

David Patrick Columbia's  
**NEW YORK SOCIAL DIARY**

Wednesday night, JH and I, and Harry Stendhal hosted a reception called Warhol Happening at the Maya Stendhal Gallery. Maya is Harry's sister. The focus of the reception was a piece of the film work – specifically footage of Andy Warhol et al – of veteran avant garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas.

Mr. Mekas came to New York City circuitously from Lithuania after the Second World War, where he and his brother spent the last years of the war and right after in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany. DP's – they were known as to Americans in that era – was a term which was not sympathetic or gratifying or complimentary in its use, as one might imagine, considering what they had endured under the hand of the Nazis and the Soviets, but was instead, derogatory.

Fortunately for Mr. Mekas, he found his beacon in life – the light in the darkness – in film, and New York in the 1950s was the beginning of a revolutionary new world for the arts.

The installation in the Maya Stendhal Gallery includes one large video projection surrounded on either side by smaller videos of random footage taken of Andy and his friends, mainly at the house (or compound of houses) he owned out in Montauk in the 1970s. Featured in these (silent) films are several adults and some children – namely Tony and Tina Radziwill and John-John and Caroline Kennedy, as well as Lee Radziwill. There is also footage of a lunch at Micheline and Alan Jay Lerner's, footage of Peter Beard, of Mr. Mekas and several of the members of Andy's Factory including Jane Holzer who in those days, was the first very famous Warhol character "Baby Jane Holzer."

Mrs. Holzer came to her fame overnight when a feature article about her was written by a then hardly known (but for only a minute more) writer named Tom Wolfe for a magazine which debuted to the world as a Sunday supplement in the New York Herald-Tribune. The magazine was edited by a young and brilliant editor (we can conclude in retrospect rather than in anticipation – as brilliant is so easily concluded nowadays) named Clay Felker. The magazine was called New York and although it had the same logo as the magazine of the same name which exists on the newstands today, any resemblance to today's elitist look-down rag ends there.

It was a very exciting era – freshly hyping the notion of glamorous to the point of ridicule; rebellious, and outrageous. This was operating under the simultaneous counterpane of the Viet Nam War which was, in the early Mekas/Warhol years, moving very slowly into the great American consciousness (as the body count began to build) until it finally surrounded and enveloped the culture with the same dull and grainy grimness, sometimes in color, sometimes in black and

white, of the film footage of Warhol and his glam gang of characters in Mekas' film clips.

The innocence in these silent, darting, dashing, alternately discombobulated clips do not reflect the catastrophic times nor do they portend what was to come, although – the two little boys, for example, wrestling in their bathing suits on the lawn above the sea – John Kennedy and Tony Radziwill – many are no longer with us, having come to untimely deaths; as it was with Mr. Warhol who also came to an untimely ending in a botched medical situation. Nor do they, or can they portend the vagaries of aging that has affected the characters in the clips who are still with us, as well as the rest of us.

Meanwhile, back at the Maya Stendhal Gallery. There were about two or three hundred who showed up for the look see. Veuve Cliquot provided the champagne to the immense pleasure of the guests who also consumed an enormous portion of fabulous tea sandwiches prepared in the kitchens by the inimitable Vincent Minuto (of Hampton Domestics – an NYSD advertiser). New York society's number one DJ Tom Finn also provided a special collection of music of the era, which played throughout the evening.

Gallery parties are gallery parties are gallery parties. The mix is always highly eclectic. I couldn't help watching the guests watching the film clips – many of them entirely unaware of the era or even the characters therein (as hard as that is to believe). Andy Warhol is now a character of literary proportions, a giant, a legend, whereas at the time of these film clips he was just an artist of some celebrity who had a penchant and talent for acquiring and/or creating other celebrities to surround himself with.

At the beginning of the evening, the first guest to arrive was Anita Sarko, a longtime member of the downtown scene in New York (as well as one of the nicest people in New York – hip or un-). She and I chatted about early Warhol. I told her my story of going to one of his first gallery openings (the recollection printed on these pages a few years ago) in 1962, and then to a party afterwards at his then studio on East 46th Street. For all the fame that followed him, and despite his outre costume (mainly the white/grey fright wig that became his signature), in person he had a rather quiet, even innocuous presence. Although it was clear that he was what today we'd call a "starfucker."

