

REPORT OF THE CATALOGUING COMMISSION
TO THE FIAF ANNUAL CONGRESS, ATHENS
15-16 APRIL 1991

I am very sorry not to be with you this year for FIAF's 47th Annual Congress. While it is my misfortune not to be with you in Athens, the cause is my archive's great good fortune. This year at the Library of Congress, we have been given permission to hire fourteen new people to organize and catalog our collections. The task of interviewing and hiring these people must take place now in April and May, and these activities are my responsibility. Please forgive my absence, and I look forward to seeing all of you again next year.

For this year's Cataloguing Commission report, I should like to take the opportunity to present a different kind of paper - one in which I can share our Commission's philosophy and vision with you. Our basic charge, as the Federation's Cataloguing Commission, is to support the aims of FIAF. These aims are outlined in Article 1 of the *FIAF Statutes and Rules*. Of these aims, points "a" and "e" are particularly central to our work:

- "a) to promote the collection and preservation of films, as works of art and/or as historical documents;"
- "e) to promote film art and culture and encourage historical research into all aspects of the cinema."

Indeed, the accurate control over both filmographic and technical information about our collections are the pivot upon which all other archival activities depend. Reliable, well-organized information about holdings is central to the work of preservation, collections development, researcher access, exhibition and use.

An additional aim of FIAF which is particularly significant for us is point "d":

- "d) to develop cooperation between its [i.e., FIAF's] members and ensure the international availability of films and documents;

More than any other of FIAF's aims, this one constitutes our central reason for coming together as a Federation - to cooperate and collaborate - to share in the work of achieving our common goals.

In the area of cataloging, the need to cooperate and collaborate - to share information - requires, as a basis, the creation and maintenance of mutually agreed-upon standards for the recording and exchange of information. In our current age, with increasingly powerful tools for automation, networking and telecommunication, this need for standards has become ever more apparent. As anyone who has been involved in automation and systems planning very well understands, machine technology requires a high level of consistent data organization and standardization in order to allow for efficient retrieval and

use. What is true on a local level is even more evident at the level of inter-institutional cooperation, particularly when one assumes the kind of international cooperation and collaboration envisioned by our Federation.

The underlying goal which has guided the work of our Cataloguing Commission over the past several years has been to create and put in place sets of standards, specifically designed for film archives, which support the work of organizing collections and of providing intellectual control and access. We did not undertake this task lightly, for, from the outset, we understood that we were embarked upon a monumental task. While local standards had been developed within some archives, and while international standards had been created for related disciplines and professions, until 1980 no international standards yet existed which were designed specifically for data collection and organization within a film archive context. Moreover, our needs for standards were far ranging - including standards for the collection and organization of both filmographic and technical data, thesauri for the provision of standard index terms (access points), and, of course, computer format standards.

Based upon the examples of successful standards development in other fields, the Commission understood that success was dependent on three prerequisites:

(1) The creation and maintenance of standards requires funding for a staff of experts willing and able to act as a secretariat; it requires coordination through providing channels for continual comment on and review and updating of standards, through regularly scheduled meetings coupled with continuous letters and telephone calls, and other forms of communication.

(2) Implementation of standards often requires a willingness to compromise individual preferences or local procedures for the benefit of the group. As C. Donald Crook wrote in his article "Cataloguing in the International Area", *Library Resources & Technical Services* (January - March 1986), p. 25:

"This simply means that we would like everyone else to maintain standards, so we can understand what they are doing and so we can communicate more easily among libraries through networks and other arrangements, but we wish to remain free to depart from these standards ourselves. Thus the perceived advantages of shared data must outweigh the disadvantages if individual institutions are to be expected to adopt and use standards."

(3) Standards must be flexible enough to allow for some variation (e.g., for the creation of subsets of data as in minimal- versus full-level cataloging, or to adapt to the inherent characteristics of different formats and eras).

In looking at these requirements, we knew we were ahead of the game. For requirement number one, we had the Cataloguing Commission. The Commission meets once a year, and we have established mechanisms for continued communication during the intervals between meetings. Our membership has been sufficiently stable to be capable of functioning in the capacity of a central staff, and finally, amongst us all, we have the expertise. Moreover, we knew our FIAF colleagues, and understood the nature and high level of their commitment to FIAF's goals and to international cooperation.

Amongst the wide variety of standards to be developed, the Commission recognized the development of a standard set of cataloging rules (i.e., rules for the organization and arrangement of filmographic and basic holdings data) to be the most central. We therefore decided upon this task as our first priority. Now, after ten years of collaboration and extensive review, you have the results - the *FIAF Cataloguing Rules for Film Archives*, published just this year by K.G. Saur.

