Cintia Gil: Hello everyone. Hi Lynn, how are you?

Lynne Sachs: I'm Good.

Cintia Gil: Welcome to the DA Films. I'm very happy to I'm Cintia Gil, and I'm really happy to be here with Lynne Sachs, whose work I absolutely love. And thank you. Yeah, so this is a conversation coming from the program put together at the films platform called Tender Non-Fictions, with 11 films from different moments in your life as a filmmaker, and your life too, because it's kind of together. And I thought about doing your conversation, not so much film by film, but traveling a little bit through the films and through also your thoughts about film making, and film, and how filmmaking connects, is a way of building spaces or building places for connection between different dimensions of our lives.

Cintia Gil: And I wanted to start by an image that very much touched me, from States of UnBelonging. The beginning, the very beginning of the film, when we are in your living room, and you are reading, so you are calling your correspondents in Israel and you are reading the newspaper. So you are folding the newspaper with the news about the killing of a woman and her two children, and you are folding this newspaper, and then you just juxtapose this image of folding a map, so folding a newspaper and folding a map, and that's juxtaposition touched me very much, because somehow, for me, it resonated with a lot of your filmmaking practice. And you say, "On my map." And then you start talking about this territory where your film will unfold, and it spoke to me about your films because you somehow are juxtaposing geography and history and language with all the metaphorical questions that are iterations of a map, territory, and lands, and place, and culture, and everything else.

Cintia Gil: And so, I realized that image, for me at least, it kind of speaks of a shift that your films do, which is going from ideas like territory into ideas of place, body, and memory and time, so going away from norms and conventions about where people exist and actually coming to something more radically difficult to systematize, which is what is a place? How do we build place? How do we see body? What do we feel? And where does memory... How does memory unfold? And how time is a space for that.

Cintia Gil: And I saw this in this film, where you are talking about Israel and Palestine and your relation to it, but also in Which Way is East, for example, the relation between Vietnam and USA history, and your and your sister's connection, the space of a laundromat in The Washing Society, in the story, the beautiful story of the bra in House of Science, where you are talking about your first experience with the bra, and suddenly your body becomes-

Lynne Sachs: territory

Cintia Gil: Territory, exactly.

Lynne Sachs: You're the first person to make that connection.

Cintia Gil: Yeah, because, for me, it was so striking, this... So yeah, I just wanted to launch the [inaudible 00:04:20].

Lynne Sachs: Thank you for being so observant. Actually, I think I'll start with the name of the program at DA Films, Tender Non-Fictions, because the curator programmer, Christopher Smalls, said... Small, he's suggested that title right off, and I was very excited by it, because Tender Buttons is the name of a book that Gertrude Stein had written, and I love her work and I love her radical disruptions of language, but then I actually mentioned it to my brother, and he said, "Well, tender, is that a problem? Does it make it look like you're soft on these issues?" And so, I just listened to him and I thought, "Maybe that's the wrong direction, maybe I need to have more edge, maybe... I want to make it clear that I'm trying to break all the paradigms around form and documentary and working with reality." But it just kept sticking in my head and I kept thinking about it.

Lynne Sachs: And then, of course, the war in Ukraine started, and Christopher and I continued our dialogue, and I started to think about, well, maybe tender is actually a good place to start, is a place of awe, because you're tender with things you're not trying to destroy them, you're aware of them and it's tactile. So then that leads me to that question that, or the observation that you made about that image in the beginning of States of UnBelonging, which is an interesting place that you started, because States of UnBelonging looks at Israel/Palestine, and it tries to come at it through the kind of a quasi-portrait of a filmmaker who was also a peace activist, who lived... Her name was Revital Ohayon, and she lived in a kibbutz, very near the West Bank, and was trying to work with families and schools and her children, with other Palestinian children, and unfortunately she was killed in a terrorist act, but she certainly had tried.

Lynne Sachs: And the thing is that the war there is so... You were talking about place, the war there is about, not just place, but the substance of dirt, of the earth, of this thing, this idea that you could claim earth from... Just because your ancestors claimed it. And we know that the world is constantly changing and you can't own something just because your great, great, great, great grandparents did, and that doesn't give you a claim to it, and that's some of what's going on in Russia and Ukraine.

Lynne Sachs: And so, it's very charged to look at place in that way, as if place is a static thing, so you brought up this two different, call it tropes, the trope of land, and then the trope as designated by a map, like a map as a signifier for land, but another signifier is also the map of communication, which is a letter, and another signifier wrapped up in there, because I'm speaking through a letter, it's epistolary in that way, but another conceit is the idea of the newspaper, which is a way to venture into another place but not to have that, not to be present in it, so I think that was really interesting.

Lynne Sachs: But you also compared it to a film, I would never have thought of comparing, so it's just like... I'm so enthralled by your perceptive approach to filmmaking, and that was that, in 1991, I made a film called The House of Science: A Museum of False Facts, and at that point, I was trying to connect with being a young girl, and the very first time that you wear a bra, and the feeling that you have isn't like,

"Hey, great, I've got breasts." I felt like, "How dare you, world, tell me that I have to entrap these things, that I have to tame them, or that I have to claim them."

Lynne Sachs: And actually, what happened was, I was in the gymnasium at my middle school and I was wearing a super tight shirt. I was at an all girls school, it wasn't like I was trying to show off my breast to the boys, but some of the girls said that... The girls told me I needed to wear a bra, and I was like, "Oh." So then it turned my body into territory, and it wasn't from my mother, and it wasn't. And from the teachers, it was from the other girls, then they didn't like it that I didn't wear a bra.

