

John Bleasdale: This is Writers on Film, the only podcast dedicated to books on cinema.

John Bleasdale: Hi, everybody, and welcome to the Writers on Film Podcast. My name is John Bleasdale. I'm a writer and film critic. Today, I'm going to be talking to Lynne Sachs, an experimental filmmaker based in New York. Her films are currently showing on The Criterion Channel. Well, one of her latest feature films, A Film About a Father Who, is a wonderful documentary about a portrait of her own father. As well as a filmmaker, Lynne is also a poet, and her latest collection, Year by Year: Poems, is published by Tender Button Press. It's a brilliant idea, brilliant concepts, and some beautiful poetry and comes highly recommended.

John Bleasdale: Remember, if you like the episode, please subscribe and spread the word if you haven't already. If you wish to, you can follow me on Twitter. Twitter handle is @drjonty, D-R-J-O-N-T-Y. But before you do any of that, please enjoy the conversation.

John Bleasdale: Yeah. So I really enjoyed it. What a brilliant concept the year by year. What a wonderful idea.

Lynne Sachs: I really appreciate you saying that. I have since writing that book or completing that book, which was in the end of 2019, I've actually taught a few different film poetry workshops, and I find that using that as a construct by which I say to people, "Think about a year in your life and write." I say, "Try to write five things that might have happened in that year, but not necessarily the most historically important events, but things that happened in your life, and then build on that." People feel such a relief because it takes them right back to their own lives, but from sort of a different doorway into that experience.

John Bleasdale: Yeah. That's what I loved about the originality of the concept is it's so literally grounded. There's a sort of discipline to it. I started my writing, well, I think my first published stuff was poetry when I was back in Liverpool. When I was a student in Liverpool, we used to run a performance poetry group called The Kitchen Club.

Lynne Sachs: Oh, I love that name.

John Bleasdale: Yeah. Well, we thought of it in a kitchen. So it was ...

Lynne Sachs: Well, actually the program that has hosted me a few times for this film poetry workshop is coming out of a foundation created by John Ashbery, the American poet, but the series is called Text Kitchen.

John Bleasdale: Text Kitchen. The analogy works, doesn't it though? Because you're putting in all these ingredients and you're putting them through processes of acid, heat, and what have you.

Lynne Sachs: Yes.

John Bleasdale: But it doesn't always work.

Lynne Sachs: And then you test it on your friends and family, and you see what they think.

John Bleasdale: And they're polite. Usually, they're polite. What do you feel is the connection between poetry and filmmaking? Because I feel, when I was reading your anthology and, obviously, I've seen your films, it's so tempting to draw these analogies and draw these lines between the two things. Do you feel they're distinct or do you feel there's a real connection there?

Lynne Sachs: Well, it's interesting that you tell me a little bit of your story, which was that you started in a poetry group. I was also writing poetry before I thought I wanted to be involved in film, and I have found it to be very exhilarating and, let's say, full of detours that are super helpful to kind of embrace both film and poetry. Because if you love poetry, then you aren't obligated to, for example, look at your films and think that words only find their place on the "dialogue track."

Lynne Sachs: The convention for feature films is you have a music track or a few. You have a dialogue track, and you have an effects track. But if you come out of poetry, you like the sound of words and the shadings of words as much as you like the words as they are used as a form of communication coming from Gertrude Stein or other poets who believe in, like you were saying, the spoken word. How does the word enter you viscerally, not just cerebrally?

Lynne Sachs: So that relationship to words is very liberating as you're working in film. I would say I've been very inspired by Robert Altman's films because I feel that he creates these layers of what you call dialogue track so that you don't always understand them narratively, but you understand how people relate to each other almost physically and rhythmically and rhetorically, all those other ways that people's bodies and minds bounce up against each other. But I think the convention in both documentary and narrative filmmaking is to think of words as a way to move story.

John Bleasdale: My experience of certainly reading poetry was I always saw a close connection between poetry and cinema, not because so much of the sound of the words, but the techniques being used, the way a scene would shift, the way within the space of a phrase there would be the equivalent of a jump cut or a dissolve.

Lynne Sachs: Exactly. I totally agree. A line break in poetry is really a parallel experience to, let's say, an Eisensteinian shift in a cut in film that isn't strictly about cause and effect, which is more of a template in a more conventional way of working. But the line break and the cut, if you see those as very comparable, is very kind of exciting.

John Bleasdale: When did you start working on films then? When did you first pick up a camera? I mean was it you were writing poetry first?

