

VERBAL PRESENTATION OF THE CATALOGUING COMMISSION REPORT
GIVEN TO THE FIAF GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATHENS, 8 APRIL 1991

The full text of this year's report by the Head of the Cataloguing Commission, Harriet Harrison, has been distributed to your "pigeon holes". It will not have escaped your notice that I am not actually Harriet Harrison. The reasons for Harriet's absence are described in the first paragraph of the report. While I congratulate her on the good fortune she describes, I am sure I speak for many of you as well as for myself in regretting her absence from this Congress.

Because Harriet cannot be in Europe at this time, we have deferred this year's meeting of the Commission, which was originally scheduled to follow the Congress, until the autumn of this year. In consequence, there are not as many members of the Commission at this Congress as have been able to attend in recent years - their absence also is regretted. We do, however, have present Jon Gartenberg, Rolf Lindfors, Vladimir Opela and myself. We would all be happy to discuss with any of you individually any questions relating to cataloguing or to the work of the Commission which you may wish to raise with us. We shall of course also make ourselves collectively available if any of you wish to suggest new directions for the Commission in the Open Forum session of this Congress, as well as in the framework of the Cataloguing Workshop later this week.

It is my task today to present Harriet's report on her behalf, and to answer any questions you may have about it. As you will have seen, it is a long report, and I shall not attempt to read it to you so much as to summarise its main points.

This year's report represents a change to the normal pattern of reports, offering a broader perspective than a simple summary of work undertaken over the past year. This is not because the achievements of 1990 are negligible: with a successful meeting in Havana, with two publications completed and a third at the printers, and with a major new project officially launched, we feel they remain at a more than satisfactory level. The reason for the change is our feeling that the precise nature of one of our publications - and indeed of our new project - signal that we have reached an important stage in the continuing work of the Commission, and that the time is ripe to share our overall philosophy and goals with you.

As we have taken many opportunities to tell you, cataloguing is central to the work of an archive. If we do not know what we hold, we cannot function. How could we plan our acquisitions, allocate our preservation or restoration priorities, arrange our screenings, or help in the serious study of film, if we did not know our holdings? The cataloguer's work may lack glamour, and frequently lacks the sense of drama, pressure or crisis that may attach to other roles, but this does not bother cataloguers, who know they are essential nonetheless.

To make a success of cataloguing, what is necessary? In four words, quality, accuracy, consistency and compatibility: quality, in the sense that the information recorded about a

film must be grounded in a sound knowledge of its filmographic, technical, historical and cultural context; accuracy, meaning that the information must be correct, as established by appropriate research; consistency, meaning that the information recorded for one film must be recognisable in terms of the style and language used in providing information about other films; and compatibility, in the sense that the cataloguing procedures used in one part of an archive must be shared with those used elsewhere in that institution, and that it is essential to have similar common procedures if one hopes to encourage communication between archives on a national, regional or global basis.

I just offered you four words necessary to the success of cataloguing: Harriet replaces them with one, which combines the sense of all four - that word is "standards". This word appears frequently in the report. It is not an exciting word, but it describes an exciting concept. We are talking here of the development and maintenance of the vocabulary and the syntax of a common language among film archivists - a language that will ensure that, when colleagues from opposite sides of the world contact each other with an enquiry they will know whether they are talking about a 1950's film or its 80's re-make, about the original film or an altered version, and so on.

Even ten years ago, there were no recognised, available, published standards for archival film cataloguing. It is the proud boast of the Cataloguing Commission that we can say that thanks to our efforts over the past ten years - and, since she is not here in her modesty to disclaim the credit, I may add thanks especially to Harriet's own efforts - such standards do now exist. Published by K G Saur during 1990 was *The FIAF Cataloguing Rules for Film Archives*. This is the achievement that prompts Harriet's report to take a philosophical turn. All full members should now have, in your archives, in this book, an essential cornerstone for international cooperation in the exchange of information about films in your collections. [I am asked by the Secretariat to remind Observers that they may purchase copies through Brussels at a substantial saving - I do not have precise details, but I understand the price is of the order of 60 DM, as opposed to the price from the publishers of over 90 DM.]

