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TRACES OF EDUCATION

LIVING ARCHIVE FOR CHILDREN, WITH CHILDREN

A film museum, a cinematheque, a film archive are film educational institutions. The educational mission of the Arsenal was described by Ulrich Gregor around ten years after the founding of the group Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek as follows:

“It fell to them [the Freunden der Deutschen Kinemathek] to achieve a specific kind of educational and informational work, by presenting films not as isolated objects, but as part of a context that went well beyond the individual film....

According to this conception, films should not be presented as singular ‘artworks,’ but as products of a medium that can be explained through certain factors—from social, political, economic factors, from factors within the artistic tradition or in rejection of artistic tradition.”¹

From the beginning, the Arsenal saw its mission as producing contexts and making them visible: contexts between individual films, in film programs, and also between a film and its historical-political and aesthetic-cultural surroundings. 50 years after the founding of the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek questions of education are being posed anew in and through the film archive. It is not only about embedding films in discursive contexts, but also about the question of mediating a film archive to those who did not grow up with the cultural technologies of film and cinema. The question of the future of film archives will be decided by the next generation in film and cinema. In order that the digital natives of today might become the film friends of tomorrow, there will need to be a comprehensive film education, for which the material history of film is a necessary component.

¹ Ulrich Gregor cited in: Stefanie Schulte Strathaus: *Andere Filme anders zeigen. Kino als Resultat filmischen Denkens*. 89-103: 90. First published in: Ulrich Gregor: *Das Berliner Arsenal*. In: *Theorie des Kinos*. Hrsg. von Karsten Witte. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1972. 257.

What might it mean to extend the concept of education in a film archive to school contexts? What might it mean to let children get a look at the holdings in the archive? Can a film archive for children be set up from the film holdings of the Arsenal: a film archive that would only exist in the first place through the involvement of children?

SUPERFILMSHOW! Film as Art for Kids

Experimental films are not only particularly well suited to intermediating with children.² They also represent one of the Arsenal archive's strong points, and which is the focus of the LIVING ARCHIVE FOR CHILDREN. Making experimental films accessible to children is no new idea, but it is comparatively rarely implemented. In the Arsenal archive there is a historical trace of exposing American avant-garde films to children. The SUPER FILM SHOW! by Marilyn Singer and her husband Steve Aronson, curated for the American Federation of Arts (AFA), was shown in 1981 at the 11th International Forum for Young Film. The curator of the program remembers:

“The film department [of the AFA] circulated packages of avant-garde films and films on art to museums, the most notable of which was ‘A History of Avant-Garde Film.’ My husband and I think that in 1979, there was a show of contemporary art for children at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, NY called ‘SuperShow!’ So, AFA decided to put together a program of avant-garde films to accompany it and to be circulated on its own. I was beginning my writing career at the time, and Steve and I selected and programmed the films with kids in mind and I wrote the notes.”³

2 For more on this, cf.: Stefanie Schlüter/Volker Pantenburg: Experimentalfilme vermitteln. Zum praktischen und analytischen Umgang mit dem Kino der Avantgarde. In: Oliver Fahle, Vinzenz Hediger, Gudrun Sommer (eds.): Orte filmischen Wissens. Filmkultur und Filmvermittlung im Zeitalter digitaler Netzwerke. Schüren Verlag Marburg 2011. 213-236.

3 Marilyn Singer in an e-mail to Stefanie Schlüter (March 4, 2013). At the time, Steve Aronson was working as the director of film programming at the American Federation of Arts, Marilyn Singer was at the beginning of her career as a children's book author. Cf.: Susan Sollins, Elke Solomon, Independent Curators Incorporated, Hudson River Museum (eds.): Supershow: a travelling exhibition organized by Independent Curators Incorporated. New York: Independent Curators Inc. 1979.

