

**Compositions of Crisis:
Sound and Silence in the Films of Bergman and
Tarkovsky**

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

As author, I declare that the research presented in this thesis is my own work. The influence of others has been indicated by references and/or citations.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines seven films from the cinemas of Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky—Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Winter Light* (1963), and *The Silence* (1963), and Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979), *Nostalghia* (1983), and *The Sacrifice* (1986).

These films were chosen as they represent the deepest periods of two directors’ engagements with the possible death of God and the subsequent loss of intrinsic existential meaning—topics with which this thesis is principally concerned.

As a starting point, this thesis argues that the films present the silence of God as the primary indicator of God’s absence from the human world. Becoming aware of this silence thus causes one to interrogate religious certainties which have hitherto been taken to be timeless and true. This thesis then contends that, when faced with this silence and its implications, Bergman desperately sought evidence of God’s existence while Tarkovsky unyieldingly maintained an attitude of faith.

The directors’ progressions toward these contrasting positions are evident through the uses of sound elements in their films. As Bergman unsuccessfully pursued evidence of God’s existence, the soundscapes in his four films become increasingly minimal. The sparse use of sound reveals Bergman’s conception of a Godless void. On the other hand, metaphysical silence in Tarkovsky’s films was not perceived as emptiness. Instead, “silence” in his films was, paradoxically, often depicted through complex layers of sounds. Presented as manifestations of the metaphysical, the sounds of “silence” in Tarkovsky’s films consequently become affirmations of faith.

Through this sound-based approach to film analysis, this thesis sets out to explain *why* Bergman and Tarkovsky understood metaphysical silence so differently by examining *how* they portrayed literal silences.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: Bergman and the Unbearable Silence	11
Chapter One. <i>The Seventh Seal</i>	13
Chapter Two. <i>Through a Glass Darkly & Winter Light</i>	26
Chapter Three. <i>The Silence</i>	46
PART TWO: Tarkovsky and the Affirmative Silence	65
Chapter Four. <i>Stalker</i>	68
Chapter Five. <i>Nostalghia</i>	82
Chapter Six. <i>The Sacrifice</i>	97
CONCLUSION	114
REFERENCES & CITATIONS	
Filmography	120
Works Cited	122
Other Works Consulted	130
Documentaries	140

INTRODUCTION

Despite never having met, Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky were great admirers of each other. As told in a well-known anecdote, Tarkovsky rebuffed suggested edits to *Сталкер/Stalker* (1979) with the confident declaration, “I am only interested in the views of two people: one is called Bresson and one called Bergman” (Tsymbal 2008: 351). Bergman was similarly vocal about his respect for the Soviet director whom he unreservedly hailed the master of dream imagery, “the greatest of them all” (1988: 73). The two also clearly found inspiration in the other’s work; in *Tempo di Viaggio* (1983), a documentary film following location-scouting efforts for *Nostalghia* (1983), Tarkovsky revealed that he would re-watch Bergman’s films before starting on his own. The Swedish director, too, reportedly had a similar habit, watching *Андрей Рублёв/Andrei Rublev* (1966) as he prepared for each new film (Mees n.d.). Perhaps the most telling evidence of the high regard each held for the other can be found in lists of their favorite films—Bergman, as one might expect, cited *Andrei Rublev* as one of the greatest films ever made and Tarkovsky, in listing his top ten films, named three by Bergman (Holmberg 2012; Lasica 1993).

Beyond this high professional regard for each other’s work, the two directors also shared cardinal themes and concerns. Although in different ways, both considered the human experience to be intimately related to the religious and the spiritual. Both were thus troubled by what they perceived as the crisis of religious faith in the modern period, a crisis caused by a collapse of religious certainties and the subsequent challenge to find existential meaning in an intrinsically meaningless world. It is the contention of this thesis that at the emotional center of a number of key films by both

directors is an awareness of the modern spiritual-existential crisis and an attempt to confront it.¹

In an attempt to explore this underlying affinity, this thesis undertakes an examination of the ways in which Bergman and Tarkovsky react to this crisis through an analysis of key films by each director: Bergman's *Det sjunde inseglet/The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Såsom i en spegel/Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Nattvardsgästerna/Winter Light* (1963), and *Tystnaden/The Silence* (1963), and Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, *Nostalghia*, and *Offret/The Sacrifice* (1986). Though these films were produced at different times in each director's personal and professional history—in addition to emerging from different periods in world history—they mark the height of Bergman's and Tarkovsky's confrontations with the modern spiritual-existential crisis.

In all seven films, the first cause of this crisis is the perceived silence of God. This metaphysical silence incites and perpetuates the belief that God, or least the God-concept, is dead. Consequently, this death of God, which Friedrich Nietzsche pronounced as the birth of modernity, harkens the systematic destruction of all that was once considered transcendent and absolute.² As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind” (1848: part 1, para. 18). This declaration aptly describes the initiation into a new era, one where an urgent need for a new understanding of how one

¹ Bergman and Tarkovsky are two among many. Their contemporaries, notably Michelangelo Antonioni, Akira Kurosawa, and Jean-Luc Godard, share these existentialist concerns. Outside of cinema, philosophers and writers have long contributed significantly to discussions of the existential crises of modern man. Those that deal explicitly with the spiritual-existential crisis of modernity include Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Samuel Beckett. For more on existentialism in Bergman's cinema, see Ketcham (1986), Lauder (1989), Kalin (2003), Koskinen (2008), Livingston (2009), and Hedling (2010). For more on existentialism in Tarkovsky's cinema, see Le Fanu (1987), Turovskaya (1989), Gillespie (2004), Burns (2011), and Skakov (2012). Also see O'Rawe (2006) and Pamerleau (2009).

² Nietzsche's “God is dead” proclamation appears in section 124 of *The Gay Science*, section 125. It is one of the most recognizable expressions of the modern world's loss of faith in the God-concept. Though written in 1882, it continues to be significant in contemporary discussions on the death of God. Martin Heidegger's essay “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead’” offers more on the topic.

should live emerges. Should one hold fast to old beliefs in the face of a possible death of God? Or should one concede to the loss of intrinsic meaning and seek new ways to establish existential purpose? Is faith an irrelevant remnant of the past; or is it sustainably viable in the modern times?

While this thesis recognizes that faith in its most general sense extends beyond the religious context to a wide area of the human consciousness, it remains focused on faith—with its usual implications of trust and conviction—within religious contexts, specifically that of the Christian tradition. However, despite faith being a central concept in this thesis, it does not address the diverse types and philosophical nature of theistic faith nor does it set out to contribute directly to areas of Christian apologetics or polemics. Faith as understood, depicted, and explored in the selected films occupies the position contrary to reason. Despite acknowledging arguments that faith and reason need not be mutually exclusive, such as those put forth by adherents of natural theology, the thesis takes its cue from the films and will discuss the two concepts as being in opposition.³ In both the selected films and this thesis, faith and reason may be seen as two uncompromising stances.

Having highlighted the films' primary themes, the thesis now considers how these themes are manifested through cinematic techniques. Close attention will be paid to how sounds and silences are employed to present metaphysical silence; this in turn enables an understanding of how this silence is perceived by each director. Beginning with the same premise that God is silent, Bergman and Tarkovsky essentially hear the same silence but decipher it in different ways. What comes to the fore here is the difference between hearing and listening. While hearing is, as Roland Barthes argues, “a

³ According to natural theology, genuine knowledge of the existence and nature of God may be attained through the practice of philosophical reflection without appeals to real or apparent divine revelation and scripture. Thomas Aquinas, a celebrated contributor to this school of thought, expressed in *Summa theologia*, his idea that the existence of God was “demonstrable” through his Five Ways (Ia.2.2). Aquinas found a compromise of sorts, arguing that God’s existence could be proven to any rational individual who was willing to concede to the limitations of reason. For more on natural theology, see Craig and Moreland (2012).

physiological phenomenon,” listening is “a psychological act” which requires one to decipher the meaning behind what is heard (1985: 245). It may thus be said that, through listening, sounds heard becomes evocative of the film’s “internal sounds”.⁴ Ultimately, an understanding of *why* metaphysical silence is perceived so differently in Bergman and Tarkovsky’s films can be achieved by examining *how* such silence is portrayed.

However, before beginning such analysis, it must be considered that literal/acoustic silences in cinema are seldom portrayed through absolute absences of sound. Most often, silence is conveyed figuratively and comprises room tone with the occasional addition of foley sounds.⁵ Generally, the sound of silence in film is, as Lisa Coulthard perceptively notes, “a constructed and fabricated *effect* of silence” (2010: 21 original emphasis).⁶ While this accurately describes most “silences”, it does not encompass the entire spectrum of cinematic silence. In fact, cinematic silence falls in between the gaps in film sound scholarship. “Silence” has been, and continues to be, used as an umbrella term to describe everything from Coulthard’s “fabricated effect of silence” to the silence achieved when sound is completely turned off in post-production. Therefore, in order to construct an analysis of sound and silence in the chosen films, this thesis proposes several terms to better categorize the sounds of silence.

1. Impressionist silence

This is the silence created when audio-logo elements (audio/sound and logo/written or spoken word) are employed to create an effect of silence that is

⁴ Internal sounds, as defined by Michel Chion, correspond to the physical and psychological sounds of a character. Though projected “onscreen”, these sounds are presumed to be heard only by this character. For Chion’s definition, see Chion (2009: 479). Claudia Gorbman refers to this as “meta-diegetic sound” (1976: 446-452).

⁵ Film sound scholarship has noted the approximate and relative nature of cinematic silence as well as the rarity of absolute silence in film. For a more extended discussion, see Sider et al. (2003).

⁶ A musical equivalent of what Coulthard refers to is John Cage’s experimental composition, *4’ 33’’*. Cage’s work brings to the attention of audiences the non-silent nature of what is usually perceived as silence.

technically non-silent.⁷ The term is derived from impressionism in art and music and places emphasis on suggestion, perception, and experience. A popular example of impressionist silence occurs during the jungle scene in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). As Chef and Willard trek through a jungle, attention is drawn to an unsettling feeling of silence before a tiger suddenly appears. Here, what I have termed an impressionist silence is created by gradually omitting louder ambient sounds from the jungle soundtrack until only birdcalls are heard.⁸ Robert Bresson describes this effect as “a *pianissimo* of noises” since it constitutes lowering the volume of the entire soundtrack to create the sense that the soundscape is receding into the background (1997: 49). As previously mentioned, Coulthard refers to this as the “effect of silence”; to Michel Chion, it is “the impression of silence” (Coulthard 2010: 21; Chion 1994: 57). This is perhaps the most common form of cinematic silence.

2. Diegetic absolute silence

This is the silence created when there is no diegetic sound to be picked up by on-set sound equipment (complete absence of dialogue, sound effects, or music) *and* no added non-diegetic sound. With diegetic absolute silence, the only sound picked up is room tone.⁹ In Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Bowman and Poole enter an EVA pod to speak in confidence; once inside, they turn off all electronic equipment. The previously constant hum of the spacecraft is dropped from the soundtrack completely and instantaneously. In this moment,

⁷ The term “audio-logo” is derived from Michel Chion's “audio-logo-visual”. He proposed the term as a replacement for “audio-visual” so as to “more accurately [describe] all the cases that include written and/or spoken language”. For full definition, see Chion (2009: 468).

⁸ Walter Murch, the sound designer for *Apocalypse Now*, described the process as “reducing the soundtrack incrementally . . . [to] bring the sound of silence,” “never reach[ing] absolute silence in this scene. It feels silent, but it isn't” (2003: 96).

⁹ Room tone (or presence) is a specific location's aural fingerprint recorded on-site during production. It is added, where necessary, in post-production to provide sonic continuity. Room tone should not be confused with ambient sound. Michel Chion describes it as “‘silence’ specific to [a] place,” referring to this as “ambient silence” (1994: 57).

there is diegetic absolute silence. The astronauts' solitude is suggested visually by the switching off of the electronics but (convincingly) performed acoustically by the diegetic absolute silence.

3. Non-diegetic absolute silence

This is the silence created when the soundtrack is turned off at the post-production stage such that all sound (diegetic or not) is muted. As a result, absolutely no sound is emitted from the cinema speakers.¹⁰ Non-diegetic absolute silence is created post factum. There are several notable instances of such silences in cinema: when the characters in Jean-Luc Godard's *Band of Outsiders* (1964) decide to have "one minute of silence" in a bustling café and all sound is suddenly completely turn off even though other people in the café continue their revelry; when Chris is sent up to the penthouse of a high-ranking mobster in John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967) and all sound is turned off from the moment the elevator doors close to when they open again; and in Mike Figgis's *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995) when absolutely no sound is heard during Ben's heart attack in a noisy strip club.¹¹

Using these terms, this thesis examines how thematic silences, such as the silence of God (and more generally metaphysical silence), are presented literally through acoustic sounds and silences. While this thesis recognizes that sound, in itself, is an ambiguous aesthetic form, it argues that, when paired with image, the resulting sound-image does

¹⁰ During moments of non-diegetic absolute silence, tape hiss might be heard due to the quality of sound equipment. When cinema standards progressed from monophonic sound to stereophonic sound, tape hiss becomes significantly reduced. With technological advancement in noise reduction, tape hiss can be almost entirely eliminated.

¹¹ In discussing the non-diegetic absolute silence, Claudia Gorbman uses the term "nondiegetic silence" and describes it as "[a] soundtrack [that] is completely without sound" (1987: 18). However, this definition is applicable to both diegetic and non-diegetic absolute silences and is therefore too wide.

not lessen both forms but instead gives rise to a specificity of created (or encoded) meaning.

In these seven films, sound elements are expressive devices used to portray the silence of God. Through paying due attention to both sound and image, the films' confrontations with the modern spiritual-existential crisis may thus be understood.

Part One of this thesis will focus on Bergman's four films. Bergman's preoccupation with the question of God's existence can be traced back almost a decade to the first film that he both wrote and directed, *Fängelse/Prison* (1949).¹² This early film already engages with the idea of a world without God; as one character declares, God is either dead or defeated and consequently death is the ultimate end of life. This idea, first sketched in *Prison*, is taken up again in much greater depth and complexity in *The Seventh Seal* where God's silence is taken to be unequivocally indicative of his non-existence. Through the knight Antonius's (Max von Sydow) spiritual-existential crisis, the film explores the existential implication of God's non-existence. As suggested through the communal bliss experienced by Antonius and his group during a leisurely hillside picnic, the only respite from an agonizingly absurd existence appears to come from human relationships. However, as the films progress from *The Seventh Seal* to *Through a Glass Darkly*, and later, to *Winter Light*, the hope for the reconciliatory power of human solidarity dissipates. *Winter Light's* original Swedish title translates as *The Communicants*. Alluding to both the partaking of the host in Holy Communion (with the significance of coming together in spiritual union) and verbal communication between the characters, the title foregrounds issues surrounding human relationships. However, this is clearly ironically charged since *Winter Light* underscores nothing less than the total impossibility of communicating either with God or with other human beings. Even the slight comfort that Antonius was able to obtain through human

¹² Bergman himself spoke of this film with pride: "the whole thing was my own from beginning to end" (Björkman et al. 1973: 39).

solidarity in *The Seventh Seal* finds no resonance in the arid and alienating relationships of *Winter Light*. Dialogue here becomes hollow and no more reassuring or meaningful than the cold and emptiness of silence. This idea is carried over to *The Silence*, a film that in its very title foreshadows the alienation and failure of communication between its characters. The last scene of the film shows a young boy, Johan (Jörgen Lindström), reading a letter written to him by his aunt Ester (Ingrid Thulin). She attempts to translate a few foreign words for him yet, though Johan utters them aloud, their significance is beyond him. The world, then, as presented in these films, ends not with a bang but a whisper in a language one cannot understand. One attempts to overcome the modern spiritual-existential crisis but, despite concerted attempts to do so, is met with empty silence all around. Ultimately, what is left is the knowledge that there can be no possible transcendence of an ultra-individualized and alienated existence. The acoustic silences Bergman created in the films serve only to give voice to the gaping void of existence, one which represents God's absence and human alienation. It was perhaps in having arrived at an absolute nadir that Bergman appeared to abandon attempts at confronting the spiritual-existential crisis of modernity after *The Silence*. As he declared in a spirit of resignation: "nothing, absolutely nothing at all has emerged out of all these ideas of faith and skepticism, all these convulsions, these puffings and blowings" (Björkman et al. 1973: 195).

In Part Two, I argue that Tarkovsky was equally concerned with the silence of God though he perhaps focused more on metaphysical silence than the silence of a certain God belonging to a particular religion. Since Tarkovsky regarded spirituality as immanent, his films do not address religion as directly as Bergman's do.¹³ They are centered on a belief in the unknowable spiritual force of the universe rather than on a search for a God circumscribed by religious traditions. To varying degrees, each of the

¹³ Two scholars who have written on immanence in Tarkovsky's cinema are Fergus Daly (2000) and Sylvain De Bleeckere (2012).

seven feature films in Tarkovsky's oeuvre grapples with the conflict between emotional and rational truths—more generally, the conflict between religious faith and secular reason. In earlier films, the eponymous character of *Andrei Rublev* suffers crippling religious doubt before he is able to fully embrace the higher purpose of his art and in *Солярис/Solaris* (1972) Chris (Donatas Banionis) is faced with the difficult choice to either remain in a comforting but hallucinatory world or return to a lonesome but real world. What begins as a series of interior negotiations between emotional and rational truths becomes, in Tarkovsky's final three films, the struggle for supremacy between faith and reason. These films attest to Tarkovsky's persistent choosing of faith over reason in the face of the great silence of the universe. Like the touted omnipotence of God, the powers of *Stalker's* mysterious Zone and Room are intangible and invisible and, highly possibly, imaginary. As a result, Writer and Professor relentlessly accuse Stalker (Anatoly Solonitsyn, Nikolai Grinko, and Alexander Kaidanovsky respectively) of creating and perpetuating rumors about the Room's powers. In Bergman's films of the early 1960s, this would constitute rational proof that the alleged powers of the Zone and the Room are myths. However, Tarkovsky interpreted this metaphysical silence in a positive way. For him, silence does not indicate the absence of God (or divine power) but instead provides an opportunity for one to exercise and assert faith. Yet, while insisting on the need for faith, Tarkovsky also acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining it. Faced with the silence of the universe coupled with echoes of doubt from Writer and Professor's questions, Stalker eventually suffers his own crisis of faith. As Tarkovsky wrote in his diaries, "there is nothing more difficult to achieve than a passionate, sincere, quiet faith" (1991: 308).

While Tarkovsky's interpretation of metaphysical silence differs greatly from that of Bergman, there are similarities in the ways the two directors react to the silence between human beings. Like Bergman, Tarkovsky revealed his distrust of dialogue as a

viable form through which people can communicate meaningfully. In both *Nostalghia* and *The Sacrifice*, speech occurs primarily in the forms of meaningless gossip and narcissistic demands for attention: the bathers in the St. Catherine pool gossip incessantly about Domenico (Erland Josephson); Eugenia (Domiziana Giordano) shouts and threatens Andrei (Oleg Iankovskii) to gain his attention; and the polite conversation at Alexander's (Josephson again) birthday party barely masks dishonesty and infidelity. Indeed, as Chion suggests, Tarkovsky sought to expose “the vanity of human speech and the weakness of its echo in the universe” (2009: 347). Yet, despite a pronounced skepticism regarding the efficacy of speech and dialogue, Tarkovsky maintained his signature hopefulness. While the rest of the world chatters on, Tarkovsky’s kindred spirits find real connection in silence. The relationship between Domenico and Andrei is shrouded in wordlessness but is easily the most meaningful relationship of *Nostalghia*. Likewise, in *The Sacrifice*, Alexander vows to give up speech, the medium through which the modern world “communicates” to no consequential end, as part of his sacrifice to save the world. His vow of silence mirrors Andrei Rublev’s (Anatoly Solonitsyn) self-imposed muteness in a film Tarkovsky had produced some twenty years earlier. Tarkovsky’s undeniably positive portrayal of silence thus sheds light on the way in which he perceived metaphysical silence. By the time of *The Sacrifice*, the conflict between reason and faith is fully resolved; Tarkovsky had declared faith to be the irrefutable answer to questions of God’s existence. The three films by Tarkovsky discussed in this thesis form a cinematic testament to the belief that existential meaning is born not from that which one has faith in, but the act of having faith itself.

PART ONE

Bergman and the Unbearable Silence of the Void

In *The Magic Lantern*, Bergman quoted an entry from his mother's diary: "I pray to God with no confidence. One will probably have to manage alone as best one can" (1988: 290). These lines—the last two in his autobiography—plainly expressed his existential convictions during the middle period of his career. During this time, Bergman produced some of his most pessimistic films. Films like *Winter Light*, *The Silence*, *Skammen/Shame* (1968), *Viskningar och rop/Cries and Whispers* (1972), *Höstsonaten/Autumn Sonata* (1978), and *Aus dem Leben der Marionetten/From the Life of Marionettes* (1980) rightly earned him the title of "the gloomy Swede" (Branigan 2004: para. 1). The influence Bergman's harsh religious upbringing had on his adult life and work is easily discernible.¹ In his cinema, existential angst and doubt are always connected with religious doubt and spiritual agony. Consequently, it is widely noted that questions of God's existence and the efficacy of religion appear in many of Bergman's films.² The first films of his career struggle to articulate such themes, shrouding them instead in metaphors of youthful angst and rebellion. However, a number of these early films—*Hets/Torment* (1944), *Kris/Crisis* (1945), and *Hamnstad/Port of Call* (1948), for instance — reveal how, from early on, Bergman had already suspected that the promises of comfort and peace that came from structures of order (the older generations, the church, and such) were hollow. This culminated in *Prison* where, for the first time, Bergman explored with full force the ideas which would later become recurrent themes in his cinema; in particular, that of a universe without God. In this early film, Paul (Anders Henrikson), a former teacher of now-

¹ For more on the topic, see Cowie (1982) and Koskinen (2008) in particular.

² Houston Mike Awalt, Richard A. Blake, and Arthur Gibson are three among many who have given specific attention to the religious themes in Bergman's work. Their works are included in the bibliography.

filmmaker, Martin (Birger Malmsteen), proposes an idea for a film:

After life there is only death. That is really all you need to know. The sentimental or frightened can turn to the church. The bored, tired, and indifferent can commit suicide . . . God is dead or defeated or whatever it is called . . . Life is a cruel but seductive path between life and death. A huge laughing masterpiece. Beautiful and ugly at the same time, without mercy or meaning.³

Though Paul is ridiculed, *Prison* proceeds to uphold the truth in his idea of Hell on Earth. In the closing scenes Paul returns to ask Martin if he had given further thought to his idea. Martin replies, “It can’t be done. The movie would have to end with a terrible, agonizing question. And such movies shouldn’t be made.”⁴ In a tongue-in-cheek manner, Bergman confesses the danger of asking difficult existential questions. Yet, the theme that *Prison* explores—that of a Godless world—forms the basis of the questions that would eventually become central to Bergman’s cinema.

³ Quoted from the Criterion DVD of *Prison*.

⁴ As above.

Chapter One

The Seventh Seal and the Agonizing Silence of God

It has been argued that the devastation of the Second World War and the socio-political landscape of the late fifties were themselves reasons for the sudden intensity and angst of *The Seventh Seal*.¹ Manifesting Bergman's indignation, *The Seventh Seal* demanded explanations for the seemingly senseless horror the world had witnessed. A well-established line of argument interprets the film as born of revelations of "nuclear weapons, anxieties about continued life on earth, and the self-destroying development of technology . . . [which] made people wonder about the meaning of . . . the future" (Kaminsky and Hill 1975: 149). Yet, the answers Bergman sought clearly related less to political regimes and more to metaphysical and existential sensibilities:

I wasn't interested in politics or social matters . . . I was utterly indifferent. After the war and the discovery of the concentration camps, and with the collapse of political collaborations between the Russians and the Americans, I just contracted out. My involvement became religious. I went in for a psychological, religious line. (Björkman et al. 1973: 13).

The connections may logically be drawn; the senseless brutality of the war honed previously blunt questions of God's existence and culminated in the burning question, "where is God in all this horror?" *The Seventh Seal* marked the beginning of a period where Bergman repeatedly sought explanations for God's apparent absence from the world as well as answers to how one should live amidst the silence.

Set in the Middle Ages, the Black Death lends itself vividly to the spirit of apocalypse that pervades *The Seventh Seal*. Yet, despite being visibly set in medieval Sweden, the film is an allegory of the modern age.² Antonius is our surrogate, returning from the Crusades like postwar audiences recovering from the chaos, both retrospectively questioning the existence of God and his indifference toward human

¹ See Holland (1959), Kaminsky and Hill (1975), and Chion (2009).

² See Steene (1968) and Hubner (2007).

suffering.³ The doubts that Antonius articulates belong to a modern consciousness— anxieties of a godless world were simply unthinkable in the stable and certain God-universe of the fourteen-century.⁴ Through the opening lines of the film, Bergman created a mirror of the modern world as he saw it, saturated with silence, apocalypse, and death. In voice-over, an omniscient narrator reads from the Book of Revelation: “And when the Lamb had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in Heaven about the space of half an hour” (Revelation 8:1). The film that follows is set within this “silent space”. As in *Prison*, the absurd cruelty of existence in *The Seventh Seal* inescapably stems from a God who is either absent or indifferent but, in any case, silent. Bergman recognized the cruelty in human existence even in childhood memories of church frescos:

There was everything that one could desire—angels, saints, dragons, prophets, devils, human beings. All this surrounded by a heavenly, earthly, and subterranean landscape of a strange yet familiar beauty. In a wood sat Death, playing chess with the Crusader. Clutching the branch of a tree was a naked man with staring eyes, while down below stood Death, sawing away to his heart’s content. *My mind was stunned by the extreme cruelty and extreme suffering*” (Cowie 1982: 143 emphasis mine).

The “extreme cruelty and extreme suffering” that Bergman perceived in the fresco finds resonance in *The Seventh Seal*. Death (personified as a cloaked figure) is ever-present and unrelenting while God, if at all present, is a mere silent witness to suffering. No respite is offered by divine grace as promised by religion. Unsurprisingly, religion and the religious are portrayed as impotent forces. Churches offer no reprieve or escape from the horrors of the plague. In the village church, there is only a lone painter working on a morbid illustration of human suffering. Furthermore, when Antonius seeks comfort in confession, there is no priest to hear him, only Death (Bengt Ekerot).

