



PHONG BUI INTERVIEW
FRAGMENTS OF PARADISE
LIFE STORIES

Phong Bui, Director, Brooklyn Rail
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Interviewed by Katie Davison
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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories Presents

Phong Bui

Director, Brooklyn Rail

00:00:07:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Okay, so first tell me who you are and what it is you do.

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PHONG BUI:

My name is Phong H Bui. I am the publisher and artistic director of the monthly journal called The Brooklyn Rail. Also the Rail editions, which is a small publishing press, and the Rail Kyoto Project, which is very ambitious curatorial project that takes on a certain kind of curatorial, you know, like project that nobody want to do. But that's what we do, and that's what I do. It's very hard to describe. When I'm constantly asked, "Who reads the Brooklyn Rail, Mr. Bui?" I always say the same thing. Those that read and



when people ask in order to support what we do, "Is there a specific demographic readership that you're trying to reach?" I say no. "And what is your mission statement?" I have none. Except it reflects the artist's arduous journey. So it's anti mission statement. That's a statement. Mission statement.

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KATIE DAVISON:

So tell me, how did you first learn about Jonas? And do you just say Jonas Minkus or Jonas Mekas for Jonas?

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PHONG BUI:

You know. It's. Swinging back and forth. It swings back and forth, and it doesn't matter, you know? I think that. He accepts that long ago. One thing about being immigrant is that when you first come up to this country, like any country, you try very hard to speak the perfect language of the code that you are migrating to. And then gradually, as you get older, everything is kept slowly. Your accent comes out and you don't care so much about grumbling. But you used to. No, but I think that's quite true to most of people. And Jonas is definitely one. If you listen to his early film. His English is very lyrical, very thoughtful, the way he spoke. And then gradually, when as he's become an older, it's sort of beginning to subside. And the poetry in him became more prominent. So it's interested and I noticed that about me too.

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KATIE DAVISON:

So when did you first learn a lot about Jonas?

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PHONG BUI:

Well, I was in college. Then it was called University of Florida, of the College of Art, which now called University the Arts. I studied with professor who have study with Stan Brakhage in Chicago or Institute maybe in early 70s. But having grown up in Vietnam, where cinema was a very serious vocation for most of my family member. So I grew up seeing films all my life, early years, mostly classic. French films like Jean Vigo L'Atalante, actually Zero de Conduite was one of my favorite film as a child growing up. So anarchy was already embedded in my heart. You know, so experiences Zero de Conduite, rebelling against that boarding school, that rigidity of schooling, you know. All of that and then just basically, having watched gradually, all the great classic that most people would watch and never forget, you know, where the love and the parodies a lot of [inaudible] a lot of Russian film actually, which is surprising, The Casket being one. But [inaudible] was very important film too. And yeah. So film have always been in my alchemy growing up. In fact, when I was young, the aspiration was to become a filmmaker. Didn't realize that the monastic temperament, being exposed to, you know, so many artists growing up on. So I thought maybe be an artist is a little bit more conducive to my temperament because, you know, you have to deal a lot of people. You just. All you need is a paintbrush in the canvas, and here you go. You know. That kind of solitude was enough, but it's not true. I. I learned to realize that I, I love working with people. So film is coming back. So having study film in college. I think it was my freshman year on so and discovered and soon after that Jonas was a great poet through a professor at the end of Stephen Berg, who was the editor of American Poetry Review. And I also love poetry.



Growing up, I came from a very intellectual family. Most members of family, both side, dad and mom were all teachers. You know. So that was always part of my upbringing. So learning about Jonas, both as a filmmaker and then the. Amazing poet and gradually, discovering that he did so many great things all the same time. You know, he he was a great editor, publisher of Film Culture magazine, which I was reading then I was reading a lot obsessively with Stan Brakhage, right in with P Adams Sidney. Definitely. Andrew Sarris, I love his writing. Occasionally you read Hollis Frampton, all the great advanced filmmakers who would contribute significantly in Film culture magazine. I think it was found very soon after when Jonas, moved to Manhattan. Must have been in 54. I think he came in 1949. So he spent the firsts several years in Williamsburg with his brother Adolfas. But I think Film Culture magazine, for me, was an incredible influence of how I began learning about avant-garde film, about how film could be poems. Films can be poems. That was a big deal to be able to see poets, which is the word that journalists owns, so admire and love and belong to. And then The Advocate. You know, community filmmakers, and they sort of come together. And Jonas was a huge part of making that happen. That firmament, you know, that beginning, what we know that now called then counterculture. But I don't think that's correct. Counterculture is just another label that those remarkable people sort of stuck with. You know, I remember as a poet, you reading at Saint Mark's Poetry Project at Saint Mark's. I remember must have been in 94 of. So I went to one reading and it was amazing. Right before me, literally sitting before me, was Dorie Ashton. The great art historian, great critic. Very influential critic whose book New York School Cultural Reckoning changed my life. You know, I remember in her chapter, the second chapter of the book called it's not just painting something like that where she articulated it's a whole



community that came together. Beautifully written about the Great Depression lead into the 50s, 60s in New York City. In any rate, Dorie was there. Next to Dorie was Allen Ginsberg. And then Jonas Mekas, you know. So I just like, I have to say a lot. You know. So there was a reception afterwards. You can meet people in those days, you know, that's a something very rare today. I don't for some reason you can't talk to famous people anymore. You know, I encourage a lot of my younger friends. Just be courageous and bold. If you have a long admiration, you have to let people know. It's very important. Anyway, I just went up and, and I say to all of them, wouldn't that be great? How lucky you are. You all kind of. You ought to. You belong to the same community. What is called counterculture. How how lucky you. You know. And, Jonas, look at me without missing a beat and say, "We're not counterculture fun. We are culture." You know what I mean? And that was it. I it stuck with me. So I realize it's a label is the problem. Took me a long time to realize that our culture loves to give a certain segment in our society. Certain individual, label. A identifiable label was easy to read them, that it's easy to reduce what they do to a certain kind of reductive activity that associate what they do. We're not one dimensional.

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KATIE DAVISON:

You were studying Jonas in school. Was he being taught in your college?

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PHONG BUI:

You know, there was film been shown, I remember. I don't know how long it worked, but certainly I saw lost, lost, lost, you know. I think we saw



fragments of his epic as I move forward. I see glimpses of beauty. But I think lost, lost, lost stuck with me a great deal. Particularly when he was filming the grass, you know. Like he was dancing around with his camera fluidly in space, so ecstatically happy he was in his element. I mean, that's a very important thing to recognize, Jonas. Because, you know, Jonas as a person is super shy. Sometimes painfully so especially when he's been caught in some kind of crowd. But he can get out of it, but as an artist, as a filmmaker, he's so free. You know, like a child. And that's super important to recognize Jonas's brilliance in a way, in a child. And Jonas is very huge, a huge inner child that would jump out and would defend his excitement, which I think is very important for an audience to recognize. For any human being who have some creative impulse or tendency to do something in life. And I think he's remarkable. He'd never censor that. You know. You remember when you were a child, any of you guys, when we were children, we'd get excited about something. Do we think about it? Negotiate? Should I do this? Do I not do that? Do you know? No. We jump on the chance. It's a beautiful impulse. It's incredible. Instinctual, primal formation. That you leap yourself into that unknown. And you. Even when you get hurt. You know and make you cry with joy. I think Jonas have that ability that I think is super rare among people I know. And he shared that with his friends. If you can retain and maintain the innocence of the child in you. Live is okay. Life is tolerable. You know, because everything heals when you are a child. And that's very important to have in your head. You know what I mean? Meeting Jonas. After that first encounter with Dory Aston, Allen Ginsberg at the Poetry Project. Later in 2000. I finally saw him again, this time with Robert Frank and, Raymond Abraham. And so we began to talk. And occasionally. I get a phone call from him, invited me to some breakfast, back. To some screen in that anthology film archives. I would



come if I could. I was traveling a great deal in those early years. But eventually, when Jonas moved to Greenpoint in 2003, in the fall of 2003. He called me up, and he literally looked. No more than five minutes drive, from where my home is in Greenpoint. So I would spend a lot of time with Jonas, maybe. Sometimes three nights a week. You know, I would come either for dinner and stay up to 2 or 3 in the morning, or after dinner, if I was busy attending some dinner in Manhattan, I would drive out and see Jonas, and we would stay up to 3 or 4 in the morning sometimes. It's a joy to see Jonas in those days.