Cintia Gil: And you, in that film, you also talk about this, sometimes conflict between the body of the body and the body of the mind, and this struggle to live together and to, again, to build some sort of place or possibility of existence where both can come together.

Lynne Sachs: And I think this is actually fairly common for a lot of girls, and maybe boys, but I can't make a claim to it, before we want to be sexual beings, we want to be invisible. We don't want... It's not just that we transition without thinking, we actually like not being objectified, and then when we become objectified and we become territory, whether it's from other girls or boys or men, then we become hyper aware of our bodies. So hyper... And then later in my life, much later, I did become more comfortable with my body, and I think probably not till I was in my early thirties and I had children, and it was the first time that I didn't feel all caught up in the parameters that had been offered.

Cintia Gil: Established.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah.

Cintia Gil: Which you talked about, this idea that the world's changes and things are not fixed or for static. And when I see your films, one thing that I find quite beautiful, is the way you seem to be quite interested in movement and fluidity, and in transition in your images production, even in the way you edit and the way you use your camera and the movements of the camera.

Cintia Gil: I was very much trying to see... So for example, just an example, it happens often, all the time, but for example, in States of UnBelonging, when you're talking to Revital's mother, and your camera goes and kind of follows their hands, or in the Which Way is Easts also, in A Month of Single Frames, you have this absolute interest for fluidity and movement and transitions, and I wanted to hear you a little bit about that, about this, because the impression that it gives me is that it's a very intelligent way of giving space for invisibility, for what is invisible, which in your cinema, happens a lot, because you often have immigrants, children, women, filmmakers, who are not on the spotlight. So you are very often talking from spaces that are traditionally of invisibility, and I feel that there's an absolute coherence or connection between that and the way you film, the way you produce your images, and I wanted a little bit to hear you about this, about movement.

Lynne Sachs: Again, Cintia, just very, very interesting correlations between what we sometimes call socioeconomic issues and issues around artistic form, aesthetics, and I think that is the most interesting challenge that we have when we're working with reality, but with reality doesn't just mean about reality, so the reality of the making.

Lynne Sachs: I think that film can document how they are made. In a way, the how gives you the opportunity to think about who's making it and who's supporting it, and who's curious to find out more about the issue. So for example, you said something about the fluidity of my camera, and traditionally, we'd say that you don't want to see a camera shake, that's a sign of being an amateur, and if you're an amateur, you didn't bring a tripod, you're not working with a professional cinematographer.

Lynne Sachs: But I actually think that a shaking camera is a breathing camera. If we could just whip out, erase that word "shake", which is not bad, because it has a tentativeness, and talk about the breadth of the maker, then we know that it's an embodied camera and that the camera is alive and thinking.

Lynne Sachs: You were talking about a shot in States of UnBelonging, where I'm interviewing a woman whose daughter had been murdered, so I felt very vulnerable myself, as a mother, as another woman, I felt sympathetic. So my camera isn't just frozen, the camera is reflecting my insecurities and pain, let's call it empathy.

Lynne Sachs: So I didn't, maybe, know that I was doing that at the time, but there is a kind of transparency that I think is fine. I was making a film called Investigation of a Flame, which is about civil disobedience. It's a film really about anti-war activists, and I was interviewing one of these very wonderful, heroic anti-war activists, and as he's talking and offering a parable to me, I let the camera look out the window, just over there, and people have asked me about it. And I said, "Sometimes when you're listening to... You, meaning the person behind the camera or a person in a conversation, sometimes the most intense form of concentration is to allow your eyes to wander. And that's what taking the camera, literally, off the tripod, or letting the camera be an extension of the body, is actually considered a very atypical thing. People think that keeping your horizon line horizontal is a sign of confidence, but why do we always have to show confidence?

Lynne Sachs: As you and I know, that one of the hallmarks of the essay film is doubt, so if you can have the form register that in a nonverbal way, and in a articulated way, then I think that's super interesting, and I do try to play with that. I have a conceit you've probably seen in a lot of my films, where I let another person walk in circles around me, and I think that's... I've done it a lot, I've done it with my mother, my daughter, my father. It's something I love to do because it makes me get dizzy, not just because you see the world passing by, but I lose my stability, and that's a form of exploration of what it is to be lost in the process, and then you find yourself, hopefully.

Cintia Gil: You were mentioning the film that is in the program, Same Stream Twice, which is with your daughter, Maya, running around you, and actually, when I was thinking about this, I was thinking about... I had noted a quote from the synopsis, where

you talk about something you can't grasp, but can feel, and how this camera of yours brings the possibility of that. And now you were talking about doubts in image making, in film making, and the political aspect of it, I thought that maybe tenderness comes from that, and I also thought about, again, in House of Science, when you say in the end, incendiary, but not arson, so that's possibility- ... but not burning everything all at once. It's maybe the tenderness question that's is absolutely embodied in your images.

Cintia Gil: But going again to how you assemble films together, another thing that I find really unique, is the way you work in between the closest intimacy to the widest perspective, and you do that a lot through the relation between image and sounds and voiceover.

Cintia Gil: And first, one thing that I find really interesting, is that your voiceover, or whoever's voiceover, is never a statement, it's always full of suggestions, descriptions, unfinished sentences, possibilities, but never saying what things are or what we are supposed to think about things.