³ Bergman stated, “In my film, the crusader returns from the Crusades as the soldier returns from the war today. In the Middle Ages, men lived in terror of the plague. Today they live in fear of the atomic bomb. *The Seventh Seal* is an allegory with a theme that is quite simple: man, his eternal search for God, with death as his only certainty” (Steene 1968: 62).

⁴ Norman N. Holland disagrees, arguing that it would “unnecessarily limit the universality of Bergman’s achievement to call *The Seventh Seal* merely a necroterpsichorean parable for modern times [since] all men everywhere has always lived with death” (1959: 267).

As Antonius and Jöns (Gunnar Björnstrand) ride toward a church, the bells ring, signifying the beginning of a service, but upon arrival the church is shown to be empty. Even in the sacred space of the church, there is only absence and silence.

Within the silent space of the film—what one might call “the Bergmanian void”—silence is understood as absence and the failure or lack of communication. Starting here in *The Seventh Seal*, and extending through to *The Silence* and beyond, silence is a clear cause for human agony.

Sounds and Silences of Void: Ominous Silence

The Seventh Seal's overarching theme of the silence of God is most plainly depicted during Antonius's confession. Here he engages Death, whom he believes to be a priest, in conversation and proclaims the private anguish of a man searching for an elusive God. As a prelude to the scene, Jöns sings a song about the distance of God and the proximity of the Devil: “Up above is God Almighty/ So very far away, / But your brother the Devil/ You will meet on every level”.⁵ Jöns acts as Antonius's worldly foil, boldly declaring that which Antonius suspects but fears to admit.⁶ Here Antonius refuses to acknowledge Jöns's taunts but the truth in the song is soon to be confirmed. They arrive at a chapel and, once inside, Antonius gazes up at an effigy of Christ crucified. A low angle shot frames Antonius and Christ under a painting of man whose face is contorted in anguish, caught between God and the Devil. The man looks helplessly to God, pleading for help, but God sits adorned in his glorious throne, raising a finger as if in admonishment of the man whose feet are gripped by the Devil. In the painting, Jöns's previous allusion to the distance and indifference of this supposed

⁵ Bergman (1960: 15), henceforth *TSS* (abbreviated from “*The Seventh Seal*”) and quoted in-text with page numbers.

⁶ Of Antonius and Jöns, Bergman wrote, “Since at the time I was still very much in a quandary over religious faith, I placed my two opposing beliefs side by side, allowing each to state its case in its own way. In this manner, a virtual cease-fire could exist between my childhood piety and my newfound harsh rationalism” (1994: 235-6).

benevolent God is confirmed. The camera's framing of Antonius and Christ directly beneath the painting of the doomed man suggests that, by virtue of their being human, neither Antonius nor Christ is exempt from the depicted suffering. While earlier Antonius could pretend not to hear Jöns's song, he soon cannot deny how remote God will feel to him.

From the moment Antonius steps into the church, a single bell's solemn chimes can be heard. The slow ringing continues as Antonius looks at Christ's effigy and persists long into his later confession. This sequence exemplifies how the silence of God is aptly portrayed through Bergman's use of a sparse soundscape.

Upon seeing a shadow in the confession chamber, Antonius approaches it and quickly begins his confession. Before long, Antonius's moody lamentation erupts into an angst-ridden confrontation with the priest (later revealed to be Death) from whom Antonius demands assurance of the existence of God. From a desperate plea for answers, the exchange between Antonius (noted in the screenplay as "Knight") and Death culminates in an accusation of God as aloof and intentionally unknowable:

KNIGHT. I want knowledge.

DEATH. You want guarantees?

KNIGHT. Call it whatever you like. Is it so cruelly inconceivable to grasp God with the senses? Why should He hide himself in a mist of half-spoken promises and unseen miracles?

DEATH *does not answer.* [i.e. silence]

KNIGHT. How can we have faith in those who believe when we can't have faith in ourselves? What is going to happen to those of us who want to believe but aren't able to? And what is to become of those who neither want to nor are capable of believing?

The KNIGHT stops and waits for a reply, but no one speaks or answers

him. There is complete silence.

KNIGHT. Why can't I kill God within me? Why does He live on in this painful and humiliating way even though I curse Him and want to tear Him out of my heart? Why, in spite of everything, is He a baffling reality that I can't shake off? Do you hear me? (*TSS 28* bold emphasis mine)

Antonius' barrage of questions bespeaks his frustration at God's silence. The questions are almost rhetorical; he does not wait for Death to provide him with answers and instead incrementally poses one question after the other. The screenplay notes the need for Death not to answer Antonius's questions, creating a scene of "complete silence" (*TSS 28*). However Bergman allows the bell to chime in lieu of Death's replies, effectively having the bell answer Antonius. At an allegorical level, the chimes force Antonius to confront his denial of God's remoteness. The chimes are the only answers he receives and even then, they do not come from a divine source but a man-made symbol of God's call. The sparse acoustic composition creates an impressionist silence which performs the void that envelops Antonius. The momentary and isolated sounds of the bell—what Chion characterizes as "elements of auditory setting (EAS)"—amplify the otherwise lack of sound, causing the silences between the sound intervals to reverberate.⁷ In the abyssal emptiness of the Bergmanian void, these impressionist silences serve as the literal manifestation of God's silence. Through the utilization of a sparse soundscape and the incremental rhythm of Antonius's questions, his frustration is amplified. These sounds and silences confront Antonius with repeated suggestions that God does not exist and is simply a conjured presence.

The other characters of *The Seventh Seal* are similarly aware of the silence which envelops their world. They are unnerved by it, as Antonius is, but, unlike him,

⁷ Chion includes a lengthy definition of EAS in the glossary of *Film: A Sound Art*. To quote a few lines in essence, he defines it this way: "in opposition to ambient sounds that are continuous and prolonged," EAS are "sounds that are momentary, isolated, and intermittent and that help to construct a given space with distinct and localized touches." For full definition, see Chion (2009: 476).

they do not seem to know why. When the group stops to rest in a forest during the night, they cannot help but notice the strange silence that surrounds them.

Their eyes are dark with anxiety and foreboding. Their faces are pale and unreal in the floating light. It is very quiet.

PLOG. Now the moon has come out of the clouds.

JONS. That's good. Now we can see the road better.

MIA. I don't like the moon tonight.

JOF. The trees stand so still.

JONS. That's because there's no wind.

PLOG. I guess he means that they stand *very* still.

JOF. It's completely quiet.

JONS. If one could hear a fox at least.

JOF. Or an owl.

JONS. Or a human voice besides one's own. (*TSS 59* original emphasis)

Once again, silence acts as a reminder of abandonment and absence. However, this diegetic silence (excluding dialogue) is accompanied by non-diegetic music. A low, slow thumping of a drum makes for ominous musical accompaniment to their anxiety, contributing to the impressionist silence pervading the soundscape. Low voices and low registers of wind instruments and percussions are used to create an atmosphere of impending tragedy. As with the film's diegetic sounds, Erik Nordgren's scoring of *The Seventh Seal's* music is similarly sparse in its composition. Roger Hickman notes, "for the most part, the instrumental groups are small and [Nordgren] never calls upon the warm sounds of string instruments" (2006: 235).

The twin appearances of the 13th century Latin hymn *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath") in *The Seventh Seal* demonstrate how deliberately sparse *The Seventh Seal's* soundtrack is. The first version appears at the beginning; the film opens with a credit sequence of white font on a black background shown in absolute silence (total silence

on the soundtrack). Ominous non-diegetic mood music is then added while the screen remains black. When the first shot appears, it does so almost as a burst of light; a low angle shot shows an overcast sky with bright light shining through an opening in the dark clouds. In accompaniment of the image, the ominous music crescendos to the soaring chorus of *Dies Irae*. It is, without question, grand and orchestral. The second aural appearance of *Dies Irae* occurs during the penitents' procession. The piece is performed in a decidedly anti-orchestral way; hooded monks sing-chant the hymn in low brooding voices accompanied by the tortured screams of penitents whipping themselves. The apocalypse loses its majestic terror and is now sullen and evokes emaciation. In the miserable world of *The Seventh Seal* even the apocalypse has been stripped of spectacle.

The Seventh Seal's sparse soundtrack reaches its nadir in the scene of Raval's (Bertil Anderberg) death. Here, diegetic absolute silence is achieved and used to great effect in depicting the silence of the Bergmanian void. Raval appears in the forest where the group has once again stopped to rest. He has caught the plague and begs for mercy. No one answers him except for Jöns who tells him to keep his distance. Raval stumbles a distance away screaming and finally dies. His death is filmed with a static camera, in long shot, and in diegetic absolute silence. On choosing the long shot over his signature close-ups, Bergman commented: "its horror would be reinforced in long shot" (Björkman et al. 1973: 109). But it is not simply the long shot that creates the horror Bergman describes; the combination of the distance of the (static) camera and diegetic absolute silence (made more pronounced by the shot being held longer than the action requires) emphasizes the solitude and abandonment one faces in death.⁸ Specific directions for silence in this scene are noted in the screenplay:

⁸ Bergman recalls the unexpected stream of sunlight that falls on Raval's corpse: "When the thief Raval died of the plague in *The Seventh Seal*, I did what I do usually and let the camera run for a while after his scene was through. Suddenly the sun appeared over the tops of the pine trees. Pale, but

RAVAL. I'm afraid of death.

No one answers. There is complete silence. RAVAL gasps heavily for air. The dry leaves rustle with his movements.

RAVAL. I don't want to die! I don't want to!

No one answers.

...

RAVAL. Can't you have pity on me? Help me! At least talk to me.

No one answers. The trees sigh. RAVAL begins to cry.

RAVAL. I am going to die. I. I. I! What will happen to me! Can no one console me? Haven't you any compassion? Can't you see that I ...

...

RAVAL. Help me, help me!

No one answers, no one moves. RAVAL's sobs are dry and convulsive, like a frightened child's. His sudden scream is cut off in the middle. Then it becomes quiet. (TSS 75-76)

Raval's pleas, "talk to me", are strikingly similar to Antonius's pleas for answers in the confession chamber. Both times, these pleas go unanswered; both times, the silences imply abandonment. The earlier scene too included stage directions that call for silence but as previously mentioned, Bergman had employed an impressionist silence. However, here in Raval's death scene, the silence is a diegetic absolute silence. The urgency of an imminent death does not offer transcendental clarity but instead a deeper and more agonizing silence. Even in death, Bergman does not allow respite from the gripping terror that is the silence of God.

Dialogue and Silence: Lateral Transcendence

On one occasion, however, Bergman allows hope to emerge amidst the darkness. The hillside picnic in *The Seventh Seal* remains one of Bergman's most positive

because the picture was underexposed, the effect was marvelous. Instead of dying in darkness in a clearing in the woods, he died as sunlight broke over him" (Shargel 2007: 7-8).

creations of human solidarity. Before they get acquainted, the paths of the major characters cross as if by fate. While resting on a cliff, Antonius sees Mia (Bibi Andersson) and baby Michael—a sight reminiscent of Jof’s (Nils Poppe) earlier vision of Mary and the Christ—and joins them. Soon Jof, Jöns, and the “mute” girl (Gunnel Lindblom) arrive and the group enjoys a picnic of fresh milk and wild strawberries.⁹ Initially, Antonius is preoccupied with his spiritual agony. Echoing his earlier confession, he tells Mia, “faith is a torment, did you know that? It is like loving someone who is out there in the darkness but never appears, no matter how loudly you call” (*TSS* 54). Antonius, however, readily engages Mia and the rest of the group in conversation. The lively interaction eventually dispels Antonius’s melancholia and he declares, “how unimportant it all becomes suddenly” (*TSS* 54). In the absence of God, Antonius finds solace in his fellow man. The hushed quality of the scene invokes a church-like atmosphere, as though the picnic were an open-air communion. Though a mask of Death hangs quietly but visibly in the background, as a reminder of the omnipresence of death, the mood remains cheerful. Their communal bliss is reinforced acoustically. As mentioned above, Hickman notes the absence of string instruments on the soundtrack but, here, Jof’s lute (noted in the screenplay as a lyre) is heard diegetically, lending to the scene the “warm sounds” Hickman argued would oppose the otherwise ominous non-diegetic music of Nordgren’s composition (2006: 235). Furthermore, the chirping of birds is heard, suggesting day, as opposed to the hooting of the owl that is heard before the scene of Raval’s death. The group’s exchanges are candid, full of spontaneity and humor, and this moment of solidarity appears to offer Antonius the transcendence he seeks. As opposed to upward (spiritual or religious) transcendence, Will H. Rockett terms this “lateral transcendence”:

⁹ In the commentary included in the Criterion DVD of *The Seventh Seal*, Peter Cowie comments on the importance of strawberries as a symbol of summer for the Swedes. Strawberries also appear as a symbol of togetherness in *Summer Interlude* (1951) and *Wild Strawberries*. Also, Norman N. Holland (1959) notes the association of strawberries with the Virgin Mary in late northern iconography.

Such lateral transcendence does take one out of oneself and one's world, but only in sideways, social, and immanent ways. To connect with another's sufferings, to practice a model of sacrifice for one another, to give selfless love, all these are hints and clues of an upward transcendence, but remain earthbound. If there is no Wholly Other, no matter the depth of experience, the "transcendence" remains lateral and secular, a sort of material religious consciousness. (Lindvall 2005: 13-14)

The idea of transcendence is affirmed by Antonius's gestures as he drinks from a bowl of milk. Cradling the bowl in both hands, he raises it to his lips, invoking the sacred ritual of Holy Communion. The secular act takes on religious significance and in doing so, suggests the possibility of resolving spiritual angst through existential epiphany. In this simple affair, he finds profound existential meaning. He declares their solidarity "an adequate sign [which] will be enough for me" (*TSS* 55).

In comparing two encounters between Antonius and Death, one sees his transition from doubting man to confidence personified. As discussed earlier, when Antonius meets Death in the church, he is angst-ridden and urgent in his search for answers. The rhythm of the earlier exchange contrasts dramatically with that of a later encounter. After leaving the group to enjoy their feast, Antonius meets Death to continue their chess game:

DEATH. What are you laughing at?

KNIGHT. Don't worry about my laughter; save your king instead.

DEATH. You're rather arrogant.

KNIGHT. Our game amuses me.

DEATH. It's your move. Hurry up. I'm a little pressed for time.

KNIGHT. I understand that you've a lot to do, but you can't get out of our game. It takes time. (*TSS* 55)

Here, Antonius appears to have overcome his desperation and urgency. While the previous exchange resembles a monologue, Antonius now engages Death in banter, taking on a playful and arrogant tone. The tables have turned, it is now Death who is "pressed for time" and Antonius is deliberately evasive. One assumes that the hillside

communion has given Antonius the answers he so desperately sought and he is now no longer apprehensive about death or preoccupied with questions of God and the possible afterlife.

Unsurprisingly, such optimism ultimately proves short-lived. Antonius's satisfaction with his one significant act is summarily shattered upon meeting Death at the castle. His inspired confidence gives way to another bout of desperation and paralyzing doubt. As the group—now joined by Antonius's wife, Karin (Inga Landgré)—has their last meal together, the sacred quality of their earlier communion is now replaced by somberness. Echoing the omniscient narrator from the opening sequence, Karin reads the biblical passage of the opening of the seventh seal (Revelations 8:1-11). Stage directions in the screenplay draw attention to the soundscape: "*the rain becomes quiet. There is suddenly an immense, frightening silence in the large, murky room . . . Everyone listens tensely to the stillness*" (TSS 80). Once again, though the screenplay emphasizes silence, the soundtrack is not technically silent. Karin's voice is most prominent and, in the background, one hears the low rumbling of thunder and a persistent howling wind. The sounds meld to create an impressionist silence which is made more pronounced by the loud echoes of Karin's solemn voice. Ominous non-diegetic music is then introduced to complete the sense of foreboding as they anticipate Death's arrival. When Death does arrive, his presence is not introduced visually but acoustically. In previous scenes, his sudden appearances are accompanied by equally abrupt synchronous shifts in sounds—either diegetic absolute silence or ominous music. In this scene, the sound elements are systematically subtracted (first the diegetic sounds, then non-diegetic music, then Karin's voice) until there is absolute diegetic silence and only then does Death appear. Confronted by Death, the group stands amidst the silence of the Bergmanian void which, at this point, unmistakably manifests their total aloneness. Faced with such silence, Antonius's

bravado crumbles. Of all those present, he is the only one to cower in fear. The film's enlightened hero "hides his face in his hands" as the others introduce themselves to Death stoically (*TSS* 81). The confidence that his existential epiphany had previously inspired in him has been dispelled by the religious doubts he failed to exorcise. While *The Seventh Seal* had previously led its audience to believe that human solidarity is the earthly equivalent (or proof of the existence) of God, it now exposes its inadequacy in placating the tortured religious individual. Antonius is reduced to a whimpering shadow of his former self; the redemptive power of existential epiphanies is renounced and once more, Antonius begs God to emerge from his silence.

In essence, Antonius's tale is an immensely pessimistic one. What is suggested is that the individual is capable of becoming painfully aware of God's silence, but incapable of compelling God to speak (or manifest in a tangible way); incapable of accepting this silence as proof that God does not exist; yet also incapable of unquestioningly accepting that God exists. For many, Jöns's approach of indifference to the question of God's existence is the best possible response. His non-religious and purely existentialist approach to life allows him to remain defiant in the face of death. He boldly instructs the group to "feel the immense triumph of this last minute when you can still roll your eyes and move your toes" (*TSS* 81). However, though Bergman recognizes the advantages of Jöns's existential approach, what is implied is that such an attitude to life is simply unavailable to Antonius, one who had been indoctrinated by religious beliefs and, at least for some time, thought them to be timeless and true. Antonius's difficulty finds similarity with Tarkovsky's interpretation of Dostoevsky's atheism (or non-religion): "[Dostoevsky] wants to believe in God but cannot—the relevant organ is atrophied" (Tarkovsky 1991: 147). The autobiographical aspect is also evident; Bergman himself constantly negotiated with his ideas of God, moving back and forth between a desired confirmation of God's existence and a rejection of it. When

examined as a whole, the structure of *The Seventh Seal* (concluding as it does with the scene of Jof's family enjoying a new day) supports Jesse Kalin's interpretation of this period in Bergman's cinema as one of "gloomy optimism" (2003: xiv). However, regarding the quest to resolve religious doubt and subsequently achieve personal salvation, *The Seventh Seal* culminates in pessimistic resignation. Furthermore, lateral transcendence and existential epiphany are shown to be inadequate substitutes for spiritual guarantees—a sentiment also expressed in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. In the Bergmanian void, sounds are primarily used to create and amplify the great silence.

Chapter Two

Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light, and the Alienating Human Silence

Through a Glass Darkly

The thematic concerns of *The Seventh Seal* are carried into three later films that are often collectively referred to as the “faith trilogy”—*Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*.¹ Bergman termed them “chamber work[s]”, inspired by chamber music which, by his definition, was music “with an extremely limited number of voices and figures [exploring] the essence of a number of motifs” (Björkman et al. 1973: 168). The shift to smaller casts (screen time is shared among four main characters at most) indicates a change in emphasis from the silence of God to the silence in human interactions. Noting this focal shift, Tarkovsky wrote that through these films Bergman “explore[d] his view of man” (1989: 147).

Through a Glass Darkly continues *The Seventh Seal*’s pursuit of God through human solidarity. Bergman wrote, “[the film] was a desperate attempt to present a simple philosophy: God is love and love is God. A person surrounded by Love is also surrounded by God” (1994: 248). The main action of the film, however, not only fails to prove this premise but also reveals the impossibility of human connectedness. This can be seen through a study of the soundscape; in scenes without dialogue, the rare sounds of the birds and the foghorn are used as elements of auditory setting (EAS), bringing to consciousness the relative silence surrounding the characters. As demonstrated in *The Seventh Seal*, silence in Bergman’s world represents void. To depict the Bergmanian void, Stig Flodin’s sound mixing in these films—*Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*—creates increasingly minimal soundscapes. In *Through a Glass*

¹ Though he adopted the term in describing these three films, Bergman would later renounce the decision: “Today I feel that the ‘trilogy’ has neither rhyme nor reason” (1994: 245).

Darkly, dialogue exists within an otherwise empty soundscape, rendering it even more vulnerable to scrutiny than usual. Consider the outdoor dinner enjoyed by the family of four early in the film:

MARTIN. How long'll you be away?

DAVID. Don't know really. Maybe I'll stay on awhile at Dubrovnik, after the others have gone home.

A moment's silence follows. David looks from one to the other, then laughs.

DAVID. Somehow or other I feel like a criminal.

MINUS. You promised you'd stay home after Switzerland. Didn't you?

DAVID. I have a vague memory we ... we spoke of it. But that I ever promised...

MINUS. You promised, Daddy.

DAVID. What a shame.

MINUS. Yes, it's a shame.

*Silence again.*²

Though it is an exterior setting, the scene is completely without ambient sound. In the moments of silence noted in the screenplay, the sound of cutlery hitting plates becomes amplified. Their words are spoken into an otherwise empty soundscape, exposing the awkward performances of familial harmony and the falsity of their words.

As the film progresses, however, at key moments, these impressionist silences are overwhelmed by non-diegetic music. As opposed to *The Seventh Seal's* subtle integration of ominous non-diegetic music into various scenes, here, it is introduced in full-force. As a result of the sudden and dramatic acoustic elevation from an otherwise sparse soundscape, one certainly does not feel an effect of silence. On a technical level, it is as though the musical piece—the sarabande of Bach's cello suite No. 2—is used to “plug” gaps and holes in the soundtrack. There is no question that the music serves a

² Bergman (1967: 23-24), henceforth *Trilogy* (shortened from *A Film Trilogy*) and quoted in-text with page numbers.

thematic purpose; it is heard at key moments and is evocative. But more than that, the sarabande is used structurally. In place of spoken language, the sarabande is employed as an acoustic refrain, performing a hope for meaningful human interactions. It inorganically “plugs” the silences that have been created by human silences.

By studying the sarabande’s various acoustic appearances in *Through a Glass Darkly*, one is able to see how far this hope to overcome the silence between human beings (and by extension, the silence of God) prevails. Indeed, much has been said about the role of music in the film and much of it focuses on music’s capacity for the “meeting of selves at a fuller emotional level” (M. Bird n.d.: 3).³ In thinking of music as an emotional bridge where words fail, *Through a Glass Darkly* anticipates later films like *The Silence*, *Cries and Whispers*, *Autumn Sonata*, and *Saraband* (2003), all of which have a similar focus on human relationships. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, the sarabande is heard four times and each acoustic appearance accompanies a moment of possible communication/communion. It is first heard over the opening credit sequence. As in *The Seventh Seal*, the credits are presented in white font on a black background; however, the acoustic accompaniment is not absolute silence but the entire first half of the sarabande. This will be the most complete version of the sarabande, indicating the fullness of hope one feels as the film begins. The second time the sarabande is heard, Karin (Harriet Andersson) has just read her father, David’s (Gunnar Björnstrand), diary. There, she discovers her author-father’s vampiristic fascination with her descent into madness as he confesses “[his] impulse to register its course, to note concisely her gradual dissolution. To make use of her” (*Trilogy* 35). Immediately after, the sarabande begins to play but this time it is truncated. Written in private, David’s words are at their most truthful. In this moment of truthfulness Karin realizes that David does not perceive himself as father with his daughter, but an artist with his subject. The possibility of

³ For more on the role of music in *Through a Glass Darkly*, see Broman (2012), Jenkins (2006), Hubner (2007), Renaud (2012), and Törnqvist (2011).

communion is disrupted and manifested in a shorter iteration of the sarabande. The third time the sarabande is heard, after an implied incestuous encounter between Karin and her brother, Minus (Lars Passgård), it is presented in an even shorter version. After their coupling, Minus becomes desperate to wake a listless Karin from a trance-like state but she remains unresponsive. Distressed, he runs back into the house and while there, crumbles to the ground in a moment of confusion. He looks out the window and utters, “God”.⁴ At this word—which undoubtedly carries much significance in a Bergman film of this period—the sarabande plays. This version of the sarabande, the shortest one thus far, signals that the film’s pursuit of God through human solidarity appears to culminate in this moment of aberrant communion. However, in the final scene, the pessimism of the entire film up to this point is renounced in favor of hope. After watching Karin being taken away in a helicopter, presumably to a mental institution, a despairing Minus goes to his father for comfort and answers. Minus demands, “give me some proof of God,” and David confidently holds his gaze, telling him:

It is written: *God is love*. . . . We can’t know whether love proves God’s existence or whether love is itself God. After all, it doesn’t make very much difference. (*Trilogy* 60-61 original emphasis)

This scene is often regarded as incongruous with the rest of the film: Robert Emmet Long calls it “totally unconvincing”; Robin Wood criticizes it as “beyond question the worst ending in mature Bergman”; and Jörn Donner finds the ending to be a “dramaturgical error” (Long 1994:100; Wood 1969: 107; Björkman et al. 1973: 167). Even Bergman himself came to admit, “the epilogue [was] tacked loosely onto *Through a Glass Darkly*,” and “they stand there side by side, quite dead”. (Bergman 1994: 243; Björkman et al. 1973: 167). The conclusion was Bergman’s attempt to accept that, as the biblical passage suggests, “for now [he can only] see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

⁴ In the screenplay, Minus is more desperate and frightened, “MINUS (*whispering*): God... God... help us!” . . . *Again and again he calls on God. At length, exhausted, he falls silent (Trilogy 50).*

The significance of the final scene, however, lies neither in its clumsy attempt to neatly resolve a family tragedy nor its (in)ability to prove the existence of God through human solidarity. Instead it is its tireless hope for human communion that is most poignant. As David walks away, Minus's eyes follow him and he utters, "Daddy spoke to me" (*Trilogy* 61). This conclusion is echoed acoustically by the sarabande. As Minus and David talk, the sarabande plays without being cut mid-way through. Instead, the music is faded out. Chadwick Jenkins maintains:

In a film that seems to document the near impossibility of communication this final gesture holds out some modicum of hope. The shallowness of David's definition of God demonstrates that communication is founded on effort and willingness more than intellectual design. Just prior to the speech we hear Bach's sarabande, beginning as it always has throughout the film. But this time, Bergman manipulates the performance; he fades the recording out. It never actually ends; it merely becomes inaudible. And in doing so, it seems to continue on unheard and uninterrupted, opening up the space within which the only successful communication of the film takes place. (2006: part 2 para. 12)

Similarly, Laura Hubner argues, "Minus does not agree with David's words *per se* but rejoices in human contact, suggesting a move towards humanism, but not necessarily a resolution" (2007: 55). The sarabande, the film's acoustic suggestion of the hope for truthful and meaningful communication, is now replaced by an actual chance to achieve it.⁵

Winter Light

Winter Light refutes the proof of God which one hopes to receive from human solidarity and communication aspired to in *The Seventh Seal* and *Through a Glass Darkly* respectively. Beginning with the cinematography, Bergman sets out to create a dreary atmosphere. He recalls, "not one shot was taken in direct sunlight. We filmed only when it was overcast or foggy. A Swedish man in the midst of a Swedish reality experiencing a dismal aspect of the Swedish climate" (1994: 264). Beyond the obvious

⁵ Per F. Broman (2012) has also noted the different tempos in each of the four versions of the sarabande, though he does not suggest any particular significance to the varying tempos.

metaphors of spiritual emptiness presented in the barren, wintry landscape and empty church pews, the film's tone is decidedly one of void. From the opening credit sequence, the silence of God is foregrounded. The visual is of white font over a black background (as in the credit sequences of both *The Seventh Seal* and *Through a Glass Darkly*) while the slow ringing of a bell is heard. This echoes the ringing heard during Antonius's confession in *The Seventh Seal*. While the earlier two films had only alluded to the great question, "Why do we have to go on living?" *Winter Light* asks it in a most forthright manner (*Trilogy 74*). When Jonas Persson poses this question, Reverend Tomas Eriksson can neither answer it nor hold Jonas's gaze (Max von Sydow and Gunnar Björnstrand respectively). This is a far cry from *Through a Glass Darkly* where David held Minus's gaze confidently when asked for proof of God's existence. While *Through a Glass Darkly* insistently (and absurdly) declares love as the manifestation of an otherwise silent God, *Winter Light* is less idealistic and explores the effects of God's silence on human beings.

