

Jonas Mekas

b. December 24, 1922, Semeniskiai, Lithuania

by **Genevieve Yue**

Genevieve Yue is a writer and film curator. She lives in Los Angeles.

[Filmography](#) [Select Bibliography](#) [Articles in Senses](#)
[Web Resources](#)



“It is for this art and from this art that I (we) speak to you.”

– Jonas Mekas, Anthology Film Archives manifesto

Midwife of the New York Independent Cinema

In the late 1940s, Jonas Mekas and his brother Adolfas were living in a displaced persons camp in Wisenbaden, Germany, following the end of the Second World War. There, for the first time in their lives, they had seen some films that stirred in them an interest in the medium, like John Huston's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948). They had also seen *The Search* by Fred Zinnemann (1948), a film about the lives of displaced persons, and it made them angry. In their minds, the film touched on nothing of the experience of displaced persons, which was also their experience. Outraged by what they had seen, they began to write scripts and resolved to start making their own films as soon as they could afford a camera. Both brothers would go on to lead long careers in film, and throughout their lives, the original motive would remain unchanged: to protest against what cinema was, and to look toward the promise of what it could be.

Previously, Jonas Mekas had lived in Semeniskiai, a quiet farming village in Lithuania. He was born Christmas Eve, 1922. Mekas had a growing reputation as a poet, having published his first collection at the age of 14. When the German army entered the country, he began editing an underground newspaper. In his journals and in his films, Mekas tells of how his hidden typewriter had been stolen, and, knowing that the Nazis would soon catch up with him, he and Adolfas left Lithuania to attend university in Vienna. Their train, however, was stopped in Germany, and they were sent to a forced labour camp in Elmshorn, a suburb of Hamburg. They escaped in 1945 and were detained near the Danish border, where they hid on a farm for two months until the war ended. Afterwards, they lived in a series of displaced person camps including Wisenbaden and Mainz, where Mekas attended university. Finally, on October 29, 1949, the brothers arrived in Williamsburg, New York.

Forced to leave their homeland, and lonely in a strange and unfamiliar city, Mekas and his brother watched films. They watched hungrily, as much as they could – European films, westerns, dramas, comedies, and avant garde programs. Mekas became increasingly involved in the film community, and in 1953–1954 he began putting together his own programs of avant garde film at Gallery East and a Film Forum series at Carl Fisher

Auditorium. The following year, he founded *Film Culture*, a film journal that dealt critically with the avant garde, Hollywood and, particularly in its early years, European art film.

In New York, however, Mekas was already finding himself at the centre of a burgeoning film culture. He would later call the movement New American Cinema, and its proponents included Amos Vogel, Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clarke, Robert Frank, and Gregory Markopoulos. Mekas began writing at the *Village Voice* as a film critic in 1958, though his "serious" ambitions as a critic were soon pushed aside for what Mekas called his "midwife" vocation (1). In the introduction to *Movie Journal*, a collection of writings Mekas produced while at the *Village Voice*, he writes: "I had to pull out, to hold, to protect all the beautiful things that I saw happening in the cinema and that were either butchered or ignored by my colleague writers and by the public." (2) Mekas turned away from feature filmmaking and devoted his column to a different kind of cinema altogether, the new, non-narrative forms of cinema emerging in America. His writings were refreshingly unlike the stiff, cynical writing of most critics: alive, passionate, and polemical. Hear his enthusiasm in this call to arms:

Let's record the dying century and the birth of another man... Let's surround the earth with our cameras, hand in hand, lovingly; our camera is our third eye that will lead us out and through ... Nothing should be left unshown or unseen, dirty or clean: Let us see and go further, out of the swamps and into the sun. (3)

In 1959, Mekas helped to found New American Cinema Group, which was created as a new model of distribution and exhibition for independent film. Unlike Amos Vogel's Cinema 16 series of experimental films and other programs, which were selective in the films they screened, Mekas championed the right for *all* films to be shown. The collective became the Film-makers' Cooperative in 1962, and soon after, similar groups came together in San Francisco (Canyon Cinema) and London (The London Co-op), based on the Coop model.

Mekas put together screenings at many locations, including the Bleecker Street Cinema and Gramercy Arts Theatre in 1963 (4). Trouble brewed when, at the Knokke-Le Zoute Third International Experimental Film Festival in Belgium, Jack Smith's provocative *Flaming Creatures* was excluded, and Mekas resigned as juror. The following year he was arrested on obscenity charges for showing *Flaming Creatures* along with Jean Genet's *Chant d'amour*. Undeterred, he launched a campaign against the censor board, and for the next few years continued to exhibit films at the Film-makers' Cinémathèque, the Jewish Museum, and the Gallery of Modern Art. He also organised the New American Cinema Expositions program, which toured Europe and South America during the years 1964–1967. By the '70s, Mekas was teaching film courses at institutions such as the New School for Social Research and MIT.

Mekas, P. Adams Sitney, and Jerome Hill began work on Anthology Film Archives in 1969. It opened in 1970 as a film museum, screening space, and a library, with Mekas as its director. In 1971, Mekas, along with Stan Brakhage, Ken Kelman, Peter Kubelka, James Broughton, and P. Adams Sitney, began the ambitious Essential Cinema project to establish a canon of important cinematic works. Over the past 35 years Anthology has grown to include video programs, a new filmmakers series, and archival projects, all with Mekas at the helm. For over forty years, he has been independent cinema's champion, protector, and yes, its midwife.

Jonas Mekas, "Filmer"

When the Mekas brothers arrived in America, they immediately purchased their first camera, a Bolex. Mekas shot short bits of footage whenever he could, ostensibly as practice

for future film projects, while aspiring to make feature length and documentary films. Deeply impressed by John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (the first version) and Robert Frank and Albert Leslie's *Pull My Daisy*, Mekas made *Guns of the Trees* in 1962, a Beat-inspired story of two couples who struggle to make sense of their changing world in the early 1960s. Mekas also made a pseudo-documentary of *The Brig* (1964), a play about prison brutality in the Marine Corps, performed at the Living Theater.

It wasn't until the mid-'60s that Mekas began to realise that the "practice" footage he'd been recording amounted to a notebook, or diary film project. Encouraged by Gerald O'Grady in 1967 to exhibit some of his material at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, Mekas edited his first "diary film" and entitled it *Diaries, Notes, Sketches, or Walden*. After *Walden*, and into the '70s, Mekas delved deeper into his past on the occasion of a visit to Lithuania, making *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* in 1971–1972. *Lost Lost Lost* was edited four years later, in 1976, and retraced the first ten years Mekas lived in New York.

With *Lost Lost Lost*, Mekas had returned to the starting point of his diary films, the mid-'60s. In 1978, he edited footage from the *Walden* years to make *In Between*. The same year, Mekas made *Notes for Jerome*, an elegy for his dear friend and patron of Anthology, Jerome Hill. The 1970s also brought about Mekas' American family, with his marriage to Hollis Melton in 1974, and the births of daughter Oona (1974) and son Sebastian (1981). In 1979 he made *Paradise Not Yet Lost* (also known as *Oona's Third Year*) as a letter to his daughter and a memoir of the family's life in New York and travel abroad in Europe.