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KATIE DAVISON:

So would you say you first Okay, we first became friends in the 2000s through Raymond. Raymond Abraham?

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PHONG BUI:

Yeah. Raymond Abraham The late raymond Abraham was a very brilliant, famous architect. I think he was so difficult and uncompromising as a person, as an architect. Hence he couldn't build too many buildings around the world because he got irritated by his client's request to change this, change that you need to make small alteration. And he wouldn't go for it. But in New York, we lucky to have. We have one, the Austrian cultural center on 53rd Street between Park and Madison. It's a great building and one of the great architectural landmark in New York City. So, yes, I admire Raymond. I also knew of him and his work associated with the Austrian action, as you know, absolutely. Automobile, Herman Nitsch, that whole gang. So. Yeah, I had my



dream and it was delighted, so delighted to have met, Jonas through him again. And we became close immediately. And in fact, Raymond used to have once every week or so, a huge dinner at his love on Bond Street where he was famous for always, roasting a piglet. You know about this big. But my my torso, good for ten people, I think, you know. And, he would argue with us. He was famous for getting aggressive occasionally about some ideas, intellectual idea with the philosophy of film, whatever. And he would just leave the party, and went to, you know, spend the night in a hotel, never come back until the next day. So Raymond is a character with the character and he was very close to the very one of his best, absolute best friends. I didn't come to America until 1980. That was. Beyond 19, you know, 70 years in it, you got to. Yeah, it got started around there. It was Raymond, design fire. It had been courthouse. Actually. I don't know what the I can tell, the story correctly, but when Jonas started Film Culture magazine in 54 or so, he thought it's going to be the greatest success. You know? And so he kept delaying paying the bill to a bunch of Franciscan monks who were printers in Brooklyn, somewhere not that far away from where he last lived in Fort Greene. So they took him to court because he couldn't pay the bill for three four issue something. They took him to court and the Courthouse is where Anthology Film Archives. Today is super. Charming, isn't it? No. But Raymond did a beautiful job in Greek, conceiving, turn it into anthology. You know, the theater upstairs, the basement downstairs, with the offices, the archive, the way that they were divided in their spatial structure, I thought was wonderful. He even create the essential cinema where the seat was blinded. You know, where you don't see the next person in the theater, so you have to look at the film right in front of you. You know. He was very intense. I think it lasted for a good six, seven years or so. And then it became very unpractical, impractical. So I think, you



know, it's not easy to get more, foot traffic and movie lovers to come and watch film under that condition. You know, sometimes people wanna take their day out, you know, they wouldn't mind to touch the hands of their friends or lovers. And I think that sort of eliminate all that possibility, possibility. So I can understand that. You know. But I thought it was great. It's a great idea. Maybe we'll do it again. Who knows?

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KATIE DAVISON:

So Jonas always had a camera in his hand. He had a kind of an excitement, you know, that everybody talks about. And I wonder if you could. I mean, do you feel that? I feel like you have that a little bit of that same excitement?

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PHONG BUI:

Well, I mean. Jonas, the camera to Jonas, it's like basketball to Michael Jordan. You know what I mean? When you see Michael Jordan play basketball. You feel that somehow. Or Jimi Hendrix playing the guitar for Christ's sake. You know, when you see Jimi Hendrix playing guitar? Jesus. It's like it's like the the, the thread of the guitar is just part of his body. Somehow is to throw hand is coordinated so naturally, so fluidly. And I think camera to Jonas is the same, you know? It just never occurred to me that he without the camera. And I think the very important thing to say about that. It's almost like Walt Whitman. Notion of democratic vistas. You know. Is that the kind of horizontal sweep where imminent? Democracy is treated equally. In other words, whether he's hanging out with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, spending some time with his friend George Maciunas or all those member of the fluxes,



or simply attending to. His children with the Oona, or Sebastian learning how to play the violin or the piano, you know? When they were in grade school, you know, super young, or following the cockroach. Just trying to get across the street on Broadway. He always had the similar joy and attention being paid to those moments. There's no hierarchy. There's no division between Yoko Ono, John Lennon with a cockroach. His children, his friends. You know, sometimes they are uneventful to some people that happen that caught his eyes. That doesn't mean that is slightly being treated less or more to Jonas' eye, to his sensibility. All that appear before his eyes in his life is part of that. He always talk about that glimpse of beauty in Paradise? That was it. It's really been playing out. Being caught in the moment. Do you know what I mean? Very important, philosophy of life, if I may say so. You know, when you think about the word static, the word static means beauty. It means proportion. Things that have the similar, I would say, elemental parts that come together, that give us pleasure. Something akin to beauty. Something akin to recognizing. Something remarkable. It's not a spectacle of life. It doesn't have to be sparked. It could be a very tiny, little, minute, quiet moment. Could be a flower bloom. Could be the sun glare in your eyes. You know. We have those moments. We recognize those moment, you know, but the world and the static is the opposite. When you amnesia. We you you have total amnesia. You are indifferent to things that happen to the world. In the world, I think esthetic to journalists every day. I don't know, like. All day long. I grew up in a family similar experience that we all share. My siblings and I, you know. They're very nice people. They all doctors and lawyers. So it's hard to say what exactly what Jonas Jonas was or who he became. You know. I don't know. I can't really describe. The difference because I don't think that I'm more special than my siblings. You know? I don't want to do that. I don't



think Jonas want to do that either. But I think it's just that whoever it is, there's a saying in Vietnamese... parents might bring forth the child. But God gave him or her the personality. It's hard to describe. I think [inaudible] with also experience is difficult to describe that, you know, I think it's just remarkable how certain epiphany that happen in life to all of us. You know, sometime it happened to us that we forget, or we, don't we? Not the present enough to catch. That glimpse, that, what James Joyce called the everyday epiphany of life. You know, that's why to being alert all the time. Super important. Because when it you know, it happened to you, you are there, ready to be taken by that experience to be bold and by that experience to be shocked by that, to be changed by the experience so I think in order to be subversive. We have to be incredibly mindful of being alert all the time and not to be governed by technology. It will take away your sense of esthetic experience all of that. All the thing that we loved so much about created life. You know, the interesting thing about it being subversive is so it's not so much about having agenda thing and so hard to figure it out. What is my agenda? What is my goal in life? What is the aspiration that would give me the clarity of my vocation so I can follow. So I can pursue wholeheartedly? No, I think the idea about subversion or anything of that nature is completely trust in the fact that you are walking into the unknown instead of being fearful, instead of being to worry about what would happen. You do it with pleasure, with fearlessness. You know, I remember once I had this amazing long discussion at dinnertime, super privilege with the great art historian Mark Shapiro, and his wife, Doctor Lillian Milgram. And I was describing my own predicament, you know, whether I'm going to be an art historian, go to Columbia on a full scholarship, maybe, or becoming an artist. I was so confused. And in any rate, so, you know, I think Maya told this beautiful story



