Experimental Podcast
https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/season-5-episode-11-lynne-sachs-and-lizzie-olesker/id1506662792?i=1000725146477

Welcome to the Experimental Film Podcast with your host, Ken Hess.
Check experimental film info for information, interviews, and episodes for the next few seconds.
This podcast is dedicated exclusively to experimental film and its makers.

Ken Hess
Welcome everyone to season five, episode 11 of the Experimental Film Podcast. Today's guests are experimental documentary filmmaker Lynne Sachs and playwright Lizzie Olesker.
Lynne and Lizzie, welcome to the Experimental Film Podcast.

Lynne Sachs
So glad to be here, Ken.

Lizzie Olesker
Happy to be here.

Ken
Great. Thank you. And for the listeners, Lynne has been on a couple of times before. Once just a general interview and then a second time about her film called *Film About A Father Who*. And you can pick those up on the podcast wherever you listen to podcasts. They're all available to you. So today we're speaking about a book that Lizzie and Lynne have co-written and have gotten contributors to tell their stories. It's called *Hand Book, A Manual on Performance Process and the Labor of Laundry*. Now, here's a weird thing. When I first got the book, I had a physical copy and an electronic copy. When I first got the book, I didn't realize that it was actually about laundry.

I thought it might have been a metaphor for laundry and that you were going to explore experimentally some aspect compared to laundry, you know, making some comparison. But I was surprised, pleasantly so, that it's telling the stories about people who do laundry. I was kind of shocked. (laughs) So before we get into the book, completely, let's have you tell the listeners about yourself and your work. Lynne, if you would go first.

Lynne
Sure. So I have been drawn to film and poetry pretty much all my life, beginning with poetry. But when I realized that filmmaking could be a kind of free ticket to ask questions, to engage with people in your everyday life, or to engage with people who are living very different lives from your own, and you want to sort of investigate how they manage, how they survive and their struggles. I started to embrace the camera and the process of sort of refracting in an experimental way and witnessing the world through my art making practice, and I really loved that filmmaking could do this. It was like a license to just be curious, to observe, to play with the

world around you. And that has become kind of my call it mantra or way of being for like decades now.

Lizzie Olesker
So it's interesting you say that, Lynne. This is Lizzie speaking about my background in theater and performance. Because for me, I guess the reason why I make theater is because it's my way of asking questions in the world and exploring what I am curious about, what is meaningful to me, and sharing that communally and effectively with those who are part of a performance, who are watching a performance in a space together live, which I'm finding is important, more important than ever. And I guess, I came to playwriting and I actually would call myself more a theater maker than a playwright, per se. I came to playwriting as a performer and actor. So that was my entry into theater was to perform. And so I feel like it's very much a part of my writing. So when I have written plays, I feel that I'm part of it on the page, as it were. So I don't feel a separation exactly between my role as a performer or writer or director. So I guess to enter and connect with Lynne around film has been we'll talk about it, I guess, but a whole other opening for me, another form to work with and ask questions through.

Ken
This is to Lizzie. Are your plays and performances experimental?

Lizzie
It's funny. They don't. I don't know that I would use that category. Exactly. However, they've been deeply influenced by my work with, I would say, more as an actor with experimental theater companies and directors, although my plays are not traditional. And they, you know, I find that each play I write that the form and the content are very intertwined, obviously, and that they can, you know, it can be a kind of realistic play, realism, with elements borrowed from other forms, such as surrealism or experimental performance. So I guess it's hard for me to put my plays into a category that they change depending on what I'm writing about.

Ken
So would you say, both of you, this is a question for both of you. Would you say that writing this book is somewhat of a step out of your norm? I mean, Lynne, you're a filmmaker and Lizzie, you're a playwright and performer. So it seems like writing a book, which is a very difficult thing to do. I don't care what the topic is, even if it's an autobiography, it's a tough thing to do. Is it a step out of the norm for both of you?

Lynne
I was going to say something that might come off as a little bit of a joke, but I'll say this. So you would think that writing a book with another person means it's half as difficult? You know. Yes. Writing a book is tough, but, well, we share the responsibility. But I would actually say that writing a book with another person is twice as hard in the best of ways, because we were always learning from each other, and we were always bringing our life experiences and our so-called expertise to the table, and then kind of being forced to challenge ourselves, being forced to think that any expectation that you had about your own medium could be transformed.

And that's been one of the most exhilarating aspects of this working process. What we shared outside of our form was our, need to sort of grapple with what it is to live in a city specifically, or to live in a place where there's so much stratification between the people who do things for other people, what the so-called service industry and the service sector and how that kind of work goes, you know, unrecognized, whether it's registered through a camera or through writing. And I'd also say that both of us work in a very discursive or, cross-disciplinary way. So my films that play with reality or, had never been traditional documentaries, and I love working in a hybrid way. And Lizzie, often, I think I could say works with verbatim information and then reshapes that to, reshapes the reality into a form of, imaginary performance. You know, imagined performance. So we have like a sort of un-pure way of looking at our own, our practices.

