



12th Annual Northeast Historic Film Summer Symposium Program

Das Wunderkino

A Cinematic Cabinet of Curiosities

Thursday, July 28, 2011 through Saturday, July 30, 2011



Frame enlargement: Camp Runoia Collection; Palermo Historical Society Collection, Milton Dowe home movies; Charles Gilbert Collection

Die Wunderkammer (German for “the wonder-room” or “the miracle chamber”) was merely one incarnation of the phenomenon of the “cabinet of curiosities” that first appeared in Europe in the 16th century. The cabinet of curiosities was based in the collection of objects, specimens and artifacts that inspired curiosity and wonder, and sometimes defied the terms classification. In many ways, the Cabinet of Curiosities was a precursor to the modern museum.

The 2011 Northeast Historic Film (NHF) Summer Symposium revisits the idea, collecting and displaying the “unusual” with a conference theme aimed to create a cinematic cabinet of curiosities. Although amateur films are often conceived of as mundane visual accounts of family vacations and birthday parties, those scholars, archivists, filmmakers, and documentarians who study amateur films know otherwise.

The theme of the NHF symposium considers the broad and unusual dimensions of amateur film: how amateur and non-commercial films are a source of curiosity and wonder that inspires attention and inquiry, and how amateur film struggles with the familiar and powerful traditions of cinema studies that often overshadow our understanding of non-conventional and non-commercial film. *Das Wunderkino* (“the wonder-cinema”) represents a desire to examine and discuss moving images that ignite our curiosity and engagement, and help us to rethink questions of creativity, the unusual, the bizarre and the unexpected found in amateur and non-commercial films.

Thursday, July 28

6:30 PM Opening Reception

Screenings From NHF

Caitlin McGrath

University of Chicago—William S. O'Farrell
Fellowship Recipient Research Presentation



Cyrus Pinkham Collection, Northeast Historic Film

Friday, July 29

8:30 AM Coffee/Registration/Conversation

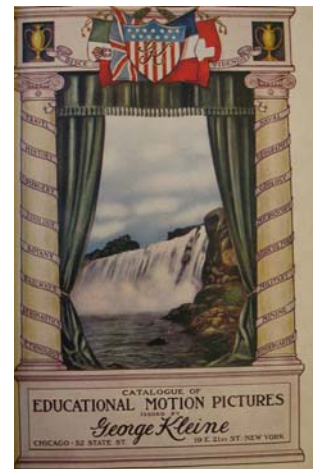
9:00 AM Opening Remarks

9:30 AM Oliver Gaycken

Department of English, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

A Modern Cabinet of Curiosity: The George Kleine Educational Film Catalogue

George Kleine created an ambitious catalogue of “educational motion picture films” in 1910 consisting of titles that he had collected from a number of European companies, notably Pathé, Gaumont, and Urban. Kleine’s catalogue demonstrates a peculiarity whose origin can be traced back to an ambivalence at the root of the concept of curiosity itself. His project was aligned with modern pedagogical research that argued for education via visual means as the most efficient form of instruction. In this sense, visual curiosity offers a powerful way to arouse interest, and the cinema’s unique visual qualities make it the most modern mode of instruction. Simultaneously, however, Kleine’s film collection recalls the miscellaneous collections of natural artifacts that were called cabinets of curiosities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this sense, curiosity appears as gawking wonder, as an arousal of the passions that leads away from enlightenment and toward the freak show. The Kleine collection was described generally as part of a modern plan for the rational deployment of the cinema, the description and content of individual films frequently display powerful contiguities with the wonders and marvels associated with an earlier era, where rationality and enchantment had not yet become antithetical. In this mixed appeal, the catalogue embodies a number of the contradictions often associated with visual education, such as the ineradicable presence of the image’s sensual and sometimes sensational dimension.



Courtesy of Oliver Gaycken

10:15 AM

Amy Herzog

Film Studies Program, Queens College, CUNY

Of Cabinets and Prurient Curiosities:

The Evolution of the Pornographic Peep Show Booth

While we tend to associate movies with their theatrical presentation, films have been shown in single-viewer machines throughout their history (from the earliest hand-cranked Mutoscopes to the contemporary handheld device). This paper will address the evolution and phenomenology of the single-viewer apparatus, with a particular focus on the pornographic motion picture peep show machine. My presentation will be divided between two related aspects of peep show culture: framing the peepshow apparatus as a *literal* cabinet of curiosity, and examining the curious content of the film loops themselves. Both the technology and the filmic texts vary widely based on time period and regional zoning and censorship regulations, making this project extremely challenging, historically and archivally. This presentation will provide an overview of the evolutionary transformation of peep shows, and to initiate a discussion regarding the place of the pornographic peeping apparatus within amateur and non-theatrical film history.



