

Nicholas S.: Hi. I'm Nick Sammond. I'm an Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto and the Director of The Centre for The Study of The United States of the University of Toronto.

It's my pleasure and privilege to interview Don Crafton today. Don Crafton is recently retired from the University of Notre Dame, or Notre Dame I guess we would say.

Donald Crafton: In Indiana we say, "Noter Dame."

Nicholas S.: "Noter Dame."

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: All right. But he was previously, until last year, the Joseph and Elizabeth Robbie Chair of Film, Television, and Theater and he's now in the middle of, what I understand, is a robust and busy retirement. And so, it's a great honor and a privilege to be speaking to such a prominent and preeminent scholar of film history and animation history in particular. And so, I'm looking forward to that conversation.

Donald Crafton has written numerous articles and books. The most recent being *Shadow of a Mouse*, which won the Anne Friedberg award for innovation from SCMS. Also the aforementioned, *Before Mickey* his work on Émile Cohl. He is published in *Cinema Journal*. He is published in *Animation*, the journal of animation. He's published in French even though you don't speak it well and German and a number of other languages. The list is so long that we can't begin to express the incredible impact that Donald had had on the profession of Cinema Studies over the past 40 years.

So it is an honor and a privilege to be here to talk to you today.

Donald Crafton: Thank you Nick.

Nicholas S.: My pleasure. I have an opening question for you. What's the first film you remember ever seeing?

Donald Crafton: Well the first film I ever remember seeing is controversial because it was *The Best Years of Our Lives* and for many years I told people that that was the first film that I saw, but then I did the math and I looked it up one day and I realized that if I in fact had seen that film on it's first release it would've been in utero.

Nicholas S.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donald Crafton: It might have been I don't know, but I asked my mom if she saw a film with guy with no hands and she drew a blank so I think it must've been a re-release.

Nicholas S.: Okay.

Donald Crafton: But I saw so many films. I grew up in a time when this was a small farm town outside of Lansing, Michigan and my dad worked at the Oldsmobile plant and he would get paid on Friday and he would collect us, we'd go down to the local cinema, we'd all go my brother and me my mom and dad. It was like replaying the history of the movies. We'd go up get cheese burgers at the restaurant and we would go and it didn't matter what was playing, we didn't even know when we walked in the door what we would be seeing and we would see it every Friday. So there's a great border there.

Also on Sundays my mom would take us down and drop my brother and me off at the same theater for the 3:00 matinee. And so I saw all kinds of things there that I don't remember, but some of them made big impressions because I always remembered the ones that gave me nightmares. Quite a few of them scared the hell out of me. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. I'm pretty sure I wet my pants in that one. All kinds of films from the 50s and it wasn't until, flash forward about 35 years and I was giving a talk to one of my classes about movie going and suddenly in the middle of the lecture it occurred to me that this is where my other siblings came from. Dropping me off at the movie theater on Sunday afternoon.

So I started doing the math and I would say, "Oh yeah *Singin' in the Rain*." Anyway ...

Nicholas S.: So did you get you to-

Donald Crafton: Hell of a lot. A lot of movies.

Nicholas S.: Okay. Did you get each of them a commemorative copy to mark the occasion?

Donald Crafton: You know Nick that's a wonderful idea and there are birthdays coming up.

Nicholas S.: Okay.

Donald Crafton: Although it would take some explaining.

Nicholas S.: So the matinees I assume was the full program?

Donald Crafton: Well sometimes on Saturdays they would have the kids matinees, but we didn't actually go to those so often because that was a busy day on the run. The house. Parents had actual things to do other than ... So, but the kids matinees, so this is something that you would be interested in with your work. The kids matinees were the whole thing where the manager would come out and his job was mainly to yell at the kids. He would yell to shut us up and we'll all be like throwing spit balls at each other and yelling and screaming and jumping over

the chairs, because this was about the only time that the kids would be liberated from adult control and so mayhem tended to breakout quite often.

But there was always at least one cartoon. Maybe two or three cartoons. There were usually serials, Roy Rogers and stuff like that. And then some extremely lame B-movie that supposedly was made for children. Probably like a monogram western or something. I have no memory of watching anything there except hitting kids.

Nicholas S.: The rest blurs together. So is that where you get your love of animation from?

Donald Crafton: No, no. I'm not even sure I have a love of animation you know it's a job.

Nicholas S.: Okay.

Donald Crafton: Somebody's got to do it.

Nicholas S.: So you saw an opening then at least.

Donald Crafton: You know I have a story I, just in the process of editing our journal *The Moving Image*, we ran a selection of David Shepard's Oral History and David for many years was in charge of the oral history program at the Director's Guild of America. And so he told us this great story as he always would about how you would start interviewing someone and you would get the dinner party story. The story that they rehearsed and told time after time and it would take about three hours before you sort of got through all of that stuff and then you could ask the real questions and get the real answers. Regrettably we're not going to have time for the steamy skeletons in the closet part.

Nicholas S.: We'll do what we can.

Donald Crafton: That'll come next year. The sequel take two, but the dinner party story is that first of all I always knew how to do animation because everybody does. I mean it's just one of those things that we're all born with. You know that's why the whole idea of the first this and that is ridiculous because everybody knows how to put images together. But I was in high school and I was studying French and very bored. Mainly because I was such a bad student. I had no idea what was going on and I made a remarkable discovery and that is that the pictures in the French textbook were very kind of oily and you could actually take your finger and rub the picture off and so I took a eraser of a pencil and I would rub off part of the picture and then take a pencil and alter it.

