Lithuanian Cinema
Special Edition for Lithuanian Film Days in Poland 2015
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Over the past decade, Lithuanian cinema has experienced a period of intense change. The production of films in Lithuania has been on the increase, as has the audience's interest in films produced domestically. Founded in 2012, the Lithuanian Film Centre, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, implements important strategic guidelines concerning cinema policy. Lithuanian cinema has received increasing international recognition: film premieres take place at international film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, San Sebastian and Sundance. For a long time, the generation of filmmakers that lived during the most recent turning point in Lithuanian history have continued to put forth works of distinction. These include such film directors as Šarūnas Bartas, Valdas Navasaitis, Arūnas Matelis and Audrius Stonys, who created their first films in the late 1980s. After the restoration of the independence of Lithuania, they established their voice and unique shooting style characterised by ellipses, slow rhythm, mythologised space, and artistic and philosophical undertones.

Such filmmakers as Audrius Juzėnas, Kristijonas Vildžiūnas and Ignas Jonynas, who made their debut later, reflect on the themes of historical memory and delve into the consequences of the failed communist system and the new social challenges and moral dilemmas. They seek to understand and reveal the duality of human nature and the juxtaposition between ideals and reality. The films by these directors can be easily defined as the first films of this type. Vildžiūnas' Kai apkabinsiu tave (Back to Your Arms), which recreates the Cold War era, was made in collaboration with Studio Filmowe TOR and was the first Lithuanian and Polish co-production. Ekskursantė (The Excursionist) by Juzėnas is the first Lithuanian feature film about the mass deportations of people to Siberia. Lošėjas (The Gambler) by Jonynas is the first joint Lithuanian and Latvian feature film in 20 years of independence. The youngest generation of Lithuanian filmmakers is also pursuing new opportunities and original forms of expression. Films by such female film directors as Alantė Kavaitė, Kristina Buolvytė and Giedrė Žickytė exude confidence. They bring the complex world of human emotions, aspirations, inner experiences, and relationships, and the conflict between carnal passions and reason into the spotlight. Freely collapsing the space between a fictional and a documentary film, these filmmakers experiment with different genres and expand the boundaries of reality and fantasy.

We are pleased to introduce you to the key stages in the development of Lithuanian cinema and the country's most famous film directors in this catalogue dedicated to Lithuanian Film Days in Poland. Prominent film critics, historians and theorists have contributed to the preparation of this material. We hope that the articles, interviews and insights provided in this catalogue will lead to better knowledge of Lithuanian cinema.
Lithuania and Poland. Neighbourship in Filmic Form in the Cinema of the 1960s

By Anna Mikonis

There is a perception of Lithuanian cinema which has hitherto maintained a lively grip in Poland. It is conceived of as oscillating between the Romantic Mickiewiczian representation of Dziady (Forefather’s Eve), Czesław Milosz’s magical and sentimental valley in Tadeusz Konwicki’s auteur interpretation and the latter’s nostalgic depiction of the land of his childhood, as portrayed through the lens of Andrzej Wajda. Meanwhile, if we were to turn that point of view on its head and try looking at Polish cinema from the Lithuanian perspective and look for connections between Lithuanian cinema and filmmakers and the cinema of their neighbour, what would become evident is a marked divergence from the romantic and sentimental vision of “kith and kin from Lithuania”, to use Tadeusz Lubelski’s description.

It is a topic that is beyond the limits of this short essay, but that nevertheless endeavours to encapsulate it in a concise whole, giving a brief presentation of the themes common to the filmmakers of both countries, as well as the sources of inspiration that Lithuanian cinema found in its neighbouring counterpart during that most fascinating and really rather complex political era that was the 1960s.

Together with the “thaw” in political relations between the Soviet Union and the West that occurred during the 1960s, interest arose not only in American culture, but also in the culture of Poland and Lithuania alike belonged to the upcoming generation, and they were changing its face. The new generation of artists stepped into the wave of revival that followed Stalin’s death, while the cinema that the young Lithuanians sought to create was one they had acquired both from the film school and from the creative atmosphere of metropolitan Moscow. All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), one of the first institutions devoted to film education, functioned as a true melting pot of nationalities and cultures, and it was while studying there that Vytautas Žalakevičius struck up a friendship with Jerzy Hoffman and Edward Skórzewski and cinematographer Donatas Peciūra talked the nights away with his roommates, Jerzy Grotowski and Roman Farat. Both Hoffman and Žalakevičius had Mikhail Chiaureli as their tutor, but it would seem that Stalin’s “court” filmmaker neither influenced the works of the former nor lent wings to those of the latter. They both graduated in 1955 and, in addition, they were linked by the creative concepts they shared. Hoffman’s and Skórzewski’s division into good and evil central characters and their roots firmly set in the dominance of dialogue, gave way to a more interesting visual form and austerist individualism. The image of the cinema that the young Lithuanians sought to create was one they had acquired both from the film school and from the creative atmosphere of the Soviet commissar, welcomed a Polish delegation as it crossed the border of her country. Its members were Tadeusz Zaorski, the deputy minister of culture and the arts, who was also the head of Polish cinema at the time, directors Stanisław Lenartowicz and Witold Lesiewicz, film historian and critic Krzysztof Teodor Toepflitz, and Helena Lemańska, the editor-in-chief of the Polska Kronika Filmowa (Polish Film Chronicle). The notion of making what would have been the first co-production in the history of Lithuanian cinema was discussed. Unfortunately, with the authorities exercising firm control over the initiative, nothing but a politically oriented concept for collaboration found favour. The film to be made by the “two nations” was to show the staunch struggle of the Polish and Lithuanian communist movement under the leadership of “outstanding Polish communist” Jan Przewalski against the “bourgeois” nationalists. Witold Lesiewicz was commissioned to direct the picture, with the screenplay being assigned to Juozas Baltušis, an author popular during the Soviet era and Jerzy Stawiński, the Polish Film School’s foremost screenwriter. However, the common friendship declared at the highest echelons failed to materialise on the ground. The screenplay was never written.

In the meantime, changes of a more vital nature were taking place within the creative milieu. In the late 1950s, the cinema of Lithuania and Poland alike belonged to the upcoming generation, and they were changing its face. The Polish Film School was born on the wave of revival that followed Stalin’s death, while the 1960s proved to be a period of thriving debuts in Lithuanian cinema. It was then that the voice of a new generation of promising filmmakers made itself heard. Alumni of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in the main, they were thirsting to create a wholly different model of cinema. They all made their debut, be it documentary or feature, on their home soil, at the Lithuanian film studios; Vytautas Žalakevičius began with a full-length feature, Adomas nori būti žmogumi (Adam Wants to be a Man, 1959), while Arūnas Žibriūnas and Marijonas Giedrys contributed two of the four films that constituted Gviesi didvyriai (Living Heroes, 1960), in other words, Pasakotimis šiūvis (The Last Shot) and Mums neberekiai (We Don’t Need It Anymore). Shortly afterwards came Raimondas Vabalas’ debut with Žingsniai nakį (Steps in the Night, 1962) and Almantas Grikevičius’ poetic documentary about the history of Vilnius, Laikas eina per miestą (Time Walks Through the City, 1966).

As this new generation of artists stepped into the Lithuanian film studios, the former, ideologically unequivocal works, with their axiological concepts they shared. Hoffman’s and Skórzewski’s
graduation film, which marked the beginning of the "black series" in Polish documentary cinema, was a creative impulse for Žalakevičius as well. Over the next decade, inspired by the ruling idea of the two Poles' documentary debut, Uwaga, chuligani! (Attention, Hooligans!, 1955), he made Vienos dienas kronika (One-Day Chronicle, 1963); innovative in terms of feature-film form, it reflects the selfsame central theme. This conviction as to society's passivity and collective responsibility for the spread of hooliganism was to become a motif common to Hoffman and Skórzewski's documentaries and Žalakevičius' feature films alike.

Moreover, at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), the students were introduced to films from all over the world and this, of course, was one of the factors that influenced their development and did so in a way so evident as to need no explanation. For in all of these works was the understanding of history as viewed from the perspective of individuals and the difficult choices they faced within a politically entangled society. Here, history takes the stage not by way of storming crowds, spectacular battles, revolutionary headquarters, or frenzied rallies, but as embodied in individual people shown in all of their existential complexity.

In all of these works, we are also looking at that refined and subtle cinematic idiom which is Aesopian language. This symbolic, visual space, filled with double meaning, is present in the films of Almantas Grikevičius, Vytautas Žalakevičius and Andrzej Wajda. The white horse of Andrzej Wajda's Time Walks Through the City and Andrzej Wajda set Ashes and Diamonds in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, telling a metaphorical tale of a young hothead who lifts his hand against the Soviet authorities. Two years earlier, in Kanal (They Loved Life, 1956), he had recreated a realistic picture of the Warsaw Uprising resistance fighters perishing in the sewers beneath their capital. Less than two decades later, the ruptured and dissonant history of Lithuania's post-war reality was unfolded by Vytautas Žalakevičius in Niekas nenorejo mirti (Nobody Wanted To Die, 1965), Raimondas Vabalas in Laiptai į dangų (Staircase to the Sky, 1967) and Almantas Grikevičius together with Algirdas Dausa in Jaunmai (Feelings, 1968). Their dramatic representation of the fate met by the Lithuanian resistance movement was constructed by means ambiguous in expression and both metaphoric and Aesopian in idiom. The Poles clothed their catastrophic post-war realities in the costume of young men's tragedies, while the Lithuanians clad them in family and individual dramas. A value both crucial and common to all these works was the understanding of history as viewed from the perspective of individuals and the difficult choices they faced within a politically entangled society. Here, history takes the stage not by way of storming crowds, spectacular battles, revolutionary headquarters, or frenzied rallies, but as embodied in individual people shown in all of their existential complexity.

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in Ashes and Diamonds, the village horses somnolently hauling the Soviet truck through the oak forest, with a Pensive Christ, symbol of agony and sorrow, affixed to one of the trees visible in the background in Nobody Wanted To Die; these are just a few of the visual metaphors with which the works in question are endowed. Here, the symbols construct a world that has shifted out of kilter and where traditional values have ceased to exist; they are also a metaphor, silent, yet so very eloquent, for a subjugated society.

On the other hand, Raimondas Vabalas' political pamphlet, Marx, marš, tra-ia-ta (Go, Go! Rub-a-Dub!, 1964), is very far removed from cinematic drama. The director, who was born in Paris and is descended, on his mother's side, from a noble Polish family, the Górski, uses grotesquerie to tell the story of a Lithuanian youth, Zigmas, and his love for a Polish girl, Jadwiga, a tale which is played out against the backdrop of two battling political factions, Centia and Groszia. The source of the film lay in a screenplay entitled Krótki (The Hare), by Lithuanian-Jewish writer Grigorij Kanovičius and the prematurely deceased Ilja Rudas-Gercovskis. That work was a light-hearted tale inspired by Andrey Munk's Zezowate szczęście (Bad Luck, 1960). In a manner both colourful and supremely comic, it told the story of a noble but hapless official whose doings lay bare the vices of a small town in the pre-war borderlands of Poland and Lithuania. The script also spoke with profound irony of the political tension in relations between the two countries, which the eponymous hare heedlessly inflames by accidently crossing the border.

The fascination of Lithuanian directors with Polish cinema was also reinforced both by their travels on the festival circuit and by friendship. Vytautas Žalakevičius came to know Andrzej Wajda, and Krzysztof Zanussi's friendly support and advice helped Almantas Grikevičius get through some difficult moments in his life. Arūnas Žebriūnas got to know Roman Polański's work at film festivals and, years later, this creator of Lithuanian poetic cinema remembered:

"Roman Polański's Dwaj ludzie z szafą (Two Men and a Wardrobe, 1960) made an enormous impression on me. The irrational scene where the two men pull the wardrobe from the sea is the most beautiful in the history of cinema. It's a masterpiece." Towering over friendship and fascination alike, though, was the sparkling penmanship and perception of a man enamoured of Lithuanian cinema, Janusz Gazda. It was, indeed, thanks to the writings of this film critic for Ekran that Lithuanian cinema has a place in the reflections of Polish 20th century film scholarship, as well as being appreciated and written about.

It was also thanks to Poland's film-oriented print media that her cinema permeated the consciousness of Lithuanian audiences. At the time, it was the only foreign press of its kind to reach the Soviet market regularly with what was, for the time, something of a mass circulation. Binders of Film, Ekran and Kino can still be found today in the libraries of Lithuanian directors, film critics and cinema lovers alike. Polish actors Daniel Olbrychski, Zbigniew Cybulski, Beata Tyszkiewicz, Lucyna Winnicka and Pola Raksa enjoyed a great deal of popularity, with their photos being clipped out of magazines and used to adorn the front windscreen of hundreds of lorries on every road in the Soviet Union.

It is also worth mentioning an initiative that was never to see the light of day. The 1960s came to a close at the Lithuanian film studios amidst the turbulent atmosphere of the work on Almantas Grikevičius' Herkus Mantas, an historical epic about the Great Prussian Uprising against the Teutonic Knights in the Middle Ages. One of the factors determining the undertaking of such a major venture was Lithuania's director's rather ambiguous reception of Aleksander Ford's Krzyżaków (Knights of the Teutonic Order). The studio decided to portray its own vision of the nation's struggle against the Order, although the way in which the filming of an historical epic was approached was learned from the Poles. Shooting took place in Malbork and the Polish Army was used in the battle scenes. As the film correspondent for Glos Wybrzeza reported from the site:

"The crowd scenes feature the Polish army, under the instruction of six experienced stunt artists, as well as sixty-five horses and grooms from the stud farm in Starogard and the Pedigree and Thoroughbred Breeding Station in Gajowo. The Starogard mounts are already seasoned film extras. After all, they won their on-camera "spurs" in Knights of the Teutonic Order".

However, work on the film was interrupted and the material shot by Grikevičius, with all its verve, its extraordinarily evocative battle scenes and its notable injection of naturalism, was thrown out by the censors, shattering the director's life2. It also seems only right to look at one more historical connection, even though this means moving slightly ahead. The turn of the 1960s is marked by events of a singular nature that took place in Poland and Lithuania alike; the "human candles“ lit in self-immolation as an act of protest against the Soviet Union.

However, the most beautiful in the history of cinema. It’s a masterpiece.

The fact that film versions of both these profoundly moving manifestations exist is down to the initiative of documentary maker Maciej Drygas, who, incidentally, is the husband of Vita Žalakevičiūte-Drygas, Vytautas Žalakevičius' daughter. In 1990, Raimundas Banionis made Vaikai iš Amerikos viešbučio (The Children of the Hotel America); the screenplay, which tells of the Soviet authorities' repression of Lithuania's youth as a result of the events of the spring of 1972, was written by Drygas and translated into Lithuanian by Žalakevičiūtė-Drygas. A year later, the Felix and for Best Documentary went to Drygas' own film, Usłyszcie mój krzyk (Hear My Cry, 1991), which restored Ryszard Siwiec's story to its rightful place in history.

For Lithuanian directors, Polish cinema was a model for emulation and a source of inspiration. It was thus that a subconscious notion arose; the notion that Polish films were films that Lithuanian cinema lacked and could have made had it enjoyed the same unconstrained creative freedom as that which, in accordance with the conviction of the time, existed in Poland. Along with inspiration and filmmaking experience, Lithuania's directors drew the courage to speak out on vital national matters from the Polish Film School. Moreover, they were always able to count on the support of their Polish friends.

It could thus well be said that the specific nature of the historical experience uniting the two countries, the shared past of bitter experiences and the affinity of mutual friendship bolstered by that past, form links connecting the film directors of the neighbouring states of Lithuania and Poland.

1 A film about the Prussian leader was made in 1972, with the same title but less successfully, by another director, Marijonas Giedrys.


A Short Review of Lithuanian Cinema
By Linas Vildžiūnas

Cinema is the only art form that does not have a patron muse, yet the exact date of its birth is well known: 28 December 1895. On that evening, two brothers, Louis and Auguste Lumière, presented a public viewing of moving pictures in the basement of the Grand Café in the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. They called their first camera and projector a cinematograph. This invention, which astounded the audience, was destined to become not only the most popular form of entertainment in the 20th century, but also a fine art that perfected the distinctive and evocative language of images.

Although a quick end was predicted more than once for the so-called Tenth Muse, especially with the invention of television, films even now continue to rule over the public’s feelings and minds, while the art of cinema is seen as an integral part of every nation’s culture.

The Lumière brothers’ cinematograph reached Lithuania relatively quickly. The first showing in the theatre of the Vilnius botanical gardens (now the Bernardine Gardens) took place on 3 July 1897. After a decade, Kaunas became the birthplace of puppet animation. Władysław Starzewicz, who later became a famous director in Russia and France, in 1910 created here the first spatial animation in Walka żuków (The Battle of the Stag Beetles). However, due to unfavourable historical and economic circumstances, cinema became more popular only half a century later in the context of national culture.

The young independent Lithuanian state in the 1920s and 1930s was unable to create its own cinematography, and the Lithuanian film studios founded during the Soviet regime, which in the post-war period made only film chronicles and documentaries, performed mainly propagandistic functions. The few Lithuanian-themed features that appeared at that time were directed by directors from Russia who artificially included the local colours into schemes of socialist realism.

The sudden breakthrough of real Lithuanian cinema was sudden and unexpected. At the end of the 1960s, the Lithuanian film studios saw the rise of a new generation of young film directors, supplemented by students returning from the Moscow Institute of Cinematography. This was the generation of directors Vytautas Žalakevičius, Arūnas Žebriūnas, Raimondas Vabalas, Almantas Grikevičius, Marijonas Giedrys and Algirdas Dausa; cinematographers Jonas Gricius, Algimantas Mockus and Janas Tomashevicius; and documentary filmmakers Roberta Verba and Henrikas Šablevičius. They searched for ways to express the distinctive Lithuanian worldview through cinema and reveal the dramatic theme of the postwar period. Drawing inspiration from national literature and art, this time they created an original style of Lithuanian cinema characterised by slow, thoughtful narrative, poetic metaphors, and the evocative plasticity of monochrome. Of course, the rise of Lithuanian cinema coincided with the easing of the political system, the so-called “ thawing”. The 1970s was the heyday of cinema in Russia and the other Soviet republics, but Lithuanian, as well as Georgian, cinema stood out even in this bright spectrum, and more than once garnered acclaim at festivals held in the Baltic States, in the Soviet Union, and internationally. It was not a free expression of creativity. Cinema, as a collective and financially and ideologically dependant art, had to fight against censorship and the ignorance of officials and learn to bypass certain obstacles by creating new, sometimes very sophisticated, authentication codes, although the audience could easily comprehend them. For them, this art form was emotionally close, appealing to their common identity.

