

*The film image*

'Let us put it like this: a spiritual—that is, significant—phenomenon is "significant" precisely because it exceeds its own limits, serves as expression and symbol of something spiritually wider and more universal, an entire world of feelings and thoughts, embodied within it with greater or less felicity—that is the measure of its significance.'

—Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

It is hard to imagine that a concept like *artistic image* could ever be expressed in a precise thesis, easily formulated and understandable. It is not possible, nor would one wish it to be so. I can only say that the image stretches out into infinity, and leads to the absolute. And even what is known as the 'idea' of the image, many dimensional and with many meanings, cannot, in the very nature of things, be put into words. But it does find expression in art. When thought is expressed in an artistic image, it means that its one form has been found, the form that comes nearest to conveying the author's world, to making incarnate his longing for the ideal.

What I want to attempt here is to define the parameters of a possible system of what are generally termed images, a system within which I can feel spontaneous and free.

If you throw even a cursory glance into the past, at the life which lies behind you, not even recalling its most vivid moments, you are struck every time by the singularity of the events in which you took part, the unique individuality of the characters whom you met. This singularity is like the dominant note of every moment of existence; in each moment of life, the life principle itself is unique. The artist therefore tries to grasp that principle and make it incarnate, new each time; and each time he hopes, though in vain, to achieve an exhaustive image of the Truth of human existence. The quality of beauty is in the truth of life, newly assimilated and imparted by the artist, in fidelity to his personal vision.

Anyone at all subtle will always distinguish in people's behaviour truth from fabrication, sincerity from pretence, integrity from



Mirror *The Director at the site for the fire.*



Mirror *The fire sequence.*

affectation. From experience of life a kind of filter grows up in the perception, to stop us giving credence to phenomena in which the structural pattern is broken—whether deliberately so or inadvertently, through ineptness.

There are people incapable of lying. Others who lie with inspiration, convincingly. Others again don't know how to, but are incapable of not lying, and do so drably and hopelessly. Within our terms of reference—namely, precise observation of the logic of life—only the second category detect the beat of truth and can follow the capricious twists of life with an almost geometrical accuracy.

The image is indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. If the world is inscrutable, then the image will be so too. It is a kind of equation, signifying the correlation between truth and the human consciousness, bound as the latter is by Euclidean space. We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality.

The image is an impression of the truth, a glimpse of the truth permitted to us in our blindness. The incarnate image will be faithful when its articulations are palpably the expression of truth, when they make it unique, singular—as life itself is, even in its simplest manifestations.

The image as a precise observation of life takes us straight back to Japanese poetry.

What captivates me here is the refusal even to hint at the kind of final image meaning that can be gradually deciphered like a charade. Haikku cultivates its images in such a way that they mean nothing beyond themselves, and at the same time express so much that it is not possible to catch their final meaning. The more closely the image corresponds to its function, the more impossible it is to constrict it within a clear intellectual formula. The reader of haikku has to be absorbed into it as into nature, to plunge in, lose himself in its depth, as in the cosmos where there is no bottom and no top.

Look at these haikku by Basho:

*The old pond was still  
A frog jumped in the water  
And a splash was heard.*

Or:

*Reeds cut for thatching  
The stumps now stand forgotten  
Sprinkled with soft snow.*

Or again:

*Why this lethargy?  
They could hardly wake me up.  
Spring rain pattering.*

How simply and accurately life is observed. What discipline of mind and nobility of imagination. The lines are beautiful, because the moment, plucked out and fixed, is one, and falls into infinity.

The Japanese poets knew how to express their visions of reality in three lines of observation. They did not simply observe it, but with supernal calm sought its ageless meaning. And the more precise the observation, the nearer it comes to being unique, and so to being an image. As Dostoevsky said, with remarkable insight, 'Life is more fantastic than any fiction.'

In cinema it is all the more the case that observation is the first principle of the image, which always has been inseparable from the photographic record. The film image is made incarnate, visible and four dimensional. But by no means every film shot can aspire to being an image of the world; as often as not it merely describes some specific aspect. Naturalistically recorded facts are in themselves utterly inadequate to the creation of the cinematic image. The image in cinema is based on the ability to present as an observation one's own perception of an object.