Lynne Sachs: Yeah, I was in a poetry group, kind of like yours, in college and I was also writing poetry in high school pretty actively. I had a poetry magazine that we started at my high school, which we called Scheherazade. It was about that 1,001 story. So that was such a big part of my life. I actually was not that interested in the movies growing up because I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, and there were not

opportunities to see alternative films, and there were not opportunities to see films by women.

Lynne Sachs: I'd never heard of a woman director. So I just wanted to make art. Actually, my major in university was history. So I was very involved in academics and writing and also art making. And then I started to go to the movies that they offer on campus. I saw Rainer Fassbinder's movies, and that was an intense revolution for ... I mean for me to think that films could be that raw and that informal, but also very, very, very, very, very, very visual was just astonishing to me.

Lynne Sachs: And then I lived for a year in Paris, where you could just hop around midday and see something like *Les Enfants de Paradis* or you could see a film by Chantal Akerman or Marguerite Duras. That was just eye-opening to me and so exciting and seemed very parallel to writing poetry. So then I went back to college and started to get more interested in the possibility of filmmaking. I took a course when I finished at the School of Visual Arts here.

Lynne Sachs: I had a great-uncle who gave me a wind-up regular eight-millimeter camera that is the size of your hand and doesn't even use a battery. I started to shoot with that and had that. He was always really encouraging of my making images, and I was super fond of Uncle Charlie. Actually, his wife, my aunt, Aunt Isabel, was a lover of poetry. So she had hundreds, maybe thousands of artist-made books. She just had this collection. I'm not trying to say everyone in my family was into art, but she happened to have those books, and she didn't have many people who were interested.

Lynne Sachs: I would go over and look at those books. So they were really important to me. And then I started to discover what you would call experimental documentary and saw, for example, the film, this is a little bit later, but *Sans Soleil* by Chris Marker, and that was really a major revelation to me, that film.

John Bleasdale: In what way was the Chris Marker film, what struck you? What affected you? `

Lynne Sachs: Oh my goodness. I loved that he was a filmmaker, not a director, so that it came out of an art-making practice and a living practice and for him, also, the notion of travel and that, as you traveled, you didn't just imbibe other people's worlds. You thought about them or you thought about how it allowed you to understand your culture better by seeing another culture. I loved the emphasis that he had on articulating his politics.

Lynne Sachs: I identified with what I would call a left-wing sensibility, and that's remained really important to me to see. My degree is in history, so trying to see conflicts, see how things resolve themselves. My films are always aware of history and what brought us to a certain place and then how we can climb our way out, and I thought that Chris Marker did that. He also worked alone, and I thought that was really liberating because it wasn't appealing to me necessarily to work with a big crew.

Lynne Sachs: Over the years, I've worked with teams and I've collaborated on a lot of things, but I don't have to do that. I'm pretty self-sufficient.

John Bleasdale: That's the sort of poet in you. Once you've had a pencil and a piece of paper, everything else seems superfluous.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah. Yeah.

John Bleasdale: It's funny as well when you're telling the story of going to Paris. Because I've got these poems very fresh in my mind, I'm going, "Oh, that's a poem. That's 19."

Lynne Sachs: Actually, there's a poem I wrote about standing in a telephone booth that really dates me. You read that one. It's from 1982, I think, where in order to call home I had to put coins in the telephone. I'm imagining my brother. Early '80s, he was kind of, let's say, figuring out or announcing that he was gay. I don't know if you ever saw this, but used to be that if you wore an earring on what one ear that meant, yeah, you're gay or not gay. You know what I mean? I don't remember which ear was which, but it was a semiotics of your identity.

John Bleasdale: I think we're of a fairly similar generation. I definitely spent a lot of time in phone booths in my youth phoning people up. Also, the idea of distance as well, when you went to France, I think it's a different experience to somebody going to France today or any distance.

Lynne Sachs: Well, also, a big part of my films, the exploration in my films has to do with translation. So actually, one of the films that's going to be in The Criterion Channel is called, Which Way is East. I made that in Vietnam in 1994. My sister was living there, and we were people who'd grown up during what Americans called the Vietnam War. So my sense of Vietnam came through the mainstream news until I went there. It was really about witnessing it and listening to stories.

Lynne Sachs: But a big part of it was also that I was an outsider and that I had to recognize that my language, being English, was not the dominant language. I think that's a really important position for people to have, especially Americans and especially English-speaking people. That has changed so much now because more and more people speak English. So there's an assumption that we can carry our language. Back in those days when we were teenagers, we had to go to places and find the tools to communicate on the terms with the people whose community we were or country we were visiting.

