

Constructing Atmospheres: A Phenomenology of the Film Image and Its Relation to Place

Kristen Kreider / James O'Leary

Royal Holloway, University of London / Chelsea College of Art and Design,
University of the Arts London

Author biography

Dr. Kristen Kreider is a practicing poet and artist whose research develops a 'material poetics' at the crossover between poetry, fine art and spatial practice (Toward a Material Poetics: Sign, Subject, Site - PhD completed 2008, Slade School of Fine Art & Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL). She is currently a Lecturer in Creative Writing [Poetry] at Royal Holloway, University of London. .

James O'Leary is a practicing architect and artist whose research explores the overlapping boundaries of time-based, visual and spatial practices. He graduated with distinction from the Masters programme at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, graduating from Unit 14 - the Interactive Architecture Workshop. He is currently Principal Lecturer in Spatial Design at Chelsea College of Art & Design, University of the Arts, London.

kreider+o'leary operate at the edges of disciplinary boundaries to integrate visual, spatial and poetic practices through performance, installation and time-based media. They have exhibited work in the UK as well as internationally in Japan (ArtX Toyama, 2006), Ireland (European Capital of Culture, Cork 2005) and Croatia (Art Radionica Lazareti, 2005).

Abstract

The 'film-image' – drawing together Eastern and Western poetics of image-making; embodying the material specificity of film – ultimately generates a particular experience of place for its recipient. We argue this point with specific reference to Andrey Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* (1983), shot on-location at St. Catherine's pool in Bagno Vignoi, Italy. The pool is a natural geo-thermal spring which generates an active surface of water and steam, the atmospheric and materiality of which are harnessed by Tarkovsky when shooting scenes from the film. The pool becomes a means to evoke the subjective psychological state of the protagonist, the poet Gorchakov. Meanwhile Tarkovsky's syntactics of the long-shot instill in the viewer a contemplative state from which to observe, over a prolonged time, the pool as film-image – as worldly 'fact.'

Bridging Eastern and Western poetics of image-making, Tarkovsky theorises the film-image in his collection of writings on art and film *Sculpting in Time* (1986). Tarkovsky approaches the film-image first through a discussion of the image in poetry, with specific reference to Japanese Haiku. We look at the particular relationship that the haiku has to time and place before turning to how this translates into Tarkovsky's theory and practice of the film-image.

Tarkovsky theorises the film-image in particular relation to *time*. In this paper we position his argument in relation to discussions in phenomenology and film-theory to suggest that, imbued with a sense of time, the film-image also gives rise to a corporeal understanding of *place* for both the film-maker and recipient of the film-image – and we liken this embodied act of cognition to one engendered by certain architectural experiences. We then turn to a specific scene from *Nostalgia* in order to appreciate that the film-image is, in fact, a 'constructed atmosphere': one that bears a naturalistic *and* poetic – material *and* symbolic – relation to place; one that therefore cultivates and embodied *and* imagined occupation of place.

In presenting our ideas, we shall also draw from our own artistic practice and, specifically, a project entitled 'Gorchakov's Wish' generated while in residence at Bagno Vignoni. This situated filmic and poetic project embodies our relation to the psychological space of *Nostalgia* as well as the material and immaterial elements of St. Catherine's pool, constructing a further immersive environment through video and sound that extends a phenomenological understanding of the film-image and its relation to place through art practice.