Cintia Gil: And the second thing, is how voice in your films always comes together with other kinds of sounds, so how you sound in a really precise way. And so, I would like to listen to you a little bit about how you build this relation between images and sounds, because it's absolutely precise, there's an absolute rigor to it, which doesn't mean there isn't doubt and there isn't experimentation in it, but it's so very much creating movements within the moment.

Lynne Sachs: I'll say a couple things about... So I do use what you call voiceover or narration, but I like to play around with, for example, a word that these days people use all the time, but it hasn't been historically so considered, and that is the pronouns.

Lynne Sachs: There's a couple of things that I think that are anathema that I do, but I'm committed to them. For example, I like to play around with the English language, with the word "you", so you can also be similar to one, and you can also be a way to invite people in and the listener, the audience isn't told that you should, I don't do that, but I say, you might think this, and you might wonder how to relate to members of your family, but I do. I don't always center myself, and so, to play around with language, that way has become very much a part of my practice.

Lynne Sachs: Another thing that I've done with voiceover and around pronouns, is to not be committed to traditional exposition. As in, you can't say he, she, without knowing who he, she is, identifying it, explaining it. So in literature, in novels, they've been doing that for hundreds of years, you don't always know where you stand, but film had this commitment to clarity, and the thing is that if you believe that clarity takes the mystery, and that eventually you will arrive at some kind of insight, maybe not like... The world is never absolutely clear, but insight is where you really want to go. So I try to play with that.

Lynne Sachs: Another thing I try to do with... Or two more things I'll say about language and about the language that I've written or spoken, and that's part of the film, is that I like to cut what... I don't call a dialogue, but you know that the convention is to call anything with voiceover, or people talking, dialogue, and it's cut like prose. It's

cut a period at the end of the sentence, or if someone speaks and then it's the end of a thought, it's where the period is, but I like to cut the language the way I would write poetry. So the thing, like a little bit like Robert Altman, things are overlapped, and you think about the ways that language, like information and communication and words, are used simultaneously.

Lynne Sachs: Thus, you can cut the voice in the same way that you cut the sounds of birds or the sounds of a door closing, and you can play with it, and you can, like the way in poetry lines, in poetry, it's vital to know where the line breaks are, that's how sound should edit. It should be rhythmic, it should be in relationship to the image. So there are line breaks. So if you look at a traditional screenplay, there's no line breaks, it just goes from one side of the page to the other, but if it were full of line breaks, then it would be more engaged with the whole fabric of the sound. So those are different ways of working, that I try to like bring in play, but with an intention.

Cintia Gil: Expanding from language, because that's also the question of the languages, which you also use a lot and you play a lot with.

Lynne Sachs: Super important, yeah.

Cintia Gil: And not only language, but translation. We had a conversation before about this, your obsession with translation and how, for example, in Your Day is My Night, where you have the different languages coming to play, or in the Washing Society, or actually, in all of your cinema, somehow in Which Way is East, et cetera, in all of your cinema, there's this question of the breaking of the language. And I actually saw a conversation between you and a lot of people in World Records, where you were talking about English, and I wanted to hear you a little bit about that, because I feel that language itself, as attached to culture and to memory and history, is something that is a material for you.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I will, just to mention, that about three years ago, I brought together a group of experimental documentary filmmakers, which included Jean Finley, Sky Hopinka, Naeem Mohaiemen, and Christopher Harris, all artists whose work I just adored, and all artists who, in some way or another, are trying to challenge the dominance of English. Even if they didn't say, that's what I'm doing, I could see it in their work so clearly. And now, three years later, English is even more dominant. And how can we, yes, have English as a language of flow between cultures, because so many people know it as their second language, but how can we also subvert it?

Lynne Sachs: And so, I've tried to do that, for example, with Your Day is My Night. The whole film is pretty much in Mandarin and Cantonese, and I have English subtitles, but they're not just subtitles, I don't even like the word subtitle, and I'm scared of the word subtitle because it's not sub. The minute you bring in English subtitles, people start, pretty much stop listening. They stop hearing Chinese, they stop being aware of the textures, the tenderness, let's say, of another language that isn't theirs, they completely separate from it.

Lynne Sachs: So I tried to, in that film, I tried to use the text on the screen and across the screen in various ways, and that's one of the reasons why we actually, on DA Films, we have a separate link for the Your Day is My Night with English subtitles, and another one with Spanish subtitles, because you couldn't just use a program or an app to get the titles for that film, they have to really move with the recognition of Spanish in relationship to the image, or English.

Lynne Sachs: So, but I've had, in other films of mine, in The Washing Society, we have a whole section of the film where you hear Chinese and you hear Spanish, and you do not have translations, or just a little bit of translation, and therefore, there's a certain moment of alienation for a viewer who doesn't know those languages, and I think that's really important. I think anybody who speaks English as a first language needs to learn what it is to be an outsider. And since that's like a form content interplay in The Washing Society, because most of the people, at least in the United States, who are washing clothes as a service, are also going through the alienation of being an immigrant.

Lynne Sachs: So I wanted to switch the power. I worked with a playwright on that film, Lizzie Olesker, she's just been a real inspiration to me, and together we tried to recognize the oral qualities of Spanish and Chinese, in this case, and to like let them enter the visceral physicality for a listener, that not just information.