Lynne Sachs: So actually, in a lot of my films, also The Washing Society, which is in The Criterion program as well, I have whole sections in Spanish and whole sections in Chinese, not very long, but some where if the listener's English-speaking has to have that sense of alienation. I don't always deliver subtitles. I think subtitles are a way of ringing people back to a dominant language all the time. So I think it's important to listen to the texture of a language and how it's delivered, not just to its translation and then which it becomes in a default that you just stop listening.

John Bleasdale: Yeah. I think it was Brecht who was giving evidence in some sort of hearing, and they read out one of his poems and said, "Look, this is obviously a communist poem, Mr. Brecht. Did you write this?" And he said, "No, but I wrote a very similar one in German."

Lynne Sachs: Oh, that is fantastic. That is great.

John Bleasdale: That idea that translations are always similar, but they're never the same.

Lynne Sachs: Well, there's an essay that Walter Benjamin wrote called The Task of the Translator, and I even made a film called The Task of the Translator that was inspired by that essay. He says exactly what you are saying, that actually the translator is offering a gift to the original, but offering something new, that they're actually, again, they're in parallel, but they are not equal. You can sometimes invigorate text through its translation, but don't erase it as a journey.

John Bleasdale: I was thinking, as well, when you didn't use the subtitles in the film, I was also thinking of a Claude Lanzmann documentary show where he purposefully goes through an interpreter for many of his interviews and keeps the original and the interpreter's translation in when, of course, he could have reduced the film by a third if he cut out the interpreter and just subtitled the original testimony.

John Bleasdale: But I think just, I don't know, there's something about putting onscreen that process and saying, "Look, this is going through several people's heads," makes it much more powerful and much more kind of honest, really.

Lynne Sachs: I totally agree. I have to say the Shoah series and Claude Lanzmann's work have been so important to me. I am so grateful that you brought that up. It's interesting because, at least in the United States, Shoah, it was a television series, was the first introduction to our culture of mainstream recognition of the word, Shoah, like the Shoah. People talked about the Holocaust, but not as much as you would think, and that film was so important.

Lynne Sachs: One of the things that Shoah did which has really influenced my work, again, going back to the film I made in Vietnam, Which Way is East, but also The Last Happy Day, which is also in The Criterion series, a film where I look at World War II through a very distant cousin of mine, is that what Claude Lanzmann chose to do is not to use images of concentration camps because I think he thought that was too facile and that he thought, "I want to evoke what it was to be in those camps or to witness them through the words."

Lynne Sachs: Actually, this is kind of a cliché, but when people say a photo or an image is worth 1000 words, I actually, even though I'm an image maker, I actually think 1000 words can be more potent because it's about interpretation. It's not so uninflected. How do you express subjectivity? So when he didn't include the images of the concentration camps, he made his viewers go into their own archive, the internal archive of that, which I think can be more haunting.

Lynne Sachs: Now, if you were to make Shoah in 2021, I'm not sure that you could rely on a broad audience to know what the concentration camps look like, and so it might be different today. I actually wonder about that because I wonder about young people and how accessible those images are in our own internal archive. But I think that was a very interesting choice of his, and I think it activates kind of in a Brechtian way, as you were talking about earlier. But it activates the audience, the

spectator, we'll say, to really participate in a much more active and less passive way.

John Bleasdale: Thinking about today and thinking about 2021, boy, I think we need a Shoah. We need people to see Shoah much more than maybe when he originally made it, it feels like. It's a film that's only increased in urgency, absolutely. Similarly, in terms of looking back towards Vietnam in your film, there's a sense that ... It's interesting that you come from a background of history because I feel we're really living in a period where history is much more important than maybe it was a little while ago. I'm not sure. Maybe every age has its catastrophe and we're just living through our ...

Lynne Sachs: Well, I've found it to be extremely interesting, at least here in New York, but maybe across the world. There are a few days or weeks that people in New York can walk through. Almost everyone I know who is older than 24 right now can tell you exactly what went on in their lives on September 11, 2001, walk through the day, walk you through that narrative. There aren't many other days in one's life that you could recount the whole day. But if you lived in New York that day, you probably can.

Lynne Sachs: And then for me, of late, would be the first week of March of 2020. But it would be different in Italy. It would be earlier, probably. But here, the first week of March, people can tell you a micro history of, "Well, then March 1st, I thought this. But by March 6th, this was happening." It's very interesting to hear them. It's a little bit like going through an internal home movie. Also, history works in another kind of way because we rewrite it as people share it with us, and then we reappraise how we remember it.