Winter Light is among the most widely debated films in Bergman scholarship. This is in no small part due to the perceived ambiguity of the closing scene. The Frostnäs church service which concludes the film has left many wondering if it expresses optimism or pessimism regarding the possibility of resolving spiritual doubt as well as achieving meaningful human communication. I argue that a closer study of audio-visual elements from earlier scenes clarifies the film's conclusion.

Sounds and Silences of Void: Absolute Silence

Mid-way through the film, Jonas, a depressed member of Tomas' congregation, returns to church to speak with his pastor. However, what begins as a counseling session soon spirals into the pastor's confession of his own spiritual doubt. Eventually Jonas leaves and subsequently commits suicide.

Despite the disconcerting series of events, many argue that Bergman intended the scene to be optimistic and had successfully executed such intention. The contention that Tomas achieves some sort of religious or spiritual epiphany is valid. As Jonas leaves, Tomas watches him walk away and the camera tracks in for a close-up for Tomas's face. At that moment, light streams in from the window and illuminates his face. Hubert I. Cohen argues, "this burst of light is the sign of His [God's] approval of Tomas's arrival at a truer sense of reality" (1993: 188). This epiphany, a metaphorical enlightenment depicted through a literal illumination, appears to be the elusive liberation from religious doubt that Tomas, and Antonius of *The Seventh Seal*, seek. As Antonius's desperate question, "why can't I kill the God within me?" testifies, he had failed to achieve this liberation but the burst of light here suggests that Tomas has succeeded (*TSS* 28). After the bright light streams in, Tomas utters emotionlessly, "God, why have you forsaken me?"⁶ This, of course, is the same phrase uttered by Christ on the Cross, one of what are known as the Seven Last Words. Its significance is exemplified by the fact that it appears in at least three different biblical passages—Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, and Psalms 22:1. Tomas's utterance echoes Christ's resignation to being abandoned by God the Father. The tone is a far cry from the another reference to the Last Words; in *The Seventh Seal*, upon finally meeting Death, the unnamed "mute" girl smiles and utters her only line, "It is finished," a declaration, theologians agree, of triumph.⁷

Understood this way, *Winter Light* will not appear optimistic about the possibility of rediscovering faith. Esma Kartal, however, contends that this epiphany

⁶ In the screenplay, Tomas is not emotionless. Instead it reads, "TOMAS (*moaning*): God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (*Trilogy* 87) The difference in the manner in which Tomas is to deliver the line is pivotal, it cues the audience in understanding if this revelation saddens or relieves Tomas. Since Gunnar Björnstrand delivers the line emotionlessly (as he remains throughout the film), the scene becomes more difficult to interpret. The difference in the screenplay and the film is important and will be discussed further.

⁷ In the screenplay, the phrase is "It is the end" (*TSS* 81). The phrase appears in John 19:30. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* proposed this interpretation: "[Christ's] mission was now about to be completed. The work of salvation was [to be] accomplished". Christ's declaration is therefore also referred to as "The Word of Triumph" (Kyle 1988: 426).

brings Tomas a new image of God; she writes, “Tomas has discovered a new way of perceiving God and he begins to form a new idea of faith in his mind” (2012: 75). Cohen and Kartal both relate Tomas’s illumination to the closing scene at the Frostnäs church, arguing that since Tomas forges on with the second church service, he has undoubtedly achieved personal salvation. For Cohen, “[the closing sequence] is infused with . . . a rekindled faith in a redefined God” (1993: 193). Indeed, the Frostnäs service is portrayed differently from the Mittsunda church service that opens the film. There, Tomas presides over the final moments of a poorly attended service in rural Mittsunda. A heavy silence permeates the scene and only Tomas’s voice can be heard. His back is turned toward the congregation and his eyes are downcast. As he prays and recites religious scripture, his voice is solemn and monotonous and will remain so throughout the service. As he prays aloud, there is a cross-dissolve to a long shot of the wintry landscape, an isolated snow-covered church, and a slow-moving river. Spiritual emptiness is performed both acoustically and visually. Michael Bird notes a number of significant differences between these two services:

[*mise-en-scene*]

In the opening scene, the church is gloomily lit; in the second scene, a warm (albeit electrical) light fills the interior; the crucifix and its imagery of death in the first setting is replaced by the life-giving image of the Virgin and Child in the second.

[Tomas]

The weak-voiced Tomas gives way to the more robustly-speaking Tomas of the later service; in the second context, Tomas no longer coughs nor does he wear the glasses which had obscured his face earlier.

[the congregation]

The indifferent congregation of the first service gives way to the solitary figure of Märta who now kneels and prays intensely in her dark corner of the church.

[the sermon]

In an interesting sleight of hand, Bergman has opened with a closing and closed with an opening, using one and the same liturgical text throughout. (n.d.: para. 34)

These differences, Bird asserts, illustrate the optimism with which *Winter Light* concludes. Along with Cohen, Kartal, and Bird, the Ingmar Bergman Foundation expresses a similar sentiment. The article on the film references Bergman's own description of the ending as depicting "the stirrings of a new faith" (2012: para. 12).⁸ Given Bergman's own declaration, it would seem indisputable that *Winter Light* offers an ultimately affirmative vision of faith.

It must be noted, however, that, aside from Bird, the above claims are heavily influenced by comments Bergman made during the time he was drafting the screenplay. Vilgot Sjöman recorded these comments in *L136: Diary with Ingmar Bergman* along with many conversations in which Bergman had used Sjöman as a sounding board for ideas. Furthermore, as can be expected of any film, there are differences between the screenplay and the actual film. In *Winter Light*, these differences become crucial in their ability to demonstrate the changing attitudes Bergman had toward the subject matter from the time of writing to that of filming. It would appear that Bergman began the writing process with the same hopefulness that closed *Through a Glass Darkly* as can be seen from his intention to end the film with "the stirrings of a new faith". It is from this comment that many have developed their interpretations about *Winter Light's* religious optimism. Sjöman notes that Bergman had intended for the film to be divided into three sections, with the final one as:

3. THE FLOWERING OF A NEW BELIEF. "That's the most difficult part to write. I think I've found a solution. Have you heard of 'duplication'? Certain Sundays the pastor has two services to perform: the one in the parish church and then one for a mission congregation. Now there is a practice in the Swedish church which says that no service need to be held when there are three persons in the church. This is what I do: When Gunnar Björnstrand arrives at the mission church the warden comes forward toward him and says: 'Only one person is here for the service.' Nevertheless, the pastor conducts the service. Nothing more is needed to indicate the new feeling which moves inside the pastor." (Sjöman 1974: 37)

⁸ Alternate translations of the phrase include, "flowering of a new belief" (Sjöman 1974: 36) and "A new faith shows signs of life" (Shargel 2007: 29).

Here, the argument for an optimistic *Winter Light* is supported by Bergman's declaration. However, this comment, dated "10 July 1961," was made when Bergman was still mid-way through the writing process (Sjöman 1974: 36).⁹ As noted on the screenplay itself, Bergman finished writing on 7th August 1961 and began filming on two months later. His vision of the film was subject to much change throughout:

[10 August 1961]

"The end. One never feels the 'flowering of a new belief' in Tomas. He just goes in and does the service . . ."

"Exactly. He is the pack mule that plods on. Much too weak to be of any use in God's work. God can't instill any strength in him"

. . .

[2 October 1961]

Where is Tomas in the final scene, religiously speaking? Here, says Ingmar: "*The mirror is clean. There stands a newly scoured vessel that can be filled by mercy. By a new image of God.*" (Sjöman 1974: 38, 40 original emphasis)

Bergman continued to offer differing interpretations even after the film's release. For instance, in an interview in 1969 (six years after), he recalled the incident which inspired the final sequence. While visiting a small church near Uppsala, Bergman and his father sat in a poorly attended church service. Before the service began, the pastor stated that he was unwell and had decided to shorten the service. Bergman's father, a retired clergyman, was, in Bergman's words, "furious" and eventually took over and conducted a full service.

In some way I feel the end of the [film] was influenced by my father's intervention—that at all costs one must do what is one's duty to do, particularly in spiritual contexts. *Even if it can seem meaningless.* (Björkman et al. 1973: 173-174)

In *The Magic Lantern* written in 1988, regarding the same incident, Bergman wrote:

When the hymn was over, he turned to us and spoke in his calm free voice: "Holy, holy, holy Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most High."

Thus I was given the end of *Winter Light* and the codification of a rule I was to follow from then on: *irrespective of everything, you will hold your*

⁹ Dated "20 July 1961" in a reprint of the same article in *Ingmar Bergman Interviews* (Shargel 2007: 29).

communion. (1988: 273 original emphasis)

And in *Images* in 1994:

He goes through with his service for no other reason than that Märta Lundberg is present. If one has religious faith, one could say that God has spoken to him. If one does not believe in God, one might prefer to say that Märta Lundberg and Algot Frövik are two people who helped raise a fellow human being who has fallen and is digging his own grave. *At that point it doesn't matter if God is silent or if He is speaking*. (1994: 271 emphasis mine)

How are we to interpret Bergman's contradictory statements? Taking all this into consideration, does Tomas become a "pack mule that plods on" or a spiritually re-born pastor speaking in a "calm free voice" ready to be "filled by mercy [and] a new image of God"? What about his dedication, "Torö, 7 August 1961, S.D.G. [*Soli Deo Gloria*/Glory to God Alone]," on the completed screenplay (*Trilogy* 63)?

As I argued earlier, there is a significant dissonance in Bergman's treatment of spiritual doubt and salvation as he moves from writing to filming. Like *The Seventh Seal* and *Through a Glass Darkly*, the screenplay for *Winter Light* is earnest and displays a desperate need for metaphysical certainties and meaningful human communication. However, the film itself is stripped of the screenplay's sentimentalism; for instance, in the previously mentioned illumination scene, the screenplay notes, "TOMAS. (*moaning*): God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (*Trilogy* 87) In the film, however, Tomas is decidedly emotionless.¹⁰

The illumination constitutes a pivotal moment in *Winter Light* as Tomas is finally able to make sense of God's silence, the very thing which cripples him. While optimistic readings of the illumination may appear valid, a different interpretation surfaces through close attention to the scene's soundscape. Unlike *The Seventh Seal* and *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light* does not employ non-diegetic sound—the only exception is the initial few seconds of voiceover in Marta's letter to Tomas. Combining

¹⁰ See footnote 6 of this chapter.

this with the barren wintry landscape where diegetic sounds appear muffled by thick snow, the soundscape becomes sparser than in any previous film. The encounter between Tomas and Jonas takes place inside the pastor's chamber where the only audible sounds are of the door when opened and closed and the constant ticking of a clock. In the first few moments of the scene, there is a quick cut to a close-up shot of the clock. This draws attention to the loud ticking and establishes it as a diegetic sound source. When the two men begin speaking, the ticking continues but becomes steadily softer until it is inaudible. By the time Tomas unburdens himself to Jonas, Jonas has withdrawn into silence and the ticking is completely absent. Tomas's words exist in an even emptier soundscape than the confession scene in *The Seventh Seal* and the outdoor dinner in *Through a Glass Darkly*. The silence is no longer an impressionist silence but a diegetic absolute silence. This silence is as intentional as it is significant. While on the visual level, the film departs from the screenplay (the screenplay calls for a shot montage that is replaced in the film by a long take of Tomas's face in close-up), at the acoustic level, the demand for silence is not only retained but also faithfully implemented:

*Complete silence. He drags himself over to the window.
No car, no traces. Not a sound. The snow falls softly and steadily. God's
silence, Christ twisted face, the blood on the brow and hands, the soundless
shriek behind the bared teeth.
God's silence. (Trilogy 87)*

Here, the silence of God is no longer depicted through suggestive sounds of bells or ominous music. In addition to the complete absence of non-diegetic sound, Flodin systematically eliminates diegetic sounds until diegetic absolute silence is achieved. When Tomas walks out from his chamber, he utters, "I'm free now. Free at last" and weeps (*Trilogy 87*). He has literally heard the absolute emptiness of God's silence and has finally seen the hollowness of religious platitudes and promises. Tomas indeed "arriv[es] at a truer sense of reality," as Cohen argues, but clearly not one blessed by

“[a] sign of [God’s] approval” (1993: 188). There is no approval to be had because the silence has shown that there simply is no God. In contrast to his namesake, *Winter Light*’s Doubting T(h)omas is liberated from his doubt by killing the God within him.¹¹ This death of God does not give rise to a new image of God but instead affirms his earlier suspicion, “there isn’t any creator, no sustainer of life, no design” (*Trilogy* 86). By Tomas’s own admission, the epiphany has destroyed any “fleeting hope that everything [religious truths and promises] wouldn’t turn out to be illusions, dreams, and lies” (*Trilogy* 88). In putting an ear close to the soundscape, one is able to hear the silence. As Märta (Ingrid Thulin) says: “God hasn’t ever spoken, because God doesn’t exist. It’s as simple as that.”¹² Manifested, the silence of God is absolute silence.

Dialogue and Silence: Mute Speech

In the absence of God, *Winter Light* turns to human relationships as a possible source of existential meaning and comfort. While the film’s exploration of spiritual doubt and faith is significant, the film also conducts a considerably extensive dialogue regarding human communication. As mentioned, when translated, the original Swedish title *Nattvardsgästerna*, reads “The Communicants”. Implicitly then, *Winter Light* addresses an apparent inability for people to meaningfully communicate with each other—an idea that Bergman further develops in *The Silence*. While the silence of God is acoustically illustrated through diegetic absolute silence, the “silence” between human beings is underscored here by excessive speech—particularly through turning dialogues into monologues.

One obvious instance of this is in the previously mentioned encounter between Tomas and Jonas. Their conversation begins with Tomas asking Jonas about his

¹¹ Thomas the Apostle had refused to believe the man in front of him was Christ resurrected. He demanded proof, declaring, ““unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it”” (John 20:25).

¹² The dialogue from the screenplay is even more poignant. Märta says, “God hasn’t ever spoken, because he doesn’t exist. *It’s all so unusually, horribly simple*” (*Trilogy* 78 emphasis mine).

depression to which Jonas only answers in short phrases. Tomas then attempts to comfort Jonas with stories of his personal struggles but stops mid-sentence, buries his face in his hands, and enters into a confessional monologue. Jonas is clearly uncomfortable; he averts Tomas's gaze and turns his face away but Tomas is indifferent to, or unaware of, it. When Jonas tries to leave, Tomas pleads with him to stay. Jonas agrees but the two men are turned away from each other for the remaining time. The screenplay presents a less self-absorbed Tomas, one who is aware of the existential turmoil afflicting the both of them. The screenplay's Tomas urges Jonas to recognize the coming of better days, a stark contrast to Tomas in the film who is patently blind to Jonas's twisting anxieties. Nevertheless, in both versions, their dialogue eventually becomes a monologue.

[Screenplay]

TOMAS. Just a little longer. Five minutes ... Just...

JONAS (*sits down, extremely restive*).

TOMAS. That's right. Now let's have a nice, quiet talk. Forgive me—I've been talking in a confused, incomprehensible way. But such a lot of things can suddenly come over one, can't they?

Tomas gets up from the table and shuts the church door, standing beneath the crucifix.

JONAS (*trapped*).

TOMAS. Well, and what if God doesn't exist? What difference does it make?

JONAS (*looks toward the door*).

TOMAS. Life becomes something we can understand. What a relief! And death—extinction, dissolution of the body and soul. People's cruelty, their loneliness, their fear—everything becomes self-evident—transparent. Suffering is incomprehensible, so it needn't be explained. The stars out in space, worlds, heavens, all have given birth to themselves and to each other. There isn't any creator, no one who holds it all together, no immeasurable thought to make one's head spin.

JONAS (*looks towards the door*).

TOMAS. We're alone, you and I. We've betrayed the only condition under which men can live: to live together. And that's why we're so poverty-stricken, joyless, and full of fear. All this stink of an antique godliness! All this supernatural helplessness, this humiliating sense of sin!

JONAS (*averts his glance*).

TOMAS. You must live, Jonas. Summer's on the way. After all, the darkness won't last for ever. You've got your strawberry bed, haven't you, and your flowering jasmine? What perfume! Long hot days. It's the earthly paradise, Jonas. It's something to live for!

JONAS. (*looks at the wall*).

TOMAS. We'll see a lot of each other, you and I. We'll become good friends, and talk to each other about this dark day. We've given gifts to each other, haven't we? You've given me your fear and I've given you a god I've killed.

JONAS (*looks away*) (*Trilogy 85-86*)

[Film]

TOMAS. Just a little longer. Five minutes ... Just...

JONAS (*nods, continues to stand with his back to Tomas*)

TOMAS. Forgive me—I've been talking in a confused, incomprehensible way. But it all suddenly hit me.

TOMAS. Well, and what if God doesn't exist? What difference does it make?

JONAS (*emotionless*)

TOMAS. Life becomes something we can understand. What a relief! And death—extinction, dissolution of the body and soul. People's cruelty, their loneliness, their fear—everything becomes self-evident—transparent. Suffering is incomprehensible, so it needn't be explained. There isn't any creator. No sustainer of life, no design.

JONAS (*leaves as Tomas watches him*).

Despite the sincerity of Tomas's confession, the exchange achieves no communication. Jonas neither receives solace from nor feels sympathy for Tomas and Tomas is only concerned with his own confusion. Virtually every spoken exchange between the characters of *Winter Light* is a dialogue-turned-monologue. And, significantly, every

exchange occurs within an otherwise empty soundscape, within otherwise diegetic absolute silence.

In a film which associates the silence of God and the silence between human beings, the similarity between monologues and prayers is inescapable. In both cases the speakers express themselves in excess while their intended listener remains silent and seemingly unmoved. Consider the parallels between the opening service at Mittsunda where the hymn sung asks God to “hear our prayers, O merciful God,” “take my hand in Thine/Lead me, gently lead me” and Märta imploring Tomas through her letter, “take me and use me” (*Trilogy* 68, 70, 82). Tomas, along with the congregation, desperately tries to communicate with God in the same way that Märta passionately desires to communicate with Tomas. She declares her love for him in person to no avail and resorts to a lengthy letter—a monologue. Just as God is indifferent to hymns and prayers, Tomas treats Märta in a cold and detached manner. When Tomas reads the letter in his chamber, he is alone and the clock’s ticking is heard prominently. A sudden cut then shows Märta reading the letter. She looks straight into the camera, never diverting her gaze, and all other sound is immediately omitted. Tomas is now confronted by her words with nothing to obscure them. The scene stands in contrast to a later scene of Tomas standing guard by Jonas’s corpse. The roar of the rushing waters from a nearby lake drowns out all other sound and essentially “mutes” the soundscape as well as Tomas’s reaction to the suicide. Tarkovsky cites the scene as evidence of Bergman’s expressive use of sound.¹³ The empty soundscape amplifies the confrontational tone of Märta’s letter and it is not long before Tomas can take no more. The long take of Märta is abruptly cut off by a close up of Tomas’s hands agitatedly collecting the pages from all over the desk and stashing them away.

¹³ See Tarkovsky (1989), page 162 in particular.

Tomas's preoccupation with God's silence renders him emotionally impotent and unable to meaningfully communicate with Märta or to reciprocate her affection. While it could be that Tomas simply does not love Märta (after all, his devotion to his late wife proves that he is capable of love), Tomas appears neither capable of nor interested in communicating meaningfully with anyone. When the crippled Algot Frövik (Allan Edwall) enters Tomas's chamber and inquires about the latter's health, Tomas cuts him off mid-sentence and signals for him to leave. Later, he obliges Jonas, who clearly has more pressing needs, to indulge him as he tries to make sense of his confusion. His subsequent encounter with Jonas's wife, Karin (Gunnel Lindblom), is no different; he remains blind to her needs, offering her the empty consolation of reading from the Bible after relaying news of her husband's suicide. Furthermore, he never holds the gaze of another, preferring to assume a posture of distance by facing away whenever possible. Like Tomas, the other characters' communicative capabilities appear dulled and stunted. The church manager views relationships as monetary transactions; he is concerned only with counting the money collected at service and tells Tomas not to feel badly for dismissing Algot since "[Algot] has his pension from the railway company" therefore does not require time or concern as further compensation for his service (*Trilogy* 72). Even Märta, who is shown to be generous with affection, is blind to an extent; she cannot see that what Tomas needs is not her unconditional affection but liberation from his agonizing spiritual malaise. Most evidently, the communion, though Märta calls it a "love-feast," is devoid of the joy that *The Seventh Seal's* earthly hillside communion so plainly possesses. It is tragically incongruous with the sermon's declaration that God "has[t] instituted this holy communion to our consolation and bliss" (*Trilogy* 76, 69).

But perhaps the scene that most reveals Bergman's pessimism about the possibility for meaningful human communication is that of Märta's "prayer" in the

closing sequences at the Frostnäs church. Upon hearing the church bells, Märta falls to her knees and utters, “if only we could feel safe and dare show each other tenderness. If only we had some truth to believe in. If only we could believe” (*Trilogy* 104). The “prayer” is not an affirmation of her new faith in God, instead it bespeaks her resignation to the wretched state of being alive and yet being unable to meaningfully communicate with another, unable to find some semblance of truth in which to place one’s faith, and unable to even have faith itself. The repeated use of “if only” disallows any interpretation of a hopeful ending for Märta. Karin’s first words after learning of Jonas’s suicide, “so, I’m alone then,” are painfully accurate (*Trilogy* 97). Although Märta’s desire for communication is intense, it only serves as a reminder of her impotence to fulfill it. While her kneeling appears positive, as Bird proposes, her voice is monotonous, her tone is defeated, and her prayer is one of resignation directed at a non-existent God.

The tone of *Winter Light* is thus fully illuminated. One is able to understand why Tomas bothered to ask if a young boy has plans to attend confirmation class; why he offered to read from the Bible with Karin after relaying news of her husband’s suicide; why he went ahead with the second service; and finally, why the final scene at Frostnäs is not as ambiguous as initially thought. *Winter Light* has shown the experience of religion to be perfunctory and, in essence, void of actual meaning and significance. That God is dead to Tomas does not affect his decision to conduct another service, it is an empty ritual and a blind allegiance to a non-existent God. The question now is whether Tomas is truly free—he may have been liberated from his doubt but he has yet to be liberated from the habit and comfort of meaningless rituals. He turns to religious scripture in dealing with Karin because it has proven to be convenient as emotional currency. When Algot tells him that there is only a congregation of one, Tomas pauses to deliberate if he should call off the service but eventually goes ahead with it. He does

so not because his earlier exchange with Algot (which was a dialogue-turned-monologue as well) has led him to personal salvation but because performing the service is routine to him; it is literally a performance.¹⁴ He nods as a signal to Algot who goes to turn the chapel lights on which in turn signals to the reluctant pianist that he may begin playing the opening hymn. This is reminiscent of the first service at Mittsunda; after Tomas's prayer, the same pianist immediately begins the hymn and the congregation rises. At both services, their familiarity with the ritual is exercised with the mechanical precision of a well-rehearsed troupe. Even whilst proclaiming the affirming declarations of his sermon during this second service, Tomas remains emotionless. While Bird's impression of Tomas is that he is now "robustly-speaking", Tomas's voice remains as monotonous as it has been throughout the film (n.d.: para. 34). The idea that "all the earth is full of His glory" brings no joy to Tomas; to him, the words are not ironic but simply meaningless (*Trilogy* 104). Even the pianist exhibits an awareness of this as he drunkenly teases Märta, quoting Tomas's sermons verbatim, "God is love, and love is God. Love is the proof of God's existence (*Trilogy* 103). These proclamations notably express the same ideas that David does in the conclusion to *Through a Glass Darkly*. Similarly, the Mittsunda congregation's half-hearted singing suggests the meaninglessness of the hymn's words. Charlotte Renaud writes, "if music signifies a hope of communion, the lack of it signifies despair" (2012: para. 33). *Winter Light* includes minimal music and even then, denounces the potential of music to unify. While Bird had pointed out the positive differences between the Mittsunda service and the Frostnäs service, the unchanging atmosphere suggests a less than optimistic interpretation of the conclusion. Perhaps it is in this light that we are to interpret Bergman's statement "*irrespective of everything, you will hold your communion*"—religious rituals are simply duties that must be carried out like clockwork (1988: 273

¹⁴ Bergman himself appears to be ambivalent about Tomas's sincerity at this point; when Allan Edwall (who plays Algot) asks "does Tomas become in some way converted through Algot Frövik?" Bergman replies, "Yes. No. Not so much." (Sjöman 1974: 39).

original emphasis). As opposed to Bergman, Tarkovsky finds deep significance in performing rituals and will explore the idea in *The Sacrifice*; this will be discussed in Chapter Six.