To take an illustration from prose: the end of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* tells how an unkind, limited man, who is dying of cancer and has a nasty wife and a worthless daughter, wants to ask their forgiveness before he dies. At that moment, quite unexpectedly, he is filled with such a sense of goodness, that his family, preoccupied as they are only with clothes and balls, insensitive and unthinking, suddenly seem to him profoundly unhappy, deserving of all pity and forbearance. And then, on the point of death, he feels he is crawling along in some long, soft black pipe, like an intestine . . . In the distance there seems to be a glimmer of light, and he crawls on and can't reach the end, can't overcome that last barrier separating life from death. His wife and daughter stand by the

bedside. He wants to say, 'Forgive me.' And instead, at the last minute, utters, 'Let me through.'<sup>\*</sup> Clearly that image, which shakes us to the very depths of our being, cannot be interpreted in one way only. Its associations reach far into our innermost feelings, reminding us of some obscure memories and experiences of our own, stunning us, stirring our souls like a revelation. At the risk of banality—it is so like life, like a truth that we had guessed at, that it can rival situations that we have already known or secretly imagined. In the Aristotelian thesis, we recognise as something familiar what has been expressed by a genius. How deep and multidimensional it becomes will depend on the psyche of the reader.

Let us look at Leonardo's portrait of 'A Young Lady With a Juniper', which we used in *Mirror* for the scene of the father's brief meeting with his children when he comes home on leave.

There are two things about Leonardo's images that are arresting. One is the artist's amazing capacity to examine the object from outside, standing back, looking from above the world—a characteristic of artists like Bach or Tolstoy. And the other, the fact that the picture affects us simultaneously in two opposite ways. It is not possible to say what impression the portrait finally makes on us. It is not even possible to say definitely whether we like the woman or not, whether she is appealing or unpleasant. She is at once attractive and repellent. There is something inexpressibly beautiful about her and at the same time repulsive, fiendish. And fiendish not at all in the romantic, alluring sense of the word; rather—beyond good and evil. Charm with a negative sign. It has an element of degeneracy—and of beauty. In *Mirror* we needed the portrait in order to introduce a timeless element into the moments that are succeeding each other before our eyes, and at the same time to juxtapose the portrait with the heroine, to emphasise in her and in the actress, Margarita Terekhova, the same capacity at once to enchant and to repel. . . .

If you try to analyse Leonardo's portrait, separating it into its components, it will not work. At any rate it will explain nothing. For the emotional effect exercised on us by the woman in the picture is powerful precisely because it is impossible to find in her anything that we can definitely prefer, to single out any one detail from the whole, to prefer any one, momentary impression to another, and make it our own, to achieve a balance in the way we look at the image

\* In Russian 'Forgive me' is *prostete*; 'let me through' is *propoostete*. — Tr.

presented to us. And so there opens up before us the possibility of interaction with infinity, for the great function of the artistic image is to be a kind of detector of infinity . . . towards which our reason and our feelings go soaring, with joyful, thrilling haste.

Such feeling is awoken by the completeness of the image: it affects us by this very fact of being impossible to dismember. In isolation, each component part will be dead—or perhaps, on the contrary, down to its tiniest elements it will display the same characteristics as the complete, finished work. And these characteristics are produced by the interaction of opposed principles, the meaning of which, as if in communicating vessels, spills over from one into the other: the face of the woman painted by Leonardo is animated by an exalted idea and at the same time might appear perfidious and subject to base passions. It is possible for us to see any number of things in the portrait, and as we try to grasp its essence we shall wander through unending labyrinths and never find the way out. We shall derive deep pleasure from the realisation that we cannot exhaust it, or see to the end of it. A true artistic image gives the beholder a simultaneous experience of the most complex, contradictory, sometimes even mutually exclusive feelings.

It is not possible to catch the moment at which the positive goes over into its opposite, or when the negative starts moving towards the positive. Infinity is germane, inherent in the very structure of the image. In practice, however, a person invariably prefers one thing to another, selects, seeks out his own, sets a work of art in the context of his personal experience. And since everybody has certain tendencies in what he does, and asserts his own truth in great things as in small, as he adapts art to his daily needs he will interpret an artistic image to his own 'advantage'. He sets a work into the context of his life and hedges it about with his aphorisms; for great works are ambivalent and allow for widely differing interpretations.

I am always sickened when an artist underpins his system of images with deliberate tendentiousness or ideology. I am against his allowing his methods to be discernible at all. I often regret some of the shots I have allowed to stay in my own films; they seem to me now to be evidence of compromise and found their way into my films because I was insufficiently singleminded. If it were still possible, I would now happily cut out of *Mirror* the scene with the cock, even though that scene made a deep impression on many in the audience. But that was because I was playing 'give-away' with the audience.



Mirror  
Childhood memories of  
peacetime: spilt milk.

When the exhausted heroine, almost at fainting-point, is making up her mind whether to cut off the cockerel's head, we shot her in close-up at high speed for the last ninety frames, in a patently unnatural light. Since on the screen it comes out in slow motion, it gives an effect of stretching the time-framework—we are plunging the audience into the heroine's state, putting a brake on that moment, highlighting it. This is bad, because the shot starts to have a purely literary meaning. We deform the actress's face independently of her, as it were playing the role for her. We serve up the emotion we want, squeeze it out by our own—director's—means. Her state becomes too clear, too easily read. And in the interpretation of a character's state of mind, something must always be left secret.

