

[ORAL REPORT]

CATALOGUING COMMISSION REPORT

MONTEVIDEO, APRIL 22 - 23, 1992

Dear Friends and colleagues: it is indeed a pleasure to be back amongst you this year and to report to you on the work of the Cataloguing Commission. A special thank you to Christian Dimitriu and the Cinematheque Suisse for hosting our 1991 meetings in November. I want to introduce those members of the Cataloguing Commission who are here with us in Montevideo: Vladimir Opela, Rolf Lindfors, and Roger Smither.

This year finds the Cataloguing Commission embarking on a number of new projects, including: 1) the expansion and refinement of our FIAF Cataloguing Rules in response to questions raised in our workshops and elsewhere; 2) the development of a computer format specifically designed for film archives; 3) the development of guidelines for selection criteria (a joint project to be undertaken with the Programming and Cultural Uses Commission; and 4) the development of rules/standards for creating filmographies (to be undertaken as a joint project with the Documentation Commission).

Last year's report focused on a philosophy of cataloging -- a philosophy which has served as the underpinning -- the basis and direction for our various Commission projects. This year, I would like to focus on automation. As we continue our work of creating a common language (rules and format) for the organizing and exchange of catalog data, developments in automation and telecommunications technology are bringing our dreams of interarchival communication and cooperation ever closer to fruition.

Over the past two decades, the power/cost ratio of computer hardware/software configurations has narrowed to the point where most archives can now afford to incorporate some form of automation into their daily routines. Microcomputers and LANs are proliferating. Reliable alternatives for software packages which lend themselves to modification for film archive use are also increasingly available; for example, MicroISIS, Minaret, MicroMARC : AMC, TESS and BiblioFile to name but a few. LANs connect individual microcomputers through the use of Token Ring, Ethernet, Point-to-Point and Star technologies. Now, increasingly, economical methods are being sought for sharing information amongst archives.

One early illustration of this cooperative spirit is our FIAF union catalog of sound nitrate era feature films which is maintained at the Secretariat in Brussels. This file is the result of practical networking efforts by FIAF members. It was designed with limited parameters and basic technologies to support archival preservation programs. Participants send in data concerning their holdings of foreign films meeting the above criteria. They may compile the data either by filling in cards or by supplying the Secretariat with computer printouts. In either case, Secretariat staff re-key this information into FIAF's microcomputer. The computer itself employs MicroISIS software.

Already, in this database, one can see the basic elements requisite to the creation of networks:

1. standards: agreement on data elements, their definition and syntax,
2. a store of information which can be used (searched) in specific ways designed to answer client queries,
3. methods of communicating data: regular postal services, FAX, or telephone. Responses to search queries can be transmitted in the same way, but require a staff member at the Secretariat to structure and carry out the actual search against the database.

Here in Latin America a major effort is underway to build a regional network of film archive data. The network is to be designed to support preservation activities, research/user information needs, and shared cataloging activities. Several of the people who will be involved in this project are here among us.

Yet another networking project is beginning to take shape under the aegis of the NGO Roundtable (FIAF-FIAT-IFLA-IASA-ICA). Here the plan is to create an international union catalog of film, audio, and video materials which would be updated and distributed on a regular basis utilizing CD-ROM technology in lieu of an international online system. Unesco has agreed to contribute toward the funding planning sessions to design the system and establish system protocols to facilitate effective communication between and among participants and users of the database. Such protocols involve not only the choice, definition, and syntax for the presentation of data elements, but also authority work to establish, update, and maintain thesauri of search terms: such as names, topics, genres, form, and technical terminology.

And what of the future? More complex projects are being planned to record in databases not only catalog records--which are in essence identification and access surrogates for documents--but also the documents themselves. Examples of such efforts are the EC's Nautilus and TIMS, the Total Information Management System. Of the two, the one which seems to be farther ahead in its exploration and adaptation of new technology is TIMS. It has been demonstrated to several of you in Paris last November at meetings of Unesco, and more recently, in Washington at the Library of Congress, and to Dutch archivists by USIA's WORLDNET.

TIMS developers describe it as a "project to develop and implement a distributed, relational multi-media database, linking major media archives according to an integrated, distributed client/server model." What this means is that portions of the database corresponding to different archive collections will reside on different servers. In other words, the database itself will be distributed on multiple servers geographically separated from one another. These databases will be linked together through high-speed networks so that the entire configuration of databases can appear to be a single entity from the user's viewpoint. Any remote user throughout the world would be able to access and retrieve information from this group of databases, provided the user is connected to Internet. In addition, to assure that scholars and librarians who use the system will be able to integrate TIMS data with their own bibliographic/cataloging data, TIMS is designed to accommodate standard library/archive cataloging formats, most particularly MARC. Since TIMS is planned to contain not only bibliographic/cataloging records, but also representations of the actual documents themselves, it will include an accounting mechanism to protect copyrighted materials from unauthorized access and use.

The TIMS development project is planned to take place in three phases: Phase 1: Prototype Development; Phase 2. National Testbed, and Phase 3. Large-Scale Production System. At the moment, TIMS development is in the first phase: the creation of a prototype database for sound recordings and related pictorial and textual material, which is being done at Syracuse University in New York. The development team there has been exploring possible database platforms for the systems. They have developed a simulated version which displays text, color images, sound, animation and digitized full-motion video. This prototype is however not a fully functional distributed database. The development of the prototype will use multiple relational database platforms which support multi-media data objects and which have distributed database management capability.

During the second phase, the project will install the system at one or preferably more cooperating archives to establish a national testbed system. This testbed will then be available for Internet users to access and use on an experimental basis. During this period performance issues of the database and delivery of multi-media data over national, regional, and local networks will be carefully studied. The third phase includes plans to scale the database to a large size and add more sites.

At this point in time, major problems still remain to be solved. These problems are both technological, e.g., how to compress, store, decompress and retrieve coordinated sound-moving image documents) and political (participating institutions must agree upon protocols and standards in order that the users of the distributed databases may speak to each other and be understood). Nevertheless, extant technology, i.e. Internet, and its planned successor NREN (National Research and Education Network) demonstrate to us that our brave new world is not so very far away.

So come and join us at the Cataloging Workshop on the 25th. By cooperating to develop standards for terminology, for cataloging rules, and computer formats, we work to assure that FIAF will have influence and will play a major role in this future. Our challenge is to exploit these new technologies; to make them work for us rather than to rule us. By working together we can and will design and implement technologies and standards to support information sharing and exchange in the twenty-first century.