

IMPRESSION OF THE FIAF SUMMERSCHOOL - 5TH TO 26TH JULY 1984

The 1984 FIAF Summer School was hosted by the Staatliches Film Archive of the German Democratic Republic.

The purpose of the Summer School was to further a mutual understanding of the current trends in film archive techniques and the associated procedures pertaining to the efficient operation of such an establishment.

In the past, the syllabus set depended very much upon whether the students came from developing archives such as those in the "Third World" countries, or archives of our standing who are fairly well established and have considerable experience in the field.

The content of our particular course, however, was biased towards fulfilling the needs of students representing both these sectors. This resulted in a course that was neither too advanced nor too basic - in fact, quite a happy medium was struck.

I believe it was the intention originally that this course should only be open to students from developing archives, but unfortunately, due to financial constraints a number of these students were unable to attend; therefore, the invitation was extended to all archives on a 'first come first serve' basis - needless to say, the course was over-subscribed.

The course was designed to cover all aspects of film preservation and documentation with the hope that the dissemination of information and the ensuing informal discussions between students would result in a greater understanding and appreciation of the workings and the very special problems they may encounter in their day to day activities. It would also enable them to appreciate the unique problems that face their colleagues all over the world; for example, countries where there are extremes in climatic differences, or countries where one has to adhere to very stringent budgets, etc.

We were very fortunate indeed that this particular Summer School was able to take place this year. In the past, UNESCO have always made a financial contribution towards the running of the course, but this year they were unable to do so. It was only through the generosity of the Department of Cultural Affairs (GDR) that it was made at all possible and to them we extend our thanks.

There were eighteen students on the course, representing fifteen different countries and institutions. Quite varying disciplines were represented, e.g. cataloging, printing, video documentation, etc. Nevertheless, all these areas were to be covered in the following weeks and the expertise, professionalism and superb organisation displayed by the member of the Staatliches Film Archive is to be commended.

We were accommodated at the Guest House of the Ministry Fur Hoch Und Fachschulewesen in Karlshorst, a suburb of Berlin. Each student had his own room which was scrupulously clean, comfortable and adequate for our needs. The staff, needless to say, were extremely polite and helpful and on the whole did everything they could to make our stay in the GDR as pleasurable as possible.

Whilst the Guest House at Karlshorst acted as our home base, there were two centres to which we commuted every day in order to attend our lectures. The first was in the centre of Berlin and was called the Zentrum Fur Kulturelle Auslandsarbeit on Friedrichstrasse. Here all lectures of a non-technical nature were held.

The other centre in which we spent a great deal of our time was at the Staatliches Film Archive itself in Wilhelmshagen.

Transport was either by "U Bahn" (Underground) or by "S Bahn" (Overhead train.) These forms of transport proved both quick and efficient. Booklets of tickets which could be used for all forms of public transport were issued to us by our hosts.

The course commenced on the 5th July with an opening ceremony at Wilhelmshagen. This was purely a social occasion and enabled us to meet the other members on the course.

We were introduced to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and other official dignitaries by Herr Klaue, the Director of the Staatliches Film Archive and President of FIAF.

The next day we travelled to the Cultural Centre in Friedrichstrasse where the course proper began. We were briefed on the schedule for the Summer School and some aspects of the unstructured nature of the course regarding the voluntary attendance of lectures were explained. The course outline was comprehensive, and if its full potential was realised, benefits to the individual would be substantial.

The first afternoon was spent covering various aspects of video. Our lecturer on this occasion was Dr. Siakkou of ORWO Video Research. I was quite surprised at the Doctor's frankness, for he quite openly admitted that video technology in the GDR is not as advanced as in some Western countries, but that they were making great strides to close the gap. I was quite impressed by the fact that our lecturers were so well informed on the current state of video technology throughout the world and were aware of all the latest advancements in the field.

This was an extremely difficult subject to put over as the majority of the students on the course were not familiar with video. What made it even more difficult to follow was that nearly all our lectures were delivered in German and had to be translated into English or French, as the case may be. On the whole though I do feel that we all benefited from this lecture in some way even if it only served to fire our imagination or satisfy our curiosity.

The following day we travelled down to Wilhelmshagen and were briefed by Herr Klaue on the activities of the Staatliches Film Archive. This was followed by a brief visit of the site - brief because we were assured we would be spending many hours familiarising ourselves with the various departments. The rest of the day was spent continuing the lecture on Archives but looking at them and their operations in a wider context. Subjects such as how one goes about setting up an archive and the role of television and the part it has to play in the preserving of the moving image, etc. - were all touched upon.