Starlight Peep Show
Marquee Card, courtesy A. Steg

11:00 AM

Break

11:15 AM

Mary Cappello

Department of English, University of Rhode Island, Kingston

Swallowed and Saved

One of the most popular attractions in Philadelphia's Mutter Museum is the Chevalier Jackson Foreign Body Collection: a beguiling set of drawers filled with thousands of items that had been swallowed or inhaled, then extracted nonsurgically by a pioneering laryngologist using rigid instruments of his own design. Mary Cappello, author of *Swallow* (The New Press, 2011), will present a mixed media meditation on this aura-laden cabinet and its maker, the visual art that continues to emerge in response to it, and recently re-discovered home movie footage of Dr. Chevalier Jackson in the place where the eccentric genius designed most of his instruments, wrote his textbooks, and made his endoscopic art. With the help of film theorist, Jean Walton, and Jackson's great grandson, Frank Bugbee, Jr., Cappello will curate clips from Frank's collection of home movies ranging from the 1930s to the 1960s. Frank Bugbee, Jr., may also be available to the audience to answer questions about these beautiful and unusual films.



Radiographer, Dr. Willis F. Manges (1876-1936).
Collection of the Mutter
Museum, The College of
Physicians of Philadelphia.

12:00 PM Lunch and Archives Tour

1:30 PM **Jane Gillooly**
Film/Video maker, Chicago

Suitcase of Love and Shame

In December of 2009 I acquired from a friend a suitcase purchased on eBay. Inside were 50 hours of reel-to-reel audiotape chronicling the details of an adulterous love affair. The Midwestern couple recorded audio letters, television shows, record albums and sex tapes for each other. They are heard talking, drinking, laughing, crying and making love. Tender and pathetic, dramatic and suspenseful, the story is raw, candid, uncensored, and revealing. The suitcase contained some still images that one can assume to belong to the couple, although there is no motion picture film in the collection. This project obviously raises questions about privacy and ownership. I have thoroughly considered the unintentional consequences of making this material public. This presentation will focus on edited excerpts of the material (last names and locations deleted) that foreground their interest in the technology of the time and its use in documenting their experiences. The tape recorder became both a party and a witness to their trysts.



Courtesy of Jane Gillooly

2:15 PM **Debra Beattie**
School of Humanities, Griffith University, Queensland

Brisbane Youth Films

Brisbane in the early 1980s was a metropolis governed by a State leader galvanized against modernity, which he saw as a source of moral decay. For the city's youth interested in creativity and cultural engagement, the choices were few. Nevertheless a lively amateur scene emerged of music making (The Saints and The Go Betweens later came to international acclaim) of theatre, the visual arts and filmmaking. This paper will examine some of the fragments of footage from that time including Hits, Brainblast, City for Sale, Love Strangled Cry, and Expo Schmexpo, and how they informed and animated the extra-parliamentary opposition to an aggressively conservative government, and provided the outlet for youthful exuberance and creative pursuits.



Stockwell, Sydney, 1986

3:00 PM Break

3:15 PM

Albert Steg
Boston, MA

My Apology: A Film Collector's Defense of Prurience as an Archival Virtue

The term “cabinet of curiosities” is all about exclusive access – the privileged opportunity to gaze upon objects normally hidden from view, either because of uncommon rarity or cultural disapproval. Karen Benedict’s *Ethics and The Archival Profession* provides case studies that vividly (but unintentionally) dramatize the way that such cabinets may be born out of a conflict between immediate institutional interests and the broader personal fidelity of individual archivists to historical truth. In this presentation I will offer the perspective of an independent film collector with archival proclivities, who views “prurient interest” as a positive marker of archival value.



