

00:00:03 – 00:00:10 :

Title (on screen), *Yuri Mechitov, 6 October 2014.*

* 00:11. Noises and broken conversation, incomprehensible...

Dr. Louise Milne: LM (00:20) I've got a super-8 camera (00:21)

Yuri Mechitov: YM (00:21) Ah! Super-8 (00:22)

LM (00:22) Yeah, yeah. SO we want to do some filming in – in that as well but we'll do that later there's no sound on that camera. (00:28)

Sean Martin: SM (00:29) OK. Well I'm ready, so - (00:30)

LM (00:30) OK brilliant, right. *

* Screen momentarily breaks-up in pixels.

LM So – um – so – I'll just start by asking you to introduce yourself, tell us who you are, your name, and maybe where you were born and how you came to meet Tarkovsky? – Parajanov? – a bit about yourself? (00:54)

YM (00:53)*

* inaudible speaking until 01:00

YM - Of course. I am Yuri Mechitov, I am a professional photographer, I was born in Tbilisi, Georgia, and yes – **as a rule... (?)** as a profession you know, I have no one to comment which, on films which I have photograph, exactly, but I live in a strange country like Georgia so everything happens. (01:21)

LM (01:22) So how did you come to meet Andrei Tarkovsky? (01:27)

YM (01:28) It happened before I knew Parajanov – before – Tarkovsky wrote to Georgia a film *Andrei Rublov* which was banned by Russian authorities, and it was on the shelf as they call it – but Georgia at this time, not today, sorry, but not today, was a country was a brother of republic, republic of Soviet Union, but was the smell of freedom over '60s you know – Tarkovsky brought his film to show to an audience and I remember very well it was an officer's house – we had by this time many movie theatres – by now of course only two multiplex, only two – and I remember very well what's a miracle was to see this film for us, for the audience – and so on and so on, but Tarkovsky took the floor. I don't remember exactly by now what he said – sorry, but I don't remember exact – but he took the floor and said some words about films and about audience – our audience we are always grateful and thankful and so-on and so-on and so-on – so the film was absolutely a shock for me – so it was in '70- I can't tell the exact date but I have to check uh this date, not to be... (02:56)

SM (02:56) Hold-on, sorry, sorry can we go from the top please I –

LM (03:04) - Oh - alright

SM (03:05) I'm sorry. My fault, um yeah

YM (03:10) This – you wise to operate this camera?

SM (03:13) No this is the audio recorder

YM (03:14) Ah – the recorder at the same time.

LM (03:22) Alright sorry we have to start again. Can you tell us then your full name? He didn't get that. (03:34)

YM (03:34) My name is Yuri Mechitov, I was born in Georgia in Tbilisi, by profession I am mining engineer but my hobby converted to my profession; by now I am professional photographer and amateur cinematographer also – I was always interested in cinema – and I can say that first my meeting with – when I first met Tarkovsky it was in '71, in '72 maybe (I can check it!) – and when he arrived and brought to us his film *Andrei Andrei Rublov* which was by this time banned by Soviet authorities – it was laid on the shelf – and so on – and he managed somehow to take this film to Tbilisi to show to us, and I remember very well the audience gathered – and absolutely no place was empty – and we admired this film – it was absolutely no fantastic – because he showed us Russia from a different angle – and we understood why he got great problems – it was another approach to – especially in those scenes when Tartars and Russian are all together invading the church and making everything which happens, it was shown in a very ugly way – of course Tarkovsky was a great man. But I wasn't a meeting with him – I go another meeting him at Parajanov's because – another great guy – but our – he was born in Tbilisi – and both of them are absolutely different persons but something was a kind of link existed between these great persons. I always think about – what kind of link was it? Because on one side Tarkovsky was very Christian, Orthodox Christian, and he was under constant repentance all this Christianity... Parajanov was absolutely free and he believed only in beauty, and beauty was his god and he – no other gods existed for him – but still they, I don't know, maybe this linke was a kind of responsibility to the glove, to humanity. I think this is the main link because this responsibility – this strive, this wish, desire to show the world which they possess in their bodies and their minds and they wanted to show this world, this unknown world to an unlimited number of persons – and this is really art. Art is a message. And you have something to say. And the both of them had something to say and really a lot of things to say. And that's why these persons were so close together – this degree of responsibility – this degree of... they were great humans – great humans – with no boundaries – and very different at the same time. (07:07)

LM (07:07) Would you say perhaps that it's an interest in the world of the imagination that they shared? Because they both make films which have visions, and moments of surrealism – they expand the world – they film things that are like dreams in some ways. (07:32)

YM (07:33) Yes of course I think that dreams occupied a fantastic part... Because it seems that _____ (?) (07:40) in one of his interviews said that we are going from childhood when we are not... from before when we are in a mother's place and so-on and so-on, and we are started from this place as an artist, you know. And that's why those people, because, and this Tarkovsky also (?) (08:07) says that from every childhood some stroke of imagination, some stroke of desires – and he – it was not – he was not able to keep it for him – it was impossible – that's why people of this kind are really artists you know everything is changed and we call artists the man who plays with – only plays with things, and organise something he can sell something and so-on and so-on – and I think that era of great art has gone, maybe the time will come * and such kind of people will appear on our planet and something really happens – they will be great changed maybe I wish such things will happen – in my life I witnesses really great persons and from this moment I have acquainted with their art and with them personally and I understand “what is it, art” and when I Talk to my students I always can say somewhere – “what is it, art” really, really, because now everything is – a lot of fakery exists – everything is changed – and people lost the starting point, lost the foundation, lost many things, due to the high pressure of - multi coloured region exists now – and there's no strong, not foundation we can call it, but it's of course it's a bad thing, because this civilization tell us, drives us only to consuming you know and not to think about and not to see about things completely about... (10:11)

* (08:47) Noises of baby crying.