I believe that this particular Summer School was the fifth of its kind that the Staatliches Film Archive has hosted over a period of a decade or so. The reason I have mentioned this is because one could not help realising as the weeks went by how well planned and executed the whole course was. This may be the result of experience, but all I can say is that the timetable was compiled in such a way that boredom was never a factor that had to be contended with. It seemed as though they knew exactly how deep to go into a subject without losing our attention. In order to keep our interest going, the lectures were interspersed with film shows, practical demonstrations and other topics of interest. Sightseeing and visits to places of interest were also an important factor in making the course extremely enjoyable.

As part of the curriculum on the Summer School we were able to view several films, including some of our own choice. Several of the documentaries highlighted anti-Nazi propaganda which included original footage shot by the Nazis themselves. The most evocative was film shot in the Warsaw ghettos and the concentration camps. These were horrific to say the least and had a lasting effect on most of the students.

Several feature films were also included in the cinema programme. Greats like Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" and F.W. Murnau's "Der Letzte Mann" were screened, but the film that I particularly enjoyed was "Solo Sunny", a DEFA (1979) production by Conrad Wolf. It was an extremely moving film and one which depicted the harsh realities of life to the full.

The lectures continued both at Friedrichstrasse and Wilhelmshagen over the next few weeks. The timetable was adhered to strictly and we gradually covered the syllabus. It is unnecessary to enumerate every detail, so from hereon I shall try to pick out certain points of interest.

Although one was encouraged to take notes at the time, detailed prepared handouts were available at the end of each lecture covering the subject.

A lecture that I found particularly interesting was the one given by Herr Klaue on the establishment, structure, financing, etc., of archives. I found this interesting because the work I do at the moment is of a strictly technical nature and certain aspects pertaining to these functions which under normal circumstances would be taken for granted were now explained in detail by someone who is an authority on the subject, giving us a greater insight into what was previously a grey area. Once again, I found as with all other members of staff at the archive, they were totally frank at all times, which is something I found particularly refreshing.

As a result of these discussions it was interesting to compare the way in which an archive in an Eastern European country functions with that of our own, e.g. the problems they encounter with officialdom, the advantages and disadvantages resulting from working under such a regime, etc. For example, the fact that the government has a greater say in the day-to-day running of the archive enables legislative matters concerning the archive to be pushed through and brought into operation much quicker.

The facilities for the employees at all of the archive establishments we visited were excellent - no doubt this was as a result of direct government intervention. Wilhelmshagen in particular was outstanding in this respect. They had their own dining room and recreation facilities and a well-staffed canteen which offered meals that were very good value for money.

It was evident that a great deal of thought must have gone into the planning and construction of the various buildings on the site so that maximum benefit was derived from the natural features and landscape. Safety precautions were always evident. Showers were provided for members of staff. Special red-tiled floors with drainage channels were present in the chemistry lab. in case of accidents, etc.

The health of the employees was of paramount importance. We were informed that members of staff had to undergo regular health checks to ensure that none of them were suffering from any disability caused as a direct result of working at the archive.

For example, people who had to work in areas where there were chemicals had to be x-rayed at regular intervals. Personnel who had to work in "dark room" illumination had to have their eyes checked periodically, etc.

To say that I was impressed with the archive at Wilhelmshagen would be an understatement. Everything was so well organised. The employees seemed to be happy and it would appear that a very congenial atmosphere existed with excellent repartee between management and staff.

Whether these benefits are a direct result of living under a Socialist Government no doubt can be argued at great length. They have had their disappointments also - when one first arrives at Wilhelmshagen, which is situated in most idyllic surroundings, i.e. a clearing in a pine forest, one cannot help noticing an enormous pit behind the main building. This, we were informed, was part of the proposed expansion and centralisation programme that was under way and which, unfortunately, had to be temporarily suspended until sufficient Government funds were made available to re-activate the project. Not all hope had been lost though as the Director expects the Government to consider the completion of this project in its 1986 budget.

One cannot help drawing comparisons between the establishment in the GDR and ourselves. There are some distinct differences in the policy and operation of the archive. For example, although we accrue most of our financial aid from the <sup>Government</sup>, this aid is not guaranteed and consequently one is never certain of continual employment. On the other hand, the Staatliches Film Archive is administered by the State and a set amount of money is allocated to them each year for their use. They also do not have to achieve a particular target of production each year in order to be certain of receiving financial support from the State.

The system does have its drawbacks, though; for example, if funds are low it has been known for our Curator and Director to approach certain commercial establishments in order to extract financial help from them. Unfortunately, this can never be so in the GDR because there is no such thing as private enterprise in a Socialist country. However, the Staatliches Film Archive does derive some financial benefit from the renting out of its films. Another peculiarity is the fact that the Staatliches Film Archive is the only establishment in the GDR that is allowed to hold Nitrate film material. Considering the nature of Nitrate this would seem a very good idea.