that was told by Oscar Wilde. The story went that a murderer who was brought before the king to be pardoned. And the king being the king, he worried about his physical appearance. So he, you know, he should. He basically consult with those in his court and immediately wanted to seek across the land for the most famous magician to be brought to him to discuss about the possibility of creating. An artificial eye for him. So it took a while several months, but they found the magician that he wished to meet. And the magician were brought before the king. And that was it. Within a week or so, he were able to create. An artificial eye for the king. And it was perfect. No one, the whole court, the kingdom can tell the difference, you know. So he say this to the murderer, the whole story. And he say, if you can tell which out of my is real, I will pardon you. And without taking time to look and closely examining it. As soon as the king finishes saying that, he answer immediately. He responded right away. He say. Your right eye is the real eyes, Your Majesty. And the King was very impressed. You say you right, but how did you know? His response was I know because that one have a glint of mercy in it. You know, and I think I feel all the I've, I feel all the great people I've met in my life and I, I think we all feel that too. The people we admire in the past, you know. All the artists, all the poets, all these great people, John Keats have a very famous term, and I'm sure we all remember. It's called negative capability, the ability to live in uncertainty with tremendous doubt all of it. But there's no need to reach out any reason to justify it, you know, is remarkable. No one ever look at Van Gogh's painting and feel pity for him. No care about the hardship he went through. We look at the painting. You don't get shock. You kind of get so much vitality of life. Those color, those brushstroke, the way he treated everything so equally. You know, the wind is going to, you know, rush right through the wheat field. Multitude of store. You know, he treat



everything as equal terms. In fact, you can argue that. Van Gogh. Probably one of the first painter who was influenced by Asian philosophy, by Buddhism, by Hinduism. Confucius. You can even argue that, you know, which is true. There's no separation in Van Gogh's painting. And I think the same way, you can, feel and with Jonas feel every time you see it. You know, I think, there's that care, that love in this to everything possible. The appeal to his sensibility within the vicinity of his vision. Nothing else can. His vision. If they happen to be right in front of it. You know. There's people who know more about you than you do of yourself. You know what I mean? So I think I learned so much. From Jonas about myself. I mean, we all have friends like that in life, you know, where we see ourselves in the friend, right? So to me, whatever that amazing, remarkable ability of Jonas from Jonas, that he able to either tolerate or to mediate to some extent, it was part of the excitement, the love, the feeling as if he or he was super fortunate to be doing what he's doing. So is it a certain kind of privilege ness of feeling that way? And I think it's true when you love what you're doing, you have to be constantly telling yourself how privileged you are to have that access to that love, to that incredible, unconditional, uncensored, whatever else that require that incredible unity, that, that, that wholeness in you. I think that's what allow him or given him. That's in inner strength, which is remarkable in that strength is rare because he worked three jobs at a time. I believe was wanted to work. A paper mill and two other factory. Mostly labor. Intensive work. And he was able to do what he was doing writing poetry, started film culture magazine and before you know it, you know. And then then, you know, film maker corroborative, and then cinema text that eventually led to Anthology Film Archive. And then he was writing criticism for The Village for the same time. He was clearing constantly, meeting people, you know, I mean, the whole culture. That's



around in Jonas in the East Village. And Soho was so remarkable, that kind of titanic energy that he had I think. That's the secret of Jonas. He knew that. He was so privileged. Even though most people, when they don't understand whether Jonas was struggling with money, whether in college, if you guys always constantly struggle with funding, you know. But the remarkable thing is, I never met anybody who never cared about money like Jonas. I never cared much either. But meeting Jonas, it's it's make me even lesser which is not exactly a good thing, but it's ecstatic thing because it allows you to focus when you love. You know, he always talk about Angel. It doesn't matter what happen. It's going to be fine. I think that's a beautiful philosophy. I'm learning more and more about that, you know, because when you love what you do so much. It doesn't matter, does it? It doesn't matter. You read Van Gogh's letter to his brothers. You know it doesn't matter. You will never feel that worry ness. When you look at his painting, you don't feel that either. When you read Rimbaud's poems poetry

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KATIE DAVISON:

You were talking about this, and by the end of it, you and Raymond both have. But you kind of. You were jealous of the way that Jonas was able to handle balancing all of these other things. Can you tell me about that?

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PHONG BUI:

I mean. I think he also had Jonas had a new ability. I wouldn't call it stoicness, you know? But he had an incredible rare talent to be able to deal the most difficult person out in the world. I'm learning from him. I used to have



incredible short temper when I confront with difficult people. You know but I observed jonas again, I think that wisdom. That incredible. Observe. And. Power, so to speak. It's like the the perception that, that, and deeply in doubt in him and it's come to fruition, that he's able to see people as a duality. You know, there's people who are incredible artists, amazing, great artists. And that great artist is not quite in tune with the person. Not many. Not many of us. I would say many of us are not as lucky. You know there are, there are two posts and there's two people in us here. You know, sometimes they don't agree. You know, you can argue easily that Jackson Pollock. The drum kill. Jackson Pollock, the painter, or same thing with Jean-Michel Basquiat, you know, I think I saw him, like, literally three weeks before his death at Francesco and Alba clement is home, you know, so there was that incredible division. The pool is so strong. I think he knew he was going to go, you know. And I think that the same applied to a lot of people. That duality was so strong they don't get unify, you know. It's like, the internal biblical episode in Cain and Abel or Remus and Robles, you know, one had to kill the other. It's kind of intense. I think we all have it to some extent. It's just in Jonas's case. He recognized that in people. You recognize that Jack Smith, the filmmaker is so beautiful, such angelic, orders anarchists in the best sense of the word. Whereas Jack, the person is very primadonna, very demanding, you know, and a lot of people don't didn't want to deal with him. Except for Jonas. And Jonas was able to see that in everybody. If he see the artist in you, that was enough for him, the poet in you, that was enough for him. So it's remarkable because. Something I learned from him, you know, because I'm a puppet, so I have to do the same. If I were to do what I do best, I have to be able to learn and see that duality in people. You know, sometimes I make my observation, if they happen to be young, I feel like in a little bit, you know, I'm a senior



now. I can give you some wisdom, you know, but most of the time, no, I just learn how to mediate Jonas and I. We would talk about the difficulties that we have to overcome. You know, I explain the data at the paper over three years ago where the rail couldn't be the rail. The force upon was sort of breathing down on my neck, and I was being told what to do, or at least no longer the presiding publisher, you know. And I remember I called Jonas and he said, oh, yeah, that happened to me a few times in my life. You know, and he always find a way to comfort me. He said, from, there's nothing worse than being labor cab. And that was it. That was, that that sort of pulled me back together, which is true. How lucky we are. You don't, you know, deal with these people, you know? Okay? You deal with it. It's no big deal. Let's deal with it. You know, it's not in labor camp whether people beat you up or nothing, you know? You have no freedom. Do you think that the two during that period was different than, like you said earlier? You can't approach celebrities now. It seemed like there was a lot of cross-pollination of ideas and artists hanging out like it was a lie. Why do you think the 50s. Right. That was. What? Henry Louis Cole, even before the US entered the second war. He predicted it already when he wrote in an editorial, may have been in 39 or is it 41? We can look at the date, but he called the American Century. Already predicted. Once the US enter the the ally trying to fight against Nazi Germany. He knew the American or the US will be succeeding British empire. So the 50 was incredibly utopian in some extent. You know this. All of a sudden, America became a big nation. You know. Martial law. Trying to plan all kind of military base in order to protect the empire. So it's very strange. Why the New York school? We're talking about painting or art. Then Dorothy. Miller, the very, esteemed curator at MoMA, create this amazing show, where American art was being shown abroad. It went to all the major city in Europe, from Rome,



