

# Andrei Tarkovsky's Production of *Boris Godunov* as an Artistic Credo

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**Abstract**—The paper discusses the Russian film maker Andrei Tarkovsky's production of Modest Mussorgsky's 1872-1874 opera *Boris Godunov* at the Royal Opera House in London in 1983. The production, which has become legendary, is, among other things, the director's statement of his aesthetic convictions, just as Alexander Pushkin's Romantic tragedy and Mussorgsky's realist opera were expressions of their understanding of art's nature and purpose. The production took place between Tarkovsky's last two films, *Nostalgia* (1983) and *Sacrifice* (1986), both focusing on the role of the artist in the contemporary world. Such a framing highlights the same thread in the opera: a meditation simultaneously on history and on art. Tarkovsky's philosophical sensibility readily resonates with the Pushkinian poetic tradition. What in its centre, yet again, is the artist's concern with truth as it reveals itself in art.

**Keywords**—Andrei Tarkovsky; opera; *Boris Godunov*; Modest Mussorgsky; Alexander Pushkin; Russian cinema

## I. INTRODUCTION

Operatic staging is not so ephemeral a genre as it may seem to be at first glance. In 1978 the Bolshoi Theatre was still showing, for example, the 1948 production of Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* by Leonid Baratov as its standard version, in which the original was badly mangled [1]. Andrei Tarkovsky's production of the same opera, based on a more faithful redaction of the score, at Covent Garden in 1983 has been the regular version of *Boris* at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg since 1990. These are comparable and considerable longevities, and they suggest that a particular production – directorial decisions about the set and costume design, the movement of actors/singers on the stage, the *mise-en-scène*, the gestures and postures, all of which add up to a unique artistic vision – is something that approaches the status of a work of art rather than a merely interpretative achievement. Among other things, it is one artist's dialogue with another, the director speaking with the author. In this dialogue it is not just the composer-librettist who is heard speaking his thoughts, but also the director who clothes the score and the libretto into its theatrical apparel and gives it “body and pressure.” The listener-spectator contemplates two perspectives at once, where each, hopefully, illuminates the other.

This is how I approach Andrei Tarkovsky's Royal Opera House production of Mussorgsky's *Boris*: it allows us to hear

the voice of the director, woven into a conversation with the voice of the composer, and both voices help us hear the harmony and the polyphonic counterpoint between them. The staging of the opera is a window into the aesthetic world of Andrei Tarkovsky, and I attempt to discern in his rendering of Mussorgsky's classic his own distinctive artistic philosophy.

## II. THE HISTORY OF THE PRODUCTION

The history of the production began in 1982, when, as Tarkovsky was finishing work on *Nostalgia* in Italy, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in London invited him to produce Modest Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* (the 1872-1874 version). The invitation was the result of Claudio Abbado's (1933-2014) intercession, who, when asked to conduct the opera, insisted that ROH invite Tarkovsky to produce it. Abbado, who was chief conductor at La Scala at that time and soon became London Symphony Orchestra's music director, was Tarkovsky's admirer since he had seen *Andrei Rublëv* earlier in the 1960s. On 6 August 1982, Tarkovsky made an entry in his diary about “a surprising concert” in which Abbado conducted Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony. “Amazing,” commented Tarkovsky, “Huge success”<sup>1</sup> [2]. He also mentioned a request from John Tooley, General Director of the Royal Opera House, to name a set designer for *Boris Godunov*, which makes it clear that negotiations about the production had been under way for some time and were already at an advanced stage<sup>2</sup>. The set designer was finally found in March next year, when Tarkovsky made a note that Nicolas Dvigubsky, who was preparing an exhibition in Paris at the time, had agreed to work with him on *Boris* [4]. (Tarkovsky bitterly regretted his choice later.) On 20 March 1983 Tarkovsky met with Tooley, who, he said, “wanted [to stage] *Boris* very much” [5]. Dvigubsky visited Tarkovsky on 2 May, in the company of Tooley's assistant, to discuss the upcoming production. The

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I rely on the edition of these diaries in Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martirolog. Dnevnik* (Martyrologue. Diaries) (no place; Istituto Internazionale Andrej Tarkovskij, 2008), further referred to as *M*.

