

THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH FILM STUDIES PROGRAM NEWSLETTER



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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR BY LUCY FISCHER

As I write, the Fall semester is in full swing. We have already had several guest speakers in the Film Studies Program (scholar of Russian cinema, David MacFayden and Israeli filmmaker, Duki Dror) and have completed various film series (Japanese and Turkmen). We have also had several meetings of the Pittsburgh Film Colloquium with presentations by Rick Pioto (on the horror film) and by Qian Zhang and Dawn Seckler (on transnational cinema).

We are pleased this term to welcome a new member of our faculty, Dr. Randall Halle who is the Klaus W. Jonas Professor of German and Film Studies. Next semester he will be teaching a graduate course on cinema and the avant-garde as well as one section of our undergraduate capstone course: Advanced Seminar in Film Studies.

Finally, we are delighted that Stephanie Lord, a current English Department MFA Writing Program student (and one who has taken classes in Screenwriting with Carl Kurlander), has been awarded a prestigious 2006 Gee Nicholl Screenwriting Fellowship, which is presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. Stephanie will receive the first installment of the fellowship's \$30,000 prize money at a gala dinner in Beverly Hills November 16. Stephanie's script is titled "Palau Rain." It was selected from 4,899 scripts submitted to the competition.

We are, certainly, off to a good start this academic year.

FACULTY PROFILE: ADAM LOWENSTEIN

Dr. Adam Lowenstein started at the University of Pittsburgh as an Assistant Professor in the English Department in the fall of 1999. He is now an Associate Professor. He is currently working on a book tentatively titled *Cinema Lost and Found: Spectatorship, Surrealism and the Age of New Media*. In the book he asks what we do with cinema spectatorship now that many viewers may have their first experience with films outside of the theaters and what this shift does to what cinema is, was, and could be.



Dr. Lucy Fischer

Inside this issue:

Memory in the Making: Dr. Richard Tobias and a Documentary	2
The Teaching Award	2
The Graduate Interview: Michael Aronson	3
Graduate Student Activities	4
Our Higher Faculties	5
Library Notes: Recent Acquisitions	6

(Continued on page 5)

MEMORY IN THE MAKING: DR. RICHARD TOBIAS AND A DOCUMENTARY

Dr. Richard C. Tobias recently passed away at the age of 81, the start of his 49th year as a faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh. He will continue to be dearly missed by many at the University. He always exhibited a friendly willingness to chat, though it may still not be widely known that Dr. Tobias was collaborating with undergraduate film student Sean Eisele on a documentary film project about his life.

Sean Eisele received two grants in 2005 with which he made plans to produce a film. He won a Pittsburgh Filmmakers First Works Grant for five hundred dollars, and a small works grant from the University of



Dr. Richard C. Tobias

Pittsburgh (which is not a film-specific grant) for the same amount. Sean wanted to produce a short documentary about an elderly subject; he was especially interested in the question of the retention of memory. After working with a few subjects, he found them to be lacking the acute sense of awareness necessary for his film. When he found Dr. Tobias, he not only found his ideal subject, but someone more than willing to help him with his project.

Sean had Dr. Tobias as a professor for a comedy class and found that talking to him was just like talking

(Continued on page 8)

THE TEACHING AWARD: TANINE ALLISON

Last Spring, PhD student Tanine Allison received an Elizabeth Baranger Excellence in Teaching Award. This is an annual award, with six annual winners, which was just started last year. To win the award, any TA may be nominated by a student, or someone familiar with their teaching. Those nominated are required to complete an application and assemble a portfolio, which includes an example of teaching materials along with an explanation of the TA's teaching philosophy and a description of a challenge encountered while teaching. Tanine was nominated for the award by one of the students in her Seminar of Composition Film class which she taught in the Fall 2005 semester.

Tanine arrived at The University of

Pittsburgh with some previous teaching experience. While at Brown, as an undergraduate TA., she taught one section of their Cinematic Coding and Narrativity course, which she describes as being very similar to an Introduction to Film course. She is now currently a fourth year PhD student in Pitt's English Department Film Studies Program, meaning that she started teaching Composition here in the Fall 2004 semester. As she puts it, her academic work "explores the intersections of genre (science fiction and the war film), technology (special effects, new media), and critical discourses (realism, post-modernism)."

