

Memory and Being: The Uncanny in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky

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ABSTRACT: Soviet film maker Andrei Tarkovsky is obsessed with the image of the home. Throughout his filmic oeuvre, we see Tarkovsky again and again returning to the space of the home. This paper will examine the status and importance of the home in Tarkovsky's films *Solaris*, *Nostalgia* and *Mirror*. Interpretation will be made through Sigmund Freud's concept of the "uncanny". The "uncanny" is especially useful as a method for understanding the highly symbolic and obfuscated dream and memory sequences that litter Tarkovsky's films. I argue that the home and the protagonists of these films share a metaphorical relationship; the homes (as depicted) are visual analogues of the characters' psyches.

Keywords: *Russian; German; art; Tarkovsky; Soviet*

Soviet Russian art house filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky is renowned for the ambiguity surrounding the content of his films. Tarkovsky employs numerous techniques that make interpretation problematic. Philosophical dialogue, esoteric symbolism and a breakdown of the barrier between the subjective and objective entrench Tarkovsky as an *auteur* whose work requires interpretation to create narrative continuity. In his memoir *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky explicates his views on the role of ambiguity in art:

By means of art man takes over reality through a subjective experience. . . . An artistic discovery occurs each time as a new and unique image of the world, a hieroglyphic of absolute truth. It appears as a revelation, as a momentary, passionate wish to grasp intuitively and at a stroke *all* the laws of this world—its beauty and ugliness, its compassion and cruelty, its infinity and limitations Through the image is sustained an awareness of the infinite: the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the limitless given form. (37)

Tarkovsky's attempt to capture the "limitless" in the form of film explains the density and obfuscation of his work. Tarkovsky's films deal with personal, individualistic themes: the self, memory, family and satisfaction. The role of the audience is also central to his conception of filmmaking,

I would meet people on whom my film had made an impression, or I would receive letters from them which read like a kind of confession about their lives, and I would begin to understand what I was working for. I would be conscious of my vocation: duty and responsibility towards people, if you like. I could never really believe that any artist could work only for himself, if he knew what he was doing would never be needed by anybody. (10)

Tarkovsky creates a dialogue with the audience by introducing relatable themes that are presented without explication; the audience is forced to draw on their own subjectivity to come to an understanding of his work, and this self-reflection is mirrored by the introspective interrogations of the characters in the films. For example, the figure of the mother is prominent in many of Tarkovsky's films.

Instead of portraying the mother with any typical matronly behaviours or dialogue, Tarkovsky often leaves the character undeveloped, or hollow. She lacks important dialogue, and is only highlighted by her importance to the equally mercurial protagonist. In trying to interpret such understated and unexplained relationships, the audience maps their own parent-child (or something similar) relationships onto the characters, brings their own subjectivity to bear on the characters' construction.

Character exploration and construction are at the centre of all of these films, thinly disguised by a storytelling trope. Many of Tarkovsky's films are predicated around a journey. The protagonist leaves from home, and either arrives or does not arrive at a destination. Over the course of the films, the physical journey premise becomes effaced by character psychology, contemplation and internal struggle. One of the most prominent features of this self-analyzing mode is the filmic reappearance of character memories. Instead of presenting us with simple images of the past, Tarkovsky troubles the ontology of 'memory' by presenting it in a highly ambiguous manner; memory and dream are often presented as one, bringing the landscape of the subconscious to bear on the images of the past. Film critic Maya Turovskaya claims that the past has a special significance in Tarkovsky's films,

the past always exists on equal footing with the present; the world of the imagination coexists with the real world. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these are as real and as present as the elements of the actual plot ...what Tarkovsky presents as dreams, as imaginings, as memories...is the element in which a character exists and has his being, is his 'individual stream of time' that exists alongside the time of the plot. In this scheme of things all moments in time are co-equal, existing alongside the ostensible plot. (87)

Not only are character memories and dreams significant to the psychological drama of the films, but they also appear in a distorted, preternatural manner. An example of this would be a scene from *Mirror*. The protagonist's mother washes her hair in a sink. The film is in slow motion, making the characters' movements seem disjointed and defamiliarized. The point of view seems to be from the protagonist as a child, watching his mother. The shot changes and the illusion of reality starts to degrade; water streams down the walls, pours out of the ceiling. The plaster of the roof starts crumbling and falling. The house is washed away around the figure of the mother.