The pioneering film of Lithuanian cinema was Vytautas Žalakevičius’ Adomas nori būti žmugumi (Adam Wants to be a Man, 1959). However, the calling card for our cinema was the anthology film Gyvenči diubrytai (Living Heroes, directors Marijonas Giedrys, Balys Bezkuskas, Arūnas Žebriūnas and Žalakevičius), which was created a year later and awarded the main prize at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. The individual sections of Living Heroes, uniting into a harmonious whole different creative styles and themes, foreshadowed the diversity in genre and stylistics in Lithuanian cinema.

The short film Paskutinis šviesi (The Last Shot), which creates a broad portrait of a girl in a polka-dot dress and expresses the contraposition of the pure world of a child against an adult’s harsh world, was expanded on by Žebriūnas in his films Paskutinė atotogų diena (The Girl and the Echo, 1964), awarded the Grand Prize at the Cannes Youth Film Festival, the television film Miritis ir vyniaus medis (Death and the Cherry Tree, 1968), and somewhat differently in Gražuolė (The Beauty, 1969). The conflictive temperament of Vytautas Žalakevičius and his talent as a cinematic playwright are reflected in the publicistic pathos and innovative form of Vienos dienos kronika (One-Day Chronicle, 1963). In his most famous film, Niekas nenorėjo mirti (Nobody Wanted to Die, 1965), Žalakevičius searched for an artistic generalisation of the post-war period, utilising the structure of a metaphorical epic ballad. Understandably, this was a glimpse not from the “perspective of the forest”. Therefore, once Lithuania regained its independence, the film was sharply, but straightforwardly criticised. However, for the viewers of the time, Nobody Wanted to Die imagined the recent history that people had previously feared to even speak about.

In a historically and psychologically convincing manner, Raimondas Vabalas’ Laiptai į dangų (Stairway to Heaven, 1966), a film rich with stern realism and based on a novel by Mykolas Sluckis, revealed the post-war period. The film Jausmai (Feelings, 1968), by directors Almantas Grikevičius and Algirdas Dausa, from the background of
historical upheaval, raises to the foreground the inner feelings of the characters. The film's rich atmosphere and multifaceted expressiveness was probably what drove its recognition as the best Lithuanian film as determined by film critics on the occasion of a century of cinema in 1995. Even today Grikevičius' talent to express complicated reflections on history only through visual associations in the documentary film Laikas eina per miestą (Time Passes through the City, 1966) continues to fascinate.

Lithuanian cinematography was not abundant, but it was very diverse and ambitious. In the psychological drama, Būtelis, vasaros pradžia (June, the Beginning of Summer, 1969) Vabalas, together with the writer Icchokas Meras, raised the Lithuanian cinematography was not abundant, but it was very diverse and ambitious. In the psychological drama, Būtelis, vasaros pradžia (June, the Beginning of Summer, 1969) Vabalas, together with the writer Icchokas Meras, raised the Lithuanian cinema with his dramatic films Velnio sėkla (The Devil's Seed, 1979), Moteris ir keturi jos vyrai (A Woman and Her Four Men, 1983), and Amžinoji ūkse (Eternal Light, 1987), giving them a sense of the grotesque and paradoxical and stylistic deformation. In 1965 the cinematographer Robertas Verba created a humble documentary with the symbolic title Senis ir žemė (The Old Man and the Land), which gave rise to a current of Lithuanian artistic documentary that continued for almost three decades. Its most important hero was a tenderly portrayed villager, while the most important theme was the connection with one's native land and inherited tradition and the cracking and systematic destruction of these bonds. It art in the conditions of captivity is a hidden form of resistance, than this feature was particularly represented by documentary films, which consistently captured the death of the traditional village and conveyed this social drama through a melancholic mood and visual symbols, sometimes speaking openly and sometimes simply poetising old rural values. Among the many films using these poetic devices are such vivid works as Verba’s Ėžiutytė Rūta (1968), Šimtamečio godos (Centenarian Dreams, 1969), and Paukutinė vienkiemio vasara (The Farmstead's Last Summer, 1971) and Henrikas Sliževičius’ Kelionė už sky, lankomis (Journey Through the Fields of Nebulas, 1973), Žinuonė (Wise Woman, 1975), and Pavasiram savam lauki (We Were In Our Own Field, 1988). Even during the years of independence this tradition was continued in the films of Diana and Kornelijus Matuzevičius, Už slenkščio (Beyond the Threshold, 1995) and Laukuanas (Waiting, 1997). We can also find echoes of it in feature films as well: Gytis Lukšas’ Vasara būgiai rudenį (Summer Ends in Autumn, 1981); Viskar ir visadai (Yesterday and Always, 1984), which was inspired by the poetry of Marcelijus Martinaitis; and the 2009 film adaptation of Romualdas Granaukas’ novel Dubury (Vortex).

Naturally continuing the tradition of national cinema were also the first films created by the generation of directors in independent Lithuania: Praėjusios dienos atminima (In Memory of a Day Gone By, 1989) by Šarūnas Bartas, Dešimt minučių prieš Ikaro skrydį (Ten Minutes Before the Flight of Icarus, 1991) by Arūnas Matelis, Nėreigų žemė (The Earth of the Blind, 1992) by Audrius Stonys and Rūdienų niegus (Autum Snow, 1992) by Valdas Navasaitis. Their common features were visual associations containing multiple meanings, long takes, and internal emotional intensity. But in their voice this cinema was already different, distancing itself from the so-called objective reality, sharing an author's expression, and conveying an individual's worldview. Although the new Lithuanian cinema was not engaged socially, the melancholy of irreversibility that encased it, the feeling of degradation, the weathering that pervades the image, reflected its own time and revealed the worldview of the socially fractured generation. The individualism of creation in part was driven by the fact that cinema was not systematically supported by the state and ended up at the fringes of cultural policy. Along with independence, almost all of the well-known cinematic masters had to withdraw from active work, while the younger generation learned to create films by producing them, founding studios, searching for foreign partners, etc. According to Stonys, cinema in Lithuania is created through blood and many compromises. Lithuanian cinema survived with the help of its artistic quality and international recognition. The pure visual suggestion of Bartas’ films Trys dienos (Three Days, 1991), Koridorius (The Corridor, 1995), Mėnų medis (Few of Us, 1996), Namių (The House, 1997), and Laisvė (Freedom, 2000) became a synonym for Lithuanian cinema abroad, although they were often filmed outside Lithuania with the help of French and Portuguese producers. Stonys’ 1992 film Nėreigų žemė was awarded the Felix Prize as the best European documentary.
film. Matelis’ touching film about the little patients in the leukaemia ward at Santarës Children’s Hospital, *Prieš parskrendant į žemę* (*Before Flying Back to Earth*, 2005), earned multiple awards at international film festivals, and in 2007 the director was honoured with a Directors Guild of America Award for artistic achievements in documentary cinema.

The high artistic status of Lithuanian cinema is affirmed by the National Cultural and Artistic Awards presented to Bartas, Stonys and Matelis. Despite difficulties with financing, it remains creative and varied. A personal cinematic chronicle is continuously being created by Romas Lileikis, various aspects of social isolation are explored by Kristijonas Vildžiūnas, Giedrė Beinoriūtė explores various genres of cinema, and more and more young filmmakers are making their debuts. Animated films, pioneered by Zenonas Steinsys and Ilja Bereznickas, almost did not have the conditions to allow them to develop further, but the debut film of Vilnius Academy of Arts graduate Reda Bartkutė Tomingas, *Kult* (*Guilt*, 2013), was the first Lithuanian film invited to participate in the Annecy International Animated Film Festival. The Berlin Film Festival’s Panorama Programme in 2011 began with the debut of anthropologist Mantas Kvedaravičius: a film about the Chechen tragedy, *Barzakh*, the creation of which was supported by the famous Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki. The artistic identity of Lithuanian cinema is beautifully described in these words by Matelis: “Our films come from similar homes: from not speaking, the growth of silence. In films one can feel the shared experiences of us all. Few can understand our feelings, for example, regarding January 13th. But even the most banal song that was heard in those days can unite us. We are from another island. You can neither run nor not run from it. In our experience, there have been moments that are important and meaningful for only us. And those moments will be the cause of an intangible commonality of sight or silence.”

## Cinema Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events in World Cinema</th>
<th>Events in Lithuanian Cinema</th>
<th>Events in culture, art, history and politics of Lithuania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>The first private screening of projected motion pictures was held by brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière in Paris in 1895. Léon Gaumont’s film company Comptoir général de Photographie was founded.</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>One of the earliest films by the T.A. Edison film company – William Heise’s <em>John C. Riea–Irwin Kid</em> brought the first demand for film censorship. The Pathé-Frères Company was founded by Charles Pathé.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>The first screening of projected motion pictures by brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière took place in the Bernardine Garden in Vilnius.</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td>Publication of Vincas Kudirkos’ poem <em>Tautiška giesmė</em> (<em>The National Hymn</em>), which later became the national anthem, in the newspaper <em>Varpas</em>.</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>The Vitagraph Company of America was founded.</td>
<td>Publication of the translation by Vincas Kudirkos of the 3-scene drama <em>Dziady</em> (<em>Forefathers’ Eve</em> (Part 3)) by Adam Mickiewicz in the newspaper <em>Varpas</em>. The first public performance of <em>Amerika parsys</em> (<em>America in the Bath</em>) was staged in the Lithuanian language in Palanga.</td>
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<td>1901</td>
<td>James Williamson’s film <em>The Big Swallow</em>. Mūsų tautinė konstantinos ciurlionis’ symphonic poem <em>Mikelis</em> (<em>In the Forest</em>).</td>
<td>Mūsų tautinė konstantinos ciurlionis painted the series of paintings <em>Laukstovynų simfonija</em> (<em>Funeral Symphony</em>).</td>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>International success of Georges Méliès’ film <em>Le Voyage dans la Lune</em> (<em>A Trip to the Moon</em>).</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Edwin S. Porter’s film <em>The Great Train Robbery</em>. Mūsų tautinė konstantinos ciurlionis painted the series of paintings <em>Laukstovynų simfonija</em> (<em>Funeral Symphony</em>).</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td>Robert W. Paul’s film <em>An Extraordinary Cab Accident</em>. Publication of the first Lithuanian language daily <em>Vilniaus laikraštis</em> (<em>Vilnis News</em>) in Vilnius (published until 1909). The ban on publications in the Latin script was withdrawn (May 7).</td>
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<td>1905</td>
<td>The premier of the first Italian film <em>La presa di Roma</em> (<em>The Capture of Rome</em>), director Fileteo Alberini. The first permanent cinema buildings were erected in Vilnius and Kaunas. Up to 30 cinemas were built before 1914. The Great Seimas of Vilnius (December 4–5).</td>
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Feature Film after 1990: Generation Change, New Aspects and Challenges

By Renata Šuikaitytė

Together with its Baltic neighbours Latvia and Estonia, Lithuanian film production is one of the world’s most modest. It rose to international prominence in the early 90s with a new identity, which was distinguished and defined by art cinema works. It should be noted that Lithuanian film quite quickly evolved from being a marginal to a transnational phenomenon due to the sympathy and great interest of prestigious international festivals and the combined efforts of filmmakers auteurs who had started their careers during the Soviet period in Lithuania (including Vytautas Žalakevičius, Algimantas Puipa, Gytis Lukšas and Janina Lapinskaitė) and those who debuted during the period of political and economic transition in the late eighties and early nineties (such as Šarūnas Bartas, Valdas Navasaitis, Romas Lileikis and Audrius Juzėnas).

In the 90s the films of Šarūnas Bartas (Trys dienos [Three Days, 1991], Koridorius [Corridor, 1995], and Mūsų nedaug [Few of Us, 1996]) and Valdas Navasaitis (Kienas [Courtyard, 1999]) became a marker of Lithuanian cinematic auteurism, which has been synonymous with the extremes of the art cinema style (long takes, fragmentary narrative, minimalist acting, and the use of desolate and vanishing locations as central points of reference in their thematic preoccupations) and rejection of many of the tenets of mainstream cinematic form, which was used as a certain vehicle for filmmakers’ major concerns and preconditions regarding the situation through which they lived and in which they were living. Gytis Lukšas is perhaps the best director (next to Bartas) to discuss, as his works remain among the most interesting and profound in dealing with the recent Lithuanian past. Lukšas’ Duburys (Vortex, 2009), based on the novel by Romualdas Granauskas, is yet another apocalyptic image of Soviet Lithuania and reveals the gradual degradation of Soviet citizens, both the colonised (the Lithuanians) and the colonisers (the Russians), as forced deterrioralization and reterritorialization makes people feel rootless and alienated, even in their own country or town. The film is composed of stylish black and white images and uses mainly long takes for revealing the emptiness and stagnation of the place in which the main protagonist resides and interacts with others. However, the director leaves the viewer (and post-Soviet Lithuania) hope since at the end of the film the main protagonist surfaces from the vortex after trying to drown himself. Other filmmakers, such as Jonas Vaikus (Vienui vieni [Utterly Alone, 2004]), Kristijonas Vildžiūnas (Kai apkabinsiu tave [Back to Your Arms, 2010]), and Audrius Juzėnas (Ekskursantė [The Excursionist, 2013]) are more explicit in dealing with historical issues in their films and focus on personal rather than collective dramas in their highly visual and emotional cinematic works.

It is worth noting that national literature is yet another important inspiration for local filmmakers. Adaptations of books by famous Lithuanian writers are among the most popular film genres that have been brought to the big screen by filmmakers, e.g. Janina Lapinskaitė’s Stiklo šalis (A Land of Glass, 2004), based on a story by the writer Vanda Juknaitė; Algimantas Puipa’s Dievybė mūkai (Forest of the Gods, 2005), which is based on the novel written by Balys Sruoga; Nuodėmės užkalbėjimas (The Whisper of Sin, 2007) and Miegancių druskštyt tvirtovė (Fortress of the Sleeping Butterflies, 2012), both of which were based on the literary work of Jurga Ivanuskaitė; Gytis Lukšas’ already mentioned film Vortex (2009), based on the novel by Romualdas Granauskas; and Donatas Ulydas’ Tadas Blinda. Pradžia (Tadas Blinda: The Legend is Born, 2011), inspired by Rimantas Šavelis’ novel. This film genre is the most admired by the local audience and the statistics prove this. For...
example, in 2005 the feature film *Forest of the Gods* climbed to the top of the domestic box office (186,372 euros) and was viewed by approximately 70,917 cinemagoers, while *Tadas Blindas*. *The Legend is Born* broke all records for attendance in Lithuania in 2011, surpassing even the American blockbustes *Avatar* and garnering a box office of over 1 million euros.

Recent Lithuanian cinema, especially the films made by younger filmmakers, has become increasingly preoccupied with adapting and experimenting with *generic templates* borrowed from Hollywood cinematic models and Western popular cinema. However, these films incorporate not only certain genre conventions, but also art cinema in general. The attractiveness of the generic formula to the young generation of filmmakers is evident. Genre films tend to be not only certain genre conventions, but also art cinema in general. The attractiveness of the generic formula to the young generation of filmmakers is evident. Genre films tend to be suitable for dealing with current issues of modern life in Lithuania (migration, alienation, new forms of sexuality, cultural diversity, the emancipation of women, the expansion of the black market, etc.), to appeal to a young audience, and to have the potential to cross over the national border. The economic development of Lithuania and the triumph of a capitalist modernity with all its advantages and disadvantages and new heroes (all kinds of dealers, a new creative class, gamblers, businesswomen, pop-stars, etc.) have suddenly occupied the Lithuanian screen. Very visibly in the films of the 2000s, the city and urbanity in general have finally assumed a kind of cultural and ideological dominance. Several films such as the drama *Nuomos sutartis* (*The Lease*, 2002) by Kristijonas Vildžiūnas, the films *Diringas* (*Diring*, 2006) and *Artimos sviesos* (*The Low Lights*, 2009) by Ignes Milkinis, the black comedies *Zero* (2006) and *Zero II* (2010) by Emilis Velyvis, the criminal drama *Perpetuam Mobile* (2008) by Valdas Navasaitis, the psychological drama *Kolekcionierė* (*The Collectress*, 2008) by Kristina Buožytė, *Nereikalingi žmonės* (*Loss*, 2008) by Maris Martinsons, the sci-fi melodrama in Saulius Drungys’ directorial debut feature *Anarchija Žirmūnai* (*Anarchy in Žirmūnai*, 2010) and Kristina Buožytė’s *Aurora* (*Vanishing Waves*, 2012), the musical drama *Narcizas* (*Narcissus*, 2012) by Dovilė Gasiūnaitė, and *Lošėjas* (*The Gambler*, 2014) by Ig纳斯 Jonynas are marked with an attempt to visualise the city in what had been a missing discourse in Lithuanian literary and visual culture for a while. It should be noted that the city in these films is a city of the imagination that film directors (and city dwellers) inhabit and which inhabits them.

**Transnational Gestures.** Due to the generic, stylistic and thematic diversity and dynamism of the transnational collaborative practices of the local cinema, it is becoming more internationalised and successful in attracting international funders, promoters, and audiences. International collaboration is getting more important in producing features with higher production value and easier access to international markets. Among the most successful recent international co-productions are *Back to Your Arms*, directed by Kristijonas Vildžiūnas and coproduced by Studio Uljana Kim (Lithuania), Studio TOR (Poland), and Studio Pola Pandora Film (Germany); *Eastern Drift*, directed by Šarūnas Bartas and coproduced by Kino Bez Granits (Russia), Lazennec Films (France), and Studio Kinema (Lithuania), and which premiered at the Berlinale Berlin International Film Festival in 2009; *Vanishing Waves*, jointly made by Temora (Lithuania) and Acajou Films (France) and internationally premiered at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2012; Emilis Velyvis’ *Redirected!* (2014), which was coproduced by Kinokultas (Lithuania) and Wellington Films (UK) became a national hit, and in one month earned more than 1 million euros; and Alantė Kavaitė’s *Sangailės vasara* (*The Summer of Sangailė*), which easily gain international visibility, and on the other hand, the so called audience film by producing best-selling literary adaptations like *Fortress of the Sleeping Butterflies* or black comedies like *Redirected*, which have pulling power at the box office.