<sup>2</sup> In September 1982 Tarkovsky met Luciano Alberti to discuss staging an opera in Florence, namely, Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, with conductor Carlos Kleiber (1930-2004), in April 1983 (*M* 456). Robert Bird notes that “Tarkovsky's production of *Boris Godunov* was also [like his staging of *Hamlet* at Lenkom in 1976-77] closely preceded by [Iurii] Liubimov, who worked with Claudio Abbado at La Scala” [3].

director remarked that he was ready to begin: “[I] have ideas” [6].

Tarkovsky arrived in London on 24 September 1983, and the next day the first production meeting took place, at which Abbado was present [7]. The conductor and the director became close collaborators and passionately exchanged ideas during the production period, sometimes openly disagreeing in public, even as a genuine, sincere friendship and mutual respect developed between them<sup>3</sup>. The premiere took place on 31 October, and the opera ran through eleven performances, to great international critical acclaim and remarkable success with the audiences. It was repeated at Covent Garden next year, and the year after that, then once again in 1988, after which it was picked up by the Kirov Theatre in St Petersburg in 1990 under Valery Gergiev's baton, with Stephen Lawless, the assistant director, and Irina Brown, Tarkovsky's interpreter and assistant during the original production, now staging it – remarkably, with Robert Lloyd, who had sung Boris' part in 1983, performing again. It is this production that was recorded on video by BBC and a CD by Phillips and thus became the “standard” record of Tarkovsky's singular excursion into the genre of opera. It ran till 1994. Abbado renewed it in 1991 in Vienna at the opening of the Andrei Tarkovsky Festival. (Covent Garden played it that year, too.) The San Francisco War Memorial Opera House produced it in 1992, with conductor Donald Runnicles and stage direction by Lawless. In 2003 Covent Garden returned to it once again and in 2006 Gergiev resumed it at his theatre, now named Mariinskii; the same year it was produced in Monte Carlo. In 2011 the Dallas Opera joined the list, with Graeme Jenkins as music director and Lawless again. One reviewer called the attempt “a stunning Dallas Opera revival of Tarkovsky's classic”<sup>4</sup>. I am sure my quick overview is incomplete and there may have been other stagings that have so far escaped my attention. Commentators also routinely view Alexander Sokurov's production of the 1869 version of Boris Godunov at the Bolshoi Theatre in 2007 as a disciple's response to the master. Tarkovsky's Boris is now an integral and acclaimed part of the film director's legacy, as well as of operatic culture both in Russia and abroad<sup>5</sup>.

### III. CRITICAL RECEPTION

I shall only briefly touch on the critical reception in the British press during the first run of the production in the autumn of 1983. Writing in *The Guardian*, Anthony Arblaster described the opera as a “political work” pursuing the theme of the intelligentsia and the people [8]. Mussorgsky, he remarked, “also [like Leo Tolstoy] shared the concern of his radical contemporaries that art should embody not so much beauty as truth, and should play a responsible social role.” He also favourably compared

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview with Irina Brown in London, 11 June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.operawarhorses.com](http://www.operawarhorses.com).

<sup>5</sup> I first saw the Tarkovsky production at the Mariinsky Theatre in June 2017. By that time it had become the standard version of the opera there. The wear showed. The tenor who sang the part of the Simpleton tore the sack off his head in the middle of the Cathedral scene – against explicit instructions by Tarkovsky. Tenors will be tenors.

Mussorgsky and Verdi, both nationalist composers, with Richard Wagner and his obnoxious views. The well-known music writer Paul Griffiths, whose 1978 book *Modern Music: A Concise History* has since become a classic, wrote a very favourable review in the *Times* but remarked that the Simpleton turning to the cross in the end was “a false note” because there was “no such religious promise” in Mussorgsky's own design; it made the finale “too easily positive” [9]. Peter Stadlen wrote a glowing review in the *Daily Telegraph*; a similarly friendly account, signed GLM, appeared in the *Morning Star*; Bryan Northcott likewise made insightful comments in the *Sunday Telegraph*; and the *Metropolitan* described the tragic conflict of the opera as “civilisation at the crossroads” [10]. Tarkovsky himself was very pleased with the press. “Fortunately, the play turned out well,” he summed up in his diary a month later. “It was a huge success. And then during all the eight shows [sic] the applause lasted over twenty minutes. [...] Here in Rome there was also a lot of press about the triumphal success of the play” [11]. He mentioned that both the French television producer Sophie Toscan du Plantier and Abbado wanted to turn the opera into a film, and that he approved of the idea.