Getting back to the course, as you may have already gathered my main interest lay in the operations at Wilhelmshagen. I was very interested in the lectures given by Hans Kanstadt who is the technical head of the Archive. He spoke mainly on the physical preservation and storage of film. An attempt was

made to cover the basic principles behind film preservation with reference to printing treatment of physical and chemical damage, properties of film stock colour processes, etc. Great emphasis was placed on the safety aspect governing nitrate films and toxic chemicals. Precautions one should take to safeguard against any accidents were emphasised firmly. In fact, at the end of the day we all went home with a new and healthy respect for the material that we were working with. What made this course particularly useful was the fact that we were able at any time to discuss any matter that we were not certain of with our lecturers - in fact it was openly encouraged.

Towards the end of the course <sup>we</sup> were allotted an afternoon in which private consultation could take place; this I found to be particularly valuable. In my case, I chose to spend the time in the Laboratory.

I was interested in various processes, in particular, the "Berlin Treatment" which was pioneered in the GDR. This treatment is quite complicated and is used to remove certain blemishes caused by the presence of certain chemical deposits in the film surface such as hypo and fixer. Another operation that I found interesting was the Staatliches Film Archive answer to our MKIV printer. Like the MKIV it is a contact step printer and is <sup>a</sup> one-off. It is used for the same purpose as the MKIV, i.e. to print material that is in poor condition, badly shrunk, perforations missing on one side, etc.

Where the two machines deviated, though, was in the transport mechanism. The MKIV uses two claws which engage the perforation of the raw stock and original and move them into position. This machine on the other hand uses an ingenious form of clamps (totally ignoring the perforations) which come together, clamping the two film surfaces and drawing them into position. Once exposure takes place these two clamps are released and moved back, re-clamped and another frame is brought into the aperture gate ready for exposure. This concept of moving a film along without having to use its perforation I felt could be of use to us at the Archive. We have quite a number of film formats such as the 70mm American Biograph which has no perforations - we also have the 60mm Demerly films which have an irregular number of perforations per frame (15 perforations per 4 frames). These films do pose a problem when it comes to duping them and this is where a printer embodying such a design may find application.

I was surprised to find that the head of the Laboratory operations at Wilhelmshagen was a woman, and a highly qualified one at that. It came as no surprise to find that most of her printer graders and laboratory technicians were women who demonstrated a proficiency comparable with our own high standards.

A particularly interesting feature of the course was a practical exercise set by Hans Kanstadt, which involved us being split up into four groups. Each group was given a reel of film and were asked to follow it through to completion, namely the making of new preservation safety material.

Our first task involved working in their equivalent of our Examination Department. We had to extract all the relevant information concerning the reel (similar to what we do on our roughs), i.e. title, date, stock footage, condition, etc. Shrinkage was measured, all necessary repairs carried out, new leaders put on and a float test carried out, etc..

The information gleaned from this examination was transferred to a number of cards and then the reel was passed into the grading department for action.

Grading, one soon realises, is not as easy as it is made out to be. We were given reference charts to which we could refer in order to arrive at the correct exposure for a particular scene. You can imagine the variance there was between our individual judgements, but once it was explained to us and we were shown what points to look out for and what to disregard, it became a very interesting exercise.

The reel of film was then printed and processed at the laboratory and at the end of the day we were able to view the fruits of our labour in the cinema. Doubtless, each group thought that their particular effort was the best.

I liked this approach to teaching because firstly, it gave me a sense of satisfaction to actually produce something tangible and secondly (I can only speak for myself) the practical experience of physically carrying out the task taught me more than I could have learned by just attending a lecture.

As yet I have not mentioned anything about the buildings or the facilities at the Archive in any great detail.

When one arrives at Wilhelmshagen one is immediately impressed with the ingenuity and thought which went into the planning and construction of the various sites. This does not only apply to Wilhelmshagen but also to Bablesberg.

At Bablesberg the vaults are surrounded by a certain variety of trees and on the walls a species of vine is encouraged to grow. This was to provide natural air conditioning.

In the Summer the vaults can get a little warm due to sunlight and by planting these trees and vines the buildings are shaded and

the vaults kept cool. There is also the theory that the presence of the vegetation helps to maintain the humidity levels.

In Wilhelmshagen all the vaults are below ground; so are some of the operation areas such as the printing rooms. The benefits to be realised from such constructions are easily noticeable, e.g. there is a great reduction in refrigeration and insulation costs because it is much easier to maintain a constant temperature and humidity level underground.