Paris, London, Warsaw and elsewhere, to promote the freedom of American culture. You have the. Kooning. Rothko, you know, Philip Guston. You know Pollock and Clyfford Still and others. But at home. It's being sensor. How could you? Represents such ugliness and anarchy of our culture. Nora McCarthy. So it's a it's always been that. Perpetual. Abroad. It represents something else at home. It's incredible. The opposite. Up. That's something else, you know? So I think in a way. The 50 wa very interesting decade in American history. And beginning. And then followed the decade after, you know, American public is super strange. To an immigrant like me. I can't help but. Growing up as a child in Vietnam, I saw cowboy movies, like, you know, the rest of us did. You know, it's pretty intense when you think about two cowboys trying to shoot each other. Who's going to win? Who's going to die? Who's going to be alive? The same apply to the extremity of American politics. It's like a pendulum swing. If it swings too far to the left. It goes to the right. You go too far to the right. Go back to the left. I mean, it's always like that. You know, it's so intense. All I'm saying is that the decay of the sick, the rebel, against the decay of the 50s. So everything opened up. You know, the civil rights started in 1960. And then eventually you get both to the anti-war and Vietnam culminate in 68. Obviously, it's a big deal because that's when the Tet Offensive happened. And then the, you know, the woman Liberation came out from it, too. So you got three major social unrest came together. It collided. It hit. It gave amazing flames to national politic attention and worldwide attention and I think that was super important for everyone else involved. The time in particular when you belong to the culture sector, because after all, is is created as a document or whatever the embodiment reflected what's happened in our socio political lives, you know? So I believe that that case, particularly the late you know, the late 60 was so exciting for



people, you know, over the world. They saw pictures in matches printed in newspaper, magazine, periodical, television. Everywhere, everywhere. Everyone saw it. Even as a kid growing up, I saw it. You know, just like my family. You remember. You would see, a Jewish gay poet like Allen Ginsberg holding hands with a gay African American novelist like James Baldwin. You know, occasionally you see Jane Fonda or Marlon Brando. But you definitely see a lot of New York, all the American so-called progressive intellectual left, walking with them with black and white. College students protested. Whether it's for civil rights or the war in Vietnam or a woman liberation movement, it's all together.

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KATIE DAVISON:

Well, I want to ask you a little bit about your background, because I think that's such an interesting connection that you and Jonas both share. You know, it's so similar. And I'd love to just hear a little bit of your, your story and how the. If you and Jonas talked about that together and connected in a way, as exiles, or if you thought of if you thought of yourself as an.

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PHONG BUI:

I don't think Jonas and I had that special. I think New York or, some other city in the US, a few people like us, you know, immigrants are not those who come here and exploit the wealth of the country. When my parents who were middle upper class, we were in labor camp in Vietnam after the Communists took over the South. 1975 no more, no less. Different than what Jonas and Adolfas was when, or were confined in forced labor in, in Germany. You know,



I think it's not that unique really, when you think about it. You know, but immigrants, like my parents, my family came to Bensalem, which is the poorer part of Berks County. You know. We immediately create a business of cleaning wealthy people's homes in the suburbs, and fancy synagogues. You know. That's what we did for a long time and to support all the children didn't want to go to school and all became lawyers and doctors, you know. And here I am. I'm publisher of a very popular monthly journal. 2 million readership online every month. And it's for free. You know, I'm eager to get back what I got from New York for meeting people like Jonas. I think that, you know. When you caught in between space, it's very, very intense because you centrally don't have any home, a home, you know, until you meet other people like yourself, and that's your comrades. That's your friends. You know. And you always been forever caught in that in-between space you never feel comfortable, you know, so you can some point in your life, you have to choose to ignore the pain, the discomfort, and you assimilate into the culture, which is interesting about immigrants, including my siblings. You know, they love the American dream. They chose to follow the American dream, work hard, get a good job, and have a beautiful suburban house, you know, raise children, and he's frankly becoming the legitimate American.

00:49:42:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Do you think that that's what informs that sense of fearlessness that you both share?

00:49:47:00

PHONG BUI:



Yeah. Because how, how I mean, are we able to do what we do? We don't not put in jail. I mean, even when Jonas was being put in jail for the weekend when he screened flaming creature. You know. It's not like. It's not like, life threatening. It's not imminent, you know? All right. He went to court. Supreme court, as you know, because, not just. Flaming Creature, but that was, let, you know more. And that was the only film ever made, and I cause I don't think they would challenge Jean Genet at the time, because he was considered to be a Nobel Prize winner in literature that year. World famous. Right. Remarkable. Being a thief. And then became the great poet and philosopher of France. Whole subject is a big biography by John Paul Sock. It's a beautiful biography. I read it, you know, the other. Birds, and it was brought by the hero painter. It was held a painter who sort of distracted. The security guard at the airport. It was him who helped it. Really? My country is culture. Can you. What did that mean to Jonas? When you immigrant, you, you appreciate a lot of things, right? Especially. I think that I wouldn't speak for my, siblings or those I know. I could only speak from my friends for me and people who I knew were my friends, or people who I admire so much. You know, Willem de Kooning, the great New York school painter, part of the, you know, abstract expressionist painters, Dutch born. I think he came to America, maybe the late 20, 28, 29. I think it was born 1904. So he's a little bit older than Jonas, you know, but he say something very funny. He say for milk to become yogurt, it needs culture. I think that's very powerful thing to say. So like him, he was also excited to be in New York. Lip superpower. Not until I believe his first show. As Sydney Channels Gallery, you know, that was the second show. That was 1953, which is the famous woman series. His first show was as a gallery name, 1948 Charles. Egan. G, e, g. And he was 42 years old. Nothing sold. Same thing in Sydney, channel 53. Nothing. So he just kept



painting houses. You know. But that's I think. That the condition apply similarly to Jonas, you know, happy making the painting happy making films. It didn't matter with the thing that so or not, you know, and culture is exactly the condition that Jonas felt at home. And it perpetual. It's a perpetual condition. It's not like. You go to work, you have a job, and then 9 to 5, which is what the workday required. You go home. You have your dinner, and then you do everything else. You with it? You watch TV, you go out to eat wherever the day ends. That's your life. It's not true. When you involve in culture. You know, Hannah Arendt spoke beautifully in her book. Human Condition. Where she talked about the difference between work and labor. We'll have a beginning and have an end, where labor is constant. No one pays a poet to write a poem. No one paid the painter to make his or her paintings. If they are real, they will do it as to the condition of their life. The calling. You know. So going back to the same idea of culture. I think that I believe that we live in the time when artists voice is so important right now. Poets. Writer. Artist. Painter. Orbit dancer. Musician. I think that we need to realize that we can't afford to be insular in the academic environment. We can't be reduced to the academy, whatever the academy means. We need to talk to everyone across various community. In the time of Jonas. We talk about that. We talk about how James Baldwin was friends with Allen Ginsberg, with everybody. Warhol was friends with Bob Dylan, with Joan baez. You know. You see everybody in together struggle together. And, you know, now we are struggling to understand what that means because experimental film culture now have a niche, a little hub, so they can come there because they will welcome student who went to graduate school or even PhD, you know, so they go there, and welcome hands. Everybody became specialists, you know. That's a disaster. So that's what I'm saying. Higher education became a business to foster this



special specialization, discipline, and you get so incredibly seduced by that specialized niche, and you forget that a music experience of music can change you, or reading a poetry book of poetry, and change you. And all of that. Cross-pollination is no longer crossing. It's no longer cross pollinated. And I think that happened pretty much, my I would say, the late 70s. But the 80 was over. You know I what I can in New York, I was lucky because I reach out to people like Jonas, Allen Ginsberg or my Shapiro or the older generation. Because I realize they are fleeting one by one. I remember once writing for Auto America on journeys, actually, where I recounted and we counted the experience of my family, being in Bucks County when we was first brought to the big, the small and in, in, in, in the county Woodhaven Mall, where my parents, I remember being so horrified by. My parents, jaw dropped, when they saw this elderly couple in their early 70s, where the man was dressed in with baseball cap and a t-shirt and shorts and sneakers, and same thing with the the his wife. You know. I think it'll shock them, because in my culture, you can't wait until you get old. So that's where, and you, with your wisdom, your, you know, you being, highly beloved for your wisdom. Because we all our parents, I mean, all my family, my siblings. We had to fight with all the family member, my cousin in order to to to get in, almost like immigration. We can't wait till our parents, our grandparents come and visit us. Oh, we get invited to visit them, because that's where the wisdom comes from. I think that by the late 60 or so, when the war ended again in 75, I think that something changed drastically in that regard. I think the idea of sending the elder to consignment in the elderly home center, it's a way to negate the wisdom there have been. Oh, you no longer useful to society. So of course, thinking back now, looking at these couple who wanted to be looking youthful because they were not comfortable confronting their mortality, their wisdom. They're



not being encouraged. So how would you expect the grandchildren to receive the wisdom from them when they've been disregarded, neglected, poor ways create this horrible space in between, right. I mean, there's something that your grandparent can tell you that your parents cannot. I was mindful of that. I was mindful when I came to New York. I was mindful when I met ma Shapiro,, for example, which was in 1986, very early. You know. I knew immediately that these are people who I need to meet before they pass away. You know, you got to meet these people, you know, because you want to hear their stories, they, struggle, and that was it. That was like in the New York, right? In New York is amazing. You can meet people. You know, I remember on the bench in Washington Square in 19, this the fall of 96. No. 95 when I came. I recognized Andrei Tarkovsky smoking a cigarette. He was there at NYU giving a talk, after Harvard. You know. Somewhere and about to go back to Tuscany, where he was gonna finish his book. Sculpting in Time, you know, which he sent me. Amazing. You can meet people those days.