To sum up, since the 90s, Lithuanian filmmakers have continued to tread a cinematic path between extreme auteurist films like Bartas’ *Freedom* and *Eastern Drift*, which easily gain international visibility, and on the other hand, the so called audience film by producing best-selling literary adaptations like *Fortress of the Sleeping Butterflies* or black comedies like *Redirected*, which have pulling power at the box office.
Raimundas Banionis: Film Plots Dictated by Reality

Raimundas Banionis was born into the family of theatre actors Donatas and Ona Banionis. Since his first feature films Greitis mano dievas (Speed is my God) and Mano mažytė imona (My Little Wife), he has worked with young Lithuanian actors and chosen themes concerned with youth. Released in 1990, his film Vaikai iš „Amerikos“ viešbučio (The Children from Hotel America) marked the beginning of the independent Lithuanian cinema.

You created full-length features for over a decade (1980–1992). This was a period of important historical changes for Lithuania, when Sąjūdis (the reform movement of Lithuania) took shape and the aspirations for independence strengthened. Although indirectly, this atmosphere is reflected in your films. So could the censorship of films finally be disregarded?

The film Neatmenu tavo veido (I Don’t Remember Your Face) already reflected changes in the mood, because the rallies of the Sąjūdis movement had started that year in Vingis Park. I took this film to Romania, a very interesting country that at the time was at odds with America, Israel and the Soviet Union. When I returned to Lithuania around 1988, just before shooting The Children from Hotel America, I was invited to speak to a person from the state security. I thought that maybe they were interested in what things were like in Romania. I told them my experience as a tourist. The man calmly listened and then asked, “And how about at your film studio? Who is saying what?” Realising that they were trying to recruit me, I angrily said, “So, you want me to squeal on people?” You can imagine where I was going had I said those words 30 years earlier. However, before saying good-bye he just wrote his name, Kostas, and his phone number.

I used this phone number only once: in my film The Children from Hotel America. There was a scene where Kostas (played by Arūnas Sakalaukas) was interrogating Jagger (played by Augustas Savelis), and then after threatening him, Kostas tells Jagger to call him if he remembers anything about his friends. The Children from Hotel America was the first independent film. Moscow allocated money for it, but it no longer controlled the production. We filmed it in 1990 when the Soviet Union announced its blockade of Lithuania. We were going from Vilnius to Klaipėda and came across only two cars on our way. There was no fuel. We needed a helicopter, so we hired it in Latvia, because they still had some fuel left. Although we did not have the money, our enthusiasm was overflowing. We filmed in the summer and half a year later, in February, the film premiered in a fully packed cinema.

The introductory credits of The Children from Hotel America read “Kaunas 1972.” This was the year of the self-immolation of Romas Kalanta in Kaunas. Did this event affect the worldview and thinking not only of the heroes of the film, but also of your generation?

I believe so. I called my generation the “shaved off” generation. After Kalanta’s self-immolation, things changed. Modris Tenisons, the legendary founder of the Kaunas Pantomime Group and Latvian film director and artist, was thrown out of Lithuania. Prominent theatre director Jonas Jurašas was in two years’ time forced to emigrate. And the editor of Nemunas, an advanced, non-ideological magazine, was replaced. The police tried to catch us in the seaside town of Palanga for having long hair and wearing jeans; this continued throughout the summer. We would go to a dancing place laid out in front of Tyszkiewicz Palace in Palanga, and there they were waiting for us: policemen with dogs. It was a different epoch that broke a lot of people. There was a long-haired guy in Kaunas, totally innocent, had nothing to do with hippies. After the events in May, one day he joined us and we noticed he had short hair. We asked, “Juozukas, did they shave you too?” “No, I did it myself” was the reply.

So was the plot for The Children from Hotel America dictated by reality?

Yes it was. Kalanta set himself on fire on 14 May, and five days later there was an amateur film festival for schoolchildren in Kaunas. My father did not want to allow me to go, but I went. I remember walking around Kaunas, it was a warm spring day and there was no trace of the riots. The city was clean, beautiful and tidy. Someone was washing Lenin’s head (a monument – editor’s note) and there was nothing else there. We learned from rumours what had happened. It was a very strong impetus for my generation and led to people taking interest in the history of Lithuania and its national symbols and formed a perception of freedom. Before that an independent state was something well in the past and we knew little about it. All of a sudden these things became relevant. So the film emerged as a story of my generation. I wrote the script together with my course mate Maciej Drygas in 1988–1989. At that time I also completed the documentary film Fontano vaikai (The Fountain Children). The witnesses who were still alive talked about their experiences.

The film The Children from Hotel America also talks about freedom. Interestingly enough, it has remained very highly watched to this day. My colleague Artūras Jevdokimovas presented the film in Latvia, Croatia, and last year in the Czech Republic. Now I have an invitation to go to California. The film continues to live because it talks about what was prohibited by the Soviets. They prohibited basic innate human freedoms: to listen to and say what you want and to live where you want. And also to believe what you are saying and to say what you are believing. After all the practice was to say one thing and to do something totally different. Andrei Tarkovsky liked to say that beauty would save the world. It’s absolutely clear to me that only tolerance can save it. Once we stop destroying people or suppressing them, we stop destroying people or suppressing them.
because they think or speak differently, and these people stop hitting back for suppressing them, we will start to live better. In the times of theatre director Juozas Miltinis, it was most important that after the stage performance you would start to think about the man and the meaning of his life. Now I often see a circus on the stage or in the cinema, yet people say – he acted well and he acted badly; the music was good or the music was bad. Art has lost its original, inherent meaning.

Interviewed by Auksė Kancerevičiūtė

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY
Grietas – mana dievas (Speed Is My God, 1979, short fiction, 30 min., 35 mm, colour)
Mano mažytė žmona (My Little Wife, 1985, feature, 75 min., 35 mm, colour)
Seisoklėčiai (Sixteens, 1986, feature, 200 min., 35 mm, colour)
Neatėnių tavo veida (I Don’t Remember Your Face, 1988, feature, 81 min., 35 mm, colour)
Fontana vaikai (Fountain Children, 1988, short documentary, 20 min., 35mm, colour)
Vaikai iš „amerikos“ vizitų (Children From the Hotel America, 1990, feature, 93 min., 35 mm, colour)
Džiauzas (Jazz, 1992, feature, 90 min., 35 mm, colour)
Juozas Miltinis. Nežinomas interviu (Juozas Miltinis. An Unknown Interview, 2000, documentary, 40 min., Beta CAM, colour)

Cinema Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events in World Cinema</th>
<th>Events in Lithuanian Cinema</th>
<th>Events in culture, art, history and politics of Lithuania</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>The first Lithuanian opera Bizutė was staged.</td>
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<td>1907</td>
<td>The Lithuanian Scientific Society was founded. Publication of the social, political and cultural newspaper Viltis (Hope) in Vilnius (published until 1915). The first exhibition by Lithuanian artists was opened in Vilnius. The first Congress of Lithuanian Women took place in Kaunas.</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>The premier of the first Russian feature film Stevka Razin (director Vladimir Romashkov). André Calmette and Charles de Burguy’s film L’Assassinat du duc de Guise (The Assassination of the Duke of Guise) presented by Film d’Art. The first international success of Italian cinema – Arturo Ambrosio and Luigi Maggi’s film Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei (Last Days of Pompeii). Pathé Studio was the first in the world to begin the cinema newsreel Pathé-Journal.</td>
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<td>1909</td>
<td>D.W Griffith became the principal director of the Biograph Studio. Władysław Starewicz from Kaunas shot Nad Niemnem (Beyond the River Nemunas). Władysław Starewicz from Kaunas shot Nad Niemnem (Beyond the River Nemunas). Antanas Račiūnas arrived in Lithuania from the USA to shoot images of the country.</td>
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<td>Publication of the first translation of Adam Mickiewicz’s Sonety krymskie (The Crimean Sonnets) (translated by Motiejus Gustaitis).</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>Aleksandr Khanchikov created the first full-length Russian film Obronna Szentpéter (Defence of Szentpéter). Kazimieras Būga published a study entitled Ėpik lietuvių asmenų vardas (Lithuanian Personal Names).</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>Mack Sennett set up the Keystone Film Company in California. Thanks to the studio, such comic performers as Mabel Normand and Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle came to fame. Carl Laemmle founded Universal Pictures. Carl Laemmle founded Universal Pictures. Carl Laemmle founded Universal Pictures.</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>Production of one of the most popular series, Louis Feuillade’s Fantômas. Production of one of the most popular series, Louis Feuillade’s Fantômas. Antoine Racine arrived in Lithuania from the USA to shoot images of the country.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Publication of the first Lithuanian literary and art magazine Vaivarykštė (published until 1914).</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Vaudeville actor and pantomimist Charles Chaplin started his career in film. Giovanni Pastrone’s (Italy) film Cabiria, a prototype of all spectacular and monumental epic films. Paramount Pictures and Fox Films were founded in the USA.</td>
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Algimantas Puipa:  
My Work Starts Where the Novel Ends

Puipa is one of the most famous Lithuanian film directors who generally uses Lithuanian classical and contemporary literature for his films. The filmmaker has over 20 films in his portfolio and has won numerous awards at international film festivals and competitions. With a creative biography spanning over four decades, Puipa remains an intriguing film director able to convey the original relative world.

You are by far the most prolific Lithuanian film director. What has helped you to retain your creative energy for such a long time and to generate new ideas?

When making films, I use literary works, although these aren’t screen adaptations. A literary work is perhaps more like a map for the film and supplements the shortage of scripts. I read a lot of literature. Sometimes, after a while, images I’ve read about come back to me and I understand that the text is calling to me. If the idea happens to coincide with my idea, I start to interpret. My work starts where the novel ends.

How did this “addiction” to literature start?

By coincidence, I got to know Vytautas Žalakevičius, one of the most prominent figures in Lithuanian cinema. He wrote the script for the film Vėnio sėkla (The Devil’s Seed), based on the works of the Lithuanian writer Petras Cvirka. Of course, there is an unwritten rule that literature and cinema are two completely different genres. Literature often defeats cinema, because the book can convey thoughts in a much more interesting and compelling way than do the tools available in cinematography. Moreover, each reader creates his own image of the text and it becomes difficult to accept a different version of the same text. Stanley Kubrick said that the most important thing was to break the code of the book. Then you become free and can work with the book as a personal piece of work.

When does the dialogue with the writer start? What is the relationship with the writer and to what extent do you take the wishes of the writer into consideration?

I have worked with writers who were also authors of the script. On the one hand, it’s nice and makes life a lot easier when you don’t have to worry about how to create a screenplay yourself. But there are moments when, inevitably, you start to argue. For example when shooting Amininoji šviesa (Eternal Light), writer Rimantas Šavėlis kept repeating, “Trust my literature. Why don’t you respect it?” to which I used to reply, “In literature there could be an image, which in the film may look highly didactic. For example, I can’t cut up the bells at the end as you wrote.” When making Ir ten kvintai smėlės (Over There the Shores Are Sandy), I did not communicate with Juozas Aputis, on whose works I relied. After watching my film, he said, “I’ve written so many stories that I don’t remember half of those used in the film”. There is a perpetual conflict between filmmakers and writers. I admired the cooperation between film director Krzysztof Kieślowski and screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz. But I, however, haven’t found anybody with whom I could venture on a lifetime travel to that world of fantasy.

Your films Nuodėmės užkalbėjimas (Whisper of Sin) and Miegančių drugelių tvirtovė (The Fortress of Sleeping Butterflies) based on Jurga Ivanauskaitė’s works contain erotic motifs. Do you think cinema is capable of revealing the nature of physical senses?

In global cinema many authors have proved that cinema has huge potential for revealing those senses. Take, for example, the outrageous Lars von Trier. With each new film he is still looking for a new letter in the alphabet of cinema. Meanwhile Michael Haneke successfully explores the inner world and the stream of the subconscious. Anyhow, those who are in the forefront regularly prove that cinema has numerous means of expression. When we had to film erotic scenes, there were many problems. There were negotiations regarding each centimetre of the naked body. In Whisper of Sin, there was quite a lot of open eroticism, because that was what the book called for. Since I did not have experience in the field, I kept reinventing the bike.

How important is the search for your own style to you?

I would assign myself to the proponents of the visual narrative. When I start thinking about the film, I check out many photographs and art books and seek inspiration there. I always think about who my cameraman will be. Sometimes it is enough to show several reproductions to the cameraman and I don’t have to look through the lens of the camera again, because he has already understood the basic principles of the composition.

That’s why there is a great focus on visual presentation in your films?

Yes, the cameraman’s opinion is important to me.
The cameraman is my eyes and the soul of the film. I find it interesting to work with Rimantas Juodvalkis (Eternal Light, Biliutės iki Taj Mahalo [Ticket to the Taj Mahal], and Over there the Shores are Sandy). Viktoria Radzevičius changed my style, which I first envisaged in my TV film Žaibo nuviesti (In the Light of Thunderbolt), and gave it a “soft” image; in Vilko dantų karolių (A Wolf Teeth Necklace) he outright dominated. There was one frame in A Wolf Teeth Necklace that was just like a painting. Then Viktor Grodecki, one of the most controversial Polish directors who had worked for a long time in Hollywood, noticed Viktoria. Now they are inseparable friends. I have been cooperating with Viktoras for twenty-six years now.

You depict women vividly in your films. What is fascinating about the woman’s world?

The roots for this are in The Devil’s Seed. In his script Žalakevičius was masterful in crafting the main characters. Morfa was played by Eugenija Pleiškytė, who later admitted that, after her part as Kotryna in Marijonas Giedrius’ play Herkus Mantas, this was one of her most beloved and strongest parts in cinema. I became interested in the woman’s world, because it’s not familiar to me. I have no insight into it. I collaborated with Žalakevičius in Moteris ir keturi jos vyrai (A Woman and Her Four Men). It was he who suggested this novel and the main character was again a woman. The Lithuanian cinema of the Soviet era was dominated by men, again, not without the help of Žalakevičius. And it just happened to me that the literary adaptations I wanted to make contained that dramatic male-female conflict that helped new actresses to be discovered or gave them a dominant part.

You have touched on the post-war theme in your early films Eternal Light and Ticket to the Taj Mahal. Later, you dropped it, although many film directors successfully exploited it. Why did you do that?

Back in the Soviet era, following the release of Žalakevičius’ film Nikas nenorėjo mirti (Nobody Wanted to Die), the post-war theme started dominating. There was hardly a director who would not explore this topic. My films appeared in independent Lithuania. I did not use state support in producing Ticket to the Taj Mahal and I was therefore completely free. I remember when Werner Herzog saw this film in Munich he said that it was the most beautiful film he’d seen that year. For me, this was the highest recognition. I realised that in spite of an autonomous subject, these signs are understood by others too. Eternal Light won the Grand Prix at the San Remo Film Festival in Italy. Even though we talked about specific things, the form in which they were presented was universal. Over time, I became interested in other themes, new ideas emerged.

Currently you are working on your latest film Edeno sodas (The Garden of Eden). The action of the film transposes us into a prosperous future Lithuania, where all the wealthy emigrants return to their homeland to die. What inspired these future predictions?

It is a delicate utopia depicted by writer Janina Survilaitė in her novels Vila Edelveisas (Villa Edelweiss) and Pažeinetės su Helveticia (Conversation with Helvetia). Originally I wanted to specify the year in which the action takes place, namely 2025. Then I would be the same age as my protagonists. But I dropped the date and stuck to a more abstract time for the painful joys of old age and the fragility of existence to unfold. I was thinking of shooting a funny film about old age and death, but then I realised that there was nothing funny in it. As a result, I turned to what is eternal and unchangeable. This is a sensitive topic or perhaps more a reflection on the passing of time that we cannot turn back.
Gytis Lukšas: I Measure My Life in Films

Over the four decades of his creative career, film director Gytis Lukšas has created more than ten feature film adaptations of Lithuanian literary classics: Virto ąžuolai (When the Oaks Fell), Mano valgytas ruduo (Autumn of My Childhood), Vasara vaigiasi rudenį (Summer Ends with Autumn), Žalčio žvilgsnis (The Serpent’s Gaze), Zemės keleivių (Pilgrims on Earth), Mėnulio Lietuva (Lunar Lithuania), Dvišūkio šviesa (Divine Light), Duburus (Vortex), etc. Lukšas is currently the president of the Lithuanian Union of Filmmakers.

You started your creative path in the 1970s, the period of Soviet ideology. Nevertheless, from your very first feature films, Žvangutis (The Handbell) and Virto ąžuolai (When the Oaks Fell), you emphasised Lithuanian national themes. Why?

In 1973, I released my debut, a comedy called Telefonas (Telephone), in the three-part feature film Linkomos istorijos (Funny Stories). This was the first Lithuanian film commissioned by Soviet Central Television. I remember how our famous filmmakers Arūnas Žebriūnas and Raimondas Vabalas laughed and said, “finally, a man who will make comedies has appeared in the Lithuanian film industry”. God, how wrong they were! I never became a creator of comedies. I was free to do what I wanted and what was dear to me. It was most important to me to talk about my land and the roots of my fathers and forefathers in my films.

How did Lithuanian literature, which has served as the basis for nearly all your film scripts, affect your creative work?

Most films are literary adaptations. It does not matter whether the film is made in Hollywood or in Europe; literature is the basis. When I read a book and I feel that I am shaking all over, because it resonates with something in my soul, I try to turn it into a film. This is how I created Autumn of My Childhood by Juozas Aputis or Summer Ends with Autumn by Romualdas Granaukas. And all the writers whose works I brought to the screen, although they were older than me, sooner or later became my friends. Then we could no longer understand the creative process and how the development of those relationships. In any historical period, people fell in love with each other and desired happiness. The most dramatic stories can be conveyed through different tones. You don’t need special scenery or mass scenes; two people are all you need. I want to have time to understand them and reveal it. I want my greatest special effect to be the blink of the hero’s eyes.

How did you opt for the model of psychological realism based on classical dramaturgy and the strong inner conflicts of characters?

In your films Vortex, Lunar Lithuania, Vakar ir visados (Yesterday and Forever), etc., you reach back into the past, into Lithuanian villages and farms. Is this nostalgic gaze caused by the national literary tradition or the desire to capture what is inevitably disappearing?

