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THE CINEMATIC GAZE AS 'A LONG LOVING LOOK AT THE REAL': ANDREI TARKOVSKY AND WALTER BURGHARDT'S THEOLOGY OF CONTEMPLATION

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INTRODUCTION

In his essay on Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983), the theologian Gerard Loughlin describes the film as 'a kind of prayer.'[1] Now, with the arrival of the documentary *A Cinema Prayer* (2019), which is composed of home video footage in which Tarkovsky reflects on his life and philosophy of film, Loughlin's analysis seems more apt than ever. Tarkovsky's distinctive style, his slow, contemplative long takes, his static, wide-angle shots, and his minimalist editing, feels very much like prayer in the way that Loughlin suggests. Through extended silences and prolonged inactivity, Tarkovsky spurns action in favour of stasis and primes the viewer for contemplation. By retarding time and withholding the action that the viewer expects, Tarkovsky's long takes 'activate the viewer,'[2] to borrow Paul Schrader's terminology, and precipitate a kind of contemplation that is centred in the duration of the shot; in the passing of time itself. Yet at the same time, Tarkovsky's style not only primes the viewer for contemplation but also performs this contemplation itself. This is also a function of the time and duration of his long takes, but it is facilitated equally by the form and style of his compositions, as well as by the narrative and thematic structure of his films. This capacity both to prime and to perform contemplation is what makes Tarkovsky's films so powerful, and it is exactly what prompts viewers like Loughlin to perceive his films as prayerful and attentive.

This essay explores the cinematic gaze of Tarkovsky's filmmaking as a form of contemplation. This is no mere 'deep thinking', but an embodiment of contemplative prayer within the Christian tradition.[3] As such, it is open to the formal analysis of a theology of contemplation. To this end, the hermeneutical key for this study is Walter Burghardt's essay 'Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real'.[4] By interpreting Tarkovsky's direction through the lens of Burghardt's theology, this essay seeks to elucidate the various ways in which his filmmaking has been and can be considered contemplative. I wish to argue that 'a long, loving look at the real' (along with all the theological connotations that this description entails) appositely describes Tarkovsky's filmmaking, and therefore provides a valuable theological framework for understanding the contemplative nature of his films.

The first section of this essay is devoted to an exposition of Burghardt's theology of contemplation. From this foundation, Burghardt's theology can be applied hermeneutically to cinema, and the second section begins this task by examining the formal potentials of cinematic art for

contemplation; that is to say, it evaluates the capacity of film as an art form to prime and perform contemplation. In this analysis, there are two aesthetic elements of cinema which must be considered: i) the corporeal immediacy of the art form, and ii) its particular temporality. In considering the first of these, this second section participates in a major project of film theory: film-phenomenology.[5] In considering the second, it engages with two seminal texts that explore cinematic time: André Bazin's essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image',[6] and Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema II: The Time-Image*.[7] It is this temporal element more than any other which is so essential to Tarkovsky's contemplative filmmaking, as he himself makes clear in his remarkable hybrid of memoir and film theory, *Sculpting in Time*. As such, this paves the way for a third and final section to address Tarkovsky specifically, and to engage in close textual analysis of his films through the theological framework provided by Burghardt. What emerges from this study is a picture of Tarkovsky's filmmaking as theologically and contemplatively powerful, where the cinematic gaze can be framed in Burghardt's rubric as a long, loving look at the real.

1. WALTER BURGHARDT'S THEOLOGY OF CONTEMPLATION

What is contemplation? This is the 'substantive issue'[8] that the Jesuit theologian Walter Burghardt sets out to address at the very beginning of his seminal essay. Finding his answer requires no heavy scrutiny, however, as it is readily available in his subtitle: contemplation is 'a long, loving look at the real.' Burghardt acknowledges that he borrows this phrase from his contemporary, William McNamara, but goes on to develop from it a robust theology of contemplation. To begin with, I will adopt Burghardt's own strategy of breaking down the elements of 'a long, loving look at the real' in the reverse order, since that is the direction in which his essay flows and since that order begins with a crucial principal of contemplation; that divine reality is to be found (and contemplated) in the ordinary phenomena of our everyday and mundane existence – 'the real'. Here, at the outset, it will be worth quoting Burghardt at length, as he emphasises the profound theological significance of the everyday:

> *'The* real*, reality, is not reducible to some far-off, abstract, intangible God-in-the-sky. Reality is living, pulsing people; reality is fire and ice; reality is the sun setting over the Swiss Alps, a gentle doe streaking through the forest; reality is a ruddy glass of Burgundy, Beethoven's* Mass in D*, a child lapping a chocolate ice-cream cone; reality is a striding woman with wind-blown hair; reality is the risen Christ…What I contemplate is always what is most real.'*[9]