01:01:11:00

KATIE DAVISON:

I want to talk about it. 2003, when you were hanging out with Jonas a lot in Greenpoint. Because there's a lot of diaries during that time where he's clearly going through something. He's just gone through this divorce. He sold the Soho apartment. You know, he he was in pain. Pain? Yes. You know, and I just wonder if you could tell me about that time.

01:01:35:00

PHONG BUI:



Yeah, I think that I was aware of it. I was aware that. He was very deeply unhappy. I was aware that he needed a friend. I was aware that. He. So me. As he himself. When he was my age, at my age, you know. And. And my friendship with Jonas in those years was mutual comfort to him as much as to me. Because, you know, I'm trying to understand what I'm doing. I had terrible ambivalent. What I was doing with the is a real worth. Investing in my. Whole life. Am I able to deal with difficult personalities? You know? Because I was offering to teach in very fancy colleges and universities, you know. Just like the way he was. Offering those similar opportunities. So it was mutual. I was eager to learn everything I could from Jonas. And similarly, he he he needed the comfort. Of my company. Because I was out there doing different things and meeting people, and so so at that point in his life, he was more invested in what he can do, could do, or needed to do. To the tail end of his life. So he's no longer going to work every day at anthology anymore. So he's focused on his work. And I think that was important to Jonas. And my friendship gave him that assurance so to speak. Because we spoke a lot of different things, you know. We talk about poetry, we talk about philosophy. Especially when just me and him, you know. Sometime. It was so intense that I think those conversations. I wish now, looking back, he would have I wish he who would have film it, you know. But I know that he didn't want to be close to personal, you know, so at time, late at night, just me and him talking about life, about his struggle with the family, you know. Going through the divorce and about anthology film archives, about all the things I think that is it was very important to Jonas when I curate the first show that recognize him as an artist. That was at MoMA PS1, 2007, I think the Summer. And it was very easy was happened like in two weeks. Really. I came and. We were talking about. Because, you know, Alana has invited me. I got a phone call from Alana one



day and she say. Phong. I love to have a lunch with you. Is it possible? And I said, sure. So we have lunch the next day. And she she said to me. Would you consider. I know you good friend with Jonas Mekas and would you consider doing this show with, of his work. And I say, when is when is. I don't understand why, why can't you do it? You have the whole step. You yourself can do the ladder. You are legend, you know. And you've been around longer than I have. And she basically said, no, he doesn't like me. Jonas at that point was not looking for attention, you know. He still trying to do his work and have all the thing is mine. But I said, sure, sure, I do it. And what what is the timeline here? You say, can you do it in two weeks? Could. Because I have an opportunity and all of my board member and just bear is pressuring me. So I came on night. That night I came and talked to Jonas about it, you know? Let's just do it, Jonas. You know, and I remember there was an envelope. Somebody right on the envelope. The beauty of friends been together, and I said, that's the title of the show, Jonas. That. Just do that, but just trying to see what. We can fit. That space. And that was it is what we decided to do. It was just quartet. That was a theme for things coming together for monitor, for a group of for, you know, building up the cute installation on the wall of Portrait of Friends, 40 of them, which is Sarah Michael Snow, psychic about. All of it, you know, all these amazing people. And then there was screen monitors, screen. 40 of them go across, and then there's a stack of four monitor. Each of the sets of building wall falling down, which beautiful show. So that was beginning. I think that was a big deal for Jonas. Because it was it was I think it's comforted him that I was able to do so fast. You know, and he trusted me so we did it. So it's opened up all the perception, how people now understand that Jonas is a great artist, not just the Godfather that took everyone else's life and work, which what he did for so long. He always put everybody above him. With the



Jack Smith. With the Bob Rubin. You name it, endless. Of all the great filmmaker, you know. And that's what he did. That's what the Anthology Film Archive was there. That's what the filmmaker was created for. He's literally singlehandedly create a home, a platform. From which all the friends were able to express themselves. That's a big deal. To express yourself. To express myself. Ourselves. That's a big, huge deal. When you able to provide that opportunity for your friend, your fellow colleagues. In the community, various community. I. I think it's a huge, huge accomplishment profile, one profile accomplishment. And that's what Jonas did but the world doesn't know how great he is. Not yet.

01:08:54:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Tell me. You said he was a visionary, but you also defined visionary. What do you mean? Can you tell me?

01:09:01:00

PHONG BUI:

Well, I mean, when you're a visionary, like I say, you are completely, submerge, immerse quite comfortably. In that term that John could describe naked capability. You know. I think great artists are very comfortable in that space. You know what? My friend. The great anarchist writer Hocking Bay. That's his pen name. His real name is Peter limbo. Wilson. He wrote a very famous book in 1992. It's called Taz. T a z. Mean temporary autonomous zone. How do you activate a space in between things? Before I'd get the archetypes, mechanize and whatnot. That in-between space. It's a glimpse. You have to catch it. You know, it's not easy to catch that, Glenn. It comes and



it goes, right? It's a very beautiful thing to conceive. It's like a certain condition or the time of the day, where a dog can become a wolf, and that's the beauty of it. You know, you become something now. It's a metamorphosis, you know. And I think that Jonas knew that he very comfortable in that. He feel rather less in that condition. It doesn't matter how hot life gets. You know, even in that light years when he's in humans, why was parting ways? You know, he recreated his new journeys. To me 365 Days Project is one of the most ambitious undertaking in modern cinema. Not on film in any artform, really, for that matter. It's huge. It's modum monumental. It's like as great as Wall Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Is that it's that monumental. And I think that. We will slowly discover. And how great, how powerful an artist. Jono. We'll be. Well, I think that, like any great artist. Right. Any great artist, you see past and present as one timeless condition. I mean, I don't think that any great artists would feel that there is a division. Of that Pacific time where you could only be capture, and it's certain space and time. I don't think that's quite true. I think that as an artist of your own time, you can't help but reflect of what. You do into the social surrounding, socially or politically or whatever else, culturally, obviously. But at the same time, you are the conduit up that historicism when before you should be also the means of reawaken your own excitement or spirit. You know, so you you take everything in, and then, hopefully all of it will become, some form of pictorial synthesis that will come out of you, you know. So that's what is remarkable about Jonas is that in 365 days project, he was falling in love with a young artist. I think, you know, I think it was sort of similar to the way that Pittracke was in similar condition with Laura on. So the French lady who was married to the ancestor of Marquis de Sade. It was unrequited love. No more. No less than Dante would be a threat. Remember. None of those women knew that the trucker or Dante