Upon being asked what type of classes she enjoys teaching most, Tanine responded that she proba-

bly prefers teaching film courses because that is where her interests lie. She mentions that different challenges are presented when teaching either composition or film. While composition can be seen more as teaching a process in order to guide and direct the students, film involves focusing on a larger number of facts that necessitate lectures. Tanine also finds that undergraduates are initially more enthusiastic about the chance to study film than about other subjects, but often when entering introductory classes they tend to assume a somewhat different perspective on film than the usual approach of film studies courses. One piece of advice Tanine has for new teachers is to stay positive and "Try really hard to like and respect your students and they will like and respect you back."

THE GRADUATE INTERVIEW: MICHAEL ARONSON

Dr. Michael Aronson, a graduate of Pitt's English Department and Doctoral Film Studies Program in 2002, was good enough to participate in a phone interview for The News Reel.

Michael Aronson started as an Assistant Professor at the University of Oregon in 2003. He recently had an article published in The Moving Image on local films made in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania in the 1910s. He also has an upcoming article about his grandfather, co-written with his father and sister, in Film History. Dr. Aronson has a book based on his dissertation, being published by The University of Pittsburgh Press in 2007/8.

Nathan Koob is a second-year MA student in the University of Pittsburgh's English Department/Film Studies Program. He is editor of The News reel, Chief of Operations for The Cinematheque and currently acts as co-president of the English Department GSO. In May 2005 he received his B.A. from Oklahoma State University.

Nathan Koob: The University of Oregon website listed digital media as one of your interests, which caught my eye. I was wondering what your interests in digital media are specifically.

Michael Aronson: It's a pretty reasonable question in part because most of my own work deals with early cinema, or the "old-fashioned" term "silent cinema." Actually, it was at Pitt as a grad student that I began teaching a course called "New Media and Digital Culture." But, of course, there's the intellectual answer and the real answer...

NK: (laughs) Right.

MA: The real answer is that before coming to Pittsburgh I was an Assistant Cameraman on television commercials; my background's in film production. The thing everyone in the industry will tell you is that camera people tend to be technology geeks. I've always been interested in the "stuff" of cinema, and my interest in new media is an extension of that. But, intellectually I do think there is a strong connection between my interests in early cinema and digital media... in the sense that as a historian of cinema, or early cinema, what I'm often trying to do is theorize the past. With the digital culture course, with what's going on now, I try and teach my students how to historicize the present, if that makes sense? Particularly I want students to have a critical frame with which to look at changes swirling around them, so the courses that I've taught under this rubric are largely a way of trying to explore and theorize the moment that we're all in. It's interesting because I only started teaching that class in 2003 and while the theoretical framework has stayed fairly stable the objects that we look at and think about have radically changed in just three years. This past spring when I taught digital cinema for a lot of students that meant YouTube.

NK: (laughs)

MA: YouTube didn't exist in 2004.

NK: I think I just discovered YouTube something like two months ago. Someone mentioned it to me as if I should know what it is; I always end up kind of behind on the new internet technology.

MA: Well not too far behind. I mean history becomes compacted in terms of technological change and there are ways in which we can get caught up in the very idea of change, of the new. I

think my strength as an early film historian is to say, "This is a particular technology: how is it developing into a set of practices and meanings for our culture.?" It doesn't matter whether it's YouTube, Flash or the nickelodeon. So it's exploratory; I do very little, if any, personal writing on new media but it's become an important component of my teaching. As a former cameraman I'm very interested in the ways in which the formal properties of the object determine and are determined by culture. So, for instance, in this course I taught this past spring besides YouTube, all of the students participated in something called Second Life, an online massive multiplayer virtual world. You can check it out on the web at secondlife.com. As part of the course the students and I actually had a virtual classroom and individual avatars that acted as our cyber-placeholders, so to speak. We regularly held class in that environment sometimes with all of us in the same real place and sometimes with all of us spread around campus and town.

NK: This reminds me, I noticed that some of your office hours are restricted to IM Chat. How does that work and do you find it to be helpful?

