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BASIC PAPER

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The Preservation of Moving Images in the Developing Countries

Main working paper for a UNESCO sponsored meeting  
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This text presented by I F T C as a basic paper for the UNESCO International Experts' Meeting on Specialized Requirements Concerning the Preservation of Films and Other Audio-Visual Media in Developing Countries (16-20 October 1978, Buenos Aires, Argentina) has been prepared by Mr. Ted Perry, Chairman of the Document Commission of I F T C for developing countries.

This paper is concerned with the basic problems and needs of moving image preservation in the developing countries .

Many of these needs and problems are not unique to the developing countries, and often there is not a clear distinction between the more developed and the developing countries . It is therefore very helpful to have a detailed overall understanding of the basic problems and needs of moving image preservation, without specific reference to the developing countries. In this respect, two documents are useful, and I have included them as appendices : (1) Conclusions of the Discussion Report, with annexes I and II, of the UNESCO sponsored meeting, held in Belgrade, 21-24, November 1977, as an "Informal consultation on the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images," and (2) "Preliminary Study on the Technical and Legal Aspects of an International Instrument Concerning the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images," being the annex of a memorandum presented by the UNESCO Director-General regarding a possible International Instrument concerning the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images, Paris, 25 March 1978, 104th session.

By including these documents as appendices, and admitting that they contain some of the best current thinking on the more general needs and problems of moving image preservation, I am free to deal more particularly with the problems which are unique to the developing countries. Please consider these appendices as basic parts of my paper, since they do indeed deal with such important topics as legal deposit of moving image material, economic issues,

technical understanding and research, standards, access, reproduction, exchange, exhibition, research, etc. I urge that the appendices be read in their entirety as an integral part of the paper.

In order to begin our discussion, I must ask you to accept one assumption, which is that moving images do in fact form a basic part of mankind's heritage and, like other important aspects, must be preserved for future generations. This assumption has to be considered as universal, recognizing none of the national, ideological, ethnic, social, and economic divisions among men. If future generations are to know who they are, and from whence they came, then we must preserve as much as possible of today's moving image documents. And by documents I include not only the moving image records of what is happening but also those artistic works which document the efforts of man's imagination.

Although moving image archives share some common characteristics, they are also very different, unique to the particular time and place in which they exist. Not all of the needs and the problems discussed in this paper are unique to archives in the developing countries. Some moving image archives in the more developed countries have needs and problems as great if not greater than those in the developing countries, and there are some archives in the developing countries which are superior to some moving image archives in the more wealthy, more developed countries.

The most pressing problem before us is that there are many countries where there simply is no moving image archive at all or, if there is any collection of moving images, it is not at all done to archival standards. I have included as a third appendix a summary of the responses to a simple questionnaire mailed out to 55 countries. Only 19 responded and of these only 11 countries have what they would consider moving image archives. The question-

naire was sent out by the Secretariat for the International Federation of Film Archives (F.I.A.F.), an organization founded in 1939 and today consisting of members representing over 50 moving image archives.

This slim response to the questionnaire, and the indication as to the number of moving image archives, supports the already obvious truth that very few of the developing countries even have moving image archives. Simply by lack of knowledge, or lack of appreciation for the problem, or for economical reasons, neither the government nor any organization nor any individuals may have felt the need for such an archive. Therefore one of our most pressing needs is simply one of providing information about moving image archives and persuading people and governments of their need.

Almost all moving image archives which do exist have as a central problem that of the actual acquisition of film and television materials. There is always some hindrance, large or small, which keeps them from completely realizing the primary goal of collecting all, or most, of their nation's production in film and television. The problem may be political, legal, economic or simply administrative. The archive not only has no legal way of demanding the deposit of national product but also has no way of requiring the deposit of copies of moving image material shot or recorded in the country by outside producers, such as news teams from other countries. In some situations, the holder of moving image material in a particular country may be legally obligated to destroy the material or ordered to do so by the owner in some other country. And in some cases when moving images are collected, it is illegal for the archive to make a copy for preservation purposes.

In many developing countries, the archives which exist face serious organizational and administrative problems; that is, the archives lack the

independence necessary to carry out their archival work. They cannot function effectively as parts of government propaganda agencies, or within government ministries where the archival function is not a high priority, or as part of state television or educational systems with different goals, or where they are dependent upon commercial producers. In general, the work of many archives is hindered because their existence is dependent upon some other structure which has higher priorities. The need is to separate out the archive so that it need only be responsible for its archival function.

Moreover, since many of these countries have not articulated a clear position about the nature and function of a moving image archive, what work is done is often duplicated by other agencies. The various administrative units have overlapping responsibilities, and there is no clear and comprehensive mandate for a national moving image collection, even one where various components might be collected and stored in different places.

