BETWEEN HEAVEN AND MUD: THE SACRED TIME OF ANDREI TARKOVSKY AND BÉLA TARR



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INTRODUCTION



Andrei Tarkovsky and Béla Tarr are two great "sculptors of time", but their works, while sharing a slow and meditative rhythm, reveal profoundly different ethical and aesthetic values. The images of the Russian director evoke a transcendent world[1],

1. In this essay, we will frequently refer to the philosophical concepts of transcendence and immanence. Transcendence refers to that which goes beyond the direct experience of the world and points to a higher reality or meaning, often spiritual or metaphysical in nature. In the context of this book, Tarkovsky's "vertical" transcendence refers to his cinema's ability to suggest a meaning that surpasses what is visible on the screen, opening a space for connection with the sacred or the infinite.

Immanence, on the other hand, refers to that which is fully rooted in reality, without pointing to a "beyond".

while those of the Hungarian filmmaker describe the relentless reality of a world without hope.

However, while it would be reductive to compare the two filmmakers solely based on their "slow rhythm", it would also be wrong to rigidly oppose them by labeling Tarkovsky's cinema as "transcendent" and Tarr's as "materialist" or "nihilist".

Béla Tarr himself has often stated that he wishes the viewer, when watching his films, to feel "comforted". A statement that, given the radical pessimism of his plots, might seem paradoxical. Yet, it is precisely in his cinematic language that we can grasp the meaning of this wish: the pessimism of the stories does not lead to nihilism because it is transfigured through an experience of time that reveals the immanence of being.

Tarr's "horizontal" transcendence, as we will define it here, is expressed in the way his cinema reveals the depth and beauty of the real, observed in its purest essence, without the need to invoke higher meanings. These two perspectives are not merely aesthetic choices but profoundly different worldviews, which will emerge in the comparison between the two filmmakers.

In Tarr's cinema, the real world is not justified by a higher order, nor does it present itself as a *mirror*[2] of a metaphysical elsewhere. The world is observed in its purest essence, and beauty emerges not from *transcending* reality (as in Tarkovsky) but from *attentiveness* to reality itself: from caring for every moment and gesture, through a gaze capable of profound empathy.

In this sense, we can identify two different forms of openness: a "vertical" one, which seeks to transcend immanence, and a "horizontal" one, which remains rooted in the world. In Tarkovsky, *time opens toward the sacred*; in Tarr, *time embraces the real*.

Among the visible expressions of these "temporal modes", two fundamental figures emerge: *elevation*, a symbolic and spiritual gesture that opens to vertical transcendence, and *legato*, which manifests sacredness through the empathetic and profound observation of the immanent world. This legato, far from being a mere technical artifice, reveals itself as the visible sign of an infinite love for reality: a

2. Let us recall that *"The Mirror"* is, instead, significantly the title of one of Tarkovsky's films.

love that does not seek transcendent meanings but finds sacredness within immanence itself.

In the following pages, we will attempt to explore some essential features of these two poetic universes, showing how both, despite their diversity, succeed in giving meaning to existence through their unique ability to sculpt space and time through images.

We hope, in this way, to offer a small contribution to the understanding of two of the greatest artists in cinema and, above all, to invite the reader to (re)discover their masterpieces.

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE



The films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Béla Tarr transport us to a dimension different from the "everyday" realm of our daily lives. The temporality that characterizes them does not flow in a linear or horizontal way but appears expanded and suspended, almost “ritual", we might say.

As the philosopher and art theorist Pavel Florensky[1], who profoundly influenced

1. Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) was a Russian philosopher, theologian, mathematician, scientist, and Orthodox priest. Considered one of the most original thinkers of the 20th century, Florensky wrote works that spanned from the philosophy of religion to physics, including aesthetics and art. His most renowned work, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914), is a cornerstone of Orthodox