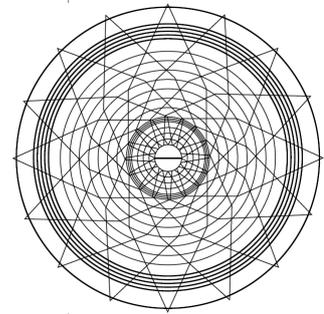


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# FROM ROADSIDE PICNIC (THE STRUGATSKY BROTHERS) TO STALKER (TARKOVSKY): A WORK OF ADAPTATION

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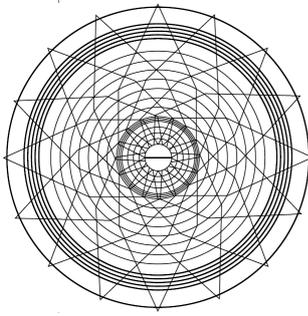
### **Abstract:**

In this article, we compare the short novel *Roadside Picnic* (Piknik na obochine) by the Strugatsky brothers with different versions of scripts written by these novelists for the film *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky. We aim to explore the unique ways in which Tarkovsky’s artistic vision through the adaptation from literary work to film changes the framework and main features of the science fiction (sci-fi) genre. Although the Strugatsky brothers were the authors of the script, the film *Stalker* (which was actually shot twice because the first version was destroyed owing to a technological failure) was much different from the novel *Roadside Picnic* in regard to plot, character names, location, and many other features; therefore, the final film version of the script was also the work of Tarkovsky. Based on a sci-fi novel, the film extends far beyond the limits of this genre, and its artistic discoveries are not fully explained by the specificities of the parable genre, as the film was defined by critics. In *Stalker*, the last film made by Tarkovsky in the USSR, the work of adaptation is mostly replaced by the difficult and sometimes painful process of creating an author’s version of art cinema.

**Keywords:** Strugatsky brothers, Andrei Tarkovsky, Science fiction, Soviet cinematography, Film adaptation, Art cinema

### **Introduction**

Andrei Tarkovsky, one of the most famous Russian filmmakers, directed his last Soviet film, *Stalker*, between 1976 and 1979. The process of filming was long and difficult, and it was accompanied by organizational, technological, and creative obstacles, as well as the replacement of members of the team, locations, and even a physical film. *Stalker* was based on the 1971 novel *Roadside Picnic* by the Strugatsky brothers. Their short novel was first published serially in 1972 in the Leningrad-based



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journal *Aurora*, and after eight years (in 1980), it was finally released in book form in a collection titled *Unappointed Meetings (Nenaznachenie vstrechi)*; however, this version of *Roadside Picnic* contained numerous changes made by a publisher. The short novel was also included in the collection *Za milliard let do konca sveta (One Billion Years to the End of the World)* (1984), but the version that was closest to the Strugatskys' conception was released in 1991.

Arkady and Boris Strugatskys are among the most prominent and well-known Russian writers of the science fiction (sci-fi) genre. Tarkovsky became interested in the adaptation of *Roadside Picnic* in 1973 and asked the authors to write the script for his next film. The Strugatskys accepted the offer, although from the very beginning, the collaboration was marked by various difficulties and misunderstandings. Tarkovsky was not satisfied with the first version of the script, titled *The Desire Machine (Mashina zhelaniya)*, and required further changes. *The Desire Machine* was later published by the Strugatskys as a "cinema short novel" (kinopovest). Returning to the script, the Strugatsky brothers wrote more than 10 versions of it, and every new version was different from the previous one. While the script writers did not approve of these rewrites, they agreed to them, as they considered Tarkovsky a film genius. At the same time, Tarkovsky did not explain clearly what changes he wanted to see; therefore, the work done on the script was like a guessing game, and Tarkovsky was definitely a co-author of the final version of the script. In *Stalker*, the last film made by Tarkovsky in the Soviet Union, the work of adaptation is mostly replaced by the difficult and sometimes painful process of creating an author's version of art cinema starting from but not based on the sci-fi genre.

### **Roadside Picnic and Problems with the Sci-Fi Genre Definition**

Fantastic (from the Greek word Φανταστική, meaning the art of imagination) is a genre and creative method in literature, cinema, and other art forms in the fictional world. Tzvetan Todorov wrote that "fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting a supernatural event" (Todorov, 1975, p. 25).

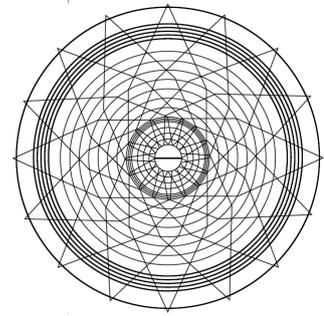
While sci-fi is a genre related to fantastic, the definitions of this genre are a methodological threat. Yuly Kagarlitsky defined sci-fi as "an area of artistic creativity, the specificity of which is in connection with science," but he also stated that it is "not popularization, but literature, and therefore obeys the laws of artistic creation" (Kagarlitsky, 1974, p. 209).

