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SOLARIS

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“Russia’s answer to 2001, not in its display of space hardware but in the speculative quality of its ideas. The film opens very quietly and slowly, in a Russian country house, a landscape of lakes and green gardens, like a Turgenev setting overshadowed by intimations from space. We watch the people in the house as they in turn watch film of scientists in Moscow, viewing and discussing more film of an astronaut’s hallucinatory adventure: the Chinese-box pattern, and the bafflingly oblique and haunted feel of the early sequences, suggest Resnais at least as much as Kubrick. There’s an extraordinary nonstop car drive (the Solaris trip?) along what looks like the freeways of Tokyo. And then the rather stolid hero arrives at the space station hovering on the edge of Solaris, the unknown planet, whose surface is all oily, cloud sea—a ‘sentient ocean’, as Stanislaw Lem’s novel describes it. The arrival is masterly: the seemingly deserted disordered space station, the phantoms glimpsed out of the corner of the eye, the discovery of the two men aboard locked up madly with their ghosts. For the hero, Solaris conjures up the spectre of his wife, long ago dead by suicide, and a kindlier shadow than his companions seem to be entertaining. But the spaceship love story is only part of the film’s fabric . . .”—Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*. (1972. Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. Starring Natalie Bondarchuk and Donatas Banionis. 165 mins. Courtesy of Sovexportfilm.)