In addition to the writing of the rules, the Commission began work on several adjunct projects:

(1) **a polyglot glossary**, the *FIAF Glossary of Filmographic Terms*, now in its second edition. These terms, listed in twelve languages, are already in use as standards for the naming of credit functions within cataloging records. Plans are underway for adding new languages to those already represented.

(2) **a set of guide-lines for recording technical data** - this project has been undertaken with the collaboration of our colleagues on the Preservation Commission. Cataloguing Commission member Günter Schulz reports that he has now completed the final manuscript. It was sent to K.G. Saur in March, and should be published before the end of the year.

(3) **Standardized terms for access** - in this area, the Commission has been working on two projects:

a) **genres** - this project was jointly undertaken by Commission members Günter Schulz and Dorothea Gebauer. Progress has been slowed since Dorothea's retirement and while Günter has been concentrating on finalizing our technical guide-lines publication. This year at our meetings, we shall evaluate the situation and make plans for continued development.

b) **early production company names and logos** - this project is under the guidance of Commission member Vladimir Opela. Designed for more than one purpose, our idea was to collect early production company logos for assisting catalogers in the identification of early films, to aid in the development of film history through the documentation of company histories, and to begin the development of a list of

standardized company names (i.e., an international name authority file). These names could then be used as access points (index terms) on standardized cataloging records gathered from a variety of institutions and sources. This project constitutes one of our more recent activities, and thus far progress has been slow. In order to move forward, we especially need the contributions and work of member archives. To date, we have only the excellent list of predominantly Czech film logos and company histories, which Vladimir himself compiled and distributed to our members already two years ago in Lisbon. Please let us know during the course of this Congress if you are still interested in this project, and whether or not we can count on your help in continuing this work.

(4) Our newest major project, the development of a **standard computer format**, is one that we could not undertake in any depth until our two earlier projects - the cataloging rules and the technical guide-lines - were complete. Now we are beginning this major task, by studying existing formats for the international exchange of information and comparing them with our requirements, as outlined in the two previous sets of standards. This work is at least as complex as the two earlier tasks and will most likely require at least as long to prepare, to distribute for extensive review and agreement, and finally to publish. But it is the single most important missing link between us and the goal of harnessing the powerful team of computerization and telecommunications to serve our information needs. And we have begun! Now we are well on the way to the twenty-first century.

A word of caution, however. Standards, once created, cannot remain static, or they will soon become outmoded and eventually disappear. Through the Commission, we have the mechanism to receive suggestions for changes and improvements, and to review and update the standards - incorporating such suggestions into our overall framework and publishing the results of this update process in a timely fashion. Standards revision and maintenance will now therefore constitute an additional major task for the Commission, providing plenty of challenge in the years to come.

Beyond our major works of standards creation and development, the Commission has, over the years, taken on a variety of additional tasks. These include: the preparation of three analytical *Studies on the Usage of Computers in Film Archives*; a paper providing guidance on *Evaluating Computer Cataloguing Systems*; a symposium on the Unesco-funded software package MICRO-ISIS (now in wide use throughout Latin America, as well as in other locations around the world); the design and oversight of a database of information about members' holdings of film from the nitrate era, maintained on MICRO-ISIS at the FIAF Secretariat; and the publication and update of a *Bibliography of National Filmographies* designed to aid in cataloging research. Another project which has been suggested

to us is the revision of the Commission's first publication *Film Cataloging*, a general manual published in 1980 and now somewhat out of date - it would be helpful to the Commission to receive a clear idea in the course of this Congress as to whether such a revision is a project that members would consider worthwhile.

There may well be more that we can or should be doing. We have been asked by our President, Robert Daudelin, to participate in an open forum discussion topic on this issue, and we invite all of you to come with your suggestions and ideas for future work. On April 19, we shall also be presenting a workshop to which we invite you to bring practical questions about any and all aspects of your cataloguing work. Commission members Roger Smither, Jon Gartenberg and Rolf Lindfors will be hosting this workshop and have each prepared a short paper for the purposes of leading your discussions. All the members of the Commission present at this Congress will also be on hand to respond to questions and to participate in the discussions.

Finally, we should like to offer our special thanks to our colleagues and friends at the Cinemateca de Cuba, who so generously hosted our meetings in Havana last year. Though they must have been very tired from their efforts on behalf of the congress, they were most kind and generous in offering us an excellent place for our meetings - one most pleasant and quite conducive to the intense days of collaboration and work which we require to keep our projects on track. Many thanks both to the Cinemateca and to the Fundacion, for your thoughtfulness and generosity, linked of course to our heartfelt and deepest sympathy in your tragic loss of Hector Garcia Mesa.

Harriet W. Harrison
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