Beyond his poetic language in this passage, which speaks to the aesthetic quality of contemplation, there are a number of crucial observations contained in this quotation. The question of transcendence, in the first instance, is raised in such a way as to challenge the conventional dualisms of immanence-transcendence, natural-supernatural, and mundane-supramundane (the latter a central aspect of Rudolf Otto's theology).[10] 'Reality,' says Burghardt, 'is not reducible to some far-off, abstract, intangible God-in-the-sky,' before listing a plethora of earthly realities which culminate with and which are subsumed by the statement, 'reality is the risen Christ.' In other words, to be truly contemplative is not a matter of meditating on some abstract notion of a celestial and intangible God, but rather a matter of attending to the tangible flesh of our worldly existence within creation. This bears a significant consonance with the way Merleau-Ponty conceptualises transcendence, eschewing the conventional language of 'so-called vertical transcendence'[11] and preferring instead to talk about transcendence *beneath* the surface of the world. At the same time, the theologian cannot help but think of Teresa of Avila here, who

passed through the 'long dark night' of Carmelite mysticism to discover God in the mundane fabric of her reality: 'God walks among the pots and pans.'[12]

The great value of such an understanding of transcendence is that it is grounded in the incarnation. It recognises that the incarnation, the doctrine that God's creative Word was made flesh, is a call to seek the God incarnate in the flesh of everyday existence, that is, in the minutiae of ordinary life. This is why Burghardt situates 'the risen Christ' at the climax of his long list of quotidian realities; the incarnation – which is to say the whole Christ event – calls the believer to contemplate embodied, enfleshed, and enworlded creation, not some disembodied and otherworldly 'God-in-the-sky,' as Burghardt puts it. He writes, 'what I contemplate is always what is most real,' and for Burghardt there is nothing more real than the incarnate God.

From this understanding of the 'real', Burghardt moves in reverse through his description of contemplation: 'This real I *look* at,'[13] he writes, succinctly beginning a new section. This 'look', of course, is not merely visual. 'Looking', here, is a metonym for the whole of attentiveness – a vital aspect of contemplation. 'Attentiveness' (from the Latin *ad-tendere*; literally 'to stretch out towards') is the direction and focus of one's senses and thought towards an object or idea. To 'look' at the 'real', then, in Burghardt's understanding, is to 'stretch out towards' reality with one's affective, bodily, and cognitive faculties.

Moreover, this attentive 'look' is only made possible by the embodied, enfleshed nature of human being; 'I am not naked spirit; I am spirit incarnate; in a genuine sense, I *am* flesh. And so I am most myself, most human, most contemplative, when my whole person responds to the real.'[14] Thus contemplation, for Burghardt, involves an embodied act of attentive 'looking'; a 'look' which is phenomenal, tactile and haptic, even audible. In his own words: 'To 'look' wholly means that my whole person reacts. Not only my mind, but my eyes and ears, smelling and touching and tasting.'[15] Here Burghardt is surely thinking of Ignatius, when he encourages the person who prays to use all of their senses in the act (*Spiritual Exercises* n.121-5). This recognition of our embodiment and the embodied nature of 'seeing'/'looking' is crucial, and it will be particularly important in the next section's discussion of cinema as an embodied, enfleshed medium of seeing.

Our embodiment, though, cannot only be understood spatially, but must also be understood temporally. This temporal aspect is the next element Burghardt dissects in his essay, as he observes that 'this look at the real is a *long* look.'[16] Crucially, Burghardt does not mean 'long' in the quantitative sense of time that can be measured: 'This look at the real is a *long* look. Not in terms of measured time, but wonderfully unhurried, gloriously unhurried.'[17] What does he mean by this? How can 'long' refer not to counted time but to something else? In short, it is to do with something like the intensity of time spent, rather than any sense of time as an 'amount'; in other words, it is a question of understanding time *qualitatively* rather than *quantitatively*.

There is a significant parallel between Burghardt's conceptualisation of time here and the philosophy of Henri Bergson, who understood the conscious perception of time precisely insofar as it is not quantitative.[18] Bergson emphasised that time is perceived by consciousness not as measured minutes or seconds, but as *duration* (his essential concept *durée*); the conscious self never experiences time as a kind of 'counting' or 'measuring' of experience, it simply 'endures' in the perceived world. As he puts it, 'pure consciousness does not perceive time as a sum of units of duration.'[19] In the same way, Burghardt's 'long' look refers not to any 'amount' of time which passes, but to the quality, the intensity, of time that is experienced by the attentive and contemplative seer. As he writes, 'you do not time the Philadelphia Symphony; you do not clock the Last Supper.'[20]

Burghardt completes the breakdown of his description of contemplation as 'a long, loving look at the real' with a focus on the second adjective: 'this long look must be a *loving* look.'[21]

The key to understanding the role of love, here, is to realise that Burghardt sees contemplation as a deeply affective act, often articulating it in terms of the beautiful. For Burghardt, contemplation 'demands that the real captivate me, at times delight me.'[22]

There are two points to note here. First, because Burghardt sees contemplation as a 'loving' look, he goes on to use the language of encounter and alterity: 'whatever or whoever the real, contemplation calls forth love, oneness with the other.'[23] Such a notion of contemplation as encounter with the other is quickly attributed sacramental significance, as Burghardt goes on to argue that 'from such contemplation comes communion. I mean the discovery of the Holy in deep, thoughtful encounters – with God's creation, with God's people, with God's self – where love is proven by sacrifice, the wild exchange of all for another, for the Other.'[24] This sacramental language of encounter is drawn directly from McNamara, whom Burghardt quotes earlier in his essay, citing his definition of contemplation as 'a pure intuition of being, born of love. It is experiential awareness of reality and a way of entering into immediate communion with reality.'[25] In this way, Burghardt arrives, via McNamara, at a concept of contemplation as 'intuitive communion'[26] with people and with quotidian reality, in which the idea of sacramental encounter with the other in creation is essential.

