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SI 678 - Preserving Sound and Motion, Winter 2010

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SI 678 Preserving Sound and Motion

Class 5 – Motion – Restoration Challenges
Themes

- What are motion pictures?
- What are we dealing with?
- Integrity and copying
- Restoration and reconstruction

“Restoration goes beyond the physical copying of surviving material into reconstruction of the most authentic version of a film.”

Gracy, Film Preservation, 2007.
What are motion pictures?

- Optical and aural illusions
- Cultural construction of reality
- Evidence
- Documents

Motion picture media issues

Themes
Motion
Media
Integrity
Restoration

- Base and binder
- Image and sound
- Film generations
- History of the film
Motion picture media issues

- **Cellulosic nitrate** – 1889-1950
  - Base gets brittle and degrades fast
  - Gelatin binder ages and distorts
  - Highly flammable

- **Cellulose acetate** – 1925/45 to present
  - Base chemically decomposes
    - Vinegar syndrome
  - Unstable color dyes (orange hue)

- **Polyester** – 1955 to present
  - Stable base and silver (B&W)
  - Unstable color dyes

Themes
- Motion
- Media
- Integrity
- Restoration

• Image Permanence Institute
Motion picture media issues

- Film generations (handout)
  - Master (camera negative)
  - Inter-negatives
  - Duplicate negatives/positives
  - Positive prints

- History of the film
  - Production quality
  - Care and handling over time
  - Environmental conditions

Inspection and Edge Coding

- **Inspection basics – handle once**
  - Cans, rewind, view, document

- **Edge coding (handouts)**
  - Dating mechanism
  - “originals” versus prints/copies

- **Power through inspection (Gracy)**
  - Knowledge and fatefulness
  - Subjective nature of observation
  - Quality control perspectives
  - Politics of selection
  - Orphaned films

Themes
- Motion
- Media
- Integrity
- Restoration

Film Preservation Guide, Ch. 3 / Gracy, Ch. 8
Cinema Sound

- 1913 – Edison Kinetophone
  - Separate sound system
- 1925 – Vitaphone
  - Great improvement of separate
- One track optical sound/film
- 1929 “The Broadway Melody”
- 1940 “Fantasia” multitrack
- 1971 “Clockwork Orange” Dolby
- 1982 “Return of the Jedi” THX

Publicity photograph of man using Edison Kinetophone, ca. 1895
(Wikimedia Commons)
Digital/Optical Sound
Preserving Integrity

Themes
- Motion
- Media
- Integrity
- Restoration

Archival perspectives (Duranti 1995)
- Authenticity
- Reliability

Preservation perspectives
- Loss of disparate parts
- Loss of context
- Loss of usability

Ethical perspectives
- Impact of actions taken on original intent
- Maintenance or loss of quality and value
Restoration as a Strategy

- What is to be preserved
- Restoration intent (Read and Meyer, p. 71)
  - As is
  - As seen then
  - As seen later
  - As intended by maker
  - As meant for modern audience
  - Reworked new version
  - New commercial product
- Technical processes (duplication)
- Aesthetic decision making
Film preservation process

- Preservation versus restoration
- Relationship of film and art restoration (Cesare Brandi, 1963)
- Restoring the original (Eileen Bowser)
  - As handed down (as is)
  - As seen by audiences (as was)
  - As intended by director
  - To play well to contemporary audiences
  - As a rework

Busche: “After all, a restoration is a critical interpretation, not an artistic enhancement of the object.” (p. 8)
Film preservation process

- Proper storage as foundation
- Duplication of film stock
  - Pre-inspection
  - Detailed preparation
  - Printing
  - Inspection and QC
- Restoration
  - Color correction (intent)
  - Assembly from multiple sources

Color restoration

- Documentation on film production and manufacture is an important part of the film’s context.
- Modern science in the service of authenticity
- Tension between authenticity and modern

• Read, “Tinting and Toning,” 1998
Thank you!

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