Lizzie
Just to go back to. I think that's true. Lynne, what you said about the way I work and that I'll incorporate, for example, what you might call documentary methodology into then creating a fictional world. However, I guess that question about the writing itself and writing a book. Yes. I felt it's very different from any other way that I've written before. So it kind of had a demand, a rigor to it, that you had to kind of speak to a, certain parts of the book to kind of a reality. That and a description of a reality or of what you were intending to do that demanded a kind of writing that I wasn't used to, that I was a kind of different muscle that I felt I had to discover and to do that collaboratively, which is what you were speaking about, Lynne, was both harder, but also, illuminating and helpful to have each other. And we literally would go sentence by sentence. I don't know if you if we want to get into the process here of collaboratively writing a book like this. And so, for example, Lynne is very strong in terms of language and grammar, which is not my forte. But somehow together, you know, we would find a way to shape a sentence. It was intense to work that way. So it was both challenging and easier. I think not so much to write this. The whole writing this way was challenging, but to do it collaboratively, I found, was helpful.

Ken
To me what's so different about writing a book is that now, you know, when you write films, you know you're you're writing, but you're writing for multiple ears and multiple eyes. And when you write a play, you're writing for a live audience. People react immediately to what you've written. And writing a book is different because you're really writing for a single person. You rarely have public performances of a book, so it's a more personal feel to write a book. We did that through either one of you off a little bit to know that this is going to be an intimate conversation between you and one other individual.

Lizzie
If I can jump in. I think one of the things we wanted to do in both, you know, subtle and obvious ways was to, it's interesting you say that, Ken, would be to speak to that directly. So we even have a, in the introduction of the book, we say, you know, you were the reader, now you're holding this book in your hands, turning the page. So to try to actually engage with that very particular relationship of a reader and a book, the book is the object. So we were interested in that and wanted the book to speak to that. And I'll just say quickly, the only thing you're writing the play for the audience, but I feel I write plays for the characters, that that's the only way I can

enter that process. I'm just writing for them, and the audience is part of it, too, of course. It's both.

Lynne
I wanted to say that is such a beautiful question, Ken, about the intimacy that one has with a book. I've never heard it put that way in comparison to other art forms. And I think fundamentally for me, that was what motivated me to work so hard to take this project, which maybe was harder than the play, maybe was harder than the film, which we also made, you know, we did projects that engage with those things. But the book was so involved and I kept thinking about the reader. I kept thinking, I'm in a room with the reader. And so the book is very graphic, as you know, like graphic. It's a, we called it a quasi cinematic experience. We wanted people to move from page to page, not just left, right, as you do with text, but to move fluidly and forward and backwards like, you know, back in the day when people talked about CD-ROMs or but a book of poetry that you start here and then you go back to another page and you're not it's not a book that works strictly in necessarily a narrative way. So I think there's a lot of freedom that the reader has here. And sometimes it's freedom to read poems, sometimes it's freedom to read memoir, sometimes it's freedom to read plays. Depending on your mood or the time of day. And that intimacy or like liberated position of the receiver of this book is really important to us.

Ken
Now, I know you two have known each other for a while and have collaborated on other projects. And how in the world? The burning question for me is, how in the world did you come upon this idea? Laundry.

Lynne
I'm going to give that to Lizzie because it started with Lizzie.

Lizzie
Okay, sure. Well, it was a very concrete thing that happened, actually. Well, a couple things I should. So I personally, I in my own work, I've always been interested in for a long time in several projects in domestic work and in the relationship between women's, the role for women in terms of labor and personally and historically, our relationship to work that often goes unrecognized and uncompensated so that that's I have a long kind of, curiosity about that. So laundry being a fundamental aspect of domestic work. But then, more specifically, I have a dear friend and colleague who had a series that she was presenting in laundromats around New York City, where she would have writers come and read their work in a laundromat in a working laundromat. And she called the series loads of prose. And it went on for about almost ten years, I think. And she did it all over the city and all five boroughs in many different, you know, small laundromats, larger laundromats. And she invited me to be part of this series to bring an excerpt from a play, which I did. And then she kind of asked me and I at the same time asked her about doing a project, developing something specifically to be done in laundromats, about the work of doing laundry. So that's how this started. And originally it was going to be kind of a more general question that I was pursuing. About when was your first experience doing laundry in a laundromat was sort of how I and I interviewed people about that experience. And then I invited

Lynne to collaborate with me because I saw her film, her amazing film, Your Day Is My Night. And when I saw her film, it was done with a performance aspect, a live performance, and I felt it was very moving to me. The way she was working with non-actors in a particular space, and she had them doing kind of what one would call maybe mundane activities or everyday things like cooking a meal and getting into bed and out of bed. She had that happening live and then interspersed with filmic with showing parts of the film, and I was so excited by that. And I thought, wow, it would be so great to incorporate film into this performance in laundromats about the work of doing laundry. So that's how it started. And then when I invited Lynn to collaborate, she had the thought and questions and ideas about the people who work in laundromats and what their experience and lives are about, who in New York City you drop, you can drop off your laundry. I guess it happens all over and people will wash and fold your laundry for you. So that particular aspect of laundry work was what we became interested in.