This type of beautiful and surreal depiction is typical of the Tarkovskian flashback/memory/dream. In this paper I will analyze the 'memory' and dream-like sequences through a Freudian lens, particularly through his essay, "The Uncanny." Freud describes "The Uncanny" as that "which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (836). I argue that we visually witness the resurfacing of the past in an uncanny mode in Tarkovsky's films.

Before continuing, I would like to examine the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, which are translated as "canny" and "uncanny" in the English version of Freud's paper (trans. Alex Strachey). The word *unheimlich* is translated as "uncanny," even though the literal meaning is 'unhomely,' the opposite of *heimlich* (homely). Freud explores the meaning of both of these words; for *heimlich*, he finds two

meanings, the first being a sense of familiarity and intimacy; and the second, being concealed, secreted and contained (826-7). The definition of *unheimlich* is presented as weird, eerie or frightful (826). Freud's interest here is in the overlapping negative connotations between *heimlich* and its lexical opposite, *unheimlich*, an overlap explained by the defamiliarizing effect caused by the return of repressed memory, something which is both intimate and yet made foreign by the subconsciousness's own machinations. The area of overlap between these two words will also be the space where the uncanny investigated in this paper will fall; both personal and familiar to protagonists, yet alienated and repressed due to circumstance and tragedy. According to Freud, the uncanny "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (833).

"The Uncanny" works particularly well for a reading of Tarkovsky because it focuses on one particular image with which Tarkovsky is obsessed, and that is the home. A majority of Tarkovsky's films feature the home as the base image of a familiar/foreign dichotomy. The *dacha*, a traditional, rural vacation home, is presented as the core of childhood and contentment, a pastoral ideal compared to the alienating locales where the adult protagonists find themselves. Dreamlike images of the home are present in many of Tarkovsky's films, and in *Solaris*, *Mirror* and *Nostalghia* in particular. What we see in these films is 'home' constructed as a site for both memory and desire. What is essential to each of the protagonists is intimately bound up with the image of the home, and their subconsciousnesses constituted by memories of it. The idealization of home in memory allows each character a mental escape from the strife of their material conditions; however, it is never simple escape into the past, as all of the characters' memories return to them in the form of the uncanny: troubled, beautiful and drained of pure representationality (there are no simple, objective replays of the past). The memories seemingly arise from the character's own history because on one level, they are flashbacks that represent the past. They become complicated in their surrealism. Many of the memories have unbelievable features (raining indoors, levitation, spatial discontinuity) that trouble any notion that the ontology of the past is simple and objective.

Incidents of uncanny memory are littered throughout *Solaris* and *Mirror*. None of these memories are depicted in a way that makes them believable; they are either surreal, as in the aforementioned scene in *Mirror*, or incomplete manifestations of subjective memory, as with *Solaris*. All of the memories fail mimesis, but it is the way they fail that is significant. The uncanny deviations in the memories give the audience an interpretive clue, a way inside the character and a brief and momentary thread to cling to for explanation (which will never come). What Tarkovsky says with these half-memories is that each of them is borne from a state of repression; thus, inherent in each of these characters is a desire that is manifest in the surreal presentation of the memory. The main characters that I will be examining are Kris Kelvin (Donatas Banionis), Andrei Gorchakov (Oleg Yankovsky), and Aleksei (Filipp Yankovsky, Ignat Daniltsev, Innokenti Smoktunovsky), the

protagonists of *Solaris*, *Nostalghia*, and *Mirror*, respectively. These characters' memories constitute the best examples of an uncanny construction, as memory is at the core of all three. All feature the return to a memory, either physical (*Solaris*) or mental (*Mirror* and *Nostalghia*). The home is also central to each of these characters' ontologies.

