The Multiplicity of a Still:
Considerations of a Still from Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker

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ABSTRACT
Three figures stare at us standing at the centre of the cinematic image. The shape of the screen is metaphorically doubled by the frame of a crumbling architectural aperture. Behind the figures, a patchy wall obscures the horizon. In the “space-in-between” the figures and the material limit of the screen where the filmic image is projected, rain showers down on the ground. In this paper, I will investigate the metaphorical dimension of a still from Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker without considering the overall narrative of the movie. In particular, I will reflect on the still’s different levels of multiplicity and their possible significance while looking at the structural and compositional strategy of this image. Building on Michel Foucault’s “heterotopia,” Roland Barthes’s and Laura Mulvey’s reflections on still’s ontological status, and Robert Bird’s previous studies on the Russian director, I will propose the articulation of an “ethics of spaces-in-between,” intersubjective and dialogical in its dimensions.

“Once halted, returned and repeated, iconography and topography are easily identified and the scene’s integral structure of symmetry and opposition acquires an aesthetic cinematic significance of its own.” — Laura Mulvey

INTRODUCTION
Three figures framed by an architectural aperture are looking in our direction from the centre of a cinematic image (Fig. 1). One figure’s head is turned slightly to the left, probably awakened by the appearance of the rain. Detached from the filmic continuum, the figures’ feelings are hardly identifiable. Their facial expressions are not legible enough, and their postures only indicate an overall sense of tiredness. On the floor, vaguely triangular shapes are created by the characters’ legs. Their arms, hidden by the rest of their bodies, are almost invisible. A flash of light draws an arch on the upper part of their heads. The arch takes the momentary shape of halos suspended on their darkened faces. Behind them, a patchy wall obscures the horizon and abruptly interrupts the deep perspectival focus of the image. In a metaphorical “space-in-between” the figures and the viewers that comprise the audience, rain falls to the ground.¹ The three figures are spatially separated from the spectacle of the rain, which comes down in large quantities in front of their eyes. The rain catches the light and illuminates the paved area, partially abstracting the ordinariness of the tiles.

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¹ I am indebted for the expression “space-in-between” (spazio intermedio) and its application to the study of cinema to the philosopher Pietro Montani. More precisely, Montani refers to an “ethics of the spaces in-between” through the analyses of a number of modern movies and reflections on the possibilities to “authenticate” an event and contingency at large. In my analysis I re-adopt Montani’s expression “space-in-between” for its reference to the intersection of fiction and reality. For a discussion of the “ethics of the spaces in-between” see Montani, Pietro. L’Immaginazione Intermediale, Laterza, 2010, pp. 35-37.
The rounded tiles, which rise behind the water, create a repeated pattern which disappears at the centre and at the margins of the image. The figures at the centre of the cinematic image, as much as the viewer outside of the still, remain in a state of suspension.

In this text, I investigate the structural and plural dimensions of the still from Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker (1979) described briefly above, without considering the overall narrative of the film. A distinctive proliferation of “screens” characterizes Tarkovsky’s polysemous still. Such multiplicity of “screens” has important consequences for the conversational engagement between spectator and characters, and more broadly, for the interrelation of fiction and reality. Finally, it would be impossible to completely separate the analysis of this particular image from a broader analysis of the “still” in and of itself. That said, the goal here is not to provide a “general theory of the still,” but to offer preliminary remarks on its ontological status.

**THE FIRST LEVEL OF MULTIPLICITY**

With my initial description, I wanted to scratch the surface of the communicative level of Tarkovsky’s still. Now, I would like to move beyond the strictly informative quality of the image and attempt some reflections on its structural qualities. Tarkovsky’s still, like every film still, tacitly participates in a multiplicity. It is obvious that insofar as it is a part of the filmic continuum as well as an isolated fragment, the still is assumed to be viewed by someone. Although
the relation between an image and its beholder is a sophisticated matter, and artists have found many ways over the course of history to neutralize or even negate the beholder’s presence, images, in principle, seem to depend upon consciousness.² It would be hard to count the number of digital images buried in data centres and abandoned to an existence without viewers. However, even those abandoned images implied the gaze of someone else’s eyes at some point of their existence. In this sense, even an invisible image hints at some degree of visibility. Literary critic and art historian W. J. T. Mitchell summarizes these aspects of viewability and consciousness with incisive words: “[i]f there were no minds, there would be no more images, mental or material” (17). For if all human consciousness were to be annihilated, the physical world, we tend to assume, would continue to exist quite nicely. At the same time, as Mitchell also clarifies: “[t]he world may not depend upon consciousness but images in (not to mention of) the world clearly do” (17). In this rather obvious initial sense, Tarkovsky’s still depends upon something outside itself: a multiplicity of eyes and perceptive consciousness.

