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PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

Report given at the IASA General Assemblé I, Perugia, 2nd September 1996

As this is the end of my term as President, I think it appropriate not only to draw the year's activities together, but to cast the net wider, in several senses of the word, and make a few observations about the broad and diverse lands we are heir to.

Let me begin with a regular IASA feature, the Constitution. The pressures on us for regular constitutional amendment will always be with us, given the changing nature of the times. However, we hope to develop techniques which allow those changes to continue without constantly holding up our more pressing activities. We shall be looking very carefully at the recommendations of the two committees which were established to make such recommendations. Hopefully they can be endorsed, in whole or in part, into a new Constitution.

As I observed in my last report, the Board also talks about money a great deal, and the future of IASA. Again, I repeat, that is part of our job. Both the last Board and this one have developed a keen interest in financial matters, with good reason as many of you know. It is, after all, your money, and it is finite, so I am pleased to say that under Mark Jones' diligent stewardship our finances are in good shape.

We have some farewells to make this year, Giorgio Adamo decided to resign from the Board a few months ago. Disagreements about style and policy will always be part of a developing association, nonetheless it is always regrettable when members feel their work cannot be satisfactorily carried out within the frame of our association. Again, it shows us how important it is to communicate properly with each other, if we are to avoid misunderstandings. I should like record the Board's appreciation of Giorgio's contribution to the work of IASA over the years.

Helen Harrison is also stepping down. She has retired from her post at the Open University in Milton Keynes and can no longer devote the time required to IASA activities. Given the large amount of work she has done for us over the years, as President, Secretary General, and as Editor - to say nothing of her tireless work in representing IASA at various meetings - one can understand her need for a rest. As you know we are recommending to the membership that Helen be made an honorary member of IASA, as a tribute to her long record of service to us.

As a result of the election we welcome Martin Elste, Albrecht Häfner and Chris Clark to the new Board and reluctantly say farewell to Kurt Deggeller, another member whose contribution was appreciated. Again, we hope his expertise is not lost to the association. The Board has discussed the desirability of drawing upon the talents of ex-Board members, particularly in those areas where their expertise has been clearly marked.

My special thanks to Sven Allerstrand, who has been a remarkable Secretary General, and will now take up the office of President, bringing continuity to the association as it prepares itself for a new age. His assistance to me, as a newcomer to the Board in Helsinki and over the past three years has been invaluable. Also, on behalf of the Board I would like to thank both Dietrich Schüller, Rainer Hubert and their institutions for their assistance in hosting the mid-year meeting in Vienna. As we all know from past experience, they are very good at this and made us all feel quite a home.

A very special thanks George Boston, for his work in organizing the Board end of this conference. This has set a procedure in place we hope to repeat in the future. Our thanks to Sue Boston as well. I also

appreciated the way George kept me informed on a regular basis of the planning and activities connected with this conference.

1995/96 has revealed a continuum of our work with other associations. Helen Harrison has represented us at UNESCO and the Memory of the World project. Sven Allerstrand at the FID meeting. Helen has written of the success of the Memory of the World meeting, emphasizing our need to represent AV matters more aggressively to the world. Sven reports that the FID meeting was useful and that we should keep in touch with them and their work.

Dietrich Schüller has written to the Board raising some very important issues regarding the way in which UNESCO is restructuring, especially in relation to NGO's such as IASA. His recommendations are appreciated and have been deliberated by the old Board, as they will be by the new. Also I imagine the matter will come up for discussion with you all during one of the general assemblies. That we need a regular and experienced representative at UNESCO is clear and the Board is exploring the best ways to make this work.

As you will all know FIAT have made it clear they do not wish to hold any further joint meetings with us. For many reasons with which you will be familiar, we were obliged and willing to try this arrangement, and believe we put our best efforts into making the joint meetings work.

But, as those of you who attended the conferences will know, the fundamental differences between the two organizations far outweighed the mutual interest. As well as this, the cultural differences between us had not been anticipated, and this more than anything I believe, contributed to the decision to associate on specific issues only. Perhaps as a result of our moves to accommodate AV, FIAT have announced in their June Newsletter "proposals for the inclusion of radio archives in our (their) areas of concern". As an independent organisation they, like us, are quite entitled to broaden their scope.

Our affiliation with the Round Table has not been without its problems. IASA, as one of its most active members, has been variously dismayed and frustrated by the difficulties facing this representative group which meets annually, with a changing cast of characters. Sven, Helen and myself have felt this keenly in recent years as the Board members who represent IASA at the Round Table. It was not always so, as our associations had more stable representation in times past, and it was easier to continue conversations with colleagues, for these people would often meet in the course of their work through the year. This is no longer the case and it makes smooth operations increasingly difficult. From my own experience, after three meetings, I was just getting the hang of Round Table business and procedures. However, we no longer have the luxury of sitting around for three years learning a job which will vanish at the end of one's term in office. It is inefficient and wasteful to continue in this fashion without developing strategies to cope with it. Again, we are attempting to do this and you will be appraised accordingly.