Many problems, of course, are economic. Like so many activities with little immediate results, archives are usually short on funds, which means it is impossible to collect all the films, to build the vaults, to pay a competent staff, to preserve and catalogue the films, to provide the necessary screening and educational programs, etc. In many cases, the economic base of the organization is very capricious, dependent upon the whims of government budgeting and subject to such rapid changes that no real long term planning can take place.

Related to the economic issue is that of a basic lack of equipment and supplies--reels, cans, film raw stock, magnetic tape, preservation, restoration, processing and printing equipment.

There are always political problems. Sudden changes in the kind of

government can make havoc of years of archival work. Years of national production may be lost or destroyed because they are associated with a previous regime. Political appointments to responsible archival positions can sometimes leave the archive without competent leadership. Censorship may prohibit some films from even being collected, much less preserved and screened. Film and television materials are often seen as politically very threatening and therefore subject to the most severe, and sometimes totally uninformed, censorship and customs procedures. Customs procedures may make it impossible to receive and send moving images without impossible red tape, delays, and eventual refusal. The country is thus cut off from sharing in the larger moving image experience of the past and the present. These and other legal and political obstacles can stop the effective functioning of an archive, since archives are usually all-purpose entities which not only collect and preserve film but perform other educational and cultural purposes within the country. These political pressures inhibit the archive from performing its missions.

The larger technical issues always make problems for the work of the archive. Almost all countries have had some film production during the period when film was shot and printed onto a nitrate base which decomposes in a relatively short period of time. To preserve the film heritage of that country requires that films on such base must be copied onto a more stable acetate base. This is an expensive but necessary program for almost every archive. In many developing countries there are no laboratory facilities for doing this work and the films are rapidly deteriorating with little hope of being saved. In some countries, shipping and customs regulations prohibit the shipping of the film out of the country even for copying purposes.

Unless other archives lend technical assistance in the form of helping to set up laboratories where nitrate film can be preserved, the films will be lost forever.

Another technical problem has to do with the need for proper storage facilities, or vaults, where optimum safety, temperature, and humidity conditions can be maintained. These qualities are extremely necessary in the humid climates of the world, since it is more often than not the excessive humidity which causes rapid deterioration of both black-and-white film and color film. Hydrolysis is a major cause of nitrate and acetate, black-and-white and color film deterioration and destruction.

The problem of color film is even greater since color dyes used in today's films will likely fade in 7-10 years when stored at room temperature and normal humidity ranges. For the time being only very cold, very low humidity storage vaults are practical for retarding this fading process. Very few countries have such vaults and, therefore, unless something is done quickly almost all contemporary color films will have disappeared in a few short years.

Magnetic tape, too, is harmed by improper storage conditions, in ways similar to motion picture film. Moreover, with magnetic tape there are the additional problems of damage by exposure to an electromagnetic field and the print-through of the signal from one layer of tape to the next. There does not seem to be very firm data on the long term storage of magnetic tape.

Almost all archives in developing countries have a personnel problem; that is, they have some difficulty in finding the trained people who can do their technical work, their educational work, the cataloguing, and programming of public screenings. They are not sure about where to turn in order

to train interested people, and they don't know where to go in order to get experts to visit their countries in order to provide advice, expertise and training.

As the F.I.A.F. questionnaire indicates, many countries have not even heard of F.I.A.F. but all 19 who responded to the questionnaire would be grateful for the various forms of professional assistance which F.I.A.F. could give.

Archives everywhere, as a part of their attempt to raise the general level of audience understanding and perception, are presented with many logistical, economic and personnel problems in trying to provide an on-site educational/screening program and any kind of an outreach program with the purpose of raising film understanding and perception. Yet it is absolutely necessary to train audiences if the real goals and needs of the archives' work and mission are to be understood and supported.

Moving image archives do not exist in a vacuum, and the support for preservation work must in the long run come from a public which has been made aware of the importance of moving images. This awareness does not happen automatically, and therefore the archives cannot be devoted exclusively to moving image preservation. They must develop public interest and appreciation for moving images. Archives are intimately bound up with the culture of the country, to the nurturing of artists, moving image makers, and perceptive audiences. Archives are all-purpose institutions, dedicated to promoting the making and preserving of moving images and to the support of the people involved in making, preserving, and understanding.

And archives in individual countries are a part of an international effort directed toward the same ends : the making, preserving and understanding

of moving images. These tasks are inseparable. Archives have an urgent need to have on their premises more and more examples of moving images made in other countries and at other times . Out of such archives entire movements are born, movements of moving image making, understanding, and appreciating.

Many archives need to be helped in understanding the importance of carrying on research in their archives, of associating with film production, education, and training programs. They also need to know the importance of collecting, cataloguing properly, and making accessible materials such as books, periodicals, equipment, posters, business records, stills and other items which document and illuminate the history of moving images in their country. The archives in the developing countries would like assistance in cataloguing and documentation methods, as well as with more technical matters.