Ken
Yeah, I started thinking when I first saw the announcement for the book, I saw the title and I thought, you know, knowing Lynne, there would probably be a, like I said, a metaphorical thing here. So I thought, is she talking about the rag business? The schmatta you know, schmatta refers to a rag. You know, it could be the clothing business. People always say, I'm in the schmatta business. You know, I'm in the rag business. I've heard magazines referred to as rags. You know, I had no idea what to expect. And then I thought, well, maybe they're talking about people, you know. Are they talking about what? It's not a very nice thing to say. But if you call people schmattas as they're, you know, they're kind of dirty and, you know, and I thought this might be a metaphor for people, you know, and, and I thought, well, I'll just have to find out. So I, you know, and I read some of the introduction and I thought, okay, this is interesting. So I ordered the book and also got, like I said, the electronic copy. And reading through the book, I got some other impressions about it that I don't know if I'm reading too much into it, but here are my impressions. When reading through the book. It. It's not just about laundry, but there's flavors of racism, oppression, the plight of immigrants who are traditionally associated with laundry in the industry. But there's also a long history of, African American workers in laundry. And so I'm curious as about the the personal aspects and that sort of thing from the book, what, you know, what was your experience when hearing these stories? Is it am I really far off or is this what you also got from it?

Lynne
I'll, I guess I'll start with this.I think that I want to go back to the title of first of the book, which is Handbook to Words. So I think there is a kind of play around. We intended this to be a play around that word in that it is a handbook. It is a and it a sort of personal, sharing of a way to make art in a site specific way, in a public way, in a communal way, a collaborative way.
But it's also a book that look specifically at hand, at the hand, at the ways that we that the body engages with labor and with other people. Again, it's like you, it's a you have the hands of holding a book. There's a lot of reflection about those exchanges, the tactile, that sometimes maybe we forget about these or we don't where where we neglect these days and the virtual lives that we lead. So letting go, moving out of that in a kind of more, even sociological way, moving out of just talking about art, we are it is true that this book became a vessel into which

we could try to grapple with issues that are very front and center these days in a very stratified society in which we live. And, I think the book encourages people to like to go out into their own environments and think about who's doing which work, particularly coming out of the pandemic, you know, where a lot of work that was done was invisible. That was a period in which we're working. We were very immersed in this project, and that was the time in which we first interacted with Sylvia Federici, who has written so much about invisible labor that's considered unpaid, invisible, and like, not really acknowledged by, mainstream society.

So Sylvia wrote our foreword, but we actually met her because she had been interviewed all about the frontline workers, the service workers who did so much for our whole country during the pandemic. So it's true, Ken, that it's a book like, for example, where we offer archival material on laundry workers who have organized and things like that.

Lizzie
But I guess I'll just jump in to about, how even though the focus is so specific on the labor of laundry that through that specificity, yes, you address the inequity of our society reality, the sense of, how people are treated as, laundromat workers, how they are treated as part of a service sector that they're underpaid. The danger there of those jobs. And through that also, we discuss very directly racism and how people experience that through their jobs. And so yes, those issues definitely are part of the project as well. We didn't kind of set out to, you know, with an agenda about it, although we each have very strong personal feelings and political views about it, but it definitely came through in the work we were doing to create the film, the play, you know, the performance, the play and now the book.

Ken
You know, one of the things I noticed, I can't remember the lady's name, it may have been Margarita Lopez, but I don't remember for sure whose story it was, but she was saying that she felt invisible and that people treat her as if she was invisible or less than you know. And that struck me because it is true that workers, and I always made it a point to the chagrin of some of my ex coworkers. I always made it a point to be nice to the people who were the housekeepers and janitors, because they do feel less than, you know, especially in a high tech society like we have. You know, I always made it a point to know their names. I always made it a point to help them whenever I could because I didn't want them to feel invisible, you know, I didn't want them to feel less than.

And so when this lady said that, it kind of brought me back to that she felt invisible or that she felt like, you know, people just throw their clothes at her. And I don't know, it's more than just a book about laundry. It's a book about how people treat other people. And I know, like you said, you didn't set out to do that, but it was really touching for me to hear those stories. And everybody went there. It seems like, you know, they talk about how people would treat them when they would come in to their laundry, or when they would pick up their laundry. So, you know, did you did you start to feel like there was a pattern once you started writing the book and gathering the stories?