Given IASA's good track record as possibly the most active member on the Round Table, both the Secretary General and I were bitterly disappointed when, at the Vienna meeting in March, the Round Table did not see fit to endorse our UNESCO application on behalf of our Cataloguing Committee. We both felt this was a show of weakness by the Round Table, given that they were not being asked to do anything except endorse our proposal; a proposal which, despite contrary argument, has been discussed in great detail and accepted as a major IASA activity by the majority of IASA members. Fortunately, the UNESCO delegate has advised us of their interest in our proposals. Mary Miliano has prepared a thoroughly solid report from her subcommittee which will be delivered this morning, and I will allow the work it delineates to speak for itself. She will also report briefly about the encouragement they are receiving from IFLA and UNESCO in relation to this project.

In the time since I attended my first conference in Como, in 1984, English has become the dominant language of the association. Given the way in which English has been adopted as a world language in that time, it is hardly surprising. The advantages of us being able to use a common language does not need any discussion, but the obverse side of this development should be noted.

It has become obvious that the countries which have got the best out of IASA have been those to whom English is most accessible. If you look at our work and development, this becomes clear. English speakers obviously have a clear lead when it comes to filling the administrative positions. This is numbingly and narrowly unsatisfactory in world terms, we only have to look within the Euro-centric group to see that the Romance countries have gradually withdrawn from our ranks, usually to form their own associations, and the Francophone countries exemplify this. This has defined IASA more than anything else over the years. We have discussed this matter before, but it always gets put into the "too-hard basket". I have no magic solution for this problem, but feel it necessary from time to time to draw attention to it.

As always, there are many interesting developments on the technical front. One of the most serious considerations thrown up by the fragile nature of our carriers and the expanding technologies on offer, is the very persuasive argument that we should sacrifice the original carriers, ensuring that we only keep the information they carry. Bendik Rugaas, the National Librarian and vice president of the Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO put it very well at the MoW meeting in Oslo, and I quote: *"Along with better access through digital storage, we must do our utmost to preserve our originals. Also for this purpose new technological developments can come to our assistance."* This is a view held by many and George Boston's very helpful introductory session on Sunday, made it very clear that the dramatic transitional phase from analogue to digital is still in train and will not be problem free for some time yet.

Alternatively, our respected advisers on technological matters are correct in reminding us that our first priority is to preserve the information, not the carriers, however charming they may be. As archivists we accept both of these points, trying to balance the huge investment needed to preserve carriers against the risk, however small, of committing the Memory of the World to the new technologies, and trust them implicitly with our audio-visual heritage.

We do have to be careful about embracing the new and disposing of the old too carelessly. One of the perceptions clouding the argument over the Cataloguing Committee's rules project is that we are simply resting in the arms of an outdated technology. I hope the report to be given by Mary Miliano this morning will show this to be a misreading by some of the work of the Committee. On the other hand it must be made clear to all that IASA is committed to progress and always open to discussion about all of its workings.

As I reach the end of my final address to you as President, allow me to give you a glimpse of the future.

As I boarded my plane in Sydney, I grabbed a copy of the Sydney Morning Herald and after take off, settled down to read it. Under the heading, The Techno Generation, I read of one Simon Rumble who, for his 21st birthday, sent out all his party invitations on the Internet, a system which is so familiar and comfortable to him and his friends that, to quote him: "I only had to send out five invitations on dead trees".

The article went on to give a graphic account of how the new generation, our new constituency, is rapidly breathing down the necks, not only of the paper based culture which we in IASA have been arguing with for years, but a new, free-ranging culture which is breaking into our established structures and rules, new consumers who truly have the upper hand for the first time and are not bound for an instant by copyright, or a dependency upon our very structured procedures regarding access to our data banks. It is not that this new world does not offer archives a vast new potential, it is the importance of grasping and recognising

the huge scope of what is happening. Embracing the future has always been welcomed by us, and this future may help solve many of the administrative and preservation problems alluded to earlier. Let us hope so.

It remains me to thank the Board for their support during the last three years, and to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to lead this absorbing, querulous and outstanding association. Despite having recently retired from the National Film and Sound Archive, I have not retired from life or work and hope to be around for the foreseeable future, and to assist in any way I can, the progress of sound and AV archiving.

My thanks to you all.

James McCarthy