For Darko Ronald Suvin, a key point of sci-fi is "the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and [its] main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin, 1976, p. 57). Related to this, the following is a well-known definition by Theodore Sturgeon: "A science fiction story is a story built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content" (as cited in Atheling, 1967, p. 14).

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In the Soviet Union, the sci-fi genre has had its peculiarities. Between 1930 and 1950, the genre was in decay: “In the country of winning utopia was no place for artistic utopia” (Dashkova & Stepanov, 2006, p. 316). The rehabilitation of sci-fi in the Soviet Union was accompanied by the marking of it as a marginal branch of popular science literature geared towards young people (Dubin, 2001). The situation changed dramatically in the Thaw period (associated with Khrushchev’s rule), as sci-fi became the most appropriate artistic form for discussing the society’s evolution based on science and technology development. This is when the Strugatskys began writing together; they started in January 1958 with their first mutual work—the sci-fi story *Izvne (From Beyond)*. In 1959, the Strugatskys’ first book, the novel *Strana bagrovyyh tuch (The Land of Crimson Clouds)*, was published. This very successful literary collaboration lasted until the death of Arkady Strugatsky in 1991. As Arkady Strugatsky was a professional translator from English and Japanese, and Boris Strugatsky was an astronomer, they complemented each other perfectly and appropriately for sci-fi.

In his essay “On the Sci-Fi Works of the Strugatsky Brothers”, Suvin stated that of the pieces published by these novelists for the first time between 1968 and 1980, *Roadside Picnic* is one of the most consistent works, combining a “utopian search, like a fairy tale, and a psychological novel with many points of view and professional jargon . . . The influence of aliens is a catalyst that reveals human greed and courage, ignorance, and ingenuity” (Suvin, 1988, p. 177). The plot of *Roadside Picnic* is not easy to retell; the reader is only sure that strange aliens visit the Earth and that a territory called the Zone is left after their visit. The Zone is filled with mysterious and often dangerous objects and unnatural phenomena. While the world after the aliens’ visit continues to exist as before, the human reaction to extraterrestrial miracles appears in legal and illegal forms. In the laboratories of the xenological institutes, experiments are carried out with magnetic traps found in the Zone, and outside the laboratories, Stalkers, who are smugglers of a new type, remove in-demand objects from the Zone at night.

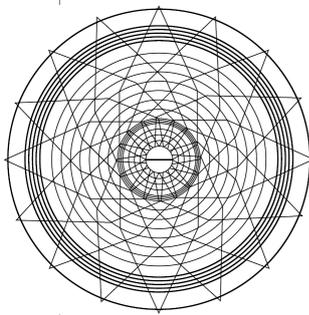
The primary motive of *Roadside Picnic* is to explore the idea of the first contact with extraterrestrial life. In a letter to his brother Arkady (January 3, 1975), Boris Strugatsky wrote the following:

We are most interested in the philosophical and sociological aspect: how (will) the relationship between humanity and alien civilization develop as soon as contact is reached. What are the possible ways of developing contact? What are the likely consequences of contact for humanity on the Earth, for its science and technology, for mass psychology, for history in general?

(Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2007, p. 365)

Literary critics and writers who praised *Roadside Picnic* as an extraordinary sci-fi piece noted that this short novel was quite unusual in both form and mood, as well as in its interpretation of the “first contact” plot.

Gurevich (1983) wrote that the novel *Roadside Picnic* presents a notion that “super civilizations are most likely deeply indifferent to people. The Earth for them is the



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same as an anthill for decades to guess about shards and scraps” (p. 80). Furthermore, Prashkevich wrote that the Strugatskys themselves considered the novel *Escape Attempt* (*Popytka k begstvu*, 1962) as a turning point. They said,

This is our first work, in which we have felt all the sweetness and magical power of refusing explanations. Any explanation—sci-fi, logical, purely scientific, or even pseudoscientific. How sweet it turns out to tell the reader: THEN happened THIS, WHY it happened, HOW it happened, from where and what came up—is not essential! For this is not the point, but something completely different, in the very thing that the story is about.

(Prashkevich, 2009, p. 261)

The same can be said about the novel *Roadside Picnic*. Stanislaw Lem found that in *Roadside Picnic*, the Strugatsky brothers move away from the traditions of sci-fi. Their story is based on two concepts: the first is “the strategy of the mystery of aliens,” (Lem 2009, p. 164) and the second is the reaction of humanity to the visit. Lem (2009) found that “the charm and dejection that scenes from the life of a stalker that make up the core of the story awaken in the reader are the result of a deliberately limited field of view” (p. 164).