LM (10:11) Superficial (10:12)

YM (10:12) Very superficial – and this persons they were two great different but great inside because they were deep inside many layers – beginning with childhood and before childhood. (10:23)

LM (10:25) So how did you meet Parajanov himself then? (10:29)

YM (20:29) Parajanov was released from prison you know in the last days of December '77 and he was banned from – he was banned to live in Kiev, and he work in Dovzhenko studios and also he – Moscow – were banned cities for him – so he came back to his native Tbilisi, it was '77, thirty-one of December, but I met him only in November '78 – because the rumours were spread that such great persons were out – but I had not seen his films at all, because you know there are hundreds of blockbusters like thirty but we call it in Soviet Union “second screen”, “second screen films” you know, it was tiny movie theatres and not for – some great ones – and no advertisement exactly existed and so I had even never heard about him you know and it was not really possible for these days to see his films, to know, so when I was acquainted with Parajanov I created a good portrait of him: he was absolutely crazy, when he saw it he said La Giaconda... exactly exists his writings La Giaconda, because he called himself La Giaconda (12:00) (??), it was fantastic success, by a little bit portrait photographer so it's normal for me to create a good portrait from the first glance and but it happens that some three, four years I was absolutely shocked by his figure but I hadn't seen his films and it happens that in '85 some six years later he

organised the screening, a showing, for us the film *Sayat Nova*, this *The Colour of Pomegranates*, and I remember it was a small, tiny movie in our old movie studio, film studio, that tiny maybe for some film editing, some hold for it, and people gathered, and when this *Sayat Nova* started it was absolutely shock for me – I was really shocked, especially was the camera, you know it's absolutely camera is standing on the tripod for ever, but moving inside is some great thing because Parajanov he used this wind machine * or something like that, you know remember there's a how these trees are – and this lady, this wool, and everything, everything * - and it was really shocked, of course I believed that Parajanov was a genius... because in every he's – moment, his activities, real activities where he served plates and organised tea for us and met people and so-on, in every moment you can confirm, we should confirm that he was a really great guy – in many aspects but, when I saw his film and afterwards only after his death I saw *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* in full, and it happened in Parajanov museum in Yerevan and I remember very well it was in VHS cassette and I saw it three times, three times in a day, because to see this, and I remember I was quarrelling with Sergei always because I was a camera man in any past, I always told Sergei, 'Sergei you started big film director – became big film director due to the Mr. Illienko who was your cinematographer, who was your camera man, who was your photographer, because from '68 – from '65 – film was released, started your career exactly, because you spent fifteen years in your Dovzhenko studios and made no shadow.' Haha. No masterpiece. Of course some receptions, some are still trying to see some – some plants – some – uh (14:54)

* (13:05 - 17) Explanatory hand gestures.

LM (14:54) Seeds (14:55)

YM (14:55) - Seeds of future Parajanov but it's very difficult to find out. But from this film, and I believe really because it's Illienko's eyes, and he ended really badly, was strong Ukrainian nationalist and created his last film **Mosepa a strong anti-Russian film (15:16) (?)** as it happens in Ukrainian, strange country, so... but I believe this meeting with Illienko was absolutely **fatalmitik (15:28) (?)** which show Parajanov the possibilities of visual art, because of course he possess some great things from childhood – he lived in fantastic city – in Tbilisi – in theatre, yeah, because Tbilisi even by now is a non-stopping theatre and from by this time it was really theatre – and I remember this – a little but by twenty years I am younger by Parajanov but I still managed to see real Tbilisi which was a carnival city, a real carnival city, and of course Parajanov's real genius which was in slipping, slipping, the state, which was bashed out, Parajanov became a master, he became a master, because I don't know, it was this Illienko, and you know this *The Shadows of...* I told Sergei, this *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, this *Sayat Nova* you made contrary to Illienko, you wanted to call films the whole world that no moving camera of Illienko made you genius. Haha! Genius from him – and that's why he organise still-miniatures like Armenian was – and how it happens you know this film in Armenian studio because Kiev frescos which was the first blow to his creative vision, they burned it, he started it in '65, it was twenty years of ending battle over Nazi, and he wanted to organise a film a little bit of another look, another – he go away from standard – perception of

this very popular military thing – he wanted to know – to make it in fresh look, but nobody understood it – that’s why they banned it and he returned to Tbilisi in very bad state but he met our – his friend of his childhood, Butsa Djorbenadze, Victor Djorbenadze who was a fantastic architect and many of his buildings are all over Georgia, and he said him, let’s go to Armenia and he showed him all this castles, everything, everything, Parajanov was shocked and the idea to create film about Sayat Nova started from this defeat in the Ukraine. The first blow, and then there were other blows because he was censored for absolutely fake reasons. (18:26)

LM (18:30) So how did – could you tell us what you know about how Tarkovsky and how Parajanov met? (18:38)

YM (18:39) I don’t know but I know that while he was in prison, Tarkovsky sent him letters and they somehow they got kind of links but it’s recorded in Parajanov books which were published afterward and his special book of his letters to “Zone” and back and so-on and from this time they knew each other and I believe that Parajanov was fascinated by his *Ivan* childhood and maybe his *Mirror* - I had not seen it by this time – it was *Childhood*, but when I saw *Mirror* it was in Moscow as I remember very well because of my political attitudes maybe; I always got the political involved – and so this film was so global, so global, it was so cosy and so tender and at the same time everything was... * really my feel even by now. (19:50)