Mekas' major cinematic work in the 1980s was *He Stands Alone in a Desert Counting the Seconds of His Life* (1985), a compilation of footage from 1969 to 1985, including family and friends from the film community. During that time he also edited a couple of short dance films, *Cups/Saucers/Dancers/Radio* (1965/1983), and *Erik Hawkins: Excerpts from "Here and Now with Watchers"/Lucia Dlugoszewski Performs* (1983) along with *Street Songs* (1965/1983). Mekas' written work from this period includes the translation and editing of his personal diaries, a couple volumes of poetry (Mekas published poetry throughout his life, mostly in Lithuanian), and a compilation of press notes from his screenings and *Movie Journal* column, which he had left in 1976.

The '80s was a difficult decade for Anthology Film Archives, and Mekas spent much of his time moving Anthology from 80 Wooster Street to its current location at the Courthouse on 2nd Avenue. Once the new building had been renovated, he poured his efforts into fundraising and finding staff to keep Anthology running. He also made a tremendous effort to rescue films that were being discarded by the many film laboratories then closing due to the increasing popularity of video.



Jonas Mekas in front of the Anthology Film Archives

In the 1990s, Mekas returned to older footage to create a number of film elegies (*Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol* [1990], *Zefiro Torna or Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas* [1992], *Happy Birthday to John* [1996], and *Birth of a Nation* [1997]), *Song of Avignon* (1998), and *Memories of Frankenstein* (1996), a recording of the mid-'60s Living Theater performance of *Frankenstein*. He completed a film begun by Jerome Hill, *Dr. Carl C. Jung or Lapis Philosophorum* (1950–91) and, in anticipation of a longer film he was

working on, he also made *Quartet Number One* (1991). Mekas' other film projects during this period include *Imperfect 3-Image Films* (1995) and *On My Way to Fujiyama I Met...* (1995). The '90s also saw the beginning of Mekas' video work, including *The Education of Sebastian or Egypt Regained* (1992), (1994), *Scenes from Allen's Last Three Days on Earth as a Spirit* (1997), *Letter from Nowhere – Laiskas is Niekur No. 1* (1997), *Laboratorium* (1999), and two videos of a drumming band in which his wife performed, *Mob of Angels/The Baptism* (1991) and *Mob of Angels at St. Ann* (1992).

Mekas began the new millennium with the epic *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2000), a moving portrait of his family life. He continued editing old footage, including the Kennedy family portrait, *This Side of Paradise* (1999), another Living Theater performance in *Mysteries* (1966–2001), *Williamsburg, Brooklyn* (1950–2003), and *Mozart & Wein and Elvis* (2000), a one-minute film commissioned by the Viennale Film Festival that revisits footage taken of Mekas' mother 27 years earlier. Mekas' other notable works of the period were made on video: *Autobiography of a Man Who Carried his Memory in his Eyes* (2000), *Notes on Andy's Factory* (1999), *Remedy for Melancholy* (2000), *Ein Maerchen* (2001), *Notes on Utopia* (2003), and *Letter from Greenpoint* (2004). With a growing reputation as a film artist, he began to create installation pieces such as 2003's *Dedication to Leger*, a room full of video footage that, when viewed linearly, comprises 24 hours' worth. His upcoming sound diary installation at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2005 will feature sounds and voices heard during the '60s.

The diary films that comprise most of Mekas' cinematic output adhere closely to the events in his life, and focus on the details of daily life. Mekas carries his camera by his side, recording friends, laughter, food, and nature. The shots are often single-frame, of varying exposure, and are sometimes superimposed over each other, causing Mekas' images to flutter delicately onscreen, in fragments. Some shots are minutes long, others only seconds. Each film is composed of a series of short scenes, strung together with music or Mekas' narration, and punctuated by intertitles that read like captions in a photo album – “home scenes”, “at the Film-maker's Coop”, and “Sunday in Central Park” – or as elliptical asides – “and I was looking at my childhood, & dreaming–” and “This is a political film.”

The films themselves are like collections of poems, organised loosely by the tone of the images, and the general time period they cover. Mekas has said of his films that nothing much happens in them, at least not like in the kind of narrative dramas we've come to expect from feature filmmaking. In his films, there is “no drama, no great climaxes, tension, what will happen next.” (5) When he shows his son taking his first steps, or a cup full of berries picked in a meadow, he explains that he is composing “a sort of masterpiece of nothing. Personal little celebrations and joy...miracles of everyday, little moments of Paradise.” (6)

Mekas insists that he is not a filmmaker, but rather a “filmer”, preferring to capture the essence of the moment before him to staging an event. He explains: “In reality, all my film work is one long film which is still continuing... I don't really make films: I only keep filming. I am a filmer, not a film-maker. And I am not a film 'director' because I direct nothing. I just keep filming.” (7)

Filming/Figuring Memory

In 1971 Mekas admitted, “There is practically no snow in New York; all my New York notebooks are filled with snow.” (8) The world that Mekas sees through his lens might not be exactly as it is, but he is looking somewhere else, towards Paradise: a snowy street in New York, children sledding, a woman twisting a blade of grass in Central Park. Mekas films the outside world as his interior one, and it is as if there is no distinction between the two.

As he explains in *As I Was Moving Ahead...*, "What you see is my imaginary world, which is not imaginary at all, but is real." By filming his imaginary world, Mekas makes an insistence on vision itself.

Living as a displaced person, Mekas was haunted by his memories of Lithuania. In his journals and in the spoken and written text of *Lost Lost Lost*, he speaks of his loneliness during his first years in America, and of the exiled Lithuanian community's empty hopes of a return to their homeland. In the otherwise industrial environment of New York, Mekas' insistence on filming natural subjects like flowers and trees and snow were a way of relocating the rural Lithuania of his childhood. The seeming randomness and improvisatory nature of his shots are in fact carefully reconstructed and linked together by memory. As Scott Nygren notes, these images are "filled with significance through memory, through what is absent from the screen." (9)

In *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, the presence of memory is steep. The film was made in 1971–72, when Mekas travelled back to Lithuania for the first time since he left twenty years earlier. "I'm a displaced person on my way home in search for my home, retracing bits of past, looking for some recognisable places of my past," he says in a



Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania

voiceover. Instead of filming the changes that had occurred, he attended to what had remained the same: his mother's earthen stove, and the fields and woods that surround his home. In his notes on the film he writes, "you don't see how Lithuania is today: you see it only through the memories of a Displaced Person back home for the first time in twenty years." Mekas, caught up in the collision of past with present, was filming the Lithuania of his childhood. At his brother Kostas' home, for example, the reunited brothers took out antiquated scythes to farm wheat, even though they were no longer used. For Mekas, "it was real enough as a memory." (10)

In a way, Mekas' films are his memories. He is drawn to record celebrations, gatherings of friends, and the joyous occasions of family life, but his films are far more than a catalogue of events. They are alive *with* memory, for Mekas also films because he remembers. His memories drive what he films in the present moment: "And what are those moments, what makes me choose those moments? I don't know. It's my whole past memory that makes me choose the moments that I film." (11)

The process of selecting subjects, however, remains for Mekas unconscious, and the mystery of those moments follow him years later into the editing room. "Sometimes he didn't know where he was," he says in a voiceover for *Lost Lost Lost*. "The present and the past intermingled, superimposed." For Mekas – lost in time and in place – the difference between past and present melt away, and all become memories. During a visit to his wife's childhood home in *Paradise Not Yet Lost*, he watches her "walk thru her childhood" as she crosses a wide field. The scene, recorded in Mekas' signature single-frame style, plays as if through the hazy lens of memory itself, with its rapid fluttering and passing glimpses. To consider that moment, the then-present instant recorded on film stock already obsolete, is to get a sense of how the past and present do not stand so distinctly after all. A woman's hand grazes the tips of the tall grass: the past and the soon-to-be-past commingling in a single frame.

