



Lark Books & Writing Studio



d.a. levy-palooza 3: celebrating three renegade presses

We get the good word from Lark Books & Writing Studio, Nostrovial Press, and Nous-zot Press in advance of the May Day event.

ART

Hugo Bastidas

FILM

Books! Screenings!

The Adolfas Diaries at Anthology and Kathryn Ramey at Connectivity

LIBRARIES

CHLOE: With 'An Enthusiastic Roar for Everything Literary,'
a Library Grows in Southeast D.C.

MUSIC

What the Purple One Taught Me in 1984

POETRY

Julie E. Bloemeke, Ryan Nowlin, Abraham Smith

SMALL PRESS

Spiriting the Radical with Lark Books
To Health and Art with Nostrovial Press
Discovering the We/Us Others with Nous-zot Press
Arm-in-Arm with Sibling Rivalry Press
Opening Paths with 4 Way Books

Adolfas Mekas at his Bard College retirement party from Joel Schlemowitz's short film *For Adolfas*.



Courtesy Joel Schlemowitz

FILM

Books! Screenings! The Adolfas Diaries at Anthology and Kathryn Ramey at Connectivity

BY JOEL SCHLEWOWITZ

A spring screenings two-book series will blossom shortly, each taking the form of a screening, naturally enough, for one is the diaries of the waggish Adolfas Mekas (1925-2011), and the other a comprehensive guide to experimental filmmaking by the Boston-area filmmaker and Emerson College professor Kathryn Ramey, *Anthology Film Archives* [32 E. 2nd St. and Second Avenue, The East Village] hosts the book release event of *The Adolfas Diaries* - book 1 at 7:00 p.m. on Sun., May 8.

The diaries (<http://www.hallelujahdiaries.com/books/>) cover the time from 1941 to 1946 when Adolfas Mekas and his brother Jonas were fleeing Lithuania during the Second World War only to be sent to work as forced laborers in a German-run factory. The end of the war found them in a displaced persons camp in Germany before the brothers eventually were able to emigrate to New York and begin their notable careers in the film community.

Adolfas would later teach at Bard College, a professor both demanding (he would blithely use the term "bullshit" when unimpressed with students' work) and mercurial (bestowing upon the department the sobriquet: "The People's Film Department" and canonizing the cinema-loving St. Tula as the department's patron saint). Both of these qualities were evident in the labored "Final Exam" for his class, which consisted solely of a daylong screening of Japanese filmmaker Masaki Kobayashi's epic masterpiece, the nine-hour and 39 minute film cycle bearing the title *The Human Condition*. To pass the final one had to sit through the entire film, an assessment that eventually caused ire among the administration at the college: Why didn't this final exam have a paper or a test or some other written component? It did not seem sufficiently academic to just have students watch a film to pass a final exam. Eventually Mekas begrudgingly relented, and a cursory written component was tacked onto the screening.

It is a startling insight to understand of the (jovial) Adolfas's admiration for this acutely bleak master-work of cinema. *The Human Condition* is the story of the protagonist's unavailing quest for human empathy as a Japanese conscripted soldier in a world of labor camps and prisoners in occupied Manchuria during and shortly after the Second World War.

The book release event will feature readings from the diary by Pola Chappelle along with music and performances. A screening of Mekas's film *Going Home*, a chronicle of his visit back to Lithuania in the company of his brother Jonas and his wife Pola, will also be featured. Adolfas's drollery is on display in *Going Home* as he and Pola every so often take a break from the matters at hand to dance a little soft-shoe number before the camera. The film includes a visit to the factory where he and Jonas labored during the war, meeting with the factory foreman who remembers them and, seemingly unaware of the caustic gaul of such remarks, still has some gently condensing things to say all these years later about their work habits as forced laborers.