The second point to note is Burghardt's acknowledgement that the 'real' is not always beautiful. In fact, he specifically includes a list which challenges any notion that all of reality will delight the contemplative beholder: 'The real includes sin and war, poverty and race, illness and death. The real is AIDS and abortion, apartheid and MS, bloated bellies and stunted minds, respirators and last gasps.'[27] Crucially, though, elements of reality as cruel and lugubrious as these are not to be exempted from a 'long, loving look'. For Burghardt, the contemplation of these elements of the real must be included, and moreover contemplation of them 'must end in compassion,' for 'compassion that mimics Christ is a synonym for love.'[28]

This, of course, all leads back to the fundamental notion of 'the real' within a theology of contemplation. In order to overcome a problematic dichotomy of transcendence-immanence, or a vertical hierarchy of the supernatural and the natural, the theologian must take seriously all aspects of everyday reality, including the unsavoury elements of our existence. Burghardt writes about the beauty of the real, and often mentions art in his essay, but this is as true for art as it is for Burghardt's theology of contemplation. Indeed, Tarkovsky expresses the same sentiment when he writes about the artistic pursuit of beauty:

> *'When I speak of aspiration towards the beautiful, of the ideal as the ultimate aim of art… I am not for a moment suggesting that art should shun the 'dirt' of the world. On the contrary! … To tell of what is living, the artist uses something dead; to speak of the infinite, he shows the finite… Hideousness and beauty are contained within each other. This prodigious paradox, in all its absurdity, leavens life itself.*'[29]

Tarkovsky, like Burghardt, emphasises that contemplation of the beautiful and the infinite begins with contemplation of finite, worldly existence. And cinema, perhaps more than any other artistic medium, possesses the potential to render and image finite, everyday reality with an immediacy that facilitates such a form of contemplation. This claim, however, requires further scrutiny, and now that an exposition of Burghardt's theology of contemplation is complete, it is high time to ask the question what, if anything, invests cinematic art with the potential for contemplation as it is described by Burghardt?

2. THE FORMAL POTENTIALS OF CINEMA FOR CONTEMPLATION

In what sense might we begin to conceive of cinema as a long, loving look at the real? That this description is incubated within a specific theological context reveals the challenge at hand; in more than one way here, we are asking if the medium of film is itself theologically significant. This section responds directly to Burghardt's description of contemplation, illustrating the primary ways in which cinematic art can be conceived of in his terms of a long, loving look at the real. I will focus on two main points of comparison: i) that film 'looks at the real' through a similar mode of embodiment and corporeality as that which Burghardt explores in his essay; ii) that the unique temporality of the art form allows film to take a 'long' look in the very manner that Burghardt suggests – not as a measured quantity of time spent, but as an unhurried, intense quality of time endured.

'The real' has long been a preoccupation of cinematic art. Realism was associated with the medium from its inception, and the earliest films were essentially documentaries (beginning in 1895 with the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*). Even throughout the advent and later dominance of cinematic fiction, critics and theorists still celebrated the realist potentials of the art form, and filmmakers often deployed documentary footage within their films (few more so than Tarkovsky). Many still deploy documentary footage, even in the mainstream (consider the final images of Spike Lee's 2018 film *BlacKkKlansman*).

For the great French film theorist, André Bazin, the tremendous power of the cinematic image was its realist potential; for him any distinction between fiction and documentary is obscured, since every film image is 'documentary' because photography renders phenomena 'as our eyes in reality see them.'[30] For Bazin, realism is the supreme principle of cinema as an art: 'photography and the cinema…satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism,'[31] because 'we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re*-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space.'[32]

Filmic realism, however, is not limited to a purely materialistic, reductive empiricism; in film's great capacity for realism lies its spiritual potential. Robert Bresson, who is frequently associated with the French realism school begun by Bazin,[33] emphasised exactly this; that the transcendent can be contemplated in film through realism and attention to the real: 'the supernatural in film is only the real rendered more precise.'[34] *The supernatural is only the real rendered more precise*. With these words, Bresson succinctly observes the redundancy of the 'God-in-the-sky' model of transcendence, realising the transcendental significance of everyday reality in nearly precisely the same terms that Burghardt would use decades later.