### IV. SOME DISTINCTIVE DETAILS OF THE STAGING

As Irina Brown notes, “The opera was to be performed on a single set, with swift and minimal scene changes, using lighting to shape the scenes, the space and the story” [12]. The set consisted of a ramp in the middle, “surrounded by the ramparts of a Kremlin-like fortress.” The ramp culminated in an arch-shaped gate “in a perpetual state of repair.” “Changes of visual details within the arch,” writes Brown, “define the place of action” [13]. The ramp was flanked by depressions on both sides (“wells,” as Brown calls them), where the mass of folk huddled and moved, with narrow galleries flanking the “wells” in turn. At times, there was a large bronze-coloured ball swinging like a pendulum in the background at strategic moments in the story. It eventually stopped “as Boris' heart stops,” in Brown's words, “while a figure of Tsarevitch Dimitri's ghost emerges from behind it.” “The boy sits down, slowly watching it come to a standstill” [14]. Commentators also noted the cinematic quality of Tarkovsky's staging, the short blackouts during which those “swift and minimal scene changes” occurred, something that was greatly assisted by Robert Bryan's lighting. Lighting in general became a highly significant part of the production's aesthetic – as though the film projector had been assimilated somehow to the opera hall and the light designer became something of a camera man. The use of a large carpet-map of Russia, spread on the central ramp in certain scenes, was also a notable detail, with characters stomping on it to assert their claims or, at one poignant moment, with a mortified Boris spasmodically clutching at it and wrapping himself in it. An especial significance belongs to the figure of the Simpleton. “Pushkin's play,” Tarkovsky remarked, “ends with the cry ‘Long live Shuisky!’ and then comes the stage direction: *The people remain silent*. Mussorgsky closes with the Simpleton and I see the removal of that sack [over the fool's head] as the most important gesture of the opera” [15]. According to Mussorgsky's own stage directions, the Holy Fool is supposed to be repairing

his best shoes in the end: a futile labour. Tarkovsky's Simpleton gazes at the fleeting image of a white angelic figure in the sky. The effect of these features is to highlight the presence of the transcendent world in the dramatic unfolding of events. Dimitri's apparitions had been treated in prior productions mostly as Boris' hallucinations but Tarkovsky "materialised" them and made the ghost visible, its appearances regular and following certain logic – or at least suggesting one. The pendulum also evokes the inexorable presence of some objective moral order that cannot be thwarted by the swarming motion of characters, masses, dancing pairs, and rushing mobs in the foreground; this order exists beyond the hustle and bustle of the sublunar world, and intrudes into human affairs from there, indirectly but inescapably.

#### V. COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO FILMS

After the premiere Tarkovsky remarked in an interview: "Directing an opera fulfils one of my greatest dreams. It's completely different from film and theatre"<sup>6</sup>. In Tarkovsky's oeuvre the production of *Boris Godunov* is nestled between his last two films. Igor Evlampiev describes these films as the director's most "didactic," at the cost of their artistic integrity perhaps [17]. Whether or not his assessment is correct, *Nostalgia* and *Sacrifice* are certainly as explicitly focussed on the figure of the *artist* as *Andrei Rubl'ev* (1966-1971). In *Nostalgia* the poet Andrei Gorchakov visits Italy as part of his research for the biography of the nineteenth-century Russian musician Pavel Sosnovsky who was an indentured servant. Tarkovsky notes in his diary that Gorchakov is actually composing a libretto for an opera about Sosnovsky [18]. Unable to overcome his nostalgia, Gorchakov's hero did return to Russia; unable to bear his bondage, he ended his own life. The parallels with Gorchakov's predicament are only too obvious but they are not pedalled by Tarkovsky. Instead, the focus quickly shifts to nostalgia of a different kind: one for a spiritually meaningful life and course of action for Gorchakov himself. At the pleading of the local holy fool Domenico and after tortured indecision, Gorchakov finally does perform an act that is supposed to save the world: he carries a lit candle across an empty pool at a provincial Italian resort. As he reaches the other end of the pool, candle still aflame, he succumbs to the heart failure that has loomed over him all along.