Lynne Sachs: In my own filmmaking, I am always interested in the retelling of things in a subjective way rather than the accuracy of exactly what happened.

John Bleasdale: How do you balance what you were saying earlier as well about your admiration for Chris Marker and that sort of political urgency of doing something with having a subjective point of view and wanting to express yourself?

Lynne Sachs: There's this constant call it a conundrum between being an artist and being someone who wants to create change in society. We call that an activist. I've always been moved and as engaged as I thought I could be in political action, but I don't know if I would call myself an activist because I think that would be misrepresenting who I am. So it's probably that I make films that I hope will cause people to ask questions and to reexamine their situations, their context, if you were in a movie, like the diegesis of your place in the world.

Lynne Sachs: But I don't make films that tell people what to do or what to think. So in that way, I'm not sure if my goals are to ... They're to change thinking and, hopefully, to make change in the world, but I don't expect people to walk out of my films and go do a political act, but to think about if you saw Epistolary, which is a short film and, also, which is going to be in this Criterion series-

John Bleasdale: The Letter to Jean Vigo?

Lynne Sachs: Yeah, Yeah. I was horrified by the, I'll say it, right-wing effort to not overthrow the government because they were perfectly happy with the president, but they were overthrowing the democratic system, trying to, in the United States, by breaking into the Capitol on January 6th of this year. I wanted people to think about that and to think about, well, where does that impulse start? Also, can we look at the period of childhood in all of our lives as innocent or does a kind of venal way of being start at that time, like in the novel, Lord of the flies, that kind of evil?

Lynne Sachs: So I guess that's a very short film where I'm very pleased and fascinated and awed by the anti-authoritarian gestures in Jean Vigo's film, Zero for Conduct. But I also wonder what happens when that itself goes awry? Really, I don't come to an answer there. I just want people to think about it.

John Bleasdale: I think that's what's been so discombobulating for the left recently has been the fact that a lot of the iconography in those ideas of the French Revolution and Occupy Wall Street, V for Vendetta guy, forks, masks, and all, this idea of make trouble and protests and stuff like that has been sort of co-opted by the right. I suddenly find myself going, "Where are the police?"

Lynne Sachs: Well, actually, there was supposed to be a right-wing protest two days ago, Saturday, in Washington, DC. It's so funny because it was a flop. One of the reasons was they said there was a sea of police officers there. Part of me is for the abolition of the police. But when there's a right-wing mandate, I'm kind of happy the police were there in their uniform. So it's confusing.

John Bleasdale: It really is.

Lynne Sachs: I made a film in 2001 about civil disobedience. I'm actually an advocate of civil disobedience as long as it's nonviolent and that people's lives are not ruined by it. But I made a film about a group of Catholic anti-war activists who broke into a Selective Service or draft office here in the US and burned draft files with napalm. So it was a performance piece. It's called Investigation of a Flame. I like that disruption of the rule of law when there's a cause that I believe in.

John Bleasdale: Therein lies the rub.

Lynne Sachs: Yes. Yes.

John Bleasdale: Absolutely.

Lynne Sachs: But the thing was, nobody was hurt.

John Bleasdale: Right. Right. Yeah. I've got a horrible feeling that the Squadristi and all the neo-fascists have no such quibbles or compunction. I was watching two of your films earlier today as well. I watched Maya at 24, which is your film of your daughter running around in circles. What a neat idea. Again, that in itself is where I would connect the poetry. I would just say, "That's the poem. That's just the poem." It's a poem that is with music and with images.

John Bleasdale: But it's the same way that you would read a poem and you would have that multivalency. You would have lots of different meanings coming through and lots of different ideas coming through but, at the same time, very difficult to pin down, or the minute you start to put it into words, it's like, "That doesn't quite capture what I'm feeling."

Lynne Sachs: Thank you so much.

John Bleasdale: But that seemed to be a preoccupation that you have as well in one of your most recent films, I think, in terms of feature-length films, the Film About a Father Who. I was interested in this idea of family. You were talking about family earlier on in terms of your auntie and uncle and how much they influenced you and then your brother. So family seems to be extremely present for you.

Lynne Sachs: I'll just say that I think that your parents have an imprint on you. And then it's generational. Then you have an imprint on your children. I'm interested in how those things pass through. Some people talk about the trauma of the past, but I'm also interested in something that is maybe less easy to define but has to do with this kind of conveying of sensibility, of ways of perceiving, and how we actually just simply look at each other. And then it becomes like a mirror back on ourselves.