Solaris (1972): Material Returns/Becomings

The general conflict of *Solaris* is as follows: Kris Kelvin, a psychologist, goes to the Solaris space station to investigate strange behaviour amongst the crew. He arrives to find everything disarrayed, in a state of anarchy. Perplexed, he rests. On waking, he finds a copy of his dead wife sitting in his chamber. He is shocked and horrified. He learns that the other scientists have been experiencing their own manifestations. As the plot progresses, the scientists try to understand and solve the problem. It becomes clear that the visitors are manifestations issuing from Solaris itself, constructed from the scientists' memories. They eventually bombard the planet with x-rays and the visitors cease. As we learn about Kris in *Solaris*, we find out that he tragically lost his wife to suicide, which explains why Solaris manifests the Hari-spectre. The visitors seem to be people of great significance to the Solaris station scientists, and it is clear that Hari exists prominently in Kris's distant and repressed idyllic memory. Kris's father's house shares a similar depiction. Both of these sites in Kris's memory are depicted as dualistic in a distinctly Freudian construction. There is the conscious self, the scientist Kris who is occupied with Solaristics, and then there is the subconscious, passionate Kris, who we come to know through the physical manifestations of his unconscious desires. As a character, Kris is generally unemotional. It is only through the external manifestations of his desires, and his horrified reactions, that we begin to see his desire. This dualism serves to demonstrate the Freudian inequality of memory; some memories are classed differently than others: repressed and distorted.

The disharmony between self and subconscious desire is at the centre of *Solaris* (as well as, we shall see, in Tarkovsky's other films), with the subconscious arising in dream and memory. What all of these memories serve to show is the mental fragmentation of the characters. The memories as well as the characters are all in a state of homelessness and 'unhomeliness;' the memories appear strange because the characters are estranged from their homes, and thus their desires. Critic Mark Le Fanu posits that the memories of home in the film combine "to demonstrate that memory need *not* be extinction; and that on the contrary we live in significance to the extent that we are prepared to embrace the shadows of our loss" (59). The shadow of loss haunts Kris throughout the film, and abstracts him from his desire. At the beginning of the film, Kris is restless on earth, awaiting voyage at his father's house. He believes that his desires lie in space, in Solaris, in the crew and in his career. When Kris leaves, we can see his self-deception. He carries only a tin containing a plant (which is shown often as strongly being associated with his father's home) and videotapes of his past happiness at his father's home. The ending

explicitly shows that Kris's desire is embodied in the figure of home, but he does not realize this until he has abandoned it.

In Tarkovsky's films, the desire of each character surfaces in their memory. Tarkovsky constructs his characters as being unable to come to a state of self-awareness. They do not consciously know what they desire, and the films' narratives hinge on the journey for greater self-understanding. In *Stalker*, a group of intellectuals travel through a supernatural landscape ("The Zone") to literally reach that which they most desire. We are told that The Zone contains a magic room that satisfies the deepest wish of whoever enters. The characters endure the perilous journey, philosophizing on their motivations and beliefs, only to come to a moment of ambivalence. The journey makes them question themselves and ponder if they even know what they desire; however, at the same time, they fear their desire and fear their self-ignorance. Whether they enter the room or not is never shown. Besides being uncanny, memory in the films also acts as a locus of wish-fulfilment. What the characters desire most becomes real in dreams, memories and alien manifestations. Consciously, the characters seem unaware of what they desire; that is, their desires are *heimlich* (kept hidden) to them. In this way the construction of the characters' subjectivity is mirrored by the construction of memory: each is fragmentary, incomplete and unrealistic.