To quote a more successful example of a similar method, again from *Mirror*: a few frames of the printing-press scene are also shot in slow motion, but in this case it is barely perceptible. We made a point of doing it very delicately and carefully, so that the audience would not be aware of it straight away, but just have a vague feeling of something strange. We were not trying to underline an idea by using slow motion, but to bring out a state of mind through means other than acting.

In Kurosawa's version of *Macbeth* we find a perfect example. In the scene where Macbeth is lost in the forest, a lesser director would have the actors stumbling around in the fog in search of the right direction, bumping into trees. And what does the genius Kurosawa do? He finds a place with a distinctive, memorable tree. The horsemen go round in a circle, three times, so that the sight of the tree eventually makes it clear that they keep going past the same spot. The horsemen themselves don't realise that they long ago lost their way. In his treatment of the concept of space Kurosawa here displays the most subtle poetic approach, expressing himself without the slightest hint of mannerism or pretentiousness. For what could be simpler than setting the camera and following the characters around three times?

In a word, the image is not a certain *meaning*, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as a drop of water. Only in a drop of water!

There are no technical problems of expression in cinema once you know exactly what to say; if you see every cell of your picture from within and can feel it accurately. For instance, in the scene of the heroine's chance meeting with a stranger (played by Anatoliy

Solonitsyn), it was important that after he leaves some sort of thread should be drawn to link these two who seem to have met quite fortuitously. Had he turned as he was walking away and glanced back at her expressively, it would all have been sequential and false. Then we thought of the gust of wind in the field, which attracts the stranger's attention because it is so unexpected: that is why he looks back . . . In this case there is no question of, so to speak, 'catching the author out' because his game is so obvious.

When the audience is unaware of the reasons why the director has used a certain method, he is inclined to believe in the reality of what is happening on screen, to believe in the life the artist is observing. But if the audience, as the saying goes, catches the director out, knowing exactly why the latter has performed a particular 'expressive' trick, they will no longer sympathise with what is happening or be carried along by it, and will begin to *judge* its purpose and its execution. In other words the 'spring' against which Marx warned is beginning to stick out of the upholstery.

The function of the image, as Gogol said, is to express life itself, not ideas or arguments about life. It does not signify life or symbolise it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness. What then is true to type, and how does what is original and singular in art relate to it? If the image emerges as something unique, then is there any room for what is true to type?

The paradox is that the unique element in an artistic image mysteriously becomes the typical; for strangely enough the latter turns out to be in direct correlation with what is individual, idiosyncratic, unlike anything else. It is not when phenomena are recorded as ordinary and similar that we find what is true to type (though that is where it is generally thought to lie), but where phenomena are distinctive. The general could be said to thrust the particular forward, and then to fall back and remain outside the ostensible framework of the reproduction. It is simply assumed as the substructure of the unique phenomenon.

If that seems strange at first sight, one has only to remember that the artistic image must evoke no associations other than those which speak of the truth. (Here we are talking of the artist who creates the image rather than of the audience who see it.) As he starts work the artist has to believe that he is the first person ever to give form to a particular phenomenon. It is being done for the first time, and as only he feels it and understands it.

The artistic image is unique and singular, whereas the phenomena of life may well be entirely banal. Again, haikku:

*No, not to my house.  
That one, pattering umbrella  
Went to my neighbour.*

In itself, a passer-by with an umbrella whom you have seen at some time in your life means nothing new; he is just one of the people hurrying along and keeping himself dry in the rain. But within the terms of the artistic image we have been considering, a moment of life, one and unique for the author, is recorded in a form that is perfect and simple. The three lines are sufficient to make us feel his mood: his loneliness, the grey, rainy weather outside the window, and the vain expectation that someone might by a miracle call into his solitary, god-forsaken dwelling. Situation and mood, meticulously recorded, achieve an amazingly wide, far-ranging expression.

At the beginning of these reflections we deliberately ignored what is known as the character image. At this point it could be useful to include it. Let us take Bashmachkin<sup>17</sup> and Onegin. As literary types they personify certain social laws, which are the precondition of their existence—that is on the one hand. On the other, they possess some universal human traits. All this is so: a character in literature may become typical if he reflects current patterns formed as a result of general laws of development. As types, therefore, Bashmachkin and Onegin have plenty of analogues in real life. As types, certainly! As artistic images they are nonetheless absolutely alone and inimitable. They are too concrete, seen too large by their authors, carry the latter's viewpoint too fully, for us to be able to say: 'Yes, Onegin, he's just like my neighbour.' The nihilism of Raskolnikov in historical and sociological terms is of course typical; but in the personal and individual terms of his image, he stands alone. Hamlet is undoubtedly a type as well; but where, in simple terms, have you ever seen a Hamlet?