Lynne Sachs: With Maya at 24, I'm filming her at three different ages. The only direction I give is let's both go in a circle and try to keep looking at me and into the lens of the camera. When she's six, 16, and 24, she confronts that or she's frustrated by that or she's very compliant. There's different kinds of relationships that have to do with a parent telling a child what to do. You could have defiance or you could have agreement. Also, I think, in her eyes, as she gets older, she becomes more self-conscious. So I was interested in that in a nonverbal way.

Lynne Sachs: You probably noticed in Film About a Father Who, I asked my father to walk in circles around me. I like that there's this tether. I think that the tether between the camera lens and the face of the person being filmed is something that hasn't been explored enough, but that is revealing it in a lot of different ways. When people in a conventional documentary say, "Don't look at the camera lens, look three-quarters off," that kind of compliance doesn't allow for the physicality that could happen between the two bodies, between the person behind the lens and in front of the lens.

Lynne Sachs: So I don't like those kind of rules, but I've been told that it's expected. But I've always resisted that.

John Bleasdale: If you apply too much to those conventions, you just end up with cliché, surely. Everything looks the same. Everybody's doing the same thing.

Lynne Sachs: I was shooting that film I mentioned before, Investigation of a Flame, in 2001 by myself and a friend of mine who worked for National Geographic said, "Well, how are you going to be able to shoot that by yourself because the person you're interviewing is going to be looking right at you?" I said, "Well, that's fine. I want that energy." There's a point where the camera, meaning me, looks off during a

point where the person I'm interviewing is talking about something. I look out the window, as people do.

Lynne Sachs: Sometimes we look out the window because we're so focused that we have to let our minds digest what we've heard. So again, that would be considered the breaking of a rule. You're supposed to keep the camera on a tripod, and you're supposed to have the person look off access a little bit. Errol Morris plays with this, too. If you work only within those templates, then there's no nuance to the image.

John Bleasdale: Do you think documentary, as well, has this perhaps because of the small-scale element to it, one person can do it? It seems to foster perhaps more independent creativity than fiction filmmaking.

Lynne Sachs: At times, but not always. I think that's happening more and more in probably the last five years. But about maybe six years ago, I went to a documentary film festival and they had a panel on documentary as a practice. They invited six or seven directors who were there at the festival. The first question that the facilitator asked, or not question, it was a statement that he said. He said, "Well, of course, we all know that a good documentary starts with character."

Lynne Sachs: And then I thought, "Oh, that's really rotten. I disagree with him completely." Plus, that's saying we owe everything to literature and narrative and to those conceits or tropes. That's why Chris Marker was so exciting to me because it didn't start with the character. Maybe you find a character. I think the film that I made with my father, *Film About a Father Who*, he becomes a character, but he's a fragmented character because of my frustrations and that those fissures maybe allow people to enter in a more personal way. Whereas, if you just made a character-driven documentary, then you feel when you finish, oh, I know that person, but do I know myself any better? Probably not.

John Bleasdale: In that movie, there's a real sense of movement as well and expansion of interest because I think it very much starts focused on your father. You think, "Oh okay. We're going to discover who this guy is." And then, by the end of it, it's really moved off to expand and include all the children. It's become a much broader portrait.

Lynne Sachs: I appreciate your saying that because that is exactly what happened. That occurred to me while I was making that, that this is a little bit of a cliché. But since there are ultimately nine children in my family, my father's children, that it was like these planets circulating around the sun. Some planets were hidden. And then other planet were always there. I actually really tried to work with that. And then I get like, "This is too obvious. Throw it out."

Lynne Sachs: I'll say it to you now, it really was like this cosmos. There's a new planet and that kind of thing where we think everything's set. We thought the solar system was set. Oh, my God. There's another one. All of us have this way, especially as we become adults, where we start to say, "Oh okay. Now I understand the matrix of my existence. I am the child of these two people." Maybe you knew them, maybe

you didn't. And then I exist this way, and now that's my childhood. And then I can go forward.

Lynne Sachs: But for me, all of a sudden, I had a sister who existed around the time that I was becoming an adult, but I didn't know it. So it shook me up to have to do a revisionist history, speaking of history. I wanted to reveal that, that kind of ... I guess I would say the film plays around with hindsight a lot, so that the film isn't all-knowing. That was super important to me that I wanted you, as a viewer, to understand that I wasn't always ... The wisdom that comes with hindsight is not just a given.