MA: Well I've learned that at least with undergraduate students we assume they are all very in tune with new technology, but it's actually a pretty broad range. For some students it's been very helpful, for others, they couldn't figure out how to turn on the Chat program. Some of them regularly use Instant Messaging in their everyday life, I see them "talking" to their friends in the classroom while I'm teaching and others have never even approached it, so it's a range of student responses. I use it as just one more way to continue a conversation that begins in the classroom, and for that it's useful.

NK: Actually, going back to your inter

(Continued on page 7)

GRADUATE STUDENT ACTIVITIES

The University of Florida's Graduate Film Studies Group recently held a postmodern horror conference, entitled "Reel Fear" at which two University of Pittsburgh students presented papers. Dr. Adam Lowenstein was a keynote speaker at the conference, a description of his address can be found in the "Faculty Profile" section.

Devan Goldstein is a second-year PhD student in the University of Pittsburgh's English Department and Film Studies Program. Devan's interests include uses of horrific imagery outside the horror genre, cinematic representations of the catastrophic, and the intersections of evolutionary and cognitive psychology with film studies. In addition to his presentation at *Reel Fear*, he will present a paper entitled "Bodies at Rest, Bodies in Motion: The Early Cinematic Corpse as Agent of Attraction" at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference in the Spring.

In his paper entitled, "A Cinema of Abjections: Horror and the Vulnerable Body in *The Matrix*," Devan examines *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999) not for any religious, philosophical, or political significance, but for its groundbreaking use of horrific imagery augmented by computer-generated effects, thus far largely ignored in critical discussions of the film (even in those that do discuss special effects). Images of violated bodies (including memorable depictions of a mouth sealing itself over and a robotic insect burrowing into a navel), in combination with the film's meaty sound effects and aggressive extradiegetic music, serve to deliver a viewing experience located primarily in the human body, made vulnerable and fragile. This spectatorial experience recalls Julia Kristeva's work on abjection,

which cannot be ignored given the film's visual concern with the corruption of bodily borders in particular. However, Devan's reliance on Kristeva is not psychoanalytic in any conventional way; rather, he makes use of her striking and suggestive imagery of abjection only to illustrate a possible path from a more traditional cinematic viewing experience (in which the spectator's body is essentially erased) to the kind of bodily awareness that *The Matrix* elicits.

Indeed, more crucially for the study, this appeal to the real body through fake imagery bears an easy kinship not only with postmodern aesthetics, but with what Tom Gunning described as the cinema of attractions, that body of early cinema characterized by the use of shocking and astonishing aesthetic devices in order to attract and arouse its viewership. Devan argues that films like *The Matrix* as such constitute a shifting of the balance between attraction and narrative in contemporary cinema..

Nathan Koob is a second-year MA student in the University of Pittsburgh's English Department/Film Studies Program. He is editor of *The News Reel*, Chief of Operations for *The Cinematheque* and co-president of the English Department GSO. His interests include postmodern genre, Lacanian theory and the position of sexuality in representations of John Waters' early films. He received his B.A. from Oklahoma State University.

In his paper, "Curbing Fear Through *Lycanthropy: The Postmodern Monster Film and the Lacanian Real*" Nathan argues that in the more contemporary monster film, fear no longer comes from the creature, but instead from the individuals losing

their grip on the symbolic and accepting the real of their desires.

Today, many monster film narratives are forced to recognize the history of their respective monster. *Ginger Snaps* (Fawcett, 1998), for example, is a werewolf film where the characters retain previous knowledge of werewolf legends and fictional constructions, leaving them with the knowledge that the werewolf never succeeds in overturning society. Viewing the Lacanian real, through Slavoj Žižek's *Looking Awry*, and its relationship to this text reveals that the monster now acts as a distraction from the fragility of symbolic constructions and fear instead comes from seeing how easy it can be to lose our grip on symbolic reality.

In the narrative, Ginger turns into a werewolf concurrent with her first menstruation. Here the existence of the werewolf acts as a distracting mask for Ginger's rejection of the symbolic and fall into the real; the onset of womanhood rips apart her symbolic understanding of childhood and forces her to realize herself as subject and victim to fate, ultimately enacting her death drive. After she begins a rampage of murder and sexual deviance, believing that Ginger is a werewolf becomes preferable to the alternative — that she is not.. The film tempts us with the realization that something as necessary and normal as puberty could destroy our symbolic universe and lead us to a place where we see that in our everyday lives we are all murderers who merely pose as moralistic and logical human beings.

