

Title (on screen): *Charles de Brontes, Paris, 4 June 2014*

Dr. Louise Milne: LM (00:11) Good, right. If you could just introduce yourself?
(00:17)

(00:14) *Charles' chair creaks loudly.*

Charles de Brontes: CB (00:17) So I'm Charles de Brontes. I'm responsible of the Tarkovsky Institute in Paris. I work in close collaboration with – I usually work in close collaboration with Larisa Tarkovsky, after the death of Andrei, and with a team of people in France, and now I work in close collaboration with Andrei Andoushka who lives in – who's based in Florence.

So we have mainly worked on – on the life of the – of the work of Tarkovsky – meaning trying to have all his writings – put in to books – greeting people who make some research about his work – helping other people make retrospectives or exhibitions – I mean all sorts of – all sorts of projects – and we have also created what we call 'The Friends of the Tarkovsky Institute' – which help the projects of the Institute – meaning that other group I created bring people and some – some means for the project we have.

So that's about now three years that he – he left us, but we try to keep the candle – the candle litten*, and – and as you see we just re-published the French *Sculpting in Time* which was out of sale -

*(01:44) *Charles retrieves a book from where it sits face up on the desk and holds it up toward Louise, and Sean behind the camera.*

- since three or four years now – we been working on the – on the diary to have it also put in – back in to French – and – what's quite interesting is we have a - Tarkovsky inspires many – many people, as you know, writers, film-makers, dancers, etcetera, and we are just now * - oh, sorry – we are organising what you call 'de Festivale des Arts Sacrés d'Andrei Tarkovsky' in Avignon – this July-

*(02:06) *Charles leaves rotating chair to reach for something out of camera. There is a "bang" while he returns to his seat holding what then appears to be a poster/flyer print for de festivale.*

- for the first time. These are new people, they know, which we're working with the **Institute Gorgovski** in Poland – and they are trying – well with going back to the idea of Andrei – he has written that in his diary too – he had a dream which was to – to create some kind of an 'academy' meaning - buy a village – buy houses somewhere in Italy – to have a place where artists could come work, where he could teach eventually, as he taught already in Moscow – and where artists could express himself – themselves, sorry – but in a special spirit – so that idea, which I have to these new people inspired them very strongly to make – to try and make 'residencies' – so they have – they are 'artists in residence' in **Abin du Portignet** in Bourgoin – and what they have been working on will be shown in Avignon, in July, for a week, and also in **Portignet**, end of July this year also.

So, just to say – just to show that – his films – his writings are still – still quite alive.
(03:46)

LM (03:47) That's fantastic. That's fantastic – Oh – I hope we can go.

(03:52) Louise takes flyer/poster for 'de festivale' from Charles and looks at it.

LM (03:53) So how did you yourself become involved with Tarkovsky? Did you meet him? (03:58)

CB (03:59) Yeah so I was in the milieu of writing and documentary films – and it happened I had just finished the translation from English to French a book called – *The Marriage of East and West*, Bede Griffiths, English monk living in India for thirty years – I had just finished that translation – I had seen the *Stalker* – and a friend of mine in a publishing home – house – in Paris told me well we should try and have – to put in to French – the *Sculpting in Time*, which I discovered myself in Munich through a friend of mine – and I brought that book to that French publisher – and that's the way I was very fascinated to know what he thought – what he said – after having seen his first film *Stalker* – so that project very concretely brought me to meet him.

(05:09) Muffled agreement from Louise.

In Stockholm for the contract – and there it started like that – I mean he – he was very, very kind to me because – the meeting was organised by a lady from Berlin – in fact it was not organised – but I didn't know that so I just arrived like that, and he was very astonished: was there also – **Mikhailovsky was there also** – but we had a short talk – and he said well 'I'm sorry – I'm not – I just didn't know – but come back on Monday' – so I went off for the weekend – I went – I went cycling around the Gotland, hoping and hoping a lot, that he would – and on Monday I went back to see him – and he said 'Okay I signed the contract for you – with you' – so he was very kind and – something started there – he gave me some confidence – some trust I mean – and we had the book made by **Ann Kishalov (06:10) – translator** – I – I worked a lot with her for the French – because I knew pretty well the film – to help her also to make the best nook possible – and that's how I started to publish all the Tarkovsky books – in all the languages – around the world from – from Paris – and with **Andrei (06:36)** in Florence after – and it happened that I went to meet him then in **Remeny** in a meeting * - in August eighty... eighty-five – and – and then we learnt