Lynne Sachs: You have to kind of recognize that you are now more aware and that your hindsight at different points is influenced by things that were secrets and then that were revealed, and you start to doubt everything.

John Bleasdale: Yeah. I mean that scene with your sister ... You'll forgive me if I don't get the name right. Is it-

Lynne Sachs: Oh, Beth.

John Bleasdale: Beth. Yeah, exactly. That scene is so much, I feel, the moment where you suddenly realize the cost of this and also the sense, what she says about going around the house and looking for photographs of people. That really felt like someone else was sort of making their own documentary just in their own head here, and-

Lynne Sachs: Well, that is so well-put. I don't think I could have ... Yes, that we're all constructing the documentary of our lives. It's in our consciousness that we have to move through the world, and we think we know who we are. She literally didn't know completely who she was. There's photographs from my other sister whom I didn't know about, Julia, where she's showing these very traditional pictures of her with her mother and with my dad at different ages, and they're set up in the most snapshotty way, but they're in her photo album, not in mine.

Lynne Sachs: I think that the compartmentalizing that was part of my story and our story would be really hard now because of cell phones. I think that our lives are much more documented in a more fluid way now and that probably some of those images would have been shared by social media, for example, or DNA, a lot of different ways that I would be more aware now than I was in all those decades. The science and the technology would make that compartmentalizing of my dad's life really impossible, I think, now.

John Bleasdale: It does become, as well, a sort of history of its own recording because you're using video and you're using the flaws on the video and the strobing of the static that I recognize all too well from terrible video cameras.

Lynne Sachs: I'm so glad you brought that up, John. I'm really, really, really glad that you picked up on the fact that I used the "progression" of the technology. When people talk about the history of film, they usually say, "The silents. And then hurray, we had the talkie. Sound came in." But then there's a lot of people who say that ruined

the image because you were indebted to the sync. The freedom that came before sync sound was such an homage to the image. So then we get stuck with sync sound, and everything is so clunky.

Lynne Sachs: The emphasis is on dialogue and the clean delivery of dialogue and all that kind of stuff. But you picked up on the shift from 16-millimeter film to early consumer VHS video to high eight to super eight film, movie film and back to ... The only constant is 16-millimeter film. To me, it's the most beautiful. It ages best. I used the same camera in the late '80s, early '90s when I was starting to shoot with my dad, that I use today, which I bought for \$400.

John Bleasdale: That's value for money.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah. I bought it used, and it doesn't require a battery. I've taken it all over the place. I've taken it to Vietnam. I've taken it to Italy. I'm not dependent on electricity with that camera. So it's really interesting. Now you shoot with your cell phone and you shoot with all different formats that we have today. It's considered more precise or more sharp, but I'm not sure that ultimately ... I don't think it's better. That's why I wanted to show the materiality of the film growing up with us and moving through time, not just the subjects.

Lynne Sachs: Also, I would say I wanted to play with skin, too, because the skin will grow old. There's nothing you can do about that. My dad grows older at exactly the same rate as I do. So we are a constant, but we change. Whereas, the medium of expression, visual, does change. Even the poetry of it or the discourse of it is different according to which machine you use.

John Bleasdale: How did the rest of the family feel about the film? Have they all had an opportunity to see it? Did you feel any sort of qualms about that?

Lynne Sachs: Yeah, I was really, really, really nervous. Some of my siblings came to the first screening, which was in Park City, Utah, last year at the Slamdance Film Festival. It was the opening night and then showed a few other nights. And then other siblings, as well as my dad, came here to New York to the Museum of Modern Art, which was in February of last year. Actually, a lot of people told me that was the last time they were in a theater. I guess I'll say it was lucky for me that the, it's called Documentary Fortnight at the Museum of Modern Art was in February because everything closed down in March.

Lynne Sachs: It's beginning to reopen, but people are still hesitant to go to theaters. Not all my siblings came to either of those live events. Then others saw it when I took it to them. And then I'll say one of my siblings hasn't seen it yet. I have given that sibling many opportunities, but they haven't chosen to see it but, hopefully, they will. They've been super supportive, just nervous about how they might look or something like that. But it's been very gratifying. I think that, in general, they all say that making the film in that day that you pointed out when Beth was speaking about her life, brought us closer as a family.

Lynne Sachs: We now meet every single Sunday with my dad on Zoom. So we met yesterday. That was the first time, but we've continued it, well, because of the pandemic.

We weren't doing it in 2018. Since the film has been finished, we've met almost every week. The current situation of our Earth has, in some ways, brought an additional intimacy in a way.