With reference to an “obvious” level of multiplicity, I am freely drawing on and readapting a famous distinction by Roland Barthes on the three levels of meaning of a filmic image: the “informational,” the “obvious,” and the “obtuse” meaning.³ By “informational,” Barthes refers to the most immediate level of communication of the image, such as the settings, the costumes, the characters, and their insertion into a narration. By “obvious,” he indicates a more symbolic significance, such as the shower of gold over the young czar’s head in Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible, a reference to his wealth and power.⁴ Finally, by “obtuse,” Barthes means something that exceeds the immediate level of signification of the image: a supplement of meaning that the intellect of the viewer cannot succeed in fully absorbing, or in Barthes’s notable terms, to “a signifier without signified.”⁵ These three levels of meaning can be separated, but they also coexist in the filmic image. My analysis concerns itself only with the superficial and the structural dimension of the still. At the same time, these two dimensions are inhabited by “informational,” “obvious,” and “obtuse” levels of significance, hence my reference to Barthes’s famous distinction.⁶

What I have considered so far—the obvious reference of a still to a multiplicity of eyes and active perceptive consciousness—are rather self-evident aspects
that would apply to many other visual examples. To explore less-obvious levels of multiplicity, I consider the architectural frame and its structural implications in the poetic logic of this image (Fig. 2).

Not only does the crumbling architectural aperture frame the figures at the centre of the image, but it also metaphorically doubles the movie screen. With this architectural “doubled screen,” Tarkovsky reflects on the concept of artistic creativity as a construction that exhibits itself.⁷ The metaphoric doubling of the screen reveals Tarkovsky’s exploration of the cinematic: his acknowledgment of the hidden presence of the filmic system of representation. A similar argument has already been noted by film and literature scholar Robert Bird in contrast to what literary critic Fredric Jameson has previously contended about the Russian cineaste: “[[t]he deepest contradiction in Tarkovsky]—says Jameson—is ‘a valorization of nature without human technology achieved by the highest technology of the photographic apparatus itself. No reflexivity acknowledges this second hidden presence’” (12). On the contrary, as I am pointing out with my visual example and as I will further discuss, Tarkovsky redirects our attention precisely toward this “second hidden presence” (12). The architectural frame moves beyond its own visual specificity in order to redirect our attention towards the exploration of the cinematic and the image as artifice.⁸ Tarkovsky’s cinematic strategy reminds us here of what cultural theorist Stuart Hall clarifies: “[representation works as much through what is not shown, as through what is” (59). Tarkovsky’s still implicitly acknowledges the hidden presence of the material screen (what is not shown) through the architectural aperture (that is, through what is shown).

In principle, the filmic always negates the materiality of the screen through the flux of images, its narrative qualities, and the viewer’s emotional absorption. However, the fixed materiality of the screen can be revealed by the filmic’s ability to refer to itself and to its constructed qualities, and if the viewer decides to enter into a state of conscious dialogue with the projected image.⁹

Tarkovsky’s reflexive analysis of filmic representation has not gone unnoticed. Robert Bird has already commented on Tarkovsky’s cinematic exploration in his analysis of another still from the first episode in Andrei Rublev, “The Jester”¹⁰ (Fig. 3). As Bird notes, through this image Tarkovsky proposes “a mediation on filmic vision […] First there is the Tarkovsky rain, which falls in sheets in front of the camera while the three monks jog along in the background [while we watch them] through a window that matches the proportions of the screen” (76-77). Fascinating correspondences exist between the still from Stalker that I am discussing and Bird’s example: the “Tarkovsky rain,” the presence of three figures, and the doubling of the screen as a reflection on the cinematic. However, there are also distinctive differences between these stills: in the one

