red hair, most evidently in the Botticellian mane of Domiziana Giordano in *NOSTALGHIA*.)

As countless critics have pointed out, Tarkovsky deployed the four elements like no other director before or since. Swathed in fog and aquatic with spas, needled with drizzle, sluicing, streaming, coursing and dripping with rain and snow, indoors and out, Tarkovsky's terrain is terrarium. The mottled forest flora of mold, ferns, lichens, and toadstools traversed by his slow camera are lushly entropic. The crumble and rust, detritus and delapidation of his watery ruins, rendered gorgeous by *sfumato* effects and desaturated or monochrome film stock, signal both the remnants of past cultures and ecological calamity. Water, earth, and fire (less so air—he scants the sky) are transformed by Tarkovsky's glacial takes into signifiers of the imminent divine. As Chris Marker notes in the commentary of his film on the director: "It rains a lot in Tarkovsky's films, as in Kurosawa's—one of the signs, no doubt, of the Japanese sensibility he mentioned so often. And like the Japanese, a physical relationship to nature. There's nothing more earthy, more carnal than the work of this reputed mystical filmmaker—maybe because Russian mysticism is not that of Catholics terrified by nature and body. Among the Orthodox, nature is respected, the Creator is revered through his creation, and in counterpoint to the characters, each film knits a plot between the four elements—sometimes treated separately, sometimes in pairs. In *THE MIRROR*, a simple camera movement brings together water and fire . . . the opposite path in *SOLARIS*."

The Japanese affinity mentioned by Marker, evident also in the folk music in *THE SACRIFICE*, is one of many forces that shaped Tarkovsky's cinema. Though profoundly Russian in his cultural orientation—religious icons figure prominently in his work, as do the influences of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (less so Pushkin)—traditional western art was a wellspring for his films. A cursory list of artists quoted or summoned by his cinema includes Brueghel, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Rousseau, Bach, Pergolesi, Purcell, Debussy, Beethoven, Dante. (He showed little respect for the novels by Stanislaw Lem and the Strugatsky Brothers he adapted, distressing the authors with his extensive revisions.) Tarkovsky's taste inclined to the conservative and canonical—he once cited *Walden* as his favourite book—even though he admired the innovations of Antonioni and himself had a demanding, even abstruse style. He was nonplussed by the films of Stan Brakhage, loathed those of Godard, and was baffled by the very concept of non-narrative cinema. His rejection of Soviet modernism was not exhaustive—he accepted Dovzhenko, no doubt because of his poetic pantheism, but reviled Eisenstein and Shostakovich. (One notes that his "spiritual heir," Alexander Sokurov, admires the former and made a feature film about the latter.)

Variouly cast since his death as shaman, martyr, prophet, saint, and visionary, Tarkovsky has been immured by reverence. His parade of lean, ascetic, even hieratic alter egos, many of them on spiritual quests to redeem the world, suggests a streak of the messianic, and one hears a theosophic thrum in some of his pronouncements:

I am drawn to the man who is ready to serve a higher cause, unwilling—or even unable—to subscribe to the generally accepted tenets of a worldly 'morality'; the man who recognizes that the meaning of existence lies above all in the fight against the evil within ourselves, so that in the course of a lifetime he may take at least one step towards spiritual perfection.

General veneration has stoppered criticism of his ideology, as though to parse were to asperse. While some have argued that his long take finally became an affectation (in *NOSTALGHIA*), and that his parable-like use of symbolism was increasingly repetitive and simplistic (e.g. the Tree of Life in *THE SACRIFICE*), it is the rare analysis that broaches Tarkovsky's reactionary values without apology, discomfort, or diffidence. Certainly his anti-materialist, anti-technological vision has gained greater currency as the world succumbs to the depredations of the triumphant market economy; he would deplore the new Russia, rampant with corruption, crime, pollution, AIDS, and inequity. For this he could feel no *nostalghia*.

Tarkovsky's legacy is immense. Like Bresson, whose singular style has often been mimicked by lesser directors with often parodic effect, Tarkovsky cannot be held accountable for the battalions of imitators who have scavenged from his hermetic world a few key elements—water, loping dogs, industrial ruin—and turned them into freeze-dried emblems of desolation. The list of directors who have copied his visual approach—long, often tracking and telephoto takes, adagio pacing, use of desaturated or muted colour, and alternation between colour and black and white—is lengthy. What no one can reproduce is his soulful poetry, its flow of enigmatic imagery and sense of quest and struggle, so mysterious, strange and powerful that the secular cynic is silenced by nothing less than sheer, unaccountable beauty.