Image from [Syracuse Voyeur] - Orphaned Home Movie, ca.1962 - Albert Steg Collection

4:00 PM

Lauren Brenner
Visual Studies, University of California, Irvine

1966 Fluxfilm: Disappearing Music for Face

This presentation focuses on the 1966 Fluxfilm *Disappearing Music For Face* as a work that pushes the boundaries of human interpretive frameworks. *Disappearing Music For Face* is an eleven minute film that captures performer Yoko Ono's transition from a smile to no smile - an action modeled after Cheiko Shiomi's score of the same name that offers the instructions for this action. This film poses major challenges to many conventional pathways to interpretation, which might trace progression or accretion over time and therein seek meaning or value. By enacting a slow, barely perceptible release, *Disappearing Music For Face* invites its audiences to find value elsewhere, and perhaps even to revisit conventional means of attributing value to narrative or time-based artwork. Furthermore, the film's ambiguous authorship and unconventional distribution (it was included along with a handheld, variable-speed projector in one of George Maciunas' Fluxboxes) make this work even more curious as an object for film studies, since these factors complicate author- and reader-based interpretations. This presentation treats these curiosities as fruitful grounds for a kind of research that can help critique and revise interpretive methodology for art history, film studies, and beyond, thus celebrating curiosity and elevating it to the status of a productive intellectual approach, alternative but not counter to more exact and decisive forms of writing.

Saturday, July 30

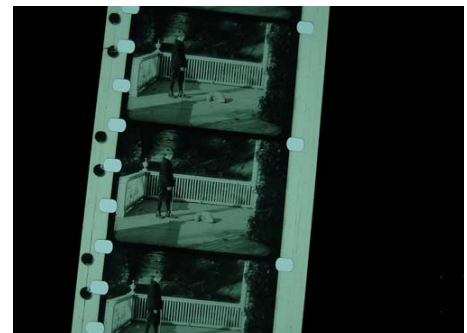
8:15 AM Coffee and Conversation

8:45 AM Opening Remarks

9:00 AM Dino Everett
Archivist, Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive, Los Angeles

***Amateur Made Trick Films –
Rediscovering the Litanical presence of Melies style magic across formats, countries,
and eras.***

There is an ongoing playfulness found in amateur moviemaking that often resembles the early work of French Magician George Melies. Somewhere in the process of learning the craft there seems an inherent tendency directing filmmakers towards a place of continuous rediscovery. It is as if the art of filmmaking was being embarked upon for the very first time. These tendencies towards simple scenes of motion trickery seem so universal they suggest causality relating more to the individuals' relationship to the apparatus, than the desire towards recreating past events. The difference between the amateur trick and Melies is in the production. The amateur presence of the trick moment is often random, rather than as a thematic part of an overall story, making the appearance within a reel almost suggesting the point of origin as to the filmmakers' discovery of how to do such a trick. The material in this presentation is culled from amateur films on formats ranging from 28mm, 9.5mm to 8mm and beyond and ranging from home movies of the 1920's and 1930's until 1970's. In addition early student made film productions will be seen as representative of a slightly more sophisticated style yet still firmly implanted in the Meliesian bag of tricks. It is a visual phenomena showcasing the true strengths of the moving image to both exhibit the filmed magic that is created through learning the magic of filmmaking.



Unidentified boy in Tarrytown, NY.
Home Movie 28mm, 1920

9:45 AM

Snowden Becker

School of Information, University of Texas, Austin

Nothing up His Sleeve: Filmmaker, Magician, and Tailor Ramon Galindo

The online collection of the Texas Archive of the Moving Image includes several films created by devoted amateur Ramon Galindo, which document many aspects of his life, avocation, and hobbies in Austin and central Texas. In addition to his work in 16mm, Galindo was both a master tailor and an accomplished magician who performed throughout his life as “Señor Galindo.” The latter talents were combined to great effect in his innovative design for the Galindo Topit—a hidden pocket used by magicians for secreting or producing objects in their clothing—which is still known and used by stage magicians today. One remarkable short work by Galindo combines all three of his passions. A virtuosic multiple-exposure split screen, complete with magical special-effects flourishes, demonstrates how to tailor a suit jacket for a hunchback. The film is painstakingly composed to illustrate each step of the process, displaying the tailor’s craft, the magician’s showmanship, and the filmmaker’s mastery of technique. The film serves as a reminder that the tailor’s fitting room is itself a cabinet of curiosities. The clients who pass through it on any given day may be extraordinarily tall or small, asymmetrical from birth or as a result of accident or illness, or possessed of tastes incommensurate with mainstream fashions. Through the tailor’s magic, their clothes conform to them, helping them conform more closely to aesthetic and social norms they might not otherwise fit.

In addition to screening the work itself, this presentation will explore Galindo’s film as a demonstration of virtuosity in both filmmaking and needlecraft, and tailoring as a metaphor for the limits of conformity.