That Bresson sees the transcendent within the immanent, the supernatural within the real and the natural, is never more evident than in *Diary of a Country Priest*, when the priest receives a vision of the Virgin Mary. Bresson refrains from any abstract attempt to depict the divine throughout the entirety of this holy apparition; the imagery of the vision is delivered with voiceover, from the priest's journal, while the camera remains focussed solely on his face. There is no vertical transcendence in this vision, no intrusion or overflowing of the supernatural into the everyday as if there were some partition between the two. Rather, it is a radically interior experience, played out in the innermost being of the visionary. Even as the priest collapses at the sight of the Virgin, Bresson only holds on more tightly to a close-up, as if the only way to portray this vision is to see its traces etched across the priest's face, amidst the spatters of mud from his fall to the ground. Such realism stands in stark contrast with certain Hollywood 'epics' which contrive to show the divine through blasts of sound and lighting, futilely attempting to depict parousia with special effects.

Such is the theological power of cinema to 'look at the real'. Yet this look at 'the real' is a corporeal, embodied look, for the cinema is an embodied, enfleshed medium of seeing. Phenomenological film theory is invaluable in demonstrating the embodied nature of cinematic art, since it explores cinema as a physical, enworlded mode of viewing. Film-phenomenologists describe an art form which is as carnal as it is cerebral; as Steven Shaviro puts it, '[cinema] assaults the eye and ear, it touches and it wounds. It foregrounds the body.'[35] The embodied nature of the medium invests cinema with the capacity to 'look' at the 'real' – the mundane everyday – in the very manner that Burghardt describes; with one's whole person.

Film-phenomenology takes seriously the communication between the various 'bodies' of the film experience – filmmaker(s), viewer, and even the film itself. In the first place, it seems evident that the filmmaker's own embodiment should play a significant role in cinema; everything about her position in the world will determine the making of the film. At the same time, the viewer's embodied position in the world determines the film experience; when we watch a film, we enter an expressive and communicative domain, contingent on our embodied perception of the world. Just as Merleau-Ponty observes that we only experience the world through our bodies,[36] so we only experience film through our corporeal embodiment. Everything from the other bodies around us to the physical space on which the picture is projected shapes the film experience. Even though watching a film can be a profoundly cerebral experience, the viewer's consciousness can never be dissolved from her phenomenal existence as an embodied human being. This embodiment is in no sense a limitation of the capacity to interpret film, but rather the actual mode for all interpretation of the film experience.

Yet it also makes sense to talk about the body of film itself. This can be done analogously at first: the camera and microphone as eyes and ears; cranes, rigs, and dollies as limbs and motor functions; director and cinematographer as the brain and central nervous system which directs the motion and the senses of all. However, Vivian Sobchack, a pioneer of film-phenomenology, takes the concept of the film body substantially further. In recognising film as 'an act of seeing which makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard,'[37] she identifies an 'invisible presence of an other'[38] at the heart of the film experience. This 'invisible other' is embodied in the performance of the film, since the viewer experiences the picture *through* this other. It is a 'point of view' in many senses of the phrase, embodied in space and time, and Sobchack calls it 'an eye that belongs neither solely to the filmmaker, the camera, or the spectator.'[39] What is essential is that this 'invisible other' can only be understood insofar as it is in some way embodied; it is not a point of view from *nowhere* (such a thing is nonsensical), but a point of view from a specific and corporeal *somewhere*. It 'sees' through a particular 'eye/I', characterised perhaps by a close-up, wide angle, or crane shot; yet it is characterised not only by the position of the camera or the type of lens, but also by that spatial-temporal perspective embodied through the screen. In this way it is radically reflexive; at once an act of performance which is perceived and an act of perception which is performed – theologically, it is a look which can *prime and facilitate* contemplation in the viewer and simultaneously *perform* contemplation itself.

However, as has already been anticipated, cinematic embodiment must be understood temporally as well as spatially. This is not least because time is an essential principle of cinematic art; to put it succinctly, the motion picture is contingent on the time given for that motion. This seems a basic intuition, for the language of movement is wrapped up in the language of time; we can move our bodies slowly or quickly, for example, and speed is a function of time. In cinema, the length of a shot affects its meaning, while editing determines the 'pacing' of a film. Juxtaposition, in particular, demonstrates just how interconnected time and spatial movement are, for juxtaposition refers both to the spatial proximity of images next to one another on a spool of celluloid, and to the temporal proximity of those images as they appear successively in

time on the screen. This is why transitions (such as fades, dissolves, splices, or sweeps) are used differently to render different passages of time. Montage is the ultimate expression of juxtaposition; deploying several successive (or even concurrent) images in montage has profound effects on the time-sense of a sequence. In short, the phenomena captured on film are determined as much by their temporal properties as by their spatial properties.