—James Quandt

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NEW 35MM PRINT! IVAN'S CHILDHOOD

(IVANOVO DETSTVO)
Director: Andrei Tarkovsky
USSR 1962 96 minutes
Cast: Kolya Burlyayev, Nikolai Grinko

"The most auspicious debut in Soviet cinema in the 35 years since Sergei Eisenstein's *STRIKE*" (J. Hoberman, *The New York Times*). Winner of the top prize at the Venice film festival, *IVAN'S CHILDHOOD* sends its twelve-year-old protagonist, a vengeful "soldier boy," on a suicide mission as a spy behind German lines during World War Two. Tarkovsky announces many of his themes (memory, war, the struggle for belief and humanity in the midst of barbarism), aesthetic strategies (dream sequences, flashbacks, use of newsreels), and visual motifs (ruins, trees, horses, apples, water, fire) in the film, and concentrates on the wintry landscape of birches, frozen swamps, and rutted fields with a kind of pantheistic fervour. The face of the martyred Ivan, whose happy memories are of his mother in a sunlit Eden (prefiguring *THE MIRROR*), is an indelible image of innocence transformed by brutality. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote about Ivan and his lost childhood: "He is mad, he is a monster. He is a little hero. In truth he is the most innocent and touching victim of the war. This boy whom one cannot but like, has been forged by violence." "Tarkovsky arrived on the scene . . . almost with the *éclat* of the young Orson Welles" (Mark Le Fanu), and his camerawork, including flying crane shots, rapid pans, tilted angles, and atmospheric lighting has a surprisingly bravura quality.

Friday, October 25 6:30 p.m.



FULL-LENGTH VERSION! ANDREI ROUBLEV

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky
USSR 1966 205 minutes
Cast: Anatoly Solonitsyn, Ivan Lopikov

We are pleased to present a new Scope print of the full-length version of Tarkovsky's masterpiece, almost a full hour longer than the version originally released here. Banned in the USSR for many years, *ANDREI ROUBLEV* is now considered the greatest postwar Soviet film. A magnificent "life" of the 15th-century monk and icon painter, who clung to his faith despite the atrocities he witnessed, this vivid recreation of the Middle Ages is charged with barbaric poetry. The closing sequence of the striking of the church bell is one of the most profound accounts of spiritual struggle in all cinema. "Its greatness as movie making immediately evident, *ANDREI ROUBLEV* was also the most historically audacious Soviet production since Eisenstein's *IVAN THE TERRIBLE*" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*). "Imperative viewing. It is a film of spiritual power and epic grandeur, re-creating fifteenth-century Russia with a vividness unmatched by any historical film I can think of. It may be Tarkovsky's greatest work" (Philip French).

Friday, October 25 8:30 p.m.

(note early start time)

Sunday, October 27 1:00 p.m.

Please note - Special prices are in effect: \$7 (including GST) for seniors and members; \$11 for non-members.

THE POETRY OF APOCALYPSE: THE FILMS OF ANDREI TARKOVSKY



NEW 35MM PRINT!

THE MIRROR (ZERKALO)

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • USSR 1974 106 minutes • Cast: Margarita Terekhova, Philip Yankovsky

"An essential film, an extraordinarily beautiful movie. . . . What could top ANDREI ROUBLEV except maybe THE MIRROR?" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*). Tarkovsky's awe-inspiring autobiographical film is a key to his world and to his other films. (He called it his "confession.") Recreating the director's childhood in a flow of unforgettable images, MIRROR is as close as cinema has come to a Proustian evocation of "lost time." Personal memories and dreams—wartime exile, the travails of Tarkovsky's beloved mother—stream into collective memory (newsreels of the bombing of Barcelona, the Stalinist era, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, World War II) in this haunting memoir. The imagery is among Tarkovsky's most memorable: a burning barn, a levitating mother, a boy being cured of a stutter by a hypnotist, a bird fluttering against a window pane. Attacked by the Soviets for elitism and obscurity, and banned from foreign screenings for many years, THE MIRROR includes an amazing sequence in which Tarkovsky's mother panics over a misprint in an official document, a reference to the famous incident of the misspelling of Stalin's name as Sralin (or "shitting man") in *Pravda*. French director Olivier Assayas has chosen MIRROR as his ideal film, one that goes *beyond* cinema and recreates the very act of remembering and perceiving: "When I first saw it, I thought the sequence just after the credits was one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen in the movies."

