

I've always noticed that public officials treat me with suspicion. They look me over, as if I'm one of those either about to steal something - or at least going to try to get away without paying the bill. Taxi drivers try to avoid me getting into their cab. Bureaucrats never take their eyes off me in expectancy of some trouble I may create. An intelligent woman gave me the following explanation: "your eyes are those of a poor man", she said. Of course I am a child of the war and therefore of hunger and of the endless queues. Sciostakovich once told me that I have fingers like those of a pianist of genius. I replied with a bitter smile "No, my fingers are those of a handbag thief, because during the war I was obliged, in fact, to steal. This all belongs to my infancy, which seems now so far off in time, but I carry it within me always, memories stir inside me like bits of shrapnel from a bullet wound."

Making a film about my infancy has been both liberating and painful, as if I'd removed those bits of shrapnel alone from my flesh. Fellini once said to me happily that to make a film, more than any other work of art is to emulate God. In fact, one seeks to create a world of new sounds and movement. Eve was created out of Adam's rib. My film was made from my own, ~~rib~~ once broken, ribs. This is not a metaphor - but actual truth. Let me explain. How did the idea of my film originate?

In 1972 I gave a recital of my verses at Saint Paul in Minnesota in the basket-ball stadium. At the end of the first reading I saw a group of people rushing towards me. Naturally I thought they were spectators desirous of shaking my hand so I went up to the edge of the stage. Thus I did not see what was happening behind my back - I heard only a gasp from the public and then felt a heavy blow on my back. I was pushed down into the crowd by a number of people that had jumped me from behind. I fell and was kicked in the stomach and the torso. The American students sprang forward to defend me and I must admit that when it comes to giving what it takes they are experts. In the struggle the microphone struck a policeman knocking out his teeth. Then the aggressors were arrested. They turned out to be a group of neo-Fascists, son of Ukraine emigrants who had been collaborators of Hitler.

I felt an intense pain in my ribs whilst I continued the recital. Later on they carried me to the hospital for an X-ray. The doctor said that according to him I had received a blow on an old fracture and asked me if by chance I'd been involved in a car accident. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered..... In 1941, during the big exodus, when I was eight years old, my mother sent me off to

Siberia to my grandmothers. The voyage lasted several months. I was alone and I sang in the railway stations to earn a crust of bread.

On one occasion I saw a load of steaming potatoes on a vendor's stall. They were wrapped in cabbage leaves, sprinkled with parsley and sunflower oil. I simply walked up and took one.

You can't call that really thieving. I started to devour it when the owner of the stall started screaming, "Help, a thief" and immediately the other vendors gathered round me and started kicking me in the ribs. I was saved from these blackmarketeers by ... other thieves who took me under their protection.

That is how I got the first fracture. When I told this to the American doctor I saw tears roll down his face just as if he were watching a film. "Have you ever thought of making a film", he asked. And that is how the idea for the film was born - from a blow on an old rib fracture.

For those of my generation the war has been a terrible kindergarten or garden of infancy. That is why I gave this title to my film. Even before its invention the cinema existed since our memory is a kind of psychological cinematic-projection. I wanted to transfer onto celluloid the film that already existed inside my head.

4.

My only aim was that there should be no falsification, nothing invented that could be a metaphoric document of my infancy.

For a long time I searched for a boy who might play the part of myself as a child. After viewing thirty youngsters I finally found the right one, a boy from the fourth elementary school in Moscow, Serghei Gusak. I put him before the following test: - "He is lying down on the platform of a wagon reading a book; his sandals are beside him; another small boy enters dressed in rags. He carries a violin. Cautiously he draws the sandals towards him with the violin bow. The ~~the~~ sound of the bow that has touched the sandals is heard."

I asked him, "How would you play this scene Serghei?" He thought for a moment and replied. "I hear the violin bow, I turn and see the boy. My first reaction is one of joy, because I think it's a friend but then I see he is holding my sandals. No, then, he is an enemy - but I see that he is barefooted and, thinking that I have anyway another pair of shoes I let him go. This was enough for me to give Serghei the part."

My direction of this film consisted in avoiding to be the director.

I chose for my actors people who by themselves knew instinctively how to behave in certain circumstances. As a result I have hardly any professional actors. I was looking for truth and authenticity above all. For the grandmother I chose GALINA STACHANOVA, ticket collector at a stadium entrance. For the part of the gangleader's mistress a girl who, even though on several occasions had failed to pass various Drama Academy's entrance examinations. Her name is SVETLANA EVSTRATOVA and she's a roadsweep in Moscow and certainly I believe the most beautiful roadsweep in the world. The teacher is played by MARINA KUDIMOVA, one of our best poetesses. The violin-maker is played by literary critic BOLDYREV.

