

Interview with Evgeny Tsybal

Moscow

05.09.2012

Translated from English by Alexandra Ovtchinnikova

Notes:

Text that was originally in English.

(Text that was added by translator)

- 00.31 I will talk in short sections so that it will be easier for you to translate.
- 00.39 - 00.54 My name is Tsybal Evgeny Vasiljevich. I was born on 1948 in Yeysk, Krasnodar region. It is relatively far from here, about 1200 km to the south.
- 00.55 – 01.56 Tarkovsky was not the one who got me to work on *Stalker*, it was the producer of the film. As a matter of fact before *Stalker* I was working with Ryazanov, and before him I worked for Larisa Shepitko. She is a very good director. She made a very complex film that is called *The Ascent*. The team that worked on this film was very good. After *The Ascent* Shepitko made a very good promotion for me. I was assigned straight away to Ryazanov. The team that was working with Shepitko was going through the post production and then moved straight to the preproduction for Tarkovsky's film. During this time I managed to make one more film with Ryazanov *Office Romance*.
- 01.57 – 02.39 Therefore, I was a member of a team that begun to work with Tarkovsky. Hence, I got to know him while working on the film. Initially he treated me with suspicion and mistrust, as he did all the people who worked for him for the first time. But after that our relationship got better. And when *Stalker* was closed down and nobody knew when the project will be reopened Tarkovsky said to me: `I hope you will not abandon me`. I answered: `No, of course`.
- 02.41 - 03.16 Well, it is commonly accepted that there was the first *Stalker* and the second *Stalker*. I would say that there were three *Stalkers*, because there was one team that worked on the first version, then there was another team that worked on the second version, and then the film was closed down, and after a couple of months, well, practically half a year it was reopened and the third team begun to work on it. This third team brought to the completion what Tarkovsky had in mind.
- 03.18 - 03.50 From the beginning till the end of the production there was one serious metamorphosis in *Stalker*. The image of the Stalker (protagonist) has changed drastically. The rest of the characters remained practically unchanged, Professor and Teacher (Note: that's Evgeny's mistake). Stalker changed completely because he became a polar opposite to the character he was in the first version of the screenplay.
- 03.51 - 04.43 He used to be a man of action. He was rather....With criminal habits. He would hit them (other characters). He was a harsh and a cruel man. And I believe Tarkovsky did not know what to do with such a character. With a harsh, resolute man. Because if you look at all of the films by Tarkovsky, Tarkovsky's protagonist is always a sickly, reflective, indecisive and suffering man. Actually, to a great extend he has attributed to each of his characters his personal characteristics. To each of his protagonists.
- 04.45 **It was his own attitudes, his own complexes, and so on.**
- 04.55 – 05.44 Well, it is a well known fact that he did not want to work on this film. Initially, He wanted to work on *The Idiot* or *Hamlet*, or on something about Dostoevsky. Therefore, when he was working on *Stalker* and was in the middle of the production process, he was paying much more attention to the play he was working on at the same time, it

was *Hamlet*, than to the *Stalker* itself. Human mind has inertia that does not let one immediately switch from Dostoyevsky, from Prince Myshkin, from Hamlet to the man of action. It is very difficult.