John Bleasdale: Strange how we're relating through, I mean we're doing this interview on Zoom as well, and we've all got ... I mean Zoom three years ago, I didn't know such a thing even existed. Even the idea of Skyping certainly wasn't present in a lot of people's lives. Now we've gone from being maybe a bit overly critical of screens to absolutely, desperately needing them for this kind of thing.

Lynne Sachs: I know. Every year, I organize a lecture at New York University. I used to teach there, and I'm not teaching there right now. It's a lecture called The Experimental Lecture. It's been going on for 11 years. So Jonas Mekas, you probably know his work, he was one of the people who gave a lecture and Barbara Hammer, a lot of experimental filmmakers. So the lecture is itself is very inventive. This year, it's supposed to happen in person. I canceled last year. But nobody who's not part of the community at New York University will be able to come.

Lynne Sachs: Since I'm not a part of the community at New York University, I don't even know if I'll be able to be in the room, and I'm the organizer. So I'm thinking, I think this would be better on Zoom because then we could invite anyone all over the world to come. It has a bit of a reputation in the experimental community. So it's funny. I have sort of a quasi option of doing it live, and I'm thinking Zoom would be better.

John Bleasdale: In what ways is it an experimental lecture? Is it the actual format of the lecture is shaken up?

Lynne Sachs: Yes,. That's the main thing. We don't allow the lecturer to show finished films. They're supposed to talk about failed projects, things that just couldn't get done or things that are still sitting on the shelf that are haunting you. I want it to be about process and about doubt. These are generally people whose films ... They're, call them, veteran artists. Do you know Jonas Mekas? Did you ever see his work?

John Bleasdale: Yes. Yeah. I'm a big fan.

Lynne Sachs: I mean he was amazing. We had so many people who came for that lecture that we had to have an additional room, actually, with closed-circuit TV.

John Bleasdale: There you go. It's got precedent.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah, there you go. It was the closest thing. When Barbara Hammer, who's a great hero of mine, gave her lecture, she carried the projector around up and down the aisles of the auditorium and projected on every single wall but the screen. The talk itself is really inventive. So it comes out of experimental film, but the talk is not your traditional artist talk. I've been doing it for 11 years.

John Bleasdale: When does that take place?

Lynne Sachs: November 19th.

John Bleasdale: Okay. So hopefully-

Lynne Sachs: I'll try to invite you. It'll definitely be on Zoom. The question is the live part of it. But we'll see.

John Bleasdale: Well, I'd love to watch it. Yeah, absolutely. What is your next project now that you've ... Have you found lockdown and everything a moment where you've become productive? Because I've talked to people who've had both reactions. Some people have been really productive. Other people have been like, "I can't get anything done."

Lynne Sachs: I guess I'll just answer. I've actually made five or six short films, and I'm working on a longer essay film. So I've had some extremely exhilarating collaborations. I made a film called Girl is Presence with a poet from California and that film, wow, it's traveled to a lot of places. It went to Germany. It went to Brazil. It went to Argentina, a lot of different spots. Epistolary has shown in Russia and in the UK at the Sheffield Film Festival. It showed in Spain.

Lynne Sachs: It's been interesting because I'll do Q&A's sometimes through Zoom and, often, with other people who are in the same program, which I love, especially if they give us a chance to watch each other's films. With Film About a Father Who, that film showed in virtual theaters, mostly around the US. I'm supposed to go to, well, I'm planning. I already have the ticket. But I was invited to the Cork Film Festival in Ireland is doing-

John Bleasdale: In Ireland, yeah.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah, they're going to do a artist focus on my film. So they're showing 11 of my films, including Film About a Father Who. And then Film About a Father Who is supposed to show ... It is set to show at the Cinematheque in Paris. So I was invited to go there. I'm going to be doing quite a bit of traveling in November which I haven't done any, except for family kinds of things, in almost two years. So it's actually been kind of a good time to work.

Lynne Sachs: I've been, as I mentioned, teaching quite a lot of these workshops on film and poetry. So that's been wonderful because a lot of my students in those workshops have started collaborating and making films that have even shown in film festivals. So I'm very proud of them.

John Bleasdale: Coming back to the poetry, the collection that I read, it feels open-ended. It feels like you could easily continue that for a second, third, fourth volume.