Alongside their programming of the films, Marilyn's written program notes are remarkable. In an astoundingly simple way, the author prepares the children for the special experience of experimental and avant-garde films:

The films in this program are different from the kind of films that you normally see on television or in the cinema (unless you're very lucky). They are different from other films because they do not tell any stories. And unlike the films of *Sesame Street* and *Das feuerrote Spielmobil*, these films are not trying to teach you how to count or spell, or to show you how a record is made. But they can teach you how to see things in a new way, even completely ordinary things you just have to be a bit patient. That's why you have to concentrate on the things happening on the screen. Watch the light, the colors, the forms and movements, and not just the objects that can be seen. Think about how many different ways you can look at a thing—a bird for instance. Then look at how the filmmaker sees it. Something else that makes these films so different is the number of peculiar and interesting techniques that they use to find new ways of seeing.

None other than Stan Brakhage had motivated the author to address children directly in the program text for SUPERFILMSHOW!:

“I spoke with a number of the filmmakers. One of my favorite recollections is talking with Stan Brakhage, who told me to write all catalog copy about avant-garde film as if I were talking to a smart eight-year-old.”⁴

Stan Brakhage as film educator: Hardly any other filmmaker has been so concerned with “childhood, primal sight, the beginning of consciousness, and the phenomenological discovery of the world”⁵ and thus with questions that are highly relevant for conveying films to children. In America the SUPERFILMSHOW! circulated quite successfully in museums and archives. Here in Germany it is (still) a struggle to show experimental films to children. A few years ago, when Stefanie Schulte Strathaus and Birgit Kohler once again put the SUPERFILMSHOW! into the program for children, it was almost entirely adults who came to the Arsenal to see it.

⁴ Marilyn Singer in an e-mail to Stefanie Schlüter (March 4, 2013).

⁵ Cf.: Suranjan Ganguly: Stan Brakhage – The 60th Birthday Interview. In: *Film Culture* 78/1994. 18-38:18.

Some of the films from the SUPERFILMSHOW!, for instance Red Grooms's LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD (USA 1979), have not survived their time. The print has reddened with age. Others, however, only get used now when I show them to children at the Arsenal and elsewhere; for example Standish Lawder's CATFILM FOR KATY AND CYNNE (USA 1973). There is hardly any film that takes on the topic of the screen as a two-dimensional surface in such a playful and at the same time spectacularly simple way. When at first a milky white screen is shown and the actual image is only exposed little by little through the diligent licking of tongues, when at the end this licking become recognizable for a short moment as the heads of three cats, this makes a small sensation, and not only for children. Due to the unfamiliar perspective from which the cats are seen, it is an exciting challenge for children to imagine how the film was shot. One child's theory about CATFILM is as follows: "The filmmaker poured milk onto his camera and the cats lick it up from the camera."

DWIGHTIANA and FADENSPIELE

DWIGHTIANA (USA 1959) was one of the first of Marie Menken's films to come to the Arsenal collection, presumably with the SUPERFILMSHOW! The acquisition of all the other available films by Marie Menken was initiated by the filmmaker Ute Aurand. A series of discoveries and activities preceded the actual purchase of the prints, which attest to how intertwined the ways are that lead films into a collection:

Dear Stefanie, ... you asked about the Menken prints - when I was teaching at the dffb in 89/90 I gave a Mekas seminar. I read his Movie Journal and found his two Menken texts there, which I was very excited by. The Arsenal already had a print of DWIGHTIANA, which I'd somehow discovered and the Blickpilotin showed NOTEBOOK at their first event in December '89 and I wanted to see more Menken films. When I began the Filmarbeiterinnen Abende in June 90 and Mekas was invited to Berlin in August '90, the possibility of buying prints became more concrete...The Arsenal agreed to purchase all the prints for 1200 DM! And finally - I think it was autumn '92 - the prints arrived in Berlin.