While *The Seventh Seal* is pessimistic about one's ability to conclusively confirm or deny God's existence, *Winter Light* suggests that even if one is able to reject God's existence, as Tomas has, it does not guarantee that the idea of God will be completely exorcised from one's consciousness. By *Winter Light's* suggestion, the tragedy of existence is made that much more intense by the human isolation into which one invariably withdraws. Attempts at communicating with others are pathetically inadequate. Dialogues turn into monologues and in doing so, become as (un)communicative as silence itself. In this way, *Winter Light* expresses profound pessimism about human existence, perceiving it as a state of silence and insularity with no hope of escape.

Chapter Three

***The Silence* and the Condemning Silence of the Apocalypse**

During the early 1960s, the heavily metaphysical concerns of Bergman's film gradually made way for larger emphases on human experiences. In *The Silence*, God is completely absent and the search for existential meaning is primarily focused on human relationships. It is the final section of a cohesive body of work comprising the four films at hand.

As shown in the previous chapter, *Winter Light* attempted to proposed a silver lining amidst the gloom—human communication and relationship as possible existential salvation—but ultimately concluded in a mixed atmosphere of desperation and hopelessness. *The Silence*, as this chapter demonstrates, is an answer to *Winter Light's* desperate effort to achieve kinship in an otherwise lonely existence. The answer it provides, however, is, profoundly pessimistic. Without restraint, *The Silence* shows the full force of all which silence encompasses. Possible salvation from emotional death that had been proposed, iterated, and echoed in *The Seventh Seal*, *Through a Glass Darkly*, and *Winter Light*, is no longer an option. The preoccupation with the silence of God becomes a preoccupation with the silence between human beings. What one hears in *The Silence* is the supreme alienation of existence and the deafening silence of the void.

Dialogue and Silence: Collapse of Communication

To depict the collapse of human communication in *The Silence*, Bergman undermined the usually prominent role dialogue has in his cinema. He remarked in a production notebook for the film:

In this film the dialogue will be entirely subservient and only an accompaniment on the soundtrack.

The dialogue [should be] only a rattle on the soundtrack without any meaning. Ignoring all that talk will be delightful... [and] cinematographic. (Koskinen 2010: 71)

In Maaret Koskinen's book-length study of *The Silence*, she noted Bergman's awareness of what he termed his "dialogue disease"; he wrote, "I really, once and for all, have to get away from dialogues. I'm damned tired of all these meaningless words and discussions" (2010: 70-71). In *The Silence*, Bergman experimented with the role of dialogue and, more generally, of language. Like the spoken word, the written word is rendered foreign and useless—words on street signs, books, and newspapers are unrecognizable and constantly in need of translation. This, however, does not indicate that dialogue is of diminished importance; it continues to be a fertile ground for examining the state of modern communication. For instance, Koskinen astutely observes that dialogue in *The Silence* had been "distorted into human sounds—murmurs, sighs, snivels, loud chewing, shouts, even hard swallowing" (2010: 112). It is unrecognizable and language has been forced to regress to a state of arbitrary vocalization.

However, in looking at *The Silence* as a concluding chapter to the films previously discussed, what is more poignant is Bergman's placing of dialogue within incrementally minimal soundscapes. In *The Seventh Seal*, the larger cast made for many instances of overlapping dialogue and, even in the barest of soundscapes, dialogue was accompanied by the sounds of bells or rain, both of which are heavily symbolic. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, there was either ambient sound or the evocative music of Bach during key dialogue exchanges between characters; and in *Winter Light*, single sound elements would be heard faintly before being completely omitted shortly after dialogue was introduced. In *The Silence*, dialogue is primarily placed within diegetic absolute silence. It is thus rendered exponentially vulnerable to scrutiny, with every word left to reverberate and every pause becoming a pregnant silence. Even at its loudest, dialogue

cannot overwhelm the silence which envelops it. Bergman indicated in the screenplay the need to establish silence's monolithic absent presence, descriptively illustrating the intended effect: "oppressive silence", "silence as a dull, thumping fear" and "uneasy silence" (*Trilogy* 109, 119, 125).

Within the hotel rooms where *The Silence* primarily unfolds, the heaviness of silence is ever-present. Mid-way through their travels, sisters Anna (Gunnel Lindblom) and Ester, and Anna's son, Johan, make a brief stopover in a city of foreign language and custom. After the trio arrives at the hotel, the first shot is taken from Johan's perspective. Curious, he looks out from a high window at the busy street below as the sounds of cars and human voices layer the soundscape. Anna then comes to close the window, shutting the noises out, and establishing the confines of the rooms to be silent in comparison. This "oppressive silence" intensifies the trio's forced proximity and, moments later, Anna announces that she wants to go out (*Trilogy* 109). When she returns, the silence continues to be unrelenting and is made worse by Ester's persistent questions. Confined to the room on account of her illness, Ester demands to know of Anna's whereabouts and activities while Anna, on the other hand, simultaneously resents Ester's interrogations and derives pleasure from antagonizing her. When Anna returns to the hotel rooms after an afternoon out, their antagonism is evident through dialogue that ensues but amplified through sound effects. In the relatively quiet confines of their room, sound effects are kept to a minimum and used only to emphasize simmering angst. Within the otherwise silent soundscape, audiences hear the harsh hard strokes of Anna brushing her hair—"combs her hair out so fiercely that it crackles" (*Trilogy* 124)—and Ester's loud yet controlled strikes at her typewriter become amplified.

Sounds and Silences of Void: Eternal Internal Silence

As in the above scene, the linguistic deconstruction Bergman performs drives other sound elements to the fore. This leads Koskinen to argue that *The Silence* exhibits deeper attentiveness to “the nature and quality of (film) sound and . . . the nature and quality of silence, as opposed to dialogue and the spoken word” (2010: 71 original parentheses). While I agree that *The Silence*, contrary to what its name suggests, is an acoustically complex film, I contend that earlier films like *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* had already shown sound to be an integral part in Bergman’s cinema. The use of sound, or if one wishes to be precise, the sound-image, in these earlier films is no less reflexive than in *The Silence*. *The Silence* is a descendant of these films not simply by virtue of chronology but also acoustic affinity.

The complex layering of sound in *The Silence* is used primarily as a foil to silence. As Robert Bresson said, “the soundtrack invented silence”, indeed, the acoustic complexity of *The Silence* is a result of the dynamic relationship between the two (1997: 48). The opening credit sequence demonstrates this to great effect. Once again, the credits are presented visually as white font on a black background. In *The Silence*, the credits are acoustically accompanied by rapid ticking, similar to that of a regular clock but at a much quicker pace which plainly evokes Jonas and Tomas’s encounter in *Winter Light*. In Bergman’s cinema, the ticking and striking of clocks serve as acoustic leitmotifs of mortality. Beyond their symbolic significance, these sounds serve a stylistic purpose; they compel characters and audiences alike to hear the silence. This imposed awareness of silence causes the sound of clocks, in Bergman’s cinema and beyond, to be perceived as unbearably unnerving. Egil Tornqvist writes, “[the sound of clocks in Bergman’s cinema] serves as a reminder of how time—life—passes and how death—when the ticking and striking will stop—approaches” (2003: 43). As mentioned,

the anxiety does not only come from the sound's symbolism but also its presentation. In an accelerated form, as in the opening credit sequence of *The Silence*, the ticking easily and effectively creates a sense of urgency. Furthermore, with the final shot of the credits, the ticking abruptly stops. In this sudden cessation, Bergman has created anxiety. Through the manipulation of aural expectations, Bergman incites a renewed fear of death (though those familiar with his cinema should expect this). One is left in amplified silence and the unexpectedness of it all arouses feelings of absence and abandonment. Acoustic ebb and flow is a recurring pattern in *The Silence*. Much of the film consists of a layered soundtrack (combinations of dialogue, sound effects, music, and silence in various permutations) followed by a dearth of sound that ranges from impressionist silences to diegetic absolute silence. The objective of such acoustic manipulation is the same as that of the opening credit sequence: to elicit an involuntary awareness of silence and a reflexive realization of what it represents.

In the dearth of meaningful linguistic communication, the characters seek comfort and kinship through other means. Johan attempts to articulate his emotions through art and puppetry, Anna pursues physical intimacy, and Ester takes solace in music. The successes (or failures) of their pursuits are brought to light, once again, through a study of sound—more specifically, of soundscapes as acoustic reflections of mindscapes.

Stig Björkman contends that Johan is “the chief figure” of *The Silence*, arguing that he is the film's locus (1973: 187). There is truth in this claim; close-ups of Johan's face appear as opening and closing shots and the first line he speaks, which is the first line of the film itself, aptly embodies *The Silence*. In the opening scene, he points to a sign and asks, “what does this mean?” to which Ester replies, “I don't know. In Johan, Bergman captured what he sought to convey in *The Silence*: incomprehension.¹

¹ Johan's line is quoted from the Criterion DVD as the screenplay does not state specific dialogue, noting instead “[Johan] asks Ester what [the sign] says” (*Trilogy* 107).

Throughout the film, Johan struggles both to understand events unfolding around him and to articulate his interior states, “looking in vain from one to the other [Anna and Ester] for some shred of meaning in his disconcerting life” (2007: 60). His awakening to Anna’s sexual life and his exclusion from it becomes an unconscious source of pain and incomprehension.

The Oedipal undertones of their mother-son relationship are evident even before Anna’s clandestine sexual affairs. After the previously mentioned scene where she shuts the window, Johan watches as his mother prepares for her bath. The camera assumes his point of view shot, watching as Anna disappears and reappears from behind bathroom walls. Finally she is naked and enters the bathtub, disappearing from view. A cut to Johan shows him, still watching though she is out of his frame of vision, playfully spitting air out from behind his pursed lips. Before long, she commands him into the bathroom and asks in a “faintly hostile” voice that he scrub her back (*Trilogy* 111). He obeys, enters the bathroom, and begins scrubbing silently. Soon, he stops and rests his face on her back; she lovingly pats his cheek and tells him to leave. To Johan, his mother’s generous displays of physical affection are incongruous with her insistence on distancing him when he becomes too intimate.

Due to his inability to intellectually understand his exclusion from parts of Anna’s life, Johan can only respond in sub- or unconscious ways. As he plays by himself, Johan wanders into the hotel room of a troupe of dwarf performers. Though they outnumber him, he does not see them as antagonists and instead allows them to dress him up (in a comically frilly dress) and participates in a noisy song and dance. Their smaller physical stature qualifies them as comrade playmates in his eyes. On the other hand, during an earlier encounter with a repairman, Johan is hostile, albeit playfully so. As the man, perched atop a ladder, fixes a chandelier, Johan walks up calmly, points his toy gun up at the man, and shoots. The man looks on incredulously

while Johan purses his lips to make the same adolescent noise he did while watching his mother in the bathroom. The two events become associated through eliciting the same response from the boy. Johan's awakening to and incomprehension of this Freudian state is most eloquently depicted in his discovery of a large painting hidden away in the shadowed recesses of the labyrinthine hotel. In a dark hallway, Johan chances upon "Deianira Abducted by Nessus" by Peter Paul Rubens. The painting depicts the well-known Greek tale:

The centaur Nessus tried to assault Deianira, the hero's [Hercules] second wife. Nessus offered to carry her across a river, but once she was on his back, he attempted to abduct her. Hercules shot and killed him with his poisoned arrow. (Roman 2010: 212)

At this point, Johan has yet to see Anna with her lover but his Oedipal jealousy is reflected in the painting. In "Bergman and Visual Art", Egil Törnqvist convincingly argues that Rubens, in choosing not to show Deianira screaming for Hercules, depicted "a seduction rather than an abduction" (2012: para. 43). Bergman's screenplay supports such a reading:

On the wall opposite the window a painting hangs in its gilt frame. It represents a fat, entirely naked lady, fighting with a man in hairy fur pants and with hooves in lieu of feet. The lady is very pink, and the dark brow man is covered with hair. *On closer inspection the lady, to judge from her stupid smile, doesn't seem altogether displeased by his attention.* (Trilogy 114-115 emphasis mine)

Through the positioning of Johan in front of the painted couple, Bergman metaphorically places Johan in the painting's diegesis, completing the triad. Johan assumes the position of Hercules and his toy gun becomes Hercules's arrow. While visual analysis of this scene is illuminating, a study of the soundscape gives a more complete understanding of Johan's awakening. While implications of the depicted tale and Johan's discovery of the painting may be clear to audiences, they elude Johan. He discovers the painting by chance but returns to it a second time though he remains unable to grasp its significance and allure. In both incidents, the soundscape is of

diegetic absolute silence; his incomprehension reflected in the dearth of sound. Dwarfed by the painting's huge size, Johan remains immobile, unable to raise his hand or gun as he had with the repairman or as Hercules had raised his arrow. Johan is impotent to both act on and comprehend the situation. The screenplay notes, "in a new and frightening way the solitude closes in around him" (*Trilogy* 116). Amidst the silence, there is no explanation to his incomprehension. Johan will later return to the room and tell Ester "I'm scared of horses", a reference to this fresh Oedipal fear of the centaur Nessus (*Trilogy* 120).

The significance of Johan's discovery extends beyond these two short scenes. Perhaps in response to the painting, Johan draws a picture of his own. In frenzied stroke, he sketches a grotesque face with large ears, a large frown, and large sharp teeth. Without looking up from his drawing, Johan says, "You musn't worry. Mum'll be back soon. Besides I'm here" (*Trilogy* 120). At this point, it is unclear if he is talking to Ester who is in the room or to himself. Through an examination of the soundscape, however, this becomes evident. Immediately after Johan speaks, the same rapid ticking from the opening credit sequence is heard. Its sudden entrance into the soundscape reveals the ticking to be an imaginary internal sound, audible only in Johan's mind; it is an acoustic manifestation of his anxiety. These sounds suggests that Johan was speaking to himself, articulating his unease at her absence from his life as well as his awakening to his exclusion from hers.

The death of the maternal figure had been foreshadowed in an earlier scene between Johan and the elderly waiter. As the waiter eats his lunch alone in a small room, Johan approaches him apprehensively. The waiter shows Johan some old family photos which causes Johan to feel uneasy despite not knowing why. One photo in particular holds his attention; it depicts a woman in a casket, presumably the waiter's

late mother or wife, mother to his children. Taking the photo, Johan slides it under a large carpet in the hotel corridor, literally sweeping it under the rug.

If Johan is indeed the chief figure of *The Silence*, then, his rejection is our rejection, his awakening is our awakening, his incomprehension is ours, and his forced emergence from childhood's infantile dependence on a parent is our introduction to the new (Godless) world order. This manner of thinking about Johan's anxiety is derived from Sigmund Freud's interpretation of religion as growing out of the Oedipus complex. Religion, as Freud argued in *The Future of an Illusion*, arose from the early helplessness of the child and his relation to the father—or the parental figure. A problem develops, however, with the inevitable maturation of the self; this Oedipal experience equates to the turning away from religion.² To Freud, and it appears, to Bergman as well, this process of growth is difficult but of great necessity. In Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, the Oedipal experience will, too, become a focal point in Tarkovsky's confrontation of the modern spiritual-existential crisis; this will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Ester, like Johan, becomes increasingly aware of her isolation. When she reaches out to stroke Johan's cheek, he immediately recoils even though he does not loathe her as Anna does. Distance is established early on between her and both Anna and Johan. Even the elderly waiter who patiently attends to her cannot cross the barrier of language. Aware of her physical and emotional destitution, Ester drowns herself in work, cigarettes, and alcohol. Her indulgences are frequently interrupted by bouts of paralyzing seizures.

Her wretched state is alleviated, however, by music. It accompanies her in moments of loneliness and grants her joy. In an early scene, Ester is working alone in her room, smoking and drinking. All is quiet when she is suddenly seized by coughing

² For more on the topic, see Freud (1927/1995).

and quickly stifles it. Her labored breathing is heard as a close-up shot shows her shaking hand pouring more alcohol into a glass. Her hand then moves to the nearby radio and switches it on; lively jazz music fills the room. The close-up remains on her hand as it comes to life with the music, tapping away energetically as Ester's laughs are heard offscreen. She turns the dial, changing the music to a gentle classical piece which puts a smile on her face. She closes her eyes to enjoy the music and, as if moved by it, stands and walks to Anna and Johan's room. She opens the door with an uninhibited swing and finds the pair sleeping. Johan is curled up in a fetal position but Anna is lying on her front in an unconscious yet hostile response to his desire for her maternal embrace. As the music continues prominently on the soundscape, Ester sits quietly by their bed, reaching a hand out towards the pair. The music performs the hope and possibility for human communion as it did in *Through a Glass Darkly*. Here in *The Silence*, however, Ester realizes the difficulty of achieving it. She is only capable of such intimacy when Anna and Johan are asleep and unaware of her presence. This realization is reflected acoustically when Ester walks toward the hotel window and looks out. Immediately, the music is cut and the soundscape is packed with diegetic street noise. Amidst the crowded street, a severely emaciated horse drags a carriage piled high with old furniture and a potted palm plant. An explosion of indistinguishable noise interrupts the serene impressionist silence of the rooms. Just as the serenity of music exists only within the silence of the rooms, intimacy is only possible when the other person has no part in it—in both cases, they are illusory and artificial. With this, Ester walks back to her room and switches the radio off. The room is plunged into silence once again and Ester returns to alcohol.

The above scene is a prelude to a later scene which bears remarkable similarities to it. This later scene is an oft-quoted one which depicts all three main characters and the elderly waiter listening attentively to music. It is cited as the redeeming moment in

an otherwise hopelessly pessimistic film: Koskinen calls it “a relief” and Charlotte Renaud, “a sudden truce in this world of suffering” (Koskinen 2010: 113; Renaud 2010: para. 21). While it is undeniable that a moment of respite is achieved, the scene is not as positive as one might hope. Their union is, as in the early scene, temporary and illusory.

The later scene takes place at night and Ester once again looks out the window. The soundscape is, again, of the noisy street but this time with the solemn sounds of heavy bells. The emaciated horse appears again, dragging what appears to be the same carriage of furniture except without the potted palm plant. Charles B. Ketcham sees this as a negation of the religious; as opposed to the biblical symbolism of the palm as a sign of Christ’s approach, this palm is “a herald of nothing” (1986: 211). Like the palm plant, the bells are empty symbols; they are descendants of the bells in *The Seventh Seal* and *Winter Light*—beckoning from an empty church with no God or people. After a moment, the shot cuts to the room’s interior and the soundscape immediately switches to soft classical music. Ester picks up the radio and sits down at a desk in the foreground, cradling the radio with both hands as it plays Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* nr. 25.³ In the background, Johan sits on Anna’s lap and they hug tightly. The elderly waiter enters with tea and immediately recognizes Bach’s music. As the music plays, each of the four characters is shot in the same frame in deep focus. After some time, the elderly waiter bids farewell and leaves, Ester stands and walks closer to the camera while Anna and Johan continue to sit entwined in the background. As though the music has once again created an emotional bridge, Anna asks politely for some of Ester’s cigarettes. Without turning, Ester accedes to her request and Johan enters through the adjoining door, retrieves the cigarettes, and sits down between the two rooms. His movement draws attention to the spatial emphasis of the sisters’ alienation from each

³ Chadwick Jenkins (2006) notes the legend that Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* were meant to alleviate suffering. Bach had composed the piece for the Russian ambassador Count Keyserling who suffered from insomnia. While the intention was to ease physical suffering, Jenkins suggests that in this scene emotional healing is achieved through Bach’s music: “the placidity of the music seems to have cleared a space in which one could again feel whole” (2006: part 3 para. 12).

other. For most of the film, they had remained in their respective rooms while Johan traversed rooms through a door that opened and shut with the changing levels of hostility. But even now, Anna does not enter Ester's room. She does, however, appear eager to ease the tension, asking Ester, "What music's that?" and upon Ester's reply, compliments, "it's nice" (*Trilogy* 127).⁴ Their moment of kinship, however, does not last. Almost immediately after extending the compliment, Anna stands up and puts on her bracelets, eager to escape from the claustrophobic intimacy. The sound of her bracelets clinking together interrupts the music and Ester immediately switches the radio off. The rooms are once again plunged into silence. Ester looks at Anna with hostility as Anna announces:

ANNA. I'm going out a little.

No reply.

ANNA (*more frightened*). It's so hot, too. You know I can't stand ...

No reply. (Trilogy 127)

As quickly as it had begun, the moment of respite is dispelled. Anna cannot tolerate even the slightest semblance of intimacy with Ester and in return Ester is spurned by the rejection. The uniting power of music conceived in *Through a Glass Darkly* is revealed to be an illusory one in *The Silence*. One is able to switch it off with the flick of a finger and reveal the true silence of human relationships.

Later in *Cries and Whispers*, music is again used to underscore the hope for communication. As the perpetually warring sisters of *Cries and Whispers*, one of whom is again played by Ingrid Thulin, briefly reconcile, Bach's cello suite No. 5 begins to play non-diegetically. The film shows us that they caress each other's faces and talk in gentle tones but we do not hear them. Their dialogue is muted and we only hear the

⁴ In the screenplay, Anna only enquires about the music and does not extend the compliment.

non-diegetic music. Tarkovsky admired Bergman's use of music here, arguing that the latter had successfully conveyed a moment of respite:

For most of the film the sisters cannot be reconciled, cannot forgive each other even in the face of death. They are full of hatred, ready to torture each other and themselves. When they are briefly united, Bergman dispenses with dialogue and has a Bach cello suite playing on a gramophone; the impact of the scene is dramatically intensified, it becomes deeper, reaches out further. Of course this uplift, this flight into goodness, is patently a chimera—it is a dream of something that does not and cannot exist. It is what the human spirit seeks, what it yearns for; and that one moment allows a glimpse of harmony, of the ideal. But even this illusory flight gives the audience the possibility of catharsis. Of spiritual cleansing and liberation. (1989: 192)

As Tarkovsky suggested, the inclusion of music hints at the possibility that the sisters are able to transcend their animosity. Alas, this moment of reconciliation, or attempt at reconciliation, is shown to be temporary and illusory. The next scenes show the sisters have returned to their distance and resentment; their earlier moments of intimacy are, at best, a momentary lapse caused by intense emotions or, at worst, a simple game of charades where, as audiences, we have been fooled by the suggestions made through music.

Likewise, in *The Silence*, the expectation to connect with her sister overwhelms Anna and she flees from the room in a hurry. Out in the streets, she finds solace in physical intimacy with a stranger. To her, emotional intimacy is suffocating and respite comes in the form of physical intimacy without a deeper relationship. At every opportunity, Anna leaves Johan and Ester complaining of the room's stuffiness and humidity. Her constant mindfulness of the heat is a physical response to her forced proximity to them. Out in the city, she enters the cabaret where the dwarves perform and catches sight of a couple in the throes of sex. She is at once disgusted and aroused and soon picks up a café waiter and initiates sex with him. Her lover remains silent throughout the film, his voice is never heard, and she revels in their deafness and muteness toward each other. She tells him, "how nice it is we don't understand each

other,” and encouraged by their mutual indifference, continues, “I wish Ester was dead” (*Trilogy* 133). Their distance allows her to lower her emotional defenses and speak truthfully. That being said, one should not mistake Anna’s honesty as evidence of *The Silence*’s favorable treatment of physical intimacy sans relationship. Anna’s sexual affairs appear pornographic and filthy and Mikael Timm contends that Bergman “aimed for heavy and unpleasant sexuality” which was successfully executed (Hedling 2008: 20).⁵ Upon the film’s release, critics described the film as “anti-sex” and the Swedish public found *The Silence* repulsive, unmoving, and utterly offensive (Björkman et al. 1973: 188).⁶

Furthermore, Anna’s sexual affairs, though emotionally cathartic for her, are a source of frustration for Johan and humiliation for Ester. While wandering around the hotel, Johan chances upon Anna as she leads her lover into one of the rooms. The door shuts and he presses himself against it, impotent to be let in. He then returns to his room and reads but before long, closes the book shaking his head. He goes into Ester’s room and finding her sleeping, goes to look out the window. He sees a large army tank awkwardly navigating the deserted narrow street below. This unnerving image drew on Bergman’s experiences in post-war Hamburg, “the city had already been massacred; but at night tanks drove about the streets, or simply stood silently sleeping at street corners” (Björkman et al. 1973: 184). In *The Silence*, the tanks are used both as visual and acoustic symbols of intrusion. After Ester is woken up by the sound of the tank, she soon learns from Johan of Anna’s sexual exploits. Immediately, Ester goes to confront Anna who, hearing Ester’s approach, stages a scene of sexual abandon to humiliate Ester. As the two sisters exchange accusations with escalating hostility, Anna’s lover sits by silently, indifferent to the spectacle.

⁵ Timm’s article is translated from Swedish by Erik Hedling.

⁶ The Swedish public’s response to *The Silence* was primarily driven by their aversion to its sexual indulgence. For more on the topic, see Hedling (2008) and Koskinen (2010) paying attention to the chapter “*The Silence* at Home: Debate and Controversy”.

This confrontation demonstrates the final disintegration of dialogue as a viable form of communication. Ester sits facing away from Anna as Anna reproaches her in a calm and disdainful voice. Their exchange occurs within diegetic absolute silence with Ester reduced to whispers and silence while Anna's voice gains volume and aggression. Anna is now the interrogator and relishes the reversal. Her confrontation with Ester culminates in cruel questions:

ANNA. You who're so intelligent, who've taken so many exams and translated so many book, can you answer me just one thing? *(Pause)* When Father died you said: "Now I don't want to live any longer." Well, why do you live, then?

ESTER. *(doesn't reply)*.

ANNA. For my sake? For Johan? *(Pause)* For your work, perhaps? *(Pause)* Or for nothing in particular?