**(06:47) Noise of Charles scratching his chin*

that he was sick so it happened that I – he asked me to take in charge of the Tarkovsky committee – to have his son and his mother-in-law to get out of Moscow, so that happened when they were pretty sure he was really sick, so the Russians gave them the "green light" – so then I met all the family. I was quite close with them anyway – they were very, very – they were famous people but very lonely people – so I tried my best you know to have their family – I knew the wife, the grandmother, the daughter, the dog* - everybody – they came to my place in the country – and I just tried to help for them to be comfortable for one year.*

*(07:41 + 07:49) LM nods and murmurs agreements

And then we created that Institute, you see – so since I've been working on – on that which ...*

*(08:00) CB noises of hesitation

- on those films and that man for me is very very important actually because his way of wedding – marrying – poetry and spirituality and a lot of genius in a very unique way – it's so seldom – that it's worthwhile giving a good part of your life to – for that, huh? (08:27)

LM (08:30) He is, I think like – ah – Robert Bresson – he's one of the great auteurs who is also a theorist –

CB (08:38) Right -

LM (continues) -of cinema.

CB (08:40) - So I brought – I went to see Robert Bresson – I – I brought Robert Bresson in the room of Andrei – and so they met once in eight-three in Cannes for *Nostalghia* but it happened that I knew Bresson through a friend of mine so _ I proposed him to – I told him Andrei wanted to meet him – so okay, I go – so I met – I saw how they met – that was very – Andrei was in bed – they had a small chat together – was very, very impressive – and as you know his book is very important: *Cinematographe – Notes de Cinematographe* – and as you say I think Sheen Martin in your book (09:37) *Sculpting in Time* has become a cult book. As strong as *Notes de Cinematographe* – very strong – two important books for all sorts of artists in fact, yeah. (09:38)

LM (09:40) Yes. So you know – who – that I've felt – we're particularly interested in dreams – and the way that Tarkovsky uses dreams in his work – could you tell us a bit perhaps what strikes you maybe as – you know – everyone who looks at Tarkovsky's films feels that they are on a different level – that there is some other dimensions of time that is being – not revealed precisely but intonated – could you say something about his style and what might be oneiric about that? (10:30)

CB (10:35) I will just say two things. The first is that – he – as he said somewhere o you have the impression that he sees life, he sees light, he sees the time going-by, from somewhere else, it's a very – it's not necessarily from his eyes – it's not necessarily from your eyes – but from another eye, you see, like a third eye, so that's – that gives him some, naturally, distance, and height, and so on, naturally it's also the privilege of film-makers to have that kind of vision – but he had a – that – that vision in a very, once more we'll say: spiritual way, putting another dimensions you see, something from high, something you see from the sky – that's one thing I will say – he – as if he was living and seeing what was going-on from the sky. And second, my big regret, was he asked me once 'Charles please bring me quickly tape recorders – that night I feel like speaking' – it was a few weeks before his death you see – so I don't know why but I didn't take it very seriously – I thought it was just a "caprice" you know, just – he was – it looked – everything was so important you

know all his medicine and all everybody was there so – and I was wondering ‘Why are you asking to me?’ I mean his wife was there. And then she told me ‘You know Charles’, she told me, ‘he said so amazing things at night you see’ – so my big regret was not to tape his dreams as I know that’s what’s interesting for you – I didn’t tape what he – what went through his mind, you see, on the Bible – because he had a Bible on the in his reading – and all other things was addressed-to – yeah that’s a big regret about dreams, I’m sure it would’ve been – so it lets you – it could leave you just to imagine what how interesting it would’ve been. I just wanted to say that. (13:00)

LM (13:00) Do you think he was dreaming a lot at the end?

CB (13:03) Yeah

LM (13:03) Yeah

CB (13:05) Well the biggest dream was probably because of drugs because naturally, poor chap, he was awfully suffering, yelling, very difficult and he was on the morphine – so you could imagine what such a man could see from morphine o you could imagine – such a poet – **visionary** – I could let you imagine. (13:33)

LM (13:36) He did do – he did dream – this is a question that I’ve been asking various people – the central dream in his last film is about nuclear war.