And so I thought that was really cool so I changed a lot of the great monuments of France into some of them were sinking into the ocean and some were buildings were falling over and stuff like that. But then I also started doing little stick figure animations in the margins. So I had like this flipbook thing going and of course it wasn't that thick. It was only about 400 pages so I had a very limited

run and so the stick figure got more and more complex as the year wore on and it started layering and cycling and things like that.

So by the end of the eighth grade I had pretty much the equivalent of *Fantasia* going in the margins of my French book and that's why I do not speak French now.

Nicholas S.: Well I think it's a worthy, worthy sacrifice. Do you still, well I won't ask if you still have it.

Donald Crafton: No we had to turn the books back in.

Nicholas S.: Oh so-

Donald Crafton: I did not get my deposit.

Nicholas S.: I can imagine. I can imagine.

Donald Crafton: And I didn't keep the book. They should've at least let me keep the book.

Nicholas S.: Yeah absolutely. Perhaps-

Donald Crafton: I think it was like 35 cents.

Nicholas S.: Perhaps they saw the promise and they wanted to save it for themselves. It's out there somewhere. When the museum opens we'll see it. So you got an MA in Film from Iowa and then went and did Art History at Yale in the 70s. What was, I mean did you know that you wanted to do Cinema Studies and if so why Art History as a way into it?

Donald Crafton: Well I wanted to do something in film. From the time I was in high school on although I'm not sure when my first cinema experience was I know exactly when my love of cinema began and that was in my 16th birthday when I got my drivers license. And my buddies and me would pile in and when all the other guys were cruising the strip and trying to pick up girls we had a ritual of going to McDonalds and getting hamburgers and then we would go to one of the art cinemas in east Lansing. And there were two or three of them at the time and we would see these amazing films. We had no idea what we were watching, but we saw films that turned out of course to be the highlight, the golden age of cinema of the 60s.

The late stages of the new Nouvelle Vague. Ingmar Bergman's films. We saw a lot of Swedish films but not for any artistic reason. And that became another part of the ritualization process. Almost every Saturday night we would go over and cruise around. The thought of inviting girls along just never crossed our mind. It's just movies and hamburgers basically. But then it really did light a fire and I just developed a great love and passion for especially the Italian films and

the French films that were coming through and despite my woeful comprehension of French I had enough so that I could tell when the sentences began and ended. Things like that. So it gave me a little bit of insight.

I went off to school at the University of Michigan much to the dismay of everybody since we live five miles from East Lansing. I could've gone there and lived on the farm which was of course the main reason for going to Ann Arbor. And I was able to coerce my teachers into letting me turn almost every assignment into writing about film at some level. And the big transformative event there was my first film class which was taught by, drum roll, naugahyde role, Robert Sklar.

Sklar was the junior teacher of the class. The senior teacher was Marvin Felheim and Sklar, Bob as I would call him later, was in American Studies and Marvin Felheim was in the English department and it was the absolutely quintessential 1960s film class. Gigantic auditorium, I think there must've been 400 students at least and it was very performative on the part of the professors. The exams were all multiple choice and I think basically everybody got an A that's why it was so popular. But we saw these great films that just fed my desire to go on and on. I saw films Flaherty films for example that I never would've seen on my own. Russian films, Soviet films, the other thing in Ann Arbor which is still going is the Ann Arbor film festival.

And that not only showed cutting edge avant-garde films, experimental underground films from the 60s, quite often the filmmakers were there. So Andy Warhol was a regular visitor to the Ann Arbor film festival and all of the people associated with the films would come through. Jean-Luc Goddard came. He was sponsored by one of the left-wing student organizations and he came and he sat at a little table in front of the theater and the ... Sat there with his glasses on and the students would come and ask him questions about, tell us about Mao or something like that. And he would just not say anything and even when people would ask him questions in French he would just like shake his head or say I don't know or something like that. He was very incommunicative.

It seemed like a kind of wasted resource in retrospect because these are people who really worshiped him and if he would've said, "Let's go shutdown the main building." You know they would've left in mass to go and shutdown the main building so he kind of missed an opportunity there. But anyway, very heady experience for a teenager to be in that kind of an environment.

Nicholas S.: So I guess that, I mean you just start covered one of the questions I was gonna ask which is so this would've been late 60s.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: So the campus must've been in a bit of turmoil at the time.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: I know that it was in Wisconsin where I was.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: Where you impacted by that much?

Donald Crafton: Sure. Yeah. I graduated in '69 so lived through '68 and the Invasion of Cambodia and all of that. Participated to some extent in the political things. I was as political as most of my colleagues, but I wasn't up on the podium carrying a banner or anything like that, but I would go to manifestations and sit ins and such and ... Probably there are some photographs in the Ann Arbor police department logs of the guy with like really long hair and stripe bell-bottom pants running around. I can still smell the tear gas in my nostrils if I think about.

Nicholas S.: Heady mixture of tear gas and patchouli yeah.

Donald Crafton: That too.