Ursula Le Guin, the well-known fantasy writer, considers *Roadside Picnic* to be an unusual “first contact” story: “Aliens have visited the Earth and gone away again, leaving behind them several landing areas (now called Zones) littered with their refuse. The picnickers have gone; the pack rats, wary but curious, approach the crumpled bits of cellophane, the glittering pull tabs from beer cans, and try to carry them home to their holes” (Le Guin, 2012, p. VI). Likewise, Carter noticed how “the science fiction elements are ever-present, and to be sure they’re the turning point of the story, but they’re far from the gee-whiz pyrotechnics that a fair percentage of the genre relies on” (2000).

As the Strugatskys experimented with different text genres, including in their short novel pieces imitating newspaper reports and interviews, as well as first- and third-person narratives and time gaps, the *Roadside Picnic* contains numerous plot “white spots,” making this short novel open to further interpretations, as well as artistic adaptations.

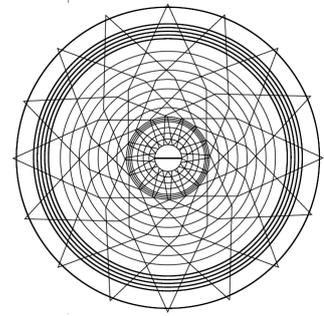
### **Short Novel’s Adaptation as a Problem of Film Concept (From *Roadside Picnic* to *Stalker*)**

Defining the work of adaptation, Linda Huncheon (2006), whose “theory of adaptation” is one of the most well-known, said, “We use the word *adaptation* to refer to both a product and a process of creation and reception, this suggests to me the need for a theoretical perspective that is at once formal and ‘experiential’” (p. XIV). As we mentioned before, the process of adaptation of *Roadside Picnic* was mostly experiential and involved not only the industrial aim of turning the short novel into a film but also the practical and artistic speculations on genre transformation, as well as the very nature of the cinema medium and the author’s role. Thus, the methodological

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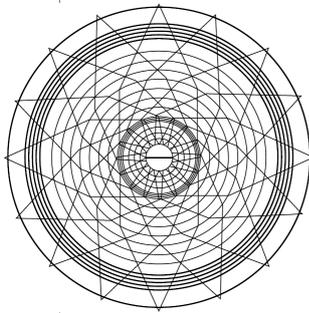


approach we chose for studying *Roadside Picnic's* adaptation into *Stalker* focused on the process and discussions that occurred during the three-year-long rewriting and re-shooting of Tarkovsky's film. Although we mostly concentrated on studying the different versions of the scripts, we should admit that the collaboration (and quarrels) between different members of the film team in the process of adaptation is also a very important aspect of the study but is partly omitted from our text. At the same time, it is necessary to mention some other members of the crew, whose work played a crucial role in the shaping of Tarkovsky's masterpiece, as adaptation implies "three major ways we engage with stories (telling, showing, and interacting with them)" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. XIV). The first version of *Stalker* was shot by cameraman Georgy Rerberg, who, after a quarrel with the director, was replaced by Leonid Kalashnikov and, finally, by Alexander Knyazhinsky. The pieces shot by all three cameramen appeared in the final version of the film. Film composer Eduard Artemyev also played an important role in the production, as his experiments mixing natural sounds and electronic music were crucial for Tarkovsky's vision of the Zone effects. The film has a glorious top Soviet star cast: Alexander Kaydanovsky as the Stalker, Alisa Freindlich as the Stalker's wife, and two other main roles played by Anatoly Solonitsyn (the Writer) and Nikolai Grinko (the Professor).

In late August 1977, Tarkovsky wrote the following in his diary: "Arkady and Boris are trying to re-write their novel into a script because of the new Stalker, who should not be a kind of drug dealer or poacher, but a slave, a believer, a pagan of the Zone" (2008, pp. 176–177). The Soviet authorities accepted the option and sent it for approval to the Soviet state organization *Goskino*, which was responsible for film making. The first version of the *Stalker* script had originally had a rude, sharp, and strong man as the main hero of *Roadside Picnic*, but in the later version, he, on the contrary, "becomes a suffering person—a dreamer who wanted to make people happy and realized that he was defeated" (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2012, p. 559). The decision was thus made to continue shooting the film *Stalker* but, at the same time, carry out the final work on the script—that is, to clarify the origin and nature of the Zone, and significantly reduce the dialogue.