We are faced with a paradox: the character image signifies the fullest possible expression of what is typical, and the more fully it expresses it, the more individual, the more original it becomes. It is an extraordinary thing, this image! In a sense it is far richer than life itself; perhaps precisely because it expresses the idea of absolute truth.

Do the images of Leonardo or Bach mean anything in functional

terms? No—they mean nothing at all beyond what they mean themselves; that is the measure of their autonomy. They see the world as if for the first time, with no experience to weigh them down. They look at it with the independence of people who have only just arrived!

All creative work strives for simplicity, for perfectly simple expression; and this means reaching down into the furthest depths of the recreation of life. But that is the most painful part of creative work: finding the shortest path between what you want to say or express and its ultimate reproduction in the finished image. The struggle for simplicity is the painful search for a form adequate to the truth you have grasped. You long to be able to achieve great things while economising the means.

The striving for perfection leads an artist to make spiritual discoveries, to exert the utmost moral effort. Aspiration towards the absolute is the moving force in the development of mankind. For me the idea of realism in art is linked with that force. Art is realistic when it strives to express an ethical ideal. Realism is a striving for the truth, and truth is always beautiful. Here the aesthetic coincides with the ethical.

## *Time, rhythm and editing*

Turning now to the film image as such, I immediately want to dispel the widely held idea that it is essentially 'composite'. This notion seems to me wrong because it implies that cinema is founded on the attributes of kindred art forms and has none specifically its own; and that is to deny that cinema is an art.

The dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame. The actual passage of time is also made clear in the characters' behaviour, the visual treatment and the sound—but these are all accompanying features, the absence of which, theoretically, would in no way affect the existence of the film. One cannot conceive of a cinematic work with no sense of time passing through the shot, but one can easily imagine a film with no actors, music, décor or even editing. The Lumière brothers' *Arrivée d'un Train*, already mentioned, was like that. So are one or two films of the American underground: there is one, for instance, which shows a man asleep; we then see him waking up,

with life, after being protected from it within the rarified precincts of the monastery, from which he had a distorted view of the life which stretched out far beyond it. . . . And only after going through the circles of suffering, at one with the fate of his people, and losing his faith in an idea of good that could not be reconciled with reality, does Andrey come back to the point from which he started: to the idea of love, good, brotherhood. But now he has experienced for himself the great, sublime truth of that idea as a statement of the aspirations of his tormented people.

Traditional truths remain truths only when they are vindicated by personal experience. . . . My years as a student, when I was preparing to enter the profession in which evidently I am destined to remain for the rest of my days, seem pretty strange. . . .

We worked a lot on the set doing exercises in directing or acting interpretation, for student audiences, and wrote a good deal, making scenarios for ourselves from teaching material. We didn't see many films (and now, I understand, Institute students see them even less), because teachers and those in authority were afraid of the baneful influence of Western films, which the students might take less 'critically' than they should. . . . Of course this is absurd: how can anyone by-pass contemporary world cinema and still become a professional; the students are reduced, as it were, to inventing the bicycle—that is, if they manage to invent it. Can one imagine a painter who doesn't go to museums or to his colleagues' studios, or a writer who doesn't read books? A cinematographer who doesn't see films?—yes, there he is, the S.I.C. student who is virtually debarred from seeing the achievements of world cinema while he is studying in the Institute.

I still remember the first film I managed to see at the Institute on the eve of the entry exams—*The Lower Depths* by Renoir, based on Gorky's play. I was left with a strange, puzzling impression, a feeling of something forbidden, clandestine, unnatural. Jean Gabin played Pepel, Louis Jouvet the Baron. . . .

In my fourth year, my state of metaphysical contemplation suddenly gave way to a burst of vitality. Our energies were channelled first into practical exercises and then into the making of a pre-diploma piece which I directed in collaboration with a fellow student. It was a relatively long film, produced with the facilities of the Institute and Central Television studios, about sappers defusing a German arms store left over from the war.