In *Sacrifice* the former actor and now professor of aesthetics Alexander is called upon to perform a similarly world-saving act after the announcement on television that the nuclear holocaust has begun. In an ardent and panicked prayer to a God in Whom he has never believed, Alexander pledges to burn his house, his most precious possession, if God spares his son and averts the calamity. Recalling the hero of *Andrei Rubl'ev*, Alexander vows to be silent if God grants his prayer. There is a holy fool of sorts in this picture, too: the epileptic postman Otto, serving as the messenger, who, similarly to Domenico's assigning a mission to Gorchakov, sends Alexander to a woman named Maria,

rumoured to be a witch<sup>7</sup>. When he reaches Maria in utter despair, their encounter culminates in the act of love, after which Alexander wakes to a world bypassed, as it were, by the man-made Apocalypse. He fulfils his promise to God: he burns the house and is soon taken away by an ambulance as a madman himself.

#### VI. DIRECTOR'S DIARIES

Tarkovsky was, apparently, going through a metanoia during the period when he worked on the two films (1981-1986) and it is safe to assume that the films – and the opera between them – became, among other things, his artistic laboratory for comprehending his own role as an artist. Reflections on the nature of creativity are not infrequent in his diaries at that time and it is natural to suppose that the insights he arrived at found expression, one way or another, in his artistic output. This is what he wrote, for example, in the entry of his diary for 13 November 1981:

[A]rt is the reaction of the human being (finding itself on one of the lower levels) to the aspiration towards a higher one. And it is this dramatic conflict (given [this human being's] inability to see the path) that is the content of art, of the artistic image. [...] Art (as testimony of man's moral effort) will cease to exist, if all people ascend to new levels, [new] heights [19].

Given his family background, Tarkovsky was never perhaps truly a Soviet person, that is, raised in strict atheism and adherence to Soviet ideology, and the transition to a spiritual quest did not cause a dramatic upheaval in his psyche. The landscape of his spiritual interests at this time is crisscrossed by most varied elemental currents: Eastern Orthodoxy, Zen, psychics, New Age, Western scientists who believed in God, and researchers of afterlife. (The psychic Juna, who was well-known in the Soviet Union in those years, was his bosom friend in Russia, and in Italy her place was taken by a similar figure, named Angela.) There are numerous entries in Tarkovsky's diaries about both these women. The director often resorted to their help in difficult circumstances for psychic support, predictions, and comfort. The picture suggests a quest that is reminiscent of that part of the Russian intelligentsia who sought, like Dmitry Merezhkovsky, a "new religious consciousness" earlier in the twentieth century. This quest is fuelled by Tarkovsky's resentment of modern culture, of its obsession with materialism and superficiality of interests. On 17 August 1983, for example, he wrote: "Materialism has afflicted the West's entire life and paralyses it. Here materialism is truly in action. In Russia it is not materialism, but anti-idealism. It is the same as idealism, except in the reverse". [20] His attitude was not so much anti-Western as anti-modern – like so much of the Russian religious-philosophical thought of the Silver Age that was deeply informed by modern experience and critiqued modernity from the point of view largely afforded by this experience. A detailed characterisation of Tarkovsky's spiritual preoccupations can

<sup>6</sup> Wire press release.

