

"Picture versus Sound" The Methodology and Practice of Newsreels Documentation at the Hellenic National Audiovisual Archive regarding Speakage'

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If historical accuracy to the maximum is what is called for, then newsreels documentation is a much more complicated process than the documentation of other forms of audiovisual records. In the Greek state newsreels there are ten subjects in average for the approximately ten minutes of each film, each of these subjects demanding special treatment and research. Recently, the HeNAA experienced the cataloguing and the documentation of a major collection of the state newsreels, almost 450 hours long, covering the period from 1944 up to 1996. To complete this task the HeNAA compiled a thorough companion of documentation guidelines, assigned the required bibliographical research and the completion of fixed database fields to scholars, while it also assigned academics to check the historical accuracy of the documentation. The aforementioned documentation was organized on two components, in addition to particular basic information for each film. The first component was the historical one, namely the attempt to fully cover the accuracy of any historical information regarding the events, the persons, the time and places that each subject referred to. The second component was the narrative one, according to which the documentalist must compose a short text on the content of the film, independent of any audio comments (the speakage). That is, the documentalist describes what he sees aided by what he hears, not vice versa. The documentalist does not record what he hears, because it was decided that he/she must be detached from the spoken words that accompany the image because they do not belong to the natural sound of the image seen, since it is a superimposed suggestion on the image. Nevertheless, if speakage in its final form might sometimes disorientate and even delude us, in its original form, before any corrections or censorship were applied to it, it may offer us additional information on the contents of the image. In an attempt to achieve a more thorough documentation and at the same time to explore the production of newsreels, the HeNAA runs the "History of the Newsreels" program. This program looks into document archives, administrative acts, catalogues and texts with the original speakage. At the same time, a series of oral testimonies by filmmakers and others who were involved in the production of newsreels are recorded, thus enriching our knowledge on this corpus. In this respect, sound issues gain special importance. During the documentation of mute newsreels, where no guidance by the speakage is at hand, many problems may occur. In some cases, of course, sound secures some information. In addition, another sound characteristic in newsreels is the music that usually predisposes the audience for the approach to the subject, since it attaches a particular tone to each subject, official, serious, mournful, cheerful and so on. Inspection of these tones furnishes additional information on the content of the newsreels subjects. However, the relation that is built between the images of particular subjects and their speakage, is a very crucial issue: this is a rather complementary relation, yet it always directs to a particular content, sometimes hiding information, sometimes proposing information that does not emerge from the image and some other times creating an interesting counterpoint. This paper briefly describes the philosophy and the methodology of documentation at the HeNAA. Then, it presents some findings from the HeNAA research on the history of newsreels production, a research that runs parallel to their documentation. It refers to particular cases where the documentation of an image is enlightened or hindered by information regarding its sound. Finally, the paper attempts to define this special arena where image and sound try to construct, whether complementary or in opposition, a meaning for the content of newsreels subjects.