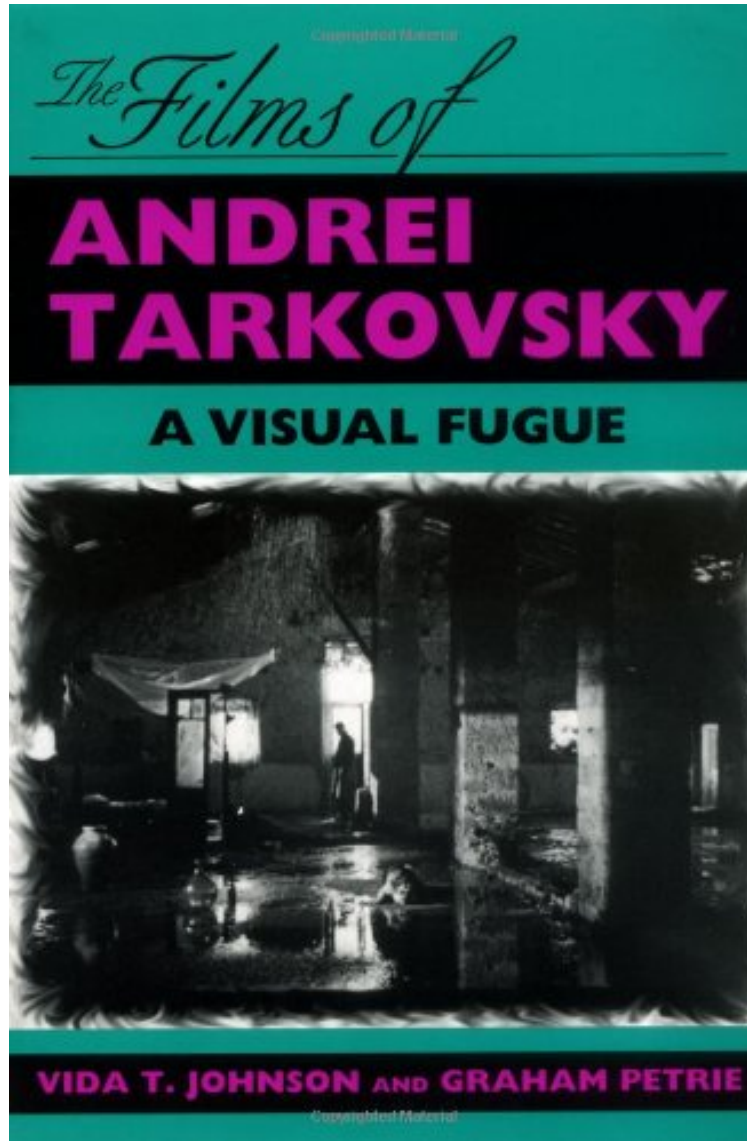


The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue

Vida T. Johnson, Graham Petrie

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Vida T. Johnson, Graham Petrie : The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A MUST-HAVE FOR THOSE TOUCHED BY TARKOVSKY'S WORKBy Larry L. LooneyI agree with points made by some of the various reviewers below. First of all, this book is vital for the general viewer of Tarkovsky's films as a tool for coming to a greater understanding of the director's methods and motivation. They offer synopses of all of the films (with the exception of MIRROR, whose structure is so

unusual as to make a synopsis impractical -- it's analysed almost scene-by-scene in the body of the book) as an appendix -- an essential aid, considering that all of them are subtitled in English, and, as the authors point out in several places, those subtitles are of varying accuracy from edition to edition. It's also very difficult for even the most adept subtitle artisan to convey things such as sarcasm and irony -- very often viewers who don't speak the language in which the film was shot are left in the dark where such subtleties are concerned. The knowledge the authors have accumulated of the Russian language and culture are put to good use here in helping the Western viewer of Tarkovsky's incredible films come to a more complete understanding of them -- an understanding that will always, given the unique nature of this director's work, be tempered by the viewer's own soul and spirit. These films speak to me on that deep level, as I know they do to many, many others -- this is part of what Tarkovsky had in mind, I believe, when he stated that he wanted the audience to work as hard as the director in 'creating' the finished product. Individual films are brought into focus in chapters devoted to them -- Tarkovsky's work-path of creation is followed in detail, outlining conception, planning, struggles with the authorities, critical and public responses, and the director's reflections on the finished works. Some of the other reviewers take exception to the critiques offered by the authors -- and indeed, it's easy to see where their own opinions enter into the writing process. I believe this is going to be a natural part of any book on film, and has to be taken by the reader with a healthy grain of salt. I didn't agree with everything they wrote -- perhaps some of their speculations as to Tarkovsky's psychological and emotional components are based on more information than they were willing to include in detail in this work. Where the authors and I diverge on our views and opinions in no way tainted my enjoyment and appreciation of their efforts. I would recommend this volume very highly -- alongside Tarkovsky's own work, *SCULPTING IN TIME* -- both valuable keys to unlocking the treasure that is the work of this artist.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent overview of Tarkovsky's films