Nicholas S.: So the other question is the opposite direction and it's one of the questions that we're sort of encouraged to ask which is so when you saw these films in Bob Sklar's class what was, were they 35mm, 16mm, [inaudible 00:16:32] thereof?

Donald Crafton: Totally beat up 16mm.

Nicholas S.: Yeah.

Donald Crafton: There was a 35mm system in there and I remember that did project a film and they were very proud of the fact that it was in 35 and Bob made a whole big thing about it. Nobody knew. "What does that mean? Who cares." And I remember the film was *Louisiana Story* and the film was scratched and so beat up that it could be barely project it.

Nicholas S.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donald Crafton: And then we had the quintessential projectionist. I remember him he was really part of the story and everybody who had a projectionist on campus all used the same guy. I'm sure you had him at Madison. He was at Berkeley. He was at Vanderbilt he was everywhere. He was the universal projectionist. And he had this big chain, big circle of key chains on his belt and so he would like jingle everywhere he would go. He must've had a key to every door in the university, but he was the only one that knew to operate the 35mm equipment.

And of course Michigan was back then a big union state and so he also had a lock on the job because he was a member of the Electricians Union, which you

had to be to be a projectionist. I think he might've been on the Teamsters Union also.

Nicholas S.: So he's doubly covered.

Donald Crafton: Yeah.

Nicholas S.: Yeah.

Donald Crafton: So he had that job pretty well down, but he was a horrible projectionist.

Nicholas S.: But irreplaceable legally. Yeah. And do you remember any like key film, like texts or authors from that period that were particularly influential to you?

Donald Crafton: We used the standard text at that time which was Arthur Knights', *The Liveliest Art*. And that was pretty much it. We read Pauline Kael and her anthologized articles, New Yorker articles that would come out. Essentially we also had Sklar's *Movie Made America*, but delivered as mimeographs. So he would give lectures based on those chapters and then he would distribute those. I wish I had them but I'm sorry to say that's not part of my archive.

Nicholas S.: There with that French book somewhere. The textbook.

Donald Crafton: Yes.

Nicholas S.: And well let's ... Well actually so did you publish anything in that period about film? Like in the school newspaper or did you start writing about film at that point?

Donald Crafton: I wrote quite a few term papers. Sort of the classic example would be we had, I was an English major, so we had a class and we had to write on *Lord Jim* so I wrote on the movie version of *Lord Jim* and how it was different from the novel and in retrospect it was pretty bad. That is not in my archive either. The thing I did there was to start a film festival the Ann Arbor 8 Super 8 film festival and it took place in the spring in a coffee house which was like in a church basement called Canterbury House. I think it might still operate.

And it was wonderful and frustrating since I had absolutely no idea how to run a film festival or anything connected to business. So we put ads out and various journals and we're inundated with 100's of these 8 and super 8 movies that came in flooding into the apartment. Then we basically had no idea what to do with them, but we did screen them and we selected the ones that we liked best and then we showed them and we gave out some prizes and things like that. I don't remember too much about it, but there was actually, there was one that was submitted by somebody who became a well-known filmmaker later on. What was his name?

I'll think of it for the second version. His first name was Richard. His family ran-

Nicholas S.: Well that narrows it down somewhat.

Donald Crafton: His family ran a resort in the Catskills ... Anyway. The one I remember the best and unfortunately I don't remember the author of this one either, but it was two films projected side by side and it was basically a whole bunch of people taking baths together and it was called *Bath Diptych* and *In A Gadda Da Vidda* was the soundtrack. There was slow motion involved too and multiple exposures.

Nicholas S.: So that went the whole 23 minutes.

Donald Crafton: It was a lively film.

Nicholas S.: Yeah. It sounds very *Chelsea Girls* somehow.

Donald Crafton: I wonder if Andy got the idea from this film. I'm not sure.

Nicholas S.: Anyway we still have a Super 8 festival here you just missed it by a couple weeks.

Donald Crafton: Oh really?

Nicholas S.: Yeah. We have it every year.

Donald Crafton: Where do they get their film?

Nicholas S.: All over Canada. It's mostly Canada, some from the States. There's a pretty lively Super 8 scene in Manitoba.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: We get a lot from Winnipeg and a lot from Toronto as well.

Donald Crafton: Yeah. Well I know our mutual friend Charlie Tepperman is big in curating this and that whole circle that he works with. Heidi and everybody. Yeah. That's interesting. Kind of inspiring.

Nicholas S.: Yeah it is. As long as they keep making the stock we'll be able to keep on having the festival. So you ran the Super 8 festival. You were writing on film you were trying to do as much as you can on film how did you get to Émile Cohl?

Donald Crafton: Well for that we have to skip over Iowa, which is fine. Not much happened there.

Nicholas S.: Nothing of note?

Donald Crafton: Well I got into the exhibition business. I started a small cinema in the basement of a hippie supermarket called The Sprocket Hole. And we went to a mental hospital and they were getting rid of some mats so we were able to purchase all of these rattan mats at a very reasonable price. Some of them had stains and had to be thrown out, but anyway, we got a good deal on these mats so we would come to The Sprocket Hole and pay 50 cents and you would go down and you would be issued a mat to sit on the floor. And we had a Bell & Howell projector that I had purchased for \$35 at an army surplus store. And the way that it worked was that we would alternate showing Marx Brothers films and crowd-pleasing films with kind of a more artistically inclined films.

