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Research into the Character Nosferatu as Played by Max Schreck and Klaus Kinski

Since the assignment called for one subject to research from the silent era and one from the sound era, I chose two different actors who portrayed the character of Nosferatu. In the 1922 horror classic *Nosferatu*, directed by F.W. Murnau, Max Schreck plays the eponymous vampire. In Werner Herzog's 1979 remake, *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Klaus Kinski plays the title role. I tried a number of ways to find information on each actor involving reference books and internet databases and each search started out broadly and was subsequently narrowed. This essay will first provide a quick survey of my reference book search, followed by another quick assessment of my search through Internet databases, and will conclude with a comparison of both.

The Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University's main research library, holds a number of key reference book indices for students and faculty. Several of the books were more valuable for research into the silent era version of *Nosferatu*, such as the *Retrospective Index to Film Periodicals 1930-1971*, by Linda Batty. Others, such as the *Film Review Index (Volumes 1 and 2)*, by Stephen L., and Patricia King Hanson were helpful in finding material pertaining to the 1979 remake. The very first step I took was to find all of the appropriate titles on the shelves. I was impressed with the availability of the books, as well as the number of other reference books that were not listed in the assignment. Once I found the books, I started to research with three different criteria in mind. First, I searched for the actor, Max Schreck. Then, I searched for F.W. Murnau, the film's director. Finally, I searched for the film itself, *Nosferatu*. I repeated this process with Klaus Kinski, Werner Herzog, and *Nosferatu the Vampyre*.

I chose this method because the first thing I discovered was that each reference book did not include either Max Schreck or Klaus Kinski. Instead, I found that looking for the particular director tended to garner results, as well as looking up the specific film. Looking up the director proved to be the broadest search. For example, in the *Retrospective to Film Periodicals 1930-1971* book, there were four articles about F.W. Murnau, as opposed to three for the film *Nosferatu*. Since the Kinski role was portrayed after 1971, that film was not included. This particular book was also interesting in that specific subjects could be looked up, such as the country of a film's origin. In contrast, the *Film Review Index* was an excellent resource for finding a film; however, it does not allow a researcher to look up specific people connected to the film, and it is impossible to know whether or not the articles explicitly mention the films' stars. I was able to find in this resource fourteen reviews of the 1922 version of the film, and even a book about Murnau, but nothing on Schreck. I was also able to find sixteen reviews of the Herzog film, but nothing on Kinski. *The Film Index: A Bibliography*, and *The New Film Index: A Bibliography of Magazine Articles in English, 1930-1970* did not include anything about any of my search criteria. I had higher hopes for *Motion Picture Performers: A Bibliography of Magazine and Periodical Articles, 1960-1969 & Supplement, 1970-1974*. Although this book was a great source of material for mainstream films and actors, it did not contain any pertinent information for my search. At this point, I applied my search criteria to Internet databases.

In searching online for material about Max Schreck and Klaus Kinski, I consulted three different databases. First, I looked at the *FIAF International Index to Film Periodicals-Full Text*, followed by the *Film and Television Literature Index*, and finally the *International Index to the Performing Arts-Full Text*. Due to the nature of Internet finding aids, I was able to tweak my search criteria slightly. Instead of looking up a director, I could look up a director and attach

their name directly to the film I was looking for. I was also able to attach the film's star directly to the first two criteria. This method of searching effectively narrowed down the amount of hits that would appear by just searching for the title of the film alone. However, the most direct search involved looking up the actor's name connected to the film.

In the FIAF database, there was one solitary hit for an article, *Shadow of a Vampire*, by Laura Wagner, that explicitly references Max Schreck. However, there was no full text provided; just an abstract of the article. There was nothing about Klaus Kinski, although there were 51 hits about Werner Herzog and his film. The vast majority of these were in German. Despite finding an article on Max Schreck, I was unable to find any articles written before 1972. Next, in the *Film and Television* database, I was able to locate thirteen articles about Max Schreck. The majority of these were recent reviews of a re-released DVD. However, one hit yielded an excerpt from a *Variety* review from January 1st, 1922. For the 1979 version, I was able to track down three articles on Klaus Kinski, although only one of them included full text. This article was specifically about the relationship between Kinski and Werner Herzog. This database was less specific in searchable detail than FIAF, but otherwise worked out well. Finally, the *Performing Arts Index* was browsed. I was able to find numerous articles for each actor. This database was the most helpful for me in that I was able to search the actor, and then narrow the search to the actor's specific character from the film. This yielded fewer results, but at the same time provided specific information. This database also offered excellent access to the full text of an article. It did not offer much in terms of articles written before 1999. The Internet databases, compared to the reference books, provided the most use to my search.

In comparing the two sources of indices, I was surprised that the digital finding aids were far superior to their analog counterparts. This was surprising because, as an analog enthusiast, I

expected much more detailed information in book form. However, I was able to find more highly pertinent information on the two actors I chose online as opposed to within the books. The problem was, in my opinion, that the level of detail that one could narrow their search down to online far exceeded the capabilities of the books. In other words, online finding aids have the ability to keyword search and books do not. Furthermore, the online sources also have access to the full text of an article, regardless of what year it was written. So not only does a researcher have the benefit of locating a variety of articles, they also are able to pinpoint which articles may be of use due to varying degrees of specificity. The reference books simply do not have this capability. Therefore, the only assessment that can be made, in my opinion, is that online indices will render tangible book indices obsolete with the exception of searching for articles from the cinema's earliest eras.

When faced with the challenge of researching film or film subjects from the silent and sound eras, the two primary finding aids are reference books and online databases. The reference indices can be invaluable in searching for articles relating to the silent era. However, the online finding aids tend to reveal a wealth of articles that the books simply cannot account for. This is due to the degrees of specificity with which a user can narrow their search in an Internet database that the books, by their very nature, are unable to handle. Furthermore, with an online database, a researcher can read a sample of, if not the entirety of, the text of an article which reference books do not do. Despite the superiority of online finding aids, reference books are still an integral part of researching the early eras of the cinema in that they reference older articles which the online databases do not seem to have access to. Therefore, both sources of reference are relevant for future researchers.