Lynne Sachs: Pretty much all my films, I have resisted that term, like documentary is an educational experience, but it is, in some ways there's something wrong with that word. If you think that it's an education in becoming aware and becoming how you are in society, that's actually one of the biggest intentions of documentary film, is to have people leave the theater or the laptop, or whatever, leave it more aware, not just of Vietnam, or not what it is to be living in a shift bed apartment in a New York City's Chinatown, but what it is in a more conceptual way, what it is to be an insider and an outsider, to be a resident and a new visitor, what it is to be in that transitional place. If you can leave a film with that, you're actually, probably, a little bit more mature or a little bit more observant.

Cintia Gil: And also, in that effort of finding a common language or finding a way to speak to another person whose main language is not English, that vulnerability also allows for some other layers of existence come to life, memories, or fears, or it's for example, I'm thinking about the moment in Which Way is Easts, when suddenly, memories of work come in a dialogue between you or Dana with someone else, and how that happens, never in a programmatic way, but always from this vulnerability position, it comes from this efforts to be somewhere else, to be there, and which is really beautiful, and I think it's a quite interesting aspect of your film making, which is this idea of, or possibility of a testimony, the possibility of a testimony, which is not a report or a declaration, or a narrative of events, but more a testimony thought of as a transmission, it's more as a transmission.

Cintia Gil: And I thought, for example, in the way, precisely you worked in Your Day is My Night and The Washing Society, which is quite even a more nuanced way of working with testimony, because you worked those monologues with the people. So there was a process to that, but it comes from before, and I feel that there's

always this quality of transmission in words, in your films, but I would like to hear you a little bit about that process in these two films.

Lynne Sachs: Actually, I'll start with Which Way is East, and there was something I learned in that film about translation, and maybe about test testimony. And I'll try to explore that, but in Which Way is East, I learned something about language and about culture. So there's always been a expectation around documentary film, that even if we've never been somewhere, if we see a movie about that person, I mean about that place, then we have the next best thing. Next best thing to travel is to watch a documentary film. Yeah, but the thing is that that film only gives you, really, the person who made it's experience, and it has a kind of... And it should have a clearly prescribed point of view, let's say.

Lynne Sachs: But when I was making, Which Way is East, I learned that when you're a foreigner in another country, I was an American in Vietnam. Yes, I didn't speak the language and my sister did, but there's another thing I didn't speak, which has to do understanding. I didn't understand the culture enough, for example, to understand the parables. So a parable is actually a far, maybe, richer and more comprehensive mode of understanding a whole way, a psyche, of another country.

Lynne Sachs: Again, during the war right now, we are all trying to understand the psyche that could make this happen, what is it? And it has to do with the mythology, and in Which Way is East, I decided I wanted to listen to every single parable I could possibly find, related to animals and Vietnam, because parables often do work with animals. And for example, we have a parable here that says, a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. If you have it already, don't try to do anything that's going to make you look like you might be able to get the two birds in the tree, like hunt them, but probably not, so just keep what you have.

Lynne Sachs: So there was a parable in Vietnam, which said, a frog that sits at the bottom of a pot thinks that the whole world is only as big as the lid of the pot. So it's sort of solipsistic, it says nothing exists beyond where I am, but it was such a wise way of thinking about a kind of xenophobia that we can have, that we don't care what is beyond our grasp, and I feel like I've been exploring that ever since.

Lynne Sachs: I explored it in States of UnBelongong, I made a whole body of work, actually, over a decade, which I called, I am Not a War Photographer, and it included... It's really started with Which Way is East, and it included States of UnBelongong, so they both contemplate what it is to be within something and what it is to observe from afar, and not really to understand and complete... Not to claim complete knowledge.

Lynne Sachs: So many times, Cintia, when I make a film in another country, which I haven't done as much lately, because I think, also it's our obligation as documentary makers to explore where we are at home, but so many times people would presume that I was an expert of anything that I... There's always that assumption, and I think that it's also our jobs as makers of this kind of work, to be really transparent that what people are have access to is our search, not really our expertise.

Cintia Gil: And can you a little bit about the way you built the monologues in Your Day is My Night?

Lynne Sachs: Sure. Yeah, so-

Cintia Gil: In The Washing Society, how you built the text, because it's quite a beautiful...

Lynne Sachs: So-

Cintia Gil: Results, and I mean, you can see...

Lynne Sachs: They both come out of failure, for sure, and if there's anything I've learned after quite... Three decades, three and a half decades of making documentary films, that every single project, halfway through, you have a point where you think you cannot go on, you cannot, because this door wasn't opened or because this person dropped out. So part of the failure of Your Day is my Night, was that I thought I wanted to make a film about people who lived in what are called hotbed houses. That's a colloquial to that people hardly use anymore, or shift bed houses, or shared apartments, in which someone might live in a room or on a bed during the day, sleep there during the day, then they go to work at night and somebody else would come in.

Lynne Sachs: And I learned about, that that was a very typical mode of managing, particularly in New York City, but I think worldwide, when you're a refugee, an immigrant, a person, particularly in an urban environment, which you don't of have access to the whole infrastructure, sometimes you just have to make do. And so, an apartment doesn't just mean one family, it could be multiple families. So I was interested in how that would be manifested in New York City, but I really couldn't get, we say here, my foot in the door, like the proverbial foot in the door. I wasn't able to get access to people who lived that way, and I felt a little uncomfortable about it. I wasn't sure that that was my role or that I should be doing that.