Working from my own—alas, quite useless—script, I did not feel at all that I was approaching an understanding of what is called cinema. Matters were made worse by the fact that all the time we were filming we were longing to make a full-length work—or, as we wrongly imagined, a 'real' film. In fact, making a short film is almost harder than making a full-length one: it demands an unerring sense of form. But in those days we were exercised above all by ambitious ideas of production and organisation, while the concept of the film as a work of art consistently eluded us. As a result we were incapable of taking advantage of our work on the short film in order to define our own aesthetic aims. However, I have still not given up hope of a short film one day: I even have some rough drafts in my note-book. One of these is a poem by my father, Arseniy Alexandrovich Tarkovsky, which he himself was to have read. Although now, of course, I don't even know if I shall ever see him again. In the meantime I have used it in *Nostalgia*:

*As a child I once fell ill  
With hunger and fear. Off my lips I peeled  
Hard scales, and licked my lips. I remember  
Still the taste of it, saltish and cool.  
And all the time I walked and walked and walked.  
Sat down on the front stairs to warm myself,  
Walked my lightheaded way as if dancing  
To the rat-catcher's tune, riverwards. Sat down  
To warm on the stairs, shivering every which way.  
And mother stands there beckoning, looks as if  
She's close, but I can't go up to her:  
I move towards her, she stands seven steps away,  
Beckons me; I move towards her, she stands  
Seven steps away and beckons me.*

*I felt too hot,  
Undid my collar button and lay down,  
Then there were trumpets blaring, light beating  
Down on my eyelids, horses galloping, mother  
Was flying above the roadway, beckoned me  
And flew away. . . .*

*And now my dream is of  
A hospital, white beneath the apple trees,  
And a white sheet beneath my chin,*

And a white doctor looking down at me,  
And a white nurse standing at my feet  
And her wings moving. And there they stayed.  
And mother came, and beckoned me—  
And flew away . . .

Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair

Long ago I thought of using the following sequence for the poem.

- Scene 1: Establishing shot. Aerial view of a town; autumn or early winter. Slow zoom in to a tree standing by the stucco wall of a monastery.
- Scene 2: Close shot. Low angle shot, zoom in to puddles, grass, moss, shot in close-up to give the effect of a landscape. In the first shot town noises can be heard—harsh and insistent—these die away completely by the end of the 2nd shot.
- Scene 3: Close shot. A bonfire. Someone's hand stretches out an old, crumpled envelope towards the dying flame. The fire flares up. The camera tilts for a low angle shot of the father (the author of the poem), standing by a tree and looking at the fire. Then he bends down, evidently to tend the fire. The shot widens to a broad, autumnal landscape. The sky is overcast. Far away the bonfire is burning in the middle of the field. The father is poking it. He straightens up, turns, and walks away from the camera over the fields. Slow zoom from behind to medium shot. The father walks on. All the time the zoom lens shows him the same size. Then he gradually turns until he is shown in profile. The father vanishes into the trees. From out of the trees, and continuing along the father's path, appears the son. Gradual zoom in to the son's face, which by the end of the shot is just in front of the camera.
- Scene 4: From the point of view of the son. Elevation shot and zoom in: roads, puddles, withered grass. A white feather falls, circling, down into a puddle. (I used the feather in *Nostalgia*.)

Scene 5: Close-up. The son looks at the fallen feather, and then up at the sky. He bends, then straightens up and walks out of frame. Pull focus to long shot: the son picks up the feather and walks on. He vanishes into the trees, from which, walking in the same direction, appears the poet's grandson. In his hand is a white feather. Dusk is falling. The grandson walks over the field. Zoom in to close-up of the grandson, in profile; he suddenly notices something out of frame and stops. Pan in the direction of his gaze. Long shot of an angel standing at the edge of the darkening forest. Dusk is falling. Darkness descends as the focus blurs.

The poem can be heard from about the beginning of the third shot up to the end of the fourth; between the bonfire and the falling feather. Almost at the moment when the poem finishes, perhaps a little earlier, can be heard the end of the finale of Haydn's 'Farewell Symphony', which comes to an end as darkness falls.

Probably if I were to make the film, it would not turn out the same on the screen as it is in my notebook; I cannot agree with René Clair's view that once you have thought of a film it only remains for you to shoot it. That is never the way I bring a script to its realisation on the screen. Not that I find myself making radical alterations to the original idea of a movie; the initial impulse for a film remains unchanged and has to be consummated in the finished work. However, in the course of shooting, editing, making the sound track, the idea goes on being crystallised into ever more precise forms, and the image structure of the film is not finally decided until the last minute. The process of producing any work means struggling with the material, straining to master it in order to bring to full and perfect realisation that one conception that remains alive for the artist in its first, immediate impact.

Whatever happens, the point of the film, the thing that gave one the idea in the first place, must not be 'spilt' in the course of the work; particularly since the conception is becoming embodied through the medium of cinema: that is, using the images of reality itself—for it must come alive in the flesh of the film only through direct contact with the actual, substantial world. . . .

It is a grave, I would even say, fatal, mistake to try to make a film correspond exactly with what is written on paper, to translate onto

the screen structures that have been thought out in advance, purely intellectually. That simple operation can be carried out by any professional craftsman. Because it is a living process, artistic creation demands a capacity for direct observation of the ever-changing material world, which is constantly in movement.