Although an achievement, the publication of the *Rules* is not the end of the process. As the report stresses, standards cannot be totally static, or they become outmoded, and then ignored. We are aware of the need to receive suggestions for change or improvement, and to publish the necessary amendments. We are at your disposal, and await your submissions.

As Harriet's report points out, the *Rules* are not the only part of the common language of archivism that it is necessary to supply, and they are not our only achievement. Also necessary is consistency of descriptive methods in areas other than filmography or cataloguing, and we note that our colleague Günter Schulz, in cooperation with the Preservation Commission, has completed the preparation of guide-lines for technical description. We also need to speak of consistency of

terminology, and would remind you of the successful publication (under the editorial control of Jon Gartenberg) of the *Glossary of Filmographic Terms*, now in its second edition and covering twelve languages. Consistency of terminology extends to other areas as well: the full report points out the existence of two further Commission projects - one on terminology used to identify genres, the other a listing of early production company names and logos. Both of these projects are making slow progress at the moment - the first because of the loss to the Commission, with the retirement of Commission member Dorothea Gebauer, of half of the team conducting the survey, the second because of the absence of contributions from you, FIAF members, to support the work of Commission member Vladimir Opela in compiling the list. We ask you in the course of this Congress to indicate whether these are the sorts of projects with which you will ask the Commission to continue, and to offer us your support if they are to do so. As Michelle Aubert has pointed out, such projects - especially Vladimir Opela's - are potentially excellent ways of responding to the earlier invitation to Commissions to suggest projects whose results will help mark the centenary of cinema, but they cannot go forward without your support.

The latest Commission project is the elaboration of standards in the information technology end of the cataloguing spectrum - the consideration of computer formats for cataloguing data. This project - involving our newest Commission colleague, Carlos Roberto de Souza - is still very much in its infancy. You have this opportunity to affect its development as you wish: it could perhaps be the most important preliminary step towards better international filmographies.

In addition to the fundamental role of developing standards for archival practice, the Commission has a tradition of seeking to assist and describe current work. As an example of assistance, we cite the *Bibliography of National Filmographies*, a project which Commission member Rolf Lindfors has inherited from Dorothea, and of which a second edition is now in preparation. I will also note my own contribution in this area, a guide to film archivists in *Evaluating Computer Cataloguing Systems*. Other activities, involving assistance through workshops, symposia and so on are described in the full report. I must also mention the very practical contribution to FIAF's central mission of the project - carried out by the Secretariat in Brussels, under the guide-lines established by the Commission - to compile a database of film from the nitrate era. This is an important resource for film preservation, but its usefulness is again confined to those willing to take part. In the category of description, I may remind you of the Commission's three *Studies on the Usage of Computers for Film Cataloguing*.

As the full report indicates more eloquently than I can here, this is our understanding of the purpose of the existence of the Commission, these are our achievements to date, and this is the position in which we now stand. We have always sought to respond to the requirements and suggestions of FIAF's members in directing our activities, and most of the projects described have depended on our continuing dialogue with members. We look

forward to the opportunity to discuss specific cataloguing questions with you in our workshop. Furthermore, it has been specifically suggested that the Open Forum session at this Congress be used to suggest new directions for our Commission. We shall be keen to hear your suggestions, and - as I noted earlier - those Commission members here present in Athens will also be happy to discuss your suggestions individually before or after the Forum.

I have already consumed a lot of your time, but before concluding I must place on record the Commission's gratitude to the archives which support the involvement of the members in the Commission, to the archive in Havana which made possible such a productive and (as I am told - to my great disappointment I missed it myself) enjoyable meeting last year, and to the Secretariat that contributes so much to our continuing activities. Thanks to them, and thanks to you for listening now.

Roger Smither
on behalf of the Cataloguing Commission