A long silence. (Trilogy 136)

Anna reiterates Jonas's question in *Winter Light*, "Why must we go on living?" but with decidedly more angst (*Trilogy 74*). As in the earlier film, no answer is given in *The Silence*. Finally, Ester leaves and Anna erupts into hysterical weeping. Without hesitation, her silent lover crawls behind her and lustfully initiates sex. Such is the state of human relationships in the modern world as Bergman saw it: mute, deaf, sexually aberrant, and irreparable. Torsten Manns summarizes it eloquently "Love in our time: impossible constellations" (Hedling 2008: 24).

The next morning, Ester is bed-ridden, pale, and fragile but Anna is ready to continue the journey without her. Ester begins to write the letter she promised Johan, translating the few foreign words she has learnt. As Ester writes, the elderly waiter sits nearby winding his pocket watch. The rapid ticking is heard once again, this time clearly diegetic. Its unnatural loudness overwhelms the soundscape while Ester lies immobile, listening to the thinly veiled silence. Here, Tarkovsky's assertion that the effect of Bergman's partiality to single naturalistic sound elements is "to enlarge the

sounds, single them out, hyperbolize them” rings true (1989: 162). The ticking continues for a full minute and becomes exponentially prominent despite remaining at the same volume. Confronted and frustrated by her solitude and mortality, Ester becomes increasingly restless. Suddenly, she is seized by cramps and convulses violently on the bed; the elderly waiter’s desperate attempts to comfort her are futile. Sensing Anna and Johan’s impending departure, Ester cries out in fear, “Am I to lie here and die all alone?” (*Trilogy* 141). Her final attempt at human contact is similar to that of Raval in *The Seventh Seal* who, moments before death, cried out “Can’t you have pity on me? Help me! At least talk to me” (*TSS* 75). While diegetic absolute silence falls over Raval’s cries, Ester’s cries are overwhelmed by the sudden eruption of a blaring siren. As the siren fades away, Ester draws a sheet over her face as if accepting her death. Johan enters the room to say goodbye and Ester hands him the note, telling him “It’s important. You’ll understand” (*Trilogy* 142). Throughout the scene, Anna is heard offscreen calling for him to leave and they finally do. In their wake, the silence of the empty room merges with Ester’s labored breathing and weak guttural grunts. A close-up shot shows her wide eyes staring into the camera; she has seen the supreme alienation of the silence and is left to face the void alone.

The closing sequence is an acoustic juxtaposition of Ester’s abandonment. *The Silence*, and the films preceding it, established silence as absence in Bergman’s cinema and the absolute nadir of the void. However, in this closing sequence, the soundscape is created not by a lack of sound but a chaotic amassing of it. It is no longer sounds but noise; it is a soundscape from which no significance is decipherable and thus, it is equivalent to silence, or deafness, itself.

Anna and Johan are shown in a cabin on a moving train once again. It is similar to the opening scene except Ester is absent and Johan and Anna now sit on opposite sides. He looks at her and Anna looks back but cannot hold his gaze—much like Tomas

of *Winter Light*—he appears to see her more objectively. Johan then retrieves Ester’s letter from his pocket and opens it but quickly folds it back when Anna approaches him. She takes it from him, reads it, returns it to him with a smirk, and goes back by the window. As Johan reads the letter aloud, Anna opens the window to let the rain in. His voice is engulfed by the roaring train and howling winds. Anna drenches herself in rain, she finally gains respite from the constant heat and humidity and is free from Ester. Suddenly, a siren pierces the blanket of noise, blaring only for a second but unmistakably resembling a woman’s scream. Anna sees Johan looking at her; she had rid herself of Ester, attempted to cleanse her hatred with the rain, but cannot escape the guilt rendered in Johan’s gaze. Johan turns back to the letter and the shot cuts to a close-up of his face. Brows furrowed and lips moving silently, Johan struggles to understand Ester’s letter. There are a significant number of scholars who perceive ambiguity in this conclusion and thus stop short of analysis, choosing instead to describe the events onscreen.⁷ One scholar who does offer an interpretation, however, is Hamish Ford who argues that the burgeoning relationship between Johan and Ester “complicates what might seem to some a blanket negation or willful adolescent destruction of the very culture from which it emerges” (2009a: para. 13). In a similar way, Bergman himself felt that the film concluded on a positive note, comparing it to the ending of *Winter Light*,

This sudden impulse to understand a few words in another language. It’s remarkable, all that’s left; the only positive thing. Just as the only positive thing in *Winter Light* is the clergyman standing up and holding his service—even though there’s no one there to hear it. (Björkman et al. 1973: 185-187)

Despite the undeniable glimmer of hope which Ford and Bergman perceive, the soundscape indicates that this hope crumbles in defeat almost immediately. As Johan reads the letter, the sounds of last two scenes saturate the soundscape—the incessant

⁷ Maaret Koskinen argues that the ambivalence of *The Silence*’s finale is intentional. She notes that in differences between the manuscript and the published screenplay, Bergman had stripped the scene of unambiguous indications of a positive ending. Significantly, Johan was initially to read the words aloud. See Koskinen (2010), pages 90-91 in particular.

roar of the train, the siren that drowned out Ester's desperate cries, and the howling of the rain which Anna wishes will rid her of Ester. All Johan can hear is the noise of indistinguishable sounds from the train, the rain, and the siren. In reflecting Johan's interior states, the soundscape demonstrates the pessimistic vision Bergman embedded into *The Silence* in spite of himself. The soundscape reflects Johan's incomprehension; in this scene, it becomes evident that the sincerity of Ester's desire to communicate with Johan and the earnestness of Johan's effort to understand her letter are inconsequential. The thirst of the film's final sequences culminates in the hope that Johan will understand the important letter—Ester told him, “It's important. You'll understand it”—but it is now clear that he simply cannot (*Trilogy* 142). John Orr, another critic who offers an analysis of the closing scene, calls this “the toughest of all Bergman's endings,” and argues:

[Bergman's] judgment is so harsh as to be God-like and he seems an omniscient auteur usurping the role of that pitiless God and his 'silence' . . . He will not intervene to save a solitary woman he has fondly created. (2007: 60)

In the course of these four films discussed, one comes to recognize silence as the most unbearable “sound” one can hear in Bergman's films. But here, a new “silence” is introduced and it is equally terrifying. This is the final shot of *The Silence* and the final image of Bergman's new world: an unfathomable constellation of noise, a puzzled expression, and an indecipherable letter.

Various scholars identify *The Silence* as the prelude to later films like *Persona* (1966), but I would argue that the film's omission of the God question from its central narrative marks the end of an era in Bergman's cinema (Kaminsky and Hill 1975; Mast et al. 1992). As Hamish Ford highlights, “the place of religion [in] Bergman's earlier work . . . is in *Persona* taken over by secular discourses” (2012: 35). The films from *The Seventh Seal* through to *The Silence* result from Bergman's concentrated explorations of spiritual-existential anguish. With each film, his preoccupations and

understanding of the world gradually shift from heavily metaphysical to heavily existential. Though he sought to rid himself of religious and spiritual anxieties, Bergman only became increasingly disillusioned, both with religion and human relationships. In his own words, “Nothing, absolutely nothing at all has emerged out of all these ideas of faith and skepticism, all these convulsions, these puffings and blowings” (Björkman et al. 1973: 195). At the end of *The Silence*, one realizes that the struggle for existential meaning within an absurd world is a struggle in futility. Life is a cycle of incomprehension which begins with “what does this mean?/ I don’t know” and ends with an inscrutable letter (*Trilogy* 107). *The Silence*, as Marc Gervais writes, is the “artistic expression of modernism at its most acute state of crisis in the quest for meaning . . . the last gasp of existentialism’s dialectical battle between meaningfulness and absurdity” (1999: 84). Ultimately, the only respite comes through Daniel Defoe’s reminder, “always we might end by death all human misery” (1726: 38). This was an option Bergman knew available: “When I was younger, I had illusions about how life should be . . . Now I see things as they are. No longer any questions of ‘God, why?’ or ‘Mother, why?’ One has to settle for suicide or acceptance” (Cowie 1982: 217). Through these four films, it appears that Bergman’s internal negotiations culminate in the eventual arrival at “acceptance”—or, one might argue, resignation. This is Bergman of the late 1950s and early 1960s; his cinema is, as Des O’Rawe concluded, “not a silent cinema [but] a cinema of silence” (2006: 404).

PART TWO

Tarkovsky and the Affirmative Silence of Eden

Tarkovsky's cinema is similarly concerned with the modern crisis of faith. With each film, one witnesses Tarkovsky's growing desire to address a world which he saw moving steadily towards spiritual bankruptcy. "The whole trouble lies . . . in the fact that we live in a society where the spiritual level of the common man is extraordinarily low," said Tarkovsky in a 1983 interview (Brezna 2012: 75). Similar sentiments are echoed by his characters, of which the most memorable is perhaps Domenico of *Nostalghia* who stands atop the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius shouting into a loudhailer, beseeching all who would listen to recognize that "mankind has come to a shameful point".¹ Yet, while he was troubled by the same crisis, the position Tarkovsky assumed in response to it was essentially antithetical to that of Bergman. Of the films he produced during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Bergman revealed:

For me, in those days, the great question was: Does God exist? Or doesn't God exist? Can we, by an attitude of faith, attain a sense of community and a better world? Or, if God doesn't exist, what do we do then? What does our world look like then? (Björkman et al. 1973: 14)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bergman's inability to reconcile God's silence with his existence eventually colored his perspective on the meaning of existence and the value of human relationships. Tarkovsky, on the other hand, approached the question of God's existence very differently. Though he also acknowledged that the existence of God was no longer certain, the fundamental difference between his response and that of Bergman was Tarkovsky's indifference to the rational impossibility of God. While Bergman agonized over the irreconcilability of God's silence and his supposed love for humankind, for Tarkovsky the question of God's existence was easily settled. In another interview he stated "when I was very young I asked my father, 'Does

¹ Tarkovsky (1999: 501), henceforth *CS* (abbreviated from *Collected Screenplays*) and quoted in-text with page numbers.

God exist—yes or no?’ And he answered me brilliantly: ‘for the unbeliever, no, for the believer, yes!’” (Gianvito 2006: 197) For Tarkovsky, then, it was purely a question of faith. He was concerned with faith in and of itself; he believed it to be an intensely personal state of belief which, though often related to, was not dependent on religion. But perhaps most importantly, Tarkovsky conceived of faith as an act that was not only irrational but anti-rational, arguing that if one held a particular belief because one had a rational reason to do so, it was then not faith which had convinced one but simply logic. Faith thus comes to be a central concept in Tarkovsky’s philosophy. In the same interview, he continued, “faith is all that man truly possesses . . . Faith is the only thing that can save man” (Gianvito 2006: 186). Contrary to its significance in Bergman’s cinema, faith is not the cause of modern man’s spiritual and existential malaise, but is instead the solution to it.

However, while Tarkovsky argued for the necessity of having faith, his films exhibit an acute awareness of the difficulty of maintaining it, especially within a world which no longer sees faith as existentially relevant. Tarkovsky’s final three films—*Stalker*, *Nostalghia*, and *The Sacrifice*—are open admissions of this, but even in his earlier films Tarkovsky sought to portray the difficult spiritual-existential positions of his protagonists in relation to their times. *Andrei Rublev* explored the struggle of its artist-protagonist who felt unworthy of his divine mission but ultimately emerged from his crisis of faith to create “spiritual treasures of timeless significance” (Tarkovsky 1989: 34). In *Solaris* Tarkovsky developed his discussion of the crisis of faith by addressing the opposition between knowledge and belief. The science fiction element of *Solaris* allows for inexplicable occurrences that frustrate attempts at rational explanations. Ultimately, the protagonist, Chris has to choose between the calculated sanity of the real world and the comforting illusions of Solaris. In the closing sequence, Chris returns to his home on earth, a familiar Tarkovskian *dacha*, where it is

mysteriously raining indoors, and finds his father there. He watches his father until their eyes meet and then both men walk to the door where Chris falls to his knees and the two embrace. The shot is held and the camera tracks out until it is finally revealed that the *dacha* is on an island in the midst of the vast Solaris ocean. Chris's nostalgia for his *dacha*, his longing for a moment of reconciliation with his father, and not to mention a reunion with his late wife, has been extracted by Solaris and granted to him in visions; for these, Chris chooses to stay on Solaris. Despite his knowledge that this reincarnated wife is immaterial and an illusion, Chris believes that his unquestioning faith will bestow longevity on this new reality. The film's ultimate message thus appears to be: in the struggle between objective truth (knowledge) provided by reason and subjective truth provided by belief and faith, the only truth that is important is that which is meaningful to the individual. This subjective view of truth aligns Tarkovsky with Kierkegaard; both consciously opt against impersonal and dispassionate truths and reject objectivity in favor of belief(s) forged through personal choice and faith.² For both men, faith is unjustifiable and cannot be understood by anyone external to the self.

In *Stalker*, the conflict between knowledge and belief that had earlier been alluded to in *Solaris* is revisited in more direct and complex terms as the conflict between reason and faith. *Stalker* is the first of Tarkovsky's final three films which together form a discourse on the existential purpose of faith and compellingly argue for the necessity of faith in the pursuit of existential meaning.

² Kierkegaard argued that in the quest to find God, dispassionate objectivity was of no use; one needed to make a personal choice in fear and trembling, a leap to faith. Kierkegaard's argument of the subjective truth can be found in most of his writings but appears most pointedly in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) as well as his journals—collected under the title *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard* (1958). Colin Brown explains the necessary subjectivity inherent in Kierkegaard's view on God, comparing it to the Wizard of Oz—"It is not so much his existence that counts but the *thought* of his existence. . . . Their lives are transformed because of their belief in him" (1969: 130). For more on the topic, see Brown (1969), pages 125-132 in particular.

Chapter Four

Stalker and the Test of God's Silence

Stalker has been interpreted in many ways—as another of Tarkovsky's science fiction films, as an allegory of the Soviet gulags, as a comment on Soviet society, and more—but at its core it is a tale of pilgrimage. *Stalker* was adapted from Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's novel, *Roadside Picnic* (1972), but in its final film form, resembles a parable of spirituality more than a work of science fiction. Tarkovsky's decision to imbue *Stalker* with the wisdom and qualities of a holy fool (or *yurodivy* in Russian literature) and to avoid explaining the Zone's power as extra-terrestrial (as is explicitly done in the novel) shifts the film's tone from mysterious to mystical.¹

The journey motif in *Stalker* exteriorizes an interior quest for true faith. As in *The Seventh Seal*, the journey here is in itself a test of faith; Antonius and Stalker, both religious and spiritual individuals, are caught between the worlds of reason and faith. Though *Stalker*'s characters do not question the existence of God and the relevance of faith in the verbally direct way that Antonius does, the film is as engaged with the discussion of the Great Silence as *The Seventh Seal*. In Tarkovsky's own words, “the film [*Stalker*] is about the existence of God in man, and about the death of spirituality as a result of our possessing false knowledge” (1991: 159). It should be noted, however, that Tarkovsky's beliefs have an immanentist dimension; his cinema often suggests that existential meaning is achieved through personal spirituality, not adherence to religious traditions. Maya Turovskaya argues that Tarkovsky was concerned “not [with] the fate of the Church itself . . . but of something greater, something which is holy for the whole nation” (1989: 80). While that holds true, spirituality as expressed in Tarkovsky's cinema goes deeper still, traversing the nation to embrace the entire human experience. In *Solaris* Chris takes with him a picture of Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* to the Solaris

¹ The holy fool is also known as the Divine Idiot. For more on the history and cultural impact of the holy fool, see Heller and Volkova (2003), Ivanov (2006), and Poulakuo-Rebelakou, et al (2012).

station and Gibarian, an Armenian, takes a picture of Echmiadzin, the central shrine of the Armenian Church; no judgment is made regarding the validity of one religion over another. Such immanentist ideas of spirituality necessitate that metaphysical silence in Tarkovsky's cinema is not confined to the silence of God but is more accurately described as the silence of the universe, and more specifically, of the divine within the universe. In the case of *Stalker*, the universe takes the form of the Room and the Zone it is situated within. But unlike the Solaris ocean, the Room and the Zone are "silent" when asked to prove their power. The invisibility and intangibility of their alleged powers make the Zone and the Room analogous to Antonius's hidden and silent God. In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky explores the possibility of God's existence through a parallel exploration of the Zone's sentience.

Bergman's "listening" to this metaphysical silence would have yielded proof of the absence of divinity but Tarkovsky offers a more positive interpretation. *Stalker* begins with an admission from a scientist—the most archetypal of all rational characters—that science has failed to explain a physical occurrence. When this Nobel Prize winning scientist refers to the Zone as "a miracle", one is forced to recognize the limitations of scientific knowledge and reason, and admit the possible existence of unknown and unknowable forces.² The metaphysical silence thus does not indicate the absence of a spiritual dimension or abandonment of the universe by God, but instead the need for anti-rational belief, essentially creating a space in which to exercise and assert one's faith in response to the Great Silence.

Though Tarkovsky's cinema is often approached through studies of visual imagery, there has been increasing attention paid to the sound design of his films.³ Hoping to contribute to this field, I argue that perhaps the best way to gain an

² Quoted from the Kino Video DVD of *Stalker*. The film's epilogue is not mentioned in the screenplay. In his diaries, Tarkovsky quoted many scientists, including Albert Einstein and Max Born, on the relationship between science and God. See Tarkovsky (1991), pages 321-322 in particular.

³ Notable works in this area include Bridgett (n.d.), Chion (1994; 2009); Fairweather (2012), Hillman (2005); Smith (2007); Svensson (2003); and Truppin (1992).

understanding of how Tarkovsky is able to insist on maintaining faith in the face of the silence of the universe is through sound. Eduard Artemeyev, who served as the sound designer and composer on *Stalker* as well as a number of Tarkovsky's other films, recalled the director instructing him to not compose music for *Stalker* but to “orchestrate” the sounds of the scenes' physical surroundings.⁴ As in Bergman's films discussed in Part One, metaphysical silence in *Stalker* manifests through impressionist silences. However, contrary to Bergman's comparatively sparse sound design, impressionist silences in *Stalker* comprise complex layers of sound.

Sounds and Silences of Eden: Expressive Silence

Between the two primary settings within which *Stalker* unfolds, there is a pairing of isolated sound/city and layered sound/Zone. The soundscape of the city where Stalker's family resides is characterized by momentary isolated sounds or elements of auditory setting (EAS). Every so often, the otherwise silent soundscape is punctured by the thunder of trains passing in dangerous proximity to homes and the mechanical chugging of patrolling vehicles. These extrinsic and isolated sounds are abrupt and intrusive, creating—beyond noise—a kind of distressing non-silence. When Stalker insists on leaving to embark on yet another journey to the Zone, his wife collapses to the floor in anger and grief. As she writhes on the floor crying, the increasingly audible roar of a passing train appears to intensify her anguish, causing her to spasm more violently. An association is established between mechanical sound and emotional distress, an idea vividly revisited in the closing scene. Writer calls the city “our godforsaken town” and the *mise-en-scène* clearly portrays this (CS 401). However, the soundscape plays an important role in reinforcing the city-dwellers' inability to escape this dystopia.

⁴ Quoted from the Criterion DVD of *Solaris*. See DVD for interviews with Natalya Bondarchuk, cinematographer Vadim Yusov (*Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrei Rublev*, *Solaris*) and composer Eduard Artemeyev (*Solaris*, *Stalker*).

On the other hand, the Zone's soundscape—often inaccurately described as “near silen[t]” and “[an] absence of sound”—is formed by layers of organic sounds, the most prominent ones being rushing waters, the chirping of birds, and the buzzing of insects (Smith 2007: 46). As the trio journey from the city to the Zone, the mechanical clanking of the railcar they are riding on morphs into strange electronic whirring. When they enter the Zone, the sound is replaced immediately with familiar ambient sounds. This acoustic juxtaposition is visually emphasized in (and visually emphasizes) the abrupt jump from sepia to color. The cut from the sepia-toned, blurred, static-camera railcar sequence to a slow, colored, tracking shot effects a transition from the frenzied urban ruins to the tranquil Zone. The prominence of organic sounds underscores the lack of extrinsic sound, this in turn forms an impressionist silence which, when pitted against the noise of the city, is perceived as familiar and infinitely comforting. A point of view shot places the audience within this visually lush natural world brimming with trees, overgrown grass, and rotting wood. The *mise-en-scène* is acoustically reinforced by a combination of rushing waters from offscreen lakes, animals that are heard but never shown, and insects that are too small to be visible. Such use of offscreen sound highlights spatial positivity, suggesting a space not empty and desolate but a place brimming with organic presence, with life. Andrea Truppin argues that Tarkovsky, through such use of offscreen sound, demanded leaps of faith from his audience in “accepting that a sound proves the existence of an unseen object [and] believing in the existence of an invisible spiritual world” (1992: 236). The immanentist belief that the divine is embodied in the natural leads Tarkovsky to conceive the organic sounds of the natural world as a confirmation of the spiritual. Truppin continues, “learning to hear the world is akin to coming into contact with the spiritual realm”(1992: 237).

As opposed to Bergman's cinema, silence in *Stalker* connotes saturation and stillness. For Tarkovsky the myriad organic sounds “answer” the metaphysical silence

and confirm his persistent faith. This interpretation of silence finds affinity with what Søren Kierkegaard expresses in *The Lily of the Field and the Bird in the Air*—the title of which reminds one of a biblical verse espousing faith in God’s providence and divine plan.⁵ Kierkegaard, too, proposed that it is in “nature’s silence [that] the poet thinks that he is aware of the divine voice. . . [and] out there with the lily and the bird, where there is silence and also something divine in this silence” (1997: 12-13). The “silence” of nature thus confirmed the existence and manifestation of the divine, of God.

Kierkegaard calls attention to it:

There is silence out there, and not only when everything is silent in the silent night, but there nevertheless is silence out there also when day vibrates with a thousand strings and everything is like a sea of sound. Each one separately does it so well that not one of them, nor all of them together, will break the solemn silence. There is silence out there. The forest is silent; even when it whispers it nevertheless is silent . . . The sea is silent; even when it rages uproariously it is silent . . . [If] you take time and listen more carefully. . . you hear silence, because uniformity is nevertheless also silence. . . you cannot say this bellowing or this voice disturbs the silence. No, this belongs to the silence, is in a mysterious and thus in turn silent harmony with the silence; this increases it . . . *it is silent, but its silence is expressive.* (1997: 13 emphasis mine)

Out in nature with the lily and the bird, both Kierkegaard and Tarkovsky become aware of God through the constellation of sounds and eagerly assume the position of a listener to the divine voice. In perceiving impressionist silences this way, Stalker is exhilarated by the bustling stillness of the Zone; it is as if he has entered his sacred sanctuary—a suggestion made in the first shot of the Zone which shows an abandoned telephone pole in the shape of a crucifix. Within such “silence”, Stalker (and Tarkovsky’s other tortured protagonists) find spiritual peace and confirmation; the space created is a sort of Eden.

An important motif in Tarkovsky’s cinema, Eden is usually characterized by the prominent presence of natural elements (the most widely noted being water in its

⁵ “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin . . . Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will* He not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6: 28-30, original emphasis).

various forms). However, I would argue that given the spiritual quality of silence in Tarkovsky's cinema, silence is equally significant in the composition of the Tarkovskian Eden. Silence, however, as Kierkegaard and Tarkovsky conceive of it, is saturated with organic sounds; it is an impressionist silence.

Consider the previously mentioned scene of the trio's first moments in the Zone. All that is heard once the creaking from the railcar stops is the "silence" of the Zone. The only sounds are of water, faint rustling, and insect calls. A moment passes before anyone speaks:

STALKER. Right, we're home!

WRITER. Phew, at last.

HE also slides down from the trolley, and Professor follows.

PROFESSOR: **It's so quiet...**

STALKER. **The quietest place on earth, There's nobody to make any noise.**

Stalker is excited. His nostrils are flared, his eyes shining.

You'll soon see. It's amazingly beautiful here—bizarre! (CS 389
bold emphasis mine)

The significance of this exchange is two-fold. First, it establishes the intrusive nature of extrinsic sound, in this case, spoken language; and second it confirms silence as positive. Occurring forty minutes into the film, these are the first lines of delight spoken. As much as visual evidence of natural elements (earth and water in particular) has come to represent the Tarkovskian Eden, the experience cannot be complete without sound. Sound, Elizabeth Fairweather writes, "forces the audience to 'feel' the sensations" (2012: 41). The sound-image creates a sensorium which indicates our arrival in the Tarkovskian Eden—Tarkovsky will reprise this technique in *Nostalghia*.

From this point, the Zone's impressionist silence will expand beyond organic sounds to include music, compelling awareness (in a direct and forceful way) of the divine voice in silence. Once the group disembarks from the railcar, Stalker excuses himself and treks deep into the untamed tall grass. In a patch of green, Stalker kneels as if in prayer, and then lies face down in the grass. Stalker is surrounded by the silence of the Zone, a silence that comprises the organic sounds of rustling and insect calls. What proves acoustically most striking, however, is not the organic sounds but the electronic music which immediately creates a feeling of heightened sentience. As Stalker stretches out on the earth, strange electronic music fills the air. This music is different from the electronic whirring of the railcar sequence; while the whirring intensified the anxiety of travelling into unknown territory, this music reflects a state of calm, stillness, and familiarity. This is confirmed when Stalker gradually becomes fully at rest hidden in the grass. In this scene, Artemeyev has blurred the boundaries between organic diegetic sound and non-diegetic music to the point that they become indistinguishable. This amalgamation of sound and music comes to be associated with the Zone, eventually becoming its leitmotif and the acoustic suggestion of its sentience. It is heard prominently only three other times in the film, excluding the opening credit sequence, and each of these three scenes alludes to the presence of an inexplicable metaphysical power.

As Stalker lies stretched out in the tall grass, eyes closed and completely still, the sound aspect of this sound-image becomes increasingly prominent. Through sound, the Zone comes alive and becomes animate. A tiny worm crawls onto Stalker's finger, as if nature is beginning to claim him to eventually consume him as it has the electrical poles and abandoned tanks. Yet, it is clear that Stalker desires this submission to the Zone. Through re-entering and intimately encountering Eden, the human is able to experience spiritual tranquility—a philosophy in keeping with Tarkovsky's idea of

immanence. By the time Stalker returns to Writer and Professor, he is completely refreshed and exclaims, “the flowers are in bloom here once more!” (CS 390) It is worth noting that this is the first, and perhaps the only time, that we see Stalker smile.⁶ Here, the individual is not tormented by silence, but comforted.