So one week you would go and you would see a John Wayne western, but not a great John Ford western some other John Wayne B film which we would rent for \$15 and we would make a couple of 100 in 50 cent admissions. And then the next week we would show *The Leopard*. And we did get a 16mm Cinemascope lens for the Bell & Howell so it was great. It was this fantastic image. We had to buy some oilcloth that you would use for covering a table and we stretched it out so we had this great image it was about 3 1/2 feet tall by about 35 feet wide.

I think it greatly exceeded the Cinemascope aspect ratio, but I'm not too sure about that, but anyway, it looked great. It was a little dim but it looked great. Anyway and then my partner that Norman Bloom who is still around who was a very promising filmmaker and I think last I heard he was working at Bennington doing something. We would basically take the proceeds and go to Baskin Robbins and spend all the money after every show.

Nicholas S.: So it was a good follow-up to the McDonalds and art film.

Donald Crafton: Yeah pretty much.

Nicholas S.: That's cool.

Donald Crafton: It was all about self-gratification on so many levels.

Nicholas S.: Well you know-

Donald Crafton: So anyway, I got out of there and with my Masters in Film and my, I had gone to Iowa originally because it satisfied two requirements. They had an interesting film program and they accepted my girlfriend. This is like the classic combination. So she went there and she had a nice little graduate stipend and we lived on that with the help of food stamps and *The Sprocket Hole*. And then she got a job in Council Bluffs, Iowa so we went to Council Bluffs, Iowa and it turns out that there's really not much you can do with an MA in Film in Council Bluffs, Iowa and I got into this thing where she would get up at 6:30 in the morning and get ready to go to work and that's just about the time I would be

going to bed because if you wanted to watch films you had to watch them as the late show on TV and of course there was no video, VHS or anything.

So I would stay up and watch movies and it was the only way to see a lot of these films. And I had Leonard Maltin's book and I would actually check off the titles. My goal was to get through the entire book. And I think I actually made a dent in it. Anyway, so I would be turning in about four in the morning and she would get up at six and then I would get up later in the afternoon and watch TV and I would watch Graham Kerr, *The Galloping Gourmet* and Julia Child, *The French Chef* so then I really got passionate about cooking. So my wife would come home after a hard day and I would say, "Veal Oscar."

So we ate well. We didn't actually have any furniture, but we ate well. Anyway, after a few months of that I decided I better go get a Doctorate in Film. So I checked around and of course there were no really undergraduate or graduate courses to speak of anywhere in the late 60s. This is like the year 1970 that we're talking about now. But I had run across somehow Standish Lawder who was a professor at Yale and who was working on avant-garde and experimental film and European Avant-garde of the 20s. These were exactly the things I was interested and I couldn't find anybody else or any other curriculum that had these offerings. So I just said, "well okay I'll go to Yale."

So I got the application, filled it out, sent it off, letter came back I was accepted. It was only later that I realized that the odds of this happening were so astronomical against it. To do this day I don't really know how or why that happened. I had taken one undergraduate art history course and got a D in it.

Nicholas S.: It must've been a hell of an application.

Donald Crafton: I think so. Yeah. I'm not sure why. Or they must've been terribly desperate. Anyway, I went there but of course they didn't cut me any breaks so I had to take the entire curriculum, which as it turned I just loved. I took all kinds of courses and another Netherlandish art. Early German Graphic Art, so Dürer and those things. The program was very focused on connoisseurship and museum skills. Took some great courses with Anne Coffin Hanson on the Development of Pictorial Space, which I was able to work right in with my film interests. Studying cubism. The person I was never able to actually work with was Standish Lawder.

Nicholas S.: Really?

Donald Crafton: Because the first year he was off teaching at Harvard. The second year he was on a leave because he had Guggenheim. The third year he came for a semester and then disappeared and then after that he went to UC La Jolla. That's about the last I ever saw of him. So I can't really say he was a great mentor or inspiration or anything. But yeah some of the papers I wrote there are the provenance of some art nouveau decorative statuary that came from some mansion in Newport or something like that.

My main mentor there was an art historian named Robert Herbert. And his specialty was in 19th century impressionism and post-impressionism Especially artists like Seurat for example. And he was a kind of I would say soft Marxist. He was really focusing on the labor and social context of these works and of course irony of the way that the artists played their connections to the richest wealthiest people in the world so they could have these kind of plebeian values expressed in their art. He was a very big influence, but I just loved the program there and I was able to finish my dissertation. I got a Fulbright so I was able to go to Paris and that's how I did the Émile Cohl thing and this is actually getting to answer the question that you in fact asked-

Nicholas S.: I figured we'd get there eventually.

Donald Crafton: Why Émile Cohl? Think of all the early film who were also doing something that would've been an interest to a very conservative empirically based Art History department. There's one name that comes up, Émile Cohl. And it's fortunate that there had been nothing written about him in English. Actually nothing in French either for that matter. So it turned out to be kind of a natural thing and so I got the Fulbright I went to France regretting everyday the fact that I had scribbled in my French book instead of learning to decline pronouns.