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⁷ For a similar interpretation of “artistic creativity” see Emilio Garroni’s Ricognizione della Semiotica, Officina, 1977, p. 103.
⁹ In other terms, the filmic negates the materiality of the screen only “in principle,” that is, if we consider the filmic in itself and its experience in itself. At the same time, it is probably true that there is really no such thing as the filmic unconditioned by experience. As art historian Richard Shiff notes: “[...] a differential or ‘critical’ term loses its efficacy when regarded as an absolute that ‘always’ applies, that is, when we designate it as the correct term under all conditions, rather than as the more beneficial term under specified conditions” (22). For a problematization of the use of generalizations in theoretical discussions see Richard Shiff’s Doubt, Routledge, 2007, pp. 19-26.
from *Andrei Rublev*, the experience of the viewer is that of the *voyeur*, while the still also resembles the canonical Albertian paradigm of the window on the world.¹¹ By contrast, the still from *Stalker* makes the viewer experience the double condition of simultaneously being both *voyeur* and *voyant*; seeing and metaphorically being seen. In particular, the centredness of the three figures, their seated positions, and their act of looking at the rain and beyond the rain creates a distinctive feeling of specular closeness for the viewer and a conversational quality within the image.¹²

The multiplicity of the still in *Stalker* is the result of the tension between this image as something constructed and something contingent. The still is about the cinematic, the characters framed by the architecture, the autonomous dimension of the filmic—in sum, about representation as a constructed language—as much as it claims, invokes, and evokes the presence and space of the viewer. That is, a non-autonomous dimension. Tarkovsky’s architectural frame makes something else appear: the material screen which, during the time of the filmic representation, tends to disappear behind the projected images.¹³ The first level of multiplicity of the still lies in this multiplication of “screens.” As we will see, however, this multiplication does not cease at the architectural frame.

**THE SECOND LEVEL OF MULTIPLICITY: THE SPACE-IN-BETWEEN**

Before commenting further on the proliferation of “screens,” I would like to consider that particular “space” that appears to have opened between the architectural frame and the space of the audience. The metaphorical doubling of the screen through the architectural frame opens up a “space-in-between” the architectural “screen.”

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¹¹ The Albertian paradigm is well known and it refers to the picture plane as an “open window” through which the object of vision is seen by an external viewer located in a mechanically fixed position. For a brief summary of the Albertian paradigm see Anne Friedberg’s *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*, MIT Press, 2006.


¹³ It is probably true that modern art’s reflection on itself has been one of its crucial aspects. Sources on this self-reflective capacity of modern art are countless. For a discussion of the progressive theoretical and operative acquisition of the conventional and abstract nature of artistic language see Filiberto Menna’s *La Linea Analitica dell’Arte Moderna. Le Figure e le Icone*, Einaudi, 1975 and Laura Mulvey’s *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, Reaktion Books, 2006.
itself and the viewers. The multiple layers of “screens” indicate that there are at least two spaces here that I am looking at: one, the cinematic world in which the characters live, and two, the “space-in-between.” That is, a representation before the representation. This additional representational layer creates a metaphoric boundary between the world of the characters and the space of the audience. In composing the shot from which I take my still, Tarkovsky refuses to erase the boundary between fiction and reality through the creation of this additional spatial layer. The “space-in-between” as representation before the representation creates a discrepancy between the fictional and the presumably more real place of the movie theatre. Instead of concealing the screen or passing it off as “reality,” Tarkovsky creates a more sophisticated interaction between the real, the filmic, and their interrelation. We might certainly dismiss this “space-in-between” as part of the filmic, and undoubtedly, this might be the most immediate interpretation of that space. With the architectural frame as a metaphorical “screen,” however, we can imply the materialization of a “space-in-between” whose ontological status is puzzling and demands greater attention. The following assumption might provide an initial starting point to investigate this additional layer: the “space-in-between” is not only a limit, but also the materialization of a relational space.

