Skakov’s monograph on Tarkovsky’s filmic opus is organised thematically into seven chapters, each chapter theme encapsulating the author’s main interpretive perspective on Tarkovsky’s individual films. *Ivan’s Childhood* is analysed through dreams, *Andrei Rublev* through visions, *Solaris* through phantasies, *Mirror* through memory, *Stalker* through revelation, *Nostalgia* through recollection and *Sacrifice* through illusion. This is a clear and welcome journey through Tarkovsky’s film texts and refreshingly free from film jargon about shots and camera angles, which make up the bulk of Tarkovsky criticism amounting to a kind of glossary of hyper-technical descriptive statements which say nothing about the structure and poetics of the films. Skakov does the opposite: he analyses Tarkovsky’s films as texts which carry a certain meaning interpretable by the viewer. The meaning of each film is organisesthrough a major concept, which thus yields for Skakov a clear model of analysis of the film in question. Like a thread which goes through all these concepts or models of the poetics of each film is Skakov’s conception of space and time, derived from Tarkovsky’s own theorising in *Sculpting in Time* and the diaries *Time within Time*, together with passing references to Florensky’s *Ikonostasis*, and an array of ‘classical’ texts on perspective in representation, such as Sontag’s *On Photography*, Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, Deleuze’s *Cinema*, or texts on time, such as Bakhtin’s chronotope, Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” and more. Skakov is also aware of more recent literature on cinematic time and space, such as M. A. Doane’s *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency and the Archive* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), whose inferences, like those of K. Marker and and N. Misler (pg. 69), serve to support his analysis.

However, precisely because Skakov’s monograph is based on his interpretations of the Trakovsky films as aesthetic texts, it is open to debate and counter-interpretations of his material. This is because his analysis is largely a-historical: he does not make any attempt to situate Tarkovsky’s opus in the time in which it emerged in Soviet cinema, against the backdrop of “new cinemas” in Europe (Italy) or the Scandinavian countries. Even when he mentions a historical fact (in conjunction with *Adrei Rublev’s* production, for instance) that Tarkovsky “most certainly” attended the “major retrospective of Rublev’s icons in 1960” (p.42), he makes no inferences about the fact that this
Soviet revival and re-appropriation of the (“obscure figure” – is that really so) of the Russian medieval painter might have had something to do with Tarkovsky taking up the theme in his (1964-66, released 1969) film. This is an interesting question, not dealt with in any detail even in the seminal study of Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994 (see page 64 in particular). Situating Tarkovsky’s films in his own time and his own place does make for a radically different take on all his movies. Thus, for example, one could object to Skakov’s interpretation of the message of the finale of Andrei Rublev, expressed in the following:

“The sequence, ‘the poem composed of icons’ [footnote reference to K. Marker], is the ultimate avowal of artistic truth in the face of various doubts, silences and renunciations. Its positive message is even more notable given that the icon painter does not paint at all in the film. However, the purely formal qualities of the finale also play a prominent semantic role. The director’s decision to present icons by framing them with the tracking camera in an overtly impressionistic manner resonates with the rejection of the notion of the ‘immobile eye’ in Renaissance perspective. The fragmented vision of the tracking camera corresponds to the real-life experience of a believer scanning the pictorial surface of icons with a moving eye [footnote reference to N. Misler]. Tarkovsky celebrates the concept of ‘reverse perspective’ and the multiplicity of vanishing points, instead of the singularity of the Renaissance perspective.” (69)

On a technical point (what Skokov would call the “semantic” structure), one could ask: how does the gliding of the camera’s eye up and down or criss-cross over the painting of the Trinity emulate Florensky’s (or Rublev’s) ‘reverse perspective’? It is a fixed camera which glides over a static picture. It has none of the visual excitement of Dziga Vertov’s camera when it distorts the reality of objects and spaces through angle shots in Enthusiasm in which the psychological mechanism of displacement is at work. It is in the missing centre of the Vertov cinematic image – a fact conveyed to the viewer by his need to struggle to get the image ‘in hand’ - which gives it justified claim to a diffuse perspective. The image of the Trinity at the end of Rublev features no displacement. The fact that it is in colour makes it at best into indifferent art reportage in documentary style. Robert Bird lets slip that “[I]t is interesting that Tarkovsky wholly entrusted the photographing of the icons to Iusov [Director of Photography, who said this in an interview, published in a 2004 DVD], who in this regard appears as a master alongside Rublev.”

This is truer than Bird appreciates since the film is really a work of contemporary art, not medieval art. It is the art of painting with the camera – in other words – with the gaze. This is the technique introduced by Vertov in his Man with a Movie Camera. Here it is applied by Iusov (and Tarkovsky) in a non-programmatic and matter-of-fact manner, as accepted orthodoxy of cinema. The notion that there is a Soviet viewer who could identify with “the real-life experience of a believer” is pure conjecture, not interpretation. Tarkovsky was raised in the