And you know it was everything was fated almost. The Fulbright you have to have a sponsor so I just put down Cinémathèque Française and I showed up at the Cinémathèque Française and I said thank you for sponsoring me and they had no idea what I was talking about. Only met Henri Langlois one time and he was very dismissive and rude. His partner I don't know if they're actually married or not was this large woman named Mary Meerson we called her "Marie Marson" but she was actually from Philadelphia I think. Mary Meerson and she was sort of the gate-keeper to Henri and everything.

But everybody knew that the only way to get in was to go to Lotte Eisner. So like so many people of my generation I introduced myself to Lotte Eisner and she was so warm and affectionate and knew all about Émile Cohl. Think she even told me she met Émile Cohl which seems highly unlikely 'cause he died in 1938 I suppose it's possible. And 'cause he was not in very good shape in those days. And she would invite me over to her house. She lived in Neuilly she had these teas. We would go out there and just sit around with these extraordinary people who's foolishly I didn't even know who most of them were. We didn't have IMDB so I couldn't look them up on the train going over unfortunately, but it was a great afternoon. Probably did that half a dozen times or so.

The apartment that I discovered was the top floor of a building which as it turns out was the building in which the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier was housed in the basement on rue du Vieux-Colombier which is this, originally it was a theater, live theater in the I think it went back to like 1780 or something. Then it became a regular theater and then the 1920s it became kind of an avant-garde movie house. And it's where things like Jean Vigo's films were first screened. It

was one of my passionate heroes. Renoir's films were screened there. You know like eight floors below where I lived and then my studio was originally made into a studio.

It was like three servants quarters that had been cut out to make a studio. Glass ceiling, glass window with a northern exposure of the rooftops of Paris. And that's where Berthold Bartosch lived who was an animator in the 1920s and 30s and he made a film called L'Idée classic animated film in my apartment. So it's just amazing how all these things came together.

Nicholas S.: The theme here it seems to be in your life is it turns out that. And that your ignorance served you very well time and time again.

Donald Crafton: You know it's a kind of a Woody Allen vision of life. You know you do kind of wander into these things. Fortunately I haven't wandered into any bad things as Woody has wandered into, but ...

Nicholas S.: But it seems like you just were open-

Donald Crafton: My life isn't over yet.

Nicholas S.: Not nearly. I would assume this is the halfway point really. But it seems like part of it is that you were just willing to take whatever experience came your way.

Donald Crafton: Well you know there's deep philosophical and theological implications to your statement. Which we probably don't have time to go, that'll be for the third installment.

Nicholas S.: Okay. Stay tuned of chapter three.

Donald Crafton: The third death-bed installment.

Nicholas S.: But Émile Cohl, the incoherence ...

Donald Crafton: Yeah so I spent one year in France and it happened that I met up with his family, his grandson who was very keen in publicizing his father and let me have complete access to all of the family materials which you know was basically stored in the basement and in the granary and big cardboard boxes. Lot of it not in very good shape, but I was able to photograph everything so I have probably 3000 35mm negative frames of all these documents.

Nicholas S.: Wow.

Donald Crafton: Not very well exposed or in focus always, but I have it. And then I spent also a huge amount of time practically every day in a Bibliothèque Nationale or the Bibliothèque des Archives because that's where the periodicals were kept back in those days. Some of them were even in Versailles the Louis XIV's castle they

had put like the really obscure journals from the 19th century so I'd get to go to Versailles and look at them out there. And so you know you'd have these original bound humor magazines from the 1880s and turn the page and oh my God there's an Émile Cohl, snap a picture. And so all of the stuff fell together very quickly so I came back and had my first teaching gig.

That would've been 1974 so oh my God. So I've been like professor for over 40 years which is scary and I apologize to all of my students out there who may be watching this. Especially the recent ones. So it all came together so anyway I get my PhD in five years, which is very fast these days. Not so unusual back then 'cause I didn't slave over every page and every word. And then I segued from being a grad student to being on the faculty and just to cut that short-

Nicholas S.: At Yale.

Donald Crafton: At Yale.

Nicholas S.: Yeah.

Donald Crafton: Those days it was extremely difficult to get tenure.

Nicholas S.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donald Crafton: It wasn't automatic or something that you could necessarily expect to get. And I went to the provost and I said, "What do I have to do to get tenure?" And he says, "Well you can raise the money through a donor or you can hope that one of your colleagues will die and open up a line."

Nicholas S.: I see an episode of *Murder She Wrote* happening.

Donald Crafton: So I didn't go with the latter suggestion, but I did try to raise money. Vincent Price was one of our targets so we had Vincent come in and he was a very nice person and his ... There was actually a paper delivered on this at the conference this year. His BA was in Art History from Yale, my same department, and he had a lifelong passion for collecting art and he also made quite a bit of money from doing that. But we brought him back and on my shelf at home I do have this extremely pathetic video that Vincent Price made for us and for the Film Studies Center and the department making a pitch for money. Which never happened.

Nicholas S.: Oh I was going to ask if it worked. What made it pathetic?

Donald Crafton: You'd have to ask Brian Meacham if it worked or not, but I don't know. Well for one thing as it turns out Vincent Price had an anomaly and I don't know if this was ever publicized or not, but he was extremely dyslexic. He also could not remember lines and this go back to even the days of *Laura*. If you look at him he's reading cue cards even in *Laura* and I would say like, "Okay say the Film Studies Center needs your assistance." And the camera would start rolling and

he would say, "I'm sorry I forgot." So we'd have to make cue cards with every single line written out for him. So it's pretty clear he's just standing there reading these cue cards without any particular involvement.