Jill Dione recently chaired a panel entitled "With Regulation and Consumerism for All" at the Film, Television and 1950s Conference hosted by Plymouth University in Plymouth, NH.

OUR HIGHER FACULTIES

Lucy Fischer's article on Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* was recently published in *The Cinema of Roman Polanski* edited by John Orr and Elzbieta Ostrowska.

In September she gave a talk for Pitt's Consortium Medical Ethics Program on "Doctor/Patient Relations in the Media" and she moderated a panel on "Transnational Film Genre and Exhibition: Case Studies in Russia and China" for the Pittsburgh Film Colloquium, for which two of her graduate students presented

papers. In October, she was an invited respondent for a film panel at the American Studies Association chaired by historian Lois Banner and in November, she delivered a paper on Agnès Varda at the University of Kentucky.

She continues her work editing two anthologies: one on American film of the 1920s (for Rutgers University Press) and another on teaching film (for the MLA).

Keiko McDonald recently published her book *Reading a Japanese Film:*

Cinema in Context (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006)

Mark Lynn Anderson gave two conference presentations this November. "Why the New York Federation of Labor Went Hollywood in 1921," at *Researching New York: Perspectives on the Empire State*, SUNY Albany, NY.

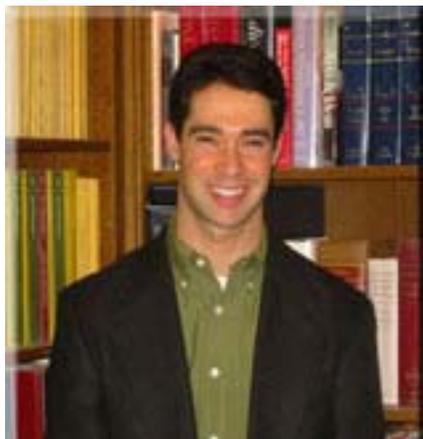
"The Coquet von Sternberg and the Closet at Paramount," at the Literature/Film Association Conference, Towson University, Towson, Maryland.

FACULTY PROFILE (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

Next semester he will be teaching a graduate seminar *Cinema/Photography/New Media* which will study the relationship between these three mediums in an effort to determine what cinema's fundamental qualities are. The course asks, "What is it about cinema that is essential and do these elements make cinema more, or less, cinematic?" Screenings for the seminar are being chosen for their inter-media aspects. Some being considered for the course are *Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1966) and *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999). A specific interest explored by the course will be the move of cinema into the art museum found in work by Isaac Julien and Bill Viola. Dr. Lowenstein also wants to use the course to study photography and the crucial dilemma of its relation to reality.

Dr. Lowenstein feels very lucky to be at the University of Pittsburgh. He is very pleased by the opportunities the city, program and department have to offer. He mentioned that he agrees with the view filmmaker Carl Kurlander conveys in his films, that Pittsburgh does have a certain special quality. Having completed his graduate work in Chicago, Dr. Lowenstein

said that while he did enjoy living in Chicago, Pittsburgh seems familiar in a way Chicago did not. When asked about his favorite Pittsburgh establishments, Dr. Lowenstein highly recommended the restaurant Tessaro's in Bloomfield.



Dr. Adam Lowenstein

On October 20, Dr. Lowenstein gave a keynote address at The University of Florida's First Annual Graduate Film Studies Group Symposium entitled *Reel Fear*. In his paper, "America Land of the Dead: Cinema, Trauma and Temporality" Dr. Lowenstein studies the somewhat belated relationship between George Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005) and *Night of the Living*

Dead (1968). He examines how this relationship works in reference to cinema's relationship to representations of traumatic events. For his discussion he uses Freud's concept of trauma and how it must be experienced with a certain lag period.

Dr. Lowenstein finds that his interest in horror has been a good combination with Pittsburgh. He has especially enjoyed working with both Tom Savini and George Romero. In February 2002 Dr. Lowenstein was delighted to introduce the premiere of Romero's *Bruiser* and participate in a question and answer session after the screening. He sees *Night of the Living Dead* as being one of the most important horror and independent films of all time. When asked about his personal opinion upon meeting Romero, Lowenstein commented that he found him to be "a very generous, thoughtful and talented man." Dr. Lowenstein has also been given the opportunity to do an event with Wes Craven and hopes to bring in David Cronenberg. He looks forward to being able to participate in many similar occasions.