In *Solaris*, Kris ultimately returns to the place he gives up in leaving for Solaris in the first place: his father's home. The final sequence of the film is a return because Kris is seemingly back on Earth, observing the pond by his father's house. There are many beautiful shots of the water, of the house, just as we remember from the beginning. Kris walks up to the window and watches his father. And then, inside, it starts to rain. This moment is shattering, uncanny; we know that this cannot be the reality of the beginning. A dissonant electronic score displaces the bucolic Bach that has been playing. In a moment of salvation, Kris approaches his father and falls to his knees. The camera zooms out, above the land, and we are shown that Kris is on an island in the Solaris ocean and not on Earth. What is important in *Solaris* is the journey that Kris makes in coming full circle. He realizes that he can find solace in coming to terms with the figures of his memory, instead of repressing them and keeping them at a distance, as he does with Hari at the beginning (by distancing himself from her, by launching her into space). Another interpretation of the conclusion could be that the surface of the planet is re-enacting Kris's wishes without his physical presence, and that the Kris we see is simply another Solarian manifestation. Whether this is the case or not is irrelevant. In both scenarios, it is the visual fulfilment of Kris's wish that is important. There would be no difference between a manifested Kris and the original Kris because they would both be constituted of the same memories and psyche.

It is only when Kris resigns to the fact that he is in contest with his self that the film changes its modality in relation to the visitors and memory. During the struggle, Kris attempts to use his rationality to solve what he sees as a problem, a problem that ironically originates with him. I argue that Kris's repressed memories, and desires, fuel Solaris' manifestations. Hari is uncanny because she is at once

utterly familiar and beloved by Kris, while also being wholly alien. The conflict escalates on the station, and reaches two climaxes. The first climax is the Hari-spectre drinking the liquid oxygen. This represents the pinnacle of Kris's struggle. He is so repulsed by Hari, a repulsion that Hari can sense, that she attempts horrific suicide. This act is an external re-enactment of Kris's internal strife. His conscious desire to be rid of Hari and his subconscious desire to have her meet in what is probably the most uncanny scene in the film. Upon discovering her own alien-ness, Hari tries to destroy herself, but is unsuccessful. Desperate, she drinks a container of liquid oxygen, and dies an unabashedly disturbing death. Kris watches her corpse. She starts twitching, writhing, and convulsing back to life. The suicide fails because of her extraordinary healing, which is a trait of the visitors, keeps her from destruction, and the spectacle of her revitalization is chilling.

Later in the film, Kris falls ill and enters a fevered dream state, featuring the final uncanny presentation of memory. The dream begins with a slow pan of Kris's quarters. The set is contrasted from his reality by the presence of flowers and plants, multiple Haris and Kris's mother. Each of these is significant. The plants invoke a sense of home, a visual return to the lush greenery of Kris's father's house in the beginning. Kris's wishes start to surface. The Hari and Mother figures are nearly indistinguishable, as many shots hide the figures' faces, and Hari and Kris's mother wear the same attire. Wife and Mother merge into a single figure. The condensation of the Wife and Mother is a recurring theme in Tarkovsky, evidenced most strongly in *Mirror*, where the same actress (Margarita Terekhova) plays both Aleksei's Mother and Wife. Kris's dream shifts into a monochrome scene where Kris and his mother discuss a vacation and time, clearly alluding to an old memory of Kris's. What is remarkable is the condensation that occurs with the mother figure and Hari in the sequence. This final uncanniness opens up Kris's subconscious for a deeper analysis; the combination of Kris's mother with the sexualized Hari hints at an Oedipal desire in Kris, a desire that is actualized by Kris's final submissive gesture to his father in the closing shot. After Kris regains consciousness, he decides to leave the station and live on Solaris. Although Solaris's manifestations have been uncanny until this point, the final and most extreme manifestation is not; it is almost shot-for-shot the same as the opening scenes, re-invoking the bucolic ideal of Kris's father's house in the beginning. Kris, in choosing to move to Solaris, has resigned himself to satisfying his subconscious desire and once again returns home.

The home has an important role in the linguistic origins of the *unheimlich*, an origin that bears importance on the construction of Tarkovsky's protagonists. In "The Uncanny" Freud mentions the obsolete root of *heimlich*, meaning "belonging to the house or family" (826, 828). What is interesting in Tarkovsky's films is the centrality of the home as a place of satisfaction and happiness. The protagonists embark on journeys that take them away from their homes, but these departures initiate a dissatisfaction which triggers the appearance of the uncanny nostalgia. The image of the home becomes intimately associated with the characters' desires. Filmmaker Akira Kurosawa says that *Solaris's* opening shots "almost torture the soul of the viewer like a kind of irresistible nostalgia towards mother, earth, nature,

which resembles homesickness” (qtd. Robinson 377). Kris's ultimate desire(s) are intimately tied with the image of the home.