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One week later, at 7:00 p.m. on Sun. May 15, the *Mono No Aware* film series *Connectivity Through Cinema* (at Gowanus Darkroom at 160 7th St., Suite 212, Brooklyn) will celebrate Kathryn Ramey's recently published book *Experimental Filmmaking: Break The Machine* with a screening of short films by many of the film-artists featured in the work. Full disclosure: I am one of the filmmakers who will be included in the screening, along with work by Ramey, Kenneth Zoran Curwood, Joshua Lewis, Lauren Cook, Lynne Sachs, Sean

Kathryn Ramey, with Bolex camera. *Carol Hsu photo.*



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Honley, and Steve Cassman. I am also profiled in the book.

Experimental Filmmaking: Break The Machine takes on the ambitious goal of being a textbook for how to make an experimental film. While books on the techniques of traditional filmmaking are plentiful, writing on alternative approaches are much more scarce. This is due in part to the nature of avant-garde film as an artistic subculture, but also to the formidable challenge of delineating the content of such a book. What is experimental film? It can take so many forms, incorporate such an array of ideas, be worked out with so many different technical means, as to send the writer off on an expedition with no end. There always is some new form of experimentation to be found, some alternative approach to be investigated further, some fundamental filmmaking rule to be disassembled.

Ramey concentrates on the alternative means that bypass the dependence on depleting one's meager finances on the most expensive shiny, new equipment, staggering film laboratory bills, and the framework of traditional filmmaking in the division of labor of gaffers, grips, cinematographers, production assistants, line producers, boom operators, assistant directors, and directors. The filmmaker takes on the roles not only the cinematographer and director. In the case of her chapter on hand-processing the filmmaker becomes the laboratory as well. With a detailed set of instructions on making hand-coated film emulsion the filmmaker even may usurp the role of Eastman Kodak in the DIY process.

The book is acutely thorough in its amassing of this information. Chapters on hand-processing contain charts, with chemical dilutions and temperatures, recipes for alternative processing with instant coffee, vitamin C, or potato juice. A chapter on the optical printer—the versatile tool of rephotographing existing film images and creating numerous visual effects—is followed later in the book by a chapter on DIY optical printing, including detailed instructions for how to build your own optical printer. The numerous how-to sections of the book come not just from Ramey's own experimentation but are collated of the tinkering of many different filmmakers, with reproductions of notes and diagrams, interviews on their idiosyncratic innovations within the alternative approach to filmmaking.

Ramey's book serves not only as comprehensive guide to many methods of experimental film, but through these encounters it also gives us an endearing portrait of a community of artists, interacting, sharing resources through networks of the counter-cultural film world, finding camaraderie in the commonly held spirit of trailblazing away from and nimbly bypassing the filmmaking mainstream.

Joel Schlemowitz (<http://www.joelschlemowitz.com>) is a Park Slope, Brooklyn-based filmmaker who makes short cine-poems and experimental documentaries. His most recent project, *78rpm*, is in the final stages of post-production. He has taught filmmaking at The New School for the past 19 years. Robyn Hasty photo.

MUSIC

What the Purple One Taught Me in 1984

BY ROGER HITTS

This piece originally appeared in *Boog City* 17, June 2004, prior to our *Classic Albums Live* performance of *Prince and the New Power Generation's Purple Rain* album.

By the year 1984 we were still growing out of our short pants musically. Understand, growing up in Flint, Mich., we were rock-n-roll boneheads fed a steady diet of local heroes like The Noggie, Seeger, and that Funky Railroad. Artists like Iggy Pop were to be scorned, not celebrated.

But oh, those college years—the birth of alternative radio, called college rock back then, and my ears, along with me pals, pricked up to sounds a bit more rash at times, a bit more subtle at others, but all fell into the challenging category while Journey, Foreigner, and Styx fell by the wayside. There were the first fumbling steps toward appreciating new, up-and-coming groups like the Psychedelic Furs and U2, then barreling straight ahead on into a brave new world of music: REM's *Murmur* of 1983 was a watershed, as was Gang of Four's *Songs of the Free X* gave us *More Fun In The New World*. By 1984, being made editor of my college paper at Central Michigan University gave me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be a tastemaker for 17,000 people between the ages of 18 and 22, and I took the challenge seriously. I immediately hired myself as chief album reviewer.