Listening to the sounds of Eden, however, does not always yield comfort. Later in the film, Writer is asked to journey through the Meat Grinder alone. The walk, Stalker reveals, is treacherous and the *mise-en-scène* is fittingly frightening. Amidst the darkness, Writer inches his way forward. Water drips from above him onto his furrowed brows and below him, puddles splash with each step he takes. Stalker and Professor are far behind, watching him from a safe distance, urging him to forge forward. Their voices reverberate within the walls of this huge metal pipe and echo along with each drop of water. Writer’s expression betrays genuine fear; there is no question that, in this moment, he believes that the Zone could come alive. His faith is induced and encouraged by the sounds of Eden. The impressionist silence of the Meat Grinder is not one that comforts but one that confirms the Zone’s sentience.

Dialogue and Silence: Idle Chatter vs. Solidarity in Silence

Tarkovsky’s valorization of silence extends to silence in the human sphere. Particularly in the final three films, dialogue is renounced in favor of silence as the medium through which meaningful communication occurs.

In thinking about human speech this way, Tarkovsky found affinity with both Bergman, as shown in Part One, and Kierkegaard who wrote, “what the human being knows is idle chatter” (1997: 11). All three observed a tendency to misunderstanding inherent in dialogue and a misuse of speech in primarily voicing personal suffering and

⁶ The other time that Stalker appears to be happy is when the trio had just disembarked from the railcar—the screenplay notes that Stalker “is excited . . . [with] his eyes shining,”—but the audience is not privy to this since it is captured in long shot and Stalker faces away from the camera (CS 389).

despair. Kierkegaard expressed concern for spiritual repercussions (ego-centric speech obscuring the divine voice), while Bergman focused on the self-centeredness typically manifested in dialogue. In *Stalker*, spoken language does exactly what Kierkegaard and Bergman had feared. Writer begins one of his many attempts to engage Professor in a discussion. Mid-way through their trek, as the trio lies down to rest, Writer addresses Professor, making the latter an unwilling listener to his tirade on vocational doubt. As Writer speaks, the Zone's musical leitmotif is faintly heard. Much louder, Writer's voice literally drowns it out, forcing the music to withdraw into itself with each word until it is completely dropped from the soundtrack. The sounds of trickling water and a rushing stream remain, but the acoustic suggestion of the Zone's sentience is obscured and overwhelmed by speech. Through this, Kierkegaard's fear of the human voice being too concerned with articulating its own despair and drowning out the divine voice is presented acoustically.

Writer's strange attempts at engaging the other two in discussion also serve to demonstrate Tarkovsky's distrust of dialogue as a viable form of meaningful communication. Writer repeatedly harasses Professor with aggravating questions and statements; it appears that his intention is not to start a discussion but a bout of bickering. Each time, Professor cuts him off and asks to be let alone. Writer's warped idea of communication is not unlike that of the sisters in *The Silence*—appearing to be genuine in its desire to simply connect with another but misguided in its methods. Writer's words are in reality extremely confessional. He freely admits to self-doubt and fears of the public's fickle attentions and affections. After going through the Meat Grinder and in the Sand Room, Writer will again express this crippling fear. However, on both occasions, neither Professor nor Stalker truly listens to or understands Writer's confessions. To them, he is babbling about his insecurities in rapid monologues. While Writer confesses the humiliation of an artist, Professor is off doing something else and

all Stalker does is recite poetry and praise him for successfully going through the meat-grinder, “Now you’ll live for a hundred years” (CS 404). Stalker fails to understand that what Writer is expressing is a desire for artistic immortality and Writer similarly fails to see that Stalker is offering him a different kind of immortality, a transcendence that would render his idea of immortality transient. No communication, at least no meaningful communication, is made through dialogue. When each exchange ends, the responses received exhibit incomprehension and indifference, and the trio simply continues on their journey. In both instances, this is further demonstrated at an acoustic level. As mentioned, as Writer tries to talk to Professor, the leitmotif plays in the background regressing from faint to inaudible, leaving only the sound of trickling water alongside their exchange. In the Sand Room, nothing is heard except for the same trickling sounds and Writer’s angry confession. In these scenes, the soundscapes are bare when compared with the others within the Zone—the sounds of the wind, the birds, and the insects are conspicuously absent. Words are left to echo purposelessly, neither allowing one to hear the divine voice or each other nor achieving communication.

Silence is shown to be most communicative at the film’s climax on the threshold of the Room. After discovering a working telephone and making a call back to his colleagues, Professor reveals his plans to destroy the Room with a bomb he has brought. Stalker desperately tries to take the bomb away and a scuffle ensues which leaves Stalker bloodied and Writer furious, accusing Stalker of wanting to preserve the Room to allow himself to feel important and powerful. To this, Stalker tearfully pleads:

That’s all people have got left on this earth! It’s the only place they can come to, if there’s no hope left for them. You yourself have come here, why destroy hope then? (CS 412)

. . .

A stalker must not enter the Room. A stalker must not even enter the Zone with an ulterior motive. . . . You’re right, I am a louse. I haven’t done any good in this world, and I can’t do any. I couldn’t give anything even to my wife. I can’t have any friends either. But don’t take mine from me! They’d

already taken everything from me back there, behind the barbed wire. So all that's mine is here. You understand? Here! In the Zone! My happiness, my freedom, my self-respect, it's all here! I bring here people like me, desperate and tormented. People who have nothing else to hope for. And I can help them. No one else can help them, only I, the louse, can! I'm so happy to be able to help them that I want to cry. That's all I want I don't want anything more. (CS 412-413)

At this point, Writer mellows in his accusation of Stalker but continues to question Stalker's faith in the Zone and the Room. He calls Stalker "nothing but a God's fool," and asks in rapid succession: "What gave you the idea that this miracle exists in the first place? Who told you that wishes really do become true here? Have you even met one person who was made happy here?"⁷ Though he is now aware of Stalker's suffering, he cannot help but dismiss his unfounded claims. Though it is not his intention, his words only draw himself further away from Stalker, widening the distance between them by focusing on their difference.

Though Tarkovsky shared Bergman's opinion that dialogue has become more insular than interactive, he recognized the potential for silent exchange between individuals. On the silence between human beings in *Stalker*, Chion writes "[the idea is] to have them get by in the wilderness . . . with speech, and the weakness of its echo in the universe . . . Tarkovsky believes in a higher force, mute perhaps but a force nonetheless" (2009: 347). What follows in the scene is the manifestation of this silent but powerful force; one that is at the core of the film's climax and finale (that is, the scenes on the threshold of the Room and of Monkey's mysterious telekinesis).

After Writer berates Stalker for his unfounded beliefs, Writer leans across the threshold of the Room to gaze inside. He loses his balance and flails his arms about trying to regain his balance and is pulled back outside in the nick of time by Stalker.⁸

⁷ Quoted from the Kino Video DVD of *Stalker*. In the screenplay, Writer does not call Stalker "a God's fool", as quoted, but instead tells him, "you are simply defective" (CS 413-414).

⁸ It is ironic that he fears entering the same place which he mocks relentlessly. The sight of Writer flailing his arms wildly in an attempt to regain his balance makes for a comical scene but also a poignant

Writer puts his arm around the sobbing Stalker as they sit together; Professor is behind them, caressing the bomb in his hand. Again the telephone rings, harkening a coming to consciousness. This time the ringing is ignored; Professor begins to dismantle the bomb and toss fragments into the puddles that surround them. The ringing had earlier caused Writer to question the mystical power of a place where electricity still runs, however, the splashes of the dismantled bomb fragments now drown it out. The sound of Professor's gesture of solidarity overwhelms the potentially divisive symbol. The trio remain silent for the rest of the scene. Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie call this a "negative ending" since "the men sit and do nothing, refusing to cross the threshold of the Room" (1994b: 29). The negativity they perceive, however, is purely along spiritual lines; the men are unable to summon the courage necessary to leap to faith. But as they sit, huddled together, Writer places his arm around the sniveling Stalker. He no longer attacks Stalker's beliefs and Professor continues to dismantle the bomb; they allow Stalker to preserve his haven. It is clear that neither Writer nor Professor has come to adopt Stalker's faith, yet despite their conflicting beliefs, the trio is able to achieve solidarity. Through their silence, a moment of genuine human connection is forged. In remaining silent, Writer and Professor exhibit a willingness to let Stalker's faith live on despite their own disbelief, demonstrating not their newly founded beliefs but their understanding that Stalker needs to believe. In doing so, the trio achieves a different kind of transcendence—lateral transcendence—akin to that which occurred in *The Seventh Seal's* hillside communion. As the trio sits together in silence, the camera's perspective switches to a point-of-view shot from within the Room. In the absence of dialogue, the sounds of the birds and trickling water become increasingly prominent. Stalker soon remarks upon this impressionist silence: "It's so quiet. Can you feel it?"⁹

statement on the inability to either wholeheartedly believe in or renounce the existence and power of the metaphysical, a sentiment similar to Antonius's at the end of *The Seventh Seal*.

⁹ Quoted from Kino Video DVD of *Stalker*.

Before long, the trickling water becomes pouring rain, amplifying the effect of silence and confirming their arrival in Eden—this time, one created through human solidarity.

However, the triumph of human solidarity successfully alleviating spiritual emptiness is quickly undermined. Back at home, Stalker experiences his own spiritual crisis and bemoans the abundance of people like Writer and Professor who have no need for faith and hope. When his wife volunteers to go through the Zone with him, Stalker reveals that he too has begun to doubt the existence of the Room's powers. Much like the hillside communion in *The Seventh Seal*, the trio's huddle on the threshold of the Room is inadequate in the search for meaning amidst spiritual doubt. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the scene is akin to Tarkovsky's interpretation of the sisters' reconciliation in Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*. Despite its transience, Tarkovsky maintains the power of such solidarity:

It is what the human spirit seeks, what it yearns for; and that one moment allows a glimpse of harmony, of the ideal. But even this illusory flight gives the audience the possibility of catharsis. Of spiritual cleansing and liberation. (1989: 192)

However, to address the larger problem of the spiritual-existential crisis, Tarkovsky offers a deeper solution.

Throughout the film, only shots within the Zone and of Monkey are filmed in color. This visual connection is supplemented by the idea that Monkey's disability is a product of Stalker being exposed to the Zone, a nuclear disaster site. The strongest and most significant association, however, is an acoustic one. As Stalker carries Monkey home on his shoulders, the camera frames her tightly and one hears the Zone's leitmotif seeping into the soundscape. Until this point, this piece of music has been exclusively associated with the sentience of the Zone; this new association with Monkey thus suggests a similar possible miracle. Consequently, when Monkey moves the glasses on the table in the final scene, she appears to be exercising an otherwise inexplicable telekinesis in the same way that the Zone could indeed possess the power Stalker claims

it to have. Yet, while the soundtrack offers such potentially enlightening cues, it also complicates the scene. First, the thunderous sounds of a passing train combined with visual confirmation of the violent vibrations is added, then the Ode to Joy section of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and finally the former is heard to outlast the musical piece. The entire time, this layered soundtrack is visually accompanied by Monkey's emotionless face; while the audience was earlier able to hear her interior narration of a poem, we are now no longer privy to her thoughts. What exactly is conveyed through the film's coda? In his examination of the scene, Roger Hillman argues that the Ode to Joy must be viewed in relation to the three other musical pieces in *Stalker*: the Pilgrims' Chorus section of Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* Overture, "Erbarme dich, mein Gott" from J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (the theme for Tarkovsky final film, *The Sacrifice*), and the theme of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero*. The four pieces, Hillman contends, form a "sequence of references to the musical canon which functions as the cultural memory of Western civilization," a sequence, which "culminating in the Ode to Joy, is used as an antidote to the arid technological landscape of the film" (2005: 62). The Ode to Joy, here as in every other place it is heard, has come to represent by way of cultural memory, aspirations toward utopian ideals of universal brotherhood. *Stalker* had earlier remarked on music as "the source of the greatest delight which stuns us and brings us together"; in *Stalker*, spirituality and human solidarity is mediated by music. In the final scene, the mechanical sounds of the train outlast the Ode to Joy, leaving a space of palpable "silence". It is in this space of daunting "silence" that Tarkovsky calls for faith, just as he had done amidst the silence of the Zone. While the Ode to Joy and all that it signifies do not prevail acoustically, they do so spiritually. Therefore, what this conclusion proposes is Tarkovsky's solution to the modern spiritual-existential crisis: an insistence on the necessity of faith for the continued aspirations toward spirituality and universal brotherhood.

Chapter Five

Nostalgia and the Constructive Silence of Kindred Spirits

Nostalgia's Andrei Gorchakov is a Russian scholar who has come to Italy on a research trip. Accompanied by his translator and guide Eugenia, Andrei intends to investigate the life and work of late Russian musician, Pavel Sosnovsky. During their travels, they meet Domenico whom locals call a madman but with whom Andrei feels affinity. The heaviness of Andrei's yearning for his Russian home and family soon weighs upon him and causes him to withdraw from Eugenia and his Italian environment. Though it is primarily from his nostalgia that the film takes its name, the theme manifests on several levels of the narrative, all of which exhibit the tensed relationship between exile and return: Andrei is so consumed by his memories of Russia that he cannot fully experience Italy, yet he refuses to phone home or hasten his return; his research interest, Sosnovsky, reveals in a letter the creative inertia he experiences in and away from Russia (manifested in dreaming of himself as a statue); fictional Sosnovsky is based on actual Russian serf composer Maxim Sozontovich Berezovsky who lived in Italy for a decade and returned home only to commit suicide soon after; Domenico's nostalgia for a perfect world brings him to suicide; and, foreshadowing a climatic sequence in *The Sacrifice*, Eugenia tells Andrei about a maid who "because of nostalgia for her family in the South, burned the thing [her employers' house] that stopped her going back".¹

The tone of *Nostalgia* is undoubtedly influenced by Tarkovsky's own exilic nostalgia at the time of filming. Diary entries from this period bear witness to the long and difficult process of his family's departure from their home country and his growing

¹ Eugenia's anecdote was scripted to appear in a separate scene (see CS 483). Nevertheless, in both screenplay and film, she brings it up without context, Andrei says nothing in response, and it is never spoken of again. Its significance is evident simply from the film's focus on nostalgia but becomes fully understood in relation to the climax of Tarkovsky's next and final film, *The Sacrifice*. This will be furthered discussed in Chapter 6.

loneliness while waiting for them to join him.² He was working outside the Soviet Union for the first time and, in addition, had begun plans to seek political asylum away from his beloved Russia.³ In *Tempo di Viaggio*, Tonino Guerra, Tarkovsky's co-writer for *Nostalghia*, reads a poem he (Guerra) finds hopeful:

I don't know what a house is,
is it a coat?
Or an umbrella if it rains?
I have filled it with bottles, rags, wooden ducks,
curtains, fans.
It seems I never want to leave it.
Then it's a cage,
that imprisons whoever passes by
Even a bird like you, dirty with snow
But what we told each other
Is so light that it cannot be kept in.⁴

Tarkovsky, on the other hand, recognized in the poem the depressing idea of the home as a cage and replied, "it's good, it's very good, it's very sad". During this time, he wrote in his diaries, "It really is not possible for a Russian to live here, not with our Russian nostalgia" (1991: 259).

Yet, the yearning for a return to a past state had been present in Tarkovsky's cinema from the beginning. His reactionary stances, particularly toward modernity, created the problem of an Eden complex: hopefulness and optimism for the ideal paradoxically causes disappointment and despair in the real. The pursuit of a lost Eden becomes, at best, a distraction, and at worst, an impediment to meaningful existence in the here and now. The fervent desire to achieve this imagined wholeness imprisons one in a state of incompleteness and perpetual loss. One is paralyzed with *and* by nostalgia. Tarkovsky's first film, *Иваново детство/Ivan's Childhood* (1962), had already expressed this inability to extricate oneself from memories. Throughout the film, child-soldier Ivan is both comforted and haunted by memories of his late mother and pre-war

² See Tarkovsky (1991), pages 303-324 in particular.

³ Shortly before filming began, Tarkovsky travelled to Stockholm with the intention to seek political asylum. See CS 465-469.

⁴ Quoted (with my emphasis) from the documentary included on the Artificial Eye DVD of *Nostalghia*.

childhood. Like the present, the future, as evident in his “science fiction” films, is plagued by the irreparability of the past. Only by travelling into the timeless alien spaces of *Solaris* and the *Zone* can one glimpse lost Eden and even there, great feats of faith are necessary to sustain its reality. Ivan, Chris, and Stalker’s unabated yearning for a lost Eden lives on in the melancholic protagonists of *Nostalghia*.

Dialogue and Silence: Linguistic Divides vs. Silence in Solidarity

The intuitive affinity between Andrei and Domenico becomes an antidote to their despair. As shown in the moment of lateral transcendence achieved by Stalker, Writer, and Professor, spiritual communion is possible through human solidarity. Though they appear to long for different things (Domenico, for a lost past, and Andrei, a distant place), their desire is for the same thing: a world without boundaries, a universal brotherhood. *Nostalghia*’s central themes of communication and silence, and solidarity and distance, unfold primarily through Andrei and Domenico’s relationship. This is especially notable since, formally, they only meet once and during their short meeting, talk minimally and in Italian, a language Andrei is hardly fluent in.

The exchanges between Andrei and Eugenia act as a foil to the relative “silence” between him and Domenico. Andrei perceives political and cultural boundaries to be the primary obstruction to universal brotherhood and is particularly sensitive to linguistic divides. In the opening scene, he asks, rather curtly, that Eugenia speak to him in Italian despite her Russian being better than his Italian. He then scoffs at her decision to read the works of Russian poet, Arseny Tarkovsky, in a translation and later snatches it, tosses it away, and burns it. He waxes philosophical about the untranslatability of art and music and asserts the need to “abolish . . . national borders” (CS 476). However, his insistence on establishing universal solidarity is ironic given his seemingly relentless, albeit involuntary, efforts to distance himself from his Italian environment.

Though he and Eugenia had driven a long way to visit Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*, he refuses to enter the convent where it is housed—he later tells Domenico that the Madonna reminds him of his wife (CS 491). Because of his refusal to recognize (and thus break out of) his nostalgic inertia, Andrei develops an Eden complex which is not unlike that of Chris and Stalker—coincidentally (or not) all three men sport odd patches of white in their otherwise black hair. Cinematically, the dissonance Andrei experiences manifests through image and sound. The visual shifts between color shots of alien Italy and sepia shots of familiar Russia are reminiscent of *Stalker's* sepia-toned city and colored Zone. But while Andrei's Italian environment is shot in color, it is seen as perpetually foggy while his Russian reveries are monochromatic but clear and shot in deep focus. On an acoustic level, his monosyllabic responses to Eugenia are heard in uneasy Italian, made more apparent by the rolling monologues he conducts in fluent Russian.

The metaphorical silence amongst human beings—shown through these uncommunicative dialogues between Andrei and Eugenia—is undone, counter-intuitively, through the literal silence between Andrei and Domenico. Visiting Domenico at his home, Andrei and Eugenia find him outside, pedaling away on a stationary bicycle “with an intense and almost severe expression” (CS 487). Since the two speak the same language, Andrei sends Eugenia to speak with Domenico. She is dismissed immediately but Andrei beseeches her to try again. She does so but Domenico rejects her once more and she marches off angrily. Now alone, Andrei apprehensively tries to engage him in conversation:

‘Forgive me...’ he says, once he has overcome his awkwardness. ‘But I think I know why you did that.’

He finds speaking Italian very difficult.

‘What? The bicycle?’ Domenico condescends to answer.

‘No, then... with your family... in that house...’ (CS 489)

In beginning by establishing like-mindedness, Andrei penetrates Domenico's insularity.

Domenico responds immediately.

Domenico back-pedals which unexpectedly acts as brake on the wheel. He slides off the saddle and goes inside. After a few moments he looks out of the window holding a glass. 'Come on, over here!' he calls. (CS 489)

Differing slightly from the screenplay, Domenico in the film simply dismounts from his stationary bicycle and goes into the house. Andrei follows him in on his own and only when inside does Domenico beckon him deeper. Nevertheless, in both versions, affinity is immediately established. Significantly, this occurs without Eugenia whose vocation hinges on successful verbal communication and who, by her own definition, is "not just an interpreter [but one who] improve[s] the words of those who use [her] services" (CS 489).

It could be said that Andrei and Domenico are *doppelgängers*. They appear to understand each other intuitively despite their brief meeting; Andrei sees himself as Domenico in a dream sequence; and coincidentally, Domenico owns a German Shepherd, the same breed of dog (indeed the same dog) frequently seen in Andrei's reveries of his Russian home.⁵ More than that, however, the film positions them not as two doubles but as one single being. Certainly this does not mean that Andrei and Domenico are coalesced into a one entity in the Platonic sense, instead, their solidarity should be seen in keeping with *Nostalgia's* central theme of universal brotherhood as spiritual union—an idea prominently displayed on a banner in Domenico's home, "1+1=1".

However, their solidarity is not immediately achieved. Despite having been compelled to approach Domenico, Andrei remains withdrawn for much of their meeting. His first glimpse of Domenico's home reminds him so much of Russia that it immediately transports him into his interior Eden. As he steps in, the shot cuts from

⁵ Tarkovsky's fondness for his own dog, Dakhus, is apparent in his diaries which include a sketch of its likeness (1991: 179).

color to sepia. A point of view shot captures a mound of soil and water in the corner of Domenico's home but what Andrei sees, cinematically presented in sepia, is the earth and streams of Russia. While this could be understood as the seamless amalgamation of Andrei's realities, it appears instead to emphasize the distance between them. From this point onward, he becomes uncommunicative. He simply obliges when Domenico demonstrates his philosophy of solidarity:

He picks up the bottle of oil and pours one drop on to it. 'One drop,' he says, like a schoolmaster, and repeats the exercise. 'Plus one . . . makes one drop, not two.'

[Andrei] smiles vaguely. (CS 490 original ellipsis)

Domenico, however, is unfazed by Andrei's disinterest and shaky grasp of Italian. He is determined to fortify their kinship and offers Andrei a slice of bread and a glass of wine. Andrei politely accepts, oblivious to this gesture of communion. In comparison to Antonius's reception of the wild strawberries and fresh milk in *The Seventh Seal*, Andrei partakes of this feast almost mindlessly.

Nevertheless, Tarkovsky perceives the potential for solidarity between kindred spirits. His belief that silence amongst human beings can be construed as positive and constructive is evident through a comparison of two scenes during Domenico and Andrei's meeting.

Consider the first moments where Andrei enters Domenico's home. As Domenico beckons Andrei deeper into the house, the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth fills the soundscape. While it is not yet known if the music is diegetic, its significance is clear. The hope for universal brotherhood is conveyed in this piece which is, without question, the most famous musical embodiment of humanism. However, as the piece crescendos to a recognizable snatch of the Ode to Joy section, it is abruptly cut. The music is now revealed to be diegetic, played on a record player by

Domenico *for* Andrei; he tells Andrei, “Did you hear that? It’s Beethoven!”⁶ Cutting the music off at such an important moment appears at odds both with Domenico’s desire for communion with Andrei and his decision to play the piece at all. The significance of truncating the Ninth, however, can be seen in relation to the use of Bach’s cello suites in *Through a Glass Darkly* (as previously discussed in Chapter Two). To suggest the diminishing possibility of communion, each iteration of Bach’s music was shorter than before. Likewise, curtailing the Ninth to exclude the Ode to Joy section here—notably the same section which imbued an atmosphere of faith and hope in the final scene of *Stalker*—suggests that at this early point in their meeting, the human solidarity and spiritual union which Domenico seeks is yet to be achieved. Roger Hillman writes, “the divine is contemplated but not attained” (2005: 58). In addition, the anti-climatic and almost comical way in which the music is cut undermines its grand cultural significance. This powerful musical suggestion of solidarity is artificially imposed upon their meeting.

The second scene occurs later during the same meeting; Andrei remains reserved and Domenico is now quiet. However, with Domenico, Andrei’s reticence does not suggest a lack of desire to communicate as it does with Eugenia—or between the antagonistic sisters in *The Silence*. The valorization of silence amongst human beings earlier expressed in *Stalker* is also present here between Domenico and Andrei. In moments of silence, the once-prominent division caused by linguistic differences is eradicated. As they sit silently, only sounds of their environment are heard. Though this acoustic constellation differs from the impressionist silence heard during the moment of lateral transcendence in *Stalker*, it eloquently emphasizes the silence between the two men. Tarkovsky’s intention, as confirmed by the screenplay, is effectively conveyed:

Silence. Both are sunk in their own thoughts: they sit next to each other and listen to the sea’s distant roar. This silence is not burdensome. (CS 490)

⁶ Quoted from the Artificial Eye DVD of *Nostalghia*. This line does not appear in the screenplay.

It is after this moment of constructive silence that Domenico beseeches Andrei to perform a deeply symbolic act of faith on his behalf—to carry a lit candle across St. Catherine’s Bath. “The divine,” which Hillman argues was “contemplated but not attained” in the first scene is now, more than ever, within grasp (2005: 58).

Sounds and Silences of Eden: Internal Sounds vs. Imposed Soundtracks

The strength emerging from their newly formed union is further illuminated through the sound-imagery of their interior states. It is shown that Andrei frequently withdraws into his interior Russian Eden. These travels are indicated both by visual shifts in color and location-specific sounds. The split-edit, otherwise known as the L-cut, is used to indicate his transitions between fantasy and reality. The visual introduction of Andrei’s Eden is prefaced, significantly, by the sound of trickling water (which has come to be a, if not *the*, staple natural element of the Tarkovskian Eden). Take for instance his reverie before he and Eugenia enter their hotel rooms for the first time. While Eugenia is talking, Andrei walks into the foreground and looks directly into the camera. The non-diegetic sound of trickling water is subtly introduced into the soundscape and quickly becomes prominent. All this time Eugenia’s voice continues on the soundtrack and the shot stays on Andrei as he stares into the camera. A cut then transports the audience into Andrei’s Russia; in sepia, he/we see(s) his wife smile, then, a young girl and a dog run through a puddle. The dog barks and its footsteps splash in the shallow water as the inexplicable trickling persists; all this time voices from Andrei’s Italian reality continue. The diegetic sounds of his Italian environment and the internal sounds of Andrei’s Russia layer the scene’s soundscape. Even before the visual transportation from Andrei’s reality to his fantasy, sounds from his interior journey are heard. Usually employed to ensure diegetic continuity, here Tarkovsky uses the split edit for psychological/interior continuity which thus emphasizes diegetic disruption.