was in love with them. But they immortalized their love for this woman in their poetry with Petrarche as K with 365 sonnet it written in that period. You know, 14th century long ago. My point is, Jonas got excited about Petrarcha 365 days. Took this for, you know, 265 songs, and he read them, and then he decided. I'm going to make 365 short movies every day in that year. So history, always alive is never dead. For some of us, I don't think just the past. The past is the condition of any great artist. Would. I would say reach out, and when you reach out into the void, you get something. That's what history is for you, right? I mean, of course he's a poet. He had my Petrarche, or Dante Rambo. I mean, of course. It will be good to reach out to Rambo. Rambo only wrote poetry for two and a half years, you know? I think it's a matter of. A way to create a project, not to be distracted. But to be ambitious about it. That's a very important thing to talk about. 365 project. Because now he doesn't have the similar commitment to run anthology. He already passed on the responsibility. I think he wanted to focus the last years on his work, and never before you have encounter an older artist with that incredible new energy, new discover energy. So the pain create the titanic energy. That's another thing that I learned about Jonas. You know, anger is important. Disappointing. Powerful tragedy in life. Also, energy can be an energy, you know, depend how you turn that into the energy, right? You know, I think life and death is really separate by strand of hair, and so is truth and false, when you think of it. So that's why it's tedious to point out those be these, you know, in our world. That's why I can't stand this. You know, this American, you know, extremity, you know. Right and left. Wrong and and right and. Rich and poor. And everything is so extreme in or. You don't need to go there. Art is never about that. Incredible. Just mental condition to begin with, you know? But I think in Jonas' case. It was super, said he was very sad about, you know,



parting way with, you know, Hollis, his wife, for 30 something years, maybe even more. So you can imagine, the creation of 365 days project was, and, on his own, unrequited love with this younger artists as much, and it is pouring way with his wife. But what came out from the. Two is the 365 day project, which is about celebration of life for that one year. So is that technically ambitious? So I wouldn't put it in that context of being saddened and therefore, that is reflection of that not reinvesting. That is really a glimpse of what children's work is about it just like it's his, one of his greatest creation of the late years. You know, when you think about the origin, the late years, it's about that, that that incredible last breath of monumentality. Trying to reach some form of the uncatchable. You know, like. The way we see late Titian, late Matisse, late Picasso. You know, any late years, it's about like, not so much that it's about fearful of death, but it's a struggle against death. Just like the way that we remember in college, take film class. I'm sure you all seen it. Remember? Like Bergman seven seal. Remember when the knight is trying to play chess with death in order to prolong the time in as long he could? So that young couple can cross into life remember that. So it's live is, after all, a postponement of death. And I think Jonas knew that it was fleeting so he's not going to be passive and live laid back, and, you know, let life's sorrow and any all the human condition of feeling, prevent him from racing against death. And in order to do that he need to create the monumental effort of his artistic of his whole entire life. I don't think Jonas' capable of doing that, have he not been an artist all along? So that's a thing where ever come the end is a it's a synthesis. It's a final summation of a life love. You know, it's like. Charlie Parker was often asked by some New York Times journalist before, you know, he died. And he was asked, can you defer jazz in one sentence? He says, easy. You don't live it. It won't come out. Your whole. You know. So the life have



lived Jonas said live that life. So Trina Signify is a really great masterpiece.
Have a great.

01:19:49:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Artist. I mean, is there an easy way to discuss why? You know, is it what he was capturing, or is it the amount that he was capturing, like what was unique?

01:19:59:00

PHONG BUI:

Well, for one thing, when we think about technology today. About selfie. Instagram, social media, we talk about even in the 80s. People began to make home video. You know, all the thing that you see on television to to see in media consumption and whatnot. I mean, Jonas invented diaristic cinema. He invented this everyday practice, where he can film everything a day, every day. He did that before anything else? Before Warhol idea of the Campbell's soup. Need to be repeated. Or Marilyn Monroe from birth to be seen several times, you know. Like the way we walk to the supermarket. Oh, my God, this product's everywhere. Hello. What to choose, you know. No, I don't think that's quite adequate to describe Jonas' invention. Creative invention? You know, his Democratic equivalent of Democratic voters is very, very removed from the commercialization of art. That's different altogether. It's different altogether. You know. It's just so profoundly different when your attention is to meet a certain criteria of reward. Reward being rewarded by certain thing.

01:21:34:00



KATIE DAVISON:

You mean that's like that inner necessity like that. It's driven by a need that comes from within you.

01:21:41:00

PHONG BUI:

Well, yeah. I mean. That's part of it. That's part of it. And the other part is you don't pay attention to the other thing. Why you just don't pay attention to it. Jonas was never jealous of his friend success or anyone else's Yoko Ono. Or you know. He was never be in, move by their success. He see them as his friends. Net never jealous ever. I don't think even ask for support from these people either. You know. Something that I'm learning. You know. Learning because you have to ask occasionally. That ass is very tricky. I don't think he liked it. Do I like it? I'm learning to accept it, which is different. I think he did that too, you know. He accepted it. I'm a little bit less than jonas. In fact, I'm not shy at all. I. I grow and metamorphosis myself into the role where I am now. I used to be less talkative. You know, and it's interesting. I think Jonas used to be much more talkative. And then gradually, he grew older. He became more shy, you know. So I'm reverse. I'm playing the reverse role. I remember. Like run into. John Updike. You know, the famous novelist who wrote criticism occasionally for New York Review of Books or New Republic. I think it was for The New Republic that he wrote. Was it in 1997? Was 94, 97? I think it might be 90. For the perspective on of Warhol at MoMA, and his criticism of Warhol was fast art for busy people. Essentially, you know criticized Warhol for that, for that ambition and, I don't remember. It must have been in 98 that I met him at the Century Club, being introduced through the great legendary publisher, my late friend George Priscilla. I remember



talking to him about Warhol, and I say, you know, I. I read your review of the Warhol retrospective at MoMA. I enjoyed reading it, but you did not mention whatsoever Warhol as a filmmaker. So you say? What did you mean? Well. In his film is super the opposite of the fast art that you describe in. It's super slow. It's the opposite. Some of them go like six plus hours long, like Empire of Sleep. Hello. So he didn't see didn't bother seeing it. And I don't think Warhol would have understood that legitimacy. The mobilized slowness. Had him not met and encouraged by Jonas. What about Jonas? Encouraged him to be a film maker. The world would go to his laugh all the time. I don't think Warhol would have been a film maker without being around Jonas. So we understood that we have been. Whoho is very incredible, Machiavellian, super intelligent artist. Always thinking, you know, laterally, you know, in multitude of ways to make sure he covered the, cover things. You know, nothing is, being neglected and overlooked. So that's what the factory is about, really. You want to make sure that people come and do what they need to. Do, he observed. That's his genius, right? But I don't think that's the case with Jonas, you know? Jonas doesn't have the same ambition. He doesn't want to take over the world. He doesn't really want to be that famous. When you think about it. You know. He's not interested in that culture, although. He know them. He know many of his friends are very famous people. But as you know, they come to his house. And then they feel super at home. They they reminded this is what? What we do. This is this is what. The community meant to be doing, you know, and I feel that Jonas provided that. Culture without making it explicitly, overtly available. It not yet to be available, and you see that more in his film. It's not about documenting the time. It's not just archiving. That's what he does, obviously. But it's going to be more than that. It's it's the essence. The spirit of time that without being overtly explicit, and



available because he's a poet. The poet in Jonas is what kept the film maker and Jonas the way it was and will be. And that's a beauty of great art, too. It's not always out there readily available for everybody, for the public consumption. But you know. And I think that we have yet to see what Jonas is capable of, and I think that's the difference between what Jonas, beyond his community is far different than what he'll build in his own community. A lot of people who went to the factory had turned out to be very damaging individuals. Many have taken their lives and odds and whatnot. You couldn't say that about Jonas community. They still making their own quiet films. Paul. Short poems, you know. Lit the light quietly, you know. And I think that's a that's a very profound thing to do. That support that community. You know, not always obsessed with fame and what popular culture consume and desire. No. I think it's important to speak for exactly those who wanted to be quiet, and make their tiny film, write their small poem and read to feel friend of theirs, you know. Not always like get invited in the big theatrical plays or state of motor to an audience that gets you applause, you know? So that's what I mean. I think that's profound thing to do in life.

01:28:58:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Do you have like a favorite Jonas story? Like a something that that you would share, like in it some wonderful moment that you need to have together with your friendship.