By MarkusG This book contains an excellent, clear and well written overview of Andrei Tarkovsky's films and style as a director. It is very detailed and full of information, all you need to get a guide to these "difficult" films. I also like that even while the authors admire Tarkovsky as a great director, they don't hesitate to point out less flattering sides and flaws in his films. The first part gives some interesting details about the Soviet film industry in the 1960s and 70s, when Tarkovsky produced his first five major films: *Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrei Rublev*, *Solaris*, *Mirror* and *Stalker*. It also nuances the story about how the Soviet system worked against Tarkovsky. Of course, the film bureaucracy was hard to deal with and made several crazy demands that could have ruined T's films. But then again: he actually managed to make five films and get them through the socialist-realist censorship. For example: all 30 demands for cuts and so on on *Solaris* were somehow avoided. Maybe this says something about Tarkovsky's status as a director, his first film (*Ivan's Childhood*) was an immediate international success. Also, there were other directors whose careers were halted by the system when they were only allowed to make one film. The first part also contains biographical information and discussions on Tarkovsky's working method and aesthetics. Tarkovsky wanted films to be a "poetic" art form, and an art that captured "time", like a sculpture of time. Here we can think about the long takes in his films, they got longer over the years and in *The Sacrifice*, his last film, the opening take is over 9 minutes. The second part is an overview of his seven films, one chapter for each. I find the analyses very clear and interesting. One thing I find fascinating is the ambiguity about what is real and what is dream or fantasy. Does the zone in *Stalker* really exist? Is Hari in *Solaris* human? What in *Nostalghia* is dream and what is reality? And does the protagonist in *The Sacrifice* delude himself, or is he more clear than the others? And so on. This is one aspect that makes the films so interesting and open to different interpretations. Also, the authors discuss the use of different themes like fire, rain, milk, horses and so on. They suggest they have no fixed symbolic meaning, but should be seen as poetic themes that recur through the films: the levitation scene in *Solaris* has counterparts in *Mirror* and *Sacrifice*, the hotel room in *Nostalghia* looks similar to the room where *Stalker* lives, the "holy fool" appears as both *Stalker* and *Domenico and Alexander*, the close ups of medieval paintings, the vegetation under water, the rain and so on... This is why the book is called "A Visual Fugue". The third part deepens the analysis of the themes of Tarkovsky's films. All in all I can really recommend this book to anyone who, like me, want an enlightening and clear introduction. Also, the authors (Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie) comments on the Criterion DVD of *Solaris* (my favourite Tarkovsky film). This commentary is recommended listening to (and the DVD is splendid).

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A GOOD SOURCE OF INFORMATION

By Andre Ali Seewood This is not my favorite book on Tarkovsky, but I find myself referring to it often because the authors have arranged a wealth of behind the scenes information about the great filmmaker's working process which is simply indispensable. Moreover, the release dates, plot synopsis, cast and crew lists are also very, very useful since most of Tarkovsky's films have multiple release dates (because of his troubles with Soviet authorities). It is strange I'll admit that this is not my favorite book on Tarkovsky because the scholarship is impeccable and the research on the actual films is thorough, but my main reason for not wholeheartedly recommending this book is because the authors have taken it upon themselves to constantly "hint" at Tarkovsky's alleged bisexuality. Their hinting around at this actually detracts from the beauty and the depth of their scholarship and their work, since they never actually prove that Tarkovsky was bisexual. It is really a red herring- perhaps an attempt to modernize Tarkovsky or throw a little dirt on the legend of an artist so committed to the spiritual health of mankind. I mean really who cares if Tarkovsky was bisexual, that in and of itself does nothing to the experience of his works, nor

to help us understand the impetus of their creation. But begrudgingly, even though this is not my favorite book on Tarkovsky, if you are looking to find out more about this genius his working methods, his reoccurring motifs, the reception of his work in the US and abroad you absolutely have to have this book on your shelf. BUT KNOW THIS: the most important book on Tarkovsky is the book Andrei Tarkovsky wrote himself, SCULPTING IN TIME. There simply is no other testament that can compete with what he wrote about his work and the cinema as an artform. A Visual Fugue simply fills in some of the gaps of Sculpting In Time since Tarkovsky did not write about each and every one of his films in his own book. Screenwriting into Film

Johnson and Petrie have produced an admirable book. Anyone who wants to make sense of Tarkovskys films a very difficult task in any case must read it." The Russian Review "This book is a model of contextual and textual analysis... the Tarkovsky myth is stripped of many of its shibboleths and the thematic structure and coherence of his work is revealed in a fresh and stimulating manner." Europe-Asia Studies "[This book,] with its wealth of new research and critical insight, has set the standard and should certainly inspire other writers to keep on trying to collectively explore the possible meanings of Tarkovskys film world." Canadian Journal of Film Studies "For Tarkovsky lovers as well as haters, this is an essential book. It might make even the haters reconsider." Cineaste "This definitive study, set in the context of Russian cultural history, throws new light on one of the greatest and most misunderstood filmmakers of the past three decades. The text is enhanced by more than 60 frame enlargements from the films.

"Johnson and Petrie have produced an admirable book. Anyone who wants to make sense of Tarkovsky's films -- a very difficult task in any case -- must read it." The Russian "This book is a model of contextual and textual analysis... the Tarkovsky myth is stripped of many of its shibboleths and the thematic structure and coherence of his work is revealed in a fresh and stimulating manner." Europe-Asia Studies "[This book,] with its wealth of new research and critical insight, has set the standard and should certainly inspire other writers to keep on trying to collectively explore the possible meanings of Tarkovsky's film world." Canadian Journal of Film Studies "For Tarkovsky lovers as well as haters, this is an essential book. It might make even the haters reconsider." Cineaste About the Author VIDA T. JOHNSON, Associate Professor and Director of the Russian program at Tufts University, has co-authored, with Graham Petrie, a chapter on Andrei Tarkovsky in Five Filmmakers (edited by Daniel Goulding). GRAHAM PETRIE, Professor of Drama at McMaster University, is the author of The Cinema of Francois Truffaut, History Must Answer to Man: The Contemporary Hungarian Cinema, and Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America 1921-1931.