I have no roots in a village and I’m not trying to produce anything specifically about villages. Maybe I find something real there, something that is disappearing like smoke. Each farm is like a miniature model of my life. A metaphor for the entire space we occupy. In my films I speak, however, from the present. I cannot reproduce the past accurately, so I talk about what is and must be important today. Is it easier to retain one’s own self or personality today or in the past? It is most important for me to reveal relationships between people and the development of those relationships. In any historical period, people fell in love with each other and desired happiness. The most dramatic stories can be conveyed through different tones. You don’t need special scenery or mass scenes; two people are all you need. I want to have time to understand them and reveal it. I want my greatest special effect to be the blink of the hero’s eyes.

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and Russia agrees to work with a young, still unknown director. He gave me wonderful lessons. And then suddenly, one night I had a call from Yalta where he was shooting a film. He said in an angry voice: "Do you know what you've done to me? Now I understand that I can play not only intellectual fascists. You have shown what I did not know you had".

I love actors, and when I write a script, I know which actor I am writing for it. I hate screen tests of actors and try to avoid them. Actors helped me to discover myself. I am concerned not only with the outcome of the film, but also with the time spent together with actors and the sensitive people close to me. I measure my life in films. It is then that I am my true self. I could have been wrong or missed something, but what I did occupied my entire life.

You are the president of the Lithuanian Union of Filmmakers. What does this activity mean to you and what processes could you highlight as essential in the national film industry?

For me, this activity means the same thing as time spent together with actors and the sensitive people close to me. I could have been wrong or missed something, but what I did occupied my entire life.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Linkinas istorijas (Funny Stories, 1973, a novel Telefonas (Telephone), feature, 79 min., 35mm, colour)

Virta aškaitai (When the Oaks Fell, 1976, feature, 88 min., 35 mm, colour)

Manno vaikystes radavio (Autumne of My Childhood, 1977, feature, 76 min., 35 mm, colour)

Vasana baigiasi raden (Summer Ends With Autumn, 1982, feature, 90 min., 35 mm, colour)

Angly valaus (Waldz, 1982, feature, 70 min., 35 mm, colour)

Vakar ir visados (Yesterday and forever, 1984, feature, 63 min., 35 mm, colour)

Zoles laikynys (Grass Roots, 1988, feature, 2 series, 35 mm, colour)

Žalčio žvilgsnis (The Serpent’s Gaze, 1989, feature, 74 min., 35 mm, colour)

Virto ąžuolai (When the Oaks Fell, 1976, feature, 88 min., 35 mm, colour)

Žemės keleiviai (The Handbell, 1995, feature, 2 series, 35 mm, colour)

Žolės šaknys (Grass Roots, 1997, feature, 80 min., 35 mm, colour)

Dviejųkštė Žiorys (The Divine Light, 2005, documentary, 44 min., video, colour)

Dubury (Vortex, 2009, feature, 140 min., 35 mm, b/w)

INTERVIEWED BY AUKŠE KANCERVIČIŪTĖ

Cinema Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events in World Cinema</th>
<th>Events in Lithuanian Cinema</th>
<th>Events in culture, art, history and politics of Lithuania</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>David W. Griffiths film The Birth of a Nation. Louis Feuillade's Les Vampires (The Vampires) series.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning of the German occupation. The first Lithuanian gymnasium was established in Vilnius.</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>Victor Sjöström's film Tierje Vigen (A Man There Was). Charles Chaplin's film The Tramp. Yakov Protazanov's film Pokrovaya dama (The Queen of Spades).</td>
<td>Yestoday and forever, 1984, feature, 63 min., 35 mm, colour.</td>
<td>Antanas Smetona was elected president of Lithuania. Women were granted the right to vote (women voted for the first time in 1920). Tautos teatras (The National Drama Theatre) was established in Kaunas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Yakov Protazanov's film Obez Sergey (Father Sergey) was the highlight of the Russian pre-Revolution cinema.</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>Robert Wiene's film Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (The Cabinet of Dr Caligari) gave a start to German Expressionism.</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>The FEKS (the Factory of the Eccentric Actor) group was founded in St Petersburg. Victor Sjöström's film Kirokaten (The Phantom Carriage).</td>
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<td>1922</td>
<td>The first Lithuanian gymnasium was established in Vilnius.</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>The Birth of a Nation. Louis Feuillade's Les Vampires (The Vampires) series.</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>The first Lithuanian Song Festival was held. Publication of the film magazine Žolės šaknys (Grass Roots).</td>
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Valdas Navasaitis:
Everything Is a Private Matter

Valdas Navasaitis is the creator of such documentaries as Tobolarija (Tobolaria, co-production with Šarūnas Bartas), Rudens snegas (Autumn Snow), Pavasaras (Spring), and Diapausia (Dia-Eared) and the feature films Kiemas (Courtyard) and Perpetuum Mobile. In 1999 Navasaitis founded his own film studio, VG Studio, where young directors created their films. Giedre Beinoriute created her Troleibusų miestas (Trolleybus City) and Dovile Gasisiute made her short film Kas meiga kalia tavęs (Who is Sleeping Next to You) in this studio.

Starting with Autumn Snow, all your films are a kind of a glimpse into the life cycle of humans. You associate it with the cycle in nature. You talk about the inevitability of life and death, autumn, winter and spring. Reality and the everyday routine that exist there outside the window are not your focus.

Well, after all, inevitability isn’t marked with a minus sign. Cinema is a way of understanding the world. For some, the environment and the buzz have a major influence and change their philosophy. There are people, however, who are essentially unaffected by what is happening, it is of little importance to them. For example, the word morality has for for the past seven years just been a cause of laughter for many. It has become a declarative concept. On the other hand, it’s just funny – public morality. Morality is everyone’s private matter. I call the buzz an imitation of life and joy. Those imitating and demonstrating are deceiving themselves. I don’t respond to it at all.

Speaking about today’s cinema in Lithuania, the issue of the spectator is often raised. Film directors are often reproached, at least behind the scenes, that they don’t try at all to define or imagine the person to whom they address their films.

Let’s remember that a while ago film production was a regulated process. After the restoration of independence in the country, conditions changed. There was the additional activity of finding funding for films. But this is a meat grinder. Relationships in the production process have changed. For the older generation of filmmakers, this transition both their hope and desire to do anything. Many are simply tired. In addition, today most film directors find it very difficult to admit that they are the same as everyone else. I would understand if it was actors who found this difficult. Directors should make an effort. And the exaggerated sensitivity towards one’s own self can’t help with living.

Does the concept of national film, in your opinion, have any substance in any sense? Can we talk about trends?

Although I have never studied at the Lithuanian film school, my films are presented as Lithuanian cinema, I don’t know what it is today.

There are films made by several individuals and these can be recommended to anybody from any part of the world interested in the art of cinema. I doubt whether you have to attach the word Lithuanian to them. Just because these films, in terms of their cinematic language, are of high or world quality?

Life in cinema is not as intense as it is, for example, in the theatre. Therefore, many things may seem accidental. [...] In addition, it is not expected that everyone working in film industry produces at the top standard. After all, there are many theatre directors too, but there are few good stage performances. This is normal. In cinema, the opportunities are even fewer. It’s hard for young people to start making films. But not everyone is aware that, if they have an opportunity to make a film, they have a great chance to actually test their profession. And if you don’t grab that chance – everything is finished.

The situation can be illustrated by the following. When I was shooting Courtyard, it was reported in the professional magazine Screen International. The producer of the film in France immediately had about twenty calls from various film schools and institutes. The callers were asking for permission to come to the film set. Just to have the opportunity to see the process and to participate in it. The opportunities were, to put it mildly, limited, because everything was taking place in the Lithuanian language. But one Belgian managed to get to us and stayed with us for a month. There was not a single student from Lithuania. They are all geniuses. Well, at least before they start making a film.

And yet, in your studio you work with young people. This means that there are young people who want to make films. You are
Responsibility is really a strange feeling. I never get involved in any creative matters. I can give my opinion when I’m asked for advice, but not more. It’s normal when people make mistakes. It’s one thing to think about how you will work, it’s quite another to work. It’s very difficult to materialise your vision. There are many corrections and compromises to be made. When working on your first film, there are numerous questions. A person who is more sensitive and wiser will always be afraid. This is a good feeling, if, of course, it doesn’t paralyse you. Then you must get to the bottom of the causes and act upon it, so that the person isn’t afraid. This doesn’t mean that you have to speak about films to such a person – there are many possible solutions to the problem. What is the true desire to make a film? I know that only when you really want to create a film, you start to have that fearsome feeling and doubt about whether you should proceed.
Audrius Juzėnas:
Evil Is Not an Abstraction; It Influences Our Destinies

The creative career of film director Audrius Juzėnas started with contemporary films: the fictional feature film Rojuje vėjo sniglas (In Also Snows in Paradise) and documentaries. The filmmaker earned international recognition with his recent feature-length films Vilniaus Getas (Ghetto) and Ekskursantė (The Excursionist), which reach back into the tragic moments of Lithuanian history in the 20th century. The films also raise the philosophical and moral issues of whether it is possible to resist evil and save humanistic ideals.

What drives you to explore the legacy of the 20th century and emphasise the conflict between ideals and reality?

When I think about it, I feel as if I were looking at myself straight through my image in the mirror. I don’t always understand what I really see and I become anxious about the immeasurable gulf that lies there. As a result, there is a wish for something clear, secure and real. Ideals are the aggregate of human values and collective experience. With the help of ideals, we create bridges to the future and without ideals we are just a gang of ignorant monkeys with atomic clubs. Therefore, the collective experience and, in other words, an ideal or a myth referring to it is perhaps the most important signpost for the survival of humanity. After all, hope is all that remains. It’s the same as the mirror in which you cannot see through yourself, but you can feel that your struggle is eternal. And there are neither victories nor defeats here.

The Excursionist is the first Lithuanian feature film about the mass deportations of people to Siberia. Nevertheless, the focus of the story is on a girl who managed to escape from a train with deportees. Why did you decide to focus specifically on the dangerous journey of a teenager back to her homeland?

The topic of exile is complicated. I’ve seen many films by different filmmakers in which people are divided into executioners and victims. All the rest falls outside the framework of the genre. But then, the key element of the vitality of life is missing. In The Excursionist our girl from the train with deportees is like a light in which the world is changing and shining with all the colours of the rainbow. She is more than just a deportee or the protagonist of the film. She is our collective experience, our pursuit of meaning, our common denominator, and the whole of Lithuania. Her story is all our experiences in which human ideals and the efforts of the many – scriptwriters, producers, actors, film crew, director, film critics, film experts, and viewers – intertwine. If any one of them is missing, the pyramid of our collective experience will collapse and so will any meaning. Without her, we are just pitiful fellow travellers from Marija’s train with deportees.

The screenwriter of the film, Pranas Morkus, relied on documentary material. Because the film is not an accurate reconstruction of historical events, what impact did this material have on the storyline?

Pranas Morkus is a very specific and disciplined playwright. Everything he creates is a real reflection of reality or inspiration. It is sometimes hidden behind the symbols, between the lines in dialogues, or just in the atmosphere. The Excursionist conveys the story of a genuine refugee. Cinema, however, is more than just cognitive educational reality. It is actually a hybrid reality or projection that changes into a personal experience. Therefore, sometimes, in order to achieve their objective, screenwriters can express far more through artistic reality than people or the story that has inspired it. The protagonist created by Morkus is no exception. She is not devoid of certain “artistic” digressions; I mean the surreal dreams, which can hardly be replicated, but this works well as an artistic tool within the framework of a given work.

Russian film stars Raisa Ryazanova, Kseniya Rapoport and Sergey Garmash played memorable parts in The Excursionist. How and why did you choose these actors and what is special about the Russian school of acting?

Lithuanians are not Russians. The screen does not lie, you cannot deceive the viewer or yourself, and neither tricks nor costumes or makeup will help. Movements, manners and gaze differ. A different soul is looking at you both in life and from the screen. You cannot mistake Russians even in cosmopolitan Hollywood films. What is real should be real if you are telling a true story; otherwise lies have short legs. Therefore, Russian actors came to play in a Lithuanian film. They have seen and experienced a lot, and they are talented and lively. They turn the post-war period, the times of Stalin’s rule and the terrible story into a reality. They are professionals and I think are an example for many Lithuanian actors, because they work both in the theatre and in films.

Not only a long journey, but also many challenges lay ahead of the heroine of the film, eleven-year-old Marija, played by Anastasija Marčenkaitė. How did Anastasija, whose film debut it was, perceive the emotional experience and internal transformations of the heroine?

Anastasija listened to what I told her on and off the set. She tried to understand not only the character’s motivation, but also the rules of the game. She is just a gift from God to this film, the director, and any producer. There is an impression that she lives on the screen rather in life. It just happens that her instincts are those of a real actress.

How did you manage to recreate the period of Stalin’s rule and the vast expanses of the Russian taiga?

What problems did you face?
The post-war period and the end of Stalin’s rule was in one or another way familiar to people of my generation from the stories of our parents and grandparents. Of course, the stories were grim. In my childhood years, the overall atmosphere changed little: red-nosed father frogs, swearing war veterans, total and mass parades in gratitude to the Communist Party, Communist ideology, Russian songs, mass drinking, and many other attributes of a “happy childhood”. We were “nearly” the same as Russians, because everyone was one grey mass, the Soviet people. So this was quite familiar to me. Therefore, it was not difficult to relocate the characters of the film to a bygone era. It was a lot harder with the vast Siberian and Alta landscapes, because the majority of deportees were sent to this area. We hoped to go on an expedition with the group and looked for ways to get at least to the north of Finland, but the crisis in Lithuania and the total tightening of belts to the extent of losing consciousness turned the fate of our film in a different direction. Despite everything, we did what we could; we shot in the environs of Vilnius, in the ethnographic region of Dzukija, and in the town of Anykščiai, anyplace that resembled the forests and rivers of the north and Siberian railways, cities and villages. The talent and experience of art director Jurijus Grigorovičius turned the whole film in the right direction, and cameraman Ramūnas Greičius and costume designer Daiva Petrylė made their contribution. What was not possible to shoot was done by computers.

The film has earned international recognition; it was awarded a Silver Crane by the Lithuanian Film Academy and a Ghetto by the Russian Film Academy. Did you expect such popularity when you were making the film?

No, because I doubted whether the topic was at all interesting to viewers. Times have changed. We would like to forget our nightmares and look to the future with the naive eyes of a child. After producing Ghetto, I never thought of wading into the same river of darkness. I easily accepted the proposal to shoot this film, however, as a job that had to be done, because no one, not a single director wanted to do it. I happen to have a persistent character, like a bull terrier, and if I cling to something with my teeth, I won’t let go even if my death is imminent. Only now do I realise that the film might have never been completed. At some point the producer wanted to “put it on the shelf of the Ministry of Culture”. Later, the film started to have a life of its own, and critics and film academicians appeared along with festivals and audiences, who somehow felt or understood the essence and the idea of this film. They felt sympathy and even love for us, and hatred for historical injustice and evil. Evil is not some abstraction; it influences our destinies. What happened to us could have happened to other Western cultures had Stalin’s generals not been satiated with violence and atrocities in Berlin, Königsberg, Prussia, and elsewhere. But The Excursionist is also about what unites us and makes us human.

Interviewed by Aukse Kancerevičiūtė

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Baijie yige mina (ItAlsoSnows in Paradise, 1994, feature, 81 min., 35 mm, colour)

Neatru iškakandyt sodybaitai (UFO, 1996–97, short documentary, 10 min., 35 mm, b/w)

Gyveno kontrabanda (Love Contraband, 1996, short documentary, 10 min., 35 mm, colour)

Rusia via Danmark (1997, short documentary, 20 min., 35 mm, b/w)

Fronto linija (Front Line, 1999, documentary, 55 min., 35 mm, colour)

Vilnius Ghetto (Vilnius Ghetto, 2005, feature, 100 min., 35 mm, colour)

Ekskurzantai (The Excursionist, 2013, 110 min., 35mm, colour)
Kristijonas Vildžiūnas: Finding Historical Truths

Since 1995, film director Kristijonas Vildžiūnas has created three short films and three full-length films. The world premiere of his feature debut, Nuomos sutartis (The Lease), took place at the Upstream Competition of the Venice International Film Festival. The world premiere of his second feature Kai apkabinsiu tave (Back to Your Arms) was recognized as the best Lithuanian film in 2011.

The story of Back to Your Arms reaches back to the Cold War era. What dilemmas did you face in making this historical film or finding historical truths?

The era depicted in the film is on the borderline of historical memory. Before creating the film, I remember going on a subway in Berlin and looking at an elderly man reading a newspaper and thinking how my film could be interesting to him. My film will probably have nothing to verify his personal attitude to history. The division of Berlin was a drama to him, his family, and his community, whereas for me, a representative of another generation and another country, this is only the means to reflect on and to express a universal theme. It was evident that the young woman sitting at the other end of the carriage would perhaps accept the film better. To pupils in Lithuania, the story of the Berlin Wall is only a not particularly interesting history lesson that they will forget at the end of the trimester. It is not possible to integrate everyone's perspectives on history into a single film. I realised that not everybody would accept my interpretation of the epoch.

The storyline was inspired by a letter written by Lithuanian-American Dalia Juknevičiūtė for her husband, the poet Algimantas Mackus. How did you come across this letter? How much time had passed before the idea became a screenplay?

This is the film that took the longest time for me to create. The first version of the script was written back in 1995. But I couldn’t debut with this project, could I? So I turned to other films and in 2007 I returned to the idea. I received the letter written by Dalia Juknevičiūtė from my father, who had read it in a magazine. In 1995, Juknevičiūtė’s experience in Berlin seemed very interesting. Our country was just out of the clutches of being isolated from the rest of the world. It was very interesting to find out what had happened to us, Lithuanians, behind the Iron Curtain. Berlin was a very symbolic city, as if a brother in arms.

The most important thing was to understand what the Lithuanian story in Berlin could tell us about the common fate of Europe, which we were a part of and have become a part of again. So I was forced to sacrifice the form of a diary containing the subjective experiences of a young woman and to introduce more characters and parallel action.

Each historical film also tells about the times in which it was created. What do you think Back to Your Arms tells us about ourselves and the people who live next door to us?

Bridging past and present with this film, I ask the viewer and myself whether we are able to understand what we want and what we are pursuing as individuals. Do we understand our desires and fears? Do our personal traumas prevent us from being masters of our own destiny and entrench us in illusions? And, finally, are our weaknesses used by the system that aims to control us?