In *Solaris*, Kris shows the Hari-spectre his cherished videos of his memories when his wife (the original Hari) was alive. These films stand as Kris's unadulterated memories, and he places a greater value on them than on any of his other possessions (which he burns before leaving earth). The video prominently features his father's house and Hari. These are the only glimpses we get of Kris's objective past, and through them, the audience can begin to constitute the logic in the reappearance of first Hari, and then the house at the conclusion of the film. Slavoj Žižek calls *Solaris* the “ultimate variation of...the Id-machine,” and “a mechanism that directly materializes our unacknowledged fantasies” (“The Thing From Inner Space”). Although Kris initially abandons his home for his work in Solaristics, we find that his desires ultimately manifest his home and his family (his father and Hari) anew. The copies that return to Kris may be uncanny (*unheimlich*), but ironically constitute Kris's desire of the canny (*heimlich*).

This begins to illuminate the central construction of self that I argue Tarkovsky is portraying. 'The mind' in these films operates as a space not unlike a home. It is familiar (*heimlich*) in the sense that it is the self, as much as memory and desire are part of the self. But the self is also the source of the uncanny, the secreted, *heimlich*, deposits of repression that hide the total self from the conscious self. There is a duality to each of these characters; there is the self that they are aware of, and then there is the other “I”, the mirror image containing the primal desires and repressed thoughts. Both of these “I”s occupy the house of the mind, and it is the work of the self, policing and restraining these psychically intolerable parts that allows the characters their false sense of a stable identity. Film critic Sean Martin notes the parallelism between psyche and home, “as if reflecting dream logic...the interiors of these dachas are always ambiguously arranged, with rooms seemingly moving around in relation to one another” (42). The instability of the house's structure reflects the disharmony between conscious and subconscious in the films. The structure of the house is mutable and confusing because the characters themselves are confused and lack a total knowledge of self. When the characters are confronted with their uncanny selves, the illusion of self-knowing is shattered, and they are forced into a state of anxiety.

Nostalgia (1983): Alienation and Desire

The home is also the centre for desire in *Nostalgia*. Tarkovsky's own biography becomes pertinent for this film. It was his first film shot outside of the Soviet Union (shot in Italy); weary with the constraints of filmmaking under Soviet rule, Tarkovsky was forced to go abroad to achieve his artistic vision unfettered. Of course, the alien culture of Italy haunted Tarkovsky in a different way. In *Sculpting in Time*, he explains:

Russians are seldom able to adapt easily, to come to terms with a new way of life. . .everyone

knows their tragic incapacity to be assimilated, the clumsy ineptitude of their efforts to adopt an alien life-style. How could I have imagined as I was making *Nostalghia* that the stifling sense of longing that fills the screen space of that film was to become my lot for the rest of my life. (202)

The journey premise in *Nostalghia* is that poet Andrei Gorchakov, the protagonist, leaves his Russian home to go to Italy to research the history of a Russian composer who was exiled to Italy, about whom he is writing a libretto. Despite the stereotypes of the beauty and artfulness of Italy, the Tuscan village where he sojourns is sterile and bleak. There is an Apollonian order to the architecture and set; the walls are bare, symmetrical and grey. He slowly falls into depression, feeling alienated by the foreign context.