<sup>7</sup> One recalls also the simple girl in *Andrei Rubl'ev*, who accompanies the hero (for whose sake, in fact, he commits murder) but then leaves him to become the wife of a Mongol warrior.

be found in Igor Evlampiev's *Khudozhestvennaia filosofia Andreia Tarkovskogo* (The Artistic Philosophy of Andrei Tarkovsky) [21] that I have already mentioned above. Evlampiev does not use the terminology of theurgic theories, but he does, nonetheless, regard Tarkovsky as a religious thinker and finds in him someone who continues the tradition of Russian religious philosophy. There are statements in Tarkovsky's diaries that provide a fairly sound basis for such a view. In the entry for 22 May 1983, we find, for example, the following observation:

I keep thinking now, all the time, about how right those [authors] are, who think that creativity is a spiritual state. Why? – Because man attempts to imitate the Creator? But is this where virtue is? Isn't it ridiculous, while imitating the demiurge, to think that we serve him? Our duty before the Creator is, by using the freedom of the will that He gave us and struggling with the evil within us, to remove the obstacles on the path towards Him, to grow spiritually, to fight the abomination within us. One must purify oneself. Then we shall fear nothing [22].

This statement is particularly important for our theme. On the one hand, it shows Tarkovsky clearly siding with a spiritualist view of artistic creativity but, on the other hand, he seems to take a critical view of the human artist imitating the divine Creator. This criticism applies (almost) equally both to the Romantic genius, who may be Tarkovsky's chief target, and the would-be theurgist, that is, the artist who seeks to fuse art with religious practice. Tarkovsky's own response to the spiritual call falls more readily within the category of ascetic humility than creativity in Nikolai Berdyaev's sense of the word. Berdyaev doubtless cast his theurgist in a Romantic light [23]. Tarkovsky, by contrast, is grappling with the *distinction* between the spiritual nature of artistic creativity and the religious work of self-purification.

## VII. THE PRODUCTION'S PHILOSOPHICAL IMPORT

Speaking to John Higgins of the *Times*, Tarkovsky called *Boris Godunov* “the voice of God” and described the Simpleton as “a concept” like Prince Myshkin from Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* or Cervantes' Don Quixote. Brown included in her account of the production her notes from rehearsals, with Tarkovsky's instructions, in which he actually said that “*The Voice of God* (Голос Божий)... in other words: The Voice of Conscience” might be an alternative title for *Boris* [16].

Mussorgsky's opera projects at once an anti-progressivist and anti-Romanticist view of art. The opera shows a history whose progress is disastrous and a world where the artist who wishes to speak the truth can do so only outside any space that modern society recognises as legitimate. Mussorgsky seems to feel that the artist's very existence is antithetical to the nature of modern politics. And yet the artist's is the only voice that enunciates the universal truth amidst an ominously carnivalesque “market-place of ideas.” Artists constantly rebel against this world, as did Mussorgsky, for the right to enunciate the truth that cannot be accommodated either by ideology or the market. Likewise, his faith in opera's ability to express the truth, however out of

place and disturbing this truth may be, forces one to reflect on the nature of this genre, riddled as it is with convention. The looming paradoxes of non-progressivist humanism and authentic artifice are perhaps the most urgent themes bequeathed to us by the musician whose simultaneous relevance and abjection remain the most distinctive features of his persona.

The philosophical import of the opera is multi-layered. It includes, for example, a certain *operatic aesthetic*, which one can illuminate by comparing Mussorgsky's artistic choices with the aesthetics of Richard Wagner or the philosophy of tragedy of Friedrich Nietzsche. This import contains, no doubt, a *philosophy of history*, on which the glance of the commentator usually lingers. The destiny of Russia, Russia and the West, the folk and the powers that be – all these and other themes are clearly visible in the dramatic fabric of *Boris*. There is also, of course, a *moral* thread in it, which has attracted a great deal of attention from commentators. The guilty conscience of a ruler and the folk's irrepressible resentment of him have by now become interpretative clichés. Less visible is the *religious-spiritual* thread, which for all sorts of reasons has more rarely been the subject of discussion but cannot be totally ignored either – in large measure because Mussorgsky himself consistently and purposefully wove it into the fabric of the opera<sup>8</sup>. All these currents of meaning flow into the overall philosophical import of the work as an *artistic* utterance; that is to say, not just of the opera as a specimen of a particular genre, but as a work of art in general. When we deal with a genre like opera, which often stands out as ostentatiously *conventional*, the question of the relation between, for example, its *religious* content and the *artistic* mode of the utterance comes to the fore – or at least it should. It is critically important to recognise that art in general and opera or cinema in particular subject this religious content to a basic transformation. One can describe this transformation in a variety of ways – by speaking, for example, of “aesthetic distance” or “detachment” or “the ludic nature of art” – but it is clear or at least ought to be clear that the “Eucharist” in Ludwig Beethoven's *Fidelio* (the prisoners' chorus, with bread and wine) belongs to a different sort of actions and events than a Eucharist taking place during a Catholic mass. It is quite clear, in other words, that the angelic figure in the finale of Tarkovsky's *Boris* is an *artistic* image rather than a mythological symbol as the latter functions in religious cult. It should be equally clear, too, that the *ideas* that are blended by the artist into the work and then absorbed from it by the spectator likewise belong to a different plane of thought than *philosophical* reflections proper. No matter how close, religion and philosophy nonetheless belong to the *extra-artistic* realm. But it is here, in the domain of religious symbolism and philosophical concepts, that the artistic is frequently and insensibly confused with the non-artistic. Even if he could sometimes be blamed for this in his ruminations, in his *creative* work Tarkovsky was never