Lynne Sachs: So I thought I would make a fiction film, my first, and I went to a Chinese theater troupe and I asked them if they would work with me, and they said, "Sure, show us the script." But I didn't really have the script. I wanted to build on observations and the kind of work that I'm used to doing.

Lynne Sachs: So that failed, and so I had already two failures under my belt, the failure of getting the foot in the door as a documentary maker and the failure of writing a fiction film, and so I... A man told me, he kind of fancied himself the mayor of Chinatown. He said, "Why don't you go to that senior, older people community center?" And I went there and I said to them that I was looking for people to be in a film, and I happened to use the word audition, because that's the word people use for trying out to be in a narrative film, and 40 people auditioned to be in the film, and then seven of them, I thought were extremely charismatic, and they had all actually lived in shift bed apartments.

Lynne Sachs: And so, instead of auditioning them, I actually did what I'm very comfortable doing, which was interviewing them. And then, so I had these fairly long

interviews in Chinese, which had to be translated, and then I worked with a playwright and we turned them into these distillation, based on their lives.

Lynne Sachs: And so it became a new way of working for me, because in documentary, there's a, sometimes a kind of trickiness that goes on, as in, I want to know about your life, but I'm going to ask about it in a new way so you don't really feel comfortable, like you lose your confidence, and you're going to say something to me that is very, very, very raw, and that's going to work perfectly with my movie because the rawer, the better. I didn't want to do that with these people who were in their sixties to eighties at all, and I've never been... Maybe I was trying to be tender or something.

Lynne Sachs: So, because it was their life story, and it was based on experiences they had, then when I gave them back a distillation of what they had already told me, I was perfectly happy with their improvising or forgetting their lines. And it became more about performance, but performing the real, and we had the best time and we got to do things like, take one, take two, take three, which usually, documentary doesn't get to do, because that's considered manipulative and that.

Lynne Sachs: So we worked that way in Your Day is My Night, and then in The Washing Society, there were issues around trying to do your conventional interview with immigrants in the US. People were scared of cameras, and even the word it's funny, like we say, it is a documentary, but we also use the word undocumented. A person is undocumented because they aren't here legally.

Lynne Sachs: It's almost... They're synonyms. To be undocumented is to be an illegal, here illegally. So when we said we're making a documentary, it was like, "No, we can't do that. We can't do that." So what we did was we just talked to laundry workers for about a year, and then we wrote a play, and then we worked with actors, and then we ended up finding a few laundry workers who were here legally, and so they were in...

Lynne Sachs: So it became a whole hybrid mix, and those are ways of working that I'm still excited about. I'm still like... Well, another thing that happened in The Washing Society, was that one of the actors, her name is Jasmine, ended up becoming one of the, call it, almost like a producer, because she decides, or not... She's acting in a film about laundry workers, and then her grandmother, with whom she lives, says to her, "Hey Jasmine, I worked in a laundry for 30 years, but you didn't know it." She interviews her grandmother, who was very involved in a union, and fought for her own... Her raise. She fought for better working conditions, and probably, her grandmother would never have told her that story, so all of these things come out of failure, or missteps, or obstacles that ended up becoming opportunities.

Cintia Gil: No, it's quite beautiful because we are slowly feeling the notion of tenderness with a lot of political power. You've just built, like explained, or at least explored also the political implications of sticking to the word documentary sometimes, and sticking to the norms and orthodoxies of what is supposedly a documentary, that many times just serves nothing in certain situations. And so it's quite

beautiful how, if we open that notion, it's much more about this negotiation or fluidity between us and the world, and what the world brings.

Lynne Sachs: I think at the very... It's most fundamental... Most, as documentary makers, our jobs are to encourage our viewers to question the truth. If we do nothing else but that, I think we've succeeded. Because that is the only way to translate or to... An experience that's very closed, which is the watching of a film. How do we create a porous presence for our viewers, that goes beyond the theater? Not so much to say, "Oh, well, I inspired them to become an activist." Maybe, maybe not, but if you're already an activist in the most fundamental ways, if you question what the reality that you see, who's controlling it, not just information, but who's telling you what is the right thing to do, what is the wrong thing to do, and who's doing it, and why, and if you question that, then you're already a better human being, I guess. But of course, we know that when that happens, you become very sad. You have no confidence in anything anymore.

Cintia Gil: Well, I wanted to bring to that, related to that, the text I was reading, by you, about Gunvor Nelson and her editing lessons, because there's a moment when you say, "Meaning is discovered outside of..." No sorry, it was me who wrote, after your text, I was writing a note saying, that you discover meaning when you let go of continuity, and of the narrative, and of plot, you... I think it was in the moment where you were talking about her, telling you to look at the outtakes, and look at what's what's outside of what... You should always look at the outsides before closing a film.

Lynne Sachs: And actually, thank you for reminding me that she told me that, because I didn't know why I believe in that. And when I was making Film About a Father Who, that was critical, because the thing is, with what's beautiful and what are the... People are working on their computers, and they have these folders, and they're called NG, like No Good. You should go back and look at those, because those are the ones where the camera's shaking, those are the ones where some kind of wild energy happen, those are the ones where you thought someone said, turn it off, but you didn't. And things get messy, and when things get messy, they get interesting. And so, she did tell me to go back and look at the outtakes, because the first response, usually, of an artist is, what is pretty? And when did I do a good job? And the good job means that I measured my F stops correctly, and the good job is that there was no traffic going on when the sound was running, and so you tend to judge things in the most insubstantive registers, you're saying, "Oh, this looks good, and this is accomplished." And the other material is more revealing.