The painter with the help of colour, the writer—of words, the composer—of sounds, are all engaged in a relentless, grinding struggle to master the material on which their work is based.

Cinema came into being as a means of recording the very *movement* of reality: factual, specific, within time and unique; of reproducing again and again the moment, instant by instant, in its fluid mutability—that instant over which we find ourselves able to gain mastery by imprinting it on film. That is what determines the medium of cinema. The author's conception becomes a living, human witness that can excite and hold an audience only when we are able to plunge it into the rushing current of reality, which we hold fast in each tangible, concrete moment we depict—one and unique in texture as in feeling . . . Otherwise the film is doomed—it will die before it is born.

After I had finished *Ivan's Childhood* I felt I was somewhere on the very edge of cinema. As in the game of 'warm and cold'—you can feel someone's presence in the dark room even if he is holding his breath; it was somewhere right next to me. My own excitement made me realise that: like the restlessness of a gundog that has picked up a scent. A miracle had happened—the film had worked. Now something else was being demanded of me: I had to understand what cinema is.

That was when the idea of 'imprinted time' occurred to me; an idea that allowed me to develop a principle, with points of reference that would hold my fantasy in check as I searched for form, for ways of handling images. A principle that would free my hands, making it possible to cut away everything unnecessary, alien or irrelevant, so that the question of what the film needed and what it must avoid would be solved of itself.

I now know two directors who worked with rigid self-imposed constraints to help them create a true form for the realisation of their idea: Mizoguchi and Bresson. But Bresson is perhaps the only man in the cinema to have achieved the perfect fusion of the finished work with a concept theoretically formulated beforehand. I know of no other artist as consistent as he is in this respect. His

guiding principle was the elimination of what is known as expressiveness, in the sense that he wanted to do away with the frontier between the image and actual life; that is, to render life itself graphic and expressive. No special feeding in of material, nothing laboured, nothing that smacks of deliberate generalisation. Paul Valéry could have been thinking of Bresson when he wrote: 'Perfection is achieved only by avoiding everything that might make for conscious exaggeration.' Apparently no more than modest, simple observation of life. The principle has something in common with Zen art, where, in our perception, precise observation of life passes paradoxically into sublime artistic imagery. Perhaps only in Pushkin is the relationship between form and content so magical, God-given and organic. But Pushkin was like Mozart in that he created as he breathed, without having to construct working principles. . . . And in the poetry of film, Bresson, more than anyone else, has united theory and practice in his work with a singleness of purpose, consistently and uniformly.

A clear, sober view of the conditions of one's task makes it easier to find a form exactly adequate to one's thoughts and feelings, without recourse to experiment.

Experiment—not to say, search! Can a concept like experiment have any relevance, for instance, to the poet who wrote:

*Shadows of night lie on the Georgian hills;  
In front of me roars the Aragva.  
I feel at ease and sad; there's a radiance in my sighs,  
My sighs are all of you,  
Of you, and you alone . . . My melancholy  
Is untouched by torment or distraction,  
And my heart is burning and loving once more  
Because it cannot do other than love.\**

Nothing could be more meaningless than the word 'search' applied to a work of art. It covers impotence, inner emptiness, lack of true creative consciousness, petty vainglory. 'An artist who is seeking'—these words are merely the cover for a middle-brow acceptance of inferior work. Art is not science, one can't start experimenting. When an experiment remains on the level of experiment, and not a stage in the process of producing the finished

\*Of course no translation can do justice to this perfect poem.—Tr.



work which the artist went through in private—then the aim of art has not been attained. Again, Paul Valéry has an interesting comment on this in his essay, 'Degas, Dance, Design':

'They [some painters contemporary with Degas—A.T.] managed to confuse exercise with opus, and took as an end what should merely be means. Nothing could be more "modern". For a work to be "finished", all that reveals or suggests its manufacture has to be made invisible. The artist, according to the time-honoured stipulation, must show himself only in his style, and must keep up his exertions until his labour has erased every trace of labour. However, as concern with the individual and with the moment gradually came to prevail over concern with the work itself and its perpetuation, that condition for finishing began to seem not only useless and tedious, but actually at variance with *truth*, *sensitivity* and the manifestation of *genius*. Personality became all-important, even for the public. The sketch acquired the value of the picture.'

Indeed, in the art of the latter half of the twentieth century, mystery has been lost. Today artists want instantaneous and total recognition—immediate payment for something that takes place in the realm of the spirit. In this respect the figure of Kafka is outstanding: he printed nothing during his lifetime, and in his will instructed his executor to burn all he had written; in mentality he belonged, morally speaking, to the past. That was why he suffered so much, being out of tune with his time.