Courtesy of Ramon Galindo

10:30 AM

Break

10:45 AM

Marsha and Devin Orgeron

Film Studies, North Carolina State University, Raleigh

Lenticular Spectacles:

Kodacolor's Fit in the Amateur Arsenal

This presentation examines one family's foray into home moviemaking in the late 1920s/early 1930s, which provides the opportunity to project Kodacolor the way it was meant to be seen. A comparatively small fraction of the Bigelow family home movie collection appears to have been shot in this short-lived lenticular format, and most of this footage is compiled on its own eclectic reel. This presentation will combine screening elements from both the Bigelow's American road trip (where black and white copies of some of this footage has been spliced in) and the full Kodacolor reel. Our intention is to discuss how and why this color technology was employed, including the technical history of the process. Our project is supplemented by interviews with family members, some of whom will be present at the symposium.



Marjorie Bigelow and Jiggs, ca. 1929. From the Kodacolor compilation reel held in the private collection of Bigelow Family Home Movies.

11:30 AM

Pam Wintle

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

A Minister's Compilation Film Curio

Found in an American Methodist minister's personal around-the-world travel film collection, this 17 minute compilation film of Japanese themed film segments begs many questions. Physical examination of the film offers some information, but what might it take to understand why this film ever existed? This compilation engages us in the mystery of the amateur filmmaker's curiosity and the desire to record it.



Japan: Promotional and Theatrical Footage, ca. 1927], Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution

12:15 PM

Lunch and Archives Tour

1:30 PM

Melinda Barlow

Film Studies Program, University of Colorado, Boulder

The Internal Archive: Reimagining the Amateur.

Provocatively mixing media and methods in a manner akin to that of the wonder cabinet itself, my presentation explores this adoptive autobiographical gesture as it has informed the work of three American women—an experimental filmmaker, a photographer, and a film historian/art collector—each of whom has invested home movies, vernacular photographs and/or found objects with personal significance. At once drawn to and disturbed by what these artifacts reveal and conceal about the social construction of femininity, each has preserved her salvaged treasures in a private collection, where they serve as mirrors, talismans, reminders, and warnings. This presentation creates a composite portrait of the practice of female collecting by juxtaposing three different ways contemporary women have adopted and reimagined the visions of femininity embodied in anonymous home movies and discarded objects. If for each woman the allure of what she has salvaged is tinged with ambivalence, perhaps it is because when it comes to identity, every contradiction is illuminating, precious, and therefore to be treasured.



"o little jeannie" (date unknown)
Collection of Jeanne Liotta

2:15 PM

Margie Compton

UGA Libraries, Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, University of Georgia, Athens

Is This Film Dangerous?

The Lasting Effects of Racism as Depicted in a Southern Home Movie

In 2009, the University of Georgia Libraries' Media Archives was given 38 home movies [1930s-1960s] showing one Georgia family's life events, scenes of children at school, a tour around the small town where the family lived, as well as cartoons and a burlesque reel—a pretty typical 8mm collection. But one reel stood out for its visual representation of racism, something we had never seen in a home movie. How we have dealt with and also not dealt with this film, and the implications for donor relations, perceptions of our mission, and the broader aspect of how this film could be used in teaching will be discussed. This is the debut screening of this film since its acquisition and preservation.



Gas station attendant, 1936. UGA Libraries' Media Archives

3:00 PM

Break

3:15 PM

Liz Coffey

Harvard Film Archive, Weissman Preservation Center, Harvard University, Cambridge

Doc Burr's Cabinet of Curiosities

DOC BURR's collection of film is a cabinet of curiosities. Although his passion obviously lay with American feature comedies and crime films of the latter half of the 20th century, he could not resist collecting all kinds of things. His collection of short subjects is a particular treasure trove. Organized by subjects (The Land, Sports, War, Wildlife), the masses of 400' film cans contain something for everyone: documentaries, educational films, short subjects, cartoons, newsreels, industrials, trailers, travelogues, etc.. Silent, sound, Kodascopes, original, shrunken prints from the 1930s, dupe versions of silent classics. The breadth of human knowledge, up to a point, ready for projection. The milk industry in Wisconsin. What lives in a pond. A new type of penicillin. Men's clothing industry. Nitrate mines in Chile.

Does this collection of shorts say something about the man, the collector? Is there an underlying taste dictating this assembly of film, or is it more along the lines of "I'll buy anything if it's under \$5"? What beauty lies hidden in the story of Magnets or a film about math? Does a physics film lend something to the modern viewer perhaps not seen in its day? What does an archive do with a collection like this?



Image courtesy of Liz Coffey

4:00 PM

Wrap-up Discussion

6:00 PM

Pre-dinner reception

7:00 PM

Lobster/Vegetarian Dinner