In *Of Other Spaces*, published posthumously in 1984, Michel Foucault considers that “[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity […] one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (22-23). In this text, Foucault concentrates on the heterotopias, a particular kind of “other spaces” simultaneously fictional and real. What Foucault calls heterotopias are “other spaces […] outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (24) Among the principles that characterize these “other spaces,” Foucault also mentions that “the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (25). Foucault’s classic example is the “mirror;” a real and tangible object that is also the representation of an illusory space. *Heterotopias* also function as spaces of materialized illusions through peculiar accumulations of time and space, as in the case of libraries, archives, gardens, theatres, and the cinema itself.¹⁴ Foucault’s notion of *heterotopias* reminds us that “spaces” themselves have their own history and that “other spaces” might complicate—*without fully overcoming*—the distinction between an ontological, presumably more real space, and the fictional, representational, epistemological one.

Similarly, the “space-in-between” in this still not only acts as a boundary, but also as a relational space in which the dichotomy between ontology and epistemology, the real and the fictional, is complicated without being strictly reduced to the primacy of one term over the other. As Robert Bird discusses, the screen in Tarkovsky’s work acts as a “field of varying depth held together by the crossing of the characters’ and spectators’ gazes” (71). In Tarkovsky’s work, these multiple layers and the relational quality of the image creates “an entire ethics of the screen” (73). Bird concludes that Tarkovsky constantly plays with the problem of mediation between actor and audience, fiction and reality, “not to overcome [their] separation, [but rather] to transform their inter-relation” (81).

To my mind, finalizing an analysis of the “space-in-between” is best done by building on and expanding Foucault’s and Bird’s inspiring insights, and by considering how in this still the interrelation between actor and audience, fiction and reality, is transformed. To this end, my analysis will concern itself once more with the “space-in-between” flooded by rain as a locus of reflections where a multiplicity of vectors converge, touch each other, and enter into mutual dialogue. A glance at the “sea of rain,” at that boundary which unites and divides, is a glimpse into the possibilities of meaning.

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¹⁴ With regards to cinema as heterotopia, Foucault offers a limited interpretation: “the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space” (25).
THE THIRD LEVEL OF MULTIPLICITY: 
THE “THIRD-SCREEN”

The architectural frame, as previously noted, doubles the actual screen where the images are projected and creates a “space-in-between” the metaphorical screen and the space of the audience. In this liminal space, the rain falls down and illuminates the pavement as the flash of lights projected on the material screen. A “third-screen” situated at the feet of the unnamed figures render them spectators in front of a metaphorical “screen” as well (Fig. 4).

Hence, the limit of the material screen is not overcome once, but twice: first, multiplied and implied by the architectural frame, and second, by the “third-screen.” Even more crucially, through a relational dialogue between fiction and reality, both the figures inside the film and the viewers that comprise the audience find themselves in a similar position, as if they are both viewers of the same spectacle.¹⁵ The “space-in-between” creates a dialogical and intersubjective realm which goes beyond the dichotomy of representation/viewer, object to be seen/subject seeing.¹⁶ Further, the “space-in-between” identifies a limit that separates us from the fictional realm. At the same time, we—the audience—find ourselves in the same position as the unnamed figures: we become the unnamed figures.¹⁷

The correspondence between viewer and fictional characters should not be read as a loss of distinction between fiction and reality, but rather as an invitation to recognize a mutual dialogue between these two dimensions. Viewers are forced outside of the fictional, obliged to remain anchored in their chairs, while they are also immersed in the fictional.¹⁸ Tarkovsky’s ethics of multiple screens produces an existential thesis which argues that the world of experience, in principle, emerges at the intersection between something given, contingent, and resisting on the one hand, and something constructed, decided, and shaped on the other. The “third-screen” is the metaphoric materialization of this intersection, of this “in principle.”¹⁹

Some additional clarifications on this “third-screen” should be provided, especially with regards to what I have named its “metaphorical” quality. Indeed, the “third-screen” is not a clearly identifiable symbol, because we do not have sufficient elements to correlate this shape to a general lexicon of symbolic signifiers. The “third-screen” is not in the image as the three characters or the architectural frame. Moreover, it remains uncertain whether such a “third-screen” might have been consciously constructed by Tarkovsky as part of

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¹⁵ As pointed out to me by the art historian Julia Walker, this combination of real and fictional has also inspired the imagination of Joyce Carol Oates who directly refers to the Russian movie in her short story, “Stalking” (1972).