Later the split edit is used again when Andrei enters a dream. In the hotel room, the sound of Italy's pouring rain dominates the soundscape. As he falls asleep, the imposing rain unexpectedly recedes to trickling water. The new sound is sustained for a moment before the accompanying visuals cut to sepia shots of his wife in Russia. Again, the interior journey to Eden is acoustically introduced. While in sepia-toned Eden, the sound of a disembodied woman's voice calling out "Andrei" is heard. It is quickly shown to belong to the real world; Eugenia is calling for him and knocking on the room door. The dream continues for a few more moments, sustaining the sounds of trickling water and sepia images of his wife, before it suddenly ends with a synchronous cut to color upon another of Eugenia's urgent calls. In cinematically mediating transitions between realities through acoustic-led split edits, Tarkovsky emphasizes the prominence of sound in Andrei's world.

Domenico's interior states are similarly exteriorized and presented in sepia-toned sequences. The soundscape, however, is markedly different; contrasting with the complex acoustic layering of Andrei's fantasies there is an absolute lack of internal sounds in Domenico's recollections. In the final moments of their meeting, Domenico remembers the police raid on his home. Convinced that the end of the world was nigh, he had imprisoned his family for seven years. As opposed to Andrei whose reveries are infused with sound, Domenico sees only muted scenes. Within the memory, Domenico calls out to his son but his voice is a disembodied one, offscreen and non-diegetic to the visual diegesis. The visual scene is extremely dynamic: a crowd of on-lookers witness the raid; a distraught woman, presumably Domenico's wife, weeps as she kneels at a policeman's feet; beside her, a glass bottle is knocked over and milk spills out onto the street; and Domenico chases his son, who looks barely seven years of age, through the crowd.⁷ It is, however, muted; the only sounds heard throughout the scene are the faint

⁷ The image of spilled milk is also present in *Mirror*, *Stalker*, and *The Sacrifice* during moments which mark cracks in a character's psyche. Coincidentally, spilled milk is also seen in Bergman's

trickling of water and the shrill screeching of an electric saw. Both sounds are associated with the diegetic world of Domenico's Italian home but the unrelenting electric saw curiously only has acoustic presence.⁸ Sounds diegetic to Domenico's interior states are noticeably omitted; he only has access to muted memories. As profoundly as Andrei is plagued by the realism of his reveries, Domenico is haunted by the silence of his recollections. Its muteness is as much a reminder of his impotence as the memory of his failed prophecy itself. In his affinity with Andrei, however, Domenico perceives an end to his period of futility and is therefore compelled to form a bond of solidarity with him.

The constructive silence between these two kindred spirits manifests in the sound-imagery of the fantasy sequence which occurs after their meeting. As a car waits to take Andrei back to the hotel, the two men bid farewell with a silent hug outside Domenico's house. The car door shuts after Andrei climbs in and it drives off. As the car cruises down the road, non-diegetic sounds of indistinguishable murmurs are heard. The sounds, both diegetic and non-diegetic, are sustained for a few seconds before a cut to sepia. From the same camera position, a flashback of the raid on Domenico's house is captured. The murmurs have taken over the soundscape; policemen are heard telling people to stand back as townsfolk on bicycles gossip away. It is unclear whose interior world is projected here. It is simply impossible that Andrei was privy to the scene and Domenico is pictured within the diegesis of the flashback which confuses the logical point of view the camera assumes. It should be noted, however, that in Domenico's mute memory, he is also pictured within the frame of the recollection. Nevertheless, the implication is that the meeting of kindred spirits has not only united two beings but also strengthened each one. Domenico's story is no longer mute and is now presented more

Through a Glass Darkly during Minus's uncomfortable awakening to his erotic desire for his sister.

⁸ Andrea Truppin contends that given the religious overtones and Christian symbolism of *Nostalghia*, "one begins to associate the sawing sound symbolically with Christ the carpenter" (1992: 238).

completely. The emergence from muteness is symbolic of his stepping out from nostalgic paralysis. On a personal level, the Eden complex, which caused him to forsake the present world as beyond intervention and redemption, is resolved. He no longer pedals on a stationary bicycle in his home but instead travels Rome to save the world through an act of self-sacrifice. Andrei and Domenico's overcoming of linguistic differences and spiritual union is acoustically presented.

However, the meeting appears to have more of an effect on Domenico than it does on Andrei. As he recounts the meeting to Eugenia, it is apparent that he hardly takes Domenico's request seriously. While Domenico is compelled to action, Andrei returns to inert states of melancholia. It appears that Andrei lacks Domenico's attentiveness to the divine voice. During one of his dream sequences, Andrei sees himself walking through the ruins of a stone cathedral. In voice-over, Eugenia is heard along with another whom she identifies God:

EUGENIA. Lord, don't you see how he's asking? Say something to him.

VOICE. But what would happen if he heard my voice?

EUGENIA. Let him feel your presence.

VOICE. I always do, but he is not aware of it.⁹

The scene is clearly a revised version of what Tarkovsky noted down in his diaries in 1978:

CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

A wilderness.

A voice: God! God! (several times) Answer!

The camera pulls back to reveal a portal; the door is very slightly ajar. Voices inside are whispering.

1st Voice: Answer him! Call to him! You can see that he is in agony!

⁹ Quoted from the Artificial Eye DVD of *Nostalghia*. The screenplay offers a different version, see CS 497.

He: How could I answer him here and now? What would he think? He surely would not start believing that I am God. I cannot make my involvement obvious. (1991: 152)

In both versions, Tarkovsky emphasizes the need to *listen* to the divine voice. One has to actively adopt a posture of listening which is only possible through faith. It is worth noting that Tarkovsky wrote the 1978 version during the pre-production period of *Stalker*, a film which, as discussed in Chapter Four, explicitly addresses the necessity of faith in order to hear the divine voice amidst the silence. After the dream sequence, Andrei prepares to leave Italy without fulfilling his promise to Domenico. It is not until Eugenia calls to relay news of Domenico's sermon in Rome that Andrei is awakened to the significance of their covenant and performs the candle-walk.

Reflecting the religious significances of Domenico and Andrei's acts of faith, Maya Turovskaya aptly termed them "Domenico's Sermon on the Mount" and "Andrei's Road to Calvary" (1989: 133). While the former has largely been interpreted as simultaneously noble and pathetic—Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie call it "grimly farcical"—the consensus on the latter is less than unanimous (1994b: 35). Turovskaya finds Andrei's candle-walk "equally devoid of catharsis" while Nariman Skakov argues that "the absurd task becomes a spiritual quest" (Turovskaya 1989: 133; Skakov 2012: 184). A closer examination of sound in these parallel scenes, in particular the uses of diegetic and non-diegetic music, illuminates Tarkovsky's conception of faith and sacrifice.

Now in Rome, Domenico stands atop the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, perched on the rump of the horse, gripping the rickety scaffold for safety. Behind him, a banner reads, "NON SIAMO MATTI, SIAMO SERI" ("WE ARE NOT CRAZY, WE ARE SERIOUS").¹⁰ His eyes express a renewed purpose as he passionately shouts his sermon of universal brotherhood to a tableau of scattered, strangely immobile, people:

¹⁰ Translated in the screenplay as "We are not mad: we just take life more seriously than you" (CS 500).

Society must become united again instead of being fragmented . . . we must go back to where we were, to the point where you took the wrong turn . . . What kind of world is this if a madman has to tell you to be ashamed of yourselves? (CS 500-501)

This scene is scripted differently in the screenplay. While the message of Domenico's sermon remains, the section quoted is spoken *after* his sacrificial act of self-immolation. The air of dignity the screenplay bestows upon Domenico's sacrifice is, however, absent in the film. "Music!" he shouts, summoning an ill-prepared assistant who struggles to play the soundtrack Domenico had earlier chosen to accompany his finale. As the camera follows his assistants' labored climb up the scaffold, there is a tangibly awkward dearth in sound. While waiting, Domenico reaches in his pocket and finds a section of his speech he has overlooked; "I forgot this," he mumbles.¹¹ Quickly, he shoves it back in his pocket, retrieves the drum of gasoline from his assistant and proceeds to clumsily douse himself with it. Ready and willing, Domenico clicks at the lighter but it refuses to yield. When it finally does, Domenico is immediately lit ablaze. He bends over, engulfed in flames, and the music scratches on reluctantly. It takes a few seconds for the record player to work and Domenico's choice music, the Ode to Joy section of Beethoven's Ninth, to fill the soundscape. Before long, Domenico collapses from the statue. The mass of listeners remain immobile, unmoved by the spectacle, except for one who parodies Domenico's convulsions in a caricatured mime. In the final moments, Domenico's record player fails him once more; the music scratches to a stop and reveals his shrill cries of agony. The desire to interpret Domenico's self-immolation as a triumph of faith, sacrifice, and martyrdom is undoubtedly overwhelming. Echoes of the 1963 self-immolation of Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, can be felt.¹² However, while Quang Duc's sacrifice had an unquestionable impact,

¹¹ Quoted from the Artificial Eye DVD of *Nostalghia*. This self-deprecating moment was not part of the screenplay.

¹² The self-immolation of a monk, presumably Thich Quang Duc, is seen in Bergman's *Persona* where upon seeing the footage, Elisabet Volger (a theatre actor who has withdrawn into muteness) is visibly horrified. In Bergman's *The Magician* (1958), Albert Volger (unrelated to Elisabet

Domenico's triumph is possible only on a lesser, more personal level. As Tarkovsky's earlier films have argued, if Domenico believes that his act of faith will save the world and such belief is indeed his personal truth, then it is so. Beyond that, however, nothing in *Nostalghia*'s presentation of his sacrifice supports such an assessment. All that is left is a screaming man in flames crawling about unceremoniously.

From Rome, the shot cuts to Bagno Vignoni. St. Catherine's Bath is drained and Andrei climbs in. His attempts to complete the candle-walk are captured in a celebrated nine-minute long take. In his first effort, Andrei walks quickly and the delicate flame of the candle is quickly snuffed out. He appears annoyed but willing to try again; his second walk takes him further but the flame extinguishes before he reaches the opposite end of the bath. On the third try—coincidentally the same number of back-and-forth necessary before Andrei (and Eugenia) could penetrate Domenico's reclusiveness—Andrei's forehead is beaded with perspiration and his face, flushed. The first two walks were shot at mid-distance and, at the nearest point, only captured Andrei from his waist up. On the third walk, however, the shot slowly tracks closer to Andrei until it tightens to a close-up of the candle in his hand. Accompanying this visual compression is the retracting of diegetic/external sounds and the elevating of internal sounds. While Andrei's footsteps and the bath's trickling water are heard prominently during the first two walks, his labored breathing has now become most audible. In this third walk, Andrei fulfills his covenant; his painstaking efforts to sustain its longevity paradoxically precede his own demise. With his final breath, he mounts the candle on the ledge. At this moment, Verdi's *Requiem* returns smoothly and non-diegetically to the soundscape. Music is not, as it was during the meeting or Domenico's self-immolation, strategically chosen and artificially introduced. Despite being non-diegetic, the music now appears to flow almost naturally from the visual diegesis. In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky asserted that acts

Volger) is an actor/magician who claims to be mute despite having no vocal impairment. The association between actors and self-imposed muteness is also present in Tarkovsky's final film, *The Sacrifice*.

of faith had to be anti-rational; in *Nostalghia*, however, he demands an even purer state of faith: one without artifice. As opposed to Beethoven's Ninth which Domenico was convinced would make a suitably grand soundtrack to his sacrifice, Verdi's *Requiem* is inspired to existence by Andrei's unquestioning commitment to complete an act he finds utterly absurd.

The final scene of *Nostalghia* depicts an uplifting transcendence into Eden but conveys a grim message. As opposed to Domenico who is deeply invested in the future and therefore eagerly offers spiritual redemption to an apathetic world, Andrei is consumed by nostalgia until the very moment of his death. As Verdi's *Requiem* recedes, the ethereal sounds of Russian song fill the soundscape and the visuals cut to sepia. With his dog, Andrei sits in a patch of earth; in front of him is a puddle of water and behind, the elusive Russian *dacha* he yearns for. As the camera tracks out, Andrei's Eden is revealed to be within the walls of an Italian cathedral. The sight of this strange merging is an unequivocal reminder of the final shot of *Solaris*. Since the simulated reality of *Solaris* is not available to Andrei, his nostalgia could only be resolved in death.

In 1970, some fifteen years before *Nostalghia*, Tarkovsky had already expressed his admiration for those who were willing to sacrifice themselves in spite of those for whom they were sacrificing themselves: "Thank God for people who burn themselves alive in front of an impassive, wordless crowd" (1991: 16-17). This notion of sacrifice is carried into Tarkovsky's next and final film, titled, unsurprisingly, *The Sacrifice*. There, however, what Tarkovsky sets ablaze is the backward-looking gaze that had permeated *Nostalghia*. Perhaps it is only appropriate that *Nostalghia*, with its backward pull, bears a dedication to Tarkovsky's late mother while the forward thrust of *The Sacrifice* is given as a benediction to his young son.

Chapter Six

The Sacrifice and the Voice of New Beginnings

When Tarkovsky succumbed to cancer on 29 December 1986, scholars were quick to read *The Sacrifice* as his final testament. Although Tarkovsky never intended the film to be his last, its narrative of apocalypse and atmosphere of finality urged many to perceive it as an uncannily prophetic projection by Tarkovsky of his own situation.¹ *The Sacrifice*, after all, does read like an epilogue. It is an unapologetically hopeful film, a summation of a philosophy that Tarkovsky had asserted throughout his career: faith, in spite of it all.

The first version of *The Sacrifice*'s dedication, however, reveals a less optimistic Tarkovsky—"Dedicated to my little son, Andruishka, who is being made to suffer, innocently, as if he were an adult" (1991: 347). Tarkovsky wrote the statement during a time of frustration; the film was already in post-production but Tarkovsky realized that his health was quickly deteriorating. Furthermore, the USSR continued to deny permission for his son to leave the country. The production period had not only been fraught with personal problems but professional ones as well. Each stage posed new struggles, from pre-production financial woes to professional clashes during production and struggles to meet contractual obligations in post-production.² None, however, were as aggravating as the mechanical failure during the first filming of the burning-house finale. Only one camera was deployed and it malfunctioned in the middle of the scene. The incident thwarted weeklong preparation efforts and aggravated the cost of an already expensive shoot.³ Having signed the contract with the Swedish Film Institute (while the film was still referred to as *The Witch*), Tarkovsky was given a

¹ Diary entries from his final years attest to the various projects he intended to pursue after *The Sacrifice*. Those closest to fruition were *Hoffmanniana*, based on the writings of E.T.A Hoffman, *The Flying Dutchman*, and an adaptation of *Hamlet*. See Tarkovsky (1991), pages 335-338, 341, 343, 347, 357 in particular.

² In particular, see Tarkovsky (1991), pages 342-349, and CS 507-511.

³ For a first hand account of the incident, see Nykvist (1997).

predominantly Swedish crew.⁴ He had much difficulty adjusting to their work culture and complained, “the Swedes are lazy and slow, and only interested in observing rules and regulations” (1991: 347). The crew found Tarkovsky equally challenging; Sven Nykvist, Bergman’s regular cinematographer from the 1960s onwards, relished the opportunity to work with Tarkovsky but also confessed that their working relationship was “somewhat strained” (1997: para. 9).

Given the significant Swedish presence, *The Sacrifice* is often described as “Bergman-esque”. The classification is understandable—the project was filmed on Gotland (near Bergman’s Fårö) with the help of Bergman regulars. Along with Nykvist, members of the cast and crew included Bergman’s choice actors, Erland Josephson and Allan Edwall, and Owe Svensson who was the sound mixer on *Cries and Whispers*, a film Tarkovsky admired for its use of music. However, Tarkovsky himself denied the label:

I don’t agree at all. When Bergman speaks of God it’s to say that he is silent, that he’s not there. Hence, there can be no comparison with me. These are just superficial criticisms, saying this because the lead actor also performs for Bergman, or because in my film there’s a Swedish landscape, none of them having understood anything about Bergman. (Gianvito 2006: 180-181)

Tarkovsky was right to reject claims to resemblance based on similarities in location, actors, and cinematography. This, after all, was largely the effect of working in Sweden with the best that the Swedish film industry had to offer. However, Tarkovsky was perhaps too quickly dismissive. It must be conceded that his cinema revolves about the same premise as Bergman’s cinema of the early 1960s—the human individual reacting to the notion of the death of God. As shown in Part One, Bergman had approached this crisis in pursuit of evidence of God’s existence. To Bergman, the lack of evidence was the evidence of lack. In *Winter Light*, he concluded that the silence of God irrefutably

⁴ During *Nostalgia*’s immensely successful run at Cannes Film Festival, Tarkovsky signed the contract for *The Witch* with Anna-Lena Wibom of the Swedish Film Institute. See Tarkovsky (1991), page 327 in particular.

confirmed God's indifference if not his non-existence. On the other hand, Tarkovsky sought to resolve the crisis not through seeking evidence but by maintaining faith. For Tarkovsky, the lack of evidence was necessary and conducive to the cultivation of faith. With each film, he developed his discourse of faith and demanded a "purer" form of it. *Stalker* argued that faith could not simply be irrational but had to be anti-rational and *Nostalghia* emphasized the absurd conditions necessary for faith. In *The Sacrifice*, *Nostalghia*'s idea of the absurd is further explored.

The Sacrifice begins on a seemingly unremarkable day. Though it is Alexander's birthday, the celebration is to be small and the guests, few. During the afternoon, a fleet of jets passes in close proximity to Alexander's family home. The jets' presence is unexplained and unseen but audible and violent. That evening, a televised newscast announces that nuclear war has erupted all across Europe. The family and party guests react to the news with a mix of silence and hysterics. Alexander, however, appears calm and whispers to himself decisively, "I've waited for this all of my life" (CS 538). Despite being a self-identified non-religious man, Alexander seeks God in the dark of the night. He offers himself as a sacrifice in exchange for the world's salvation and vows to undertake a life of silence. Soon after, he is approached by Otto (Allan Edwall) who bears strange instructions.⁵ Alexander is to go to Maria (Guðrún S. Gísladóttir), a middle-aged Icelandic woman who works for, but does not live with, Alexander's family, and couple with her in order to save the world. When probed for a reason, Otto enigmatically evades providing one and only says, "there is no alternative".⁶ After a period of skepticism, Alexander heeds Otto's counsel. He pleads with Maria to couple with him but she rejects him. In his desperation, Alexander draws a gun to his temple. Driven by pity and affection, she acquiesces. When Alexander wakes, it is the next

⁵ Some two decades earlier, Edwall played a messenger character, Algot Frövik, in Bergman's *Winter Light*.

⁶ Quoted from the Kino Video DVD of *The Sacrifice*. The screenplay reads, "You've no alternative" (CS 549).

morning and he is in his own home. The world appears normal and Alexander takes this as a sign that he has indeed saved the world. Keeping to the deal he struck with God, Alexander burns his house and surrenders his voice.

In *Nostalghia*, Domenico believed that his self-immolation would indirectly result in the salvation of the world. The film's presentation of his sacrifice portrayed his belief and actions as absurd and impotent. With this in mind, one would expect that Alexander's belief that his prayer and/or his coupling with a supposed witch would directly *and* immediately deliver the world from nuclear apocalypse would be treated as laughable. However, in *The Sacrifice*, faith is defended in all its anti-rationality and absurdity.

Sounds and Silences of Eden: Impossible Sounds

The Sacrifice's fierce defense of faith extends beyond the narrative content reflected onscreen. In the act of watching and listening to the film, audience are forced to take on Alexander's faith regardless of personal beliefs. This is achieved through projecting Alexander's interior world onto the audience—no explicit cues are provided to indicate that a transition between “objective” reality and Alexander's interior reality has occurred. A similar strategy was employed in *Nostalghia*. There, however, the transitions were mediated by the use of location-specific sounds and visual shifts in color. In *The Sacrifice*, however, the transition is less apparent. The film's muted color palette, achieved by post-production color reduction, blurs the visual distinction between the grey-tones of Alexander's reality and his black-and-white monochromatic dreams.⁷ When dreaming, Alexander, like Domenico, frequently observes himself from outside his body. Significantly, Josephson plays both characters. This third-person point of view further confuses the audience's ability to distinguish between Alexander's

⁷ Nykvist and Tarkovsky removed almost sixty percent of the color content from selected scenes. See Nykvist (1997).

reality and dreamscape. Such ambiguity is even more confusing on an acoustic level. There is no definite way to distinguish between ambient and internal sounds. As can be seen from the Zone's leitmotif in *Stalker* and the electric saw in *Nostalghia*, Tarkovsky has a penchant for using sounds that are both unanchored to a diegetic sound source and logically implausible. In *The Sacrifice*, the most outstanding sounds are also the most perplexing. At unrelated moments throughout the film, shrill flute music fills the air, a foghorn punctures the soundscape, and a woman's voice calls out indecipherably. Sometimes these sounds appear in the soundscape in isolation while at other times they come together. Further, they are of such similar pitch that it is occasionally impossible to differentiate between them. Svensson, the sound mixer for *The Sacrifice*, complained that *Nostalghia*'s sound was "very poorly done" and took pride in announcing that he had done all the foley sound in *The Sacrifice* by himself.⁸ However, he attributes many of the film's memorable sounds to Tarkovsky; among them were the Japanese flute, ship sounds, and a woman's shepherding cow calls.⁹

Examined more closely, these three sounds can be seen to be associated with three separate levels of reality in *The Sacrifice*. The Japanese flute music is revealed to come from Alexander's tape recorder. Therefore, by way of a shown source, it is diegetic to Alexander's home. On the other hand, the source of the foghorn is never shown. However, since the film unfolds on a seaside landscape, the sound of the foghorn is perceived as diegetic ambient sound. The strangest sounds are the cow calls. Having no shown source or logical context, they are least connected to the diegesis. Like the Zone's musical leitmotif in *Stalker*, the cow calls, I would argue, are associated with the spiritual. When asked about them, Svensson recalls:

The idea about this woman's voice that permeates the film occurred to us [Tarkovsky and himself] early, before sound editing began . . . The important thing is that there was the presence of a woman that comes into

⁸ Svensson reveals, "all the footsteps were produced by me; that is, I physically walked in different pairs of shoes, even ladies' shoes size 45" (2003: 114).

⁹ See Svensson (2003).

the film quite early. And then she enters the dream; that represents a connection with human emotions, which is of course a contrast to the threat of war. (2003: 113)

Though Svensson does not elaborate on the relation he draws between human emotions and the threat of war, the ethereal quality of the calls remains. The calls' spiritual connotations are evident in its association with Otto, the self-identified collector of "'inexplicable' but genuine" events (CS 533). After recounting a curious tale to an enraptured group of Alexander's family and friends, Otto walks around the house and seems to hear the calls. The sound can be heard faintly on the soundscape. He shrugs it off and upon doing so, collapses to the floor dramatically. When he comes to, he tells the others, "an evil angel brushed me with his wing" (CS 535). While Otto is able to hear the calls, the others appear oblivious to it. This further reinforces the sound's association with the spiritual. This, however, is the only time that Otto hears the calls; for its remaining acoustic appearances, the calls are heard primarily in scenes which feature Alexander. They first occur during his monologue on the culture of inaction in modern society; then during the dream sequence after his desperate prayer; when he cycles to Maria's house; and throughout his coupling with Maria and the dream sequence which occurs after. The only other instance is in the final scene with Alexander's young son (who is only referred to as Little Man). The significance of this will be discussed later.

Given their associations with specific and separate realities, when these sounds co-exist, it suggests a merging of realities. This is only possible if the sounds are actually Alexander's internal sounds. Indeed, *The Sacrifice* uses sound extensively to forge audiences' identification with Alexander. This is clearest during his visit to Maria's house. Under Otto's instruction, Alexander goes to offer himself as a sexual sacrifice to Maria whom Otto believes is a white witch. As Alexander cycles toward Maria's house, the soundscape is relatively silent, mostly comprising isolated ambient

sounds. All that is heard is Alexander's labored breathing, the bicycle tires travelling across a gravel path, and the distant sound of a foghorn. The uneven path causes Alexander to fall heavily off the bicycle and land in a puddle of muddy water. As he picks himself up unenthusiastically, the cow calls are heard. Alexander pauses and then turns to return to his home. After a few steps, the cow calls are heard again. This time, Alexander turns back around to continue toward Maria's house. The synchrony of the calls and Alexander's actions suggest that the first call had reminded him of the absurdity of his intention and caused him to abandon his quest while the second call has urged him to take the leap to faith in spite of it.

Inside Maria's house (the exterior of which resembles Domenico's Italian home) the first sound heard is the ticking of a clock. The sound is unnaturally loud, amplified perhaps by its unusual appearance in a Tarkovsky film. In contrast to Bergman's cinema where time is frequently acoustically presented through clocks, time is almost never measured by a clock's ticking in Tarkovsky's cinema. Its ticking here is prominent and constant; it continues without pause throughout Alexander's visit. It is sustained for over ten minutes despite being occasionally pushed into the background by Alexander and Maria's voices. Understandably, Alexander finds difficulty expressing the intention of his visit. It is only when the clock chimes that Alexander realizes the urgency of his situation. The sound awakens him to action and he begs Maria to love him. When she rebuffs his advances, Alexander draws a gun to his temple. His desperation is echoed by sudden sounds of vibration. Glasses clink and furniture rattles against wooden floorboards offscreen. The *fortissimo* of these sounds culminates, once again, in the deafening roar of jets passing in close proximity. Maria, however, does not seem to hear these sounds or perceive the vibrations. The sounds, like the cow calls, are Alexander's internal sounds. They reflect his interior states and, in this instant, the mounting desperation he feels. For audiences, the clinking, rattling, and roar are acoustic

reminders of the earlier scene in Alexander's home. It should further be noted that the impending nuclear war is revealed primarily through sound, both the jets and the televised newscast are heard and never shown. In "suppress[ing] the visual action of war," Gabriel Giralt argues, "Tarkovsky elevates the imagery of war to a more subjective level of representation" (1999: para. 16). As a result, sound becomes *the* indicator of the advent of apocalypse. By making audiences privy to these sounds and further establishing them as Alexander's internal sounds, Tarkovsky compels audiences to identify intimately with Alexander. As in Bergman's cinema, the use of internal sound in Tarkovsky's cinema allows audiences to hear the interior states of characters. Essentially, audiences are able to perceive silence (metaphysical and/or human) as the characters do. As such, audiences are led to accept the character's interior world as their own. In *The Sacrifice*, Alexander's anxiety becomes theirs, as do his desperation and beliefs.

