

## To Be Alive and Remain Facing up to Time, Choice and Reality

*It would be fruitless to curb or escape from daily life: as if searching for a fluid unexpectedness. And yet there are so-called aesthetic values – the only pure, the only that reject any negativity and can pull upwards. Imperfection then emerges as a springboard, throwing us out of the insignificance towards a sense.*

Algirdas Julius Greimas

Trapped in vital trials, losses and time, experiencing our own earthly existence, we seek meaningful reincarnations of memory and the present, which would provide for our daily life the faith in the power of ideas, identity and beauty. “How to be yourself?”<sup>1</sup>, how, according to Jonas Mekas, to preserve youthfulness, passion and joy, how to live and celebrate life<sup>2</sup>, so that time beyond our control would belong to us, we are not afraid of losing our choices and experience happiness in the face of reality<sup>3</sup>.

At the London Book Fair that took place in April 2018 Jonas Mekas presented his latest book *Conversations with Film-Makers*, published by Spector Books. It features interviews by Jonas Mekas with those who believed that cinema might become an art form unrestricted by frames and rules. The interviews were previously published in the cult New York magazine *The Village Voice*. Andy Warhol, Stan Brakhage, Susan Sontag, John Cassavetes, Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer, Claes Oldenburg, Kenneth Anger, Michael Snow and other avant-garde artists and filmmakers interviewed by Jonas Mekas from 1958 to 1977 witness an extraordinary time as a record of an artistic vision of the late twentieth century and an amazing visual document. Living in the present moment Jonas Mekas valued memory and the experience of presence as freedom and life here-and-now<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In memoriam. Jonas Mekas apie tai, kaip išlikti pačiu savimi („Be pykčio“, 2007), *lrt.lt*, 2019 01 23. Access through internet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvaKhexhWaY> [2019 12 12]; Jonas Mekas: Advice to the Young, *Louisiana Chanel*, Aug 11, 2015 09 11. Access through internet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW4ss8L8dgo> [2019 12 12].

<sup>2</sup> Jonas Mekas – Always Beginning, *TateShots*, 2017 11 11. Access through internet: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzkzQEx\]9rc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzkzQEx]9rc) [2019 12 12].

<sup>3</sup> A Happy Man: Jonas Mekas, The Godfather of Avant-Garde Cinema Celebrates His 90th With a Major Retrospective and World Premiere, *Nowness*, 2012 12 05. Access through internet: <https://www.nowness.com/playlist/32269/dok> [2019 12 12].

<sup>4</sup> „A person does not think about how he feels all the time, every second of life. But once you're born there, it can't be changed. I grew up in Lithuania, and I was twenty years old when I left Lithuania. In twenty years, everything that is Lithuania has entered into me. The whole memory is full of Lithuania, human and Lithuanian thinking, and language, and nature, and weather, and snow, and images, you can't throw it away. This is very normal and almost physical. You ask me, do you feel Lithuanian? Such a question is nonsense, and the answer would be nonsense because, you know, you can't change it. You were born Lithuanian, and you will die Lithuanian. You can learn languages, you can live and work in these lands, you can travel all over the world, but still you'll be who you are.



Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Jonas Mekas, Serpentine Cinema: Jonas Mekas, Conversations with Filmmakers, presented by the Lithuanian Culture Institute in partnership with Serpentine Galleries and MUBI, 10 April 2018, Peckhamplex Cinema. Photo: Elisabeth Presland

Every meeting with Jonas Mekas is a perfect puzzle of surprises, no matter where it takes place – as an example, at the London Book Fair in the meeting at the Peckhamplex movie theatre he shared with readers his dream of a dog he met on a street speaking to him about galleries. Wearing the mask of a German shepherd dog and thus preserving the dream vision, he delivered his monologue to the director of the Serpentine Galleries in London about the importance of small gallery spaces<sup>5</sup>.