<sup>8</sup> For detailed discussions of the Dimitri theme in the opera, see Taruskin, *Mussorgsky*, and Allan Forte, “Mussorgsky the Modernist”. Religious singing – popular, by the *kaliki*, monastic, and by the court chapel – weighs considerably in the score.

guilty of such confusion. His artistic practice shows that he was fastidiously attentive to the special nature of artistic utterance. All the other layers of the philosophical significance of his production should be viewed precisely in this light: they are artistic rather than religious or philosophical. We do, in fact, know quite well how to tell these things apart; we know the rules of art's play, but this knowledge is mostly practical, that is, we know how to play the game but when we need to comprehend it and express our comprehension in concepts, we do not know how to translate an artistic utterance into the language of religious or philosophical discourse, and may categorise Tarkovsky as a "religious thinker" or to "read" his films as spiritual-philosophical treatises – to say nothing of facile moralising on behalf of one ideology or another<sup>9</sup>.

In historic-philosophical terms, Tarkovsky clearly grasped the idea of two chronotopes, two worlds colliding in Mussorgsky's *Boris*, with characters caught in their dramatic collision. The ghost of the Tsarevitch, the vision of the Holy Trinity in the Cell scene, the swinging pendulum, and the Angel hovering over the pile of corpses – all point to the chronotope of the pre-modern world. These images are to be found neither in Pushkin's drama nor in Mussorgsky's libretto; they are Tarkovsky's original contribution to the reading of the story. Still Tarkovsky's cautious optimism, if one can call it that, is not exactly Pushkin's: what catharsis the poet offers in his tragedy comes from the aesthetic poise of splendid form. Tarkovsky's response is that of a modern artist working in the late twentieth century: his formal language is modernist, but his message is anything but. The significance of his production as a whole cannot be reduced to either of these aspects, but must be understood as a dynamic interaction, an intensely trembling membrane that produces its own, unique music of meaning. Neither Pushkin nor Mussorgsky nor Tarkovsky call for a return to "the absolute past"; the medieval mythical world has lost its battle with modernity and receded into history. But all three artists, and especially Tarkovsky, expose modernity's limits and call for art to reach beyond them.

And yet neither Mussorgsky nor Tarkovsky's visions can be reduced to a flat, superficial doomsday moralising. What triumphs in the opera's finale is not a blind and irrational *Fatum*, but the objective principles that determine the outcomes of characters' actions, not the bacchanal of violence at Kromy, but precisely the inexorable moral law that was despised and shoved aside by the mob. The figure of the Holy Fool in the end is not that of an accuser or judge, but of *pity* for Russia, as she hurls herself into an abyss. The figure of the mythopoeist, whom modern history leaves only the role of a holy fool crying in the wilderness, is a fitting symbol of the artist in the contemporary world. It would be an exaggeration, of course, to say that the artist who strives today to express universal harmony meets no empathy in his or her audience. And yet one cannot suppress anxiety at the sight of those forces that persistently push serious, truth-telling art away from the centre and out into the margins of