Lynne Sachs: And so, when I was working on Film About a Father Who, I made myself go back and look at videotapes that had been shot on VHS in the 1980s and stored in garages, and I thought they were ruined, and I was just about to throw them away. And then I come across an image, for example, of my dad, where all the color had disappeared, and it was just his silhouette and some lines going through, but you could still tell it was a man walking away. And I thought, that's the perfect image for the last shot of the film, because people don't mean detail, and furthermore, these days, with the digital cameras, we've got a plethora of detail.

Lynne Sachs: We know what people's faces look like, what we need is something that's more ephemeral and suggestive, and therefore, if it's at the end of the film and I had totally dismissed it, I should say, if it's the end of the film, the audience can fill in the detail in their heads. And that means they're involved, that means they did the work, that means they spent 74 minutes with me and with us.

Lynne Sachs: And so, those are the kind of images that Gunvor would've said, you need, and I would've, in the 1980s, when she was my teacher, I would've said, "Oh, that's embarrassing. That's terrible." And she taught me a lot, she taught me that dead flowers are prettier than living ones, because you have stores selling the pretty ones, the living ones with color, but nobody's selling dead flowers, so they're much more thought provoking.

Cintia Gil: Yeah, and it's interesting when you link that to what you were talking about, that the minimum, or what a documentary filmmaker does, is to make people question truth. And at the same time you talk about building meaning by... In bringing to the film, this sort of failures, or moments of not... Unprettiness, it's quite beautiful, which brings me to the next question, which is the role children in your films, because it's one of the most risky things to do in film, is to work with kids, and you do it.

Lynne Sachs: And dogs, and I don't do dogs.

Cintia Gil: Yeah, true. But it's quite beautiful because it's, I think most of the time I meet with girls, young children, girls, but children, in general, are all through your filmography. Not all the films, but they are there very much present, and it's beautiful because they bring a sense of transition, again, this sense of unstable transition, but also this sensation of extreme perception. It's like they come... It's very much linked to play and you film them in a very, how to say, very grounded way, in the sense that you portray them in some sort of mystic way, or whatever.

Cintia Gil: But at the same time, they bring this capacity for extreme perception. For example, the young girl who talks to you in And Then We Marched, or the children in States of UnBelongong, the children, for example, the film that is not in the program, but the film you did with your kids, with the, we need the pool play.

Cintia Gil: So there's always this weird capacity of children in your films, that through play, they reveal something else, and they add something to the film. So I wanted to know, because you started that really early in your film making, to do things with kids.

Lynne Sachs: Well, yeah, I can say that one of my beliefs, when I decided that I would have children, and also I decided I would be an artist, it's not that I said right away, I'm not going to separate them, but there is a, call it a paradigm, for male artists, that there's a woman at home, taking care of the kids. So Paul Gauguin can go to Tahiti, and other filmmakers we know of, like Francis Ford Coppola, he could be shooting, what's the movie he shot in... Apocalypse Now, and his wife is along, making a movie about him, and their kids are there too, but she's there to support him. And my husband is a filmmaker as well, but we support each other,

and I just didn't want to separate myself, as in, I have a person taking care of the... They were there.

Lynne Sachs: So there's an expression in English, where people say out of the mouths of babes, like as I never thought children have more insight. I was just interested in the evolution of insight, I was interested in trying to connect with something like the novel and book, The Tin Drum. You go back to these movies that talk about this haunting quality. One movie that had a very big effect on me was The Thin Red Line by Terrence Malick, and believe it or not, the person who pushed me to see what an incredible film that is, it's not a child who's speaking, but it's a young man who's a soldier.

Lynne Sachs: And with Stan Brakhage, and those are not the kind of movies that Stan, the great American experimental filmmaker, Stan Brakhage didn't make kind of movies with voiceovers and story, but he loved that movie, he loved the rawness of it, and I think there's a way that children offer that and they don't censor themselves. And I also like that they're willing to make mistakes, or they make mistakes.

Lynne Sachs: And in The House of Science, a breakthrough moment for me was that I asked a friend of mine if I could film her daughter, tap dancing. And so when I went to their house, she kept running away from me, it's in the film, so she's supposed to be on a pedestal, tap dancing, and she doesn't obey us at all. And she's wearing this Batman costume, not a costume with a little tutu or anything, and she runs away.

Lynne Sachs: And then there's another scene in that film, where I was working with a girl and I had her read the most insidious anthropological text by a man named Cesare Lomroso, and she makes all these, which you would call mistakes, but they become very subversive and radical and smart, at least from my perspective. And both girls saw the film a few years later, and they said to me, "Oh, that it's so embarrassing. I can't believe I wasn't reading well." Or, "I can't believe I wasn't compliant." But I've never been interested in compliancy. I, once when my girls were younger, I met a woman who was bragging to me because her... She said, "My daughter is in all these commercials for The Gap." It was for the... Because she's so compliant. And I think, "I'm glad my kids were not invited to be in commercials." But I've been surprised by children ever since. And then,

Lynne Sachs: And Then We Marched, I had filmed the Women's March in 2017, when we were all devastated by the new president of the United States, but I decided that if I were to listen to another adult, I'd probably hear what I expected to hear, and I wanted to hear from a child. So it was a great excuse to knock on the door of my neighbors, I hardly knew, and to talk to this little girl. And she was so excited by things like yelling on the street, and she was so excited, she was so sad that they'd lost their sign. And there was something so clear and not hype. It was super smart, but it wasn't trying to be too intellectual. It was just there, like just observant, and I thought that was so much of a gift. I'm really interested in all the gifts that happen in filmmaking. You do give to your audience, but the people who are willing to be in your movies are also giving of themselves.