- 05.46 – 06.50 Furthermore, I believe that Tarkovsky considered himself to be akin to Hamlet and Prince Myshkin rather than to a man of action. Though, during the production process he was very energetic and constructive. And filmed very fast. But only when he knew exactly what he wanted. However, he did not know what he wanted *Stalker* to be like, he was studying him for the whole first year. It was a method of trial and error. He tried to pinpoint what he wanted him to be like. Of course he did not want and could not admit it; therefore he used all kinds of external obstacles and excuses to justify his inner uncertainty. That is why a lot of people have been changed during the production of this film. And that there were so many changes.
- 06.51 It is very well depicted in the film *Rerberg and Tarkovsky* by Igor Maiboroda.
- 07.07 - 08.14 No, all the dreams are *Stalker's* dreams. It is not there. All the dreams are *Stalker's* , hundred percent. Because Tarkovsky needed Writer and Professor to act like mirrors that provided a better view of the *Stalker*. Therefore, their inner world was of little interest to him. He was happy with them from the beginning and their images have changed only slightly. Mainly, due to the fact that *Stalker* has changed drastically, some of their lines were altered but their personalities remained unchanged. With regards to the visual solutions, all three directors of photography worked in a same style. Of course every one of them had something unique, but in general all three directors of photography were shooting the same film. But Tarkovsky made different films.
- 08.16 – 09.49 It was very interesting to work with Tarkovsky when we did this panorama. Because he did not say what must be in there. There were objects that he liked which he asked to include in it. The metal boxes that were used for boiling medical equipment, he really liked these metal-nickel boxes. Syringes, needles...Some fuzz in the air. Otherwise, when we were working he said: `I want it to be a kind of history of mankind and the present at the same time. And that it would be alarming, fearful and a little bit disgusting`. And we tried to do it ourselves. Initially I wanted to include some Bruegel and Cranach, and Tarkovsky liked the idea. But I could not find them. I found Van Dyke. He said: `Well, put Van Dyke then`. I thought that Van Dyke is not inferior to Brugel or Cranach. There is also a tree by Rembrandt, three threes.
- 09.51 – 10.59 And present at the same time. And he left a lot of space for creativity. But since we worked with Tarkovsky we wanted to do our best. And we spent four or five days on it (on panorama). We were arranging readymade objects into something he wanted, the feeling he wanted. And when it was ready he looked at it and liked it very much. He walked around it for a while and then said: `And now go and catch a little frog, and once we will approach it with panorama, release it into the water`. And when we did so during the rehearsals it was absolutely ingenious, because it (the frog) looked like a living soul, small, defenseless and touching, swimming through this monstrous and fearsome world.

- 11.00 - 11.40 **It was as human being.** But, but, but sadly once we turned on the lights the frogs would swim away with such speed that the camera could not catch them. We have wasted probably five hours battling with these frogs. Then he (Tarkovsky) said: `To hell with them, lets film without the frogs`. If at that time there was a more sensitive filmstock the shot would have been much better, I think...
- 11.41 - 11.40 It was shot at the Mosfilm pavilion. There was a set that had an inbuilt rain installation. You remember the shot when they are sitting there and talking? The rain starts, then gets heavier, then calms down, but the drops are still dripping. Before that Professor has disassemble the bomb and threw it away. And in many respects we return to the world he saw in his dream, but now it is a reality. The world from back then has arrived, it is here. It is dirty, it is scary, but now it also has bombs lying around. I assembled it afterwards...
- 12.43 - 13.58 (About the war) Well, I think it is present in all of his films. It was, of course, a very powerful presence that he had inside. I think it was something that all the children of that time had. The children that went through war. I think it is quite hard for foreigners to imagine the place that the war had occupied in the psychology and world perception of the Russian people. I mean there were 30 million less men than women. The surviving men were often crippled. When I was small I remember I saw a lot of crippled. Well, you know the trauma you are talking about was part of everyone's life; it was part of the whole country. Tarkovsky's father, as well, left for the war, and returned an invalid. After the war there was fear in both Russia and the West, though different kind of fear.
- 14.00 – 14.31 And I think...I believe, perhaps I am wrong, I don't know, I am not a Western man. I think that in the West the fear of the Nuclear War has been metaphysical, it was a fear of annihilation. In Russia it was a different kind of fear. It was a fear of poverty, fear of pain, fear of losing people close to you. It was a more personal fear so to speak.
- 14.32 – 15.15 Well, you know, firstly, because Tarkovsky was a war child. He has survived the war, it was part of his life, and it was part of his childhood. And he lost his father several times. The first time when his father left them. The second time when he left for war. The third time when he has returned wounded from the war. I think it is a kind of obsessive dream that has repeatedly visited Tarkovsky himself. He loved his father very much and wanted him to return to them.
- 15.16 - 16.02 For example, I remember that during my childhood there were a lot of boys who had crippled fathers or had no fathers at all. The boys who had healthy fathers, wholesome fathers were very proud of that fact. In his case his father returned from the war, but not to them. In a way they have lost him once more. Furthermore, he was wounded and lost his leg. Therefore, he had not returned and at the same time he had returned, and he was not wholesome even though he could function more or less normally.
- 16.02 - 16.52 (About Tarkovsky's Mother) His mother was very much a literal woman. His father left her when she was still young and beautiful. And she could definitely remarry. I think she was not overlooked by man. But she chose her own destiny. She served not so