What passes for art today is for the most part a demonstration of itself, for it is a fallacy to suppose that method can become the meaning and aim of art. Nonetheless, most modern artists spend their time self-indulgently demonstrating method.

The whole question of *avant-garde* is peculiar to the twentieth century, to the time when art has steadily been losing its spirituality. The situation is worst in the visual arts, which today are almost totally devoid of spirituality. The accepted view is that this situation reflects the despiritualised state of society. And of course, on the level of simple observation of the tragedy, I agree: that is what it does reflect. But art must transcend as well as observe; its role is to bring spiritual vision to bear on reality: as did Dostoevsky, the first to have given inspired utterance to the incipient disease of the age.

The whole concept of *avant-garde* in art is meaningless. I can see



Solaris  
Chris Kelvin (Donatas  
Banionis), in the space  
station.

what it means as applied to sport, for instance. But to apply it to art would be to accept the idea of progress in art; and though progress has an obvious place in technology—more perfect machines, capable of carrying out their functions better and more accurately—how can anyone be more advanced in art? How could Thomas Mann be said to be better than Shakespeare?

People tend to talk about experiment and search above all in relation to the *avant-garde*. But what does it mean? How can you experiment in art? Have a go and see how it turns out? But if it hasn't worked, then there's nothing to see except the private problem of the person who has failed. For the work of art carries within it an integral aesthetic and philosophical unity; it is an organism, living and developing according to its own laws. Can one talk of experiment in relation to the birth of a child? It is senseless and immoral.

Could it be that the people who started talking about *avant-garde* were those who were not capable of separating the wheat from the tares? Confused by the new aesthetic structures, lost in the face of the real discoveries and achievements, not capable of finding any criteria of their own, they included under the one head of *avant-garde* anything that was not familiar and easily understood—just in case, in order not to be wrong? I like the story of Picasso, who when asked about his 'search' replied wittily and pertinently (clearly irritated by the question): 'I don't seek, I find.'

And can search really be applied to anyone as great as Lev



**Mirror**  
*The old house, reconstructed from family photographs, in which the Narrator was born and spent his childhood, and in which his father and mother lived.*

Tolstoy: the old man, you understand, was seeking! It's ridiculous; though some Soviet critics almost say just that, pointing to how he lost his way with his search for God and non-violent resistance to evil—so he can't have been looking in the right place . . .

Search as a process (and there is no other way of looking at it) has the same bearing on the complete work as wandering through the forest with a basket in search of mushrooms has to the basketful of mushrooms when you have found them. Only the latter—the full basket—is a work of art: the contents are real and unconditional, whereas wandering through the forest remains the personal affair of someone who enjoys walking and fresh air. On this level deception amounts to evil intent. "The bad habit of mistaking metonym for revelation, metaphor for proof, a spate of words for fundamental knowledge, and oneself for a genius—that is an evil which is with us when we are born," observes Valéry, again, sarcastically, in

'Introduction to *The System of Leonardo da Vinci*'.

In cinema search and experiment present even more difficulties. You are given a roll of film, and the equipment, and you have to fix on the film what matters, what the film is being made for.

The idea and aim of a picture have to be clear to the director from the outset—quite apart from the fact that nobody is going to pay him for vague experiments. Whatever happens, no matter how much the artist searches—and that remains his private, purely personal affair—from the moment those researches are fixed on film (retakes are rare, and in manufacturing language mean defective products), that is, from the moment his idea has become objectivised, one must assume that the artist has already found the thing he wants to tell the audience about through cinema, and is no longer wandering in the dark.

In the next chapter we shall look in detail at the forms in which an idea becomes embodied in a film. For the moment I want to say a few words about the rapidity with which films become dated, a phenomenon which is regarded as one of its essential attributes, and in fact has to do with the ethical aim of a picture.

It would be absurd to speak, for instance, of the *Divine Comedy* being dated. And yet films which seemed a few years ago to be major events unexpectedly turn out to be feeble, inept, like school-boy attempts. And why? The main reason as I see it is that as a rule the film-maker doesn't see his work as morally exacting, as an act of crucial significance to him personally: and true artistic work can be done in no other spirit. A work becomes dated as a result of the conscious effort to be expressive and contemporary; these are not things to be achieved: they have to be in you.

In those arts which count their existence in tens of centuries the artist sees himself, naturally and without question, as more than narrator or interpreter: above all he is an individual who has decided to formulate for others, with complete sincerity, his truth about the world . . . Film-makers, on the other hand, have a feeling of being second-rate, and that is their undoing.

Actually, I can see why. Cinema is still looking for its language and is only now coming somewhere near grasping it. The cinema's progress towards self-awareness has always been hampered by its equivocal position, hanging between art and the factory: the original sin of its genesis in the market-place.