Lynne
I wanted to say, I am so thrilled that you mentioned Margarita Lopez. That is absolutely her name. It's one of the first, contributor pieces in the book, and she's someone whom we met just walking in and out of many laundromats all over New York. And it's actually important to me, to both of us and I, and to Margarita that she's now a published author. You know, her life experience is in our film, but it's also here in the book and verbatim, actually. And then the book can celebrate her life experience and her eloquence about that, her ability to articulate the pain of it and also her confident self-confidence and, you know, talking about everything from herniated discs to lifting, like people think laundry is kind of soft and it smells good, but actually it's kind of dangerous. The chemicals and also the weight of those bags is incredible all day long. So and the and the repetition of the folding is really hard on your body. So we wanted to make that clear, but not from the perspective of data, but more from the perspective of a first person accounting. So that's there in the book.

Lizzie
Yeah. And I it's great that you're bringing all of this up can because I think the other thing that I hope is woven into the book, and I believe it is both. Yes, the emotional experience and how they feel about how they're being treated. But we also are giving these not just examples. We're exploring how workers themselves are, moving toward changing their material conditions, how they're being treated, what they're being paid, the structure of their work. So later in the book, we interview Mahoma Lopez and Rossana Rodriguez, who were both working with a group called the Laundry Workers Center. And they're an independent, grassroots, union of laundromat workers. And so to see, we felt it was really important to, to bring to light, movements that are working to change those conditions so that it's. Yes. How are you treating the individual worker one on one. But also, how can the workers themselves change the conditions under which they're working? And that was also true. I don't know if you want to speak to this more directly about the washing society and that moment in history that was so extraordinary, where Black washer women organized together in 1881 to make change.

Ken
Yeah. In fact, I was going to bring up the washing society and ask you about that. But there's a couple of things I want to cover first, like, having being from Texas, I've worked with a lot of people who were immigrants, worked around a lot of immigrants, worked in various jobs where there were immigrants, and they didn't really ever want to participate in these kinds of conversations. Did you have any reluctance for people who you'd asked to participate?

Lizzie
I'll jump in first, maybe, Lynne. Very much so. And, and I think that's a really complicated thing, in fact, which we were very aware of and tried to address in the play that we wrote and in the film and now the book, because. So one of the lines in the play that gets repeated is, I don't want to talk about it. Leave me alone. There's nothing to say. And this sense of, because of, for many reasons that are both real and internalized, why it is difficult to speak about that. It's their own experience. And it also brings up who we are as the, you know, the authors, the filmmakers, the playwright, and that we're separate from them. So we didn't want to erase that

difference. We wanted to make it apparent. And also to respect it as well as confront it. I and I don't know, Lynne, maybe you want to speak to why other reasons that you thought that was true.

—
You're listening to the Experimental Film Podcast with Ken Hess, and now back to the show.
—

Lynne
I think the journey of making a work that engages with reality can be interesting to people. And that journey is different from how a scholar might present their work, or any other person who's trying to kind of articulate our complex world. So I've, I find it in general that people in the documentary realm, often want to be respected most by their ability to open a window into someone else's life, like, oh, you know how did you get in there?

How did you get so and so to speak when you didn't even know them? And then, oh, that's so great that you did that. But actually, Lizzie and I ran into a lot of obstacles. And that becomes part of the formal investigation of the film, because we are working with people who don't have certain kinds of privileges or stature in American society. So instead of just not including them, we tried to recognize their power within the structure of this project, their power of resistance to us. And so there's a lot of reflection in this book about resistance to, yes, oppression. But like in the form of the washing society, the women of the washing society, but also resistance to us, you know?

And who were we? What did we represent? How did we look different from the people we were engaging with? And we tried to be pretty transparent about that. We did our best. There's an essay in the book in which we consider a photograph taken by a 19th century, early 20th century photographer, pictorialist photographer, named Gertrude Casimir, and she took a picture of a 19th century looking, Black woman laundress.

And the laundress is looking directly at the camera. And that photograph has become sort of famous and iconic. Not extremely famous, but it's it is, let's say this. It is represented by Getty Images and it is available on Google. So we actually think about that, exchange of gaze between that photographer and the woman. Her quote, her subject, the woman in the image, and then also how that image looks back at us as we're looking at it.

So that's a cut, you know, a piece. It's kind of like a play dialog between the two of us around that image. That gives us a chance to sort of examine our own positions.

Ken
So as far as process now, some people would want to know this. I'm always curious about this myself as an author. How long did it take you from initial concept or discussion to published book?

Lynne
Lizzie.

Lizzie
Good. I'm just saying. Good question. You know, I'm not sure. Was it five years, Lynne?

Lynne
I was exactly going to say five years.

Lizzie
Yeah, something like that. 4 to 5 years.

Lynne
Yeah. I think we should say something about our publisher.

Lizzie
Oh, for sure, because it would not have happened without.

Lynne
You want to?