Upon seeing his desperation, Maria accepts him in a womblike embrace. As they lie together, their bodies levitate above the bed and begin to spin slowly. The peculiar scene then cuts to a montage, presumably of Alexander's dreamscapes. The first scene is shot in stark black-and-white. From directly above, a mass of people is seen scrambling in different directions. The visual anarchy is accompanied by the sound of chaotic footsteps. Strangely, no one is screaming. Following this, still in black-and-white, Maria is seen dressed as Alexander's wife, Adelaide (Susan Fleetwood). The scene is reminiscent of *Nostalghia* where Andrei dreams of an embrace between Eugenia and his wife, also named Maria. A sudden cut switches the shot to color. The final shot of the montage is a long take; back in Alexander's home, his daughter, Marta, runs down the corridor naked while Adelaide watches. Adelaide then peers into the living room where Alexander is sleeping on the sofa. Within the same take, Alexander awakens, crying out "Mama!" It is the next day and the film is back in everyday reality.

The screenplay has a drastically different version of this sequence. No montage is described and Alexander's return to his home is explicitly depicted. The screenplay reads:

Maria is sleeping. Mr. Alexander raises himself on one shoulder, listening. Then, trying not to wake Maria up, he dresses quickly in the darkness . . . tiptoes out of the house and within a minute is cycling along the white road in the early dawn . . .

Back in his study, he drinks some brandy, lies down on his couch, wraps himself in a blanket and falls asleep instantly. (CS 554)

Had the film depicted the events after Alexander's visit in this way, the narrative would have been linear and logical. The artistic merits in replacing the scripted version with the dream are evident but should not be understood as the only reason for such a change.

While the montage is visually fragmented and extremely dynamic, the soundscape remains relatively uninterrupted and homogenous. Before the montage begins, Maria comforts Alexander as he sobs. From this moment on, their voices are present on the soundscape and will persist even when sounds from the montage's realities are introduced. As mentioned, during the scene of human chaos, there is a stampede of footsteps. However, another layer of sound is added as the dream sequence begins. This layer, unconnected to the visual diegesis of Alexander's dreams, comprises the Japanese flute music along with cow calls. Since the Japanese flute music is anchored to Alexander's tape recorder back in his house, its presence here, like the cow calls, is heard as Alexander's internal sounds. However, as the montage's second shot (Maria dressed as Adelaide) begins, sounds from the visual diegesis are omitted. Only Alexander and Maria's voices as well as the cow calls and Japanese flute music are heard. In the final shot of the montage, the visual scene is brought back to Alexander's home and the voices and cow calls are slowly faded out from the soundscape. Since the cow calls and Japanese flute music sound similar, the withdrawal of the former is

extremely subtle. By the time Adelaide peers into the living room, only the Japanese flute music remains. It continues as Alexander wakes from his sleep, walks around the room, and only stops after he switches his tape recorder off.

When Alexander awakens, he regards his surroundings as though they were an extension of his dream. This sudden traversing through time and space also disorientates the audience. While the Japanese flute music had been an internal sound, it is now shown to be diegetic to the real world of Alexander's home. The transition from one day to the next and from reality to dream to a different reality, confounds the audience. Not only does the aural-imagery provide no cues of transition, it indicates that no transition has occurred. The flute music had an uninterrupted presence throughout Alexander's dreamscape (in Maria's house the previous night) into his conscious state (back home the next morning). As a result, the audience's perception of realities become as confused and conflated as Alexander's. It is illogical and, indeed, anti-rational but the film does not offer audiences any choice other than to accept it as real.

When Alexander discovers that the world has returned to normal, his reaction is not one of consternation but confirmation. Audiences are compelled to believe, as Alexander does, that his sacrifices have worked. Despite his encounter with Maria, Alexander fulfills his deal with God and prepares his house to be burnt. His double-sacrifice—giving himself to Maria and relinquishing earthly possessions—appears bizarre. Conventionally, the Christian belief in God and the pagan belief in witches are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, Alexander commits to both. *The Sacrifice*'s refusal to reveal which sacrifice successfully averted the apocalypse addresses the issue of faith. No judgment is passed on the validity of one belief over the other. In an interview, Tarkovsky revealed that he intended to leave room for ambiguity:

Those who are interested in various supernatural phenomena will search for the meaning of the film in the relationship between the postman and the witch, for them these two characters will provide the principal action. Believers are going to respond most sensitively to Alexander's prayer to

God, and for them the whole film will develop around this. And finally a third category of viewers who don't believe in anything will imagine that Alexander is a bit sick, that he's psychologically unbalanced as a result of war and fear. (Gianvito 2006: 179)

Like Alexander, audiences are free to believe what they will—either/ or/ both.

Tarkovsky's immanentist spirituality necessitates that since both sacrifices were made in fear and trembling, they are leaps to faith and therefore worth defending. That which becomes important is not the subject of one's faith but faith itself. Alexander had earlier told of the parable of a monk who, under the instruction of his master, "water[ed] [a dead] tree everyday, until it came to life" (CS 516). Tarkovsky's understanding of faith is as the parable illustrates; it is ritualistic commitment to the anti-rational and absurd. In response to an interviewer who commented, "this faith [as portrayed in *The Sacrifice*] seems in a certain sense to border upon the absurd," Tarkovsky declared, "that's only natural!" (Gianvito 2006: 180) This way of thinking about faith brings to mind Tertullian's *Credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd) and further emphasizes the necessary abdication of reason when confronted with unprovable truths.¹⁰

In heeding Otto's absurd advice to avert apocalypse, Alexander performs the necessary rejection of reason that is inherent in faith. Otto's solution and his reference to Piero della Francesca should be understood in relation to the infantilism of the faithful. When looking at a framed print of Leonardo da Vinci's *Adoration of the Magi*, Otto reveals that he prefers Piero's work; since it of a similar subject matter, it is presumed that he refers to *Madonna del Parto*.¹¹ The *Madonna*'s emphasis on the maternal is reflected both in its focus on pregnant Mary and Tarkovsky's earlier use of it in *Nostalghia*, a film explicitly dedicated to the director's mother. As argued in my

¹⁰ The phrase is a misquote from Tertullian *De Carne Christi* which reads, "*credibile est, quia ineptum est*" (*it is credible because it is ridiculous*). For more on Tertullian's paradox, see Götz (2002).

¹¹ In the screenplay, Otto only reveals the fear that *Adoration* evokes in him and makes no mention of Piero or the *Madonna* (CS 549).

discussion of the film in Chapter Four, the maternal is yearned for (in the forms of Russia and Andrei's Russian wife, Maria) and the anti-maternal is rejected (Eugenia). Otto's seemingly offhand remark brings the *Madonna* and its maternal significance into *The Sacrifice*. In instructing Alexander to go to Maria, Otto indicates the need for a return to the maternal body and regression to a child-like state. Maternal figures are noticeably absent from Alexander's adult life. Like Eugenia, Adelaide is the antithesis of the maternal: spiteful and sexual. Having enjoyed the celebrity of Alexander's illustrious theatre career, Adelaide resents their retirement into dormancy. Furthermore, her behavior towards Victor implies that she is sexually involved with him. It is also insinuated that Victor is intimate with Marta, Alexander and Adelaide's teenage daughter. Adelaide's anti-maternal figure opposes the image of femininity which, in Tarkovsky's cinema, is embodied in long tresses, pregnant wombs, and dutiful subordination.¹² Maria is the Madonna to Adelaide's Whore. To comfort Alexander, Maria assumes the maternal role and, because of this, their union is not so much sexual as spiritual. Alexander is also reminded of his late mother when he is with Maria. It is significant that Tarkovsky's mother's name is also Maria.¹³ The conflation of lover and mother occurs throughout his cinema and is perhaps most notable in *Зеркало/Mirror* (1975) where the same actress, Margarita Terekhova, plays both mother and wife. In *The Sacrifice*, the return to the maternal is confirmed when, the morning after coupling with Maria, Alexander cries out "Mama!"

Alexander's return to the maternal facilitates his regression to a child-like state, which is essentially the state of dependence and unquestioning faith. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Sigmund Freud argued that religion could be seen as derived from the early helplessness of the child. Freud uses a familiar vernacular when highlighting the

¹² In a confrontational and candid interview, Irena Brezna, one of many who recognize the deeply gendered world of Tarkovsky's cinema, questioned him on his regressive views toward women; see Brezna (2006; 2012).

¹³ Bergman also used his own mother's name, Karin, for many of his female characters. Several examples of this can be seen in the films discussed in this thesis.

correlations between the parent-seeking impulses of a child and the God-seeking impulses of a helpless person. In *Family Romances*, he emphasizes the breaking away from one's parents as a necessary rite of passage into adulthood. An integral part of separation is the "faithlessness" (though meant in the sense of not being filial as opposed to "lacking in faith") of destroying the exalted image of one's parents who have thus been "the source of all belief" (1995: 300). The validity of such a comparison can be seen plainly in *The Silence* where the child's (Johan's) maturation indicated the emergence into a new God-absent consciousness as well as here in *The Sacrifice* where regression to childhood signifies the retreat into a God-centered consciousness. In both his encounter with Maria and during his prayer, Alexander abandons his air of intellectualism and is reduced to a sniveling child. Only after such surrender is Alexander able to commit to faith and sacrifice. Salvation, for Tarkovsky, is achieved through renouncing attributes associated with adulthood (self-sufficiency, skepticism, and reason) and surrendering to those associated with childhood (dependence, belief, and faith). The return to a child-like state is a rebirth into a new world, a new Eden.

This new Eden that Alexander's sacrifice brings forth is embodied in Little Man. His unquestioning belief in Alexander's parable of the monk is depicted in the closing sequence of *The Sacrifice*. After Alexander is driven off in the ambulance, a cut takes the film away from the inferno of the burning house to Little Man by the seaside. As visually abrupt as the cut is, what is more noticeable is the sudden dearth in sound. The roar of the burning house, as deafening as the jets were earlier, is immediately replaced by placid cow calls. The calls, as previously mentioned, are acoustic suggestions of the spiritual and have been primarily associated with Alexander. After burning the house and taking the vow of silence, Alexander's sacrifice is complete and he passes on to his son a connection with the spiritual. This is similar to *Stalker* where, in the closing sequences, the Zone's musical leitmotif is associated with Monkey to suggest the

metaphysical quality of her telekinesis. In *The Sacrifice*'s inverted Abrahamic sacrifice, instead of the *taking of* the son there is a *giving to* the son. Throughout the film, the privileged position of the son is visually suggested through the strong presence of Leonardo's *Adoration*. It is most apparent when Alexander deliberates Otto's bizarre instruction; the camera focuses on the Christ-child within a framed print of *Adoration* and in the reflection of the glass, Alexander is seen looking at the painting. It reminds him of his son and he goes to Maria. In addition to the visual symbolism, the privilege position of the son is, in the closing sequence, acoustically established. The cow calls are now associated with Little Man. Furthermore, they are heard for a longer period and in a complete version which fully reflects the different inflexions of the woman's voice.

Dialogue and Silence: Birth of the Voice

Beyond the cow calls, this patrilineal transference is more evidently represented through the demise of Alexander's voice and the resurrection of Little Man's. Counter-intuitively, voice, in Tarkovsky's cinema, resembles silence more than it does speech. While speech is associated with egocentric human communication, both voice and silence are deeply connected to the spiritual. At the beginning of *Stalker*, Stalker speaks assuredly but is eventually reduced to whimpers and pleas when attempting to defend his beliefs. However, when he recites poetry and biblical passages, he engages his voice and asserts his beliefs authoritatively. Likewise, in *Nostalghia*, only after Domenico's faith is affirmed is he able to summon strength for an impassioned, albeit clumsy, sermon. In its valorization of voice, *The Sacrifice* is most closely related to *Andrei Rublev* and *Mirror*. In these films, silence precedes voice. In *Andrei Rublev*, the eponymous character takes a monastic vow of silence in the hope of resolving a crisis of faith. During his travels, he encounters Boriska (Nikolai Burlyayev), a young boy who believes he can forge a bell despite not knowing how to do so. Boriska has a

pronounced stutter which he constantly fights to suppress in order to establish his authority amongst other bell-forgers. It is only when he fully asserts himself that Boriska eventually overcomes his stutter. Rublev watches Boriska silently from a distance. When Boriska eventually succeeds, Rublev's faith is reaffirmed. At the climatic moment of the bell's first ring, Rublev breaks his vow of silence. Similarly, in *Mirror*, the stutter is seen as an inability to assert one's voice while the voice is seen as the affirmation of the self. In the opening sequence, a young boy undergoes hypnotherapy to overcome a pronounced stutter. The therapist instructs, "You will speak loudly and clearly, freely and easily, unafraid of your own voice and your speech".¹⁴ The scene is unrelated to the rest of the film but its significance is clear. The boy acts as Tarkovsky's cinematic surrogate and his suppression of his stutter is Tarkovsky's triumph over artistic inhibitions. These earlier films elucidate the significance of voice in *The Sacrifice*. Alexander's expiration, which significantly occurs on his birthday, allows for Little Man's affirmation. Victor, the family doctor, had predicted that Little Man's voice would not be fully recovered for weeks, but after Alexander surrenders his voice, Little Man speaks and does so confidently. Alexander's sacrificial act resurrects Little Man's voice. It is the verbal equivalent of Verdi's *Requiem* after Andrei's candle-walk in *Nostalghia*—both inspired into existence by acts of faith.

Significantly, Little Man's first (and only) words are "In the beginning was the Word. Why is that, Papa?"¹⁵ The transfer of voice from father to son is the symbolic deliverance of future. Through his sacrifice, Alexander brings about the beginning of a new world order. Little Man is the embodiment of the innocence of the new man (the man-child) that inherits this future. Significantly, the third and highest of Nietzsche's Three Metamorphoses of the Spirit is the child:

¹⁴ Quoted from the Kino Video DVD of *Mirror*. The scene does not appear in the screenplay.

¹⁵ Quoted from the Kino Video DVD of *The Sacrifice*. The line does not appear in the screenplay.

The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a scared Yes.
Yes, a sacred Yes is needed, my brothers, for the sport of creation: the spirit now wills *its own* will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins *its own* world. (1883/1969: 55 original emphasis)

On the level of the narrative, the extrication of the self from the current world as well as the formation of the new world is performed through Alexander's surrender, his deliverance of Little Man into the new Eden, and Little Man's words which indicate a transcendence of linguistic consciousness. For Tarkovsky, however, the advent of a new beginning is represented in the inferno of the burning house. Slavoj Žižek writes, "the object sacrificed (burned) at the end of [*The Sacrifice*] is the ultimate object of Tarkovskian fantasmatic space, the wooden dacha standing for the safety and authentic rural roots of the Home" (1999: para. 24). Therefore, what burns in the flames of *The Sacrifice*, as Gino Moliterno argues, "is not just Alexander's house but *all* of Tarkovsky's houses" (2001a: para. 26).¹⁶ Through its many appearances, the *dacha* has come to represent the lost Eden which Tarkovsky had relentlessly sought to recover. *The Sacrifice*, paradoxically, is at once the culmination and the negation of Tarkovsky's reactionary cinema. With the symbolic act of immolation, Eden ceases to be grounded in the past. While Tarkovsky previously searched for comfort in lost pasts and distant places, he now looks to the present and the future. The nostalgia of his past films is exorcised by the hope for, and of, the future.

By the end, *The Sacrifice* has come full circle. The film's closing shot mirrors its opening shot, both panning vertically up a tree. The first was focused on the tree in *Adoration* and now, in the final shot, the tree which Alexander plants for his son takes center-stage. The significance of *Adoration* is transposed onto *The Sacrifice* and Little Man becomes the Christ-child, ushering in a new beginning founded on faith and promise. Furthermore, this final shot reflects and redresses Tarkovsky's very first film,

¹⁶ For more on the topic, see Žižek (1999), Moliterno (2001a), and Král (2001).

Ivan's Childhood, where the opening shot was a similar vertical pan up a tree.¹⁷ While the innocence of childhood had been prematurely taken away from Ivan, it is now returned. Despite having finished the film before he realized his terminal condition, *The Sacrifice* feels like a conclusive end to a period in Tarkovsky's cinema. It is hard to know whether he would have further developed his cinematic discourse of faith after *The Sacrifice* but, by this time, it is clear that Tarkovsky had finally renounced the reactionary impulses of his earlier works and invested in the promise of the future.

¹⁷ For more on the appearances and significances of trees in Tarkovsky's cinema, see Loughlin (2008).

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, this thesis has argued that, for a period of time, the cinemas of Bergman and Tarkovsky followed a parallel trajectory. During this time, both directors produced films which engaged with, and considered the implications of, the idea that God was dead to the modern world. The films in question, as previously specified, are Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*, and Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, *Nostalghia*, and *The Sacrifice*. This thesis has used a sound-based analysis of these films to show how Bergman and Tarkovsky arrived at such contrasting conclusions in their confrontations with the modern spiritual-existence crisis. Though the two directors "hear" the same silence, the contrasting ways in which they "listen" to it can be observed through a close analysis of the way sound is used in the films in question. It thus becomes possible to understand *why* the directors understood the silence of God so differently by examining *how* they portrayed these silences.

Though similar concerns had been expressed in earlier works, *The Seventh Seal* and *Stalker* are the first in a series of films which mark the height of the directors' engagements with the modern spiritual-existential crisis. These two films are also the most directly analogous; both are founded on the same premise (the silence of God perpetuates the great war between reason and faith), focus on the same problem (the consequent struggles of the human individual), and explore the same solution (human solidarity as a possible source of existential meaning and comfort). To an extent, these two films also concluded in the same way, introducing a glimmer of hope amidst dark days. Despite this considerable level of similarity, *The Seventh Seal* and *Stalker* demonstrate that Bergman and Tarkovsky approached the problems of God's silence and the subsequent doubts about his very existence in vastly different, indeed contrasting, ways. Bergman saw faith as unsustainable in the presence of doubt and was

persistent in his pursuit of positive proof; Antonius, his cinematic surrogate, stated in no uncertain terms that he wanted to “grasp God with the senses” (*TSS* 28). Tangible evidence was thus required and the absence of it was, for all intents and purposes, evidence of absence. Tarkovsky, on the other hand, sought spiritual and existential meaning through unquestioning faith. The lack of observable confirmation of God’s existence was, for him, the foundation on which faith was built. As Bergman relentlessly sought evidence and repeatedly found none, the soundscapes of his films reflect the nothingness his pursuits yielded. With each film, the diegetic soundscapes retreated into themselves until absolute silence became the dominant “sound”. On the other hand, though Tarkovsky regarded Bergman “a master with sound,” his use of sound was vastly different (1989: 159). In comparison to the incrementally minimal soundscapes of Bergman’s films, those of Tarkovsky became more complex and layered. While his diegetic soundscapes often sought to create an impression of silence, they were technically dynamic. In Tarkovsky’s hands, silence became expressive and, as a result, the silence of God found an affirmative resonance.

Consequently, as can be expected from these divergent approaches towards silence, Bergman and Tarkovsky arrived at different positions in their negotiations with the modern spiritual-existential crisis. Turning to fellow human beings in search of existential meaning is either futile, as shown in *Winter Light*, or subsumed under a larger spiritual purpose, as shown in *Nostalghia*. Therefore, in *The Silence* and *The Sacrifice*, Bergman and Tarkovsky’s attempts to resolve the modern spiritual-existential crisis return to questions of God’s existence. It must be noted, however, that these two films, much like *The Seventh Seal* and *Stalker*, have a considerable level of similarity. Both *The Silence* and *The Sacrifice* are set in God-forsaken worlds where the threat of apocalypse looms near. The prospect of impending death intensifies the urgency with which characters seek existential meaning. Furthermore, in both films, ideas of God and

faith are presented through the Freudian correlation of childhood and religion. Respectively, *The Silence* and *The Sacrifice* depict the rejection by/return to the maternal body and the premature emergence from/delayed regression into childhood. The contrasting conclusions at which Bergman and Tarkovsky eventually arrive at are, however, most apparent in the parallel codas of *The Silence* and *The Sacrifice*. In these closing sequences, Bergman and Tarkovsky's lengthy explorations of the questions of God and faith in the modern world are laid to rest. Johan of *The Silence* and Little Man of *The Sacrifice* become representatives of the future; the directors' visions of the new world are revealed through these young boys. The final scenes to these two films show Johan's voice withdraw hesitantly into silent incomprehension while Little Man's emerges confidently in articulate wonderment. By this point, at the end of the seven films, the two directors' confrontations of the spiritual-existential crisis culminate with Bergman's arrival at resignation and Tarkovsky, surrender.

After *The Silence*, Bergman continued his renowned film career for another four decades. Regarding the existence of God, his pursuit of evidence has brought him to an absolute void where his attempts at resolving the spiritual-existential crisis are shown to have been agonizingly futile. Marc Gervais thought Bergman to be "the prophet seeking *the answer*" but it is perhaps more accurate to say that he was a man seeking an answer, any answer at all (1999: 112 original emphasis). In Bergman's world, one cannot objectively prove the existence of God and yet, is unable to come to grips with the intrinsic meaninglessness and absurdity of a Godless world. Forcibly snatched from a state of blissful ignorance, Bergman enters into a new consciousness utterly disillusioned and intolerably consumed by ennui. From this point on, it appears that Bergman would leave his religious preoccupations and anxieties behind and focus instead on the problems inherent in human relationships. In the new era of Bergman's cinema, questions of God, if they were present at all, would take secondary place. This

is not to say that the subject ceased to appear in his work—given the profound influence of his upbringing, this would simply be impossible. Traces of religious themes can be seen in work as late as *Enskilda samtal/Private Confessions* (1996) and *Trolösa/Faithless* (2000), both written by Bergman but directed by Liv Ullman, his regular actor and, for a time, his romantic companion.¹ As Peter Cowie has pointed out, “for Bergman, the lapsed Christian who cannot quite dispense with the Christian idiom, the difficulty lies in finding some compensation for the apparent lack of purpose in life (1982: 342). If in *Winter Light* and *The Silence*, characters had already recognized God as no longer a viable source of existential meaning and had been driven to seek comfort in the form of human solidarity, the characters of Bergman’s post-*The Silence* cinema become exponentially more desperate to establish meaningful relationships. Though severely depressing at times, Bergman’s exploration of human relationships has yielded more hopeful conclusions than his engagement with questions of God in earlier years. Decades on, the films discussed in this thesis continue to garner attention from both scholars and audiences. If nothing else, the iconic image of a man playing chess with Death is evidence of the longevity of Bergman’s God-centered cinema.

Unlike with Bergman, audiences are left to speculate on what Tarkovsky might have produced after *The Sacrifice*. His untimely death regrettably truncated what was certain to be an even more distinguished career. As previously mentioned, Tarkovsky’s diaries reveal many projects that he intended to pursue, foremost among them an adaptation of *Hamlet*.² Outlining his thoughts on the play, Tarkovsky interpreted Hamlet’s revenge as “a sacred duty” and an embodiment of “the idea of self-sacrifice” (1991: 378). These suggest that Tarkovsky’s *Hamlet* would not have strayed far from themes already expressed in his cinema. Yet, however this unmade version might have been, Tarkovsky’s existing films more than sufficiently attest to his passionate

¹ Liv Ullman revealed that Bergman had asked her to direct these films “because [she] believe[s] . . . because [she] wanted to touch things that he doesn’t want to touch” (Ullman 2004).

² See Tarkovsky (1991), pages 335-338, 341, 343, 347, 357 in particular.

commitment to an attitude of faith. In these films, he acknowledged the rigorous demands of faith yet insisted on its relevance to and necessity in one's life. Tarkovsky recognized the possibility of the non-existence of God but, nevertheless, sought to conquer such doubt with faith. As he expressed in an interview conducted in the final year of his life, "faith is all that man truly possesses . . . Faith is the only thing that can save man, that's my deepest conviction" (Gianvito 2006: 186). Such belief is explicitly expressed in *The Sacrifice* and makes it an appropriate final film in Tarkovsky's cinema. As this period of Tarkovsky's cinema comes to an end, it brings about the beginning of a new world where hope and promise is founded on the complete surrender to faith.

Perhaps this thesis should close with the qualification that faith, religious faith in particular, is not inherently positive nor reason, inherently nihilistic. Atheist thinkers, especially Nietzsche, and those of the humanist tradition have long argued that the opposite is true; without God, religion, and religious faith, agency is placed entirely back into human hands—as espoused and embraced by the squire Jöns in *The Seventh Seal*. In a Godless and therefore intrinsically meaningless universe, human beings are free to find, pursue, and create existential meaning however they wish. As can be seen, conceptions of religious faith as being hopeful and irreligious reason as being hopeless are not timeless or true. However, in the cinematic worlds of these seven films by Bergman and Tarkovsky, these conceptions certainly hold true to an exceedingly large extent. By the end of Bergman's four-film exploration, the reason-driven approach to the question of God's existence and existential meaning spirals into utter disillusionment. Conversely, Tarkovsky's faith-propelled three-film trajectory closes with hopeful surrender.

In conclusion, this thesis hopes to have demonstrated that beyond the great influence and significance of their individual careers, there is a wealth of possibilities

where the cinemas of Bergman and Tarkovsky can be explored together. As a start, this thesis has addressed the deep thematic affinity in several of their films as well as their shared knowledge and ability to use sound elements in expressive ways. As Bergman sought evidence of God's existence and found none, the sounds of silence in his films become confirmations of negating absence. Contrastingly, as Tarkovsky maintained an attitude of faith, the sounds of silence in his films become impressions of a rich presence. Ultimately, in Bergman's four films, the composition of crisis is the unbearable silence of void; while in Tarkovsky's, it is the affirmative silence of Eden.

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