The process that the Strugatsky brothers employed when working on the script for the film based on their novel can be traced in their correspondence and their memoirs, as well as in the "Martyrology" (Martirolog), which is the diary of Tarkovsky. The Strugatsky brothers are mentioned in the "Martyrology" between January 1973 and June 1981. Tarkovsky started the first *Stalker* script in 1977 and the second in 1978; the film was finally released in 1979. On 26 January 1973, Tarkovsky wrote that he had read the sci-fi novel *Roadside Picnic* by the Strugatsky brothers and had decided that it "could make a tremendous screenplay" (2008, p. 81).

In the part of his memoirs dedicated to the work with Tarkovsky, A. Strugatsky outlines the beginning of this cooperation. Tarkovsky and the Strugatsky brothers met several times until Arkady managed to find out that Tarkovsky "was interested only in the fourth part of the story, namely, the heroes' approach to the golden sphere, The Desire Machine" (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 1982, p. 277). On 7 January 1975, Tarkovsky



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wrote the following in “Martyrology”: “I want to see a thunderous mixture—an emotional story about myself, combining simple and sincere feelings—tending to raise several ethical and philosophical questions concerning the meaning of life” (2008, p. 131).

The Strugatsky brothers spent the second half of January in Komarovo, where they wrote the first version of the script. In the “Working Diaries” (*Rabochie dnevniki*), they wrote about the difficulties of work with Tarkovsky, who saw the world differently from them and who could not convey his own purely individual vision because such things “are not amenable to verbal processing.” Although the Strugatskys were quite aware of the difference between literature and cinema—the former is “highly symbolized reality, a very special system of associations, influencing completely different senses,” and the latter is “a mixture of painting, music, the mercilessly real world, the elementary unit of which is not a word, but the sounding image” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2012, p. 466), — their work on the script turned into endless, exhausting discussions. Sometimes these discussions led to powerless despair, during which the tormented and tormenting director tried to explain what he needed from the writers, and the agonized writers tried to understand the director. Eventually, the Strugatsky brothers decided that “only the trial and error method was possible. Discussion . . . development of a rough plan of the script . . . text . . . discussion of the text . . . new discussion . . . new plan . . . new version—and again not that . . . and again it is not clear what is needed” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2012, p. 466). Meanwhile, they found Tarkovsky “tough, uncompromising and devilishly unyielding” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2012, p. 467) with the writers. “All our timid attempts at creative rebellion were suppressed strictly and with no mercy” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2012, p. 467). Rerberg (2006), the first cameraman of the film, who said that Tarkovsky’s participation in the script is indisputable, noted that the film was reduced “to a jumble of gestures, words, ideas, images” (p. 35).

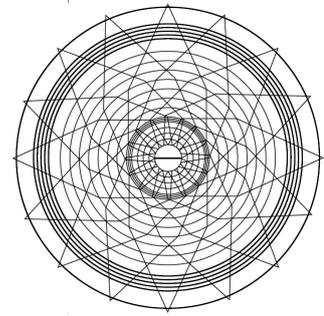
The main concept of the script was revealed by Tarkovsky himself, who wrote the following in the “Martyrology” on 22 February 1976: “I think I found my ambition—a film should be made about Jesus. Of course, not like Pasolini’s. There are two paths here—either film it abroad or do it as an allegory with a hand-held camera” (Tarkovsky, 2008, p. 149).

An additional important explanation was given by Tarkovsky to the Moscow-based film journal *Iskusstvo kino*, which published an interview with him, in which he explained that the film began where the story of the Strugatsky brothers ended. For him, it was very important that the plot of the script meet the requirements of the unity of time, place, and action, according to the rules of antic theatre, and that there was no time gap between sequences. Therefore, he threw out from the script everything that could be thrown out, believing that “the film should be simple, very modest in its construction . . . In *Stalker*, only the initial situation can be called fantastic” (Tarkovsky, 1977, p. 118). A. Strugatsky himself suggested to Tarkovsky that he throw away the fantastic elements of the film so it could be seen not as a fantastic script but as a parable script. A. Strugatsky emphasised the parabolic features of the script when he

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outlined how a “fashionable writer and a significant scholar go to the Zone for the fulfilment of their cherished desires, and the Apostle of the new creed, a kind of ideologist, leads them” (1987, p. 7). During the Arts Council, which was held at the Mosfil’m studio in Moscow in September 1977, this option was taken into account, and it was recommended that Goskino should approve the amendments. Whereas previously, “it was a sci-fi script,” now, “there was a translation into a moral and philosophical parable, where the main thing is not in the events, but in the attitude of people to those questions that concern them” (Nekhoroshev, 1994, p. 74).