What was most important in trying to find the correct form for the film?

The main challenge was to fuse archive material with the material we shot. We had to provide sound to silent archival material as if it were our own material. The trick worked. The archival material does not differ from the part actually filmed by us, although we didn’t even try to hide it. We sometimes inserted archival material in the scenes of the film. As a result, the whole film is shot in the style of a documentary, without aiming for a pictorial effect.

Both actors, Andrius Bialobžeskis and Jurga Jutaitė, also played in your You Am I. Why did you decide to try them in another role?

I knew that they would play in a convincing, not banal, manner. Andrius had minimal means of expression, but for example he played brilliantly in the scene where the father is standing with his back to the camera and putting gifts into the suitcase for his daughter. You can feel his emotions from his hand movements.
How did you select Elžbieta Latinalë, the main character in the film?

I saw her for the first time in the play Three Sisters directed by Rimas Tuminas in Vilnius. Elžbieta has energy and a high emotional intelligence. I knew it would be difficult to work with her, but I really wanted to try.

Back to Your Arms is the first Lithuanian and Polish co-production and was made in collaboration with the film company Studio Filmowe TOR, which is managed by the famous Polish film director and producer Krzysztof Zanussi. What did this cooperation give to the film?

I consider Krzysztof Zanussi to be one of my teachers. As a student I visited his workshop and his thoughts about films later helped me make Likusios dienos (The Days Are Left), my graduation work. Krzysztof liked the screenplay of Back To Your Arms. In his opinion, the idea of the film fell to the song “Back to Your Arms”. Antoni wrote four songs, all sung by his wife, the singer Mary Komasa. Three songs were written for the dance club scene and the fourth song for the end of the film. The last song is heard against the images of the construction of the Berlin Wall, which absorb the energy of personal drama, universalise it, and at the same time provide hope, because we know that the wall will ultimately be destroyed. So far, we still live in a world in which shake-up is necessary so we can grow spiritually and become wiser.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Likusios dienos (The Days Are Left, 1995, short fiction, 30 min., 35 mm, b/w)
Biblioteka (Library, 1997, short fiction, 35 min., 35 mm, b/w)
9 varty miestais (9 Gate City, 1999, documentary, 40 min., Beta CAM, b/w)
Nuomos sutartis (The Lease, 2002, feature, 90 min., 35 mm, colour)
Ai at į tu (You Am I, 2006, feature, 90 min., 35 mm, colour)
Kai apkabinusis tave (Back To Your Arms, 2010, feature, 90 min., 35 mm, colour)

A shot from K. Vildžiūnas’ Kai apkabinusia tave (Back To Your Arms).
Kristina Buožytė: 

Film Is the Door to a Specific World

Kristina Buožytė, a film director representing the younger generation of filmmakers, released her debut feature film, *The Collectress* (Kolekcionierė), in 2008. Her second film *Aurora* (Vanishing Waves), which was four years in the making, has earned the director worldwide recognition. It was awarded Best European Science Fiction Film at the Sitges Festival in Spain in 2012 and earned the best film, best director, best screenplay, and best actress awards at the Fantastic Fest Festival in Austin (USA). It continued its momentum by winning the special programme East of West Prize at the Karlovy Vary Festival in the Czech Republic.

**Kristina Buožytė:**

What do you think is important in I’m trying to find this essence in feature films. its characters, and what language to speak to them. How to purify the theme of a film, how to “access” their essence. It takes a long time to understand documentaries, I’d have to dig deep until I get to few years. I think that if you want to do something situation. I’ve been in the film industry for only a very interesting. I’m frightened that in a watch and to discover something unexpectedly films. Why did you choose feature films? It was prompted by the desire to create a love story. At the same time, I wanted it to be an adventure. In general, a film for me is the door to a very specific world, and you want it to be an exclusive, suggestive journey.

Over the summer, I watched a lot of Michelangelo Antonioni’s films. They were the first inspirations for *Vanishing Waves*. Antonioni’s films are not based on a story. The story can be conveyed in one sentence, but after the end of the film, his characters continue to live on. This is something magical, some kind of alchemy. To me this is a sign of professionalism in filmmaking.

**Why did you choose the genre of science fiction for your film Vanishing Waves?**

I love science fiction and in my teenage years I read a lot of science fiction and enjoyed the fantasy films of the 60s and 70s. In *Vanishing Waves*, the science fiction genre is only a platform for expressing thoughts and talking about problems. The budget of the film was not large. My colleague, writer Bruno Samper, came up with the idea: “What if we create an adventure in the human mind rather than in reality?” I really liked the idea. Then we started to think about what to do to give science fiction a real basis; we wanted the story to be based on true scientific information rather than depict conversations that have nothing to do with reality. We communicated with scientists and doctors, and we discussed whether science in the future could take this path and whether similar effects could then be achieved.

Since your first film, you have collaborated with screenwriter Bruno Samper and cameraman Felikas Abrukauskas. How is their participation important in the creative process of the film? Bruno is my creative partner. I’ve always looked for a person with whom I could write screenplays. I don’t think it’s fair that in Lithuania a film director must also be a screenwriter. Each must do what he knows best. Since Bruno is strong at visualising and conceptualising and I am good at communicating, we complement each other. When working with him, I’m continually convinced that a film means thinking and talking in images and that it isn’t only telling a story. All that is left after watching a film is a kind of image that cuts into your brain. When I try to remember any film, there is always some kind of scene that affects me and is imprinted in my memory.

As for Felikas, he challenges me. He’s a great cameraman who sets high standards for both himself and those around him. When you meet people with whom you can create and share, when your attitudes and certain standards (we are all perfectionists) coincide, you just don’t let them go.

**Does it all start from the theme?**

No, it doesn’t. Filmmakers usually say so, but in reality it doesn’t. There is some sort of concept, an image or a fragment of something. You spot it and start adding new aspects to it: philosophical, social and emotional. Everything connects and little by little becomes a logical whole.

**How did the idea to create The Collectress come about?**

The film was based on intuition. At that time, I had no idea how to create a feature film. Later, when I understood how to write a script, I started to integrate themes, action, new characters, and problems; I started to work in an entirely different way. The starting point for *The Collectress* was a fragment of a story about a woman watching films and being able to experience emotions only through a film.

**And how about Vanishing Waves?**

It was prompted by the desire to create a love story. At the same time, I wanted it to be an adventure. In general, a film for me is the door to a very specific world, and you want it to be an exclusive, suggestive journey.

Over the summer, I watched a lot of Michelangelo Antonioni’s films. They were the first inspirations for *Vanishing Waves*. Antonioni’s films are not...
You worked as a stage director and created commercials for a long time. What does this experience give you in making a full-length feature film?

Although I worked in the theatre, I was always thinking about films. Some people even described my stage productions as “cinematographic.” But theatre is of course a far more intimate and quieter place than a cinema. In the theatre I learned improvisation with actors, which is handy in filmmaking. My experience in the production of commercials helped me to understand the entire shooting process. I learned to work with filmmaking equipment and gained organisational experience.

How did you discover the theme for your debut feature film, The Gambler? Why did it seem important to you?

I belong to a generation very rich with experience. This generation graduated from secondary schools in Soviet times and began their higher education under capitalism. At the junction of two regimes and two centuries, the duality of human nature, spontaneous attempts to adapt to the new conditions, and the revaluation of moral values came to the fore. I wanted to talk about it, but I needed time for a perspective, a temporal distance to understand what was going on with us. In the face of the economic crisis and all the perturbations in Lithuania and the world, the issue of moral choice become relevant as never before. I felt that this was the perfect moment to sum up my experience. Together with Kristupas Sabolis, the co-author of the screenplay, we started looking for borderline situations that would best reveal the duality of human nature. I remember that Kristupas told me about a few friends in Italy who jokingly bet on which celebrity would pass away from a drug overdose or from some other reason that year. I proposed moving this idea to an ambulance unit, and we gradually developed a scheme for the game.

The generation that lived at a turning point in Lithuanian history is the focus of the film, and you are one of the representatives of that generation. Who and what kinds of people represent this generation, and how important do you think the experience of this generation is?

I think that the main feature of this generation is its ability to adapt, both in the positive and negative sense of that word. These are realists who are pretty critical about the environment. My generation has a range of conflicting characteristics: a mixture of idealism and cynicism, despair and faith, and the fight for well being and going with the flow. These are experiences of different political systems. Contradictions born out of these systems affect the behaviour or outlook of this generation.

What was most important when choosing actors for the film? What were the discover an artistic form that would be attractive to the viewer who demands higher artistic quality, but at the same time would not discourage mass-production film buffs.

What was important in choosing the form of The Gambler?

I wanted to provoke and to find an attractive form to address an unattractive issue. I like different kinds of films, for example, those of Carlos Reygadas and David Fincher. Both are brilliant professionals and both deal with complex topics, but both are going along radically different paths. One deliberately ignores the principles of classical narrative in a film and looks for a new artistic language, and the other very strongly controls the film’s narrative and tries to involve a broad range of viewers into the story by employing the measures typical of Hollywood productions. I find it interesting to combine both paths: to
The Gambler is a Lithuanian and Latvian co-production. How did Latvians become involved in the creative process, why you chose them, and what did it add to the film?

Janis Eglitis, the cameraman, is not only a great professional, but also my friend, and we have produced a lot of commercials together. I shared the idea of the film with him, he willingly agreed to join, and then I thought that maybe it would be of interest to a Latvian producer. Janis recommended Roberts Vinovski and this is how our cooperation began. Our common historical and cultural experience apparently helped find a common language in the film too. We are very pleased that this is the first joint Lithuanian and Latvian feature film in 20 years of independence. As far as I know, there are no more projects like this now.

I was looking for a man who would not stick-out from a group of passers-by for Vincent’s role: a person doing his work in good faith, but not getting adequate consideration and showing no special emotional involvement in what is going on in reality; a person who is going with the flow of life, the ones you might meet in your stairwell or in a queue in the supermarket. It took us more than half a year to select the actors. But the result was not disappointing.

I work with Kristupas because I like when the boundaries of collaboration dissolve. We rewrite each other’s scenes, share ideas, and correct each other’s dialogues. We are sufficiently different, but at the same time tolerant people who are able to agree on a compromise. It is not always easy, but in six years we have already honed each other’s sharp edges. We stick to the rule that if you are able to convince each other with arguments, this is a sign that the viewer may also be convinced.

Interviewed by Elena Jastiniute

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Sekmadienis taka, koks yra (Sunday as It Is, 2003, short feature, 31 min., 35 mm, colour)

Sokantis kirminas (Dancing Worm, 2006, short feature, 20 min., 35 mm, colour)

Ločius (The Gambler, 2013, feature, 109 min., colour)

Cinema Timeline

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events in World Cinema</th>
<th>Events in Lithuanian Cinema</th>
<th>Events in culture, art, history and politics of Lithuania</th>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Andrezej Wajda film Popiól i diament (Ashes and Diamonds)</td>
<td>Publication of Adam Mickiewicz’s Dziady (Farewells’ Eve) (translated by Justinas Marcinkusvičius)</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Alain Resnais’ film Hiroshima mon amour</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Jean-Luc Godard’s film À bout de souffle (Breathless)</td>
<td>Novella film Gyvai deiukiai (Living heroes) which consists of four short films by directors Marijonas Giedrys, Balsys Bratkauskas, Aritonas Žebrūnas and Vytautas Žalakevičius was awarded the Grand Prix at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival.</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film debut Accattone. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s film Chronique d’un été (Chronicle of a Summer)</td>
<td>The screenplay “Gott Mit Uns” by Grigorijus Kanovičius and Vytautas Žalakevičius was published in the magazine Perpal (No. 9). The story was about a priest who hid a Jewish boy and a Soviet partisan during the Nazi occupation. By order of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party the film was banned from being made.</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>David Lean’s film Lawrence of Arabia. Agnès Varda’s film Cléo de 5 à 7 (Cleopatra from 5 to 7). Terence Young’s film Dr. No – the first film about James Bond. Andrei Tarkovsky’s film Ivanovo detstvo (Ivan’s Childhood).</td>
<td>Resolution of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party regarding measures to strengthen control over cinematography.</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>Federico Fellini’s film 8½ started the theme of filmmakers and filmmaking. Roman Polanski’s film Nik w rzedzie (Knife in the Water).</td>
<td>Resolution of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party regarding the celebration of the anniversary of the 1863 Uprising.</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Michelangelo Antonioni’s film Il deserto玫瑰a (Red Desert). Bernardo Bertolucci’s film Prima della rivoluzione (Before the Revolution). A heavily censored version of Marlen Khutinsky’s Mizh chastnii krest (I’m Twenty Years Old), originally entitled Zastava flryusha (Lenins Guard), was released. Wojciech Has’ film Bykopia, zwolniony w Sarzeczce (The Sargassum Manuscript).</td>
<td>Aritonas Žebrūnas’ film Punktiniu strategiju direkts (The Last Day of Vacation) marked the beginning of the poetic trend in the Lithuanian cinema and films about children and teenagers.</td>
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Šarūnas Bartas (b. 1964) is the most esteemed and acclaimed auteur in Lithuania. He consistently deals with the multiplicity of the experiences of homo sovieticus and the process that those living on former Soviet territory go through to form new identities. His interest in this problem could be explained by the fact that Bartas launched and nurtured his cinematic career as an experimental film maker just on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union and produced his first professional film, Praėjusios dienos atminimui (In Memory of a Day Gone By, 1990), during the period of political and cultural shifts just after Lithuania announced its independence. Bartas' obvious artistic talent, coupled with his entrepreneurial outlook and strategies, made him an inspirational figure for the 1990s generation of local filmmakers, many of whom were influenced by his filmmaking style, with its lack of emphasis on narrative, non-verbal storytelling, long takes, ambient hypnotic sound, amateur actors, etc. In all his works starting with In Memory of a Day Gone By, Bartas reflects on and reveals small joys and passions, inner conflicts, fears, and longings for freedom of a man in the presence of societal, economic and political stasis and shifts. Bartas' early films accurately document the vanishing remains of a once “powerful” empire and question the loss and disappearance of a previously common territory and form of shared belonging. The films do this, among other things, through an emphasis on close ups and long shots. The characters in the films (who unmistakably are anti-heroes) silently observe the outside world and each other, but are not able to establish sensible relations with each other, or change their lives. They are closed inside their own world, which consists of an assemblage of recollections and dreams and a sense of an unstable present. The editing in these films intentionally lacks logical connections so as to give an impression of spontaneity and uncertainty with reference to the newly crystalizing nation and state. These films have the feel of a kind of mnemonic, a sort of artificial memory, referencing a past associated with sadness, uncertainty and alienation. His 1991 film Trys dienos (Three Days) manifested the first full expression of this unique style, which became a common denominator of the national auteur film and was further nurtured in Koridorius (Corridor, 1995), Mūsų nedaug (Few of Us, 1996), Namai (The House, 1997), Laisvė (Freedom, 2000), Septyni nematomi žmonės (Seven Invisible Men, 2005), and Eurazijos Aborigenas (Eastern Drift, 2010).

Šarūnas Bartas' films can also be perceived as a bridge of communication linking post-communist Eurasia with Western Europe. He depicts different post-communist groups (Russians, Tofalars, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Tartars, and people in Kaliningrad Oblast) healing historical traumas and grappling with the issue of post-1989 identity, including the damage of an artificially created multi-cultural and multi-national belonging. Bartas' films implicitly suggest the increasing threats of moral and mental deprivation in traumatised dystopian societies. However, he leaves some hope for the viewer and indirectly talks about the necessity for a new human sensitivity, as well as for healing historical social traumas.
Did you create your first feature film *Trys dienos* (*Three Days*) after completion of your studies in Moscow?

Not exactly. I started making *Three Days* during my third year of studies. I was in a rush, because there was not really much for me to do in Moscow, nor indeed for many others. *Three Days* was the first independent Lithuanian film (not sponsored by the Lithuanian state budget) co-produced with Estonians. Nothing like this had ever happened in Lithuania before, so everyone was very suspicious of me. Halfway through shooting we had to terminate our cooperation with the Estonians because of disagreements related to the content of the film. Furthermore, at that time we also established the first independent film studio, Kinema, in Lithuania. And then all the events leading to the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, like the economic blockade and other events, started. We suspended the shooting of *Three Days* but continued shooting documentary material with the money that was left. Some of the footage of the events at the Seimas (Parliament) building was later used in my film *Koridorius* (*Corridor*, 1995).

**When you started your film *Three Days* you were only 23 years old. What effect did historical and social change have on the themes of the young filmmaker and his subsequent creative work? Did this changing context affect the state of mind of the film director?**

It’s hard to say. I think it probably never had a profound effect, although, of course, we live in a certain period of time and shoot what we know. For example, the shooting of the documentary film *Praėjusios dienos atminimui* (*In Memory of a Day Gone By*, 1990) started and was completed in the Soviet period. Had it not been for perestroika, the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (VGIK) might not have allowed me to make it, though at that time there were indeed attempts to prevent and prohibit it. And concerning the developments in Lithuania at that time, they are directly reflected in my later film *Corridor*.

**Can we compare you with those realists who tried to document and reflect reality in their films instead of constructing it?**

You see, everyone constructs reality in films, whether reflecting it or not. Realism in films is an entirely different matter. We can’t tell what is real and what isn’t. Each of us even has a different perception of reality, because we rely not only on what we are looking at, but also what has happened to us earlier in our life. We may be looking at the same point, but for one of us the reality would be at this angle (showing), while the other may forget what he is looking at and may at that time think and “see” their interlocutor’s face. So these would be two different realities at the same time. Even in a single four-dimensional space there could be many realities.

Reality should also be separated from stylisation. Reality in cinema is mutilated. For example, the action showed in my *Three Days* takes place over a few days, but my film lasts only one and a half hours, so time is compressed and quite different laws apply than in reality. We are probably talking about a reality that in order to make the show easier and happier is deliberately further stylised and simplified for the show to take place. This is not a bad thing, because this is a spectacle with its own laws. It should be noted that even as the show is being created, attempts are made to reproduce an illusion of reality. All creators or producers are trying to recreate an interval in time. A very short interval of time is even recreated in a painting. It is presented to a viewer, who looks at it and his life becomes easier, because after seeing a little piece of the world with someone else’s eyes, the viewer finds more points of reference. It becomes easier for him to find his own place and to understand himself. Perhaps this is why such
Many of your films contain features characteristic of a documentary film (a realistic depiction of the environment, non-professional actors playing themselves, the use of diegetic sounds, etc.). What do you think about the difference between a documentary and a fictional film?