André Bazin recognised this in the very same essay in which he extolled the cinema's potential for realism. In fact, the unique temporal aesthetic of film – that the moving image is determined by its duration – is one of the primary reasons why Bazin thought film was the supreme realist medium. 'The cinema is objectivity in time,' he argues, 'for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration.'[40] What Bazin means by this is simply that the duration of a shot is as much the substance of a film image as is the phenomena pictured. He illustrates this in a different essay with reference to the hunting scene in Robert Flaherty's documentary *Nanook of the North* (1922): 'the length of the hunt is the very substance of the image, it's true object.'[41]

Tarkovsky echoes the same idea throughout the pages of the appositely titled *Sculpting in Time*. Just as Bazin described the invention of cinema as the moment when the image of phenomena became intertwined with the image of their duration, Tarkovsky celebrates the Lumière brothers' very first film as the moment when, 'for the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means *to take an impression of time*.'[42] For him, time is the very fabric of cinema, and he states this in no uncertain terms: '*Time, printed in its factual forms and manifestations*: such is the supreme idea of cinema as an art.'[43]

The greatest study of time and film in recent decades is Gilles Deleuze's remarkable second volume on the cinema: *The Time-Image*. In this text, Deleuze describes the potential of film to produce what he called 'a direct time image.'[44] This is not, as he says, 'an indirect image of time deriving from movement. It does not abstract time; it does better: it reverses its subordination in relation to movement.'[45] In other words, the time-image is an image where time appears for itself, as the substance of the film image. At one point, Deleuze illustrates this with the example of a famous scene in Ozu's *Late Spring*, where Ozu cuts away from his protagonist to show a static image of a vase, holding on to the shot for seven full seconds. The duration of this image is its substance, according to Deleuze; in his own words, 'this is time, time itself, 'a little time in its pure state'.'[46]

What, though, does it mean to talk about time appearing as the substance of an image in this way? Deleuze's language is esoteric, even obscure occasionally. Whilst it is impossible to dissect Deleuze's philosophy of cinema comprehensively in the limited space of this essay,[47] the critical idea here is that time appears qualitatively, not quantitatively in the time-image. A direct time-image renders time *essentially*, 'in its pure state,' and does not render time in any constituent sense that it is 'counted' or quantified. This, of course, is the same qualitative sense of time that was discussed earlier, with regard to Bergson and his concept of *durée*.

Indeed, understanding Bergson is key to understanding Deleuze's philosophy of film, for Bergson is a primary influence on his project: Deleuze's two volumes on the cinema are interspersed with several chapters subtitled as a 'Commentary on Bergson'. These commentaries ground his entire philosophy of cinema (including the concept of the time-image) in Bergson's thought, especially in his non-quantitative understanding of time. Because of this Bergsonian influence, Deleuze maintains that, counterintuitively, to count time is to abstract time,[48] since the experiential essence of time must be understood through Bergson's notion of unquantifiable duration.

This leads to a fascinating observation about cinematic time for Burghardt's theology of contemplation. The cinematic 'look', with all its realist capabilities, can be a 'long' look in that

same sense of unmeasured, unhurried time that Burghardt describes; it can be 'long' in the same qualitative sense with which Burghardt uses the adjective. Again, this seems intuitively true on one level; when spectators talk about a film's pacing, it is common to talk about some sequences as if they rush by, and to talk about others as if they linger and intensify in their viewing. This is true for entire films as well: a film with a shorter running time can be 'slower' than one with a longer running time; Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) takes some three-and-a-half hours to screen, whereas Béla Tarr's and Ágnes Hranitzky's *The Turin Horse* (2011) takes just under two-and-a-half hours – and yet the latter is undoubtedly the *slower* film.[49] It is this capacity of the cinematic gaze to lengthen and linger, irrespective of hours and minutes of 'counted' time, which opens up the cinema's formal potential for contemplation in the way that Burghardt describes.

3. TARKOVSKY'S FILMMAKING AS 'A LONG LOVING LOOK AT THE REAL'

Cinema, then, possesses a profound theological potential for contemplation, precisely in Burghardt's terms of 'a long look at the real'. The previous section argued that this contemplative potential of the art form can be realised in two ways: through film's nature as an embodied, haptic, and corporeal medium of 'seeing' (precisely what it means to 'look' at 'the real'); and through the medium's capacity to render time in the film image such as it appears to consciousness, as unquantifiable duration ('long', in the specific sense that Burghardt uses the adjective). This final section now seeks to show that Andrei Tarkovsky's filmmaking powerfully realises this potential for contemplation. Close study of his films reveals a form and style of cinema that primes and performs Burghardt's theology of contemplation. In the final analysis, I will return to the hitherto forgotten adjective in Burghardt's description: a long, *loving* look at the real; for the long take, the foundational technique of Tarkovsky's style, is not only a long look, but also a *longing* look at the world.

A powerful example of Tarkovsky's use of the long take comes at the very beginning of his sixth film, *Nostalghia*. As the titles appear, the first image the viewer is presented with is of a rolling field, mantled in some vague mist. As the minutes pass by, figures traverse the field from a house in the foreground to a small lake in the distance, a thin stretch of water at the foot of the hill. At some indeterminable point in the long take, the shot freezes and becomes a still photograph. Then the titles finish and Tarkovsky fades to black. The next shot, another long take which lasts for minutes, begins the narrative proper. Another mist-veiled field; another rolling expanse of country. It is framed with a wide angle that deliberately encourages the viewer's eye to wander over the scene; the turbulent lie of the earth, the dawn fog descending, the mundane fixtures of wire fence and electrical masts.