Saturday, October 26 8:30 p.m. (note early start time)

Tuesday, October 29 6:30 p.m.



NEW 35MM PRINT!

SOLARIS (SOLJARIS)

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • USSR 1972 167 minutes • Cast: Donatas Bonionis, Yuri Yarvet

"SOLARIS ranks with the best of Tarkovsky's work, which is to say it ranks with the best of the movies produced at any time" (Jay Scott, *The Globe and Mail*). Originally released in North America in a severely cut and dubbed version, SOLARIS was seen as the Soviet rejoinder to 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. When it finally became available in its full-length, original version, critics recognized it as one of Tarkovsky's most important works, not really a science fiction film but a visionary work in which the travel is not so much into outer but inner space, the cosmos of memory, consciousness, dreams. Based on the famous Stanislaw Lem novel, SOLARIS is set in the near future on a planet whose "Thinking Ocean" materializes people's fantasies, much like the Room in STALKER. A scientist is dispatched to investigate strange messages emanating from Solaris, and finds that the cosmonauts sent before him have fallen prey to hallucinatory exhaustion or have been driven to suicide. His dead wife appears, and the rationalist is soon captive of irrational forces: painful apparitions of their life together and her suicide, his secret and repentive longings for the things he has lost. Feverishly shot in Scope and alternating artificial Soviet colour with black-and-white, SOLARIS is possibly Tarkovsky's most moving statement on loss and regret. (The dacha and landscape of the opening sequences is another of his irrefragable Edens, echoed in the final image of Father and Son.) "SOLARIS seems to me in every way a majestic and achieved work of art: not to make too fine a point of it, a masterpiece" (Mark Le Fanu).

Wednesday, October 30 8:15 p.m. (note early start time)

Thursday, October 31 8:15 p.m. (note early start time)

STALKER

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • USSR 1979 163 minutes • Cast: Aleksandr Kaidanovsky, Anatoly Solonitsyn

"A cultural event. . . . No one interested in world cinema . . . should miss it" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*). Unscreened in Toronto in over a decade, STALKER recounts the odyssey of three men—the Writer, the Professor, and the Stalker—who travel from a post-apocalyptic landscape into the Zone, which the government has declared off limits after a mysterious extraterrestrial event has rendered it uninhabitable. At its centre is The Room, which reveals and perhaps materializes one's deepest desires. Guided by the severe, shaven Stalker, who lives by a polluted lake with his wife and mutant daughter, the men navigate across a treacherous landscape of shifting, invisible "traps," industrial debris, and subterranean passages to the threshold of the mysterious, wish-fulfilling Room. Tarkovsky rarely achieved such an intense rendering of spiritual quest; the Christ imagery and intimations of Dante, the voluptuous sense of ruin, decay, and imminent catastrophe, the painterly references to Bosch, Rembrandt, and Flemish art, and the *temps morts* of dripping water, billowing fog, and slow wind all combine to make the film one of his most beautiful and mesmerizing. Based on the novel *Roadside Picnic* by the Strugatsky brothers (who also were the source of Sokurov's DAYS OF THE ECLIPSE), STALKER is "a masterpiece. . . . Not an easy film, but most certainly a great one" (Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Chicago Reader*). "As necessary to the cinema as Mozart to music" (Gavin Millar, *The Listener*).

Tuesday, October 29 8:45 p.m.

Sunday, November 3 1:00 p.m.

NOSTALGHIA

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • Italy 1983 126 minutes • Cast: Oleg Yankovsky, Erland Josephson

"One of the year's ten best. . . . The most extraordinary film by a Soviet citizen working abroad in 50 years" (J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*) has long been unavailable in Canada. Made in Italy after Tarkovsky was forced to leave the Soviet Union, NOSTALGHIA has a muted beauty borne of the Tuscan landscape where much of it was shot. A lush, mystical contemplation of exile, madness, and the end of the world, the film is among Tarkovsky's most ravishing; "This is a film," Hoberman memorably writes, "which turns the spectacle of an ancient, leaky cellar—slow droplets bombarding a futile cluster of green or brown bottles—into an image as memorable as any this century." A Soviet musicologist, researching the life of an 18th-century Russian composer who lived in Italy, encounters a holy madman who is awaiting Armageddon. In the deserted pool of Bagno Vignoni, near the medieval town of Siena, the Russian attempts to save the world with a redemptive ritual. In his (and the film's) final ecstatic vision, Russia and Italy, east and west, are conflated in the image of a snowy Russian country house walled within the ruins of the abbey of San Galgano. NOSTALGHIA mourns many worlds that are passing, or past: Tarkovsky's homeland, Mother Russia; the spiritual certainty and solace of Christianity; and medieval art and religion. With its Dantean imagery and Italian setting, NOSTALGHIA makes an odd companion piece to Antonioni's RED DESERT, though Tarkovsky considered DESERT the director's worst film. Domiziana Giordano as the Russian's interpreter (and "modern woman" scorned by Tarkovsky) is surely the source for her role in Godard's NOUVELLE VAGUE.