* (19:46) YM gestures the action of “churning”

LM (19:52) I sort of thought, I mean, *Mirror* is always spoken of as this autobiographical film but at the same time it is a film about the 20th century, it’s a film about the terrors which we all live through and that we dream about. (20:10)

YM (20:11) I remember the scene when the soldiers in slow motion are walking in very shabby ways through this waters carrying this ammunition, some canons, boxes, something like that, it’s a long-lasting movement and, some sound exists also, it is fantastic you know, it was a vision of a man who really deep inside this troubles and this sufferings of mankind – it’s starting from Adam and Eve. (20:49)

LM (20:51) But also it’s really about – let’s see – when was Tarkovsky born? (20:56)

SM (20:57) ‘32

LM (20:58) ‘32 – born in ‘32, so he’s a child of the war –

YM (21:03) - Of course

LM (21:04) - His father does come back from the war unlike many fathers but it’s almost as if his father did not come back from the war. He has the sense – the thing I remember about *Mirror* – the soldiers and the mud – extraordinary – but also the faces of the Spanish children who are sent to Moscow, there’s a particular little girl who looks at your straight in to the camera. (21:31)

YM (21:30) It’s the future part of this film because there are some parts of the documentaries shot in Spain, mix of Madrid and so-on, but there is a fantastic future

part where they have dancing and this Spanish – this – this Spanish energy – this fantastic passion and it is now in the frame of the Soviet System which give you no chance to Spread your wings and that's – how he felt it, I don't know, don't know – because – and you know it's Tarkovsky was a friend of Russian civilization because all this picture, of course, is about absolutely genuine Russian civilization which, you know, words about, we stopped this Mongol offensive and defended by this way Europe – and Europe was not in that bad state and Russia due to the way absorbed them – no, the story was this book, lifting this pages, and – there are many, many things in this film, especially you know there is some kind of mistaken newspaper, and terror exists everywhere, Stalin faces on the corners, and so-on, and these ladies coming like “oh my God” maybe something really bad's happening, and how they are lucky with – they lived through this book – I lived through these times – and I, a little bit – also I'm sixty four and I step on the tail of those terrible times – but exactly I lived in a more prosperous times because my childhood was not so terrific – and... (23:30)

LM (23:31) Did you have – I asked also about whether or not the general, the feeling of the 1960's which in the West is this great period of - (23:44)

YM (23:44) - Peace and liberation – (23:46)

LM (23:46) - Yes, and revolution, and really a new attitude to reality which um, you know, comes true in certain ways but certainly shapes all the art and the films that were made at that time – and I asked if this happened in Moscow – you know, if they too had a sort of Spring time of change? (24:11)

YM (24:11) Of course there were some – some – trends, and this which would happen in the west, had a kind of impact on the life of the Soviet Union, some things were banned – I remember especially it was very difficult to find some LPs, and I remember one guy: he died recently he was a great man collecting all these LPs and spreading all this music everywhere, it was confiscated, he was jailed – there were some – and I remember, there was once church converted to LPs house – not it's church haha! – and I remember well I went here and I bought Simon and Garfunkel and West-side story and so on, I paid some two or three times more and but it's – I remember even the way we play this rock and roll on **78-revolutions-per-minute you know this Redken films you know (25:22) (?) where all this bobs, it was a musical bobs, some people organised recordings**, it was very obsolete techniques, all this bobs of persons – and we I remember very well there was some music was there was some banned station, jamming of them, so-on and so-on we wanted some kind of fresh air, by now we see there was not fresh air, by now it's not fresh air of course. (25:48)

LM (25:47) Right. (25:48)

YM (25:50) And even this the possibilities of 60's Allen Ginsburg and Tim Leary and everything – everything was hushed then because so much freedom was dangerous, even for capitalist system. (26:06)

LM (26:07) Absolutely. (26:08)

YM (26:08) They stop it. They stop it. And now we have what we have. There's absolutely totalitarian regime from the side of country who declared that he was a statue of freedom and so-on, he was a totalitarian country. And we have in this country even now... how many stupid people, by now, there's so many information to know what's... and they still are in dreams or something, good things happen somewhere besides us, haha! (26:43)

LM (26:42) Yes. Yes. We can – (26:43)

YM (26:43) But people are always saying... (26:45)

LM (26:45) Yes. Yes. But we can hope. * Can you tell us the last time you saw Tarkovsky, and the last time... (26:54)

* (26:48) Shot jumps slightly.

YM (26:54) The last time was in the '82 – '82 – he visited Tbilisi once again before he wanted to go – and he was still a Soviet citizen – but I remember because he was going – about to leave us to – from Italy – for his *Nostalghia* film, yes, um, he was in a good mood as I remember and showed us his new shoes and his **banned – leather (27:19) (?) so good and you see what's a and I was so shocked because I did not** expect from such great men, like giant men to talk about some peculiar things like shoes and so-on, even though I talk to my friends, look at this man, O, you should understand because he's so great, he can talk so greatly about such kind of things, like shoes too, haha! So in my book is reflected in the sittings with Parajanov and Tarkovsky and remembers they were sitting at some friends of ours – for tea – the table was served for tea for two – even one witness existed – and Parjanov told Tarkovsky, “you, Tarkovsky are a great guy, a very talented guy, but you are not a genius. And Tarkovsky – um – I see believes that he was a genius – haha – and he only opened his eyes more and Parajanov added “because you are not homosexual, and never served in prison!” haha! That was sentenced... (28:38)

LM (28:37) Very good. Very good. And how did – how did Tarkovsky respond? (28:43)