Mekas' films, especially those that concern his family and his dearest friends, are highly intimate. Whereas other filmmakers may distance themselves from their subjects or approach them as voyeurs, Mekas fully participates in his scenes. He talks off-camera, or shakes it with laughter. Occasionally he turns it around to film himself. The warmth expressed in his films, however, take on a note of sadness when we consider that the subjects with whom Mekas feels so close, are already gone. In the moving *Zefiro Torna or Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas*, for example, Mekas reads from his diary while footage of playful Fluxus performances dance by. Describing his last encounters with his dying friend, he remarks, "death always walked around me."

By the time of editing, the subjects of Mekas' films have already moved on (12). *Lost, Lost, Lost*, for example, which concerns Mekas' exile in America, was edited thirty years after the earliest footage was collected, after his homeland had been at least partially regained in *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. Perhaps most poignantly, the tender marriage celebrated in *As I Was Moving Ahead...* was already falling apart by the time the film was cut together. It is as if Mekas can tell his stories only after the fact, when only traces remain. The voice heard in his films is that of a man piecing together his memories, years, sometimes decades later. Though the images he speaks over are full of life and people, he frequently reminds us that he is alone in his studio, late at night. "I sit here by myself and I talk into my tape recorder," he says in *Paradise Not Yet Lost*, as images of his three year-old daughter dance by. "This is late at night in New York. The city is sleeping. I can only hear some cars in the street. This is late. Everything is gone. It's gone. Everything is gone."

Mekas often alludes to dark periods and silences in his films, and of sleeplessness and loneliness. Rarely, however, are these moments figured literally. More often they exist as text in an intertitle, or as several seconds of black/blank space, briefly interrupting an otherwise happy scene. Such moments, though they occur frequently, are easy to miss. The beauty and joy of the domestic scenes so fill the imagination that we forget to question what kind of darkness Mekas might have been experiencing. Yet he leaves clues that indicate there might more might be happening than what is immediately apparent. "Cinema is innocent," he muses in *As I Was Moving Ahead...*, "People are not innocent."

During a conversation I had with him, Mekas took out his camera and filmed himself saying, "I do not remember when I was 15 to 25." Then he corrected himself. "I do not want to remember." The decade Mekas spoke of was the one during which the German army invaded Lithuania and he was forced to leave his home. He was speaking not of memory's fog, but rather of its persistence, and moreover his own determination to shut out those painful memories. The force with which he said the word "want" – "I do not want to remember" – alters the context of his films, giving new appreciation for their depth and hidden sorrow. Indeed, that period of Mekas' childhood remains largely absent from an otherwise comprehensive body of film and written work (13). To consider Mekas' deliberate refusal to remember opens up another, hidden side to his films. Like the shadow self-portraits that appear in *Walden*, *Notes for Jerome* and several other films, the dark moments are perceived as absences. They compel us to look for what isn't seen.

Viewed another way, the images that are seen trace the outline of those that are not. Look at the way the images are shown, rather than at what they show. The absences are inscribed into the film's single-frame technique, which, as Scott Nygren writes, "incorporates visible absence in the form of the space between the frames into the recording process." (14) In the single frame, the fragment, or "glimpse" as Mekas would say, is the basic structural device used in his film work. As we see the fractured motion of branches swaying in the wind, what becomes apparent is the spaces between the frames, or what we don't see. Mekas himself notes: "...what I have, after all, is already fading, it's

all just like a shadow of the real reality which I do not really understand.” (15)

Song of Avignon tells of a transition out of one such shadowy place. The film begins with stormy, rattling footage taken from a night train, which then arrives in the peaceful and quiet town of Avignon at dawn. The wind has calmed, and Mekas sits in a café. He feeds part of his croissant to a cat. In the film notes, he writes: “Dedicated to my 1966 trip to Avignon that helped me survive a deep crisis that I was going through.” Nowhere does he reveal what kind of crisis he was experiencing, but its presence, or rather its absence, gives the film its compelling emotional force.

The closeness Mekas maintains to his subjects translates into a similarly intimate relationship with his viewer. In *Walden*, he asserts that the images shown are “for myself and for a few others,” suggesting an intimate circle of friends. This was in fact true, as *Walden's* first screening was an informal “first draft” version at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo. By showing details of his family life, and of outings and time spent with friends, Mekas extends an invitation to his viewer to partake in their beauty. “[These images] are not much different from what you have seen or experienced,” he says in *As I Was Moving Ahead...* “There is no big difference, no essential difference between you and me.” To watch a Mekas film is to experience the intimacy of someone sharing his life with you. When this is done in a theatre, it is as if the room is filled with old friends. Together – and Mekas is a master at bringing an audience together – you sit as guests at his table, watch his children grow, and even share in his unnameable sorrow. “I drink to you, dear friends!” he calls out in *As I Was Moving Ahead...*, and though he is speaking to the people gathered around the table onscreen, it's easy to believe he's speaking to you, the viewer.

Walden

Walden was Mekas' first diary film, and it was edited as a collection of images gathered between the years 1964 and 1969. Its original title was *Diaries, Notes, Sketches*, which was the intended name for all of his films (they would each have different subtitles), though when it became too confusing for film laboratories to distinguish between films, Mekas abandoned the practice. He still kept *Diaries, Notes, Sketches* as a subtitle in *Walden*, *Lost Lost Lost*, and *In Between*, and the name is often used to designate his entire film oeuvre. The sketches in *Walden* refer to various films that, edited previously, were later included in *Walden: Report from Millbrook* (1965/1966), *Hare Krishna* (1966), *Notes on the Circus* (1966), and *Cassis* (1966) all occur within the film.

Walden is organised into six reels, loosely cycling through the seasons of the year. In the first two reels, Mekas establishes his life in New York with friends, trips abroad and in the country, and activities at the Cinémathèque and the Film-makers' Coop. Reel two also includes a meeting of the Kreeping Kreplach, in which a new generation and culture is announced. The next two reels of the film includes scenes of winter. In one sequence, Mekas remembers a scene from seven years before, footage of the “women for peace” which later appeared in *Lost Lost Lost*. The longest scene of this



section takes place during a visit with Brakhages at their mountain home in Colorado. In the final two reels of the film, Mekas includes more footage with friends, spring and autumn, weddings, and Adolfas' spoof on underground filmmaking.



Walden
© Re:Voir

In "I Feel Passionate about the Film Journals of Jonas Mekas", filmmaker Richard Leacock writes, "to view a Mekas film is to participate in the avant garde film community, to become a member of it, to share its struggles, to pay homage to the pioneers of film art." (16) This is perhaps most true of *Walden*. The film is a celebration of Mekas' friendships and the vibrancy of the independent cinema community. We see the marquée at the Cinémathèque, the mailing of *Film Culture* magazine, meetings at the Coop and Anthology, and countless filmmaker friends and family: Gregory Markopoulos, Carl Th. Dreyer, David and Barbara Stone, Tim Leary, the Brakhage family, Ken and Flo Jacobs, P. Adams Sitney, Tony Conrad, Storm de Hirsch, Marie Menken, Hans Richter, Andy Warhol, Allen Ginsberg, John Lennon and Yoko Ono. As a shy immigrant, Mekas' interaction with the film community was mediated by film itself: "my camera allowed me to participate in the life that took place around me." (17) He attended weddings, births, and countless gatherings of friends, and became the home movie-maker of the avant garde.