Sure, we made mistakes along the way. Buddy Rich (the friend, not the drummer) and I made the 150-mile trek to Detroit to catch the hottest of new bands, Big Country. We thought they were the dizzying height of new music—even with a set list so sparse they played their eponymous FM hit *Big Country* twice in an hour. Big Country ran out of gas before they had even filled 'er up.

Still, we were making a small progress toward building a better musical understanding and better record collections. And that was thanks in no small part to record labels that finally realized there was gold in them that hills of college campuses and bombarded us with new releases from XTC, Dream Syndicate, Eurythmics and, er, Kajagoogoo. We would

at around nap listening to that first Valenti Femmes record—we never heard anything like it, and 20 years on, still never have. Their anguished, maturationary loser groove, as filtered through Gordon Gano's Lou-Reed-with-balls-squeeze vocals was something we all could relate to.

That all sounds well and good, but to be honest, a lot of our tastes in music still revolved around which bands sounded best while clutching a bong. We were white-bread bobos who had only a passing knowledge of what went down in our own state at Hoville, U.S.A., and James Brown was more likely to conjure up images of the kid sitting next to you in Moral Ethics class than the Godfather of Soul.

There was a purple man who wore a purple suit and put out a purple album, a soundtrack for a movie that hadn't even been released called Purple Rain.



But nothing could have prepared us for what came across the reviewer's desk in June 1984. There was a purple man who wore a purple suit and put out a purple album, a soundtrack for a movie that hadn't even been released called *Purple Rain*. As stated before, we were all woefully ignorant when it came to black music—we knew of Prince through the video for "Little Red Corvette," which, truthfully, didn't turn anyone's head or turn anyone onto the Minny musicologist. All we knew was that he was dirty but he didn't belong in the rock lexicon that to us stretched from Rush to Millions of Dead Cats.

What a record! On from the get-go, Prince pulling a decidedly rock spin on "Let's Go Crazy"—even ending it with a blaring guitar God break that gave us a reference point to our past musical idols—Michael Schenker would be proud. The absolutely charming "Take Me With U," with a chorus that

stuck in your head like a rivet to the Chevy's our fathers built, followed up "When Doves Cry" was carried by a beat that sounded like it didn't come from any place on this world as we knew it. "Purple Rain" was a genuine rock anthem, all nine minutes of shimmering, slow jam glory that could stand next to the canon of rock anthems. Finally, a new "Stayaway to Heaven," a new "Bohemian Rhapsody." And best of all, the whole album sounded great with Columbia Gold! It was black music as filtered through our Midwestern Caucasian sensibility—which probably made sense, since Prince was a Midwesterner himself, around our age, and probably heard most of the same shit we did growing up.

I wrote enthusiastically about *Purple Rain* in the student paper. I called the record "a major statement from an up-and-coming artist who sounds like he still has plenty of musical mountains left to climb." In retrospect, I'm not sure he ever climbed them or ever reached the heights of *Purple Rain* again in his career. And even though he's back again, it's rare indeed that someone finds a new mountain to scale this late in the game.

Still, it changed the way we thought about music, and everything else, for that matter. Slapping on *Purple Rain* was a much better prelude for getting a coed to bed down than Agent Orange. *Purple Rain* became the ubiquitous soundtrack for at least one year of college—it blasted from every beat-up LeSabre cruising down So. High Street, every frat house window, and every dormitory on campus.

Many of the aforementioned bands did amazing things to our eggshell minds and managed to shake the Flint out of us—no small feat. They paved the way for a lifetime of musical pleasure that continued with Hüsker Dü and the Jesus and Mary Chain riding up through the grunge era and our current love of bands from The Stills to The Soundtrack of Our Lives. And yes, we learned to appreciate our Midwestern Minny man Iggy too. But it was Prince who raised the stakes and challenged us to not only look at Sly and the Family Stone as a profound musical statement for the first time in our goopy little lives, but opened the possibilities of what a song could be by structure, texture, and emotion.