After some time, a car enters the frame and crawls slowly across the picture. The camera tracking is minimal and eventually the car is allowed to pass out of sight – and there is no cut. Instead of moving to a different shot and pursuing coverage of the car, as conventional filmmaking dictates, Tarkovsky holds on to the mist-shrouded field. There is nothing but stillness for a while and time to think. When the car does re-enter and Andrei and Eugenia get out, Tarkovsky still holds on to the shot. And so the viewer's first encounter with the film's two protagonists is faceless and deliberately distant, reckoned only by their silhouettes and sparse dialogue, which seems to get lost among the mist in the screen's expanse. Here, then, are the rudiments of Tarkovsky's contemplative cinema; these are distancing techniques drawn out of the long take and wide angle, designed to dislocate the viewer and present her with the time to take a long look at the real.

In a note to the previous section, I mentioned Tarkovsky's connection with the genre of filmmaking usually referred to as slow cinema – and, crucially, sometimes as contemplative cinema.[50] The opening of *Nostalghia* bears significant similarities to this genre, and even prompted Paul Schrader to write about the scene described above in his new introduction to the 2018 edition of *Transcendental Style in Film*, comparing Tarkovsky's style to that often seen in slow cinema. Schrader describes the long take as 'the sine qua non of slow cinema,'[51] and observes that Tarkovsky uses the long take just as the slow cinema filmmakers that followed him do; 'the Tarkovsky long shot is more than long. It's meditative.'[52] Interestingly, Schrader also compares Tarkovsky's rendering of time to Bergson's philosophy: 'for Tarkovsky duration was more than mere waiting. It was Henri Bergson's '*durée*', duration, time itself, the vital force governing and meditating upon all organic life.'[53]

Yet Schrader errs when he writes that Tarkovsky 'was not interested in the spiritual per se.'[54] Contrary to what Schrader suggests, Tarkovsky was deeply invested in his Russian Orthodox tradition and in understanding the world through the vision of Christian theology; *Sculpting in Time*, for example, is filled with spiritual and theological language, including numerous references to Christ, which is unsurprising given the number of 'Christ-figures' in his films. Above all, the very final line of the book reveals his profound theological convictions: 'Perhaps our capacity to create is evidence that we ourselves are created in the image and likeness of God?'[55]

One particular instance of Tarkovsky's theological language has already been discussed in this essay; Tarkovsky talks about the world (and 'the real') in a similar manner to Bresson and Burghardt. He writes of 'the aspiration towards the beautiful, of the ideal as the ultimate aim of art,' yet quickly adds, 'I am not for a moment suggesting that art should shun the 'dirt' of the world. On the contrary! The artistic image is always a metonym…to tell of what is living, the artist uses something dead; to speak of the infinite, he shows the finite.'[56] How similar such language is to that used by Bresson: *the supernatural in film is only the real rendered more precise*. Meanwhile, as I suggested in the first section, Burghardt's long list of unsavoury elements of 'the real' seem to correspond with what Tarkovsky calls 'the 'dirt' of the world.' For Tarkovsky, the artist is called to contemplate 'the real', with all its 'dirt': 'hideousness and beauty are contained within each other. This prodigious paradox, in all its absurdity, leavens life itself, and in art makes that wholeness in which harmony and tension are unified.'[57]

Here, again, the outmoded dichotomy of transcendence and immanence, in which the divine is, as Burghardt derides, some 'God-in-the-sky,' is dispelled. Tarkovsky, throughout *Sculpting in Time* and throughout his films, suggests that the infinite is manifest in the finite, so that transcendence and immanence interpenetrate and co-substantiate. Consider, for example, the mysterious (and mystical) appearance of the strange woman towards the end of *Mirror*.[58] This apparition, though a moment pregnant with the supernatural, is signified not with abstract or extraordinary means, as with an excess of sound, lighting, or special effects, but with the naturalistic minutiae of the encounter; with the condensation left on the table by her illusory coffee cup. After the woman's vanishing, Tarkovsky deploys a rare close up of the table, where the ring of condensation left by the cup slowly recedes and then disappears like the memory of the ethereal woman herself. From this most mundane of physical processes the mystical is portrayed; within the immanent, the transcendent; beneath the natural, the supernatural.