LIBRARY NOTES: RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Ann Ronchetti recently submitted some information outlining new acquisitions to the library that can aid both film students and faculty. Hillman library also continually updates its extensive collection of films which can be found in the Media Resource Center located near the Cup & Chaucer on Hillman's ground floor. We at *The News Reel* hope you find these resources useful and encourage all University of Pittsburgh students and faculty to take full advantage of all that Hillman Library has to offer.

ARTstor

Over the summer, the ULS acquired access to *ARTstor*, an online database containing over 500,000 images and related data from a number of sources ranging from the Carnegie Arts of the United States collection to Harvard's Schlesinger History of Women in America collection and the Huntington Archive of Asian Art, among others.

ARTstor permits keyword searching across the collections as well as in individual ones. In addition to images of art and architecture from around the world, the database contains photographs of actors and other film personalities, including formal portraits by prominent photographers of their era such as Steichen, Beaton, Avedon and Leibovitz. Also included are stills from movies such as D. W. Griffith's *Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) and Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Users of *ARTstor* may print, export or download images for educational use by employing the database's print or export functions as described in its "Terms and Conditions" section. A link to the database appears on the "Databases A-Z" list on the library's home page found at www.library.pitt.edu.



Hillman Library

Early Russian Cinema, 1907-1918

Among recent purchases of periodicals back issues in Hillman's Microforms Department is the Russian Cinematographic Press's *Early Russian Cinema* microfiche collection of thirteen early Russian film periodicals, including bi-monthly journals and popular weeklies published by major Russian film studios between 1907 and 1918. For a complete listing of the periodicals included, enter the title of the collection in PittCat.

The Will Hays Papers

Last summer Hillman's Microforms Department acquired microfilm of the Indiana State Library's collec-

tion of the personal and business papers of Will Hays, who served as president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (the MPPDA, which came to be known as the "Hays Office") from 1922 to 1945. The microfilm collection focuses on those years of Hays's leadership, when the MPPDA represented the major Hollywood studios on matters of distribution and foreign trade, and antitrust, censorship, and other regulatory legislation.

The 78-reel collection has been assigned the call number PN37, and is accompanied by a printed guide to the reel contents. For a description of the collection, see the following Web page:

www.lexisnexis.com/academic/2upa/Apc/WillHaysPapers.asp

New reference titles

Among recent additions to Hillman's reference collection, the 3-volume *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (REF PN1995.9 D6 E53 2006) and the 3-volume *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography* (REF TR642 E5 2005), both from Routledge; Mark Emmons's *Film and Television: A Guide to the Reference Literature* (Libraries Unlimited, 2006; REF Z5784 M9 E47 2006); and the third edition of Susan Hayward's *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2006; REF PN1993.45 H36 2006).

THE GRADUATE (CONT. FROM PAGE 3)

ests in early cinema, I know you're also interested in local histories so I was wondering if you've found Eugene, Oregon to be fruitful for this endeavor, or how it compares to Pittsburgh.

MA : Yeah, to be honest I haven't spent a whole lot of time exploring Eugene's moviegoing history, although it was certainly a question I was asked when I interviewed here for a job. It's funny, the idea of doing your whole dissertation on one city makes a lot of sense from a historiographic position. I think we largely agree that looking at things from a narrow perspective gives us some real insight into the ways in which movies are part of everyday life and the differences that can be caused by region, ethnicity, etc., But of course when you go on the job market you're not interviewing in Pittsburgh and everyone wants to know: A) are you going to spend the rest of your life working on Pittsburgh? or B) are you going to do the same thing that you did in Pittsburgh for... [insert name of city that you're interviewing in]. So I got that question many times, "Are you going to come and do a local history of Eugene?" The answer is that you can probably find out just as much about Eugene as you can about anywhere else. At the same time I think Pittsburgh is a particularly interesting case study because it stands in for so much of what we think about in terms of the development of modern industrial society.

NK : Yeah, I know very little about Eugene, Oregon so I wasn't sure if there was something special about it and if that was possibly one of the reasons you decided to go there.