The only thing I can say is that at the end of it there was this big cobweb in the corner of the courtyard and so I had the cobweb filmed and the idea was that at the end of his interview we were going to cut to the cobweb and dub in a little voice saying, "Help me, please." Didn't happen.

Nicholas S.: Well it's not too late. Could be pretty easy to do now.

Donald Crafton: Fix it and post.

Nicholas S.: Yeah absolutely. So what was it like to teach Film Studies at Yale in the early 70s?

Donald Crafton: Oh it was great of course. Students were wildly passionate for film and the classes were huge. I taught a course on British Cinema with Brigitte Peucker who is still there at Yale and I think there were like 225 students taking the class and it wasn't a gut course. We had actual grades and everything. I'm just going through some of my things now. I taught a course called Two Avant-garde Cinemas. And it was about the 20s European avant-garde and the 60s American avant-garde and that had 50 some students enrolled in it and it's shocking now to think that so many students in this general undergraduate program would be interested in studying film. But it was extremely popular and there were a lot of people who came out of Yale at that time who went in to the industry and ... My most famous student is Jodie Foster.

Nicholas S.: I feel I've heard of her.

Donald Crafton: Yeah.

Nicholas S.: Yeah.

Donald Crafton: She was my favorite student although she was only in my class for three weeks. That was the last I saw of her because it was the Reagan attempted assassination and she was immediately whisked off, not off campus actually, but she was basically sequestered in her dorm for the rest of her college career and had her classes delivered pretty much privately and everything. And she was a good student. I also had Jennifer Beals as one of my students and another guy, I probably shouldn't say his name, but I'm pretty sure he was the kind of despicable character in Robert Altman's film *The Player*. I think he was my student too.

Nicholas S.: So that's sort of like you said with the classes were large and I assume at that point you were at Yale you were doing 35mm most of the time in much better prints than you had at your previous institutions.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: I became like one of the first books I bought of yours was of course *Before Mickey* which you published in 1982 and it was groundbreaking in the sense-

Donald Crafton: Thank you. Thank you.

Nicholas S.: Yeah it was really important to my career and it also was ground breaking in that it came with a VHS copy of the cartoons. It was intermedial. I'm wondering about how it was getting that process that was MIT right that-

Donald Crafton: Yep.

Nicholas S.: And then by the time I got to graduate school you got the book without the video cassette and you had to go hustle it up somewhere else.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: You know third generation, which is kind of difficult.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well I'd always wanted to have the video accompaniment because I always felt it was ridiculous to talk about these films that were not only unseeable, but unobtainable for the most part. So most of the films, well all of the films at least at the time I thought were public domain. It turns out that was not quite true, but I was innocent babe in terms of the legality of these things. Many of them I rented from Murray Glass who was a California distributor who had basically purchased David Shepard's library and distributed a lot of these things on 16mm.

And some of them I got from the Library of Congress. Some I got from collectors on loan or I just purchased outright and 16mm so it's all 16. The qualities all over the place and I hired a student to compose the soundtrack, which actually turns out to be pretty good. It's improv piano it's as good as anything you would hear in Pordenone for example. And yeah the, I think the book cost \$15 and the VHS cost \$35 or something like that. And it came in two 'cause it was a two-hour program so it came in two one-hour cassettes, which I made myself. I had like this studio I setup in my office. The masters were three quarter inch U-matic and I would dub them off two or three at a time which of course doesn't really help the quality very much.

So it's almost embarrassing to think about this now. This is like more embarrassing than The Sprocket Hole really.

Nicholas S.: It was a great thing for me to see those films when I was reading the book, honestly.

Donald Crafton: But they were films that you couldn't see and that changed your experience. Let me tell you a funny story Nick. Flash forward like 35 years. Two weeks ago I was giving some lectures in Stockholm and there is since I was in Sweden I wanted to have Swedish animation of course there is only one Swedish animator from that period Victor Bergdahl. And one of his films was on that *Before Mickey* cassette. It's called *Kaptain Grogg* among other strange animals. Horrible print. And so I wrote to the instructor there and they're connected to the Swedish film institute and so I said, "Let's include this film in the program." He wrote back and says, "Yes we can do that."

And he sent me a clip that he had of the film and so I looked at it and not only is it the same film that was on my VHS cassette that I had made like in the 1980s, it had the same soundtrack from my student on it.

Nicholas S.: So they transferred it back?

Donald Crafton: This was circulating in Sweden as the example of their animation patrimony. Anyway I thought that was strange.

Nicholas S.: Strange and wonderful. And eerie at the same time.

Donald Crafton: Well you know they had a big fire in 1941 and the archives big nitrate fire is infamous and they lost, I don't know, a very high percentage of their silent film production. And so they've reconstituted but it's all repatriated material and they have that film on 35. We did project it and it look pretty good, but it's the same material. I suspect they probably bought it from David Shepard, honestly.

