



DREAM PALACE

Mirror (Zerkalo)

With a pre-recorded introduction by director Małgorzata Szumowska.

Olivier Assayas on 'Mirror'

What interests me in cinema is *not* cinema in itself, but what cinema, as an exploratory tool, catches in its nets. So for me *Mirror* is not a film, it is something that goes *beyond* cinema – to delve into issues of memory and remembrance, and the relationship between memory and perception. *Mirror* is a first-person narration about a man who recounts sensations he once experienced and is attempting to 'reconstruct' them, as Proust would say. And he does so not as a filmmaker, but as a poet: he uses cinema to create correspondences between materials, odours, colours, faces. The way poetry, by putting words together, allows us to reconstruct a particular feeling: *Mirror* is a sort of dreamlike *cinéma vérité*, based on this idea which is crucial in Tarkovsky's work – that the object of cinema is not to film the real, but to film *perception*.

Can't we say it unravels associative structures that demand the presence of a spectator – for without a spectator, the world thus created wouldn't exist?

Indeed. What moves me in *Mirror* is that it sends me back to my own childhood, to similar feelings I have experienced: this is why I see it as *beyond* the dramatic or syntactic structure of cinema. Yet it comprises purely cinematic devices that are extraordinarily virtuosic and intelligent. It uses the whole gamut of cinematic resources, richness, even tricks – but it does so to end up speaking in the first person, to outline a detour through the territory of autobiography. Tarkovsky's goal is not to tell a story – not rationally to transmit a message – but to delve into his past, into the memories of his own childhood. By confronting these memories with archival documents, but also by reconstructing (beyond the mundane, abstract situations) the abstract, imaginary world the child then lived in, he inserts the invisible into the world of the sensuous experience. And, in *Mirror*, this is expressed through the absence of the father. When I first saw it, I thought the sequence just after the credits was one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen in the movies. I think of the mother, sitting on the fence, of that man who walks away, and suddenly of this gust of wind flattening the corn ... It is a miraculous moment and this puff of wind indicates the presence of the invisible – possibly the presence of the father.

Yet by constructing its imaginary world around the absent father, it uses purely cinematic devices to express the existence of an empty centre.

In *Mirror*, the presence of the father is manifested through his poetry, read by the invisible narrator of the film, who is none other than the filmmaker himself. These poems are magnificent, and I am moved by Tarkovsky's decision to give the meaning of the film to poetry, to beauty, to the art created by this absent father. The father is seen only twice, and one of these moments is quite magical – he appears after the slaughter of the cock at the house of the healer, as if this sacrifice was producing him, as a young man, with a stellar beauty, as he was at the moment of conception of the filmmaker. What is important for me is that the poetry-reading voice echoes that of the stuttering teenage boy who, in the pre-credit sequence, finally manages to speak. The film can start after he has articulated his first sentence – literally, it starts with the voice. The film's goal is to

reconstruct the word, to construct the adult man so the words he utters may give birth to the world again.

Childhood entails a more sensuous relationship to a territory, and this is a theme that runs throughout Tarkovsky's cinema, but never had it been more powerfully explored than in *Mirror*. There are moments that convey that truth can only be expressed through sensations, for example the perception of the rotting wood you can almost smell – it leads to the sensuous presence of the land, the greatness of the territory.

Mirror is based on the idea that the truth lies in the duration of things. It is not driven by montage, but by the juxtaposition of units. And these units draw a certain legitimacy and truth from the Bazinian elements they contain: respect for the passing of time, respect for the real, respect for the spectator – it allows you to feel the pulse of the world. And while it is the jostling together of dialectically disparate elements that gives birth to an additional idea, the very strength of that idea is supported by the truth internal to the scenes. Similarly, the sudden appearance of the father's face depends on the length of the ritual that brings him forth. This is a theme that fascinates me a lot right now – cinema as a ritual of invocation. And watching the film again with you, I became very aware of the imprints earlier viewings had left in me – for example, the tracking shot following, then losing, the mother behind the railings when she's on her way to work – I realised that it is a shot I have used a lot in my own films, and here I recognised its unconscious origin.

In the first post-credit sequence we have three characters – the man, the mother, the child – and the question is, every time there is a change of camera angle, of field of vision, of camera position, who is the bearer of the gaze, the bearer of the discourse?

This sequence never fails to move me. We see a man who appears, but not the man who was expected, a man who is here by mistake – so there is a missing man, but it's not that one; but before disappearing quickly from the diegesis, he says one thing, that words betray thought, that images and sensations are much more powerful – while, in the pre-credit sequence that came before, a young man had just regained the power of speech. And when this man is leaving the wind starts blowing, and he turns back in the direction of the woman...

When he finally decides to leave, understanding he won't get anywhere with that woman, he gazes back at her – not so much with desire as with regret – and, immediately after we hear the first poem, a love poem.