(13:51) CM hums agreement.

- Is about in particular – the – the kind of nuclear I think that a lot of people feared in the – the post-war period, and during the cold war in particular. And Tarkovsky writes in his journals about this dream that he had much earlier – about nuclear wars – and he put that dream in to *The Sacrifice* – and I was just curious about this because it’s a dream that I had – it’s a dream I think that lots of people in the West had – a collective dream almost, for obvious reasons, for historical reasons – but the Russians don’t – don’t seem to see it that way – they were not so afraid of nuclear war at that time – maybe they had closer things to be afraid of – I just wondered what you – there is a sense in which Tarkovsky’s films express the on-going trauma of the war. There’s war in all of the films. I mean he starts with *Ivan’s Childhood* and he ends with *The Armaggedon*

CM (15:15) – right, uhuhm

LM (15:15 – continues) - and then in *Mirror*, in *Circular* he includes these sequences – I was just wondering if you could perhaps address that idea about the on-going impact of the war? (15:31)

CM (15:31) We don’t – we forget – especially today how much that nuclear risk was huge on the – between the – both sides – and the – I’m not really sure the Soviets were less frightened from nuclear war than were the Western people – but that was very strong, I mean I remember in eighty-six when I was over there, at one tie I was struck there making a documentary film and suddenly I thought, wow, I’m on their side, if ever – because I was seeing planes – it was very strong tensions and I was

kind of stuck on the other side of the curtain – that was very strong yeah. No but I think it was something permanent here, permanent, and also it was an argument of the Soviets naturally – we made war, we won the war against Hitler, and now the awful Western people want to naturally crush us, so it was naturally a daily argument for them to keep power, but it was also very true here also there was that risk, I mean it was very strong in my youth, I remember. I think for Tarkovsky's way also to put – to go-on to the limits – to put people to put everybody on the limits of life and death – seeing the risk is there – the risk is there – the risk of disappearing – so what to do with that, what to do?* – So in *Sacrifice* he gives one's answer – answer, yeah – just

(17:26) *there is a yell or call from outside*

don't move – stay where you are, etcetera, you know the film. But that indeed inspired all his work – to such an extent that some people find this some kind of repetition a little bit between *Stalker*, *Nostalghia*, and *Sacrifice* – and I know about those critics, I know, but don't forget that – okay – that his other film was Hamlet, was also Anthony, so it was starting the other – the other – he always said it was a trilogy: *Stalker*, *Nostalghia*, and *Sacrifice*, was a progression towards no more music – only one shot, etcetera, but then he was probably going to start something else, with a lot of sufferance, because it – he had to change, I mean, he was living in the West, I'm sure it wouldn't have been very easy for him at all – to make – to go on with his new projects but just to come back to the – that nuclear atmosphere, I think it was very very vital to his – it explains a lot, yeah, and gives him... (18:51)

(18:51) *Louise looks at camera*

LM (18:57) Great. That's excellent. Wonderful.

CB (18:59) Yeah. Yeah.

LM (19:04) Um, just a couple more questions

() Charles hums agreement, his chair creaks

LM (19:07) I wanted to ask about – what was the first – with *Stalker* - what was the first Tarkovsky film you saw?

CB (19:13) *Stalker*

LM (19:14) It was *Stalker*?

CB (19:14) Yeah it was *Stalker*, yeah

LM (19:16) – And you –

CB (19:16) – And then we were all waiting for *Nostalghia*, it wasn't coming – we were all very... The first thing that shocked me was shocked me was the way *ici* to come back to spirit how he shot – how he shot – leaves and branches you see, moving, only that, I was just very impressed by the way the branches with their leaves had some kind of independent life you see – and a human life – so that I said wow that's one

chap he managed to – to – to shoot what we call the wind of the spirit, for me that was... (20:00)

LM (20:00) Genius Locii

CB (20:01) – Yeah –

LM (20:02) – Yes. **Youssef** told us that he was –

CB (20:05) – Sorry?

LM (20:05) – **Vladimir Youssef**

CB (20:07) – Yeah –

LM (20:07) – Told us that Tarkovsky was always looking for ways of introducing * something moving, silently, water, wind, curtains, things like that.

**(20:11) Louise gestures and refers to the sycamore outside the window.*

(20:14) Soft singing from outside.