In many countries, there is also a language problem. The official language under which the government operates may be entirely different from that of the majority of the people. There thus arise publication problems, education problems, personnel problems, etc. If moving images are to be seen and studied, what language(s) shall they be in? Which dialects? Translated subtitles may not help if large portions of the audiences are illiterate. Also, since almost all of the instructional information and guidelines for archival work are prepared in languages other than those used in many developing countries, this presents additional problems for the archives.

Archives need to be in close touch with other archives all over the world, and to organizations of archives, such as F.I.A.F., not only to exchange films, technical data, personnel, etc., but also merely to gain

strength and understanding through such associations. But few developing countries can afford to send their personnel to these international congresses and summer schools.

Having provided, in the appendix, an overview of the needs and problems associated with moving image preservation, and having spoken about some of the particular problems associated with moving image preservation in the developing countries, let me now present a list of specific recommendations; that is, actions which might be taken by UNESCO alone and through such international bodies as the International Federation of Film Archives. I think, for the purposes of discussion, that I should not feel limited by economic considerations, although it should be obvious that neither UNESCO nor F.I.A.F. has the economic resources to follow through on all of these recommendations. What is needed is some ranking of these recommendations according to priorities, and I have done this from my point of view.

One of the most important steps to be taken is the adoption by UNESCO either of an international recommendation or an instrument on the importance of safeguarding and preserving moving images. Such a step would help immensely in making more of the developing countries aware of the desirability of preserving moving images. They might not have given consideration before to this need.

The adoption of such a recommendation or instrument would not only strengthen the work of collecting and preserving moving images representing the cultural heritage of a particular nation, but also it would help to identify that activity as a global effort, one involved with preserving the cultural heritage of all mankind. This broader scope might give the archives a more international importance and less subject to some of the changes in

political regimes and ideological positions within that particular developing country.

With the adoption of such a recommendation or instrument, there would also be a need to establish an office within UNESCO which would be concerned with such preservation efforts. Considering that a great deal of experience and expertise in this matter already exists, and that there is an international body, F.I.A.F., devoted to such preservation, it would not seem that the UNESCO office should itself be involved in preservation efforts but with coordinating, informing, and otherwise serving as a clearing house for present and future preservation activities. Such an office, for instance, could help coordinate and support the efforts of F.I.A.F. to provide publications on the various aspects of archival work and to see that these publications were distributed. Developing countries interested in beginning an archive, and who contacted this UNESCO office would be put in touch with the F.I.A.F. secretariat and subsequently with professionals in other archives. Other examples of what such an office could do should be obvious in the recommendations which follow.

While the effort is being made to adopt an international recommendation or an instrument, every effort should also be made to acquire accurate information about current efforts in developing countries. We need to know which countries do have moving image archives and which do not. We need to know how these archives function and the results of their efforts. The questionnaire sent out by F.I.A.F. should have gone out to many more countries, but there was a great dearth of information about where to send such questionnaires. The response might have been much greater if more properly addressed. Surely, UNESCO has the resources, knowledge and administrative

structure to identify where there are and where there are not archives, and what these archives are doing.

Once this information is obtained about the developing countries it is then possible to find out what, if any, assistance the existing archives might need. In cooperation with F.I.A.F., UNESCO could sponsor a program of sending specialists to these archives. F.I.A.F. can nominate experts in various matters--laboratory work, preservation, restoration, vault construction, cataloguing, documentation, education, programming/exhibition, study and research facilities, etc. UNESCO could then facilitate and coordinate the sending of these experts. Wherever possible, it would be helpful to nominate and select an expert from the same region. The visits of the experts might be brief or for extended periods of time.

When it is discovered that there are no archives in the country, UNESCO, with the assistance of F.I.A.F.; could make every attempt to communicate with that government and the proper administrative division, if there is one, within that government in order to impress upon the officials the need for preserving their cultural heritage as recorded on moving images. It would seem again that UNESCO is the logical leader in this regard since it has more direct knowledge of, and access to, the various governments of the developing countries. It would seem particularly appropriate for UNESCO to sponsor a program in which the country would be visited by a representative of UNESCO and one of F.I.A.F., travelling together. The UNESCO representative would have arranged to see the proper officials and would carry the message of the international importance of preserving moving images, while the F.I.A.F. person would speak to the specific tasks involved in such a preservation effort.

The communication must be directed not only at the governments but also at the makers and producers of moving images. The artist/maker is concerned about his artistic legacy and the producer about future economic gains. If they knew that their work would disappear in a few short years, they might be more concerned about how the materials were stored. It is more than surprising how many makers and producers are ignorant of what will happen to their work if not properly taken care of.