His seemingly amateur aesthetic, however, is far from accidental. Though *Walden* was Mekas' first diary film, he had already fully mastered the technique of single-framing and rapid changes in shutter speed, focus, and exposure. Full of motion, colour and joy, his filmic style is as recognisable and as personal as handwriting. The inclusion of so-called "technical imperfections" are, for Mekas, what "reveal aspects of inner and outer reality that could not be caught through technical 'perfection.'" (18) Every movement and every frame is directly connected to Mekas' reaction in the moment. Editing is in-camera, and nothing is staged.

Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania



Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania

After *Walden*, the next film Mekas completed was *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. By 1971, after twenty years of exile, the Lithuanian émigrés were finally allowed to return to their home country. The film consists of three parts. The first contains some of Mekas' first footage shot in New York in the years 1950–53, scenes of immigrant life in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The second part, "100 Glimpses of Lithuania, 1971" was shot during Mekas' return visit to Semeniskiai, the village where he was born and what he calls "the center of the world". The third part includes a parenthetical segment that follows Mekas' postwar trajectory to a forced labour camp in Elmshorn, Germany, and the film concludes when he is restored to his original destination, Vienna, and there greets friends from the film community.

The reopening of the Lithuanian border, presented, for the first time since the war, an opportunity for Mekas to return to his native country. And yet *Reminiscences* begins with the establishment of Mekas' new roots in America. "It was good to walk like this and not think anything about the last ten years," he says over footage of boys playing in the Catskills. "For the first time I did not feel alone in America. This was the beginning of my new home."

The new home Mekas had found in New York, a life full of the friends and art seen in *Walden*, did not, however, undo the pain of losing his Lithuanian home. Over images of the

black and white streets of Williamsburg, he laments, "the minute we left we started going home, and we are still going home. I am still on my journey home."

When Mekas actually returns to Lithuania in part two, he seeks out the home he left by deliberately avoiding that which had changed in the past twenty years. The "100 Glimpses" include bright Lithuanian folk songs and focus on the life of Mekas' mother, who refused to change her ways or leave her home. Mama's home is much the way Mekas remembers it. She still draws water from the old well and cooks over an outdoor stove. Mekas' brothers and their families join in the happy reunion, and as they dance in a circle, Mekas explains, "when more than one Lithuanian get together they sing."

During the second and third parts, Mekas includes parenthetical segments in which the events leading up to his exile are revealed. The parentheses in part two tell the story of his hidden typewriter, his uncle's dictum to "go, children, west, see the world and come back," and the Vienna train redirected to the forced labour camps in Hamburg. In part three, he visits Elmshorn, the site of the camps, where "only the grass remember there used to be a labour camp here." Parentheses normally function to insert into a text an afterthought inessential to the major idea. Without the parentheses, however, *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* would simply be the story of a man who left his homeland and later returned to visit. The crucial addition of the parentheses not only gives Mekas' story its background, but also deepens our understanding of his loss. The delicate manner in which these episodes are presented, as parentheses, only underscore their significance. Though they are central to the understanding of his postwar life, the only way Mekas will allow them into his story is as afterthought.

In the final act of *Reminiscences*, Mekas joins filmmakers and scholars Peter Kubelka, Hermann Nitsch, Annette Michelson and Ken Jacobs in Vienna. Mekas names his friends as saints, admiring them for the way they live in and through culture. They visit Vienna's cathedrals and markets together, and Mekas' tone is noticeably buoyant. "No, I never got to Vienna that time but some strange circumstances pulled me back much later and there I am now." In the final shot of the film, the group passes a burning fruit market outside Vienna. Mekas recounts how Peter Kubelka speculated that the market was likely set on fire so the city could get rid of it. "They want a modern market now." In a film deeply concerned with the fixity of time, Mekas cannot help but film the beautiful colours of the burning market, even if it means acknowledging the passage of time. For even in Vienna, the city where Mekas should have gone, the world was moving on.

Lost Lost Lost

Walden may have been Mekas' first diary film, but the film that incorporated Mekas' earliest footage was the one that told the story of his postwar arrival in America, *Lost Lost Lost*. The film is divided into two parts: the first concerns life in the Lithuanian community of Williamsburg, and the second chronicles Mekas' move to Manhattan and his integration into the independent film and art scenes of New York.

Here Mekas is at his most deeply personal. He describes the loneliness and struggle of those early years with mournful music and spoken laments: "Long, lonely days; long, lonely nights. There was a lot of walking through the nights of Manhattan. I don't think I have ever been as lonely." Mekas also closely follows the lives of his fellow Lithuanian immigrants. During a gathering in Connecticut, he explains, "occasionally we used to escape to Stonybrook, places where immigrants exchanged their memories. We all gathered there, we all lived on memories there." As the first section progresses, however, a tension develops between Mekas and the other immigrants. Though Mekas sympathises with them, he grows increasingly disenchanted with their hopes to reform and return to Lithuania. By

the end of the reel, he leaves the community in Williamsburg and moves to Manhattan.

These were our last times together. I began to feel that I had been turning on one spot around my memories. I began to feel if anything can be done for Lithuania, it can only be done by the people that live there. That the only way that I can be useful to Lithuania is by building myself from scratch, from the beginning, and then giving myself back to it, back to Lithuania, however I am.

Part two, the section entitled "Diaries, Notes, Sketches", describes the beginnings of Mekas' involvement in the underground film community, and his gradual establishment of roots in Manhattan. It includes unfinished scenes from the first film that he and Adolfas worked on, a story about a woman who presages the death of her husband. This is also documentary footage of Mekas on the set of *Guns of the Trees*, standing with his arms crossed and jaw tensing, obviously uncomfortable. Living in New York and making friends, Mekas gains in enthusiasm: "It was exciting; everything was new." Still, Mekas is a long way from the jubilant life portrayed in *Walden*. He admits, "there is very little known about this period of our protagonist's life. It's known that he was very shy and very lonely during this period. He used to take long, long walks. He felt very close to the parks, to the street, to the city."

What dominates the second part of *Lost Lost Lost* is Mekas' imperative to film. He is drawn to the bravery of people who insist on being heard: the protesters gathered at City Hall, pamphleteers hailing a "New America", and the leaflet women who stood outside on the coldest day of the year. With his camera-eye, he gives them the recognition they seek. "I have seen you, the leaflet women," he calls. "They are known in rain, in snow, in cold, in hot summer days. I've seen you, the leaflet women." As Mekas voices his salute in the moment of editing, however, it is decades later, long after the struggles themselves have been forgotten.

Moments later, he reveals a deeper motive for filming. "It's my nature now, to record. To try to keep everything I'm passing through, to keep at least bits of it. I have lost too much so now I have these bits that I have passed through." The "too much" that Mekas refers to, his pre-war life and irretrievable childhood, resonate as loss in the images he does manage to collect. Mekas' insistence to film is directly tied to his need to hold onto the pieces of his life, so he will not lose any more than he already has.