YM (28:46) Little bit shocked but Tarkovsky... uh and you know this Layla Garrett, he wrote fantastic book *The Collector of Dreams* I believe it's one of the great books about genius, you know; the second is mine about Parjanov – haha! – but it's only in Russian. That's why I organise another version which is in English too, because I am a really lucky man in that I met these people, especially my working time when I worked with Parajanov, it was 11 years of our mutual enrichment I can say because it was not only a one-way street, but first of course it was a one-way street, to me, because I was absolutely – I really did not know material culture and some things and I cannot construct – I cannot make – I can – could only catch some things, report it, but not to organise – to be creative – **to be (29:57) (?) demur?** – and so-on and so-on – Parajanov could. So Parajanov taught me. Maybe I learned it by myself. I don't know. But we – but we have some clashes always because my understanding of what is it art; was really different from what is Parjanov's one, but it's really some kind of enrichment. And these clashes – also okay I remember he visited an

exhibition hall when I exhibited my works with my colleagues, was really conceptual portrait exhibition, a little bit not Soviet style, it was bigger, there were some kind of crazy people, cast-away people and so-on. Parajanov looked and there was not beauty like he liked – you know beauty – no beauty at all – and he entered this hall, looked at it, and I am waiting: I was waiting to see if there is some kind of praise, as before there were masses of people, many of them, “Oh you are seeing that you are Parajanov, but Parajanov is me!” haha! It’s me! And said many bad words about it and left... (31:25)

LM (31:25) Right. Right. (31:26)

YM (31:26) But – it was in ’85, January ’85, I remember it very well. (31:32)

LM (31:33) And did you see him – the last time you saw him maybe? (31:34)

YM (31:39) The last time I saw him – on the – in Yerevan, he was taken to Yerevan on March 15 of 1990, and the last time I saw him alive it was April 18... he was sitting on the street, and on the knee of his two-storey building which now is a museum of him – it was not organised like a museum before – it was supposed to be his house, museum and so-on and so-on and so-on, when they started two years ago in ’88 they thought that Parajanov will live if not forever then for a long time, at least, at least, but it happens that after he was taken to Frane for two months of struggle for his life in vain – but in vain – and he – they returned him to Yerevan – maybe in died in plane, even before, nobody know but - (32:39)

LM (32:38) Right.

LM (32:41) Okay.

YM (32:39) - He was buried in July 25 and we visited – visited this burial and Georgian delegation, was strong delegation – and it was bad years – really controversial – was in collapse, exactly it collapsed – but still planes were flying. (33:05)

LM (33:06) That’s good. It’s important to go to the funeral if you can. You know, funerals - (33:13)

YM (33:13) - Parajanov’s a lucky guy because he did not see Tbilisi some one year’s later when he was in flames, and the centre was burnt out and we got a kind of civil war: fourteen day civil war in the centre of Tbilisi, which was really visible from Parajanov point where he lived. (33:39)

LM (33:38) Right. Okay. (33:42)

SM (33:41) What about things like Parajanov’s style: influenced by theatre, or what Parajanov taught Yuri, or... that sort of thing? (33:53)

LM (33:50) Um – yes – could you – could you say about – because he sort of stopped making films, didn’t he, Parajanov, and he concentrated on his art, is that fair to say? (34:02)

YM (34:02) Uh – when he get the chance to shoot films of course he was concentrated on his art, it was like – when he – he made his last film, is '88, is *Ashik Kerib*, it was in the bad times when the war was starting between Armenia and Azerbaijan and he had an Armenian cameraman in was happened in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, he managed to escape but – got to have such – some complications and – a strange film – it was '88 and he started to organise new film, “Confession” – it was in '89 – and in '89 and I was in staff and only two shooting days were in June – five and six – fifth and sixth – and there were kind of problem with his lung and he felt himself very bad and everything stopped – and forever stopped – he was taken to Moscow hospital, lung was operated, removed, but still his ... were going on (35:22) (?) and he – he got very bad aches by the end of '89 – '89 – '89, yes. (35:29)

LM (35:28) Right.

YM (35:29) It was really bad state and it was really sorry because I couldn't help him, somehow it was impossible, one lady looked after him, and so-on, so-on, so-on, but there were some bad things in '88-'87, because he thought about another films and *Ashik Kerib*. He thought about **Martino Shushanik (35:51) (?)** – it's a geographical – the oldest one in Georgia – 4th century geographical literature work – and Parajanov wanted to screen – to hoot his mother Siranush Bejanova in this role but there were some strange nationalist movement in Georgia and they really stopped him by any means. So the situation/atmosphere was very intense and it was impossible to perform this task – to start to work on this film – so he switched to *Ashik Kekrib*, it was politically more acceptable, by this times, but it's a strange thing because no other film was shot in Azerbaijan language before, so Parajanov surprised audience once again - (36:50)

LM (36:51) Hmm. Hmm. (35:54)

SM (36:54) Uh, how did – how was the legend of the Swami fortress, that was shot in Georgia - (37:01)

YM (37:00) It was shot in Georgia, it was shot in '83, they started in '83, November, and it was ended in '84, and it was released in '85. '85, yes. And he was accepted here with mixed emotions you know. Some bad article was published at a **Georgian ... (?) (37:24)** where such kinds of dresses – the film was very oriental – and there was so much oriental that – because there was always existed some kind of model, some kind of **chablose (?) (37:35)** imaginations of some things should be – I like this – the same thing happened with Andrei Rublov and Tarkovsky, you know, it was unacceptable for many of the people because they believed only moles were bad in Russian – never were bad – they were always good and so-on – but Tarkovsky broke all this simple attitudes and simple – simple meanings – and – and showed a more complex scene – and so – I – when I talk to my students I say one of – one of the features of art is that it's unacceptable for majority of people haha! It's normal! (38:24)