<sup>9</sup> Evlampiev concludes his book with a chapter titled "Religious Thinker," while Johnson and Petri routinely reprimand Tarkovsky for sexism and other sins.

culture. Among these forces we find not only powerful ideological propagandistic apparatuses, nor only an equally powerful culture industry, but also, regrettably, the current philosophy of art. With a few isolated exceptions, contemporary aesthetic thought either in Russia or abroad cannot accommodate such an artist. Today's aesthetic thought vacillates between two extremes: ideological moralism of all political colours, on the one side, and hypocritical pan-aestheticism, on the other side, that tries to convince us that the world is a signifier without a signified, infinite Brownian motion of nonsense simulating sense.

At the same time, the artists who are the heirs of Pushkin, Mussorgsky, and Tarkovsky demand from a contemporary philosopher precisely the opposite: a comprehension of their effort as imparting artistic form to a dynamic, evolving, and yet rational order of universal being. They break beyond the framework set for them by the dominant trends in mass culture and aesthetic discourse and demand that truth be returned into the kingdom of art, so that the artist who dedicates his or her work to this truth stop being a holy fool on an empty stage, and that his or her song be transformed from threnody into a dithyramb to life to come.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

But here it is fitting to recall that basic transformation that I mentioned earlier, which occurs when both religious symbolism and philosophical ideas are drawn into the domain of art. The first thing that happens to them is that they are detached from reality: they no longer refer to ultimate values and horizons of consciousness in the same direct manner. They become *material* in the hands of an artist who *plays* with them. The artist *de-absolutizes* them, lifts them from their fixed state, and sets them free from their immediate immersion in reality. The artist performs such a liberating act on absolutely all aspects of human experience: nothing is left standing rigidly fixed to its usual place and everything is set in motion, all of human experience soars away from its moorings, and the infinite multiplicity of life's facets is effortlessly recombined into an alternative to reality – an alternative, whose purpose is precisely to be *other than* life. Such an approach has nothing to do with the panludism that I mentioned above because the dialectical relation between life and art is its beating heart, whereas panludism reduces serious life to ludic art. But it also resists moralism's reduction of art to life, which, as I have already pointed out, is the singular mark of our time. Tarkovsky handled the nature of opera very carefully and his engagement with this most conventional and most unrealistic of all art forms stands as an example of an artist in firm possession of the nature of poetic truth – the truth that only art can articulate, without which the truths of religion turn against themselves and the truths of philosophy cannot even arise.

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- [17] I. Evlampiev, *Khudozhestvennaia filosofii Andreia Tarkovskogo (ARC: Ufa, 2012)*.
- [18] Sosnovsky spent years in Italy and was homesick but, being a serf and indentured servant to his master, return to Russia meant re-enslavement for him. Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martirolog. Dnevnik (Martyrologue. Diaries)* (no place). Istituto Internazionale Andrej Tarkovskij, 2008. P. 465.
- [19] The reference to "levels" comes from the conversation that suggested to Tarkovsky these thoughts. The conversation had occurred earlier that day and in it Ludmila Yakovlevna Reznik spoke of seven levels on which human beings can exist. Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martirolog. Dnevnik (Martyrologue. Diaries)* (no place). Istituto Internazionale Andrej Tarkovskij, 2008. P. 371.
- [20] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martirolog. Dnevnik (Martyrologue. Diaries)* (no place). Istituto Internazionale Andrej Tarkovskij, 2008. P. 505.
- [21] I. Evlampiev, *Khudozhestvennaia filosofii Andreia Tarkovskogo (The Artistic Philosophy of Andrei Tarkovsky)* (Ufa: ARC, 2012), esp. chapters VI-VII and the Conclusion. P. 347-466.
- [22] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Martirolog. Dnevnik (Martyrologue. Diaries)* (no place). Istituto Internazionale Andrej Tarkovskij, 2008. P. 488.
- [23] "[T]he creative experience of [artistic] genius," Berdyaev writes, for example, in *Smysl tvorchestva*, "will be acknowledged as religiously equal in value to the ascetic experience of sainthood". P. 396.