Cintia Gil: Now, as the last question, I wanted to build a little bit, some sort of leap between the oldest film in this program, which is Drawn and Quartered.

Lynne Sachs: Ah, yeah.

Cintia Gil: And the film of About the Father Who, because it's quite... They are completely different, they come from completely different moments, but it's quite beautiful, because in Drawn and Quartered, you obviously were experimenting and looking at intimacy and closure and body in the most... It's beautiful, because actually, in your films, and now I'm thinking about the way that film finishes, there's this link to the window, there is the closure, but then there's the window, there's the outside, and there's the world also. But then in Film About the Father Who, it's like you are taking a trip in the... We never know where it'll take you, we as a viewer, we never know where we will go, and it's quite beautiful because you give it... It's like a film where I feel somehow that you, as a film maker, are more vulnerable than in that first film that we see.

Lynne Sachs: I think that Christopher Small's curating is really brilliant to have included these two films for exactly that reason. So there's a word that we use a lot in talking about how our culture works. We talk about exposure, like, do you want exposure? Do you feel exposed? Are you exposing yourself? Is someone exposing you? It's both a active... Like a transient and... A transitive intransitive... You use that word in many, many different valances. And so, when I was making Drawn Quartered, where I take all my clothes off, my boyfriend takes his clothes off, I had read Laura Mulvey's essay at the time, which was only probably 12 years in... It was part of a cannon of feminism, but not everybody had read it, but I had read it, and I was aware of her ideas around the male gaze.

Lynne Sachs: So I wanted to try to subvert that without erasing it. So I gave the camera to my boyfriend, he shot me nude, I shot him nude, and it's all in the film, and it's only four minutes, and I called it Drawn and Quartered, which is an expression, it's from like the medieval period. To be drawn and quartered is to be pulled, like punished, it's a punitive action when you're pulled into four parts, and the film actually exists in four parts, so horses pulled you into fragments and you're killed. So I felt really exposed in that film, but I'd done it to myself, and I actually edit my face out. I thought, "Okay, I'll show my body, but I won't show my face." And then I thought, "That is very weak. If I'm going to claim my in my film, I'll put it back in."

Lynne Sachs: So this was before computer editing, so you see the splices. It's destructive editing, like am I in, out, in out? Anyway, I ended up in the film, and so, audiences can see that very exposed film. It's got nudity, so I don't know if DA Films has to put, click a button, like, "This is awkward, kid." No- ... nudity than you might see in the Louvre, with a Rodin or a Michelangelo, but it's nudity, and not as many muscles.

Lynne Sachs: And then I make a film about my relationship with my dad and my other family members, and it's really very exposed, but there's no nudity. It's very, it's vulnerable in another way, and much scarier. I was scared in 1986, but I was terrified in 2000, in 2020, excuse me, 2020, which is when I finished that film,

because I felt like I'd kind of been making up who I was all along, and I felt vulnerable because I both had this very compassionate appreciation for my dad, as well as rage, and to show both, either one of those, made this into a very personal film, but I wanted the film to give people a chance to connect to their own families and maybe find some court, like relationship that seemed familiar to them. But all of it came because I actually didn't put any filters on. I kept thinking I should, and then I didn't, and I really didn't think many people would ever see this film. It never occurred to me that it would stream, ever. It never occurred to me that I would really travel much with it. I just needed to get it out of my system, so the exposure part of it was a relief, like, "Okay, now I'm just being honest."

Cintia Gil: Now it's quite amazing, because today I was thinking about the film again, and linking it to your other films. And I was thinking about the sentence, I am not a war photographer, and somehow it resonated, the way, how do you, as a filmmaker, go into a film, or for example, when you talk about fear in States of UnBelonging. And I see all of that in the film of About the Father Who. I see fear too, and I see this sort of, the potential idea of war in the sense of, how do you place yourself as a filmmaker in a place of conflict, and it's absolutely impressive that all these ideas that flowed through your work, suddenly they are met together in a film about your father, where you were so vulnerable too.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah, yeah, definitely. And it's been real... I want to say, so there have been two independent documentary makers who've died in the last two weeks in Ukraine. Maybe one of them was in Russia. I don't know where they both were, but there, in the work that we do, there is a tendency to want to witness. And I love... Wherever you are, you're witnessing. And they put their lives on the line, so I want to say, I'm awed by that, and that is the ultimate vulnerability.

Cintia Gil: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. I had one last thing to ask you still about a Film About the Father Who, which is the... Because you give it the title, drawing from Film About a Woman Who, by Yvonne Rainer, and which you also refer to in your second short film, I think, the one, A Woman With Four Objects.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah.

Cintia Gil: You also link to Yvonne, but it's interesting, because in Film About a Woman who, she's moving away, or she's refusing the narrative control, and idea of plot, and the antimonic normativity of narrative, and I find it fascinated, the fact that you affirm that for yourself and you come from there to film a man and a story, or a lifetime that is more fascinating, sometimes, than the wildest of fictions. So it's very interesting, because you affirm this putting narrative away when you are dealing with the most incredible fiction story that you have in front of you, so I wanted you to tell us a little bit about this.