Working with Regina Schütze from the Blickpilotin we made the Menken publication and organized screenings...⁶

When a few years ago Milena Gregor suggested including DWIGHTIANA in an animated film program for children in the context of WAS IST KINO?⁷ I visited Ute Aurand to find out more about Marie Menken. Spontaneously she showed me her film FADENSPIELE (GER 1999), which the sisters Detel and Ute Aurand had made, and which would not have existed, according to Ute, if it weren't for DWIGHTIANA. Ute projected the film between the kitchen, where the 16mm projector stood, and the workroom, where there was a screen; somewhere in the middle of this arrangement was me. How great it was to see this film for the first time, and in dialog with DWIGHTIANA! When I took on the work with the Living Archive project, I decide to make a 16mm print of FADENSPIELE (GER 1999), since the film had previously not been in the Arsenal collection.⁸

At my first children's screening with DWIGHTIANA one of the children asked what the film was about, since it doesn't tell a story. Out of the group of first-graders came a spontaneous answer right away: "I think the film's about the fact that you can make nice movies out of just the stuff you have at home. Colored pencils, beads, stones..." The greatest moments in the work of educating are those in which—like here—the spirit of a film does the job for you. Marie Menken would presumably not have put it any differently. As the reason for her filmmaking, she once said that she liked the whirring of the Bolex camera, and she made DWIGHTIANA to do something nice for a sick friend.

If we understand mediating film a form of aesthetic education, working with avant-garde and experimental films are a perfect vehicle, since the experimental composition

⁶ Ute Aurand in an e-mail to Stefanie Schlüter (November 11, 2012). On the occasion of the first complete retrospective of Marie Menken's work in Germany (at the Arsenal), Ute Aurand and Regina Schütze edited a collection of texts: Ute Aurand, Regina Schütze (eds.): Marie Menkens Filmpoesie. Berlin 1992.

⁷ WAS IST KINO? is a film educational program for schools at the Arsenal, initiated by Milena Gregor (Arsenal), Anke Hahn (Deutsche Kinemathek), and myself. The focus is on films from the Arsenal holdings and those of the Deutsche Kinemathek.

⁸ Only the episodic film FADENSPIELE II (Detel und Ute Aurand | GER 2003) is part of the collection. Detel and Ute Aurand are currently working on FADENSPIELE III.

of films often coincides with the spectators processes of perception: experimental aisthesis. In addition, working with experimental film and archival prints facilitates a seamless connection to the material history of film.

Traces on the material

The LIVING ARCHIVE FOR CHILDREN is preceded by several years of intensive educational work with various film influences and contacts to filmmakers, which whom I conducted workshops in schools. When Ute Aurand, Robert Beavers, Dirk Schaefer and I were planning a series of experimental film workshops in 2010, the work with children and experimental film got underway. The same is true of the work with the material of film. By directly painting on and scratching 35mm film material, by filming with a 16mm Bolex camera, and finally by adding music to selected sequences, around 50 Berlin children and young people left their soundtracks on and their traces in the material. They did so, to our surprise, with great enthusiasm for the analog filmstrips. While we were conducting the workshop series, it could not yet be foreseen how quickly the digital conversion of cinema would be carried out. Only three years later, the cinema no longer existed in its earlier form; one hears more and more frequently about film labs closing down, and that the future of analog film production is uncertain. This also means that the film museum, the cinematheque, the art exhibition, and the film archive will become the exclusive locations where one can encounter analog film.

Analog film material, as can be confirmed in countless pedagogical situations, is an inexhaustible source for film education; and neither the appeal nor the visible clarity of the filmstrip can be replaced by a digital medium. As an indispensable witness to the history of the moving image, it will remain important for film education to see, touch, and experience analog film—precisely because it is understood as disappearing. To put it another way: working on and with the material of film has become more precarious than ever in a very short time. And this is exactly what makes it that much more important and interesting.

Memory games: Children into the archive!

The approach of the LIVING ARCHIVE FOR CHILDREN is simple: I extract a body of work from the Arsenal's film collection consisting mostly of short, experimental films. Here an incomplete, unorganized list:

CATFILM FOR KATY AND CYNNIE (USA 1973) and COLORFILM (USA 1982) by Standish Lawder; FADENSPIELE II (GER 2003) by Detel and Ute Aurand; KRATZIG 1 (D 2010) by students at the Hunsrück Grundschule in Kreuzberg; DWIGHTIANA (USA 1959), GO! GO! GO! (USA 1963), NOTEBOOK (1962), LIGHTS (USA 1965), MOON PLAY (USA 1961) by Marie Menken; IMAGINATION (USA 1957), MOOD CONTRASTS (USA 1953), SPOOK SPORT (USA 1939) by Mary Ellen Bute; STILL LIFE (GB 1976) by Jenny Okun; LOOSE CORNER (USA 1986) by Anita Thacher; MOTHLIGHT (USA 1963) by Stan Brakhage; FREE RADICALS (USA 1958), RAINBOW DANCE (USA 1936), A COLOUR BOX (GB 1935), COLOUR FLIGHT (GB 1938), TUSALAVA (GB 1928) by Len Lye; RHYTHMUS 21 (GER 1921), RHYTHMUS 23 (GER 1923), VORMITTAGSSPUK (GER 1928) by Hans Richter; FANTASMAGORIE von Emile Cohl (F 1908); 33 YO-YO TRICKS (USA 1976) by P. White; PP II (USA 1986) by M.M. Serra; GERTIE THE DINOSAUR (USA 1914) by Winsor McCay; POR PRIMERA VEZ (Cuba 1967) by Octavio Cortázar; A MAN AND HIS DOG OUT FOR AIR (USA 1957) by Robert Breer etc. etc.

Instead of confronting the children with curated film programs, in LIVING ARCHIVE they contribute to the selection of films themselves. For every film that comes under consideration I have prepared an index card with an image from the film and (technical) information, so that the children can play with a pool of film cards. The rules of the game are flexible. The children can create a timeline with the cards—from the oldest to the most recent film; they can arrange the films according to country, according to whether they are color or black-and-white, or whether they are silent or with sound. A film cluster can be formed in a variety of ways that bring single films together so that they can take up contact with one another. By playfully engaging with the film cards, the children begin to make choices. They take out the film cards that rouse their curiosity, setting others aside. Afterwards they go in search of the films they've chosen in the archive, taking them down from the shelves themselves. Finally they fix an order

with the cards and watch the films together in the cinema. Based on children's curiosity and dispositions, a short film program comes to be!

Viewing the archive films is a work of both discovery and memory. And talking about films is not always the best way to reveal the affects of this work. So after a LIVING ARCHIVE event, the children draw a film image on a blank index card from memory. These "memory cards" provide information about the visual moments important to the children, and they track down the traces that individual archive films have left in the memory of each individual child. Some of the traces also lead (back) into the cinema. The screen, the projectors, the spectators' seats—all of this is part of the children's visual experiences.

Traces in the Archive

Every workshop with children and all the work on material leaves traces that can be traced back to the Arsenal archive. The children's films that were created in the experimental film workshops are kept there under the titles KRATZIG 1 and KRATZIG 2 (GER 2010), and provided with numbers in the archive. KRATZIG 1 (16mm) has already traveled around the world. The print went on tour Canada as part of an experimental film program.⁹ The LIVING ARCHIVE FOR CHILDREN, WITH CHILDREN initiates an exchange between children and archive. By engaging with archival films, a mosaic of children's film memories was drawn, which itself becomes a small archive. So that the memory drawings made by children could themselves migrate back into the archive, they became the basis of a 16mm film, which Ute Aurand made for the Arsenal collection. Children see, remember, and draw archive films; the drawings themselves become film and leave yet another trace of children in the archive: memory back and forth.

⁹ The program RADICAL RECESS: AVANT GARDE FILMS FOR CHILDREN! curated by Larissa Fan, was shown at the Image Festival in Toronto in 2011 and is currently touring as part of "Images across Canada – 25th Anniversary Tour": http://www.imagesfestival.com/calendar.php?event_id=645&month=y (last viewed: March 13, 2013.)

In order for an archive to continue, it needs new blood. I find it hard to imagine a more living archive than a children's archive. With the collection's experimental films, the LIVING ARCHIVE FOR CHILDREN has made a start; for a children's archive there are still many films yet to discover.

PARTICIPANTS

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1st grade

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Workshops

»Film ohne Kamera«

Students at the Heinz Brandt School (teacher: Lars Degen)

Ute Aurand, Robert Beavers (filmmakers)

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Special thanks to the Arsenal projectionists, who impressed many children at countless events by showing them what goes on back in the booth.