This way of 'looking at the real', of seeing the world through the contemplative gaze that endures in the long take and persists in the corporeality of our embodied existence, primes the viewer for contemplation and performs contemplation itself. And, when this form and style of cinema is harmonised with the narrative and thematic content of Tarkovsky's filmmaking, it becomes even more powerful. There is a dream-sequence in *Stalker* (1979), for example, which realises this harmony of form and theme, of style and narrative, particularly well: this is the

second of the eponymous Stalker's sepia-lensed dreams, when one remarkable tracking shot passes over a shallow length of water for several minutes. Collected beneath the surface are the detritus of long-lost years: a steel tray; a painting of some trees; discarded syringes juxtaposed with the astounding visual of a fragment of the Ghent Altarpiece, portraying the image of John the Baptist. Fish swim among the strange accumulation, 'a symbol for the Christ who has been with the Stalker both night and day.'[59] Interestingly, this dream-image of water, altarpiece and symbolic fish is accompanied by a voiceover from Revelation 6:13-17, which picks up on the eschatological tremors reverberating through the narrative; for *Stalker* tells the story of a journey into some apocalyptic and paranormal 'Zone', within which awaits 'the Room', a mysterious and salvific space where one's innermost desires are realised.

The content and imagery of this dream sequence resonates with the apocalyptic vision of the voiceover, which describes the opening of the sixth seal. At the same time, Tarkovsky's attentiveness to the strange phenomena in the water – the syringes, mundane paraphernalia, and astounding Ghent Altarpiece fragment – is performed through a very long and mostly silent single take. The uncanny inertia of this tracking shot gives the impression that the camera is in fact stationary, and that the use of a tracking shot is just an illusion created by the objects as they flow with the water across the long and contemplative gaze of the shot.

This is one of the more explicit examples of how Tarkovsky primes and performs contemplation through 'a long look at the real'. The spiritual and theological content of this single take is framed through a corporeal and haptic realism; the composition of the shot brings the strange stream of objects almost to the viewer's touch, and even the water, with a liquid flow of light rippling across its surface, is made palpable through the diegetic soundtrack which drips and trickles over the viewer's ear. And all of this is rendered in the profoundly contemplative form of the long take, such that the duration of the shot is as much the substance of the image as is its audio-visual content.

CONCLUSIONS

This style of filmmaking, which is attentive to the mundane reality of the world and which is performed through the unhurried, immeasurable 'long' look described in Burghardt's theology, invests cinema with a profound potential for contemplation. Tarkovsky's filmmaking realises this potential; scenes like those at the beginning of *Nostalghia*, as well as images and compositions like the tracking shot in *Stalker* or the receding line of condensation in *Mirror*, at once prime the viewer for contemplation and perform contemplation themselves.

But what of the other adjective Burghardt uses to describe contemplation? 'A long, *loving* look at the real'. The key, I think, lies once again in cinematic renderings of time. For the long take, 'the sine qua non of slow cinema' and the foundational technique of Tarkovsky's style, is precisely a *longing* look at the world. The long take *longs* for the real. Bazin said that 'only the impassive lens…is able to present [the objects of the world] to my attention and consequently to my love.'[60] In letting the cinematic gaze linger on the real, the filmmaker resists conventional tactics of action and noise, and manifests a loving desire to contemplate the world in silence; 'to contemplate is to rest – to rest in the real.'[61] This is why Loughlin is moved to talk about Tarkovsky's filmmaking as 'a kind of prayer.'[62] It is prayerful in the very manner he suggests; as a contemplative rendering of time, where the duration of the long take signifies the desire for something more: 'in waiting on the film we wait on that which arrives in our waiting.'[63]

'A long, loving look at the real.' Film can prime and perform each element of Burghardt's description of contemplation. The cinematic gaze is 'long' in the sense that Burghardt expounds;

not in the sense of measured or counted time, but in the sense of that quality of time epitomised by Henri Bergson's concept of *durée*. It is also a 'look' which contemplates 'the real' in the way that Burghardt suggests, not as mere sight, but as an enfleshed and enworlded gaze; a carnal and somatic address of the whole person. As with contemplation itself, the cinematic gaze begins with an attentiveness to mundane reality; such is the significance of Tarkovsky's mist-shrouded field in *Nostalghia*, and of the mud-spattered face of Bresson's protagonist in *Diary of a Country Priest*; 'the real rendered more precise.' Finally, the cinematic gaze is a loving look at this real. Precisely in its form as a 'long' look, it *longs* for the real; it longs for time to rest in contemplation, for time to experience beauty, and for time to encounter the other on, through and behind the screen. Nowhere else in cinema is this potential for contemplation more fully realised than in the filmmaking of Andrei Tarkovsky.

Notes

1 Gerard Loughlin 'The Long Take: Messianic Time in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 13:3-4 (2009), 365-379. DOI: 10.1080/14797580903244753

2 Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), p. 9.

3 Contemplation, as a prayerful act, traces its origins to the early Church, for example with Gregory of Nyssa, and it is developed in the medieval period in the mystical tradition. It is helpful to contextualise contemplation and contemplative practice through mystics like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, however the specific context of this essay is best identified in 20th Century theologies of contemplative prayer, such as that of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986).

4 Walter Burghardt, 'Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real' in: George W. Traub, *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008) pp. 89-98. Originally published in 1989.