01:29:10:00

PHONG BUI:



Is so, so endless, you know? But I think I love making him laugh. So I love to tell him joke because he loves it. He love my crazy joke, you know? I think for immigrant, it's also it's very special because you learn culture through jokes. You know what I mean? For example, what do you get when you cross an atheist and dyslexic? Somebody who doesn't believe in dog. I'll tell you a great deal. Right? What about this? What do you get when. You cross an atheist, dyslexic, and insomniac? So somebody who stay up all night long thinking whether there is a dog. So you understand joke and humor. It's allowed you to understand the culture a little bit deeper than otherwise. Do you know what I mean? So, jokes, it was very important to me. And the Jonas loved it. When I tell any jokes that I learn with a sometimes long, sometimes short, doesn't matter. I never forgot the joke that ever told to me. Ever. You want to hear the latest one?

01:30:30:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Okay.

01:30:31:00

PHONG BUI:

What do you get when you cross a p*nis and a dictator? Oh sh*t, I throw it away? No. It's supposed to be like a p*nis and a potato dictator. It's pretty good, right? My my little, my friend's son told me one just the other night. Why does the spider spend so much time in front of his laptop? I say why? And his response was he's looking for his website. I loved it. Jonas would love joke like that. You know. Because he doesn't have time to pay attention. Things like that. And I think that also for me to tell the joke was a way to offer



in him what I learned. The ladies. It doesn't matter what that means, you know. He loved it. So that's one of the the joy that I always felt if I could make him laugh. The other joy, is really to be there when he needed me. You know. Sometimes the party will be traveling and, you know, he's just like Phong, let's get together for a drink. And I know it's more than a drink. It's always going to be dinner, so I always follow up and take him out for dinner. At time I organized then at home, where he can either reunite in some of his old friends, or meeting new friends. So I love hosting dinner at my home, and he loved it. He always come and very happy to be there. And you know, during work till 2 or 3 in the morning sometime, you know. So I love giving him the equivalent what he once experienced in his community. Because I'm kind of building my own community so he can relate, you know, because he see some of his friends of his generation and younger people. So I think that gave him profound joy, that I'm able to bridge the older and the younger generation. Because it's fleeting, you know? In the last two decades, very few people do what I'm doing. And that's going on, so give me joy, because I'm doing the impossible, right? Like the impossible, you know. How would you turned out to be the dean of a fancy art school somewhere? And doing this. So in some ways, you know, we were very powerful friends. You know, I admired everything that he did. I definitely would very much committed, interested to see that he will be fully appreciated for what he created for others, for our culture. Really, it goes beyond cinema.

01:33:32:00

KATIE DAVISON:

Can you tell me about the end of his life? What was happening when he got sick? Did you know he was sick?

01:33:38:00

PHONG BUI:

Well, I saw him, few days before he passed away in the hospital, and at home, when he went home. He died with incredible serenity. In fact, he. As Sebastian. To be sure that he'll be up when he die, because that's when the spirit leaves the body. It's easier for it to to leave the body rather than laid horizontally. You know, he knew. He knew. No. It was super wet till the last minute, you know. But you know what I mean. When you live a life that is so full feel. You ready to pass on the button? He was very happy. I mean, I spoke to him, before he lost consciousness, a few days before his passing. He said that. You know, I see you soon. And I know what that meant, you know? Yeah, I think he was. He's ready to go. I think he was rather pleased that I told him I will work hard to be sure that Anthology Film Archive will be in good hands, you know. So that's my promise to Jonas. But I have other things to work on, which is his work. I don't think we know how great Jonas. Is not as an artist, you know? So I think sometimes we get too caught up in our ideas about a certain orders and you know, certain I don't know, tendency in what is considered great art. You know. But often the we can be blinded. You know. Often we can be distracted. You have to get out of the establishment consumption. You have to step away from the mainstream culture to to see other things, you know? And my, my commitment is not in the mainstream culture, although I have a few hands in it. It's not the mainstream that I'm interested, you know. Not at all. All the while, the real shouldn't be free. Right. But it may put a price tag on it and spoon feed people. That's a most easy way to make money. Well, I mean. He's told that he saw what happened. The seduction is too great, so he felt I don't need, I don't feel the need to do so as



much, although in my own way I do. But I think for Jonas, he just needed to do it for his friends. So they feel like you have your own legitimacy in the community in which you should feel entitlement to be completely free in what you're doing. It's true that it it's have its own value. You know, I think he need to say that about the other man. God, you know. Just like the way that poet two needed some form of legitimacy. Someone who would speak for their behalf. You know. I think he needed to do that. He needed to, he felt the need to do so. You know, because sometimes, as you guys know, sometimes people forget. They forget where they came from. They forget also. And. You know, you become successful and you completely forgot to support the very concept aspiration that brought you there in the first place. In fact, most people kind of cover it up a bit. You know. And I think he needed to to voice that's legitimacy for those who not ended up being. In Hollywood. They wouldn't survive in Hollywood or they don't know how to compromise. And there's a place for you.

01:38:00:00

KATIE DAVISON:

You read the 100 Year Manifesto the other night I cried. I mean, I've heard Jonas. I saw Jonas read it to you when he wrote it. But then when you read it, I don't know something about the reading. It just. It touched me. Like what? Why did you find that manifesto so important?

01:38:19:00

PHONG BUI:

Because, you know, it brings down to the the basic necessity. You know, I think, like I say earlier, about how many times we have confronted



experience. In Bangkok in a museum. How many time we have encounter a work of art with the. It's the late Nick Angelo, for example. You know, the last Judgment in the Vatican, in the Vatican. Is so moving. You know. The late Michelangelo. I mean, Jesus. It's like the slaves in the Accademia in Florence. These slave trying to break out that marble. It's unfinished, you know. I mean, you realize it's Michelangelo himself, the great artist struggling to overcome his own masterful skill. You know, art is hot, is really intensely trying to fight to be alive. So I think all the great orders have similar desire when I die I hope wherever I do invest in my life, it will embody in my spirit. My spirit will be in this object and I hope it will be alive after I die, my body will die dissipate, you know. And I think that's what it's about in the. They're all great art. The ones we admire, we adore. And then it dies. You know. And this art are always alive. And I think there's a world that we don't want to play around with. We shouldn't take it for granted. Is the word profundity profound? There's no other word to subject to it. You can substitute. Beautiful. Wonderful. Splendid. You know. But when you use the word advantage profile, you can't substitute. Not many artist profile. You know so I think when you encounter a profound work of art, you are incredibly moved by it. You couldn't believe that. Even the cave art were made by people we don't even know. There's no authorship in that. Wherever that desire to make known, to share that I was here and this is what I did. So you understand the context of my community. Come around, you know, and I think that's very fundamental. That profound human necessity I hunger, therefore the object becomes food, is not because the object lays before me that drives my hunger. You know. And I think that just people like that. But it's Raya. And Jonas is one of them. You can't seduce Jonas. He's not able to be. Doesn't mean you can seduce Warhol. He want to be seduce? He wants seduce you? Certainly. But not Jonas. That's not who you



want. You know. So thank God for those like Jonas who spoke for those who are like him. Barbara Rubin, great, great example, who came to join us as an assistant. She was 16 or 17, I can't remember. She makes some great films, you know, and then she went off that film and Mary Richardson. You never heard him again. And he loved that. You know, he accepted that. That wonderful contribution. However, you know decades about you know to hear that enough. You know, and I love that, I admire that. You know all this. We shouldn't be always create works for mass consumption. That's one way of doing it. But that note, not every one is suited for that similar ambition. And I think it's important to recognize as not as an individual among us. I think the wonderful thing about Jonas is that he not because he recognized what he can offer and contribute and share. He also created the space for those people who can become themselves. That's important. It's just that we don't make compromise. That's a different. And Jonas doesn't want to be read that easily, like a poet, any poet would desire that similar poetic freedom. Poetry is not reading. So that you understand everything that readily anyway, even at the expense of a bad poet. Do you know what I mean? So being elusive is something that we all desire, you know. I love when people don't understand me. You know when this time. Me? I feel very trapped, I feel I don't. I'm not doing my job. You know what I mean? So I think it's important to to learn how to be a lucid. To to go between things if you know what I mean. You know. It's exactly what Jonas been doing so well for so many years. So long. You know, I think in the end, if I can glue. This is the poet that dictate the pace and the creation of the filmmakers and the community. That's what remarkable. Because very few poets in modern time were able to do that in the old days, in ancient time long ago. Yes. There was those remarkable poets with Dante who worked for the Venetian Republic, were responsible for re,