Lizzie
Well, when we kind of thought. I will say that Lynne was a little bit at the early engine behind it, I would say, because you were very determined. You said we should publish the play that we wrote together. That became the basis of the performance. Every fold matters and the film sort of all. So, initially that was the impulse. And then as we both talked about it, we said, well, it's not just the play, it's also these other elements that are so much a part of this ongoing project, which has been ten years, honestly, from the beginning to now, going on 11.

And so then we decided that we needed to find a publisher who would be interested in, what we hybrid book, a book with many, quote, “experimental elements”. And so we did some research around that. So kind of as we were, imagining and starting to work on the book, and we were also looking for a publisher, and we made it we worked on a very specific proposal, and we came up with a list of alternative, independent publishers, and one of them was interest Said yes, and that was Punctum Books, which is an independent, they're connected with,UC Santa Barbara. They publish many, I would say many hybrid, unusual books that go from poetry to theory to history. And they were enthused about publishing the book. So that was part of the and I guess that happened, I want to say probably six months into or a year into our process, Lynne?

Lynne
Yeah, I mean, we were really feeling very discouraged for over a year. And then we heard about Punctum Books and we sent a pretty tight, I gotta say, proposal. And we really emphasized that we wanted the book to be full of images, and to our surprise and glee, they accepted the project. And it's just been fantastic to work with them because they've done their line edit of the

book was extremely thorough, like, so it's like having a brilliant professor who spent more time than you ever wanted on your book, on the text, and then we had this fantastic designer.

So Eileen Frayedenberg Joy was the tech, was the publisher part of the publishing team who edited the text and then then Vincent… his name is really hard to pronounce.

Lizzie
So I'll have to look it up quickly. Yeah. So yeah. But go ahead.

Lynne
Vincent WJ Van Girvan. Okay. He did the graphic design and he was in Albania. He lives in Albania. So it was just a brilliant and global collaboration to publish this book. Pretty cool. And I guess just quickly it also involved reaching out to all the to the people who had been involved in the project. So we invited our, the people who had collaborated on the performance, the actors, on our film. So the sound editor has a piece, the composers Steven Vitiello, Amanda Katz, the editor, the woman who my friend who originally invited us to do the performances in laundromats, Emily Rubin. So they all contributed pieces, which, you know, we had to sort of gather them and edit them and figure out how that would be part of the book. Because it is such a hybrid book, I think the order of it is very important, the kind of juxtaposition of one thing after another was important to us. So it all took time.

Ken
Yeah, it does take a lot of time. You know, one of the questions is going back to the process again, one of the questions publishers always ask me when I pitch a book idea is why are you the one to tell this story? So I'm going to toss it out to you. Maybe your publisher ask you, maybe they didn't. Why were you to the right people to tell this story?

Lynne
Lizzie, could you start? I'll start.

Lizzie
Honestly, I would just say we're the only people to tell this. I mean, in a way, the project is so idiosyncratically ours and connected to this project, you know, that the whole. Because in a way, the book it tells the story of our collaboration, of what does the project, what it is and it includes the play. So the play script is kind of at the center of the book. So it's interesting that you ask it that way. Can because in a way, I mean, I listen, I do feel like somebody could and should at least one person write a book about the washing society. You know, from a historical perspective, from a feminist perspective, from a black writer, you know, that is ripe for exploring. But I think that the specific kind of like way we approached it and, the kind of the kind of, accumulative elements of the book, I think were because of who we are, you know, deeply connected to who we are. So it's kind of an expression of us and of this project that we've been doing for a long time. The book is the next expression of it or iteration of it.

Ken
So there is an associated film that you guys completed in 2018 called The Washing Society.

Lynne and Lizzie
Yes.

Ken
And it that was your first collaboration on this project.

Lizzie
Correct. Actually, the performance, which is called Every Fold Matters, which the book includes the play script, that was the first part of the project, and we performed that over 2 to 3 years. You know, after creating it, we performed it both in laundromats as site specific, as a site specific performance, and also in small theaters and universities. So the play performance came first. I will say that in the play we had some filmic elements. So the, you know, we had done some interviews and some other filmed elements that were part of the play. So some, you know, call it a multimedia performance. And when we were doing it in the laundromat, we would "project" those filmed elements off the laundromat, television. So. So you'd see an image on the television along with the live actors doing, you know, either speaking monologues and scenes and or doing movement pieces that were in relationship to or juxtaposed against the film. But then following those performances, we decided to make a hybrid documentary film itself, which incorporated parts of the performance. So if that all makes sense.

Ken
Yeah, I like those situational, performances like that. And you know, who used to be really good at that was a show called In Living Color. Yeah, they would have the actors in a laundry, and one of the ladies would be folding clothes, and she would gossip to the camera and she'd go, but you ain't heard that for me? And then she would go on and tell you another story. And it was hilarious because she was folding clothes the whole time and telling the story. And to me, I just love that situational storytelling like that. So I was pretty excited to learn of the play. Every fold matters. So.

