

Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966)—“Art is a Form of Prayer”

“They are about the extreme manifestation of loyalty to a moral debt, the struggle for it, and faith in it—even to the extent of a personality crisis. They are about an individual armed with conviction, an individual with a sense of personal destiny, for whom catastrophe is an unbroken human soul. I’m interested in a hero that goes on to the end despite everything. Because only such a person can claim victory. The dramatic form of my films is a token of my desire to express the struggle and the greatness of the human spirit. I think you can easily connect with this concept with my previous films. Both Ivan and Andrei do everything against their own safety. The first physically, the second in a spiritual sense. Both of them in search for an ideal, moral way of living.” —Interview with Naum Abramov (1970)

In Tarkovsky's *Sculpting in Time*, he reflects on the nature of the artist, the director, the film image, and most other aspects of filmmaking. Chapter 5, “The film image,” is the longest and the most exacting of the chapters, focusing not only on the film image, but also on time, rhythm, and editing; scenarios and shooting scripts; graphic realization; film actors and film music. According to Tarkovsky, while the artistic image gestures toward the infinite, in practice it incarnates a particular moment of existence, that of the “life principle,” which has its own concrete beauty. The image is a gift given to us that we may elusively grasp the totality of existence. In cinema the images mimic the subjective perception of the objects in the world.

Exploratory Questions

- What are the most important images in the film?
- What kinds of shots does Tarkovsky favor?
- How does he use tracking shots? Crane shots?
- How does he use time in shots as a form of operative pressure?
- How does he bring out the personality of his actors?

Tarkovsky on Rublev & Theophanes

As for Roublev, he is opposed to Theophanes the Greek in the film. (...) but with a higher level of intensity. Theophanes the Greek could adopt a more remote, more philosophical attitude than Roublev because he was a painter covered with glory, he was not a monk, he was generally more cynical (...) Roublev abstains from reacting like Theophanes. He goes further. He doesn't express the unbearable weight of his life, of the world around him. He looks for the grain of hope, of love, of faith among the people of his time. (...) He expresses the attraction towards unity, fraternity, love—everything the people lack yet which Roublev feels to be indispensable. . . .Roublev was obviously a man who was able to express himself, to express his ideal, and his genius is to have made that ideal coincide with that of his people. Whereas Theophanes the Greek is one who, like they say in the Orient, “sings what he see.” —Interview (1969)

1. What is the meaning of the balloon ride that opens the film?
2. What does the film reveal and not reveal about the jester who is taken by the soldiers? Why does he return later in the film?
3. Why does Kirill make his move back to secular life? What motivates him? How does he change as the film develops?
4. How would you characterize the debate between Nicholas and Andrei?

5. What is the visual and overall artistic impact of the crucifixion scene?
6. What is the tone of the witchcraft scene? (59:00-1:12) What meaning does it add to the overall film?
7. How would characterize Rublev's motivations during the scene? Is he simple curious? Attracted? Repulsed?
8. Why does Rublev quote the 13th chapter of I Corinthians?
9. What does the blinding of the craftsmen suggest about the overall theme?
10. What is the film's understanding of violence?
11. What do you make of the irony of the Russian prince's brother explaining the icon to the Tartar warrior?
12. Why does Rublev talk to Theophanes's ghost after the destruction of Vladimir?
13. Why does he take a vow of silence? Is he right to do so?
14. What kind of parallels can you draw between Boriska and Rublev?
15. What role do the princely brothers play in the art?
16. Why is it Kirill who must urge Rublev to return to painting?
17. How much did Boriska really know and at what level?
18. What does the film want to teach us about being an artist?
19. Why does the film end with portions of actual Rublev icons, then thunder, rain, and horses?