For the film *Stalker* the Strugatsky brothers wrote no fewer than 10 versions of the script. A. Strugatsky (1987) commented as follows:

The scriptwriter is a slave to the director. We are deeply convinced that the film is made by the director, not the screenwriter . . . And in the final version of our script, only the words *Stalker* and *Zone* and the mystical place where wishes come true are left from the story. The film is extremely complex and ambiguous.

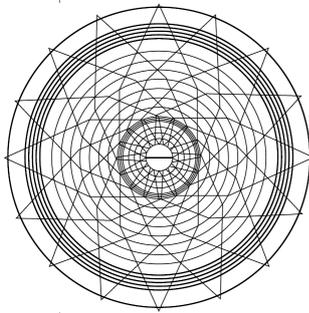
(Strugatsky, 1987, p. 7)

In accordance with this, Evlampiev (2012) identified how Tarkovsky’s films *Solaris* and *Stalker* constitute a philosophical and fantastic diology in his work, and the centre of gravity lies in *Stalker*, which can generally be considered the pinnacle of the whole of the director’s art, a work in which he expressed the most paradoxical and deep principles of his worldview. In this sense, Tarkovsky’s (1977) statement about the film’s idea is very important: “There’s no fiction inside the very fabric of what is happening, even the *Zone* will be real. Everything should happen now as if the *Zone* already exists somewhere near us” (p. 118).

Thus, instead of numerous characters from the novel, in the *Stalker* film, there are only three main characters—the stalker, writer, and professor—who have more symbolic than narrative functions. For instance, the stalker and the writer, moving along the dry tunnel, fall into the trap of the *Zone*, and at the end of their path, they go to the same place from which they left.

It was not only the Strugatsky brothers or the Arts Council who mentioned the dramatic differences between the novel and the script. Notably, Tsymbal, Tarkovsky’s assistant director, recalled that whereas the sci-fi novel by the Strugatsky brothers was very popular, for Tarkovsky, it became the pretext of an “emotional story about yourself,” although with a subsequent “philosophical and ethical interpretation of issues related to the meaning of life” (Tsymbal, 2015). The crucial example already mentioned above is that in Tarkovsky’s film, nothing remains of the original main character from the short novel—Redrick. “The initial portrayal of the *Stalker* character as a crude, brutal criminal was radically rewritten to create a diametrically opposite persona” (Tsymbal, 2012), which is perhaps the director’s alter ego.

Not all the reviewers agree that the changes that were eventually made to the script were for the better. Suvin wrote: “The story has since been extensively revised and, in my opinion, impoverished, in the Strugatsky brothers’ script for the Christian existentialist film *Stalker* by Tarkovsky” (1988, p. 162)



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The dramatic process of adapting the *Roadside Picnic* short novel into the script, carried out by the authors themselves but in endless discussions with the director, is also described by Alexander Mitta, the fellow film director, who recalled that Tarkovsky began shooting the film but then interrupted the shooting, feeling acute dissatisfaction with the script. The Strugatsky brothers then had to write a new version of it. However, Tarkovsky did not accept the new version either. Yet another script was written, and again, this one was not accepted by Tarkovsky. In desperation, the Strugatsky brothers offered their story in the form of “melodramas, where the emotions and actions of the characters developed according to the maximum amplitude of the characters’ movement from unhappiness to happiness, as a goal, and again to unhappiness” (Mitta, 1999, pp. 141–142).

All of these numerous revisions of the script may also be partly explained by Tarkovsky’s attitude towards the sci-fi genre. Freilich (2007) recalled that Tarkovsky did not like the fact that *Solaris* and *Stalker* were called sci-fi. Tarkovsky thought about sci-fi, in a way Serguey Eisenstein did in the process of adapting the scientific material, which he “wore out and handed over to the archive” so as to develop ideas not through scientific but through artistic and figurative lines (Freilich, 2007, p. 107).

### **The Struggle Behind the Scene: Versions of the Stalker’s Script Comparison**

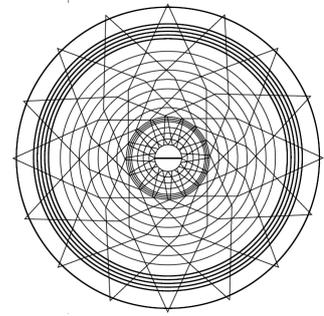
We have already mentioned that if we compare the novel *The Desire Machine* (based on the first version of the script) and the final script of the *Stalker* film, we can see how the character of the protagonist has changed considerably. In this part of our paper, we focus on the other substantial differences between the short novel and the film in terms of plot, dialogue, and characterization.

