

Andrei Tarkovsky

JURRIËN ROOD: How did you come to know Bresson's work?

ANDREI TARKOVSKY: In 1957 and after my film studies, I spent a lot of time in the Moscow cinematheque called "Bielye Stolby," the White Columns. There I studied the work of Mizoguchi, Bergman and Bresson; it was there in fact that I came to know him. We studied western films at the Institute, but the films that interested me were other films I found myself in the archives.

The Trial of Joan of Arc was the first Bresson film I saw. I found the film extremely touching and I understood that Bresson was the only director who knew how to captivate and surprise me. I was particularly touched by the absolute independence of the spectator in regard to this film. A total independence in the sense that the film never appears to be a spectacle, but rather nature, life itself. If one wants to watch, one watches, if one doesn't, one doesn't. If one wants to see it as art one may, otherwise not. Such a strong independence from public and critical opinion remains for me the exemplary attitude of a director towards his audience.

ROOD: What do you consider the importance of Bresson?

TARKOVSKY: There are many reasons I consider Bresson a unique phenomenon in the world of film. Indeed, Bresson is one of the artists who has shown that cinema is an artistic discipline on the same level as the classic artistic disciplines such as poetry, literature, painting and music.

The second reason I admire Bresson is personal. It is the significance of his work for me—the vision of the world that it expresses. This vision of the world is expressed in an ascetic way, almost laconic, lapidary I would say. Very few artists succeed in this. Every serious artist strives for simplicity, but only a few manage to achieve it. Bresson is one of the few who has succeeded.

The third reason is the inexhaustibility of Bresson's artistic form. That is, one is compelled to consider his artistic form as life, nature itself. In that sense, I find him very close to the oriental artistic concept of Zen: depth within narrowly defined limits. Working with these forms, Bresson attempts in his films not to be symbolic; he tries to create a form as inexhaustible as nature, life itself. Of course this doesn't always work. In fact, there are episodes in his films that are extremely symbolic and, therefore, limited—symbolic and not poetic. An obvious but banal example of this is the rabbit hunt in *Mouchette*.

The original way that *Mouchette* chooses to die in the film—the repeated suicide attempt that does not work until the third try—that is for me perfect, very original, because of its profundity, the impossibility of interpretation and its singularity. That which is shown in the film cannot be recounted.

The first episode for me is an example of parts of his films that are symbolic and thus not very meaningful; the second is an example of those parts that are non-symbolic, political and profound.

ROOD: Was your own filmmaking influenced by Bresson?

TARKOVSKY: Without a doubt. But there are artists whose influence you couldn't possibly define. For me Bresson stands as an ideal of simplicity. And from that point of view, I, just like everybody else who strives for simplicity and depth, can't help but identify with what he has achieved in this field. But on the other hand, even if Bresson would never have existed, we would have eventually come across this notion of a lapidary style, simplicity and depth. And when people tell me during the shooting of my film that a certain scene is in some way reminiscent of Bresson—and this has happened—I will immediately

change the approach to avoid any resemblance. If there's such an influence, it doesn't show on the surface of my work. This is an influence of a deeper nature. It's a moral influence between artists, without which art cannot exist.

ROOD: At the 1983 Cannes Film Festival you were in direct competition with Bresson. How did that feel?

TARKOVSKY: It didn't feel uncomfortable, because any director can come to Cannes and compete. But I disliked the festival from the start. It was nothing like an art festival; it turned out to be thoroughly commercial.

I was surprised that Bresson came to present his film. I had not expected that. I received an invitation for a screening and I went. Sadly, the only films I saw during the festival were Bresson's *L'Argent* and my own film. After the screening we met. They've told me that I am the only director Bresson wanted to speak to. I've known him for a long time. We met in Paris long ago, and since then I've always held a great respect for this master.

So I liked to be, so to speak, on equal footing with him. [Bresson and Tarkovsky received a joint Special Jury Prize—J.R.] But I do not know if he felt the same way.

*Translated by James Quandt and Jurriën Rood.
Jurriën Rood is a Dutch filmmaker among whose films is
The Way to Bresson made with Leo de Boer.*