Lynne
Oh, that term, which maybe lots of people have heard, but I haven't so much situational storytelling, Ken, and it's so exciting for us to be having this direct conversation with you as a reader. It's just really it's super interesting to see what sparks you, what jumps out to what resonates, because you just don't mean that's any art making, but you just don't know what will captivate somebody. And also, we always learn about what we've been doing by, our readers or viewers or, and, you know, there's a whole section of the film of the book, excuse me, which we call response theory, so that that people writing to us over this whole decade, writing to us to help about the work that we made and giving us that, like perhaps a Marxist interpretation or an interpretation by another of, for example, a Chinese woman graduate student

responded to our depiction of Chinese workers in some of the, in the film. And, you know, that was a very specific interpretation of what we were doing, and we felt it was really important to have that the full, cycle, let's say, of art making, where the response where the third prong of the, you know, there's the maker, then the stage or the screen or the book itself, and then there's the recipient. And we wanted to include that as a part of the gestalt.

Ken
When I was reading through the book, I got pretty involved with it because of the stories and what I really wanted. It was funny when I was reading the first story or two in the poems. I was thinking, you know, I wonder what it's like to hear one of these stories as if they were telling it to their children. You know, trying to tell them to, you know, because I know a lot of these jobs, like laundry, they become generational, you know, you'll have 2 or 3 generations working in a business like this, like a laundry business. But, you know, the breakout stories, like a mother tells her daughter, you know, you want to get an education or you want to do something other than this. You know, I'm working hard for you so that you won't have to do this kind of work, you know? So I got those stories, and I really enjoyed that part of the book where I felt like I was getting some intimate details from the inside of the lives of the people who were doing these jobs, you know, which are not glamorous, you know, but are required. Right? I mean, somebody has to do this work, but yet nobody wants to do this work, which is why it usually falls to immigrants and, you know, people who, you know, don't necessarily have the language skills or the education to do other things. So I felt that there was some real intimacy in the storytelling here. So I really appreciated that part of it. So there's some more feedback from a reader.

Lynne
I wanted to say something about that you just illuminated, for me at least, is all the different places where we have intergenerational, no reflections. There's a woman in the play who talks about the actress Ching Valdezeron, but she's performing as a character whose name is also Ching, and she talks about her son, like working with her son and the laundry mat, and how he sometimes helped and didn't. And there's that. And there's a woman, Jasmine Holloway, who performed in the play and in the film, and she realized as we were making the film or was informed by her grandmother that, her grandmother had worked in a laundry center for 30 years. And that came about because not because she was living with her grandmother, but because she was making a piece about laundry. And so her grandmother had never told her that for 30, that for decades she had been in the laundry industry. And also she had been involved in a strike. So it became an opportunity for oral history across generations. And Lizzie and I, in our in some personal writing we did for the film, or for the sorry, we did for the book, we talk about our own children and kind of the not about what they are doing, but being mothers at the same time as being art practitioners and teachers and other things. So there's a lot of reflection about that, that looking to the past and to the future generationally.

Lizzie
Yeah. It's interesting that I was struck by that, too. Ken, when you asked us just now that there is that element of it, you know, because some of it, I think is sort of the neat somehow with laundry work or domestic work, that it becomes intertwined with our role as mothers or a generational

sensibility. But there's also, one of the people we interviewed, it's he's in the film, and then it's also part one of those things that we project in the performances was a, a gentleman named Mr. Ho, and he was working in a laundromat in New York City and in Chinatown. And he speaks about, you know, his role as a father to, you know, and how his sons are part of it and how the day, you know, how he wakes up and leaves the house with his sons. So there's a presence of children and of other generations or again, Jasmine with her grandmother. There's another thing that it made me think of at the end of the play and in the script, we invited the actors to give their own stories related to laundry. So they had been characters in the play embodying laundromat workers. But then at the end of the play, we invite them to talk about something in their own lives, and each of them relayed something that often had to do with family and generations. So, for example, Ching talked about growing up in the Philippines and who did the laundry and what that was about. So interesting that you bring up the sense of generations.

Ken
Yeah. So, I noticed that in the book, you do include the play. So are you wanting people to perform this or are you licensing it through the book? I mean, what's the impetus behind including the play in the book?

Lizzie
I think we wanted people to read it as a play script, you know, as dramatic literature. You know, we didn't really, I mean, we did write it, you know, put it on the page and adapt it as much as possible. It's such an interesting thing about plays and when they're published, it sort of has to give the sense of the performance.

And so writing the stage directions, all those details that we had to really focus on to get it ready to be published. And I guess, yes, somebody could do the play. We didn't really think that far in terms of getting the rights to do it as a performance. Do we just, is it just open access?

Lynne
Oh yes, it's open access.