much her husband, but his image. It was an image of the beloved. And she served him like a nun, like a female character from the Russian novels of the 19th century. She never remarried.

- 16.52 I don't think it was a play with the archetypes as much as it was a kind of wandering in the personal complexes.
- 17.03 - 17.53 (About the reactions that *Stalker* got) Intellectual audience has received the film with delight. However, the mass audience did not. They simply did not understand it. They thought that it was a slow, muddy and vague film. They could not understand the problems the film talked about. His most successful film was *Solaris*. If I am not mistaken 14 million people have seen it. At the time it was probably seven-eight percent of the country's population. But I believe this number was achieved due to the efforts of the intellectuals. The efforts of students. I saw the film seven times, for example.
- 17.54 - 20.06 (About Tarkovsky and the magical, unexplainable) Well, at the time Tarkovsky was fascinated by the sort of, I would say, mysterious things. There was a famous woman in the 60s, Rosa Kuleshova. She is considered to be the first one to have claimed to see colours with her fingertips. Later psychologist and physiologists begun to work with this, conducting experiments on the transmission of the thoughts, and some sort of emotional state over the distance. All these things were, of course, classified, but Tarkovsky had a big, let's say, desire to know about them. As a matter of fact he had a peculiar combination of the intellectual, scientific world view, and some sort of superstition and fear almost of the medieval kind. For example, when we were filming...Oh, forgive me. When we were filming *Stalker* in Estonia there was an article in a newspaper about some ufos (unidentified flying objects) flying somewhere nearby. Tarkovsky got very excited after hearing this information. And he was...The weather was sunny, so we could not film. So this discussion (about ufos) has continued for the next two-three hours. He mentioned two scientists, their surnames, who were reading lectures about ufos, and other miracles like circles on the fields, around the same time. So he wanted to find this lectures. To listen to them. So the sound designer found them, and when we could not film due to the weather, when it was sunny, we were listening to these lectures, for two or three days.
- 20.07 - 21.34 These lectures were forbidden, but they were destributed around on the tape recordings. There were, and there were a couple of people around Tarkovsky who cultivated and fueled such interests in him. I also remember how, even before the filming begun we were watching films of such kind at Mosfilm. They were amateur and scientific films but they were rather curious. Though, I think there were funny things as well. For example, supposedly there was a Scottish sailor who could create images on the film with the power of his will. They were not photographs. He had a hat and the photo camera was attached here (on the forehead) with the lens facing his forehead. Tight. And he did it like this. Firstly, he drank 12 glasses of beer, after that he took the glass and did like so HOP! And supposedly some foggy images appeared on the film after that.