Saturday, November 2 8:00 p.m. (note early start time)

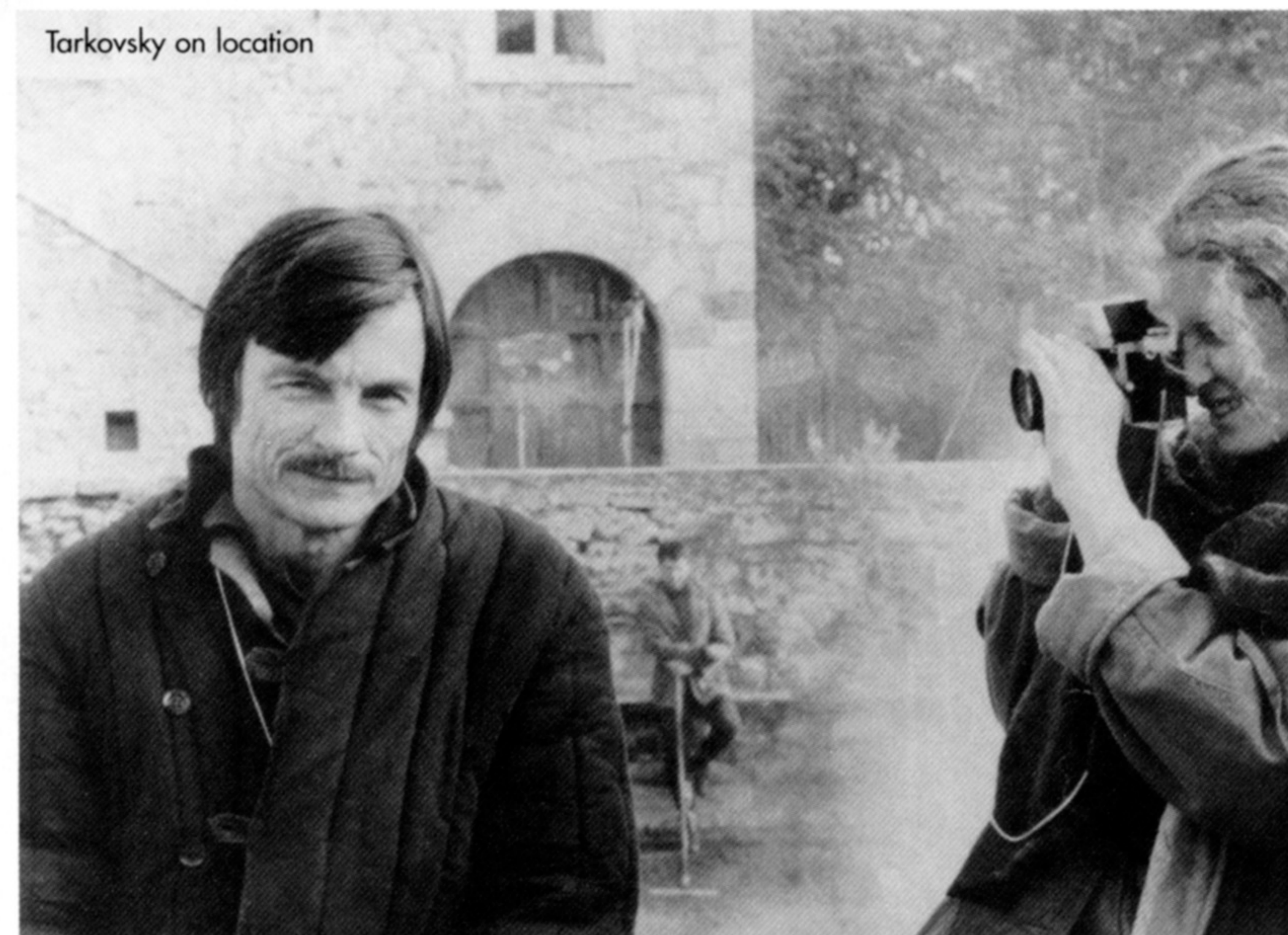
Saturday, November 9 8:45 p.m.