Yes, because the voice of the father is the only one entitled to recount the past – simply because the past was the present of that voice...

At the beginning of Mirror, like at the beginning of Irma Yep, fiction is gradually generated: it is supported by a first character, then by another, and yet another.

That's quite true. Things are progressively revealed – and what interests me, and can be found in my movies, is that the real is kaleidoscopic, or rather, cubist. I am convinced that, to be able to approach the real world, you have to show all the different facets of the same situation. And this is the way things are, but also a way of approaching this 'empty centre' we were discussing earlier: the invisible that is born out of the conjunction of all the points of view – the object of cinema, that strange thing that lies in the middle of collective perception.

Olivier Assayas in conversation with Bérénice Reynaud, *Sight and Sound*, January 1997

MIRROR (ZERKALO)
Director: Andrei Tarkovsky
Production Company: Mosfilm
Producer: E. Waisberg
Production Manager: Y. Kushnerev
Assistant Directors: Larissa Tarkovskaya, V. Karchenko, M. Chugunova
Screenplay: Aleksandr Misharin, Andrei Tarkovsky
Director of Photography: Georgi Rerberg
Lighting: V. Gusev
Camera Operators: A. Nikolaev, I. Shtanko
Special Effects: Y. Potapov
Editor: Lyudmila Feiginova
Art Director: Nikolai Dvigubsky
Sets: A. Merkunov
Costumes: Nelli Fomina
Make-up: V. Rudina
Music: Eduard Artemiev, Johann Sebastian Bach, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Henry Purcell
Sound: Semyon Litvinov
English Subtitles: Peter Seward

Cast:
Margarita Terekhova (*Alexei’s mother/Natalia*)
Ignat Daniltsev (*Ignat/Alexei, aged 12*)
Maria Tarkovskaya (*Alexei’s mother, as an old woman*)
Alla Demidova (*Lisa*)
Fillip Yankovsky (*Alexei, aged 5*)
Oleg Yankovsky (*father*)
Nikolai Grinko (*man at printing shop*)
Yuri Nazarov (*military instructor*)
Anatoli Solonitsyn (*passer-by*)
Innokenti Smoktunovsky (*voice of Alexei, the narrator*)
Tamara Ogorodnikova
Y. Sventikov
T. Reshetnikova
E. Del Bosque
L. Correcher
A. Gutierres
D. Garcia
T. Pames
Teresa Del Bosque
Tatiana Del Bosque
Larissa Tarkovskaya (*rich doctor’s wife*)

USSR 1974
106 mins

**DREAM PALACE:
THE FILMS THAT CINEMAS WERE BUILT FOR**

Mirror (Zerkalo) + pre-recorded intro by Malgorzata Szumowska
Mon 24 May 17:50; Wed 9 Jun 14:30
Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawat)
+ pre-recorded intro by Chaitanya Tamhane
Mon 24 May 20:30; Sat 19 Jun 17:50
Goodbye, Dragon Inn (Bú sànn)
Wed 26 May 18:10 (+ intro by Peter Strickland); Wed 2 Jun 20:50
The Gleaners & I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse)
+ pre-recorded intro by Zhu Shengze
Thu 27 May 18:15; Fri 26 Jun 14:30
Hair + pre-recorded intro by Kleber Mendonça Filho
Fri 28 May 17:45
The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet)
+ pre-recorded intro by Mike Williams, Editor *Sight & Sound*
Fri 28 May 20:50; Wed 30 Jun 14:30
The General
Sat 29 May 12:45
Footloose + pre-recorded intro by Francis Lee
Sat 29 May 18:00
Winner of the Dream Palace Audience Vote: Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)
Sun 30 May 12:20
Broadcast News
Sun 30 May 15:40 (+ intro by Sarah Smith);
Sat 19 Jun 20:20

Beau Travail + pre-recorded intro by Kirsten Johnson
Sun 30 May 18:20
Car Wash
Mon 31 May 18:50
Blow Out
Tue 1 Jun 20:40
The Shout + pre-recorded intro by Mark Jenkin
Thu 3 Jun 18:00
The Wonders (Le meraviglie)
+ pre-recorded intro by Mark Cousins
Thu 3 Jun 20:30
Magnificent Obsession + **Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)**
Sun 6 Jun 18:40
Black Narcissus
Mon 7 Jun 17:50
David Byrne’s American Utopia
Mon 14 Jun 18:00
The Elephant Man + pre-recorded intro by Prano Bailey-Bond
Tue 15 Jun 17:45; Sat 19 Jun 12:00
The Warriors
Mon 21 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia);
Mon 28 Jun 14:30
Beginning + pre-recorded intro by Luca Guadagnino
Tue 22 Jun 20:30
The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover
Thu 24 Jun 20:30

In partnership with:



BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join