LM (38:23) Yes. Yes. (38:25)

YM (38:25) If everybody likes it like I taught it means it's not art. It's kind of culture, which is acceptable for everybody. So you can eat with pleasure. Haha! (38:36)

SM (38:37) Two other thoughts were – one I could you say something about the influence of painting on both of the film makers. Do you think? Parajanov seems quite theatrical – like carnivalesque in his style, and also the role of dreams, have we talked about that? (38:52)

LM (38:52) Yes we have, we've spoken a bit about dreams. Yes. That's good. Yuri – could you say something – you mentioned, for example, that Tbilisi was a carnival city, and there is a strong theatrical element in Parajanov – (39:07)

YM (39:07) Haha! Everywhere, in his year two. (39:09)

LM (39:07) - How do you think this come about? What aspects of local culture here influenced him in his... (39:20)

YM (39:20) I think this really... It is a fantastic relation between hi people of openness and we got some kind of – we have by this time block house with isolated rooms and flats and so-on – it was open yards with various peculiar facilities and people were involved in mutual corporation and went to neighbour for alt and for onion and they look at each other – they know if some lover came, and everything bad what happened – bad and peculiar which happen in families – everybody knew about it -so it was open theatre – and Parajanov grown in atmosphere of this open theatre, and especially his family exactly, his family was kind of theatre you know, were very coloury people were * - his father – his father' father was possessor of this antique shop with this all this things – and also he was possessor of one of the brothels, he was even jailed for this haha! – reason, and the constant quarrels was between the mother of Parajanov and father on the reason of the jealousy... os it' really constant theatre, and the – Parajanov because were from 12 or 21, when he went to Moscow, he wanted to be a singer I know before hand, and then switch hi mind to film director – and found himself in gig – old union – institute of cinematography – cinematography institute – so I – and Tbilisi – and when I talk about Parajanov, I got some kind of lecture about his origins, I always stress that even he is of course a product of Tbilisi – of course he had Armenian origins and so on – and Armenians always played a fantastic part in Tbilis even – all this end of 19th century and beginning of 12th century – modern art, and art deco buildings, were built and possessed by rich Armenians, by this time – so it was normal by – and so – he; but it's a curious thing to be Armenian here – and also it's a kind of play, you should be, you are native Armenian but you are also native to Tbilisi and the kind of nation, it's a very kind of character, very open, without some kind of things that created Western philosophy, haha! No Kafka existed here! Haha. (42:24)

LM (42:23) Right. Right. Not pessimistic. (42:27)

YM (42:28) Not pessimistic! Very optimistic approach. Always gathering with wine – the – simple bread and cheese is enough to organise good company – there' no need to make expensive banquet and o-on and so-on. It' no – it happens – and

I'm going to make it now, a series of my still lifes, still lifes, dedicated to this atmosphere you know of this friendship, to wine drinking, and, have a show of it. Haha! So I want to – it's kind of nostalgic – because something will be lost some... and Parajanov was a real Tbilisi guy, so his roots, and why, that's why he was able to, converted to Ukrainian, you know, how he can create the best Ukrainian cinema after Dovzhenko, how he can create this *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* – of course due to Illienko and so-on and so-on, but due to his total... immersing to the – this Ukrainian tragedy – you know he shows us this shadows – look what happened, one man killed another man – it's starting – the tragedy starting from this point, you know, because some misunderstanding existed and one guy killed another one and all this. (43:51)

(43:52) *A whistling from outside.*

LM (43:53) It all follows. (43:54)

YM (43:54) ... and the red horses, red blood, and so-on, because he made, maybe he felt some – some really tragic with the lives of... Ukrainians, nobody knows, especially in the West, they know nothing, you know, exactly. And everywhere there was nothing: people know nothing and: but Parajanov felt some kind of this, this passionate people, uh – he was very close to this – those times of intelligencia, and the Soviet authorities always fought with Ukrainian nationalists you know, Parajanov was in the circle of this nationalists, you know, this Armenian man from Tbilisi, found himself in a circle of nationalists, and he was presented as a Ukrainian nationalist! It's due to his flexibility, which was borrowed from Tbilisi where multicultural centre – all nations – all religions – confessions, all together, mixed, as this multiculturalism which failed in Europe existed in Tbilisi, haha! (45:06)

LM (45:05) Yes. We still have some hope for achieving that, but not much, I agree. Can I ask then about – just to rephrase Sean's question – about *La Gioconda* – he was fascinated with this picture, the *Mona Lisa*, and you said that he referred to himself as *La Gioconda*? (45:25)

YM (45:24) Ah this is a fantastic story – he – he edited and performed at the end of his life, and I believe that this fantastic post-modern – when he started it was post-modern, it was a really good thing you know – now we live in post-modern so now nothing is really – it is not a phenomenon to study – when – but Parajanov I believe – one architect, late architect, told me – told me – one Georgian architect told me: Parajanov exactly was the first post-modernist, you know, because he – he – maybe he understood somehow (he never used words like this, I even never saw a book at Parajanov's house) but he was really – so smart a guy – in perceiving you know – he really needed, no, did not need to embrace everything he could touch a small tiny part of a phenomenon to – to understand everything – and he was confirmed post-modernist – and especially this *Gioconda* work, you know – he ordered his nephew to buy every copy of a nearby shop of this *Gioconda*, which was printed by some DDR, some German Democratic Republic printing house, they costed not so much, maybe two rubles haha! – poor thing – and he used all the glue and the scissors to organise an absolutely masterpiece; I believe they are great masterpieces, maybe people

don't understand because such Louvres, and such great museums are really – because there is no price for it by now, because there is no understanding, really whenever you mix it, and wake book and every values are now, I believe that maybe at the end of the 12th century – it's a greatest work of visual art – the great works. (47:51)

