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Assignment #1: Comparing Reference Tools

For this assignment, I chose to search for the following: the German silent film, *Hamlet*, directed by Sven Gade and Heinz Schall in 1920; and the Japanese director, Hiroshi Teshigahara. After years of conducting online searches, usually for things with which I had some previous familiarity, I found it quite difficult to limit myself to a targeted search (film name and director name, respectively). Therefore, while the reference works consulted provided widely varying indexing schemes, resource scopes, and justifications thereof, almost all of the reference tools eventually yielded applicable citations. If I had conducted my research with a very specific goal, perhaps the results would have been different. Nonetheless, as is intimated in several of the introductions/guides to the indices, I found that, as to my efforts, the curious and creative researcher is rewarded.

Initially, the most accessible of the reference sources in terms of familiarity and focus was the online *FIAF International Index to Film Periodicals Plus*. The option to select search terms from a database-generated list prevents failed searches resulting from either misspelling or previously unencountered spelling variations. Immediate access to the full text of articles in both HTML and PDF formats is extremely gratifying and the ability to download different citation formats, save searches, set up alerts for new results, etc. makes great use of online functionality. In addition to these search functions, the *Treasures from Film Archives* database allows the researcher to locate potential access and preservation copies of films, like those that I found for

*Hamlet*. The PDF-format user guide, which utilizes colorful graphics to provide clear instructions, further enhanced my ability to conduct online database searches by including information on proximity operators and truncation. Since only four databases are included in *FIAF*, the amount of time required to take full advantage of the resource felt manageable.

The *Film and Television Literature Index with Full Text* has a less attractive user interface, but yielded results as easily as *FIAF*. For both online resources, I attained the most complete results by performing multiple searches in different fields, marking citations, and collating the results. The fact that the *Film and Television Literature Index* has been bundled with a plethora of other EBSCO databases makes locating and pinpointing the relevant guide a little difficult, and I preferred the *FIAF* printable quick-guide document to the EBSCOhost video tutorials and the overwhelming number of links to information. “Visual Search” is a novel and effective way to intuitively narrow search results. Wildcard searching is also new to me.

A distinctive feature of the *International Index to Performing Arts*, the last online resource I consulted, is that a portion of the sentence in which the search term appears is included for each relevant citation. This provides a quick measure of the potential value of the source. It is also notable that *IIPA* focuses on results from the most recent 10 years of the 260 periodicals that it covers. For my two particular searches, *IIPA* appeared to offer the greatest number of full-text articles.

With regard to reference books, I found *The New Film Index: a Bibliography of Magazine Articles in English* to be the most entertaining and interesting because of the creativity required to parse out which categories might contain relevant information. By limiting the scope of the index to magazine articles, the authors were able to keep the material down to one volume, a fact that I came to appreciate after lugging other multi-volume resources back to my desk.

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**Comment [1]:** This is my main frustration with this index also

Moreover, the authors' assertion that "in the general effort of brevity and simplicity, we have not felt it obligatory to be dull" (MacCann and Perry ix) is well put. By comparison, *The Film Index*, which *The New Film Index* is intended to complement, has a similar method of subject indexing, but is cumbersome in its multiple volumes; it held more interest for me as a historical document than as a reference resource.

Supplement to the *FIAF* index, the *Retrospective Index to Film Periodicals 1930–1971* is devoted to just fourteen film journals along with film material from the *Village Voice*. It is therefore intended to be an exhaustive resource within those limits. As a whole, I found the *Retrospective Index* to be immediately user-friendly. In the "Subjects" section, subdivision by decade makes it easy to scan quickly. In accordance with the explanation provided in the guide, that section is where I found a listing for Hiroshi Teshigahara. Of the five versions of *Hamlet* listed, the version for which I searched was not included. Though easy to use, this resource was not the most fruitful.

*Motion Picture Performers: a Bibliography of Magazine and Periodical Articles, 1960–69* "does not claim to be definitive" and "is closely related to the dictates, conditions and scope of the collection and the Library & Museum of the Performing Arts, the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center" (Schuster v). Extremely simple to use, as there is only one indexical method employed, this resource provided numerous results for Asta Nielsen, the title character in *Hamlet*, and, somewhat surprisingly, a citation for Kyoko Kishida (one of the stars of a Teshigahara film) in the supplementary volume, which extended coverage to the period 1970–74 and opened the breadth of the bibliographic scope. While I did not strictly adhere to my chosen search topics with these searches, I was curious to see what results would come from a resource with such limited focus.

Though not fully detailed here, my investigation of the nine reference resources provided a rich look into the various agendas and methods of film-related indices. With regard to popular magazines, scholarly journals, and trade publications, the range of materials which each print reference deemed to be relevant is quite wide; the reasoning behind those choices could be a research topic in and of itself. Contrasted with the seeming simplicity of a quick Google search, the careful planning that goes into providing and indexing research materials is very evident in the documentation for each source, and particularly revealing in the more expansive introductions to some of the print resources, e.g. *Film Review Index* and *The New Film Index*.

As to future research choices, the net result of my investigation is that, in addition to using the three online indices, I would be likely, at the least, to check *The New Film Index* to see what ideas it might spark. I am also interested in revisiting *The Film Index: a Bibliography* in order to gain insight into how film and its surrounding materials were digested and arranged by the scholars of that time. I am impressed by the interest in scholarship and apparently generous intent that must have galvanized the efforts to collect all of this information and to record it—neatly arranged so that I would, in the space of hours rather than days or even years, be able to narrow the wide field of film-related references to a relative handful.

Laurie,

Very nice work! Your writing is excellent as is your analysis and comparison of the various resources. I really don't have any specific comments besides keep up the good work!

Thanks,

Nancy