CB (20:16) Uh-uh, yeah yeah yeah... (20:22) Yes, kind of catch the rhythm of life or something...(20:25) *

**Un-audible murmuring until (20:28)*

LM (20:29) Um. Okay. So and your final question really is – what is your favourite sequence in Tarkovsky's films, what are you – what is there? – the scene or the film in particular that made the deepest impression on you if you had to pick one (20:50)

(20:52) Charles, un-audible noises of hesitation.

CB (20:56) For me it would probably be the final shot of *Stalker* probably, yeah... that little I would say just that – just that look at the eyes of that little girl – just that you see, yeah... just that- the way he manages to stop, you see, to stop on that head and have it slowly moving and have those – the invisible strength of those two eyes – having them being strong – and strong enough to glasses which is just an image naturally – Um – that would probably be -

LM (21:46) – Twisting the world in to the future.

CB (21:48) Right.

Sean Martin (“SM”) (21:50) * That was – that just reminded me that I think Tarkovsky based that final shot on some footage of a psychic – did you know that story? – of the um –

**(21:50) Charles and Louise look up in to the camera.*

CB (21:59) Yeah

SM (22:00) The filmmaker was called Edward Namold.

(22:02) Chares points at the camera: at Sean

CB (22:02) Yes you told me, I think I read it also in your book, or in the – yeah yeah could be. (22:08)

SM (22:07) Well I just wondered – I’ve seen some of that footage on the internet where she’s got things on a table underneath a plastic box with scientists surrounding her, I just wondered if we – if you could say something about Tarkovsky – how interested was Tarkovsky in the so-called “supernatural”? (22:22)

(22:22) Charles pauses, and shifts on chair

LM (22:23) That’s a good question.

CB (22:25) Well – he says very often in his diary that he is very much interested in para – paranormal experiences – yeah – that he writes this very closely – then the *Sacrifice* is full of that. Then to go back to his diary he says how he was moving tables and how the voice of Parsonac * - towards the end that he would only make seven films and I think once more that he was very much aware of all – very much interested in all sorts of kind – all sorts of spiritual – signs – you see those spiritual signs could come from anywhere, naturally, from animals, from people, from nature, from inside also, so he was Christian, he was a poet – that was, more than all he was a very free man – a free man – and a huge poet – so that all that together, to say once more, he was very unique, and he was, that goes back to your question – how did he see life go by? You see – he was o he always tried to catch something un-normal, something special – yeah – so very interesting – I went with him from the hospital to his home by taxi and he told me ‘Look Charles’, to those – from **Cheuren to Nouvelle** from the highway, very you know, very banal, saying look at those clouds, look at those lights, he was just looking at the light, you know, light in Paris is but a sky – clouds – clouds and lights in Paris – very very impressive – suddenly I saw things different you see – I thought ... (24:40) ... I saw somewhere that **he learned Christoph how to look at raindrops** falling in the film of Tarkovsky – true also – suddenly you look at drops falling in a very different way because as very fundamentally he says – you have in drops you know the whole world could be reflected in one single drop, it was very fundamental for him also. * - So, these are just little tricks.

* (25:13) Some noises outside.

LM (25:16) It’s a good story.

(25:20) Both Charles and Louise look up in to camera: at Sean. There is noise outside. There is broken conversation between Charles, Louise, and Sean and Louise gestures, referring back to the poster for ‘Le Festival’ –

CB (25:37) Well if you came to Avignon in July you will see many

LM (25:41) – Yes – yes –

CB (25:41) – people are crazy about Tarkovsky

LM (25:45) That’s a good idea

SM (25:45) Shall we – did we cover? – I mean could – do you know why Tarkovsky has this sort of appeal to many people in different media? – You mentioned the dancers and writers and so-on – so he doesn’t just inspire other filmmakers.

CB (26:00) No, you're right, yeah. Um, well very basically I think for two reasons – once I think his book has moved a lot – so just by reading the book because he speaks not only about cinema, he speaks about art and life – so very important – and second, because he – he's very much based on the inside life – so when you are very aware that there is – first – that there is an inside life, "vie interior", which people don't believe, that vie interior does exist, and that he speaks about it in a very convincing way, so then it touch everybody, you could touch a child, a sweeper, you could touch a dancer – you could touch anybody – you get in touch with anybody in that case – I believe so. (27:08)

LM (27:11) Excellent. Excellent.