Included at the beginning of the first version of the script is a conversation between the members of the International Institute of Extraterrestrial Cultures about the origin of the Zone from external super-civilization and the attempts of the human race to imagine that there is a powerful and completely incomprehensible alien life. In the second and third versions, the replicas containing the details related to the Zone—the Campbell Memorandum and Graviton Concentrate (places of increased gravity)—are removed. There is also a scene in the writer’s mansion. A conversation between scientists is replaced by a discussion between a drunk writer and his guest (in the second version), who becomes his girlfriend (in the final version). The guest (girlfriend) thinks that the Zone is a product of super-civilization. The writer says that the Zone “has nothing to do with super-civilization. It has just appeared one more lousy boring law that we did not know before” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2007, p. 358). In later script, the teenager Arthur (the son of Vulture Barbridge) is replaced by two adults—Writer Anton (Writer in the final version) and Professor Philip (Professor in the final version). While the characters writer and professor do not exist in the short novel, the occasional characters of the stalker’s wife and daughter are important for the film’s plot, though their functions have changed completely. In *Roadside Picnic*, the action takes place on Earth, presumably in the 1970s in the town of Harmont in a fictional English-speaking country and includes the separate pieces of action placed in

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different times and spaces. In contrast, in *Stalker*, the nationality of the heroes and any geographical locations are totally unidentifiable, the time and space in the film are fictional, and the action is united and obeys the dramatic law of the three unities. The film's action takes place in the Zone, and in each subsequent version of the script, the technology becomes less noticeable, and most of the action takes place in a completely timeless environment of nature, which is spotted with the remains of settlements. The comparison with the novel *The Desire Machine* shows that the elements of sci-fi are simplified in the script and are made more picturesque. The director strives for more cinematic and lighter performance effects, so many of the original ideas from the story are rejected. There is no “witch’s jelly” or “meat grinder,” but there are unattainable idyllic landscapes from some other time and/or space which will soon disappear, and the scientific expedition is stuck in a time loop, which repeats the same crossing of the bridge for many years. In the earlier versions of the script, the writer, Anton, separates from the expedition and goes to his death, and the Stalker sacrifices Professor Philip, wishing to heal his daughter. The Stalker then returns to his wife and child, but he realizes that he has received the money instead of healing. The script ends with the explosion of a bomb that the Professor brought to the Zone.

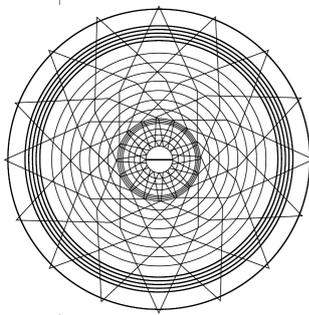
Kofyrin (2012) noted that Tarkovsky decided to change the plot: By sacrificing the Professor and Writer in the Zone, the Stalker receives wealth instead of his daughter’s health, cursing his subconscious desire to get rich. In the last version of the script, as in the film itself, none of the characters enters the Room of Wishes; startled and powerless, they return from the Zone empty-handed. B. Strugatsky comments that this ending is suitable for the film, in contrast to the open ending of the story:

The fact is that the ending, which is good for the story (the so-called open ending), is bad and even worthless when it comes to cinema. Cinema is a crude, simple art that does not allow for omissions and double interpretations. That is why we fought for so long, trying to find the ending at the same time, both strong (spectacular) and significant, deep in meaning. In my opinion, we could not find such an ending, but what turned out for Tarkovsky was quite fine with me. It turned out, in fact, an OPEN and at the same time a successful ending—a rarity for the cinema.

(B. Strugatsky, 1998)

Following the various scenarios, we can still see that one after another, the final irreversible actions of the hero are eliminated: The writer does not separate from the expedition, the professor does not activate the bomb, and the stalker does not enter the Room of Wishes. Maya Turovskaya noted that having started working on the script, the Strugatsky brothers

decided against a direct transfer from page to screen. They changed both the structure and title, leaving only the science fiction genre and the basic elements of the plot. The most obviously “cinematic” elements have disappeared: the golden sphere, the green dawn, the mirages—were all abandoned; proper names were forgotten, the convolutions of the plot were straightened out. Nobody now died,



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nobody reached their goal, nobody even crossed the threshold; the three came to a halt before the entrance to That Place.

(Turovskaya, 1989, pp. 106–107)

A radical change in the protagonist could not but change the meaning of the film, and Redrick of the Strugatskys could in no way be the hero of Tarkovsky. “You know, my mother was very opposed,” says the stalker’s wife in the director’s development of the script, “[and] you already understood, he’s probably blessed . . . The whole district laughed at him. He was a muddler, so pathetic” (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 2007, p. 394). Speaking about the film Kofyrin stated that “Mysticism replaced fiction; the adventure thriller turned into a philosophical parable” (Kofyrin, 2012).