Lizzie
And I think it would be wonderful. Let people do the play if they desire. The other thing that we added to the play, which I'll just call attention to, which is not traditional, is we have these things called margin notes, where we include, kind of, dramaturgical notes that informed the play. So it might be, you know, kind of digressive thing about history or about our process or something related to our own former work that, isn't normally included in a play script, but which we were very excited about and are curious to hear reactions to.

So I guess we've seen margin notes and other kinds of books, but I've not quite. I haven't experienced some very often in a play or ever. So that was one thing we were committed to.

Ken

So did you find any in this kind of an off the wall question, but did you find any superstitions or rituals that people perform around laundry? I mean, it seems like every, you know, cooking has its own sort of language and rituals and superstitions associated with it. Cleaning house does, you know, I just wondered if there anything like that associated with laundry that you found

Lizzie
Folding. People have very specific ways that they fold.

Lynne
I would say folding is very ritualized. Something that I found, which was almost the opposite of that, was what people's reactions were to lint. So lint is the detritus, let's say, of making your clothes clean in a machine. And there it's the fallout. It's like the oh, it's like basically lint is a little bit of fabric, a lot of hair, dead skin. It's what people want to throw away first. And we got really interested in lint, so much so that the lint is magnified in images throughout the book to kind of celebrate that visceral nature of laundry, that reminder that there are aspects of it that we dispense with. But it's also like lint is also our past. It's what it's the hard part of life that we want that some people want to get rid of. And instead sometimes in this is in the play, we would audiences would sometimes come into the play and we would have, someone at the door taking their tickets and somebody else at the door giving them a little piece of lint to fiddle with, which was tactile a way of kind of like a mnemonic or something of a reminder of physical reminder of the body and of cloth and all of that coming together. And so those were some which, you know, the ritual is usually to throw it away immediately. And so we wanted to excavate it and kind of, celebrate it.

Lizzie
And just to go back to ritual and superstition or habit. So with the folding, it's often, how did your mother do it? So again, the generational idea, like how things get passed on so that there's some of that in the play and in the film too, this is how I do it. This is how you should do it.

Ken
Yeah, it's funny you talk about lint. In fact, your description is in the book, just like that detritus. I'd never heard that term before. And I started thinking about lint, which I may have spent way too much time thinking about lint after reading that in the book. Oh, good. It's what we wanted. Well, you know, a lot of people do throw it away, but Boy Scouts save it and when our kids were in scouts, we saved the lint off of the screen. You know, when we pulled it out of the dryer. Because what they would do with it in scouts and start fires with it.

Lizzie
Oh, this is what a great use for it.

Ken
Yeah. Wow. Yeah. In fact, our oldest son actually tried to light some in the house once near the laundry and scorched the toilet seat. And I was like, okay, what were you doing? You know, I

can see the scorched toilet seat. And so he's like, well, I was lighting lint is like, okay, let's not do that anymore.

Lizzie
That's fascinating.

Lynne
I just want to say this is another reason we do what we do. Because you have added to more than my day. Like I will never see lint again in such a useless way, but a wonderfully useless way, like practical way. I never thought of lint as having any practical presence and especially the Boy Scouts did it. So thank you for that. I'm really glad that our book brought out that story.

Lizzie
I'm going to save some for the next camping trip.

Ken
Exactly. I'll just go save it for your next camping trip. Just put it in a little Ziploc bag. Yeah. You know, and just keep it dry. And it's perfect because it's already dry. It's flammable as heck, trust me. And it works. And you don't have to, you know, ruin anything or tear paper to make pollution or anything. It's already processed for you. It's ready to go. So how can people purchase the book?

Lizzie
Well, they can order it through our publisher, Punctum Books dot com all one word punctumbooks or any online bookstore. You can order it through bookshop.org. You can order it through the independent bookseller distribution. It's called asterism.com. You know, you can go to the evil Amazon empire and order it, but it's available online everywhere and you can, of course, go to your bookstore and ask them to order copies or your library, but it's readily available online.

Ken
I bought it from punctum myself.

Lynne
Oh really?

Ken
Yeah.

Lynne
That is great. And I want to add that on Punctum, there are two ways to obtain our book. You can order the book and have something to hold in your hands, or if you are far away or you don't have the $25 that it costs to buy it online, you can download it as an e-book. And we're perfectly happy with that. And that's part of the Punctum books commitment to the creative Commons, to

making this kind of book available to anybody who has a computer or a cell phone, you know, so it's really accessible. And I have to say, the digital version is in color. So it it's not necessarily better, but it's a little different. And it's quite vibrant.

Ken
Is there any associated merch with the book? I mean can you buy let's say like a handkerchief with, cover or something on it?

Lizzie
Not yet.. We haven't. We used to at the performances, we had done some a little bit of merch, we had laundry bags that we were selling that said, every fold matters.

Ken
Oh, there you are.