5 This strand of film theory traces its origins to the great French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who described the corporeal and phenomenological gaze of cinema as "movie material *par excellence*" in an essay published in 1964 (originally given as a lecture in 1945). 'Film and the New Psychology', in: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964) pp. 48-59. In the 1990s, film-phenomenology was developed significantly in Vivian Sobchack's seminal book *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), and it has since been taken up by numerous scholars, most notably by Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009) and Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

6 In: André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967) pp. 9-16.

7 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). Originally published 1985.

8 Burghardt, p. 89.

9 Burghardt, pp. 91-92.

10 See: Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964) p. 71.

12 St Teresa of Avila, *Book of the Foundations* 5.8.

13 Burghardt, p. 92.

14 Burghardt, p. 92.

15 Burghardt, p. 92.

16 Burghardt, p. 93.

17 Burghardt, p. 93.

18 Bergson's philosophy is also vital for Deleuze's two volumes on cinema, especially *The Time-Image*. The two essential texts for Deleuze are Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, and *Matter and Memory*. Indeed, Deleuze's various commentaries on Bergson (see section II, above) emphasise his notion of *durée* in the following terms: time appears as duration to consciousness, constantly and endlessly dividing in two as 'the present which passes and the past which is preserved in the present' – both of which coexist in the conscious experience of time as pure 'duration'.

19 Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013) p. 196.
20 Burghardt, p. 93.
21 Burghardt, p. 93.
22 Burghardt, p. 93.
23 Burghardt, p. 93.
24 Burghardt, p. 93.
25 Burghardt, p. 91.
26 Burghardt, p. 91.
27 Burghardt, p. 93.
28 Burghardt, p. 93.
29 Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (London: Bodley Head, 1986) p. 28.
30 Bazin, p. 11. For an overview of Bazin's theory of cinematic realism, see J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) Part II, Chapter 6: 'André Bazin'.
31 Bazin, p. 12.
32 Bazin, pp. 13-14.
33 Andrew, p. 95.
34 James Blue, 'Excerpts from an Interview with Robert Bresson' in: 'James Blue Papers' 1905-2014 (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives) box 6, folder 41, June 1965.
35 Shaviro, p. 260.
36 This is a central tenet of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, who follows Gabriel Marcel's maxim 'I am my body.' See especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012) pp. 67-206. From p. 84: 'The body is the vehicle of being in the world (*être au monde*)…my body is the unperceived term at the centre of the world toward which every object turns its face…I am conscious of the world by means of my body.'
37 Sobchack, p. 3.
38 Sobchack, p. 203.
39 Sobchack, p. 203.
40 Bazin, pp. 14-15.
41 Bazin, p. 27.
42 Tarkovsky, p. 62.
43 Tarkovsky, p. 63.
44 Deleuze, p. 103.
45 Deleuze, p. 103.
46 Deleuze, p. 17.
47 There is no substitute for the primary texts here; Deleuze's two volumes have become essential reading for any film theorist or film philosopher. However, Hugh Tomlinson's and Robert Galeta's 'Translator's Introduction' to *The Time-Image*, provides a good overview of the text and the key concepts at stake in this essay.
48 Consider Bergson's example of counting the swings of a pendulum in *Time and Free Will*: 'When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration, as seems to be thought; I merely count simultaneities, which is very different.' (pp. 107-108) And later: 'Pure consciousness does not perceive time as a sum of units of duration; left to itself it has no means and even no reason to measure time.' (p. 196) The pendulum – and devices like it which seek to 'count' time, such as the hands of a clock or chimes of a bell – actually abstract time rather than measure it, for time appears to consciousness only as pure duration.
49 In recent years, the genre of 'slow cinema' has emerged and risen to prominence, and Béla Tarr is one of the filmmakers most frequently associated with the genre. Slow cinema techniques emphasise long takes, minimalist editing, and extended periods of inertia. Crucially, a 'slow film' does not have to possess a lengthy running time; the 'slow' in slow cinema refers not to the counting of hours and minutes, but to the conscious perception of the film's duration. I will say more about slow cinema in section III, for Tarkovsky is often considered a progenitor of the genre. Fascinatingly, for the argument of this essay, 'slow cinema' is sometimes called 'contemplative cinema'. See: Tiago De Luca & Nuno Barradas Jorge, *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
50 See above, note 49.
51 Schrader, p. 11.

52 Schrader, p. 6.
53 Schrader, p. 5.
54 Schrader, p. 4.
55 Tarkovsky, p. 241.
56 Tarkovsky, p. 38.
57 Tarkovsky, p. 38.
58 This is the scene in the post-war time period of the film, where Ignat, Alexei's son, is home alone and encounters a mysterious woman who requests that he read a poem by Pushkin. The telephone rings to interrupt the scene as Alexei calls the house. When Ignat picks up the telephone he turns away from the woman. When he looks back, she has vanished.
59 Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry* (London: Faber, 1989) p. 113.
60 Bazin, p. 15.
61 Burghardt, p. 93.
62 Loughlin, p. 378.
63 Loughlin, p. 378.