SM (27:12) Great.

LM (27:15) Thank you – so – thank you. That was just perfect Charles

(27:17/18) Cut. Change of light. Charles more obscured in darkness.

LM (27:19) The – it's weird, now, isn't it, asking the Russians about the cold war – I assumed they would be as worried – as we were.

CB (27:30) Hmmm – but you think you're not

LM (27:31) I think they're not

CB (27:32) Today or before?

LM (27:32) No-no, before, before

CB (27:34) Before? Oh really

LM (27:35) I thought they would be – I thought it would be parallel – on either side

CB (27:38) That's interesting

LM (27:38) – and when I asked...

CB (27:40) – why do you say that?

LM (27:44) – well I asked Dmitri about this –

CB (27:45) I understand what you mean they had other problems okay but yeah but it's a very strong argument... and all the bunkers they had

LM (27:51) he said - I think what he...

CB (27:55) I mean all Moscow was a huge bunker I mean – we didn't have that – but they had it there were secret cities, secret bunkers (28:06)

(28:06) Charles, noises of hesitation (28:11)

CB (28:11) For me it's a miracle that they never did push on the button or anything

LM (27:14) Well we were all praying...

CB (27:15) For once I would, for once I would say thanks Americans, I mean, I don't say it often, but I means, because when you see how crazy the Russians are when

they drink, or when they – they could get absolutely – they were cut-off – they were cut from the reality – so they could have the sooner you know – we are – it's a miracle nothing happened – that no – no – no nuclear missile went away (28:43)

LM (28:44) Do you remember the alerts that were set-off by birds?

CB (28:48) Yeah

LM (28:49) Mistakes

CB (28:50) Yeah yeah yeah

LM (28:50) The idea was it might just be an accident after all that

CB (28:55) Yeah yeah yeah yeah

LM (28:57) I remember reading about it – ah! But did – well – our friend Dmitri

CB (29:03) But all that was ideology that was ideology now

LM (29:06) Yeah

CB (29:07) But I know, I knew a man very well who had a place in the French government who told me there's absolutely no risk of war – all that was just a matter of putting the two systems one against the other you see, just to make people frightened (29:20)

LM (29:20) – Bluff –

CB (29:21) – Yes but – people are stupid – I mean are they like going to push a button and get killed in three seconds, I mean – so all that – it was a lot a matter of tension – to for – to justify budgets – to justify arms – to justify etcetera – which is probably also true. The Americans need someone to engage them, to fight, and the Soviets also, needed that probably to keep in power, to keep the people crushed -also that's something – tension yeah. He told me you know – for, how to paralyse France – one bomb – you need one bomb about three thousand metres above France; only one – it wouldn't kill anybody – but that's enough to paralyse the whole country for months and months and months – because it craps everything – all – incracité, all computers – everything's finished – so you're – you're stuck – oh gosh, terrifying (30:23)

LM (30:28) It was very terrifying. And –

CB (30:30) Sorry I cut you; you were saying something

LM (30:31) No, no, the Russians seem to – the Russians now, the people we spoke to in Moscow

CB (30:40) Oh yeah

LM (30:41) They took the view that because they, the Russians, had experienced the real war to a much greater extent that say the Americans or even the British

CB (30:54) – absolutely

LM (30:55) Um they said that this – the reality of the war, of the real war was more oppressive, on-going – in an on-going way, its continuing ripples were more – were stronger than the fear of the future war – right – and in this sense you see, Tarkovsky was Western, because he dreamed of the future war, in the same way that we did (31:26)

SM (30:29) He said something interesting in his talk in London about the apocalypse

CB (31:33) Yeah right –

SM (31:35) The apocalypse is general and that could be the – you know – the second war – the greater patriotic war had nuclear war was but it's also – for him as a personal – on a personal or a vie interior level it was a catalyst for change. That if I understand hi correctly that it was – you've got this threat of annihilation so that could actually be something positive if it improves your fight –

CB (32:01) Yeah yeah yeah you're right. He used to take the catastrophe as the reason to change, that's the end of the book, I mean, we're all going straight in to the war, we need to change – yeah – so it was probably the same kind of argument yeah. (32:20)

(?) *Microphone rustling as Charles rubs his shirt.*

LM (32:29) That's it. Yes, that's great. That's really useful. (?)