The question of what constitutes the language of the cinema is far



Mirror *The Mother* (Margarita Terekhova): Arseniy Tarkovsky's poem,  
PERVIYE SVIDANYA—FIRST MEETINGS.

## First Meetings

*Every moment that we were together  
Was a celebration, like Epiphany,  
In all the world the two of us alone.  
You were holdier, lighter than a bird's wing,  
Heady as vertigo you ran downstairs  
Two steps at a time, and led me  
Through damp lilac, into your domain  
On the other side, beyond the mirror.*

*When night came I was granted favour,  
The gates before the altar opened wide  
And in the dark our nakedness was radiant  
As slowly it inclined. And waking  
I would say, 'Blessings upon you!  
And knew my benediction was presumptuous:  
You slept, the lilac stretched out from the  
table*

*To touch your eyelids with a universe of blue,  
And you received the touch upon your eyelids  
And they were still, and still your hand was  
warm.*

*Vibrant rivers lay inside the crystal,  
Mountains loomed through mist, seas foamed,  
And you held a crystal sphere in your hands,  
Seated on a throne as still you slept,  
And—God in heaven!—you belonged to me.  
You awoke and you transfigured  
The words that people utter every day,  
And speech was filled to overflowing  
With ringing power, and the word 'you'  
Discovered its new purport: it meant 'king'.  
Ordinary objects were at once transfigured,  
Everything—the jug, the basin—when  
Placed between us like a sentinel  
Stood water, laminary and firm.*

*We were led, not knowing whither,  
Like mirages before us there receded  
Cities built by miracle,  
Wild mint was laying itself beneath our feet,  
Birds travelling by the same route as ourselves,  
And in the river fishes swam upstream;  
And the sky unrolled itself before our eyes.*

*When fate was following in our tracks  
Like a madman with a razor in his hand.*

Arseniy Tarkovsky  
(Translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair)

from simple; it is not yet clear even to professionals. When we talk of the language of cinema as modern or not modern, we tend to gloss over the essential issues and see only a collection of current techniques, as often as not borrowed from the neighbour arts. We thus fall captive to the transient, chance assumptions of the moment. It becomes possible to say, for instance, that today 'the flashback is the cinema's last word', and tomorrow to declare just as presumptuously that 'any dislocation of time is finished in cinema, the tendency today is towards classical plot development.' Surely no method can of itself either date or be right for the spirit of the time? The first thing to establish must still be what the author means, and only then—why he has used this or that form. Of course we are not discussing the wholesale adoption of well-worn methods—that comes under imitation and mechanical craftsmanship and as such is not an artistic problem.

The methods of film change, of course, like those of any other art form. I have already mentioned how the first cinema audiences ran from the theatre in terror at the sight of the steam-engine advancing upon them from the screen, and screamed with horror when they thought a close-up was a severed head. Today these methods in themselves arouse no emotion in anyone, and we use as generally accepted punctuation marks what yesterday appeared as a shattering discovery; and it wouldn't occur to anyone to suggest that the close-up is out of date.

Before passing into general use, however, discoveries of methods and means have to come about as the natural and only way for an artist, using his own language, to communicate as fully as possible his own perception of the world. The artist never looks for methods as such, for the sake of aesthetics; he is forced, painfully, to devise them as a means of imparting faithfully his—author's—view of reality.

The engineer invents machines, guided by people's daily needs—he wants to make labour, and thus life, easier for them. However, not by bread alone . . . The artist could be said to extend his range in order to further communication, to enable people to understand one another on the highest intellectual, emotional, psychological and philosophical level. Thus the artist's efforts, too, are directed towards making life better, more perfect, making it easier for people to understand one another.

Not that an artist is necessarily simple and clear in his account of

himself or in his reflections on life—these can indeed be hard to understand. But communication always demands exertion. Without it, indeed without passionate commitment, it is actually not possible for one person to understand another.

And so the discovery of a method becomes the discovery of someone who has acquired the gift of speech. And at that point we may speak of the birth of an image; that is, of a revelation. And those means which only yesterday were devised to communicate a truth attained through pain and toil, by tomorrow may well become—indeed do become—a well-tried stereotype.

If a skilful craftsman uses highly developed modern means to speak of some subject which does not touch him personally, and if he has a certain taste, he can for a time take his audiences in. However, the ephemeral nature of his film will be clear soon enough; sooner or later time inexorably shows up the hollowness of any work that is less than the expression of a unique, personal worldview. For artistic creation is not just a way of formulating information that exists objectively, merely requiring a few professional skills. In the end it is the very form of the artist's existence, his sole means of expression, and his alone. And the limp word, search, clearly does not apply to a triumph over a muteness that demands unrelieved, superhuman effort.