Mekas filming *Lost Lost Lost*

The third reel contains the unfinished "Rabbit Shit Haikus", vignettes filmed while Adolfas was shooting *Hallelujah the Hills* (1963). Here, Mekas tells the story of the rabbit shit at the end of the road, albeit a different and slightly darker version than the one that appeared in his journal, *I Had Nowhere to Go* (1944–1955). In a journal entry from December 30, 1951, the man who reached the fabled end of the world laughed when all he found was rabbit shit, realising the foolishness of his long years of effort. The *Lost Lost Lost*, version, however, told over twenty years later, describes what happened when the man returned home: no one believed him. The *Rabbit Shit Haikus* include 31 views of mostly natural subjects: trees, snowy landscapes, and the sky. Mekas introduces his subjects by speaking their names three times in a slow, incantatory cadence: "the sunset...the sunset...the sunset..." or "the

childhood...the childhood...the childhood...". He and Adolfas frolic in the snow like children. In one shot Jonas dances through the falling snow with his accordion. In another, Adolfas slides down into the semi-frozen river. Mekas was never completely satisfied with the "Rabbit Shit Haikus", but nestled within *Lost Lost Lost*, even in their unfinished form, they give the film a sense of peace and simplicity not felt, perhaps, since Mekas first left Lithuania. In temperament, the "Rabbit Shit Haikus" have more in common with Mekas' later films about his family, *Paradise Not Yet Lost* and *As I Was Moving Ahead*. Their appearance in *Lost Lost Lost*, the film that concerns Mekas' difficult first years in America, offer an expression of hope for what could be.

Embedded in the images of *Lost Lost Lost*, there is also the story of a maturing filmmaker, who, in the beginning, poses awkwardly for test shots and uses a tripod for portraits in black and white. By the end, Mekas has begun to perfect his technique. Late in the film, Mekas describes a scene at a film seminar at Flaherty where he and Ken Jacobs were denied entry. They sleep outside, in the bed of their truck, and awake to a cold, foggy morning in a vast field. Mekas uses some of Jacobs' footage to show himself with a blanket wrapped around his shoulders, guiding his Bolex in wide, looping gestures. Then he cuts to the footage he was shooting. It is as if Mekas' camera loosens. We see momentary bursts of single frames, the rapid and blurry motion of his camera interrupted by startling detail of the wildflowers in the grass. This is the first instance of what would become recognisable as Mekas' signature style, and its realisation at Flaherty, where the established film community had rejected him, coincides perfectly with the emergence of a distinctive way of seeing.

The last scenes in the film occur at a beach in Stonybrook, where Mekas had been ten years before with the Lithuanian émigrés. As he films his friends wading in the water, he realises that he had been on the beach before. "I have been here before. I have really been here before", he says with some amazement. As his filmic restoration of Lithuania in *Reminiscences* allowed him to move forward on the path he should have gone (i.e. to Vienna), the recognition of the beach at Stonybrook gives him a sense of fixity in an otherwise uncertain fate.

Lost Lost Lost, though it contains Mekas' earliest footage, was edited only after Mekas saw his community blossom in *Walden*, and after he had regained his homeland in *Reminiscences*. It is as if the painful themes of exile and loss could only be explored after a considerable length of time had lapsed, though in reviewing his filmed memories, it is clear that they were never entirely gone. In one telling scene he looks at his friend filmmaker Barbara Rubin's hair as she sits beside a fountain. Perhaps recognising a hairstyle from long ago, he interjects, "No, no he won't look back." Mekas pulls away, turning his attention to "the unpredictable and unknown" as the image of a woman's face appears, engulfed by enormous bubblegum balloons.

Paradise Not Yet Lost

In 1974, Mekas married Hollis Melton. Their daughter, Oona, was born the same year. Where Mekas had found a home in the independent film community during the 1950s and '60s, by the mid-'70s he had his own family to care for. He made *Paradise Not Yet Lost* (aka *Oona's Third Year*) in 1979 with footage shot in 1977. The film is arranged in six chronologically-ordered parts, each filmed in a different location during Oona's third year: the first, domestic life in New York; the second, a trip to Sweden; the third, a return to Lithuania with Mekas' new family; the fourth, a visit to



Warsaw; the fifth, time spent in Vienna and Italy with Peter Kubelka and his daughters; and the sixth, the family's resumption of life in New York.

Oona is the film's central figure. She sings and laughs, and Mekas pays careful attention to her expressions of wonder as she accompanies her parents through the city streets and rural pastures they visit. When an intertitle flashes with the words, "the diarist", Mekas refers not to himself but to



Paradise Not Yet Lost
© Jonas Mekas

his small daughter writing in her book. The film is also constructed as a letter to Oona, "to serve her, some day, as a distant reminder of how the world around her looked during the third year of her life." (19) To depict this world, Mekas also includes footage of the people and events that were important to their family: her cousin Sean's third birthday, the story of how Mekas' mother refused to leave her home, an arm wrestle between Mekas and one of Peter Kubelka's daughters, a visit to Harry Smith's hotel room, and Nicholas Ray walking down the street after a heavy snowfall.

The title, *Paradise Not Yet Lost*, suggests that through Oona and the growth of his family, Mekas finds some hope of redemption. To that end, Mekas passes on some of the lessons he's learned to his daughter: "I'm talking to you, Oona. Be idealistic, don't be practical. Seek the insignificant small but essential qualities, essential to life." Yet his advice is marked by the bitterness of his own experience. In another passage, during which the family visits Oona's grandparents, he says:

I'm talking to you, Oona, because I have no more trust in my contemporaries. They have betrayed the nature, they have poisoned mine and your air. They have even driven me out from my home. They have no interest in the things that are essential to life.

Several times intertitles appear, marking the images as "fragments of Paradise". The Paradise that Mekas finds in his life are moments of simple beauty and joy: Oona standing on a table, looking at a cat; a feast of wild mushrooms, cooked in the field where they had been found. Moreover, these glimpses of Paradise describe the scenes of Oona's childhood, and through them, Mekas' own childhood. Midway through the section on Lithuania, Mekas recounts a story he had heard about Adam and Eve after they had left Paradise. While Adam slept next to a rock, Eve looked back and saw the "globe of Paradise exploding into millions of tiny bits and fragments." Once ejected, the view back towards Paradise is a fractured one. For Mekas, Paradise can only be seen in "tiny bits and fragments". The Paradise he seeks, then, is one experienced through the act of viewing.

To find Paradise, even in fragments, is a rare occurrence. In addressing Oona, Mekas also cautions us:

But I am not saying, Oona, that things have been that much better ever before. No, at any given time there were only very few women and men struggling to seek out and preserve the little bits of Paradise so that their lives would be more beautiful and the lives of those who would come after them. Paradise cannot be gained without a constant struggle, moment by moment.

As we live after the Fall (and for Mekas, the devastating Fall occurred when he was forced to leave Lithuania), we can only catch glimpses of Paradise, in fragments. Mekas' great accomplishment, then, is to persist in filming Paradise wherever he can, despite the darkness and struggle that surrounds him.