I think that there is hardly any clear boundary between a documentary and a fictional film. Documentary films can be divided into journalistic-style reporting, TV, or other documentaries, but in each case we record a certain interval in time and the extent to which it seems real to us depends on how much effort we put in for it to look so. I disagree that non-professional actors who play in my films bring my films closer to reality. You are wrong to say that they’re playing themselves, because this isn’t indeed so at all. These actors can be compared with the people in some American films who have also been picked up on the street and who are certain types in the film. Federico Fellini, who could never be called a documentary filmmaker, picked up nearly all his actors on the street, but they didn’t play themselves. There is no such expression as playing oneself; a good actor doesn’t act at all.

What are the most important features for you in an actor?

In each film, even in the so-called entertaining films, actors who can’t act are the most valued. If someone says, “that actor really knows how to act”, it means that he acts pretty convincingly. Acting is a part of our communication, because we are social creatures and constantly convey something to others with our expressions (face, gestures and language). We usually don’t understand the emotions of animals (well, perhaps only tail wagging), because we are different. But we understand each other, because we are united by our means of communication. When we can see that a person is lying, it means that he is a poor actor. Of course, there are people who know how to lie very well, which means that they believe what they’re saying.

Acting is not a profession that can be learned, just as it is possible to learn to sing, but it is impossible to learn to have a very good voice. Recreation and saving one’s energy are a professional actor’s skills that are usually quite easily learned, but the essence of a good actor is different. On the other hand, a person may seem completely realistic, but be bland and uninteresting. Directors choose models for the characters in their films in the same way that painters choose models for their paintings.

There are often no precise time and space boundaries in your films, and an action usually develops in an abstract, distant and unfamiliar space in an indefinite time, so I want to ask: how much time in which we live is important to you when making a film?

We probably can’t even use the word important here, because the time in which I live is all I have, which is the same for any one of us. It is that foam of life that came to the surface and that we carry forward into the future. It is at this time that we are foaming and are alive. None of us, no matter how young, will be here one hundred years later, so the time in which I live is the entire essence, because I don’t know any other time. On the other hand, our imagination is based on memories and these, as we know, wear out. The brain arranges our memories the way it likes. Therefore, we can hardly grab even the time in which we live by the tail.

In your films (especially the early ones) there is little dialogue, the language is minimalist, and the storytelling is almost static, unlike usual narrative cinema in which language is a very important link in the story. Do you agree that the language of images in cinema is more important than words?

I don’t know. Both the image and sound must have their place. There could be fewer or more words. Sometimes the text can say more, because it helps the viewer to understand more about the scene or character, though I don’t see the need to illustrate each image with a sound. This is all related to TV, in which series, where practically everything is conveyed by text, play an important part. And this is happening for a reason, otherwise a person would not be able to do household chores or make pancakes with the TV on. Everything on TV is conveyed by the text and the image becomes just a background. Of course, I think that filmmaking also tries to simplify the whole business. This is done for the purpose of distributing the film more broadly and making it more understandable. After all, if someone has a couple of hours available and walks into a cinema, that person isn’t always in the mood for for anything heavy. He just wants to relax, forget about something, or whatever. And he’ll be unhappy if any effort is required. We know that many works of art, books, films, or stage performances require an effort on the part of the viewer. But not everyone wants to do that, so there are other stories available for those who don’t want to do that.

You probably know that your films are often compared with the works of other directors. I wonder what film director (or directors) has had a strong impact on you?

I’ve heard such comparisons, but in my opinion they have no real grounds, because this is done after the fact and often based not on real similarities, but rather differences. In much the same way music is popular, modern or classical, there are attempts to categorise film directors. Back when I had nothing to do with films, I was impressed by Roman Balajani’s film Flights in Dreams and in Reality (Palytojy vo së nejavta). I didn’t even know that such films existed, because before that I had only watched films about American Indians. When I saw Balajani’s film, I was fifteen years old, but I’ve never forgotten the impression it made on me. Later I was also very impressed by Fellini’s films. Then the whole of Europe flocked to cinemas to see them, so they were very commercial, but today, behold, they’ve become almost experimental (smiling). So the development of films has its own ups and downs. The Italians can be a great example, because today they hardly create anything very interesting, although they have given the world many of the all-time greatest film directors. The development of the cinematography requires a lot of time. First for canonisation, then for breaking down the canons, as it was in painting.

You not only direct your films, but also perform other technical functions: you are a cameraman (in the film Septyni nematomi žmonės [Seven Invisible Men]), a sound engineer, and you are even going to act. Is this the true model of an auteur film?

First, without the knowledge of all the professions of filmmaking, it would be foolish to imagine that you could manage everything. Imagine that a conductor does not know how to play the violin or he can play the piano, but knows...
nothing about other instruments. Conductors can play virtually all instruments and are fully aware of their potential (smiling). Therefore, it can play virtually all instruments and are fully aware of other instruments. Conductors can choose to play. But conductors themselves don’t play, and in order to conduct it’s sufficient for them to know how the instruments work.

Of course, but if it was really necessary they could play. But this depends on the case. As for me, as I said, I did a lot of shooting prior to my studies (VGIK). Then I did not have any assistants and I had to figure out what, where and how. Therefore, I said, I did a lot of shooting prior to my studies (VGIK). Then I did not have any assistants and I had to figure out what, where and how. Therefore, I can work professionally with the camera, but if I don’t have to, I don’t do it. In my opinion, directors must intervene in any process that’s not going the way they think it should be going. After all, you can’t say in the credits that someone on the creative team has failed.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY
Tofularia (Tofalaria, 1986, co-directed with Vydūnas Navasaitis, short documentary, 16 min., 16 mm, b/w)

Praėjusius dienos atminimui (In Memory of a Day Gone By, 1990, short documentary, 40 min., 35 min, b/w)

Trys dienos (Three Days, 1991, feature, 76 min., 35 mm, colour)

Koridorius (The Corridor, 1995, feature, 80 min., 35 mm, b/w)

Mūsų nedaug (Few of Us, 1996, feature, 105 min., 35 mm, colour)

Namai (The House, 1997, feature, 120 min., 35 mm, colour)

Laure (Freedom, 2000, feature, 94 min., 35 mm, colour)

Nieko nepraranda vaikai (Children Lose Nothing, 5 min. segment in feature having several creators, Visions of Europe, 2004, 140 min., 35 mm, colour)

Septyni nematomi žmonės (Seven Invisible Men, feature, 2005, 116 min., 35 mm, colour)

Eurasijos aborigenas (Eastern Drift, 2010, feature, 90 min., 35 mm, colour)

Interviewed by Lukas Brašiškis
Jonas Mekas’ Diary Films

By Maksim Ivanov

At the age of 93, Jonas Mekas (b. 1922) is one of the oldest active filmmakers in the world and remains an avid practitioner of the diary film genre, which he famously pioneered in the second half of the 20th century.

Mekas’ films have been screened extensively at some of the world’s biggest film festivals and contemporary art venues, and he is often considered to have played a crucial role in the emergence and formation of the New American Cinema of the 1960s, significantly influencing the global scene of avant-garde filmmaking of the following years.

Born in a small agricultural town in Lithuania as the fifth child in the family (with the sixth soon to follow), Mekas left his homeland with his younger brother Adolfas in 1944, when they were in danger of getting arrested for their participation in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. Without ever reaching their destination, the two spent the next few years moving from one displaced persons camp in Germany to another, until landing in the USA in 1949.

In 1954, Jonas and his brother started the seminal magazine, Film Culture, which would go on to become the agora of avant-garde filmmakers and their supporters. In 1962, Mekas and twenty of his colleagues organised the Film-Makers’ Cooperative, aimed at the distribution of avant-garde films.

From 1964 to 1967, he presented a series of New American Cinema festivals and expositions, which toured the USA, Europe, and South America. In 1970, he founded Anthology Film Archives, a unique centre for the preservation, study and screening of independent, avant-garde and experimental films.

The year 1961 saw the release of Mekas’ own feature debut, Guns of the Trees, which not only had a plot and a cast, but also included spoken interludes by the legendary Beat poet Allen Ginsberg. In 1964 The Brig, a filmed version of The Living Theatre’s performance of a play of the same name, came out. The film was awarded the Grand Prize in the documentary section of the Venice Film Festival.

Two weeks after his arrival in New York, Jonas bought a Bolex camera and started recording bits of his day-to-day life. In the beginning, it was merely a way of getting acquainted with the filming process and keeping the necessary skills in shape, without any intention of incorporating the collected footage in a proper film project. Little did he know that documenting the everyday on film would become his life-long obsession.

Despite being critical of the avant-garde film scene at first, Mekas had become one of its prominent figures by the mid-1960s. His leadership skills and organisational abilities paved the way for the establishment of an entire underground film industry, fully independent from Hollywood’s network of film studios, cinema chains, and distribution companies.

In 1969. Since then, he has focused almost exclusively on this type of filmmaking.

His next diary film was the Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania (1971–1972), which depicted his and Adolfa’s reunion with their family after 27 years of separation. In 2006, the film was added to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress in recognition of its cultural, aesthetic and historical significance.

Mekas made his first major diary film, the three-hour-long Walden: Diaries, Notes & Sketches, in 1969. Since then, he has focused almost exclusively on this type of filmmaking.

Some of Mekas’ other notable diary films include Lost Lost Lost (1976), He Stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of His Life (1985), Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol (1990), Zefiro Torna or Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas (1992), and As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty (2000).

Many of Mekas’ works, although centred on a particular topic, group of people, or series of events, manifest a diversity of material, ranging temporally from the filmmaker’s first days in the USA to the moment of the film’s editing. Yet the main focus is almost invariably on the close-knit circle of his family, friends, and fellow artists or filmmakers.

The earlier films normally contain soundless footage, set to the accompaniment of either separately recorded, desynchronised sound or selected musical pieces, as well as Mekas’ voice-over commentary. The newer films, more often than not, feature synchronised sound, giving way to voice-over here and there. Mekas also consistently uses stylised written intertitles to both distinguish between separate sequences of the film and provide relevant information about their respective subjects.

Persisting throughout Mekas’ filmography, the voice-over is usually self-reflexive, with the filmmaker contemplating the very activity of making a film about the people he cares about and the times that have irrevocably passed. In this context, filmmaking appears as a way of escaping
the confines of time and preserving the past. Such an approach to cinema culminated in 2007, when Mekas would post a film each day on his website as part of “The 365 Day Project”.

After Lithuania regained independence in 1990, Mekas embraced the new opportunities to take part in the cultural life of his country. In the 1990s and 2000s, he helped popularise in Lithuania the heritage of fellow Lithuanian-born American artist and founder of the Fluxus movement, George Maciunas. In 2007, the Jonas Mekas Visual Arts Center opened in Vilnius.

Mekas was also partly involved in the activities of the Ministry of Fluxus, a one-year-long art project established in Vilnius in April 2010. In addition, he has had several books of poetry and essays, his most established in Vilnius in 2010. In addition, he has had several books of poetry and essays, his most

Mekas’ recent films include the five-hour-long *Lithuania and the Collapse of the USSR* (2008), which is composed of American television newscasts of the 1989–1991 events, shot off Mekas’ home television, and the more traditional diary pieces *Sleepless Nights Stories* (2011, premiering at the Berlin International Film Festival) and *Outtakes from the Life of a Happy Man* (2012).

The latter two show Mekas as an aging artist, for whom filmmaking is perhaps the best means of reconciling with the passing away of his friends.

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**Cinema Timeline**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events in World Cinema</th>
<th>Events in Lithuanian Cinema</th>
<th>Events in culture, art, history and politics of Lithuania</th>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>The first Steven Spielberg’s film <em>Duel</em> and George Lucas’ first film <em>THX1138</em>. Bernardo Bertolucci’s <em>Ultimo tango a Parigi</em> (Last Tango in Paris). Lucahino Visconti’s film <em>Morte a Venezia</em> (Death in Venice).</td>
<td>Ikksietro kino (No. 1), a film magazine published in Moscow, featured Boris Runin’s article “Images, Symbols and Hieroglyphs”, which for the first time identified and critically reviewed the Lithuanian cinema tradition.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Steven Spielberg’s film <em>Juno</em>. Andrej Wajda’s film <em>Ziemiai obuolcnia</em> (The Promised Land).</td>
<td>Algimantas Puipis, one of the most devoted authors of literary adaptations in Lithuanian cinema, debut film (co-directed with Stasys Motiejūnas) <em>Atpildo diena</em> (The Day of Retribution).</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>Martin Scorsese’s film <em>Taxi Driver</em>. Nagisa Oshima’s film <em>Ai no korîda</em> (In the Realm of the Senses). Nikita Mikhalkov’s film <em>Nekounenschennaya Pyusa Dlya Mekhanicheskogo Pianino</em> (An Unfinished Piece for a Player Piano).</td>
<td>Vytautas Žalakevičius’ film <em>Eto slakoje slovo zvoboda</em> (The Sweet Word Freedom) made at the Moscow film studio was awarded the Golden Prize of the 9th Moscow International Film Festival. Speech by Justas Pekkeravičius, chairman of the KGB of the Lithuanian SSR, at an operational staff meeting regarding the ideologically harmful views of the intelligentsia.</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>David Lynch’s film <em>Eraserhead</em>.</td>
<td>Arūnas Žebriūnas’ film <em>Riešutų duona</em> (Nut Bread) – one of the most popular Lithuanian films of all time. Viktoras Starosai’s documentary <em>AI myliu direktorį</em> (I Love the Director) was the first to tell about children abandoned by their parents.</td>
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The first years after the restoration of the independence of Lithuania were a time of recovery, breakthrough, diversity, and creative ideas in the Lithuanian documentary film industry. Some of the ideas, the moral and ethical beliefs, and the requirements of high artistic quality that matured at that time shaped the documentary film scene in Lithuania today.

After long years of Soviet censorship, where genuine and honest documentary filmmaking provided a permanent refuge for creators who aimed to remember and to remind their audiences of one’s own self and identity and where the style of Aesop became the main instrument of the language of film, Lithuanian documentary filmmakers took the opportunity of the period of reformation and openness and spoke out. Filmmakers took the opportunity of the period of one’s own self and identity and aimed to remember and to remind their audiences of the wounds left by the Soviet period, but the two epitomising works of the period were their Dar sykį Lie-tu-va (Once Again Lithuania, 1990) and Lietuva. Žodžiai į sąžinę (Lithuania. Words to the Conscience, 1991) dedicated to the path leading to the restoration of the independence of Lithuania. This diptych perhaps most accurately reflects the type of films being made by the older generation of documentary filmmakers in the first years of independence.

Among the documentaries that reflected the general mood and problems of the nation, several stood out. The film Sala (Island, 1990) by film director Rimtautas Šilinis and cameraman Viktoras Radzevičius depicted a mental hospital as a metaphor for the post-Soviet society. There was also a series of four films by Rimtautas Šilinis together called Penkias Dievo įsakymas (The Fifth Commandment of God, 1991–1994). These films were dedicated to the most important political events of 1991, including the attack on the TV tower in Vilnius and the victims of that attack (13th January), the massacre of border officials at Medininkai (31st July), and a timeline of the events that took place during the August Coup in Moscow.

The young generation that set out on its creative path in the early years of independence could only rely on themselves. It was difficult for the new country to support the expensive film industry (and this partly explains the abundance of documentaries and dearth of feature films at that time). The Lithuanian film studios, earlier the only base for film production, became just one of several studios in the country. Financial independence encouraged many young directors to become film producers and control the fate and distribution of their own productions. The Kinema Studio established by Šarūnas Bartas became one of the most important centres of attraction for young creators.

The film directors of that generation focused on unusual spaces and identified with marginalised people, thus communicating the message of the separation of the directors from the crowd and rediscovering the suggestiveness of the poetic mode of expression in the new reality. The noise of rallies and speeches were juxtaposed with the silent heroes and a prayer at the foot of the Gates.
of Dawn (Priešmetais dievo atminimui [In Memory of a Day Gone By, 1889]), director Šarūnas Bartas), the incoherent matter of Mish, a resident of the Užupis area in Vilnius (Dieinti minuotų priež Šarūno skydf), [Ten Minutes Before the Flight of Icarus, 1990], director Arūnas Matelis), the silence of the blind (Ner esi žm [Earth of the Blind, 1992], director Audrius Stonys), the creaking of snow underfoot during a funeral procession (Rudens smėg [Autumn snow, 1992], director Valdas Navasaitis), and the sounds of the daily life of Roma in the Pavilnių area in Vilnius (Kirtimos idės [The Idylls of Kirtimai, 1992], director Artūras Jevdokimovas). The works of these filmmakers also showcased a silent protest against the spirit of films containing a lot of dialogue. They projected slow, contemplative images that were a declaration of their desire to create anthropological films or what they considered to be pure films. These images captured stories filled with internal energy about human loneliness in the voids of history and about the universal and currently relevant pursuit of inner spirituality in our everyday life. The new film dissemination opportunities that opened up for this generation brought international recognition to filmmakers. In 1992 Earth of the Blind by Stonys received the European Film Award for Best Documentary of the Year from the European Film Academy. (The particular contribution of Rimvydas Leipzig, the cameraman and co-creator of many films made during the transitional years in Lithuanian history, must be emphasised in creating the story and visual expression of Earth of the Blind). Films by Navasaitis and Matelis earned awards at Oberhausen, Pärnu, Paris (!), Babelsberg, and other festivals.

Documentaries by Matelis and Stonys, the filmmakers of the generation that lived at the turning point in Lithuanian history and laureates of the National Culture and Art Award, have remained important representatives of the Lithuanian world of film at the most famous international festivals and events. With a portfolio of nearly twenty documentary films, Stonys is one of the most creative and prolific filmmakers of the middle generation of Lithuanian filmmakers. His films Kenotafas (Cenotaph, 2013), Raminas (Ramin, 2011), Varpas (The Bell, 2007), Ūkio ūkiai (Uku uka i) (2006), and others accommodate a clear visualisation of reflections on existence and rough everyday life, randomness, experimental spirit, and loyalty to his own cinematic voice. Meanwhile, Matelis is the creator of unique film projects, a producer, and an initiator of civil campaigns. His most famous films have been awarded at Leipzig, Amsterdam, Cannes, and other prestigious film festivals. His films Sekmadienis. Evangėlijų pagal lietūninką Albertą (Sunday. The Gospel According to Lift-Operator Albertas, 2003), a grim joke of a film reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's play Waiting for Godot, and Priėt parskeuandint j Žemę (Before Flying Back to Earth, 2005), a riveting fable about transience and eternity dedicated to children suffering from cancer, are today part of the "golden collection" of Lithuanian documentary films. The film racked up awards at several international festivals and became the only documentary film created outside the USA to receive recognition from the Directors Guild of America.

