Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker": matter, soul and folded surfaces

Sarah Stilwell
The affect of overwhelming volume ready to burst in a cathartic moment is akin to the 'universal veil' in developing, toxic mushrooms: the veil eventually bursts into a volva as the mushroom fully develops. The affects of catharsis and "bursting" through skin are important in examining the film "Stalker". The figuration of the "universal veil" and "volva" also help one to understand some of the concepts of the single folded surface.

"Stalker" (1979) is a film by Andrei Tarkovsky loosely based on a novel "The Roadside Picnic" (1971) by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky. Tarkovsky says of the Stalker, that he is the "last idealist." Stalker leads two men, Professor and Writer (who are explicitly realists), into "The Zone: a militarily guarded place that has become desolate for of unknown reasons. There is a room in "The Zone" that is supposed to grant your innermost desire and Stalker serves as a guide through the labyrinthine path of The Zone and into the room, so that anybody who desires to go can navigate the invisible dangers that the zone creates. I argue that Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Stalker" unfolds and enfolds matter and soul through affective experience and formal cinematic language. I suggest also that "Stalker" reveals the world as a plenum of interconnected monads and does so through a consideration of the connectedness between the characters, the camera, and the spectator. The sound, the interchanging film stock, and the labyrinthine path of the characters (as set up by the camera) are some formal qualities used in "Stalker." These qualities help one to consider cinema as an unfolding of the monad as such, as well as an unfolding of the connection between monads; it helps to unfold a portion of the world and reveal the world as a single folded surface. Looking at the film itself, I will be examining how matter and soul enfold in "Stalker" and its monadic qualities. Regarding cinema, I use "Stalker" as an example of "monadic cinema" to examine how film unfolds the world of a single folded surface and additionally, the interconnectedness between the characters, the camera, and the spectator.
The universe enfolds and unfolds the soul and matter and the surface is the common limit of the two. Enfolding of the universe happens by the film/characters and by the spectator, and the camera captures and displays, like how the skin feels and perceives.

In Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Stalker" diegetic and non-diegetic sound enfold each other, which functions as means for understanding how the surface enfolds both matter and soul, as well as, how the camera enfolds the characters and the spectator. Throughout the film, one remains unsure if the sound is from within the diegesis. At other times, one is positive where the sound is coming from and yet, in other instances, the diegetic sound engenders non-diegetic sound (and likewise) and confuses. For example, the sound during the scene where the three men are on the railway work cart leading into "The Zone", and the steady, rhythmic "click-clack" sound of the cart moving, begins to create non-diegetic synthesized "zip-zap" sounds. Another example would be Stalker's dream sequence where water lapping against a shore eventually
fades and a women's laughter blends in with the non-diegetic sound of a traditional Oriental instrument. This enfoldment of the surface is similar to the "surface" of an object for Henri Bergson as "the only portion of space which is both perceived and felt." (57) The surface is a plenum of interconnected monads and "Stalker" is a film that demonstrates this surface as enfolding soul and matter; the surface is a space that both perceives and feels. The inside of the film and the outside of the film entwines within the image of sound so that it becomes indistinguishable.