Lizzie
They sold very well. And tote bags. But no, we haven't done anything for the book. We just hope that people will, you know. Yes, there's the open access, which is so great that punctum is committed to, you know, the electronic version, but also just to have the book because the book's design is very special.

Ken
So, yeah, I love the book. It's a beautiful book. It was beautifully bound and the pictures are really cool. I love the cover. The old style clothespins bring back a lot of memories. I can still see my mom hanging up close with those things on our clothesline cause like I said, we are in rural Texas so everybody had clotheslines and you would hang up your clothes and oh, they smell so good when you hang up clothes and bring them in.

Lizzie
and see so many sensory associations.It's so interesting with laundry. Yeah. Home about, you know, the work often mothers and women do. It's really interesting.

Lynne
I wanted to add one other little detail to the book that yes, it is available, but we made the film The Washing Society, and in the book we have a very cute, cool QR code so people can see the film easily with the book in either the electronic version or the three dimensional there version, there is that code that you can just open it up and watch the film.

Ken
Oh very cool. I didn't see that, but I saw it on your Vimeo. So in fact, let's have you each give your website and Instagram whatever else you want to talk about for your personal sites so people can engage with your other work.

Lizzie
I'm going to let you go first, Lynen, because you have a much stronger presence.

Lynne
But I'll go ahead. So I have a website. It's my name, lynnesachs.com. And pretty much all of my films are available through my website, but also available through Kanopy or through Icarus Films, or internationally through Documentary Alliance. And then I also do have a YouTube channel and the film that we spoke of, The Watching Society is there, as well as on Vimeo. So my films are pretty available. And also I wrote a book of poetry published by Tender Buttons Press, and that's out in the world too.

Lizzie
I'm not a big social media person, I have to admit. However, I'm performing in a couple things coming up in New York City. I'm going to be in a play in October with a company that I work with, the talking band. It's a play called Triplicity, and it's going to be at the Mabu Mines Theater. And I'm also doing another play that I co-wrote called Language of Dolls that's going to be at the Touchstone Theater in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, if any listeners or in the Allentown Bethlehem area March 5th-8th. And we'll probably have other shows in the New York area in the late spring. I am on something called New Play Exchange. It's a network. It's online newplayexchange.org where you can find more about me and some of my scripts.

Ken
So where's that theater in New York, the one you spoke about first?

Lizzie
The first. Oh, where it's going to be in October. It's called Mabu ma b o u. Mine's like salt mines theater. It's in the East Village in New York City.

Ken
Oh, cool.

Lizzie
Yeah. And the company that I'm working with, who has been doing original work for literally 50 years in New York City, they're called the talking band. Oh, and I've worked on and off with them for years. Yeah. So if you're in New York in October, it's called Triplicity, the play. But if you just look up the talking band, they have a website, you'll find information. It's great.

Lynne
Can I? I wanted to say one other thing, which is that I have a new film. Every contact leaves a trace. It's a feature length film that will be having its world premiere in November at the International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam, but I just found out a few days ago it will have its New York premiere at a festival. You probably know Ken called Prismatic Ground, which is an experimental film festival here in New York in the spring. So yeah, we're doing new things, but right now we're working really hard on this book and it's fun.

Lizzie
Yeah, well, also a couple of book events coming up for the book, which I'll just say we're kind of approaching them at almost like performances. So we've done one and it was a really interesting way to kind of introduce the book to people and engage with it in a different way, so that we have a few dates coming up for that too.

Ken
So, Lynne Sachs, you forgot one of the most important things ever, and it still impresses me every time I look you up on it is the Criterion Channel has several of your films?

Lynne
Well, I should say they did for three years, but they cycled off so that and that criterion. Yeah, but it was very nice while it lasted.

Ken
Yeah. I used to look them up quite often. I was like, well, I don't know if you get paid from this, but I'm going to keep playing them.

Lynne
Oh thank you.

Ken
But I would watch them every now and then. I'd tell people, hey, I know this person who's got stuff on the Criterion Channel. And they were like, oh, wow, that's really cool, Ken.

Lynne
That was fun.

Ken
Oh, yeah. So someday you'll have to tell me how you did that because man, I that's, you know, I love the Criterion Channel. I've had a subscription to that for at least 5 or 6 years. So yeah, I love it. So anyway, all right. Very cool. Thank you guys for coming on. I love it. I love the book. I appreciate the work. It took me five or more years worth of work. The associated film, the associated play. I just can't tell you how impressive the whole body of work is for me. And I was glad to hear about it.

Lizzie
Thank you so much, Ken. Really lovely to have a conversation with you. Really great. Thank.

Lynne
What a gift to experience our book through your eyes. Thank you for sure.

Ken
And thank you for joining us for this 11th episode of season five of the Experimental Film Podcast. Today. Our guests were experimental documentary filmmaker Lynne Sachs and playwright Lizzie Olesker.