Elegies

In the 1990s, Mekas began collecting footage from previous films to create several film portraits. Because his subjects had all passed away by the time of editing, however, these portraits function more as elegies. The first such elegy was made in 1978, when Mekas put together a sensitive portrait of close friend, filmmaker, artist, and Anthology benefactor, Jerome Hill, in *Notes for Jerome*. The footage comes from the times Mekas spent with Hill at his seaside home in Cassis, France, in 1966, 1967, and in 1974.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about Mekas' elegies, especially those of celebrities, is how ordinary his subjects appear. Though *Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol* (1990) contains vibrant footage of Factory life, set to a fuzzy Velvet Underground drone, the most touching moments in the film are when Mekas describes the summers with the Kennedy children at Montauk. "Life was simple-minded and silly," reads an intertitle, and Warhol, a normally reserved-looking figure, is seen offering a birthday present to Tina Radziwill and pretending to be a big scary monster. Much of the footage from the same period was later compiled into *He Stands Alone in a Desert...* and *This Side of Paradise* (1999), a quiet portrait of Jackie Kennedy's and her sister Lee Radziwill's children during the summers Mekas spent with them, teaching them about cinema. Through Mekas' eye, the children are like any other children: swimming, playing jokes, and laying pennies on train tracks. "These were days of Little Fragments of Paradise" Mekas writes of the film, though in the film notes he mentions that the period was marked by the then-recent death of the children's father and uncle, John F. Kennedy. Another elegy, *Happy Birthday to John* (1996), portrays John Lennon in the late '70s, including a birthday gathering of friends and music in Syracuse, a concert at Madison Square Garden, and a party at Klein's. It concludes with footage from Central Park, December 8, 1980, the day Lennon was tragically killed. In a film full of music and cheer, the most notable aspect of this final scene is the lack of foregrounded sound. People have gathered in the park and a child plays in a pile of leaves. Mekas sights a memorial banner that reads, "his spirit lives." The film finishes in complete silence.

The elegies for the friends Mekas was closest to are his most poignant. In *Zefiro Torna or Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas* (1992), Mekas reads from his diary encounters with his friend and fellow Lithuanian émigré, George Maciunas, during the years when Maciunas' health was in rapid decline. The footage shown, however, rarely depicts Maciunas' illness, but rather his vitality and humour at Fluxus events and performances. Mekas talks of Maciunas' favorite composer, Monteverdi, and at the end of the film, his voice gives way to Monteverdi's jubilate madrigal, "Zefiro Torna". As it plays, Maciunas is seen for the first and only time on a hospital bed, smiling. *Scenes from Allen's Last Three Days on Earth as a Spirit* is an elegy for Allen Ginsberg, whose body, in the Buddhist tradition, was laid to rest for three days. Shot continuously on video, with few edits, the elegy takes on a slower, more meditative quality than his film elegies. Mekas arrives at Ginsberg's home after Ginsberg has passed away, and films the chanting monks, the gathered friends, and Ginsberg's peaceful face. "All that footage of friends gone," he muses. "In my footage people get born, grow up, live, and die." In a telling scene, the people in Ginsberg's loft are asked to leave while the body is being prepared for transport. Mekas is allowed to stay, as is a friend who prays at the foot of Ginsberg's bed. Mekas later attends the prayer service at the Buddhist Temple where many of Ginsberg's friends have gathered. Following the service, he goes to Anthology, where, with a few friends, he offers a toast to his departed friend.

As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty



As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty

In 1991, Mekas released *Quartet Number One*, not knowing how long the long film project he was working on would be, or when it would be released. By 2000, *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* was completed, and the footage from *Quartet Number One* was included in the film. The film is indeed long, the longest of Mekas' film work: 4 hours and 48 minutes. (Aside from the 24-hour video installation, *Dedication to Leger*, it is also his longest motion picture work.) *As I Was Moving Ahead...* consists of material from 1970–1999 and tells the story of Mekas' marriage to Hollis Melton, and the two children they raised together. It is Mekas' most intimate work.

As I Was Moving Ahead... is composed of twelve parts, two for each of the six reels. Its scenes occur in loose, semi-chronological order, though, as Mekas admits in the first part, "The first idea was to keep [the scenes] chronological, but then I gave up and I just began splicing them together by chance." From order by way of chronology, the film gives way to lyrical allusion and invisible connections. Though certain titles announce the births of Mekas' children, or dates on which various trips were taken, the film moves circuitously, hovering around its three primary subjects: Hollis, Oona, and Sebastian.

In the previous statement, however, Mekas announces himself as the film's true protagonist, not as a subject in the film, but as a man sorting through the moments of his past, and piecing them together the only way he can. *As I Was Moving Ahead...* can be viewed as a drama of filmmaking, where the act of remembrance is a literal re-remembering of the fragments of the past. In the film's evolution from chronology to lyrical connections, Mekas gives himself over to the processes of memory. Whereas a logical, sequential order benefits the viewer, the non-chronological order is closer to the actual experience of remembering, where everything from the past occurs in the same instant: more an impression than a story.

Again, the dance of past and present takes place, although its arrangement is significantly changed. Where in *Lost Lost Lost*, "sometimes he didn't know where he was," the Mekas of *As I Was Moving Ahead...* is firmly planted in the present, though he views himself in the past with a barely articulate sadness: "This is me there, here, and it's not me anymore because I am the one who is looking at it now, at myself, at my life, at my friends, the last quarter of the century."

In the midst of his rapture of remembering, Mekas remains carefully attuned to his viewer. He keeps a running commentary on the images that float by, reminding us constantly of the viewing experience. It is a kind of diary, less about the film's subjects and more about filmmaking itself. Mekas speaks to his viewer almost plaintively, as if wishing to reveal all: "You expect to find out more about the protagonist, who is me. All I want to tell you, it's all here. I am in every image in this film. I am in every frame in this film."

The spare, haunting piano improvisations of Auguste Varkalis set the emotional tone of the film. As the score is accompanied by Mekas' "images of Paradise" – the beatific smile of his wife, his golden-haired children, lazy afternoons in Central Park – it renders a sense of loss. With the knowledge that, at the time of editing, Mekas and his wife were already separating, this loss is deeper than nostalgia, because it speaks of a time that is not only over, but, with its traces in the present vanishing, completely gone. For David James, the

very experience of loss is what drives Mekas' film work: "...loss is not simply the master narrative; it is the condition of their coming into being..." (20) To film, and moreover to splice together footage, is, for Mekas, a kind of recovery of the past. Moreover, it is a reconstruction of the past, informed by Mekas' experience of loss as a desire to gather together his moments of greatest happiness.

Peter Kubelka once said of his friend, "Jonas has realised that, whatever paradise there is, it should be here and now. Loving care is a key to it." (21) *As I Was Moving Ahead* is a loving portrait of Mekas' early family life, a song of beauty and a testament to the possibility of Paradise. Appropriately, Mekas concludes the film in song, accompanied by his tireless accordion:

I do not know where I am, and going to, where I am coming from. I have seen some beauty. Glimpses of beauty and happiness. Yes, la beauté. And it is still beautiful in my memory. And it is real, as real as this film.

© Genevieve Yue, January 2005

If you would like to comment on this article, please send a letter [to the editors](#).