¹⁶ Very incisively, Bird has also considered that: “To understand Tarkovsky it is imperative to develop this complex sense of the screen as a locus of interchange between world, image, and spectator” (72).

¹⁷ For a broader discussion of the theoretical and philosophical status of screens, their characterization as active agents and their interrelation with viewers see Mauro Carbone’s Filosofia-Schermi. Dal Cinema alla Rivoluzione Digitale, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2016, pp. 89-139.

¹⁸ An argument that might also be developed is the possible parallelism between the “space-in-between” and the concept of “liminality.” Bjorn Thomassen reminds us that “liminality” refers to something very simple: “the experience of finding oneself at a boundary or in an in-between position, either spatially or temporally […] liminality involves the experience of inbetweeness itself […] Human beings tend to ritualize and symbolize such moments and passages” (40). The correspondence between the idea of “space-in-between” and the concept of “liminality” has been pointed out to me by my colleague and friend Lisa Gulesserian. For the concept of “liminality” see, Bjorn Thomassen’s, Thinking with Liminality. To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept. Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality, edited by Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, Berghahn Books, 2015.

¹⁹ As commented by the philosopher Pietro Montani: “A strict and irreducible dichotomy between reality and ‘simulation’ does not pass any critical investigation. It is completely evident, for instance, that events with notable consequences within the real world take place within the simulated realities accessible in the web: economic transitions, communications, conflict amongst people, etc. […] Similarly, the real world is intimately intertwined with simulations” (16-17, translation mine).
this still. To a certain degree, one might easily assume that the existence of such a “third-screen” is purely speculative. My interpretative attempt, however, deliberately tries to exceed the immediate visibility of the image and its possible levels of immediate significance. Nevertheless, the non-immediate and reflective attempt of my reflections are only possible as a consequence of Tarkovsky’s polysemous cinema and its openness to multiple levels of significations.²⁰ The polysemous quality of this still sheds light upon its “poetic logic.” As William Empson clarifies, one of the most original roots of poetic expression lies in its semantic ambiguity:²¹ “[…] the machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry” (3). Multiple levels of significations are revealed by the poetic word’s capacity for multiple denotation, but also and more prominently by its connotative imprecision. The poetic word—as much as the poetic image—is efficient in multiplying its layers of significance through lack of precision, or in other words, ambiguity. The same “poetic logic” applies to images, such as the case of Tarkovsky’s still. Its ambiguity is its own generative force of meanings.

In such sense, the “third-screen” lies within the still itself and by virtue of the still’s “poetic logic.”

Many commentators have stressed that a characterizing aspect in Tarkovsky’s cinema is the adoption of a “deep focus.”²² Numerous visual examples of a deep photographic focus might be found in Tarkovsky’s work, as Tarkovsky demonstrated a preference for images which open themselves to perspectival depths (Fig. 5).²³

As noted by film theorist André Bazin, the “deep focus” shot implies “a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution

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²⁰ For an example of a non-polysemous cinematic language, also related to a Russian director—Sergei Eisenstein—see Barthes, p. 56.
²¹ For an analysis of the ambiguity of the poetic language see William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, New Direction, 1969.
²² The reference to the “deep focus” in Tarkovsky’s cinema has been pointed out to me by the media theorist Jeffrey Kirkwood.
²³ The “deep focus” and the lengthy shots have been also correlated to Tarkovsky’s “anti-montage aesthetic.” For a similar discussion see Leon Marvell’s, “Tarkovsky’s ‘Solaris’ and the (im)possibility of a Science Fiction Cinema.” *Endangering Science Fiction Film*, edited by Sean Redmon and Leon Marvell, Routledge, 2016, pp. 132-145.
on [the spectator’s] part to the action in progress” (35-36). Bazin elucidates that “while analytical montage only calls for [the spectator] to follow his guide […] here [the viewer] is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from [the viewer’s] attention and [viewer’s] will that the meaning of the image in part derives” (35-36). Following Bazin’s insightful observations, one might consider that the technical strategy of the “deep focus” demonstrates how influential the gaze of the viewer is in the “making” of the image. As Italian philosopher Massimo Carboni comments, one of the crucial aspects of modern art lies precisely in the fundamental role played by the viewer for the completion of the work.²⁴ “The spectator,” says Carboni, “might also be standstill in the seat, but the spectator’s eye—that identifies itself with the camera—it is as mobile as ever, and it can research, even unconsciously, what transcends the semantic, narrative or simply perceptive explicitness that defines the filmic image” (25, translation mine). In our case, however, the still’s peculiar aperture to the mobile action of the spectator’s eyes is not only the result of an uninterrupted perspectival depth or “deep focus.” Rather, the “openness” of the image results from the multiplication of “screens” and layers that the viewer can recombine in a mutual discursive game with the image. What Tarkovsky is indirectly, or perhaps directly, telling us through this still, is that images are more than just passive “things” we interpret, or even strict representations of ideas; they are participants in relationships. Images’ meanings do not simply flourish out in recollection of data and facts or in the sociological analysis of their systems of production, distribution, and consumption. The “meaning” of the image is also subject to the spectator who participates in the construction of meaning.²⁵ Tarkovsky’s still reminds us

²⁵ A similar argument is expressed by Hall, 60.
that an image, in principle, is not a “thing,” but a relationship. The “third-screen” is the site of this dialogue.²⁶

The “openness” of Tarkovsky’s still indicates that its interpretation requires us to recognize a variety of senses, the set of relations, the possibilities of internal combinations, and the identifications of the frayed boundaries of the visual text.²⁷ The process of elaboration implies the opening of spaces of reflections and the construction of structures of mediations which are within the image as much as veiled by the multi-dimensional spatial layers of the still itself. The imaginative work of the visual critic lies in the recognition of these “spaces” and “structures,” and in their verbalization. This work is “imaginative” and “critical” in its capacity to distinguish and differentiate in the continuum of the image what is non-continuum, and hence in need of elaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

Roland Barthes reminds us that the still is generally considered “a remote subproduct of the film, a sample, a means of drawing in custom, a pornographic extract, and, technically, a reduction of the work by the immobilization of what is taken to be the sacred essence of cinema—the movement of images” (66). Moving away from this general understanding, my analysis considers the still as more than a temporal suspension and more than a mere “subproduct” of the filmic.

In his seminal work “The Third Meaning. Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills,” Barthes also attempts to formulate a preliminary theory of the still. Among its constitutive qualities, Barthes mentions that the still establishes a right to the syntagmatic disjunction of images [...] [that] film and still find themselves in a palimpsest relationship without it being possible to say that one is on the top of the other or that one is extracted from the other [...] [and finally that] the still throws off the constraint of filmic time.”²⁸ (65-68)

Barthes’s theory of the still requires some historical contextualization. Barthes wrote these words in the 1970s, before the explosion of the VHS industry and the popularization of home videos during the 1980s which allowed a great number of viewers to record, pause, and manipulate visual material. The statement that film and still found themselves in an amorous embrace in which neither could be considered without the other makes sense given the historical context during which the actual opportunities of disfiguring the textual and temporal continuum of the filmic were rather limited. After the era of the home video and even more so today, in our digital age of opportunities to totally manipulate both film and still, we are able to dismantle and reorganize the whole and the fragment.