The vaults in particular are an outstanding feature of the Staatliches Film Archive. They have been constructed with a great deal of attention paid to the safety aspect. The films are stored below ground in secondary vaults which have been specially constructed to withstand and, at the same time, dissipate the effects of blast. Within each individual vault there are cabinets set into the wall which hold approximately 8 to 10 cans. The thought behind it being that if one of the cans catches fire only those films in that cabinet will be lost and the other cans in the vault will be unaffected.

The colour storage vaults are even more impressive. A complicated but efficient conditioning plant is in operation on the site and is responsible for maintaining the very low temperatures required to achieve colour stability.

Unlike the nitrate vaults with their individual compartments the colour vault consists of a single massive room. At the entrance to the vault is a room similar to a decompression chamber where material in transit can gradually be brought up to room temperature or reduced to storage temperature.

One can appreciate why the Staatliches Film Archive has gone to such lengths to preserve their film material (under as near perfect conditions as possible) when you realise that, unlike us who are committed to re-duping all our nitrate material onto safety stock over a certain period, they have no such plan at the moment other than duping the material that is already showing signs of going unstable. In fact they are hoping that their nitrate material will remain stable for at least another 60 years, by which time they will have duped all their nitrate stock.

I have mentioned previously that the archive at Wilhelmshagen was hoping to expand its premises, for like ourselves they are faced with the same problem of having various departments scattered over a wide area.

It was hoped that by centralising all these operations considerable time and money could be saved. For example, with a little injection of money the site at Wilhelmshagen could accommodate a completely new laboratory and all the films that in the past were sent to outside labs could now be printed on the premises with a huge saving in cost. The various cataloguing and documentation departments could also be housed under one roof.



My comments so far have mainly concentrated around the activities and lectures at Wilhelmshagen because to a certain extent that is where my chief interest lies, but it would be unfair to say that the lectures and discussions held at Friedrichstrasse were no less stimulating.

Cataloguing and documentation are two of the subjects that were covered at this venue. Although these aspects are unfamiliar to me, their importance in the smooth running of an archive was plain to see.

The legal aspect covering copyright was also covered and it would seem that the laws concerning it are just as complicated and unwieldy in Eastern European countries as they are in the West.

The preceding paragraphs may have indicated that the efficiency, organisation and facilities of the Staatliches Film Archive has awed me to the extent of glossing over the syllabus content. Whilst this was not the intent, it is nonetheless pertinent to stress that the visit on its own and seeing the various facets of the archive in operation was in itself an education and a most rewarding experience.

Full justice would not have been done to the organisers of this course if mention is not made of the various historic and cultural centres to which we were given free access by the auspices of the respective bodies. To this end, we must extend our gratitude and thanks to the Department of the Ministry of Culture and to Herr Klaue and his staff.

Some of the centres visited were the Film Museum in Potsdam, the DEFA Film Studios in Babelsberg and the film archive of the Federal Republic of Germany in West Berlin. We also enjoyed excursions to such historical venues as Cecilienhof Castle where the famous Potsdam Agreement was signed by the allies in the last war. The USSR Museum in Karlshorst had an equally interesting history behind it because that is where the cessation of hostilities was endorsed.

The Castle and Parks of Sanssouci were in direct contrast to the devastation experienced in Dresden and its subsequent rejuvenation. To think that this city which is gradually being restored to its former splendour was raised to the ground in the last war, is unbelievable. It is indeed a remarkable memorial, to the determination and tenacity of the people of the GDR.

On a lighter note, the concert amidst the ruins of the Abbey in Chorin and the magnificent views from the "Television Tower" was an exhilarating experience and one never to be forgotten.

Sadly, in like vein, the sombre elegance of the parliamentary building of the GDR expressing its ideals of equality and freedom contrasts grimly with the regimented Nazi extermination camp in Sachsenhausen.

The 26th July was soon upon us and we were receiving our certificates from the Deputy Ministry of Culture. It was a sad moment for all of us as it must have been for the staff also. We had come together from all over the world and in this short space of time the camaraderie and understanding that sprung up from such a brief encounter would have been the envy of politicians.

In conclusion, I would like to show my appreciation for the courteous welcome extended to us by our hosts and for their efforts in ensuring that our Summer School was a technically enlightening and culturally satisfying experience which was greatly appreciated by all members of the course and in particular by myself. I hope that the two trees that we planted will in years to come be surrounded by hundreds of others - a symbol and tradition that I hope will be carried on by other students in appreciation of our most excellent hosts - the Staatliches Film Archive of the GDR.

The next morning in the departure lounge of Tegel airport, the regimented precision of the previous four weeks which we had begun to accept as the norm, together with the realisation that our course had finally come to an end, hit home when the dulcet voice of the information clerk announced that our flight was delayed - for the first time in four weeks arrangements were running behind schedule!

by KEVIN PATTON, Technical assistant, NFA, London.