recreating streets and the map of Florence. Similar would go to. You know. There are cases in the past, but Jonas is one of the few ones. You know, very few. I think that may be the last one that we can think of. Maybe Walt Whitman did that. Not even Allen Ginsberg did that, you know. Course not to take away from Ginsburg. Brilliance. Of course he created the poetry project with and woman, and he did the same thing with Naropa in Colorado. But to join them there. But that's what they're great friends, right? That's what they were so close friends that they knew each other values. Very profoundly so. You know. So that's one thing I would say is the poet. And that's exactly Ginsberg understood very well of Jonas. And similarly, you know, it is possible he was a great artist. I remember trying to describe John Jonas, you know, performing artist, a filmmaker of, you know, a painter, installation artist before. I don't know the answer to. Just call me an artist. For. Let's call me an artist. And that's a very important thing to say. He's a great artist. You know who was able to do everything. But in the end, it's the artists that personify the poet in him, because it's a very important thing to to to again, the poet is the uncompromising spirit of everything else he did. You know what it is. It's the moral compass. Up the port that keep Jonas' morally uncompromised clear of his vision. Clear of his intention. Clear of what he capable. Of given to all the friends and colleagues. The whole community. Clear when he leave this earth. What would that meant? What it looked like. He he was so clear all about that. And I think that clarity comes from John as the poet. It's like the way that he grew up in the form he's never forgot that. That's where that whole, phrase came from, from when he was interviewed for that newspaper. It's called The Farmers not long ago, you know. So I travel a great deal when people ask me where I come from. You know, I was born in Lithuania, I live in New York, but my country is culture. That's where he said it. He never forgot



where he came from. You know, and I think that's the poet. That keeps him clear of his conscience. The very important. So you get distracted in America, in New York particularly. You know what I mean? We all guilty of it. But not Jonas. It's always like I watch him so many times. Whether he's with Yoko Ono, with the he's with Sarah. He's always the same person, like he was with his musician friend, or poet's friend in Brooklyn playing together. A man. He used to have a ban, by the way, in woodlands. But you know. And that's just beautiful. That's. That's what happened. I'm grateful for Jonas. You know, I don't think that I have good role models. I hate to use that word again. F*ck. What? Take that out, you guys. No models. But, similar spirit, I guess. You know where culture is. The relay. You pass on the baton to the next generation. And I think the certain people understood that that beauty, that responsibility, that incredible heavy duty upon your, your, your shoulders, you know, your whole live being but the same ecstatic joy. When you are given the baton by the right friend, the beautiful, caring mentor. You know, and I think that's what, I learned from Jonas. You know, he gave me a lot of love. No cynicism needed necessary. You know, occasionally I get angry. You know, we all do. But it's certainly easily outweighed by the other ecstatic and innocence and feeling excited about. Think that that one love in life. What I love in life, you know. And I think I learned that from Tom Jonas. Great. I'm in debt to Jonas as a friend, as a comrade, as the young generation among his friends, you know. I feel that. I don't feel the responsibility. I feel it's natural. That he pass it on. I'm naturally feel ecstatically joyful to to bring it on. And I can't wait. Until it reaches age where I'm ready to pass on the baton to someone young, from someone young, you know. So it's. Yeah, it continues. Right? Some are talking about the end of history. There are others who say that we are at the end of cinema. Do not believe any of it. And the movie



industry and the movie museums around the world are celebrating the 100th anniversary of cinema, and they talk about the millions of dollars their cinema had made. They discussed their Hollywood's and their stars. But there is no mention of the art vanguard of the independence of our cinema. I have seen the procedures, the programs of the museums and archives and cinematics around the world. I know what cinema they are talking about. But I want to take this occasion to say this. In the times of Bigness spectaculars 100 million Movie productions, I want to speak for the small, invisible acts of human spirit, so subtle, so small that they die when brought out under the clean lights. I want to celebrate the small forms of cinema. The lyrical forms, the poem, the watercolor, etude, sketch, postcard, arabesque, thrill at the Bagatelle, the Lulu 80mm. Songs in the time. Would everybody want to succeed and sell? I want to celebrate those who embrace social and daily failure to pursue the invisible. The personal things that brings no money and no bread, and make no contemporary history or art history or any other history. I am for art, which we do for each other as friends. For ourselves. I'm standing in the middle of the information highway and laughing, because a butterfly on a little flower somewhere, somewhere just flutter its wings. And I know that the whole course of history will drastically change because of that flutter. A super eight camera just made a little shop buzz somewhere on New York's Lower East Side, and the world will never be the same. The real history of cinema is the invisible history. History of friends getting together, doing the thing they love. For us, cinema is the beginning. With every new burst of the projector. Yes. With every new birth of our cameras. I'll jump forward. My friends. Yeah. Here, you guys. This is what counts. This is where it comes. And this is what it's about. It's here.

01:54:29:00

KATIE DAVISON:

What am I missing about? Like what else? What else is it really important to know about Jonas is like, what else is there? You know, that you really feel like we must include or would be incredibly important to know about him.

01:54:44:00

PHONG BUI:

The last thing I would say about Jonas is that, the incredible ability to define the political culture press into accepting an individual, ourselves, as one dimensional beings. You know, there's a famous book by Mercurio I think is said 62. It's called One Dimensional Man. You know. I think Jonas is a great example of someone who. Discover that live experience require a multitude of other experiences. It go beyond what you love, because what you love is a part of the cultural firmament. I think cross-pollination, again, is the word that we take for granted now. But it's no longer appreciated. And when you think about education and being a business executive that want to do. It, want to assimilate, train you to become one dimensional. Because the business. So I think one thing I can say about Jonas is like Isaiah, Berlin, the the British philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin once wrote a very famous essay. It's called The Hedgehog in the Fox, published in 1953. But it didn't become famous until we were included in his very famous book is called Russian Thinker that was published by Viking Press, I think, in 1975. Or is it? No, I think 75. Very famous essay. It came from the Greek poet. A key locus from a line from his longer poem. That say? The hedgehog might know. No, the fox might know many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing, so he created his whole. It's a. He claimed later on that. It was intellectual game. How to differentiate



the different intellectual and artistic temperament. You know, there are those who might experience different kind of experiences. But they all have to filter through one single lens. It had to be one lens, you know, and the artists opposite to whom the work cannot be boiled or down. One lens. You have to include having multitool experience and let it all open. So that's two different temperament, you know. So the hedgehog I would say in art, it will be like an it's more. And that's a good example. You know, she spent her life in the square given format and repeatedly with incredible multitude of subtlety of this horizontal line going across from the left to right throughout the picture plane, and to repeat the next one with subtle differences. So my note that requires attention. Whereas somebody like Louise Bourgeois, who did so many different things, you know. You look at her body of work is never the same. It's completely a mirror of her psychological condition. How much he really hated her father to begin with. So go on from there, you know? So I think Jonas is definitely the fox. She's like Louise Bourgeois. He's not. And his mom and not the beard we reduced in Jonas to this or that category. But I think it's important that even though it's in the actual game, I think, let's face it, it's very seductive. To inspire people into a hedgehog, because you can read them easily here. Earlier you notice that all this produce one thing is very identifiable to what he or she creates it's harder when you create different things. It's not easy for people to read you.

END TC: 01:59:42:00