Nicholas S.: Well this raises an interesting thing about the practice of being a film historian or a media historian more generally because pretty much all of your work has been intermedial from the beginning. Émile Cohl did newspaper illustration and fine art and film all at the same time, but the other thing that's interesting to me is you start with an Émile Cohl project and you're in the Bibliothèque Nationale, you're in Versailles. You know you're in these very Cinémathèque Française and then you're out collecting David Shepard films and you're scraping things up from private collectors and it's one of the things I find fascinating about what we do is we have to kind of have very flexible archival practices.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: I'm wondering and you end up meeting a lot of people who are not historians by trade they just happen to collect and I'm wondering how that's been for you and how that's changed over time?

Donald Crafton: Well it's serendipitous and I think that it could happen to anyone, but you have to be open and as researchers you also have to be omnivorous and very patient. Because you have to have time to digest all the omnivorous things that you

consume and this is a luxury that I've always had that a great many of my colleagues have not had and that is I've had extraordinary support from my institutions from Yale, University of Wisconsin, especially Notre Dame which seems to want to give me everything I ask for. So it gives me time. It gives me time to study this material. You know it's one thing to take 2000 frames of an archive it's another thing to have six months to sit down and look at that material and think about it and to put it together and just see where it comes from and to track down the journals that it came from.

So a lot of it was accidental, a lot of it is having the physical means to exploit it. Hiring assistants. I've never been a big one for having a graduate assistants but that's one of the things that can be very helpful for research. And just being there. Being open when you see something and be willing to go through things that are outside of your comfort zone. Another recent anecdote is you know I'm working on this restoration of Winsor McCay's Gertie from 1914 and there's a small archive in the Cinémathèque Québécoise which they took in at the same time that they got the donation of the film prints. And evidently scholars have not really looked at this or looked at it very intensely because there's a notebook that McCay used when he was working on the film.

Nicholas S.: Is this the one that's in code?

Donald Crafton: It has a code.

Nicholas S.: Yeah.

Donald Crafton: A code that describes the scenes and everything. And there's also a script. We're not exactly sure what the provenance of the script is, but it's not the same material that's on the film that we're familiar with. And there's a line in it that says, to Gertie, Winsor McCay says to Gertie on the screen, "You dance like Gertie Hoffman." So of course you would have to like well what does that mean? Who's Gertie Hoffman? So you know it was easy thing to Google Gertrude Hoffman go to Wikipedia and track her down and as it turns out she was this famous and somewhat infamous performer who was McCay's counterpart. And they were crossing paths in the vaudeville circuit all the time, sometimes appearing on the same bill in the same theater.

And Gertrude Hoffman was an amazing woman that I don't think anybody remembers anymore with at least one exception. She was a choreographer. She was married to a composer and songwriter Max Hoffman who wrote a lot of her material and she would go to Europe and study the Ballet Russes and then she would come back and she would essentially rip off these productions that she saw in Europe and present them in New York. And she would also have her girls on the stage. Very scantily attired with seemingly see through clothes although in those days nothing was actually see through. It was always what they call Crepe, French Crepe or something like that. It was just kind of a flesh colored leotard that they would wear to make it legal.

But she was arrested anyway for obscenity and so it turns out she lived not far from Winsor McCay in Brooklyn and she had this dance called the Gertrude Hoffman glide. It was featured in her shows and her reviews and so I'm putting this together so I'm thinking, "Okay there's a reference to Gertie Hoffman. We know that the dinosaurs name originally was Jessie not Gertie. So it's possible that the dinosaur Gertie is a kind of reference or homage or friendly tip of the hat to Gertrude Hoffman. Haven't seen any substantiation of that yet, but what did happen is that the music ... You'll see my story has a point eventually.

Nicholas S.: I don't doubt it.

Donald Crafton: The music for the Gertrude Hoffman glide is archived at Wake Forest University so I wrote to them and you know I got a copy of it and the librarian wrote back and said, "Well we have another patron who's interested in Gertrude Hoffman. You know with your permission and her permission I'll put you together." And so I now have corresponded with this professor at Auburn University who's writing a book of Gertrude Hoffman and she gave some programs, some vaudeville programs that show McCay and Hoffman on the same program and were exchanging ideas and everything.

We'll probably never know if Gertie the dinosaur is named after Gertrude Hoffman or not, but that is an answer to your question about how does one pursue these things and you have to get out of your comfort zone and go where the research leads you. Whatever medium it happens to be in.

Nicholas S.: I definitely have had that experience. When I was working on *Birth of an Industry*, ASIFA-Hollywood had that split where Steve Worth left and Jerry Beck came in and he moved his entire collection to a house in Pacoima which is in San Fernando valley and so if I wanted to do the archive I had to go to his house basically and hang out with him there which was great. It was amazing, but you kind of have to follow where the material takes you.

Donald Crafton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: Do you think that digital archiving is changing these kinds of practices and for the better, for the worse, or just for the difference?

Donald Crafton: Well there would be no Gertrude Hoffman connection without digital archiving. 'Cause my research was done on ProQuest so I could go back to the *New York Times* so the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* that's where the stories were. That's where the public story takes place and you have to be able to access them and do, you know, sit through the archives of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and turn the pages while possible you just can't physically do it anymore in the kind of timeframe that we have. The-

Nicholas S.: Which is too bad 'cause the Fleischer's, Max Fleischer drew for the *Eagle* didn't he?

Donald Crafton: Yeah.

Nicholas S.: Yeah.

Donald Crafton: Yeah. It's all there but it's basically the Eagle is not one of the great examples because it's digitized microfilm.