Anita concurred with a laugh over the irony. She told me that in those early years she'd seen him around for a long time at parties although he never spoke to her because she wasn't "somebody." Then one night she went to a dinner party only to find that he was her dinner partner. At dinner he told her that he didn't like the way she was wearing her hair and suggested a different "do." She told him that she'd worn it like that for awhile but decided against it because she felt it made her look like a man in drag. Unfazed, Andy continued throughout the rest of the meal to insist that she change her hair back to the previous style. She didn't, of course, as Anita is one of those people who has a mind of her own, and is, as they say, her own woman. We laughed over the incident while marveling at the outcome of that memorable time and the remarkable person whose enigmatic persona is captured on Jonas Mekas' film.

Mr. Mekas, not so incidentally, came before Andy Warhol artistically, which is, no doubt, what attracted the artist to him.

For more about him:

Jonas Mekas: filmmaker, videomaker, film critic, poet, lecturer, curator. Born into a farming family in Lithuania on December 24, 1922. Imprisoned in a forced labour camp in Nazi Germany from 1944–45. Studied philosophy at the University of Mainz from 1946–48. Relocated to the United States on October 29, 1949. Worked in factories in Brooklyn, New York from 1949 to 1950.

In 1954, Mekas became editor-in-chief of Film Culture magazine. He was the movie critic for the Village Voice newspaper in New York from 1958–75, and the movie critic for Soho Weekly News newspaper, also in New York, from 1976–77. He was President of New American Cinema Group (Filmmakers Cooperative) from 1961–80, film curator of the Jewish Museum from 1968–71. He taught film at higher education centers including Cooper Union, international Center for Photography, M.I.T., New School for Social Research, New York University. He lectured on film throughout the US, Europe, Asian and South America. He has been Program Director and President of Anthology Film Archives since 1970.

He has befriended Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, John Cassavetes, Salvador Dali, Miles Davis, Robert Frank, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Henri Langlois, John Lennon, Norman Mailer, Nico, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Lou Reed, Andy Warhol. He married Holis Melton in 1974 – parents of daughter (Oona) and son (Sebastian).

An excerpt from an interview with Jonas Mekas. For the entire interview, click [here](#).

JM: In 1950–51, my New York life begins. I keep stressing New York, because I don't know America. All my American life has been in New York. New York's movie life was very busy in 1950. First, on 42nd street between 6th and 8th Avenue, there were maybe fifteen movie houses, and you could see everything, and spend all night watching movies. You could see four or five westerns. You know, they were specializing: westerns, imported European films – 'art' films, they were then called – comedies, short subjects, newsreels and so on. Now, if you wanted to see old movies and classics, you went to MoMA, which we did. And we did not miss a single day, because we wanted to catch up with everything. Or if you wanted to see newsreels, there was a theater just for newsreels. If you wanted to see the avant-garde, the new experimental films, you went to Cinema 16 programs. Every month they had a new program. If you were of a more Trotskyite persuasion, you went to Club Cinema on 6th Avenue and 10th Street, where every Friday or Saturday night – I don't remember – they showed documentaries of a leftist persuasion. If you wanted to see very rare early silent films of various formats, you went to the Theodore Huff Society, again once a week, run by Herman Weinberg, Bill Everson, Bill Kenly and some other people. I'm talking about 1950.

In 1953, I started the first screenings of what was called at that time Experimental Films. I showed the Whitney Brothers, Gregory Markopoulos, Kenneth Anger. I started my own screenings at Gallery East, which was on Avenue A and 1st street. As you can see, I didn't move very far... [Anthology Film Archives is at 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue] Also in 1953, a woman by the name of Dorothy Brown had weekend screenings in her loft on Ludlow Street. I helped her. Around the same time, Gideon Bachmann was running the Film Study Group, which I joined. I helped to write notes. Once a week or so, or every two weeks, we had screenings, usually with filmmakers present. And on it goes. And if you were clever enough, which of course I was, I also used to sneak into the New York University. As part of the film department, George Amberg - who began as a ballet critic, and wrote a very important book on ballet - was holding screenings of the avant-garde films for students, but you could sneak in. And he had filmmakers present. That's where I met Gregory Markopoulos. George was very verbal and perceptive - he could really go into the work and explain it, he was a very brilliant person. You could also sneak into the New School for Social Research where Arthur Knight had classes on the independent, avant-garde, experimental film. With filmmakers also usually present. So, as you can see, there was a lot going on. Actually, the second evening after arriving in New York, I was already at the movies. I saw *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Jean Epstein, 1928) and *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) on, I think, 16th Street or somewhere, at the New York Film Society run by Rudolf Arnheim.