Speaking about the difficulties of adaptation, B. Strugatsky said,

The main difficulty was that Tarkovsky, being a filmmaker, and also a brilliant filmmaker besides, saw the real world differently from us, and he built his imaginary world of the future film differently than we, and as a rule, he couldn’t convey to us his own, purely individual vision—such things cannot be verbally processed, no words have been invented for this, and it’s impossible, apparently, to come up with such words, or perhaps to invent them

(B. Strugatsky, 1999)

Therefore, in their adaptation, the Strugatsky brothers decided to freely approach the work that Wagner (1975) would call an analogy transformed into a completely new narrative essence. The final form of the film is impressive because with his exceptional ability to convey a radically different view of the world, Tarkovsky did it in a form accepted in the art.

Many film scholars agree that *Stalker* is Tarkovsky’s most successful attempt to put his poetry into practice: “Long static frames have incredible internal tension and are connected to the pipe with the logic in which events take place in the Zone” (Tropin, 2007, p. 291).

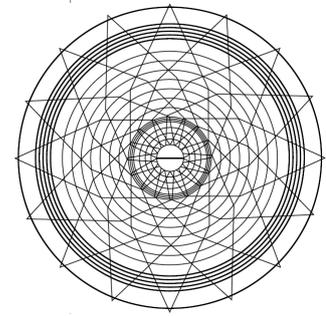
Cinema critic Freilich found that in *Stalker*, Tarkovsky appears not only as a director but also as an artist: “We are faced with a film adaptation of Strugatskies’ story as an excuse for an art cinema, which always asserts its right to self-expression” (Freilich, 2007, p. 143).

It is remarkable that over 10 years before the work on *Stalker* started, the Strugatsky brothers themselves raised the problem of adaptation. In their text *Why There Are No Pure Film Fanatics*, they programmatically formulated “three main problems: director, script, technique” (B. Strugatsky, 1999). It appears that in spite of many new problems of communication, the three afore-mentioned problems were resolved by choosing Tarkovsky as a director and them as screenwriters. The third problem—the technique—results in a simple form of the film: there are practically no special effects in *Stalker*. Therefore, the result was a film they were proud of: “serious, passionate, thought-provoking and empathic, a film smart and perfect in form,

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addressing important issues, designed for the most rigorous, demanding audience” (B. Strugatsky, 1999).

A key difference between the film and the novel can be found in the image of the Golden Ball fulfilling every wish, as well as the Room in the film, which reveals only the truest, deepest desires. Another big difference between the novel by the Strugatsky brothers and Tarkovsky’s film is the fact that the harm to people caused by artefacts from the Zone arise most of all from human ethical immaturity. Tropin (2007) wrote,

This method to eliminate from the film imaginary futuristic artifacts that are not related to human civilization turns sci-fi elements into ethical and ontological issues of a dark parable in which the creative side of the human spirit (Writer) and the cognitive (Professor) are weaker than low, almost atavistic instincts (Stalker) and therefore suffer.

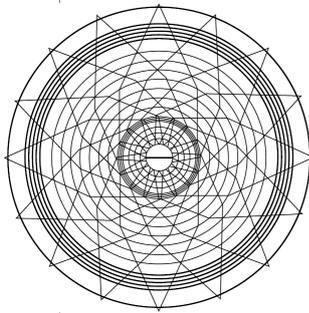
(Tropin, p. 298)

Tarkovsky (1986) directly identified simplicity as one of his artistic goals in the film: “As a matter of principle, I wanted to avoid distracting or surprising the audience with unexpected changes of scene, with the geography of the action, with the elaborate plot—I wanted the whole composition to be simple and muted” (p. 194). In addition to this, Tarkovsky proposed a mysterious end in his film as a promise. In the first version of the script, the sick girl acted only as a catalyst, which encouraged the stalker to approach *The Desire Machine* and make his wish come true at the cost of human sacrifice. However, in *Stalker*, the girl opens the magic continuation of the story beyond the framework of the film: As she demonstrates the ability of telekinesis and moves objects on the table in front of her, Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* breaks through the sound of the train.

### **Conclusion: To Which Genre Does the Film *Stalker* Belong?**

Although *Stalker* definitely began as a sci-fi feature film, the final result—like many outstanding artistic achievements—exceeded the boundaries of the genre. Is it accurate to say that the film *Stalker* belongs to the genre of sci-fi? To answer this, Tarkovsky (Baglivo, 1983) said, “Thus, in *Stalker*, like in *Solaris*, I was least interested in the fantastic situation. Unfortunately, in *Solaris* there were still too many sci-fi attributes that distracted from the main thing”.