²⁶ For the analysis of the experience of the spectator at the cinema see Casetti, 141-168 and Francesco Casetti. The Lumière Galaxy. Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come, Columbia University Press, 2015.
²⁷ For a theoretical and historical discussion of images that differ from Tarkovsky’s cinematic “openness” by depicting normative institutional “frames” integral to the apparatuses of discipline, see John Tagg’s, The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning, University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
²⁸ Foucault’s “fourth principle of heterotopias” which identifies “other spaces” as temporal refusals, resonates in the still’s capacity to displace the filmic time. Some of the examples proposed by Foucault for the heterotopias’ fourth principle, such as “museums” and “libraries,” are not particularly convincing. The space of a traumatic experience, instead, might be more convincingly associated to this fourth characteristic of the heterotopias. Likewise, stills might be considered as the “trauma” of the movie. For a discussion of the “fourth principle of heterotopias” see Foucault, 26.
Needless to say that the spread of digital technology contributed and continues to strongly contribute to the metamorphosis of the status of the filmic itself. This has been famously noted by film theorist Laura Mulvey, who asserts that

\[\text{in film theory and criticism, delay is the essential process behind textual analysis. The flow of a scene is halted and extracted from the wider flow of narrative development [...] In the course of this process, hitherto unexpected meanings can be found hidden in the sequence [...] With the spread of digital technologies this kind of fragmentation of film has become easier to put into practice. (144)}\]

The transformation of the filmic experience and the critical analysis of movies under the pressure of new modes of technologies and, conversely, new modes of perception, is a huge discussion that cannot be sufficiently articulated in the context of this essay. Here, I would simply add that with my analysis of this still, isolated from the narrative and temporal continuity offered by the cinematic experience, I do not aim to restore any “auratic” quality of the image. It is not the still in its uniqueness that interests me. What I imply with my analysis is that “to kill” the filmic in its continuity, in this case by isolating one still out of the cinematic flux, recreates the movie as a series of “open” images.²⁹

Today, film and still are not only in a palimpsest relationship, as Barthes previously noted. Films have acquired a natural inclination to segmentation which has been caused by a broader transformation of the media landscape. Such transformation surely determines even retroactive consequences in such a way that Tarkovsky’s \textit{Stalker}, originally released in 1979, can reappear to us, today, not only as a filmic occurrence historically grounded, but also as an authorial archive of forms. Again, Laura Mulvey’s words quintessentially capture the nature of this transformation: “[n]ew ways of consuming old movies on electronic and digital technologies should bring about a ‘reinvention’ of textual analysis and a new wave of cinephilia. [...] the cinema is deeply affected by the passing of time itself” (160). We probably are still in a process of discovery and reflection on the intrinsic characteristic of the “reinvention” of textual analysis accompanied and triggered by a transformation of the filmic medium itself. At the same time, we are, perhaps, even no longer strictly talking about cinema anymore, but about something else that we should continue to discuss. This “something else” certainly concerns the “old” medium of the cinema (with its “auratic” continuity of filmic time) and the “new” media of techno-digital manipulation (with its open inclination to transformations).³⁰ As part of this larger and longer discussion, what we can stress, for now, are the following aspects: the filmic text can currently be interrupted in every moment to allow a plurality of developments in multiple directions. In this sense, the characters in \textit{Stalker} as much as the audience can lose their names, and become the unnamed figures of our thoughts. Similarly, the individual characters or members of the audience cease to exist as separate entities and are reborn as dialogical figures. Deprived of uniqueness, distanced from a narrative continuum, we—characters and audience—become open to the possibilities of the encounter with the other and with ourselves as an other. ●

²⁹ For the discussion on the impossibility to pause or delay a movie without killing it in its “filmic time” (tempo di film) and the transformation of the filmic operated by new media, such as by television or home videos see the brief but incisive remarks by Enrico Ghezzi. “Alla memoria (dello scrivere di cinema).” Paura e Desiderio: Cose (Mai) Viste, 1974-2001, Bompiani, 1995, pp. 7-13. For an analysis of the “Delayed cinema” and the tension between still frame and the moving image see Mulvey, pp. 8-9, 67-84, 144-160, and 181-196.

³⁰ With regards to the importance of the still in film and its effect on spectatorship, Laura Mulvey also reports the fundamental analysis of Raymond Bellour in \textit{The Pensive Spectator}, whereby she incisively summarizes: “Bellour makes the crucial point that a moment of stillness within the moving image and its narrative creates a ‘pensive’ spectator who can reflect ‘on the cinema.’ [...] This pause for the spectator, usually ‘hurried’ by the movement of both film and narrative, opens a space for consciousness of the still frame within the moving image” (186).
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