Endnotes

1. Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959–1971*, Macmillan, New York, 1972, p. ix. ▲
2. Mekas, p. ix. ▲
3. Mekas, p. 236 (April 21, 1966) ▲
4. Mekas compiled a complete list of screenings and programs he organised in "Showcases I Ran in the Sixties" in David E. James (ed.), *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992. The collection of essays also features a detailed chronology of Mekas' life, filmography and list of books published on Mekas. ▲
5. Mekas in his film *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*. 2000. ▲
6. Ibid. ▲
7. Mekas in *Just Like a Shadow*, Interview with Jérôme Sans, Steidl Publishers, Göttingen, 2000. ▲
8. Mekas, "The Diary Film" in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, New York University Press, New York, 1978, p. 191. ▲
9. Scott Nygren, "Film Writing and the Figure of Death: *He Stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of his Life*" in James, p. 245. ▲
10. Mekas in his film *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, 1972. ▲

11. Mekas in *Just Like a Shadow* ▲
12. In his essay, "Film Diary/Diary Film: Practice and Product in Walden", David E. James formulised the theory that "The greater that distance, the greater the sense of loss and the greater the sense of the irretrievability of time; as the editing follows more closely on the shooting, time's ravages are felt proportionately less." In James, p. 165. ▲
13. The earliest accounts of Mekas' life come from his journal, *I Had Nowhere to Go*, which begins its story immediately after Mekas left Lithuania. The first entry is from 1944, when Mekas was 22. Furthermore, the Black Thistle Press edition was not released until 1991. ▲
14. Nygren, in James, p. 246. ▲
15. Mekas in *Just Like a Shadow*. ▲
16. Richard Leacock, "I Feel Passionate about the Film Journals of Jonas Mekas" in James, p. 302. ▲
17. Mekas in *Just Like a Shadow*. ▲
18. Mekas in *Just Like a Shadow*. ▲
19. Mekas. Notes for *Paradise Not Yet Lost* (1979). ▲
20. James, p. 168. ▲
21. Peter Kubelka, "Dear Friends" in *James*, p. 240. ▲

Filmography

Guns of the Trees (1962) 75 min
Film Magazine of the Arts (1963) 20 min
The Brig (1964) 68 min
Award Presentation to Andy Warhol (1964) 12 min
Report from Millbrook (1964–65) 12 min
Hare Krishna (1966) 4 min
Notes on the Circus (1966) 12 min
Cassis (1966) 4.5 min
The Italian Notebook (1967) 14.75 min
Time and Fortune Vietnam Newsreel (1968) 4 min
Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches) (1969) 180 min
Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania (1971–72) 82 min



Jonas Mekas

Lost, Lost, Lost (1976) 2 hours, 58 min
In Between: 1964-8 (1978) 52 min
Notes for Jerome (1978) 45 min
Paradise Not Yet Lost (also known as *Oona's Third Year*) (1979) 96 min
Street Songs (1966/1983) 10 min
Cups/Saucers/Dancers/Radio (1965/1983) 23 min
Erik Hawkins: Excerpts from "Here and Now with Watchers"/Lucia Dlugoszewski Performs (1983) 6 min
He Stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of His Life (1969/1985) 150 min
Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol (1990) 35 min
Mob of Angels/The Baptism (1991) 60 min, video
Dr. Carl G. Jung or Lapis Philosophorum (1991) 29 min
Quartet Number One (1991) 8 min
Mob of Angels at St. Ann (1992) 60 min, video
Zefiro Torna or Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas (1992) 34 min
The Education of Sebastian or Egypt Regained (1992) 6 hours, video
He Travels. In Search of... (1994) 120 min, video
Imperfect 3-Image Films (1995) 6 min
On My Way to Fujiyama I Met... (1995) 25 min
Happy Birthday to John (1996) 24 min
Memories of Frankenstein (1996) 95 min
Birth of a Nation (1997) 85 min
Scenes from Allen's Last Three Days on Earth as a Spirit (1997) 67 min, video
Letter from Nowhere - Laiskas is Niekur N.1 (1997) 75 min, video
Symphony of Joy (1997) video
Song of Avignon (1998) 10 min
Laboratorium (1999) 63 min, video
Autobiography of a Man Who Carried his Memory in his Eyes (2000) 53 min, video
This Side of Paradise (1999) 35 min, 16 mm
Notes on Andy's Factory (1999) 64 min, video
Mysteries (1966-2001) 34 min
As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty (2000) 288 min
Remedy for Melancholy (2000) 20 min, video
Ein Maerchen (2001) 6 min, video
Williamsburg, Brooklyn (1950-2003) 15 min
Mozart & Wein and Elvis (2000) 3 min
Travel Songs (1967-1981) 28 min
Dedication to Leger (2003) 24 hours worth of footage, video installation
Notes on Utopia (2003) 30 min, video
Letter from Greenpoint (2004) 80 min, video

Scenes From the Life of Jonas Mekas (as seen by his friends)

Newsreel - Jonas in the Brig (Storm de Hirsch, 1964) 5 min, 16 mm
Shooting Guns (Charles I. Levine, 1966) 8 min, 16 mm
Screen Tests - Jonas Mekas (Andy Warhol, 1966)
Song 15 (Stan Brakhage, 1966) 16 mm
Festival Mix (Jud Yalkut, 1967) 16 mm
Jonas (Gideon Bachmann, 1967) 16 mm
Filmmakers series - Jonas Mekas (Taka Iimura, 1969) 6 min, 16 mm
Portrait of Jonas and Peter (Friedl Kubelka-Bondy, 1993) 3 min, 16 mm
Jonas in the Desert (Peter Sempel, 1994) 102 min, 16 mm

Jonas Mekas, Friday the 13 Okt (Anja Czoska, 1995) 6 min, 16 mm
Jonas Mekas in Paris 10/97 (Pip Chodorov, 1997) 4 min 16 mm
Jonas Mekas joue de l'accordéon (Boris Lehman, 1998) 3 min, 16 mm
My Country is Cinema. Scenes from the Life of Jonas Mekas (Brigitte Cornand, 1999) 58 min, video
Happy Birthday Jonas (Auguste Varkalis, 1999) 3 min, 16 mm
Oona's wedding (Robert Fenz, 1999) 5 min, 16 mm
Fête d'anniversaire de Jonas Mekas avec portraits d'invités (Boris Lehman, 2000) 5 min, 16 mm
As Radau., Arba Palakiojimai (I Found... or Flyings) (Algimantas Maceina, 2001) (his 75th birthday, Christmas in Lithuania) 20 min, Beta SP
Moving Images – the Film-Makers' Cooperative Relocates (Joel Schlemowitz, 2001) 14 min, 16 mm
Jonas présente REMINISCENCES (Guillaume Lauras [La Fémis], 2001) 7 min, video
Cinéastes de notre temps: Jonas Mekas (Jackie Raynal, 2001)
As Jonas Was Moving Ahead, Peter Rode Off (Pip Chodorov, 2002) 5 min, 16 mm
Jonas Tourne Toujours (Pip Chodorov, 2002) 10 min, video
Meanwhile a Butterfly Flies (Julius Ziz, 2002) video



Select Bibliography

Writings on Film and Art

Robert Hughes, (ed.), *Film: Book I (The Audience and the Filmmaker)*, Grove Press, New York, 1959 [Contributions by Siegfried Kracauer, Frances Flaherty, Charles Siepmann, George Stoney, Federico Fellini, Jonas Mekas et al.].

Gregory Battcock, *The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology* E.P. Dutton, New York, 1967 [Contributions by Jonas Mekas, Taylor Mead, Andrew Sarris, Rudolf Arnheim, Parker Tyler, Henry Geldzahler, Ronald Tavel, Amos Vogel, P. Adams Sitney, Gregory Markopoulos, Dwight Macdonald, Susan Sontag, Stan Brakhage, et al.].

John Coplans with Jonas Mekas and Calvin Tompkins, *Serial Imagery*, Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California, 1968.

John Coplans, *Andy Warhol*, NY Graphics Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1970.

Alberto Arbasiano and Jonas Mekas (eds), *Entre el Underground y el Off-Off*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1970.