LM (47:52) I've seen these *Mona Lisa*... (47:54)

YM (47:54) - They are so deep they are – even, I dedicated one article, I don't remember because... article to it – I believe it – this Parajanov – it's a manifestation of love, it's a manifestation of beauty, manifestation of tragedy, manifestation of dying, diverse thing, it is really human, existed in this pictures, existed in this series of pictures – so much sexuality also exists here. I don't know how it happens, how it – because it was created in the times when his nephew committed suicide – one of them – and he was a great blow to him – and I remember all this cancer thing started from this point, because I believe that he took some kind of a responsibility for his suicide – he took responsibility, because he was absolutely shocked by this I think – I remember we went to cemetery in this day and I could not even look at Parajanov and I left this cemetery before this ceremony was over, and he was: “Oh, how he could do this *... On this state he created this series, so this series saturated by this great pain – great pain, because in this accident – in this event he maybe embrace it, the tragedy, who may contain – I don't know – this same time happened earthquake in Armenia which deals with – which resulted in some forty thousand deaths and all this tragedy started, you know all this things in *Carabal?* (49.52) (?) this Armenian and Azerbaijanian conflict, everything was mixed together in his... shattered body of Parajanov... he – maybe he felt that he was dying and he was going to his end and was going to his end – inevitable and so it's impossible to create this series in the kind of you are prosperous artist early in your studio – young girls are going around and so-on. (50:34)

* (49:16) *Slapping his leg in a gesture of emotion*

LM (50:36) Yes. (50:37)

YM (50:37) It's product of man who was deeply involved in this process of life which is really tragical by – from the origin, from the beginning – from the beginning – and today civilisation don't want to see that life is tragic because all the world of consuming prevents us to see – only if you are not selling coffins of course. (51:02)

LM (51:02) Hmm. Indeed. Indeed. One more thing now struck me in the collection *

* (51:10) *Scene cuts*

LM (continues – 51:10) - the cosmonauts. (51:12) Yes. (51:14) Yes. (51:16)

YM (51:13) Ah – the guide – that is one work dedicated to him. You know, Parajanov was an admirer of Soviet power – he was not anti-Soviet man – they know by now – just now, exhibition was held you know in New York, and one article was dedicated to this exhibition, and to Parajanov personally – and there were some

absolutely strange things about his dissident nature and that he always Soviet power struggled with Parajanov – another thing happened you know. Another thing happened. Even to Tarkovsky because this Soviet power gave him free education haha! Gave – was given – there were chance to create, even. Of course there were some people who were against some accents sometimes – this masterpiece was held for a time, and so on but everything – but they had the chance to create. Now there's no chance to create you know – because there were some flow of money for this because this companies believed that art should be enrichment and education there's even some kind of – they even – they created the diggers, grave-diggers, for them because they were bothered to make society more educated – more oriented for good not evil and so on and so on – maybe they were knaves I don't know – but the atmosphere was not bad for people. If you see Georgia Film Studios production you know well everything was done – was done under this regime. Now we got – we have no now film studio in the same size because we were second studio after **Mosfilm. Georgia Film Studio, and a lot of talented people were working here and created -no year was left without some grant on Cannes or some other festival and we got a lot of re-votes for our production (?) (53:28)** here in Georgia, and in the state of totalitarian regime as they – you like to say it – it was totalitarian – but not the kind of totalitarian without the chance to create. (53:39)

LM (53:39) Yes.

YM (53:41) Sometimes some narrow frames of reach, and some pressure, helps you to be more inventive, to organise things in kind of allegoric language, which is more suitable for arts than to say directly that you are bad. Haha! And so-on and so-on. So it's another thing. (54:02)

LM (54:02) Hmm. I know. When you think of the size of some of these film shoots, you know *Andrei Rublev*, you know, a thousand people, all these professionals, the locations – the everything – only Hollywood couple possibly... (54:16)

YM (54:15) ... Yes you see how the *Andrei Rublev*... (54:17)

LM (54:17) ... Yeah – it's enormous. Haha! (54:21)

YM (54:21) ... Much money was... (54:22)

LM (54:23) ... Yes... (54:23)

YM (54:24) ... **Was spent for these things, of course, for *Weimar*, for "Peace" – and for Peace and – *War and Peace* – was spent much more haha! Even Kodak. It's a funny thing that Parajanov films were shot in the ... hill (54:38) (?)** which was every film cameras were crew for such kind of battlefield because it was very battlefield really, exactly battlefield, of low sensitivity, and Prajanov for *Legend of Suram Fortress*, his cameraman bought somewhere on the dark market on the black market several cans of Kodak films to organise the silver torch haha! Because everything was shot on this film. It was not more than fifty-ISO, and it was very – and – you know

this film I breathing, you know, even by now, *Sayat Nova*, because it was not even emulsion – and layers were not rightly oriented. (55:30)

LM (55:28) Right. Right. (55:30)

SM (55:31) So all Parajanov films were shot on Soviet stock then? (55:35)

YM (55:35) Yes of course, Soviet stock, yes. (55:37)

LM (55:37) Yes. (55:38)

YM (55:38) And even Tarkovsky film of course, Tarkovsky film of course *Sacrifice*, and *Nostalghia* were shot on Kodak. (55:47)

SM (55:46) I heard he always wanted to shoot on Kodak. And there was a real struggle for Tarkovsky to get Kodak and so they only had limited amount of Kodak. (55:59)