Andrei constantly dreams of his Russian home while enduring his suffering. It is clear only in his dreams that what he truly desires is intimately contained within his concept of home. Tarkovsky differentiates Gorchakov's dreams by using black and white film and slow motion. Critic Peter Green notes the importance of this formal separation,

Andrei's memory is reduced to a schematic signal...his other recollections, visions and dreams are likewise drained of colour...what makes Tarkovsky's films so enigmatic at first sight are these shifts between different planes. He eschewed the familiar convention by which the viewer is prepared for flashback and dream. He cuts or dissolves without an explanatory transition. In doing so he demanded a new cinematographic awareness of his audience...time past and future, dream or vision are juxtaposed on a more or less equal footing with present reality. All states, all times form a continuum. (118)

By crafting separate ontologies for Gorchakov's dreams and his morose, Italian reality, Tarkovsky draws attention to the source of Gorchakov's sadness. Italy is essentially and formally different from the Russia of Gorchakov's mind. In Gorchakov's subconscious, the difference between familiar and alien is rigid. Along with images of the home come depictions of Gorchakov's family. Unlike Kris, the members of Gorchakov's family are never developed as characters. Instead, they stand as placeholders for the idealized reality that Andrei wishes to return to. The film opens and closes with slow tracking shots of Andrei's *dacha*. This establishes the frame for the unspoken conflict that takes place between Andrei and his environment throughout the rest of the film. Andrei only finds respite from his ennui when he enters his dream world, and this is the space he returns to in death.

The film's final shot is of particular importance. The image is static. Andrei sits with a dog in front of his house. The camera slowly tracks out and reveals that the house is sitting in the middle of an Italian cathedral. Although it would be easy to read this scene as Andrei finally achieving hybridity between interior and exterior, I think that it is in fact the opposite. The final image is a visual analogue of Gorchakov himself. Despite the surrounding context, his core has remained essentially the same. This draws another parallel between the home and Gorchakov's subjectivity: both remain essentially Russian, despite the context. The shot can be read temporally as a return of sorts; the cathedral tells us that it

takes place after being in Italy. The irony is that the home Gorchakov is physically pictured with is one that he never mentally left. Although physically displaced in Italy, Gorchakov can never mentally be divorced from his home, as the two are symbolically continuous.

The house in *Nostalghia* is constructed differently than that of Kris's father's in *Solaris*. Although they both serve as landscapes of desire, Kris's father's house is more thoroughly depicted and explicated than Gorchakov's. Gorchakov's dreams are very succinct, whether temporally or visually. The discourse surrounding the home is also minimal; there is only one scene where Andrei talks with his wife—the remainder are silent. This constructs Gorchakov's house as much more fragmentary than Kris's. The atmosphere in *Nostalghia* is, overall, more stoic compared to *Solaris* or *Mirror*, and the occlusion of Andrei's house once again visually mimics the ambiguity of his character. In this, we can see Tarkovsky moving towards the differing definition of *heimlich*. Instead of evoking a familiar atmosphere, Andrei's house is shrouded, kept hidden from the viewer's interpretation. The audience can deduce that Andrei's desire lies within the home, but what this desire is remains unclear. This lack of clarity is tied to the unattainability of home for Gorchakov (and Tarkovsky). The home embodies desire, but the protagonists are spatially distanced from it, and this distance represents a distance from themselves, and thus their desires.

Mirror (1975): Reflections of the Past

Mirror also deals with an unattainable concept of home. Unlike *Solaris* and *Nostalghia*, the journey in *Mirror* is not material; it is metaphysical. The film is a collage of memories from the mind of protagonist Aleksei, ostensibly, as he relives them on his deathbed. Much as in *Solaris* and *Nostalghia*, there is a contrast between the modern and a pastoral ideal that demarcates genuine homeliness. The memories take place primarily during two time frames: Aleksei's rural childhood around the time of the Second World War, and Aleksei as an adult, focusing on the relationship with his son Ignat in Aleksei's urban apartment. Jeremy Robinson describes *Mirror* as “a film of acutely remembered places. Film as personal psychogeography, self-reflexive, even indulgent” (402). The subjectivity of the past is a central conceit in the film. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky discusses the importance of memory in *Mirror*,

It seemed to tell us something about the special quality of our memory—about its capacity for penetrating beyond the veils drawn by time, and this was exactly what the film had to be about; it was the seminal idea. (132-33)

Although the film is non-linear, cohesion is felt throughout the memory collage it presents. There is a cliché that reads, “a person is the sum of their experiences,” and this adage works especially well for this film. The present diegesis is hardly given any film time; it is almost entirely composed of memory/flashback, and the periods for these memories are highly kinetic.