10 CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO



THE POETRY OF APOCALYPSE: THE FILMS OF ANDREI TARKOVSKY



Tarkovsky on location

THE STEAMROLLER AND THE VIOLIN (KATOKI I SKRIPKA)

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • USSR 1960 46 minutes • Cast: Igor Fomchenko, Vladimir Zamansky

A rare screening of Tarkovsky's diploma film, which the director said, "was very important for me because it was then I met the cameraman and composer with whom I continued working." It also stated the themes that were to become his preoccupations, particularly that of artistic vocation, and foreshadowed such Tarkovskian motifs as the apple and the trammelled child. Sasha, a frail boy who has been bullied, takes violin lessons from an unsympathetic teacher. The child befriends a steamroller driver, for whom he plays his violin in an outpouring of appreciation after the man teaches him to stand up for himself. If the idealizing of the relationship between worker and artist seems a hangover from socialist realism, the film has a strong autobiographical tinge, and "the mark on little Sasha's neck . . . is the first example of the burden borne by the Tarkovskian artist-seeker. Thus THE STEAMROLLER AND THE VIOLIN also contains, in embryo, the elements that make Tarkovsky Tarkovskian" (Julian Graffy, *Sight & Sound*).

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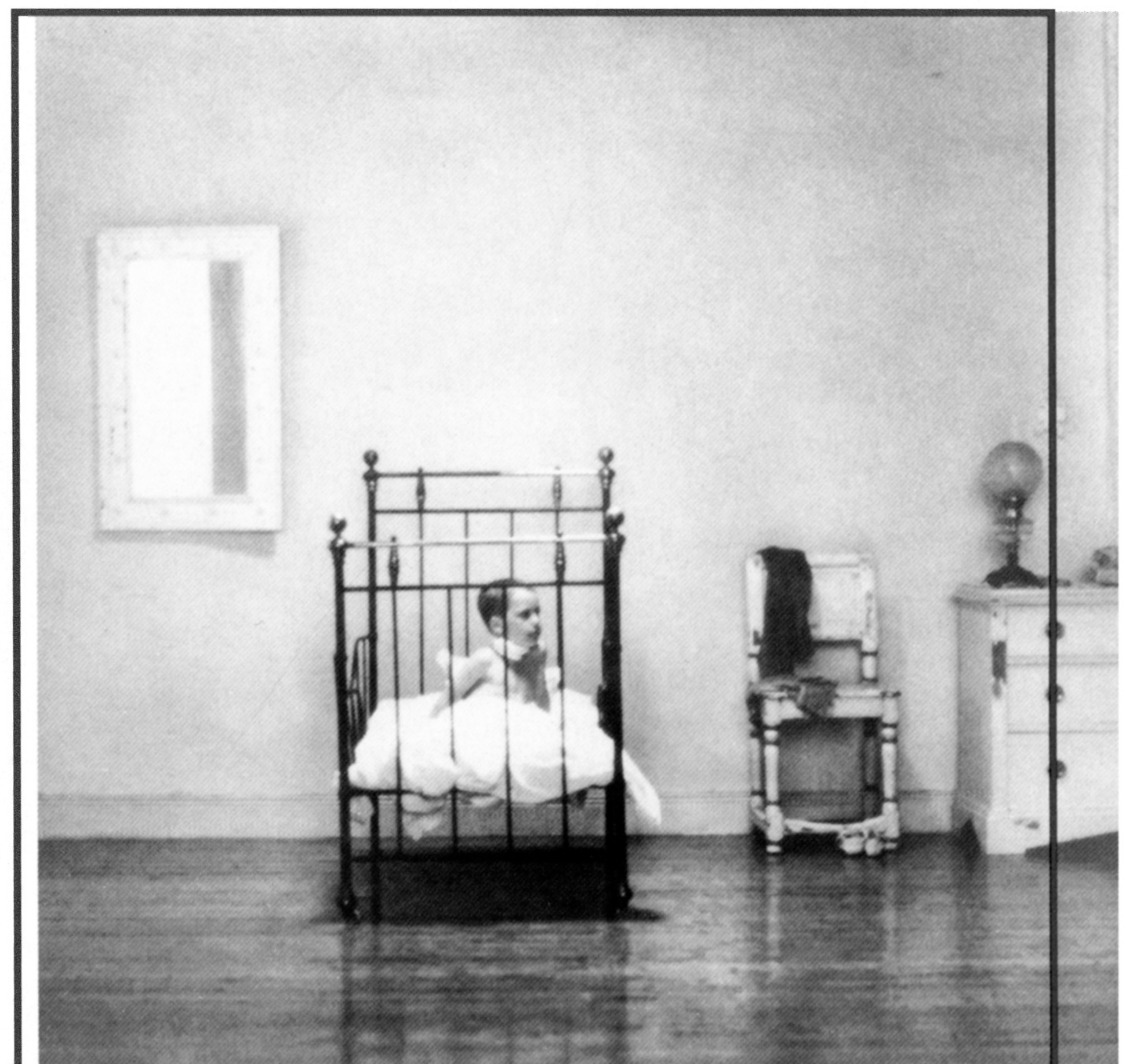
TORONTO PREMIERE!