YM (55:58) Limited. Yes of course. Limited for him – Maybe for propaganda film, for some great really masters who were – who were more impotent for authorities and could get kind of links – but Tarkovsky was a man not of Tbilisi kind of man – he was not so open – he was like – how we call this, “beast” – haha! – he was not so friendly, I believe – Parajanov was *... and this was Tarkovsky... (56:37)

* YM mimes two different kind of beasts. (56:25-37)

LM (56:36) Solemn – introverted. Yes. (56:40)

YM (56:40) Yes. Because of religion, because of childhood, because of his wife, many many things happened in the life which make him, but I am really grateful to Tarkovsky because Tarkovsky in *Sacrifice* really showed to whole mankind the really threat of nuclear disaster which is still is hanging in air, like darkness – and all this scene with this... that’s fantastic scene but now time has gone and I hardly can imagine people, audience, who can see now *Sacrifice* you know, today’s people are still multi-faceted; they want in some second to see some five, or six image which are changing each other in a second of time, because of this multi-media, this – everywhere plasma screens and so-on and so-on and everywhere there is so a lot of images and before, before there was a strive to images – and I remember very well there was one Russian magazine, Soviet magazine, and only all the inside was two pages of spread of Karla and people took this spread and pin-up in homes and decorated because it was a desire to art and desire to beauty, a desire to some – and everything was over and people are absolutely disorientated – disorientated people, and that’s plain. (58:19)

LM (58:19) Hypnotised. Hmm. Yes. (58:21)

YM (58:20) I believe it all the houses, everywhere, series of, how you call this series, not controversial but - ? (58:31)

SM (58:31) - Conspiracy? (58:32)

YM (58:32) Conspiracy - (58:32)

LM (58:33) Conspiracy theories! (58:34)

YM (58:35) Yes! They especially invented this word too, “conspiracy theory” to confirm the people the nausea existed – they’ve existed – they’ve performed everywhere – because everywhere there are kind of plans – something happens out on location, of course, of course, but if it happens every day and every time, haha! In the same degree – there is some kind of... (58:58)

LM (58:56) Yes, yes.

YM (58: 58) **Some kind of base authority exists. Haha! (?)** (59:01)

SM (59:02) What about asking Yuri about the threat of nuclear war? (59:06)

LM (59:06) Yeah – I was going to do that. Can we,* could we just get rid of that box – yep. (59:10)

** (59:08 - 18) Louise points at the computer screen behind Yuri, on which a dialogue box has popped-up upon his background. Yuri turns and gets rid of it with the mouse...*

LM (59:17) Um yes. You know that – speaking – going back to the *Sacrifice* – Tarkovsky had a dream about nuclear catastrophe, about third world war - (59:28)

YM (59:28) A dream – a horrific dream, because it was a fear, this catastrophe. (59:32)

LM (59:32) Yeah, in 1971. And I... (59:38)

YM (59:38) 1971? – no, the film was shot in ’85. (59:41)

LM (59:42) I know. But he remembered this dream you see, and he put it in the film, he waited ten years, fourteen years and he put it in the film – and I wondered about that dream because it was a common nightmare, I think, um - especially in the West – I had such a dream about nuclear disaster... (1:00:07)

YM (1:00:07) Yeah, exactly, because there were many articles, people said about winter – (1:00:11)

LM (1:00:11) Yes.

YM (1:00:12) - Nuclear winter, and all the consequences which follow, so – in Soviet Union at this time there were not so active propaganda, some information were hushed, and all in special addition, so as for me it was clear that by this time what – bad things could happen, but exactly people were not well informed and we believed that we got some kind of shield which prevent and somehow defend our country from this nuclear rain and so-on, so-on, so-on. It was a kind of a – of course it was a lie, but this lie – helped us to survive, haha! (1:01:01)

LM (1:00:59) Hmm. Indeed. (1:01:02)

YM (1:01:02) And in the West with all this media of course I know, there were more information about – more fears existed especially, especially like such – such - tales of Russian aggressive politics and so-on. (1:01:21)

LM (1:01:20) Yes. (1:01:21)

YM (1:01:22) By now it's absolutely demonization of Russia. And I see that the West is under heavy pressure of special information machine to create monster from Putin, to create monster from Russia, to - name it as the same evil. (1:01:47)

LM (1:01:47) Same again. Yes. Yes. (1:01:50)

YM (1:01:48) ...* The Islamic State which was created by Americans too. (1:01:54)

* Un-audible. (1:01:48 – 51)

LM (1:01:55) I just wondered though now, I wondered – I asked these people in Moscow, you see, did you have dreams about – did you fear – did you have nightmares about the Armageddon – you know the word, Armageddon? – It's what we called it, actually, Armageddon. And they said, no, and I said, well, Tarkovsky had this dream haha! Only Tarkovsky had this dream – (1:02:21)

YM (1:02:22) Not only Tarkovsky had this dream – there were obviously formidable – and responsible people all the '60s, but as for Moscow intelligencia, so called intelligencia, or called liberals, they are so – they got tiny brains you know, they got tiny brains, they believe that there - there existed some – some prosperous countries and Russia should follow these prosperous countries and there will be no problem, will be no threat after and so-on - they are not great thinkers believe me, believe me, especially in Moscow – it's another city – it's another ... people who lived in most prosperous state and they are in a good situation because they bear no responsibility, even for nothing, even they care – they are – especially even they organise demonstration against the home state – it's no – it's always Russian intelligencia who fought against the State – it's a mark like a seventh ... * - how we call it this – it's like say a – (1:03:40)