Despite the non-linearity and discontinuity, there emerges an identifiable subject position throughout the film. We are constantly put into Aleksei's perspective, so much so that when the camera opts for a third person view, we find ourselves immediately following and sympathizing with Aleksei, whose eyes we share. Tarkovsky constructs Aleksei's character in fragments, fragments that are in tension with one another due to the temporal distances of the different memories. This returns us to the image of the house. Not only is the house a central image in the film, we can once again see the configuration of the house mirrored in characterization and film structure. Every episode in the film is discrete, compartmentalized, kept separate from the others. The temporality of film structurally allows this with ease; a jarring shift in time and location displaces the viewer, and segregates each section. These separate memories, then, are compartments whose totality equate to the life of Aleksei. If each memory is a room, then his entire life is the house itself, a structure that embodies these experiences.

This allegory extends beyond the film's structure. The interior of Aleksei's childhood house in the film is depicted as mysterious and labyrinthine. In this way, it is similar to Gorchakov's house in *Nostalghia*. The exterior of the house is depicted often; it is the exterior expression of the self. Where the exterior appearances of houses are relatively clear, the interiors are the opposite. The space of the inside is poorly defined, poorly lit, and spatially confusing. Often the interior is occluded entirely from view and left shadowed or in total darkness. This echoes the subjective message of *Nostalghia*; the core of the character, his deepest desires and secrets, are beyond the viewer's knowing, even beyond the character's own knowing. Self-unknowing is at the core of the subconscious struggle, "for Freud, human reason was not master in its own house but a precarious defense mechanism struggling against, and often motivated by unconscious desires and forces" (Lietch et al. 807). By keeping these desires *heimlich*, the interior impenetrably dark, Tarkovsky does not allow the viewer full access to the wishes and repressions of the characters. Instead, the audience, much as the characters, is left to interpret the uncanny presentation of repression through their dreams and memories.

The house in *Mirror* is imbued with an extra layer of meaning. Inasmuch as the house can be read as a metaphor for Aleksei, we can see a parallel between Aleksei's state of dying and the frequent violence done to the house itself. The barn burns, the windows break, and (as described earlier) water erodes the interior. This destruction mirrors the pain and bewilderment of Aleksei in his moment of dying, as his life flashes before his eyes. The instability of the self also explains the prominent uncanniness of the film. Here, desire and memory are blended in a different way than in *Solaris* or *Nostalghia*. The moment of dying can be seen as a total collapse of the self, and it is in this moment of destruction that the mind's self-constructed barriers fail. Wish, memory, repression and fantasy become commingled in this unique and personal space, and this potentially explains why almost every segment of the film features the uncanny.

Fragmentation is key to the characters that Tarkovsky crafts; they are all deeply determined by the episodes of their past, and the individual struggles that occur onscreen are products of the repression

of select memories. Some of the memories are portrayed as uncanny because they are keys to understanding; in a sense, they are keys that Tarkovsky leaves dark for the characters and ambiguous for the audience to interpret. The home remains central to the construction of characters in Tarkovsky's films for many reasons. First, it is the site of childhood, where memory, and thus the self are forged. It is also the place that remains closest to an individual; it is a place that is one's own. The house also serves as a convenient metaphor for the construction of identity in the films. Each protagonist is composed of compartmental, episodic memories, each like a room in a house. Some rooms contain things that are 'unhomely'—things that, while central to the character, seem foreign and threatening. Within the house also lies the desire of each character. In coming to a structural understanding of the films, the audience can begin to assemble the structure of each character portrayed, and come to appreciate a deeper understanding of the complex construction of the self that Tarkovsky presents. On the journey to self-awareness, the only thing that can be learned is that the self is as alien as any external place that one can journey to, and that the road inward is traced with nostalgia, uncertainty and pain. Despite the struggle of mental journeying, it is the only way these characters are able to fulfil their core desires. Ultimately, these are the true quests that Tarkovsky leads us on—into the mind, into the self.

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