Starting with the sci-fi short novel, “Roadside Picnic”, the efforts of the Strugatsky and the Tarkovsky (as a third script writer in disguise) led to a masterpiece of art cinema made in the tradition of European film art. Is this transition from *cinéma de genre* to *cinéma d’auteur* just an outstanding case or a specific trend of post-war Soviet author film? We can extrapolate this very method of intellectual Soviet and then post-Soviet film creation further, as surprisingly, the sci-fi works of the Strugatsky brothers inspired several Russian author-directors to make highly complex, intertextual, and parabolic films. Besides *Stalker*, these are *Dni zatmenia (Days of Eclipse, 1988)* by Aleksandr Sokurov, based on the Strugatskys’ novel *Za milliard let do konca sveta (One Billion Years to the End of the World)* and *Trudno byt bogom*



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*(Hard to be a God, 2013)* by Aleksey German, which is based on the Strugatskys' homonymic novel. The answer is contradictory, as Dashkova and Stepanov showed in their paper "Fantastic in the films *Solaris* and *Stalker* by Tarkovsky" (2006), which is one of the best studies of Tarkovsky's relationship to the sci-fi genre. As the scholars showed, there is a lot in *Stalker's* metaphoric language inherited from the desire to avoid the restrictions of Soviet censorship, but the unique style of sci-fi transformation in Tarkovsky's film is by no means fully explained by only this desire. First, for Tarkovsky, *Stalker* is a way to develop a purely cinematic language, continuing the search for "l'essence du cinema," which was started by the European pre- and post-war directors and film theorists. The sci-fi in *Stalker* is a good way to combine the immanent (indexical) realism of cinema with its poetic essence, creating an intertextuality of the realistic and extra-natural. Second, the effect of fantastic in Tarkovsky's film is made not by sci-fi genre clichés but by the marking of the "alien gaze" and the many disruptions of cinematic conventions on the background of time and space film's unity. Thus, when speaking about the sci-fi traits in *Stalker*, we should mention not "the conventional signs of the genre, but the specific effects appearing in the process of watching" (Dashkova & Stepanov, 2006, p. 315).

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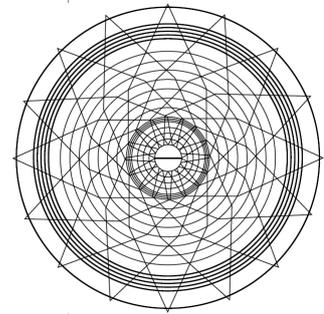
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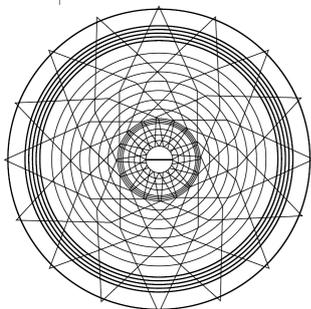
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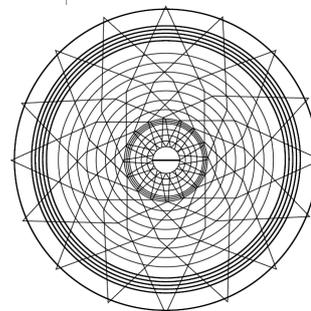
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### ОТ «ПИКНИКА НА ОБОЧИНЕ» БРАТЬЕВ А. И Б. СТРУГАЦКИХ К «СТАЛКЕРУ» А. ТАРКОВСКОГО: РАБОТА АДАПТАЦИИ

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#### **Аннотация:**

В нашей статье мы сравниваем текст повести «Пикник на обочине» братьев А. и Б. Стругацких с несколькими версиями сценария, написанного этими писателями для фильма «Сталкер» Андрея Тарковского. Наша цель — выявить некоторые черты уникального авторского подхода А. Тарковского, который позволил с помощью адаптации литературного текста в фильм выработать оригинальный кинематографический инвариант жанра научной фантастики. Несмотря на то, что Стругацкие являются авторами сценария «Сталкера», этот фильм (который фактически был снят дважды, т. к. первый вариант оказался испорчен из-за технических проблем) значительно отличается от повести сюжетом, именами и функциями персонажей, местом и временем действия и т. п., А. Тарковский фактически является соавтором итоговой версии сценария, хотя его имя не указано среди сценаристов. Созданный по мотивам научно-фантастической повести, «Сталкер» не укладывается в рамки жанра НФ, но и определение этого фильма как притчи не вполне объясняет его художественные особенности. В «Сталкере», последнем фильме, созданном А. Тарковским в СССР, работа над адаптацией вытеснена сложной и подчас мучительной «работой адаптации» — созданием авторской версии артхаусного кино.

**Ключевые слова:** братья Стругацкие, Андрей Тарковский, научная фантастика, советский кинематограф, адаптация, артхаус