* (1:03:33) YM beats his chest, slaps a fist in to his palm, and then rubs his thigh, in a gesture of "marking" or "branding"

LM (1:03:41) Hallmark. Their characteristic – (1:03:43)

YM (1:03:43) Hallmark! Their hallmark – because they can do without. They should – because they got some kind of example so, some prosperous – somewhere – and they like patriots want their own country to be like Sweden: for Russia it's impossible to be Sweden, Norway. Haha! (1:04:06)

LM (1:04:06) Denmark? (1:04:06)

YM (1:04:07) - Denmark. But it's impossible! But they don't want to understand such kind of thing because they are not people like Tarkovsky: Tarkovsky was Russian to this – to the bones, you know – to the origins – because he understood this tragedy of – because every nation is a kind of irrational, tragical – I got my own definition of "nation" and that's why some say "that's not a nation": it's a nation. If it has its own irrational things deep involved* in your head – and the models eventually follow from this craziness, if you possess a specific craziness you are another nation. Haha! Craziness in a good sense of the word – because you

understand it – your vision of world it's, you know – with nobody possess reality, nobody possess genuine reality – it's impossible – only God may possess – so are kind of our own - (1:05:06)

** (1:04:38) With his hands, YM demonstrates his notion of "nationhood" existing in the mind.*

LM (1:05:06) - Facets. Facets of reality, yes. (1:05:08)

YM (1:05:07) Course. Yes yes. There is Russian truth exists. Haha! Really, it's a Russian truth which is not compatible with other worlds. – Not compatible with Anglo-Saxon. (1:05:21)

LM (1:05:21) Right. (1:05:22)

YM (1:05:23) Really not, because it's another civilization and we should allow to this civilization another civilization exists too, but you don't want to allow it! With all your * – especially with this negro president. Haha! But he is active figure exactly. He is puppet guy. (1:05:44)

** (1:05:33) YM mimes a frontier and gun.*

LM (1:05:44) Yes. (1:05:45)

YM (1:05:45) Yes. It's not for cinema. It's really puppet. And everywhere, decreasing of power bodies happened, you know, and they – they are laughing by now, if you compare to Franco, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Churchill, Roosevelt, they were giant figures in those times – maybe they were dictators, but they were figures, and now we have nothing – who is Tony Blair? Who is Tony Blair? Absolutely nothing you know, look. Hollow-man, nobody, and it's silly what's happened in England by now it's fantastic, and in France – how is this France? – France - and Holland – Sarkozy, it's a disaster – you have your own disaster – you have your own disaster and you are talking about Russia, about Putin who is really person. You demonise him because he's a person. Haha! (1:06:45)

LM (1:06:46) Well - (1:06:46)

YM (1:06:47) He's a person, you know. Person, who have - has responsibility to his country, you know, toward his country, one hundred and fifty million people look at Putin, haha! (1:06:58)

LM (1:06:57) Yes. (1:06:58)

YM (1:06:58) Maybe don't look at him as a saviour but it's... destiny (1:07:03)

LM (1:07:03) Yes... Okay – (1:07:07)

SM (1:07:08) I can't think of anything else really – (1:07:10)

LM (1:07:08) That's it really. I think - (1:07:10)

YM (1:07:11) ...We went apart again from cinema. Haha! (1:07:13)

LM (1:07:13) No-no that's fine. That's fine. I think – (1:07:14)

SM (1:07:14) And did we cover – Is it worth asking about, what Yuri learned from Parajanov? Or - (1:07:20)

LM (1:07:21) I think we have - (1:07:22)

SM (1:07:22) We think that's covered? (1:07:23)

LM (1:07:23) I think we covered it. I think you need to do now is, if you put the – if you put the tripod over there – where (1:07:29)

(1:07:29) Frame cuts, and goes black.

(1:07:32) Frame cuts to a shot in front of the desktop, with Yuri sitting in front of it. The computer screen shows a black and white photograph of Tarkovsky. The camera is out of focus and in movement.

YM (1:07:33) I use this picture for my album. 101 pictures by Yuri Mechitov – that's a swish flash - (1:07:40)

LM (1:07:39) That's a great photo. (1:07:41)

YM (1:07:41) Ah yes, it's a good one. (1:07:42)

** Chair creaks loudly. (1:07:42-43)*

LM (1:07:44) I haven't seen him with that haircut before haha! (1:07:47)

SM (1:07:48) Was that – (1:07:49)

LM (1:07:49) - By the time he - (1:07:50)

SM (1:07:50) - Was that taken in Tbilisi? (1:07:51)

YM (1:07:51) Yes, it was Tbilisi, Tbilisi, it was officer's house, haha! It was at the military commandment - (1:07:57)

LM (1:07:57) Yuri, would you allow us to use this in our film? – Could we – use – (1:08:03)

YM (1:08:02) Yes, yes, of course, of course, use it, use it, use everything, because I want you – I want to - for the mankind this person should be known. (1:08:11)

** (1:08:07) Shot zooms in on the computer screen.*

LM (1:08:11) If you could send us then – send us then the – the photos, maybe, email them - (1:08:16)

YM (1:08:17) Yes yes I can send them even by now, only to - push the button, haha! (1:08:22)

LM (1:08:22) Yes, yes, thank you!

~

Transcriptions of interviews relating to Andrei Tarkovsky and his work. (3 – Yuri Mechitov)

Conversation about Yuri's book of photographs of Parajanov and Tarkovsky, including a photograph in which they are dressed as women. There is noise of the chair creaking and the gloss of the page squeaking. The book consists of over 2000 pictures.

~

YM (1:011:31) So Parajanov was immortal without me of course but I add a little bit to his immortality haha! (1:11:37)

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