TEMPO DI VIAGGIO (TIME OF A JOURNEY)

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • Italy 1995 62 minutes video

A visual sketchbook or diary of Tarkovsky's journey across Italy in search of locations for NOSTALGHIA, this film was shot in 1983 but only released at the 1995 Cannes film festival. Tarkovsky travels with veteran screenwriter, Tonino Guerra, who was instrumental in getting him out of the Soviet Union. Scouting for the ideal setting for the film, they begin in Sorrento and end up near Siena, where Tarkovsky settles on the medieval ruins of Bagno Vignoni for the central sequence of the "candle walk." The two men, similar in intellectual gravity but different in temperament, vie with each other about Italy, which Tarkovsky says lacks the depth and space of Russia, which he clearly aches for, rejecting the baroque buildings of Lecce, and the beauties of the Amalfi Coast and the Tuscan landscape as too much, too banal, too shallow. Guerra described his role as "witness and provocation," and described the Italian journey with Tarkovsky as "a mutual reflection for a film on nostalgia, absence, and strangeness." Full of many lovely things, especially the moment when Tarkovsky reveals the directors he cannot live without, TEMPO DI VIAGGIO offers precious insights into the thought of two great artists.

Tuesday, November 5 8:30 p.m. (note early start time)



THE SACRIFICE

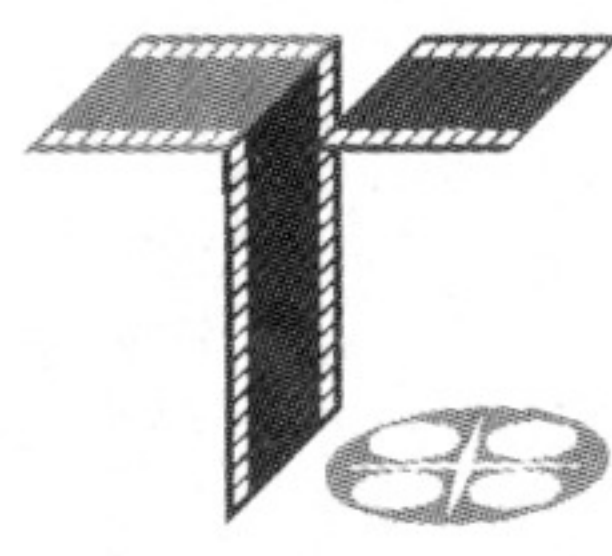
(OFFRET)

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky • Sweden/France 1986 150 minutes • Cast: Erland Josephson, Susan Fleetwood

Like Bresson's L'ARGENT, Tarkovsky's final film is a magisterial summation of his work, both testament and epitaph. Alexander, a tortured former actor, isolated with his friends and family on the desolate Swedish island of Gotland, makes a pact with God after a distant nuclear attack makes the end of the world seem inevitable. He will renounce family, possessions and self if the world is saved. The themes of apocalypse and the redemptive innocence of childhood, of muteness and (holy) madness, of magic, memory, and dreams, are classic Tarkovsky, and the film is full of imagery that recalls THE MIRROR (including a levitating Icelandic witch), STALKER, and NOSTALGHIA. Shot by the great Swedish cinematographer Sven Nykvist in otherworldly northern light, THE SACRIFICE is bracketed by two of the longest (and riskiest) takes in the history of narrative cinema. "Not to be missed by any one who cares about the cinema as an art form. . . . An intensely moving and humanistic document. . . . Erland Josephson . . . gives the performance of his career in this film" (John Harkness, *NOW Magazine*).

Wednesday, November 6 8:00 p.m. (note early start time)

Wednesday, November 13 8:45 p.m.



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