Over the past decade, trends concerning the making of history-centered and social documentaries have been coming into focus. These types of documentaries were often compromised in the Soviet era and therefore were viewed with distrust for a long time. Now documentary filmmakers more frequently opt to examine social life, however. The international premier of Liza, namo! (Lisa, Go Home!) by Oksana Buraja took place at the Leipzig International Documentary and Animated Film Festival in 2012. The film, which has featured at dozens of international festivals, tells the story of the divide between the worlds of childhood and adulthood and also talks about the trap of belonging to one social layer or another. The "bottom" layer of society is a vicious circle for the hero of Galutinis tikslas (Final Destination, 2013), which was directed by Ričardas Markūnas. The film reveals the director's attempts to change the hero's life and the tenacious reality threatening to steal the hero's attempts to change.

Answers to important questions about the world and life are provided by children from difficult backgrounds in Pakebiai rintomis temomis (Conversations on Serious Topics, 2012) directed by Giedre Beinoriūtė, who pursues sincerity and authenticity by using radical minimalism. Young filmmakers Linas Mikuta and Kristina Sereikaite regularly bring representatives of socially marginalised groups of the population to the screen: Dzūkijos jauniai (Dzūkija Ox, 2013) and Pietūs Lipovkėje (Dimer, 2014). Compassion, social survey, and reflections of the Lithuanian poetic film tradition are the constant themes of these films.

In recent years we have also witnessed the increased attention of documentary filmmakers to the world at large, and therefore the geographic and thematic arena of Lithuanian films is rapidly expanding. The social implications of everyday life in different countries, unfamiliar cultures, or the scars of aggressive political policies have become objects of exploration. Memorable
debuts in recent years have put filmmakers such as Maratas Sargsyanas (Tevys [Father], 2012), Lina Žižytė (Įgražkių įgražkiai, 2012), and Tomas Smulkušis (Rojuos bėgikant [Paradise Road, 2012]) on the map.

Director Audrius Stonys avails of his extensive experience in documentary filmmaking in order to observe what he has always found interesting – the spiritual content of human life and its manifestations. The once famous Georgian wrestler Ramin Lomsadze in Stonys’ film Ramin (The Grand Prize at Pärnu International Festival Award in 2014) feels lonely among his fellows and dreams of meeting his old love and bringing back the illusions of the past stolen by time. In his recent film Avinėlio vartai (Gates of the Lamb, 2014), Stonys aims to depict the meaning of baptism. He studies sacred rituals of various nations and people of different ages and social backgrounds and creates a seemingly generalised sense of faith.

UB Lama (2011), Vertelytė’s film made in Mongolia, shows the efforts of a mischievous boy to get closer to his dream of becoming a Buddhist monk. Young film director Julia Zubaivienė set out together with her grandmothers on a trip across Europe in her film Igruški (2012), and Tomas Minkus’ film Father, 2012, created by sharing life with the heroes and facing their pain or poverty.

Historical reflection in films has also been gaining momentum. In her Gyveno senelis ir bobutė (Grandpa and Grandma, 2007), Beinoriūtė offers a unique creative documentary and animated film project reminding us of the deportations to Siberia. A trilogy interpreting Soviet myths and realities is offered by Giedrė Žickytė in her film Gyveno senelis ir bobutė (Grandpa and Grandma, 2011) and Meistras ir Taityna (The Master and Taityna, 2014). Vytautas V. Landsbergis has created a film about the last Lithuanian partisans of the post-war period (Trispalvis [Tricolour, 2013]). Interest in films made by these film directors is a sign that Lithuanian history awaits interpretation and deeper exploration to help people to better understand the genesis of the spiritual condition of today’s society.

Anthropologist Mantas Kvedaravičius’ film Barzakh (winner of the Ecuencanal Jury Prize at the 61st International Berlin Film Festival and the Amnesty International Film Prize) and naturalist Mindaugas Survila’s film Stebukšlų laukas (The Field of Magic) were born from the belief in the power of the camera. Kvedaravičius spent three years filming Chechen people waiting for the return of their missing relatives. The director seeks to present the condition between life and death, hope and illusion, and knowledge and uncertainty. The existential, even mystical sense of being in this film has reporting and political undertones. Survila created an anthropological and moving film about the people we encounter as they happen to live below the poverty line. The films Barzakh and The Field of Magic have been created by sharing life with the heroes and facing their pain or poverty.

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The Decalogue (his TV series Dekalog, 1986) was the first comprehensive presentation of Lithuanian documentary films abroad.

A shot from M. Kvedaravičius’ Barzakh.
Your films continue the Lithuanian poetic documentary tradition. How would you describe your relationship with this tradition?

The relationship with the national poetic documentary mode is undeniable. Arūnas Matelis, Valdas Navasaitis, Šarūnas Bartas and Giedri B. Beinoriūtė, everyone who had anything to do with the creative work of Henrikas Šablevičius or communicated with him became “infected” with poetry. The essence of poetic documentary does not lie in the poetic depiction of beautiful images, but rather in the attempt to cast a view on the other side of reality in the belief that in addition to fact, character and incident, there is some kind of space and it would be very interesting to see it. It seems that nothing is happening in Šablevičius’ films; for example his *Kelionė ūkų lankomis* (*Journey Through the Fields of Nebulas*) depicts a man sitting by his cottage, railway workers replacing rails, and then a train travelling into the mist. Yet watching the film, one is thinking about lost values, human simplicity, and innocence. Or, for example, in *Šimtamečių godos* (*Dreams of Centenarians*) by Robertas Verba, old people talk about their lives and that’s it. But behind their conversation is a huge layer of meaning.

Lithuanian poetic film is closely linked with black-and-white photography, and as a result it is very visual. We peer at a person’s face and try to read the story in it. It is true that today this kind of film is undergoing a transformation, becoming more sociable and communicative; there is much less silence and more action in it.

You are the only director in Lithuania who has been awarded the Felix, the European Film Award for Best Documentary, by the European Film Academy for your film *Earth of the Blind* in 1992. What does this recognition mean to you?

The award has made my path easier, but it did not destroy me. I was only 26 and all my life was before me, so it made no sense for me to stop and bask in the honour of receiving such an important prize. I wanted to search for untried means of expression and new themes. My next film was *Griuvėsių apaštalas* (*Apostle of Ruins*), in which I rejected metaphors and used the Georgian language and colour, because I wanted to do something completely different from what I’d discovered in *Earth of the Blind*. My story was inspired by my acquaintance with Alexander Oboladze, a Georgian who had once been a party animal and a lover of restaurants, but suddenly became infinitely lonely. The next film was *Antigravitacija* (*Antigravity*). Two years after the completion of *Earth of the Blind*, I still had the impression that a man climbing a big chimney had made on me. I had a desire to share this impression when one’s breath is taken away at a high altitude. I am curious to see objects and phenomena that are right by our sides and yet are often unnoticeable. I have never been aiming at global recognition, and for this reason I accepted the Felix as an unexpected quirk. When I found out about the nomination, I thought, “Ah well, perhaps they’ll invite me to Berlin?” That was all I expected.

How does the cooperation with cameramen take place? They often appear to be, whether it is Rimvydas Leipus, Audrius Kemežys or Laisvūnas Karvelis, thinking in a similar vein as you.

In documentary filmmaking the input of a cameraman is altogether crucial. If you wish to achieve what you are dreaming of achieving, then during filming the director and the cameraman must understand each other without words. At this point other senses are activated. I strive towards a creative relationship. I understand that the outcome will largely depend on the cameraman’s approach and the “dialogue” between us. When I feel that there is an inner connection between us, we can get down to work. In a documentary, the cameraman is very independent, especially during filming.
How long does filming take? After all it is necessary to find a common language not only with the cameraman, but also with the characters at whom the camera is directed?

It depends. It took 14 days to shoot Ramin and two years to shoot Kenotafas (Cenotaph). The production of my current film, Moteris ir ledynas (The Woman and the Glacier), has also been quite a long while. It took two years to shoot Avinėlio Vartai (Gates of the Lamb). Each film requires a different shooting time. One of the components of the film is establishing relations with the main character. Furthermore, there are many other things that influence the duration of the filmmaking process. Sometimes even mystical experiences are triggered when you feel that you can no longer shoot, that there’s something in the way, that there’s something you can’t find. A month or two or three pass and suddenly you realise that something had to be resolved inside yourself. You realise that had you not waited those three months, the film may not have appeared.

The film Uku ukai emerged from a desire to expose the beauty industry, but in the course of shooting your attitude changed radically. Does it often happen that life adjusts preconceived visions?

Perhaps not a single one of my films was unaffected by this. The idea changes, because reality turns it upside down and destroys it. At first I was very frightened; it seemed to me that was it, that was the end. I had an idea and everything took another turn. Then I understood that this was supposed to be so. None of my films are as I originally conceived them. In Uku ukai both the theme and the character changed. Instead of a strong, healthy, young man who goes swimming every day irrespective of whether it rains or snows, we have a tiny old woman tip-toeing across her room. Viena ( Alone) was supposed to be about a girl who was going to visit her mother who was in prison and talking what she sees and feels, but instead I made a completely silent film. Tas, kuro nera (New Martyrology) was supposed to show a man who died unknown to anybody, but instead the Lithuanian film director Augustinas Baltrušaitis, whom fate and circumstances tossed instead the Lithuanian film director Augustinas Baltrušaitis, whom fate and circumstances tossed

The initial concept is therefore diametrically opposite. When I was shooting Trys minutes po didžiojo sprogimo (Three Minutes after the Big Bang), it seemed that a simple person would say very profound truths, but it turned out that it was all the same to this man: he didn’t care a fig. So I had to look into the mirror. But this is just a natural thing in documentary filmmaking. The moment you think you know everything and it only remains to capture your “discoveries”, the truth of life takes over and turns against you. So, I let my visions be transformed. The essence lies in the quest. Subsequently, the films will live lives of their own.

INTERVIEWED BY AUKŠE KANCERÈVÇITÈ
Arūnas Matelis: Films Emerge from Sensations

Your first films, Baltijos kelias (The Baltic Way) and Dešimt minučių prieš ikaro skrydį (Ten Minutes Before the Flight of Icarus), appeared in 1990 when our country experienced historic transformations. Did these transformations inspire your creative work or were they on the contrary a challenge that had to be overcome?

This historic turning point essentially gave me very much, because the system had changed. On the other hand, it was very difficult because many film directors were seduced by the easiest option, flag waving. But in that case, there wasn’t any place for a film, only for one-day political reporting. When everything is bubbling around, it’s hard to understand where the artistic truth is, whether we’ll better go to the barricades and defend the homeland or whether we should continue shooting films. My colleagues and I opted for a kind of dissenting position. The old film editors at the Lithuanian film studios were asking, “Where are your films with flags and songs? Why are you shooting a courtyard in Užupis?” I had to decide what really was important and what I wanted to talk about. Everything seemed to have been opened up, but a choice had to be made. That turning point in the history of Lithuania inspired me immensely or maybe I only needed time to mature.

How did the flight motif appear in your films?

Very simply. I was born three days after Gagarin flew into space. Maybe when I was in hospital, the radio was broadcasting news of the first flight. This is a theme that got stuck in my mind.

After Gagarin’s flight, the Communists insisted that there was no God. Your films however contain prominent religious and mythological allusions and attempts to guess how and why we are here.

For me, as a former mathematician, it’s clear that we are not alone in this world. Therefore, one of the most important things is to invite people to communicate and to learn. There is a phrase that in feature films the director is God, in documentary films God is the director. Life is infinitely big and full. You can’t plan everything to the fullest. Generally, a sensation that is hard to explain gives rise to a film. You just need to be honest and sensitive and to wait for the appropriate moment.

What factors encouraged you to talk about children ill with cancer in the film Before Flying Back to Earth? People are often afraid to cross that threshold and see the pain.

In a sense it was easier for me to take that decision, because I’d already had experience when my daughter was ill. On the other hand, this was one of the greatest experiences in my life, perhaps equivalent to 13th January 1991 in the life of our country ["as a result of clashes with Soviet military personnel, 13 civilians were killed on that day in Lithuania], when I felt that the skies had opened up. It was like a flash of lightning and suddenly I understood a lot of things, even what people had experienced during the Holocaust. I wanted to share that experience. It became clear that many things just began at the oncology hospital. Yes, there is pain, uncertainty and loss there. But at the same time there are many warm and bright moments. Human strength and the ability to be happy open up, which when you are healthy often don’t even make you content. My arrival at the hospital was natural, although the filming crew (Audrius Kemežys and Giedrė Beinoriūtė) found it difficult. I said, “We’re going to make a film only if you come to realise that you want to be here. We can’t come for an hour, do the shooting and leave.” We used to go to the hospital without a camera and walk around. Two months later, the mother of one patient phoned me and said that we could come back again, because she had to collect her benefit payment. Then we understood we could do the shooting, because there was a sense of community between us; people began to trust us.

You left the camera to the children and they could freely record their lives and hospital rituals. How did the heroes of the film become creative collaborators?

We wanted to achieve a sense of playfulness. If it were my choice, I’d give the main prize to Andrius, one of the main characters, for his contribution to the film. He made some fantastic shots about how he communicated with the nurse and how medicines worked. But for those shots, the film would have been different. We wanted Andrius’ view from within. The story has a difficult ending, but Andrius did what no one had so far done before. A child who had a first relapse of a severe case of leukaemia filmed his magic and funny moments of life full of happiness.

The speeded-up image of clouds passing and changing seasons outside the hospital walls and the relief image of the Earth. Did you conceive this form of storytelling during filming?

You don’t start shooting on impulse, but build and think everything over. Of course, each day can bring different frames that form a certain shape. There were things that had been quite clear from the start. There were discoveries; for example, the boy filmed by Kemežys who could break a piece of wood with a knife hand strike. Perhaps only Robert de Niro could perform so eloquently in an entire story involving a single piece of wood. Surprisingly, I write a lot before filming, but after the film is made, many things come out differently from what I wrote. For example, episodes that I wrote as theoretical ones appeared in the frame.
Did you expect the film to be such a huge success?

During the creative process you don’t think about success. I just wanted people to appear who after the screening of the film would like to help those children. Obviously, it’s pleasant to receive a prize on the same stage with Martin Scorcese, but to me human understanding is more important. For example, after a screening in Aachen, the audience decided to collect a large sum of money and build a small rehabilitation centre for the children, where they could, at least for a short while, forget about their illness. Or the 100 Japanese musicians who, after watching the film, came to Vilnius at their own expense and organised two charity concerts. The money that was raised was used to buy children’s cancer diagnostic equipment for Kaunas Clinics. These are the most important awards.

In addition to your work as a director, you are also a producer. You were among the first in Lithuania to establish your own independent film studio, Nominum. Lately you have produced films by such young directors as Oksana Buraja, Eglė Vertelytė and Ramunė Rakauskaitė. Why did you choose this course of action?

I want to encourage film production, because it’s too difficult to give so much of yourself each time. However, even producing a film, I am closely involved in the creative process. It’s very interesting for me to create and to participate when new films are born from a joint effort. This process allows me to keep my form and to nurture my other works rather than just to sit and wait for an inspiration or a favourable opportunity to appear. I’m very pleased with Buraja’s film Ilpžažinės (Confession). For me, this is one of the least conformist films in Lithuania.

There is also the new documentary film, working title Gliadiatorii. Kita planeta (Gliadiators. A Different World) in the making. What will it be like?

The title is not yet clear. Either Gliadiators or My Beloved Losers. As long as the film hasn’t been made, I’m afraid to say anything. I’ve been waiting for the film for a very long time, perhaps seven years. We were perhaps the first after 40 years to obtain a permit to send our team to the Giro d’Italia and to do the shooting. I’ve ridden one of those bikes myself, and I tried to get through those mountains where the athletes compete. It’s almost impossible for an ordinary man to complete this route, but still it’s interesting to identify with those whom you are making a film about.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Peleus møžminas (Giants of Pelusa, 1989, short documentary, 10 min., 35mm, b/w)

Baltils keliai (Baltil Way, co-directed with Audrius Stonys, 1989, short documentary, 10 min., 35mm, b/w)

Dešimt minučių prieš Ikaro skrydį (Ten Minutes Before the Flight of Icarus, 1991, short documentary, 10 min., 35mm, colour)

Autoproteinės (Self-portrait, 1993, 10 min., short documentary, 35mm, b/w)

Iš dar negalėjau jūsų pasakyti (From Unfinished Tales of Jerusalem, 1996, short documentary, 26 min., 35mm, b/w)

Privažietikos akmenys sąrašas (First Farewell to Paradise, 1998, short documentary, 15 min., 35mm, b/w)

Prieversmės emigracijos dienoraštis (The Diary of Forced Emigration, 1999, short documentary, 22min., video, b/w)

Skydrys per Lietuvą arba 510 sekundinė tylės (Flight over Lithuania or 510 Seconds of Silence, 2001, co-directed with Audrius Stonys, short documentary, 8 min., 35mm, colour)


Prieš paraškendant i žemę (Before Flying Back To The Earth, 2005, documentary, 52 min., 35mm, colour)

Interviewed by Auksė Kancerevičiūtė

Cinema Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events in World Cinema</th>
<th>Events in Lithuanian Cinema</th>
<th>Events in culture, art, history and politics of Lithuania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Martin Scorsese's film <em>The Last Temptation of Christ</em> (Sergi Parajanov’s film Ashug-Kehr) won a prize at the San Remo Film Festival (Italy).</td>
<td>Algimantas Prūsis’ film Antrojo išejo (Eternal Light)</td>
<td>The initiative group of the Reform Movement (Sąjūdis) of Lithuania was founded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Joel and Ethan Coen’s film *Renton Fook Ridley Scott’s film <em>Thelma and Louise</em>.</td>
<td>Šarūnas Bartas’ film <em>Trys dienos</em> (Three Days) was screened at the Berlin Young Film Forum. The film won the Ecumenical Jury Prize and the FIPRESCI Prize. Gyūtis Lukas’ psychological drama <em>Zemės kalavės</em> (<em>Plygno en route</em>) won the Silver Grape Award at the Central and Eastern European Film Festival in Lugoj, Poland, in 1993.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Clint Eastwood’s film <em>Unforgiven</em>. David Lynch’s TV series <em>Twin Peaks</em>.</td>
<td>Audrius Stonys’ documentary <em>Neregių keleiviai</em> (<em>Children of Paradise</em>) won the Felix Prize at the Oberhausen Film Festival.</td>
<td>Collapse of the USSR. The independent state of Lithuania begins to be recognised by the rest of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Jane Campion’s film <em>The Piano</em>. Krakowsky Kieślowski’s first film of the trilogy <em>Trzy kolory: Niebieski</em> (<em>Three Colours: Blue</em>).</td>
<td>Lithuanian film studios started providing services to German, American and French filmmakers who were shooting films in Lithuania.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Quentin Tarantino’s film <em>Pulp Fiction</em>. Steven Spielberg’s film <em>Schindler’s List</em>. Billa Tarra’s film <em>Sztálinigaz</em> (<em>Sztálini Tango</em>). Kazimierz Kutz’s film <em>Smiarjak kosmosa chiba</em> (<em>Death as a Slice of Bread</em>).</td>
<td>Janina Lapinskaite’s directorial debut <em>Tai mano likimas</em> (<em>This Is My Destiny</em>), which established her as a director of both documentaries and feature films, and, also an actress.</td>
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You were a student of film director Henrikas Šablevičius. What influence did your communication with this filmmaker have on your films?