Lynne Sachs: Thank you for saying that. Yeah. I'm still writing poetry. I am actually going to read a poem publicly on Sunday. I'm not writing in exactly that way, but I wrote a long poem, which I called Pandemiton that includes a lot of the scruff and detail of this last few years. There's some things I already miss about ... For example, there were about three months where we were on lockdown and we were at home all

the time. And then at 7:00 PM at night, everyone would go outside and bang pans.

Lynne Sachs: It doesn't sound very typical thing for people to do in the United States. I know they do that a lot in Argentina and I love it. Maybe we picked it up from the Argentines. But I thought that was a wonderful and kind of musical interaction. It was supposed to be celebrating the first responders, but it was also very bonding just on the street because it was like this symphony for about one minute every day.

John Bleasdale: I think it might even have started in Italy. I don't want to claim too much for Italy, but-

Lynne Sachs: Well, I wouldn't say it started here. I think we copied somebody, so probably in Italy. It sounds right. Yeah.

John Bleasdale: Just because we had the worst European outbreak, very early on. I remember what happened. I remember there being some famous film of they would go out on the balcony, as you say, 7:00, in these tenement buildings in Napoli and in Rome. Some of them, there'd be an opera singer. They would sing the national anthem. There was this phrase that you saw flags everywhere of this phrase, tutto andrà bene. Everything is going to be all right.

John Bleasdale: After six months, people began to take those signs down because I think it was like, "Well, maybe not." But, in the end, it was okay, I think. Because I'm between England and Italy, so I went back to England once. I haven't been back to England for over a year now. But I was impressed with the way Italy handled it and less impressed by the way England handled it, I have to say.

John Bleasdale: Well, there's one last question I'd like to ask, which is we always ask everybody on the podcast, give me a film book.

Lynne Sachs: I prepared.

John Bleasdale: Right. Yes. Very good.

Lynne Sachs: But this is a podcast, so I have to tell you. Finish your question. Finish your question.

John Bleasdale: No, no, that's it. I want your film book recommendation straightaway, please.

Lynne Sachs: Okay. I could say I did my homework, but it was so easy that it wasn't really homework. So I would say the film book that I go to regularly, I go to as a muse, I go to for guidance, I go to to acknowledge that there is this weave between sound and image and that image should never take precedent over sound, but it must recognize the subtleties of sound in a way that it enhances awareness. I would say that would be Notes on the Cinematographer by Robert Bresson because I think it's a wonderful book full of good advice and a book that can apply to experimental filmmaking, documentary filmmaking, narrative filmmaking.

Lynne Sachs: I mean when I think of Bresson, I do think of narrative filmmaking. But there's such a brilliant awareness of space and light and the qualities and possibilities of silence and how that pause gives time for reflection and a kind of intense engagement. So I would pick Notes on the Cinematographer.

John Bleasdale: Brilliant. Brilliant. I've never read that. I've obviously seen Bresson films, but I've never read that book. As a filmmaker, a huge inspiration then?

Lynne Sachs: Yeah. Actually, I was reading the back, which is interesting. There's a quote. Can I just read it out loud?

John Bleasdale: Sure. Go ahead.

Lynne Sachs: By none other than Jean-Luc Godard. He said. "Bresson is the French cinema as Dostoevsky is the Russian novel and Mozart is German music. Listen to him. 'A good craftsman loves the board he planes.'" So it's actually beautiful because it's looking at the craft of filmmaking. Earlier, we said that I sort of introduced the idea of I wanted to be a filmmaker more than a director. I think that Bresson in The Trial of Joan of Arc or Pickpocket or Diary of a Country Priest, he's involved in all aspects of it as a filmmaker and has an attention to how the tools work for us and how to respect the tools and how to push the tools to go in directions that reveal new things about cinema.

John Bleasdale: That sounds brilliant. }That's definitely-

Lynne Sachs: Look, it's such a little book. You can carry in your backpack or your back pocket.

John Bleasdale: I'm definitely getting that. That's another copy to go on the ... This podcast is costing me so much money.

Lynne Sachs: Well, according to the back of this book, you could buy this for \$8.95. So let's say 10 euros.

John Bleasdale: Yeah, nothing, nothing for that. The price of wisdom, which is ... Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Listen, Lynne, thank you so much for taking your time to talk with me.

Lynne Sachs: Very nice to meet you.

John Bleasdale: So I hope you enjoyed our conversation. It was a real pleasure to talk to Lynne about poetry and about filmmaking. Her recommended book was Robert Bresson's Notes on Cinematography, which you should put on your reading list, as I have, immediately. All that remains is for me to thank Ellie Atkins for the music and Ali Howard for helping out with the artwork. Until the next episode, please take care.