P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *Film Culture Reader*, Praeger, New York, 1970.

Still Light: Film Notes & Plates (with an Introduction by Jonas Mekas), Florence, 1971.

Reminiscensijos, New York, 1972 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971, Macmillan, New York, 1972.

Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney, *The Pleasure Dome: American Experimental Film 1939-1979*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1980.

Three Friends: John Lennon, Yoko Ono and George Maciunas, Tokyo, 1990.

Takahiko Iimura Film and Video (preface by Jonas Mekas), Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1990.

Jonas Mekas et al., *Swedish Avantgarde Film: 1924–1990*, Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1991.

Scott MacDonald (ed.), *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1992 [includes essay by Jonas Mekas].

Every minute as we are talking films are falling to dust: Jonas in the desert, Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1994.

Jim Shedden (ed.), *Presence and Absence: The Films of Michael Snow 1956–1991*, Art Gallery of Ontario/Knopf Canada, Toronto, 1995 [with essay by Jonas Mekas].

There is No Ithaca (English edition, translated by Vyt Bakaitis, of *Semeniskiu Idiles* and *Reminiscensijos*), Black Thistle Press, New York, 1996.

Letters from Nowhere, Vilnius, 1997 [in Lithuanian].

Laiskai is niekur, Baltos Iankos, Vilnius. 1997.

Hans Ulrich Obrist and Guy Tortosa, *Unbuilt Roads: 107 Unrealized Projects*, Hatje Cantz, Germany, 1997 [epilogue by Jonas Mekas].

Robert A. Haller (ed.), *Intersecting Images: The Cinema of Ed Emschwiller*, Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1997 [with essay by Jonas Mekas].

Shelly Rice (ed.), *Inverted Odysseys*, MIT Press, Boston, 1999 [essay on Maya Deren by Jonas Mekas].

Déclarations de Paris / Statements from Paris, Les Cahiers de Paris expérimental no. 2, Paris, 2001.

Le cinéma de la nouvelle generation, Les Cahiers de Paris expérimental no. 8, Paris, 2002.

Jonas Mekas Presente Flux Friends, Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2002.

Dore Ashton (ed.), *A Joseph Cornell Album*, Da Capo Press, Cambridge, 2002 [with essay by Mekas].

Articles on cinema in *Film Culture*, *the Village Voice*, *Soho Weekly News*, *Sight and Sound*, *Bianco e Nero*, *The New York Times*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Isskustyo Kino*, etc.

Poetry, Prose and Diaries

Knyga Apie Karalius ir Zmones, Tubingen, 1947 [prose in Lithuanian].

Semeniskiu Idiles, Kassel, 1948 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Géliu Kalbejimas, Chicago, 1961 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Pavieniai Zodziai, Chicago, 1967 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Poezija, Vilnius, 1971 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Reminiscensijos, New York, 1972 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Dienorasciai, New York, 1985 [poetry in Lithuanian].

I Had Nowhere to Go: Diaries, 1944–1954, Black Thistle Press, New York, 1991.

There is no Ithaca (English edition, translated by Vyt Bakaitis, of *Semeniskiu Idiles* and *Reminiscensijos*), Black Thistle Press, New York, 1996.

Dienu Rastai, Vilnius, 1998 [poetry in Lithuanian].

Zefiro Torna or Scenes From the Life of George Maciunas (diaries), Arthouse, New York, 1998.

Daybooks 1970–1972 (English edition, translated by Vyt Bakaitis), Portable Press by Yo-Yo Labs, Brooklyn, New York, 2003.

Lettres de nulle part = Letters from Nowhere (English and French edition, translated from Lithuanian by Marielle Vitureau), Editions Paris expérimental, Paris, 2003.

Artist's Book, One Star Press, Paris, 2004

Writings about Jonas Mekas

Gordon Ball, *66 Frames* (with introduction by Jonas Mekas), Coffee House Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

Alain Bergala, *je est un film*, Acor (association des cinémas de l'Ouest pour la recherche), France, 1998.

Judith E. Briggs, *Jonas Mekas (Filmmakers filming monograph)*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1980.

H. Currie and M. Forte (eds), *Cinema Now: Brakhage, Cage, Mekas, Vanderbeek*, University of Cincinnati, Ohio, 1968.

Lewis Jacobs, *The Emergence of Film Art*, Hopkinson and Blake, New York, 1969.

D. E. James (ed.), *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1992.

Algirdas Landsbergis, *Antroji proza zvilgsniai*, nr. 1. Gabija, Brooklyn NY, 1951.

Jonas Mekas, Patrick Remy (editor), Michel Mallard (illustrator), Patrick Remy, Jérôme Sans, *Just Like a Shadow*, interview with Jérôme Sans, Steidl Publishers, Göttingen, 2000

Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Film: The Front Line 1983*, Arden Press, Denver, 1983.

Jack Sargeant, *Naked Lens: An Illustrated History of Beat Cinema*, Creative Books, London, 1997.

P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde in the 20th Century*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1974, 1979, 2002.

P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, Anthology Film Archives Series 3, New York, 1987.

Calvin Tomkins, *The Scene: Reports on Post-Modern Art*, Viking, New York, 1976.

Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, Grove, New York, 1969.

James M. Welsh, Thomas L. Erskine, Elizabeth C. Bellavance (eds), *Literature Film Quarterly: D. H. Lawrence, Jonas Mekas, Andrew Sarris (Pt. 1, Shakespeare on Film I: Vol I/Set of 4 Books)*, Salisbury State University Press, Salisbury, Maryland, 1973.

Jonas Mekas, Diffusion le Seuil, Paris, France, 1992.

Jonas Mekas Films Immobiles, Une Celebration, Galerie du Jour, Paris, 1996.

October 29/Summer 1984, a journal of art, theory, criticism and politics, MIT Press, Boston, 1984 [interview with Mekas].



Articles in Senses of Cinema

Interview with Jonas Mekas by Brian Frye

He Stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of His Life by Fred Camper

Some Notes on This Side of Paradise: Fragments of an Unfinished Biography by Aaron Scott

Jonas Mekas Film and Videography by Anthology Film Archives and Pip Chodorov



Web Resources

Anthology Film Archives

The Film-makers' Cooperative

People's Archive

A free subscription site where you can watch a lengthy interview with Mekas. Highly recommended.

Jonas Mekas

Site from the University of Maryland.

Film Directors – Articles on the Internet

A couple of links to online articles can be found here.

Jonas Mekas et il Cinema Underground

Italian site dedicated to Mekas. English version under construction.

Just Like a Shadow

Excerpt from *Just Like a Shadow*

Artfacts.net

A listing and links to Jonas Mekas' art exhibitions from 2000–2004.

Jonas Mekas artist and art

A collection of useful links to Mekas' poetry and magazine interviews.

Writing on Jonas Mekas by Fred Camper on the Web**French Culture | People: Jonas Mekas**

France Honors Jonas Mekas Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters.

REVIEW: JONAS MEKAS

Review of Jonas Mekas at Laurence Miller Gallery, 1996.

City Arts

Interview with Jonas Mekas and Fabiano Canosa.

Click [here](#) to buy Jonas Mekas DVDs and videos at Facets



Click [here](#) to search for Jonas Mekas DVDs, videos and books at



[contents](#) [great directors](#) [cteq annotations](#) [top tens](#) [about us](#) [links](#) [archive](#) [search](#)