Lynne Sachs: So interesting, when there is this propensity in documentary filmmaking that you have to buy a ticket. If you really need to go far away to find what's most exotic, the most interesting, because your life... And I actually, maybe, had bought into that at some points in my life. I had made a lot of films that required travel. And then, actually, probably about 10 years ago, I started to think, how can you look

inward? How can you, not so much make personal films, but what do you know from living the life that you have for this many years? So I think that the insight that Yvonne Rainer, to me, gives us, is a kind of rigor to look at the structure of family, to look at family as an anthropological being, and to distance ourself, to look at archetypes, to look at relationships that we can find through the structures that she creates in that film, that has a lot of detachment. She allows us into her head through her aesthetic choices and her very radical resistance to certain formulas that exist in family.

Lynne Sachs: I had to take, what I got, I got, this is the world I live in, the family is this way, but I want to leave the answers in an... She uses an ellipsis. So she uses dot, dot, dot, dot. Film About a Woman Who, you fill it in, and you fill it in because you understand how narrative works, or syntax. And I tried to, I left that off. It's a little bit like Which Way is East. They're not questions, they don't have that at the end, but they ask us to, one, to fill in. And in both cases, I guess what I'm trying to do, is I actually want you to fill in, so you fill in because you learn about me, but that's not the gift I gave, the gift I gave you isn't just this extravagant story of a dad who had nine kids by six different women, because that was the life I lived, and I just knew was hard, but I want my viewers to... And this has happened a lot more than I thought, a lot, where people look at their... They transpose my story to their lives in this very energetic way.

Lynne Sachs: And it's not just women, it's a way of saying, my flawed situation that I thought was so flawed is my own situation, but there are very few families that don't have that, that don't have something that gives anguish, or maybe not the extreme that I have, but I don't wish that you would live and think this is the wildest story I've ever seen, though it's pretty wild, but maybe just that, in my case, that a woman lived through it with shadings of a lot of emotions. And I think there are many ways that my film is different from Yvonne Rainer's. She's made some brilliant films that deal with her cancer, she's made some incredible films that deal with the lives of performers and the psychic space that goes on in their heads. So she has ways of telling us what's on her mind, and it's the formal discoveries that are so interesting.

Cintia Gil: We should finish now, but I still want to push you for one more, which is, because you were talking about Yvonne and about the spectator and how... And all your cinema is built... I think your body of work is probably, for me, one of the closest to what could be a correspondence cinema, which is not an epistolary cinema, it's beyond that. It's like a building in between different people, and it speaks to the way you film Barbara and Carolee and Gunvor, and how you build A Month of Single Frames, but also how you exactly, you build that come and go and trust with the viewer, with your known viewer. So I wanted to ask you a little bit to talk about collaboration in this open sense, about this idea of correspondence and how you, in your work, you allow others to exist with you and how you build that.

Lynne Sachs: Thank you for asking that. I'm still looking for the right word. Is it correspondence? Is it a collective experience? Is it a collaboration? One thing I'll say that is kind of a tricky issue around documentary, is that there's a expectation that you don't pay your subjects, because if you pay them, then they're influenced by that financial relationship. I actually, about nine years ago, threw

that out the door, because I thought, if there's any experience where someone is time with me, multiple iterations of that, I need to recognize them in a professional way, and recognize that they're not able to do something else that makes money. So there's, yes, I want to say, I have chemistry with people I work with, I have a commitment, but I also recognize that they're doing something for a project that I created, and I have to also see their work as important enough to be paid for it.

Lynne Sachs: So that's one thing, I won't say it's very much, but it's a recognition. Then there's the other relationships, that I feel really grew, like in Your Day is My Night, these were people I had never met before, and it's particular to Chinese culture, and I wasn't aware of it, that you have a lot of physical contact. So we met over a period of a year, and definitely, food was a very big part of our experience. And I think in a movie making situation, they collect craft services, and you have to have good food because people get tired. But I think the food is totally different, it doesn't have to be that good, it has to create, it has to contribute to that warmth, it has to contribute to the fact that we can be friends, as well as people making something together. And that's something I feel I'm always looking for in my work, that people have enthusiasm for making something that they might not have made, like if I'm working with someone who does a sound mix for me, I like to show that person the film over six months, so that he's involved intellectually.

Lynne Sachs: I work with a man named Stephen Vitiello. He worked on Film About a Father Who, he worked on Your Day is My Night and other films of mine, that he doesn't just do... He is a musician, but he involves himself. Sometimes he'll deliver sounds to me that I have to meet him, and so we have this, call it mutual respect, and we get excited as artists, as creative people, about our collaboration.

Lynne Sachs: Also, I feel really close to people like you, people who are curators, who give me insight, and then I learn through your observations of the films, I learn how your mind works, I learn how certain things exhilarate you. I feel like we met on the terrain of cinema and then learned things about each other, and I think that's really pretty profound.

Cintia Gil: , but it's also very beautiful, the generous way how you allow your films to have that.

Lynne Sachs: Hopefully.

Cintia Gil: Thank you so much, Lynne, it's an absolute pleasure to talk with you, always.

Lynne Sachs: Thank you for your fantastic insights. And it's actually rare for a film maker to have the chance to talk to someone who's looked at work over this many years and sees threads that I didn't always know they're there, but I know how I work, so I really, I learned a lot from you, thank you very much.

Cintia Gil: No, I learned from you. Thank you. And thank you to your films.

Lynne Sachs: Yeah.