Such visits to countries and contacts with governments, moving image makers, and producers would be more productive if UNESCO were to help support F.I.A.F. in finishing certain basic publications, in developing other publications, and in seeing that these materials were circulated internationally to the proper persons. For instance, F.I.A.F. either has ready or is about to finish a brochure on F.I.A.F. and its aims, a basic manual on the work of moving image archives, a booklet on preservation, manuals of cataloguing methods, indices to periodicals, etc. Other publications are needed on criteria for selecting which moving image documents to preserve and a booklet setting forth international standards for cataloguing methods and documentation procedures. With assistance from UNESCO, all of these publications could be readied more quickly by F.I.A.F. and made available more widely.

Publications are important, of course, but there is no substitute for the actual person-to-person contact when people are sent out by UNESCO and F.I.A.F. A program of sending specialists, and another program for sending out together representatives of UNESCO and F.I.A.F., are vitally important.

Whether dealing with countries which have archives, or countries which do not, there are three crucial messages which must be communicated:

1. The historical importance of preserving moving images as a part of mankind's cultural heritage.
2. The need for legal means to require deposit of certain, if not all,

moving images .

3. The technical problems involved in preserving this moving image material for any length of time and the consequent need to take immediate action in order to see that no more moving image material is lost .

As interim solutions to the need of preserving moving images in the developing countries, there are several solutions which, while they are not ideal, can only be more helpful than harmful in the long run :

1. Archives in the more developed countries must agree to store some moving image material from the less developed countries. In this respect, F.I.A.F. can be of assistance by providing some mechanism whereby individual archives in the more developed countries are designated as repositories for moving image materials from the less developed countries. Specific archives would serve as repositories for moving images from specific countries and/or regions .

2. Where there are a number of developing nations in one area, regional archives could be built with the assistance of UNESCO and the expertise of F.I.A.F. members . Such archives could be designed and built in order to cope with the particular climatic problems of the region, such as high humidity and excessive dust, thereby serving as models for the future creation of archives in the particular countries of that region .

3. More exchange between archives could be supported and facilitated / The more copies of the material that exist in several archives, the more likely the long term preservation of the images .

Member States are encouraged to support UNESCO's efforts towards establishing cinema archives in developing countries ; that is , building of vaults where there could be housed moving image documents which have no vaults or inadequate ones . This would be

be particularly easy if UNESCO had access to storage conditions--such as underground, as in salt domes, or in very cold climates, where the construction and maintenance of vaults would not be as expensive. The use of international territories might be feasible. Not all of the moving image documents produced in the developing countries could be housed there, but certainly enough material could be selected so that there would be a representation of the cultural heritage of mankind in these developing countries. Surely UNESCO, with the technical assistance of F.I.A.F., would have the ability to build these vaults and to transport materials to them.

Many archives and countries which hold nitrate material have no way to preserve the material because no laboratory in that country will handle nitrate film. In such cases, UNESCO, with the assistance of F.I.A.F., might help establish and equip regional laboratories which would copy the nitrate. UNESCO could also help the countries and the archives in cutting through any legal red tape to see that the nitrate film could be shipped to these laboratories.

Some of UNESCO's influence and financial resources could be used to fund the research necessary to develop new methods of preservation and archival storage of magnetic tape and film, particularly color film. In the United States some of the most promising new research indicates that there may be a way to store color images on a single strip of holographic material. UNESCO would be well advised help fund this and other research. By doing so, it would help to endorse the need for the research, and no doubt more funds would thereby be forthcoming.

More people from the developing countries should be helped to attend the summer schools run by F.I.A.F. since they would learn at first hand more

about preservation of moving images . Persons from the developing countries also should be helped to serve as interns in some of the more established archives. They might intern in the very archive which is storing some of the moving images from their country. The archive would benefit by learning more about moving image production in that country and the intern would return with more knowledge about preservation and the structure of an archive.

With assistance from UNESCO, it would be possible for F.I.A.F. to offer more advanced summer schools, dealing with some subjects in more detail and in more depth.

One of the more effective ways in which UNESCO could help the preservation of moving images in the developing countries would be actually to help representatives of these archives and governments to attend annual F.I.A.F. congresses. Indeed, a close cooperation between UNESCO and F.I.A.F. might make it possible for one F.I.A.F. congress to have as its symposium topic the needs and problems of archives in developing countries. Such a symposium would have enormous impact upon the preservation of moving images if UNESCO could assist in seeing that many archives and governments from developing countries were represented at such a meeting.

To begin this very hour and this very day in making a concerted, international effort to preserve moving images is already to begin very late. While there is no way we can meet satisfactorily on a national or international basis all of the needs and problems associated with moving image preservation, nevertheless we must begin. These specific recommendations are presented as an attempt at such a beginning.