Moreover, the sound within "Stalker" functions not only as a surface between soul and matter, it also functions as a means to understanding the connectedness between the monads of the characters, the camera and the spectator(s). Sound, in this film, intermingles in such a way, that there is a caesura of dualism (diegetic and non-diegetic), and sound becomes a full, undulating sound wave. This enfolding of sound indicates the surface between the "inside" (diegetic) of the film and the "outside" (non-diegetic) world of the spectator. There is an inclusion of the world of the spectator through use of non-diegetic sound, and the camera is the monad that films what it is most interested in. There is no perceptible distinction between the sounds as there is no perceptible distinction between matter and soul (they are "the same expression" (Deleuze, 35)). If the world is a single, folded surface, connecting all monads, then what can we make of the film "Stalker"? The sound, for one, suggests an interconnected and folded surface of monads. By pointing out at the spectator (through the use of non-diegetic sound), and by folding its sound, the camera becomes a "tunnel" which selects from the universe of images, and tunnels those images into a film, that is then tunneled back towards the spectator through the camera or through projection.
In addition to sound, Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Stalker" makes use of both black-and-white film and colour film and the switch between evokes a non-dualistic, folded surface. There are a few switches between black-and-white film and colour film within "Stalker". The few moments in the film where there is a change in film stock usually signal a physical or geographical switch within the film. For example: when the three men enter "The Zone" from the railway cart, it switches from black-and-white to colour (signifying geographical change) or, when Stalker's dream sequence switches back-and-forth between black-and-white and colour (signifying physical change). But more importantly, the switch signals the folding of the "in-between" surface between perception and affection, inside and outside; there is a plenum inherent in the "in-between" for it is a surface full of other folds. Collusion occurs between matter and soul in this film.
As Deleuze suggests, there is a multiplicity within the world; it is non-dualistic, because it is not possible for three worlds to exist. (119) This implies that the surface is commonly mistaken as a world in itself, and that it is the division point between soul and matter. Looking at "Stalker," the men do not quickly switch or change from geographical point to another geographical point, or from physical state to another physical state: the diegesis within "Stalker" tells us the change or switch is gradual and flowing. So, what of the use of interchanging film stock? There is an indication of a folded surface within the "in-between" engendered through affect. It is like the volva of toxic mushrooms. Likewise, the switch between black-and-white and colour and back again signals a voluminous enfolding and unfolding of affect of in-between spaces and time. For Leibniz, "... all is a plenum (and thus all matter is connected together)..." (8) This seems to suggest a rippling wave of continual change and in the case of this film, full of different enfolded and unfolding affects. The actual content remains in continual (and even) flux throughout the film. The moments where the spectator is jarred, is between the changes in film stock. This gesture of change points outside of the diegesis of the film towards the actual physical film itself because of the jarring affect it has on the spectator. Suddenly, one is aware (if
only for a moment) that the film is material. Perception and affection, "alloy" themselves together (Bergson, 58) and this alloy relates to matter and soul entwined. Similar to Bergson, Deleuze suggests that one is "forever unfolding between two folds, and if to perceive means to unfold, then [one is] forever perceiving within the folds." (93)

Additionally to folded sound and interchanging film stock, "Stalker" generates the labyrinth structurally (through the camera) which suggests an enfolded and unfolding of the surface between matter and soul. As outlined in the diagram below, the pathway towards "the room", takes on a spiral formation, for Stalker says in the actual story that he must lead the other two men into the room, taking the long way around, to avoid the dangers the zone creates. The arrows pointing towards the solid, spiral line indicate the actual positioning of the camera (front, back, or side shot) in relation to the pathway that the three men are taking. There are two loops departing from the spiral shape as well as a dotted line and they indicate where in the Zone, there was a deviation on the pathway to "the room". The spiral in this case is representative of the labyrinth, for even though it looks like a straightforward spiral, the camera deviates (indicated by the numerous points of view represented in the arrows from the diagram) and folds throughout the path, as if the camera itself is "pursu[ing]...the labyrinthine paths of experience and thought." (Perniola, 7)

The labyrinth also suggests connectedness and an infinite of folds. It has no eventual point: only more folds like "caverns within caverns." (Deleuze, 6) Despite the characters' eventual goal to reach "the room," that goal is to purge their innermost desire to be granted. This seems to imply a deeper spiraling into the soul. Within the film, the enfolded path (i.e. labyrinth) is like the "fertile seed" as suggested by Deleuze, who further says, "[l]ife is not only everywhere, but souls are everywhere in matter." (11) The labyrinth enfolds matter and soul:
matter through tunneling and soul through the tunneller. The positioning of the camera not only tunnels in (the film gets darker within The Zone, with every subsequent shot) and contains the film and characters (as they close in on the room, the spaces themselves get darker), but it includes the spectator through its structure and selection of images. This connects spectator with camera, and camera with the film/characters, which are all images that were selected from the "aggregate of images" (Bergson, 18) The labyrinth indicates an interconnectedness between viewer, camera, and character and this is demonstrated through its enfolding and unfolding of space and time; perception and affection. (Bergson, 55-8)

![Diagram of spiral pathway and positioning of camera in "Stalker"

The enfoldment of the universe in cinema and the enfolding of matter and soul through the single, folded surface exemplifies Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Stalker." He makes careful use
of sound, interchanging film stock and the labyrinth created diegetically and cinematically. 

Sound in this film captures from both the "outside" world and the "inside" world of the diegesis. Interchanging film stock, likewise, points to the plenum of the in-between moments. Finally (but certainly not lastly), the labyrinthine path enfolds spatially and unfolds temporally, from the universe of images. Picking up the thread of interconnected monads inherent within the folded surface, cinema interweaves and connects the spectator with the camera, the camera with the characters, and the characters unfold and enfold images from the universe. The surface between matter and soul is a folded and unfolding plenum of infinite monads. Additionally, soul and matter enfold into each other within this film, and by teasing out the formal elements within this film as a way to tease out a monadic and interconnected cinema, I hope to show that the world is connected through one large, folded surface and cinema is one way to show foldedness. Materiality and spirituality enfold and unfold within this film, at the films surface as well as the affective surface of the spectator: the monad.
Works Cited