- 21.34-22.18 He would hold the glass in one hand and with the other he would hit the table. He had a very fierce face. It was funny. But some believed in such things, yes, yes, yes. I think yes. He (Tarkovsky) yearned for a miracle in life. He wanted miracles, manifestations of some sort of unknown, unfathomable processes. A proof that something unfathomable exists. I think it was a reflection of the dissatisfaction with the life as it was.
- 22.19 – 23.06 **I think his generation was not satisfied of very pragmatical, very ideological style of life. And his...** His course mate Vasily Shukshik in many of his short stories, searched for a celebration/festivity rather than miracles, or rather he called it differently. So, he searched for it not among the otherworldly but within our real life. I think this is characteristic of the whole generation. They wanted something unusual, something joyful. Something that gave an alternative perspective to the existence. I would put it that way.
- 23.18 - 25.34 (About the pressure from the state) Pressure? Yes. Of course he felt it. Absolutely. I think they were lucky that they begun their artistic careers during the Khrushchev's *Thaw*. Because it was the time when KGB was disoriented, ideology was not that oppressive as under Stalin. Only after Khrushchev was dismissed, after three or four years, the pressure resumed, gradually becoming more and more oppressive, and more and more nasty. Khrushchev was a very inconsistent man during that time. He did take action against the intelligence, but at the same time he exposed Stalin and gave some sort of freedom. Therefore, his repressions were not considered to be the state's policy but rather as inadequate reactions of the uncultured man. However, the overall trend and tendency was towards the *Thaw*, towards some sort of liberalism and greater acceptance. During the first years of Brezhnev's rule these gushes of the liberal wind remained, but gradually the Sinyavsky–Daniel trial and Iosif Brodsky's trial took place and so on and so forth. And it exposed itself fully during the Czechoslovakian *Thaw*, so to speak. During the Prague Spring. Starting from that moment methodological and persistent extrusion of any kind and sort of freedom has begun. Extrusion from the life and from the thought.
- 25.35 - 26.47 (About Tarkovsky's exile) Well, you know if one was to look for the general reason...There was not enough air in the country for him and for many others. From the public...The oxygen was pumped out from the public life. Starting from the early 70s, when the Jews begun to leave, when they were allowed to leave, a lot of people left. There was a proverb: `Jewish wife is not a luxury, but a source of transportation`. Not only Jews took advantage of this but a lot of actors, musicians and writers. There was a joke: `What is the difference between Bolshoy (Big) and Maly (Small) Theatres? Bolshoy theatre is the one going to America for the tour, and Maly is the one that returns`.
- 26.48 - 28.15 **It was a special kind of, little cynical, proverbs. Because many people from ballet, from musical not come back from tour. From the tour. Yes, yes, absolutely. And this...**This desire to leave behind the place where one was not allowed to breathe, was very strong during that time. And he (Tarkovsky) made an attempt to stay in Sweden, but got scared for the fate of his family, his son. In a way, inside himself he has already decided to stay, he left the hotel, he was absent for two or three days. But all these

time he was painfully in thought, and then at last returned to the hotel, and Soviet Union. Nobody knew about that. But I think this fear of staying, has lead him to accept his decision to move to the West legally.

- 28.16 And I think that his wife, of course, fueled this desire in him. She told him: `Do you see our life here? We are beggars. There, however, you are a respected director. There you are a star`.
- 28.30 - 30.15 Well, you know I would not like to talk about other films. My favorite films are *Stalker* and *Solaris*. Tarkovsky had a tendency to say after the release of his new film that all his previous work was so-so...It was not very good. The last film, however...! In *Stalker* my favorite part is the panorama because I made it with my own hands. And I also like the journey to the zone. I think that in the zone and at the beginning the film drags a bit. As a matter of fact, in *Stalker* the plot starts to develop after the 40th minute, and the film is 2 hours 40 minutes long. And of course I really like the moment when they leave the pub at the end of the film. When we see the girl moving against the monstrous, terrifying industrial landscape, thinking that she is walking, only to realize that she sits on Stalker's shoulders. The whole story about the girl. It is a story if Saint Kristopher, I need to research it in the internet, this story. I don't know it as well.
- 30.16 This is an international film festival. It is organized without the official support of the government. I am very proud of this prize.
- 30.27 - 31.48 (About the prop-bomb) I can unscrew it. Is the camera working? This is what Professor did. This is tab, as if there were numbers. This is for setting...Here everything was connected with wires. Yes in a way. I tried my best. It is a model but I consulted experienced experts about the way it should look. And then...I don't know if it will open...Also here...No. See, it is rusty. There was a detonator inside. You could blow up something with this bomb. Then Professor threw it around. I have somewhere all the paintings that where lying under the water. Luke the Evangelist from the Ghent Altarpiece. I need to look for it, I won't find it very quickly.
- 31.50 (About the cat) He is more interested in wires. Home is a place with a cat. He does not have a tail. It is the type of breed. Come, show us your tail. Where is your tail?