Jonas Mekas' works have inspired many artists and filmmakers following in his footsteps. Mike Figgis, Jim Jarmusch, Harmony Korine and Martin Scorsese have also mentioned Jonas Mekas as their greatest influence. Mekas' films and archival material are on display at famous museums and galleries, including the Serpentine Galleries in London, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm, the PS1 Contemporary Art Center (MoMA) in New York, the National Museum of Modern

But viewed from another angle, it is truth that we must be born several times. Once we were born in that geography, in that village, in that place, in that thought, and then, perhaps, you went to schools, universities, traveled around the world, the horizon has been expanded – you were born a second time. You were born in the wider world." Jonas Mekas: „Vien tik praeitimi gyventi negali, nors ta praeitis ir auksinė“, *delfi.lt*, 2012 12 02. Access through internet: <https://www.delfi.lt/kultura/naujienos/jmekas-vien-tik-praeitimi-gyventi-negali-nors-ir-ta-praeitis-auksine.d?id=60122117> [2019 12 12].

<sup>5</sup> Serpentine Cinema: Jonas Mekas – Conversations with Film-Makers, 2018 05 04. Access through internet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7HEPdDy6RI> [2019 12 12].

and Contemporary Art in Seoul, his works were presented in the Documenta of Kassel, at the Venice Biennale 2005, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum Ludwig in Cologne, the Baltic Art Center in Sweden and the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum.

The introductory part of the issue is dedicated to the most famous Lithuanian artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the godfather of American avant-garde cinema Jonas Mekas. The present volume contains the translation of a conversation between legendary filmmaker Jonas Mekas and director Jim Jarmusch, published in *AnOther Magazine S/S17*, and the article written by American culture and media researcher Genevieve Yue about Jonas Mekas' creative works until the digital turn, supplemented with additional bibliographic material, as well as the paper by PhD student Evelina Kazakevičiūtė at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (JOMEC), United Kingdom, "The Sad and Beautiful World of Jim Jarmusch's Films: Language Problems and Poetry as a (In)Transitional Bridge to Otherness", written on the basis of her dissertation and aiming to reveal the uniqueness of cinematic poetry.

The chapter "News from the World of Science Policy" reprints the Recommendation on science and scientific researchers, adopted at the General Conference of UNESCO in 2017, which has become a new normative instrument to address various issues in the field of science policy. It emphasizes that all Member States should pay particular attention to strengthening of their scientific communities in order to ensure responsible and high-quality research while addressing the brain drain. The translation of the Recommendation into Lithuanian was initiated by Research Council of Lithuania.

The main part of the issue is devoted to papers that were previously presented at the conference "Public Intellectuals, 'Gray' Intelligence and (Sur)Vival Strategies" held on October 10, 2017, including articles by art researcher Ieva Pleikienė and cultural researchers Rita Repšienė and Vytautas Rubavičius. The sociologist of culture Aida Savicka and art critic Skaidra Trilupaitytė complements the volume with relevant topics – their texts delve into the problems of digital natives and digital immigrants as well as the issues of inclusion of artistic activism in museums. In the section "From the History of Culture" music historian Vida Bakutytė in her study "Baron Ernst von der Osten-Sacken and His Baroness Ekaterina: Participants in the Cultural Life of Vilnius (2nd Half of the 19th Century)" explores the lives of interesting persons, who have lived through difficult times.

Remaining in a meaningful horizon of time, memory, and values, we could extend the words uttered by Jonas Mekas: "I believe that we have come from the light and we are on the way back to the light", spreading light and understanding that the most important thing to do is "to create a more wonderful humanity"<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> In memoriam. Jonas Mekas: darbštūs angelai, vynuogių lėkštė ir vien tik "dabar", *Pasaulis yra gražus*, 2019 01 23. Access through internet: <http://8diena.lt/2019/01/23/jonas-mekas-darbstus-angelai-vynuogiu-lekste-ir-vien-tik-dabar/> [2019 12 12].