Nicholas S.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donald Crafton: So you know you lose, well they didn't take a lot of care with the microfilm. Microfilm of course has the potential of being a fabulous archival tool, but it was very seldom realized that way. The project that I've kind of finished now is on a distributor named Edna Williams and she is a person who I think is safe to say were it not for digital archives would have no existence. No one would ever have heard of Edna Williams or have known about her or what she did or what her contribution to the history of cinema was without the Digital Media History Project. Lantern, to be able to use Lantern, the aggregator for all of these film journals.

And I came across Edna Williams just when I was looking for something else because I was working on the RC Robertson Cohl cinema company and she was for sometime an employee of theirs and so I came across her. But I was able to go back, again, without leaving the comfort of my home office and get her passport applications, early trade journal references, comings and goings on steamship line manifests and things like that. And to be able to reconstruct her career and I think I'm gonna try to put this together in some sort of popular audience oriented piece called *The Woman in the Computer*.

Because for me she's very real. You know I have early photographs of her and everything. Sort of like you know the Bill Morrison film *Her*. You know the film?

Nicholas S.: Yeah actually I was just thinking of *I Dream of Jeanie*, but you know *Her* works too.

Donald Crafton: You're absolutely right, but anyway so many of the papers I've seen at the conference, especially the last two years rely so much on material taken from Lantern and you can always tell because it has that kind of livid color that they add to the images. I don't know why exactly, but-

Nicholas S.: It's an Instagram thing.

Donald Crafton: You can tell. I probably should mention the Gertie project because you know this is turning out to be an important part of my career and I think an important contribution too. And this stems from an idea from David Nathan who was a Psychiatrist at Princeton who was passionate for years about Gertie the Dinosaur and had gone around and collected as many scans and photocopies of

original Winsor McCay drawings as he could. So he has an archive of about 350 original drawings. Many of them just photocopies of course.

And he had this idea of restoring the film using McCay's drawings for the most part, but especially when McCay would present the film on the vaudeville stage at the end remember Gertie picks him up in her mouth, sets him on her back and they go off you have to imagine there was thunderous applause. Well some applause. Curtain would close and then McCay would come out, take his bow and then he would call Gertie back and the curtains would open and she comes back out on the screen and bows to the audience and everything. Well when Fox made their movie theatrical version in 1914, 1915 that part wouldn't have made any sense and so they just left it off.

They also cut out a lot of frames for the intertitles and so it's missing some footage. So I made a pitch to the Cinémathèque Québécoise while you know one could go through and follow-up on David Nathans idea and do this restoration and of course there the keepers of McCay's films and kind of his patrimony because McCay was born in Canada.

Nicholas S.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donald Crafton: He didn't stay there very long. We're talking maybe a month or two. And he moved to the States and never set foot in Canada again, but that's close enough. He's a Canadian filmmaker and so they very passionately embraced this project and what they're doing is working with the National Archives in Ottawa and they have restored the film footage in 4k restoration and I have written a short play that will incorporate the Gertie footage into a live performance so that we can present it, simulate how it would've looked in 1914 when it was originally playing to vaudeville audiences.

Nicholas S.: That'll be great.

Donald Crafton: So we'll have an actor portraying Winsor McCay and unlike the times that this has been done before it's relatively easy to do. You know just edit out the intertitles. This'll be the complete animated footage and it'll have the curtain call at the end. We're commissioning a new score that will be based partly on the Gertrude Hoffman glide.

Nicholas S.: Of course.

Donald Crafton: Taking some poetic license. Some historical license and I'm looking forward to a season of booking Gertie.

Nicholas S.: And it's going to tour?

Donald Crafton: It will. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nicholas S.: Keep your eye out. Coming to a theater near you quite soon. Just in the spirit of what Fieldnotes is attempting to do I wanted to ask you sort of it's interesting talking to you because the sense we have with Cinema Studies back in the day was that it was cinephilic which you are, but also very meeting a specific which you are not. You are an intermedial scholar from day one to the present and so one of the questions they'd say like we used to talk about is where do you see Cinema Studies going? And now we have the "M" both in the conference and we're changing the title of the journal. Thoughts about that?

Donald Crafton: I would say that the evolution away from cinema as hardware and software is very advanced at this point. It's always been my idea, my orientation that cinema was just part of a larger social construct symptomatic but also constitutive. This was why I was interested in Art History to begin with. It just seems to be that Media Studies has continued to expand and kind of like a nebulae going out in all directions you know not a concentric circle configuration. It's not indeed like that. It's very messy and explode off in one direction and then another unpredictably.

And the way in which scholars and SCMS are starting to work with amateur film for one example but also gifs and YouTube and postings on social media as legitimate areas of study. I think indicates the fuel is just going to be going off in many different directions. Now something is lost with that process. I mean in the 1960s and 70s Cinema Studies had one object and it was pretty much the Euro-American art cinema and commercial cinema of the day. And that spread out devolved very rapidly into other nationalities and other genres and forms.

And it's a process that never really stopped. So calling it Cinema and Media Studies is a natural progression but in a sense it's kind of a retrospective acknowledgment of what happened in fact some time ago. Like 15 years ago so we already maybe obsolete or out of date and not even know it. It's hard to say. We'll have to wait for the third installment.

Nicholas S.: Okay. To be continued.

(silence)