MA : I think that the kind of local work that you're talking about can be done productively almost anywhere. One of the things that I try to teach my students is that very fact: that they can learn something about the culture of cinema and the ways that it impacts

people in their communities at any particular moment in time and place. I often do have students do reception studies in the towns where they grew up. For example, I teach a course on the Warner Bros. studio as a case model of the studio system and I have students research the reception of a particular WB film in their hometown. They find out a lot of things both about the films, about themselves and their town. It's really interesting to see how a town in rural Oregon would advertise a review of a film as opposed to say a larger city like Pittsburgh and the various ways those differences are expressed.

NK : For students at Pitt looking to apply to graduate programs, do you have anything you'd like to say about what your department has to offer at the University of Oregon?

MA : Yeah, I mean I was a strange case in some ways at Pitt as a graduate student, I mean maybe there isn't a stereotypical Pitt student but considering that Film Studies is based in the English Department at Pitt it seems that most of the people seem to have some sort of background in literature and become seduced by the "dark side" or they're more generally theory-oriented and interested in the ways in which film and literary texts overlap. I came to Pitt in some ways accidentally and then stayed because of people like Lucy Fischer, but also because my project was based in Pittsburgh. At Oregon, likewise, I'm in an English department so I think that the kind of graduate student who does best here is somebody who is interdisciplinary in nature, who's interested in a broad range of texts. So the students who seem to do excel here are in some ways similar to those at Pitt in that they have a broad interest in texts and film is one of those instances. Oregon is a smaller school, but I think it's a good size; it's not too small, and the film studies program is not as big as Pitt but I would say its also intensely personal

and highly energetic. There's a really active group of graduate students and undergraduate.

NK : Okay, you've made mention of this a little bit already, so this is a good lead-in to my next question. What are your feelings on the relationship between English and Film Studies departments?

MA : That's actually something I've thought about a lot and in some ways it's weird that even though my graduate degree is in an English department, and I ended up as a professor in an English department, my background is in production, as a filmmaker. I taught at Pittsburgh Filmmakers for years; I was one of the first Pitt people to go teach there, and I taught super-8 filmmaking. But I think there's a certain institutional logic to it. One of the primary places film studies grew up in the academy was in English departments, and Film by nature, I think, is an interdisciplinary subject. If you're a new PhD on the job market you're going to end up applying to theater, film and dance departments, television departments, communications departments, art departments, art history departments, so why not English? I think it can make sense and I think Pitt is an example of a place where it works very well.

NK : Yeah, I think so too. I understand that this is kind of a weird on-the-spot question but do you have any advice or any qualities you find essential to being a film student.

MA : Well I guess I would say TiVo and a cable subscription to Turner Classic Movies. Sundays at midnight is the silent film series. As a dad with two kids I'm never up at midnight and TiVo does the job.



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MEMORY IN THE MAKING (CONT. FROM PAGE 2)

to one of his friends. Sean thought he was unique in that he obviously enjoyed teaching and was always very interested in popular culture. Sean said that Dr. Tobias' interests ranged from stories about World War II to asking Sean about the revealing clothes girls wore these days. Sean mentioned that Dr. Tobias represented to him how he would like to be when he grows older. Sean was fascinated to learn how Dr. Tobias came to be the way that he was.

In preparation for their documentary, Sean and Dr. Tobias made a

short film, that could effectively be called a trailer for the larger project, where Sean juxtaposes images and short scenes with Dr. Tobias reading the poem *Imposter*, by Jesse Bier, in voice-over. This short film was completed and it can be viewed on Sean's website at www.ogonotzfilms.com. They had a lot of plans for the documentary, but unfortunately Dr. Tobias passed away before the bulk of the project could be initiated. Sean does have about an hour of interview footage which he has turned into a seventeen minute rough cut that he believes will work as a decent film. Heavily inspired by Errol Morris and Frederic Wiseman, Sean

wanted to refrain from shooting a straight interview and instead structured the film to give the appearance of a grandfather talking to his grandson.

Sean looks forward to other projects. He is currently editing a thirty minute documentary on Philadelphia, his home town. He has the possibility of doing either an interview documentary with an ex-convict or a short film with Tony, a custodian previously at The Cathedral of Learning, concerning racism. Many of Sean's previously finished projects can be viewed on his website.