I personally selected all the participants for the crowd scenes. I wanted to achieve a gallery of faces which collectively would ideally represent our people. The professional "extras" who today may play the aristocrat, tomorrow the peasant and the day after some tattooed savage are a real danger to a film-maker because they are nearly all totally indifferent to the parts they are supposed to be playing.

b.

When I examined the shooting at the end of the first day, the departure of the volunteers to the front, I was amazed by the number of totally inexpressive faces to be seen on the screen. I hurriedly phoned various friends, painters and writers and, notwithstanding their fame, they all came forward and took part in the scene, brief yet, to me, so important. I tried real actresses for the scene where the peasant woman breaks half a loaf of bread to give to a starving child - but they couldn't make this simple gesture in a convincing way. So I got hold of a Siberian peasant woman who divided the bread so sublimely that my cameraman was moved to tears. The woman then told me how she had been a beggar woman during the war. This I hadn't known - but in choosing her ^{my} "poor man's eyes had noticed hers, in ^{those of a poor woman's} the crowd".

I preferred to talk and explain to the people rather than try to get them "to act". The main thing, for me, ^{was} the selection of totally characteristic ^{physical} types. I don't like the directors who try to manipulate their actors sometimes quite brutally softening them. If the cinema is an "imitation of God" then the director who feels himself to be superior to the others will never make a valid film.

In my film there is a scene where a naked woman dives into the snow after a Siberian Sauna. We filmed this at about 30 degrees below zero and the film snapped so we were obliged to take the shot more than once. Yet the actress in question never let up for a moment because she felt herself to be a "companion" and not a robot at some director's capricious mercy.

When I had need of a real old tank and couldn't find one in IRKUTSK The Siberians made me an incredible gift. The ~~tank~~ pulled down, with the help of acetylene flame-throwers, an old tank from its pedestal. This had arrived from a Nazi battlefield many years ago. This was done by night so that the local citizens were amazed, next day, not to find their monument in its place. We had to return it the following day so we violated all syndicate rules by having the whole troupe, including the small bit-part actors, work for nineteen consecutive hours. There was no word of protest because, to them, I was just a companion and not a "superior".

In my script there is the interrogation of a Russian officer JASNAJA POLIJANA by a German officer which takes place in Tolstoy's home. I later eliminated this because I couldn't find an actor capable of playing the part of the German officer and I didn't ^{have} the money to engage a foreign actor. ^{I felt that} A Russian actor would somehow have looked phoney. However when I saw KLAUS MARIA

BRANDAUER brilliantly play the role of ~~"Mephisto"~~ "MEPHISTO" I couldn't get him out of my mind. I had to get him. Although I didn't know him personally I wrote to him warning him that his compensation could only be my hospitality. A miracle happened: Brandauer accepted and, in my opinion, played the part wonderfully! This made me especially happy as it proved that even in the so called "decadent" western world money is not everything. Artists of all the world really belong to the great anti-bureaucratic state of Poetry. I do not like the term "superpower", the only power that exists is that of the human soul.

9.

This might sound banal but banalities which are sacred are better than ^{newly} invented novelties of dubious value.

The whole idea of the film is expressed with great clarity by the great poet BORIS PASTERNAK:-
"A better age will come, the ~~witnesses~~ ^{testimonies} will disappear and the torment of the tortured children will not fall into forgetfulness"

Little Bruno and his father (The protagonists of De Sica's "Bicycle Thieves") go searching for the stolen bicycle even in the streets of Moscow. I, too, would like my little hero with his aquarium to go through the streets of Italy and to be understood.

But, who knows what fate attends my film? We made it with sincerity but we all know that sincerity alone is not sufficient in art. You may well land up in hell along roads of good intentions.

If I'm talking of my film here to the Italian reader, it's not to be my own lawyer, or worse, to make self-advertisements.

The film is here, before you, in the ^{home-}land of
 Rossellini, Zavattini, De Sica, Fellini, Bertolucci,
 and Antonioni, of whom I would like to
 consider myself a humble Russian pupil.

My film is defenceless, before them,
 and all of you.

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Eugenei Evtushenko.

Translation from the Italian text in *The*
"Corriere della Sera" of sept 6th 1984
 by John Corbridge.

The piece was written by Evtushenko in
 occasion of the presentation of his film
"Garden of Infancy" presented at
 this year's Venice Film Festival.