I’m from the first group of students who were trained as film directors in Lithuania. Before that all filmmakers were trained at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (VGIK). We started our studies in 1970 and after graduation went to work in television. Our training course was a bit experimental, and there were a lot acting courses, which later affected my creative work.

Šablevičius was my teacher and there was no escape from his influence. He taught me to love my heroes. My documentaries are sometimes referred to as creative and feature documentaries. I think that this style also features in Šablevičius’ films. For many years he was my teacher and then he was my colleague. I still think that the most beautiful documentary is Šablevičius’ Kelionė ūkų lankomis (Journey Through the Fields of Nebulas).

Your creative biography includes only one feature film, Stiklo šalis (A Land of Glass). Why then did you opt for documentary films?

As second director I worked a lot on feature films of Algimantas Puipa and that was enough. Even now, when asked whether I will return to directing documentaries, I say yes. My path is documentaries and I always long for them. Perhaps this is the influence of television, where I started. Whatever the times, television provided an opportunity to meet with people in towns or outlying areas. The possibility to immerse oneself in human simplicity was a very interesting, very important experience. Later, this began to unfold in my documentaries.

In most cases your protagonists are weirdoes, people who live on the edge of society. How do you find them?

You know, the theme comes to me first, but not the hero. The theme starts "torturing" me, whether it’s the theme of loneliness or miscommunication or, which happens in all times, lack of goodness or kindness. When the theme takes possession of me, it seems that I become magnetised and start to attract the characters, messages and information. Everything slowly starts to build into a whole. For example, when I wanted to rethink the topic of alienation, it resulted in the film Iš elfų gyvenimo (From the Life of Elves). I wanted to find the burgeoning seedlings of goodness and this family, whom I called elves, was just what I needed.

When I wanted to make a film about loneliness, I discovered the character of Venecijus from the countryside. I found loneliness and his life with his piglet called Caesar. When I was very hurt by the journalistic approach to an individual, by their aim to find a hero, draw him out, and identify what is interesting to them rather than the hero’s inside, I found the heroine of the film Šokanti ant stogų (Woman Dancing on the Roof). When I watched how easily she undressed on TV shows, it seemed to me that this woman was hiding many more interesting things. In my film, however, she does not undress physically. So my films commence with the theme.

Loneliness and sadness are often pervasive in your films. Is that a conscious choice?

It seems to me that joy is a transient euphoric state. When the sun is shining, it is warm, and there are good feelings, but they generally do not call for further reflections. However, when it is raining outside the window, I am angry and generate many deeper, more meaningful thoughts. Although my heroes carry their sadness and pain along with them and we may conclude that their lives are not very successful, I understand when communicating with them that in spite of everything they are still optimistic.
You said that your films are often called feature documentaries. Do you allow yourself to re-enact situations on a set?

Yes, I do, because I am not filming with a candid camera hidden under a bed. But the characters in my documentaries never behave in a way that they wouldn’t in real life. If, rather than using the environment and habits of the protagonist, you started asking the protagonist to do what was alien to him, I think that would no longer be a documentary.

It is important for a maker of documentaries to “tame” characters. How do you approach them?

None of my heroes asked to be filmed. I come and I am in the position of one who is asking for something. I try to tell them what I want to talk about and why I want to film them. A documentary filmmaker is a kind of psychologist. Once he steps into the environment of the hero, he must understand whether he can step into his home too or whether he can only talk to the hero in his yard. And after the “taming” part, there comes this state, as I put it, when we all begin to “play a film”. When the period of getting settled in and taking the first steps into the hero’s life is over, it is easy to work. But afterwards, it is very difficult to leave. We communicate as friends and when we have to say goodbye, it hurts everyone. It’s as challenging as getting acquainted. Earlier it seemed that I would be able to communicate with all my heroes until the end of life, but this is not true. All our lives move on.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Color</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venerčius gyvenimas ir Cezario mirts</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>documentary</td>
<td>b/w</td>
<td>25 min.</td>
<td>Beta CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Šokanti ant stogo</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>short documentary</td>
<td>b/w</td>
<td>23 min.</td>
<td>Beta CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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<td>Venerčius' Life and Cezario's Death</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>documentary</td>
<td>colour</td>
<td>34 min.</td>
<td>Beta CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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<td>The Magic of Travelling</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>documentary</td>
<td>colour</td>
<td>34 min.</td>
<td>Beta CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aktas</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>documentary</td>
<td>Full HD</td>
<td>57 min.</td>
<td>CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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<td>Šarūnas Bartas' film Žings nedang (Few of Us)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>feature documentary</td>
<td>b/w</td>
<td>94 min.</td>
<td>CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Šarūnas Bartas' film Namai (The House)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>feature documentary</td>
<td>b/w</td>
<td>113 min.</td>
<td>CAM</td>
<td>colour</td>
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Cinema Timeline

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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Emin Kaftanova's Podzemnije (Underground). Dogme’95, a manifesto signed by Lars von Trier and a group of other directors. Šarūnas Bartas' Kortneris (Corridor) was screened at the Panorama Programme of the Berlin International Film Festival. Vilnius International Film Festival Kino Pasaulydis was held for the first time, has become the biggest film festival in Lithuania.</td>
<td>Šarūnas Bartas’ film Žings nedang (Few of Us) was shown at the Un Certain Regard Programme of the Cannes International Film Festival.</td>
<td>Retrospective of Krzysztof Kieslowski’s films was held in Vilnius.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Joel and Ethan Coen’s film Fargo. Lars von Trier’s film Breaking the Waves. Šarūnas Bartas' film Namai (The House) was shown at the Un Certain Regard Programme of the Cannes International Film Festival.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Retrospective of Agnieszka Holland’s films was held in Lithuania.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>James Cameron’s film Titanic. Šarūnas Bartas’ film Žings nedang (Few of Us) was shown at the Un Certain Regard Programme of the Cannes International Film Festival.</td>
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Your full-length documentaries The Tiny Birds of God and Pieno kelias – Paukščių takas (The Milky Way) focus on the painful themes of exile, escaping from the Soviet occupation, and collectivisation. What does historical memory mean to you?

Julija: After the restoration of the independence of Lithuania, there were quite a few TV and feature films about partisans, deportees, and political prisoners. Lithuanians in the USA have constantly been interested in the history of Lithuanian refugees. Unfortunately, all you had in Lithuania were “happy” collective farmers. There was even such a poem: “We are happy collective farmers, the sun of the Soviets shines upon us”. But no one was interested in those former “happy” collective farmers. We saw how the generation of collective farmers was going away. You could see those old women looking through the windows in apartment blocks. Most of them had been widowed for a long time. So they hung around like that until one day you couldn't see anybody in the window. They can no longer tell anyone anything. The time of our parents (that they spent suffering, mourning, drinking, stealing) is being ousted from our memory, and no one wants to delve into it. We dedicated The Milky Way to our grandparents and parents.

Rimantas: Julija was born and raised on a collective farm. From an early age she did all the hard work very much like her mother, aunts and uncles did. My grandparents and great-grandparents were eternal exiles. The first time the Gruodis family was deported to the areas beyond the River Volga after the 1863 uprising. They then managed to return in their horse driven carts to free Lithuania, spent two decades at home, and again were all deported. My father was born in exile. When my grandparents finally returned to their farm in 1960, they found it completely ravaged by the collective farm. Rusted parts of machinery that belonged to the collective farm were lying scattered around the well in the meadow, the water in the well was contaminated, smelly tractors were in the spacious barns, the doors of the building were all damaged, and all ornamentation had been removed. When they saw this picture, they could not stand the idea of living there and therefore moved to the city not to see the horror.

One of the characters in The Milky Way says, “We saw how masters became beggars and now beggars have become masters. We've witnessed it all except that we can't do anything.” Do you think a documentary film is capable not only of saying something, but also of changing something?

Rimantas: It can't. Neither can a line from a poem. It can cause us to think more deeply or stir certain feelings if a person who is watching or listening is sensitive.

Julija: During post-production of The River in Warsaw, we met a young Polish documentary filmmaker. We were stunned by his pessimism. “A man today doesn't get help even from the heavens. Only hot black asphalt is falling from it,” he said. Maybe because we are not that young we believe that we should walk on the bright side of life. You can then have a better view of the mysterious and frightening depth of life and its tragically fragile beauty.

Rimantas: On the other hand, you don't want to take away all hope from yourself and others.

Julija: The key dimension in The River is sensuality. If the viewer is not caught by what is happening on the screen, he is not going to "enter" these people's lives, and the film will appear shallow and cold. The best Lithuanian, and not only Lithuanian, films are imbued with feeling, although there must also be moderation.

Rimantas: The Czechs found the film remarkably expressive. For example, they laughed when they heard the little heroine of the film say, “My father has no money; no one has money. Only gran has money [...] We have two cars, but neither is working.” In such cases, you realise that words spoken behind the scenes can mean very much: to
convey the relationships and obligations invisible to the naked eye. On the other hand, we saw some really good films with interesting themes, but some of them were so verbal, lacked focus, or were too long. Documentaries created by filmmakers from large countries are particularly verbal. They obviously have the time and money. Furthermore, I can’t help but boast that the juries of international festivals, especially the Czech film critics, highly praised the visual side of The River, which is the contribution of cameraman Viktoras Radajevas. Without him the film would have been different. Viktoras was well aware of what we needed and this made the story richer, clearer and brighter.

In 1994, you set up your studio Periferija and have produced at least one documentary per year since, but you’ve avoided publicity. Why?

Julia: We didn’t do anything on purpose. It just happened that way. We don’t like to babble on about the film before it’s completed, but when the work is finished we are pleased to present it to the Lithuanian people if there’s an opportunity. In addition, some films such as The Bathhouse, Kaltuniai (The Scarecrow) and Household were screened at the New York Museum of Modern Art, at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, at the Belem Cultural Centre in Lisbon, on TV abroad, and at international film festivals. So the films haven’t been sitting on a shelf, but we just haven’t been trying to make a buzz or make ourselves seem important.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Ona ir Mykolas (Ona and Mykolas, 1990, short documentary, 10 min., 35 mm, colour)
Girme (The Dingo, 1991, short documentary, 10 min., 35 mm, colour)
Dyker (The Waste, 1993, documentary, 60 min., 35 mm, colour)
Slogutis (The Pain, 1995, documentary, 30 min., video, colour)
Pirtis (The Bathhouse, 1997, short documentary, 10 min., 35 mm, colour)
Territorija (Territory, 1999, short documentary, 12 min., video, colour)
Smėlyna (Household, 2001, short documentary, 10 min., 35 mm, colour)
Kaltuniai (The Scarecrow, 2002, short documentary, 9 min., 35 mm, colour)
Meistras (The Master, 2004, short documentary, 18 min., 35 mm, colour)
Dievo paukšteliai (The Tiny Birds of God, 2005, documentary, 80 min., video, b/w)
Brudendukas (The Brass Band, 2006, documentary, 60 min., 35 mm, colour)
Už (The River, 2009, documentary, 30 min., 35 mm, colour)
Lūktnas (The Swamp, 2010, short documentary, 28 min., video, colour)
Sėkmės metai (The Lucky Year, 2013, short documentary, 28 min., full HD, colour)

Interviewed by Auksė Kancerevičiūtė
Giedrė Žickytė:

Film is an Emotion

Film director Giedrė Žickytė has been producing documentaries since 2006. Rebellious and equally talented artists who lived and worked in the Soviet period are frequent protagonists in her films. A series of her portrait documentaries – Baras (Bar), Kaip mes žaidėme revoliuciją (How We Played Revolution) and Meistras ir Tatjana (The Master and Tatjana) – delve into the unofficial world of the culture of Soviet Lithuania and the world of complex human feelings, aspirations, and internal experiences.

You created a few short films and then proceeded with full-length documentaries. What was the reason for that?

The themes and stories I discovered and found interesting could best be told in a documentary. For example, when developing the idea for How We Played the Revolution I was at the same time thinking of a feature film. I even wrote a script with Kęstutis Navakas, but once I found archival video material, I understood that there would be nothing more authentic and evocative than that. I’m currently working on documentary projects, because reality surpasses imagination in the stories I’ve found. I don’t know what will be next.

Three films – Bar, How We Played the Revolution and The Master and Tatjana – are often seen as an unofficial cultural trilogy. Why did you choose three artists who were prominent figures in the Soviet period for your films?

In fact, I never thought that this could be a trilogy. The protagonists in my films are not an ordinary musician, photographer, and independent filmmaker in Soviet times. They are prominent, distinctive figures of the time and by exploring them I can access the world that surrounded them and the reality in which they lived and get insight into topics that excite me. In the finite time in which my heroes lived, questions of moral choice and the confrontation between adaptation to the system and loyalty to one’s ideals were at issue. I also love to dig through the past and archives “in search of lost time” and create my own interpretation and history based on the images of the past, and with the help of history, to understand my identity and historical memory.

How did the idea for the film How We Played the Revolution come about?

I got a proposal to make a film about the music group Antis. When I started collecting and going deeper into the material, I realised that the film would not be just about the group. My parents were architects. When I was little, they used to take me to the concerts of their colleagues, the group of architects called Antis. I remember how they were getting ready for the New Year carnivals organised by architects, and then together we went to the rallies of the reform movement (Sąjūdis). Everything around was very phantasmagorical, and it seemed that life entailed regular dances and songs, flags, poetry, prayers, and rallies. Twenty years passed, and I found the archival material and saw that this was not only a childhood tale. Life at that time was in fact like a never-ending festival that could not have been subject to any laws of logic or normal daily rhythm. Everything was hyperbolised. But the country had to live through this surreal stage for the transformation to happen. Then I started to make my film.

Why did you choose the story of the restoration of the independence of Lithuania as a leitmotif for the film?

If I’d thought I was making a film about the history of Lithuania, I’d have been terrified of the responsibility and would probably have produced nothing. I was interested in Antis and the fairy tale that surrounded them. Antis became a mask that allowed me to make any interpretations and to be free to create. The magic story of Antis helped me to build the backbone of the film and the musical path of the group perfectly coincided with the path of Lithuania to independence. I wanted to tell this playfully rather than didactically. In fact, the historical truth of the film lies in the archive footage and human emotions.

And the word played used in the title of the film is the connection with the fairy tale?

In the English title How We Played the Revolution, the word played has two meanings: to play a game and to play music. In the Lithuanian title, however, there is only one meaning: to play a game. Our revolution was full of games and lightness. If we compare the Lithuanian revolution with other revolutions that have taken place or are taking place, ours was really bright and playful, except, of course, the victims of 13th January. The history of the Lithuanian revolution is a euphoria turning into a tragedy, but still with a happy ending, a classical Hollywood screenplay.

Even so, you had to use objective history and archival footage for the story. How did this work?

I spent several years making this film. I am one of those people who, before starting to do anything, must collect all available material. Only then the idea of the future film crystallises. Of course, I read all the contextual history and conducted a lot of interviews. But the most interesting part for me was working with the archival material. I used the official information available in the Lithuanian State Archives. But I mostly looked for private archival material, which, in my opinion, gave the film a lot of charm. The archival material I discovered altered the film script. For example, I knew I had to talk about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. But how was I supposed to talk about it? I could put a historian in front of the camera and he would explain everything, but that wouldn’t be interesting. And then I found archival footage depicting an emotional discussion of teenagers about the pact. Such gems allowed me to build the backbone of the film. My aim was to tell an objective history through the situations and the archival material.
But the leader of the group, Algirdas Kaušpėdas, remained in the film as a man with a mask. Was this done deliberately?

He saw the film for the first time during the premiere and then shared his impressions with me: “I was watching and everything looked nice, but at the same time I’m thinking: aren’t you going to show me as I am today? Almost as if I were dead? And at the end, bang! It’s like in Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita, at first mystification and then unmasking.” So some sort of disclosure did occur. Or one mask was replaced with another. Kaušpėdas was indeed supposed to be like a mask. And what is behind the mask is a story for another film.

So what you like in a documentary is an opportunity to put individual masks on objective history?

A film for me is a subjective emotion rather than facts that can be found on the Internet or read in books. I dare say that it was not so important in this film on which day of 1988 our tricolour was raised. It was much more important that grandmas burst into tears at the sight of the flag.

Interviewed by Elena Jasiūnaitė

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Vyds nu (The Role, 2004, short documentary, 20 min., video, b/w)

Europa (Europe, 2006, co-directed by Rudolfa Levulio, short documentary, 10 min., video, colour)

Banas (2009, TV documentary, 49 min., video, colour)

Pasak savo ir iškas (After Sun And Goats, 2010, documentary, 30 min., video, colour)

Kas mes žiūrėme revolucioniją (How We Played Revolution, 2011, documentary, 67 min., video, colour)

Megtis ir Tatjana (The Master and Tatjana, 2014, documentary, 80 min., DCP, colour)

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