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| Германская пропаганда военного времени, революция в России и киноархивы.

Фрагментарное наследие / German Wartime Propaganda, the Russian Revolution, and the Film Archives: A Fragmentary Legacy |

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РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ В РОССИИ И КИНОАРХИВЫ. ФРАГМЕНТАРНОЕ НАСЛЕДИЕ**

В период Первой мировой войны кинопропаганда характеризовалась намеренной заменой военных корреспондентов из гражданской среды репортёрами, фотографами и кинооператорами, контролируемые государством. Для того, чтобы установить монополию на все виды военного кино- и фоторепортажа в Германии было организовано Фото- и киноуправление (БУФА), что дало германским военным возможность осуществлять значительный контроль над изображением войны и проложило путь для использования кино как инструмента воздействия на массовую аудиторию. В 1918 году, в результате революции в России и последовавшего за ней Брест-Литовского мирного договора, германские военные кинооператоры были размещены на новых оккупированных территориях Балтии, Украины и даже Кавказа. Хотя это размещение было недолговременным (оно закончилось вместе с перемирием между Германией и Антантой от 11 ноября 1918 года), результатом его стал ряд короткометражных документальных фильмов, снятых на территории бывшей Российской империи. Первоначально эти фильмы распространялись БУФА, непосредственным предшественником кинокомпании «УФА (Универсум Фильм Акциенгезельшафт)». После 1918 года эти фильмы снова стали показываться – уже в Веймарской республике, несмотря на то, что их первоначальной целью была пропаганда войны; и даже в наши дни они используются в качестве иллюстративного материала в коммерческой кино- и телепродукции о Пер-

вой мировой войне. Предлагаемая статья анализирует деятельность БУФА, вышеупомянутый вид фильмов и отношение к ним в киноархивах до настоящего времени. Автор статьи утверждает, что продукция БУФА стала переходной для двух очень разных архивных, политических и идеологических систем и что она может служить примером изменений в том, какое значение и какая историческая ценность придавались историческим фильмам на разных стадиях общественно-культурных трансформаций, имевших место в XX столетии.

Ключевые слова: киноархивы, кинематографическое наследие, кинопропаганда, Октябрьская революция, "культура воспоминаний", военный репортаж, Первая Мировая война.

**GERMAN WARTIME PROPAGANDA, THE
RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, AND THE FILM
ARCHIVES: A FRAGMENTARY LEGACY**

Film propaganda during World War I was characterized by the deliberate substitution of civilian war correspondents with state-sponsored reporters, photographers, and cameramen. In Germany, the Bild- und Filmamt (BuFa) was installed to monopolize all film- and photography-based war reporting, giving the German military considerable control over the image of war, and paving the way for film to be used as a medium to influence mass audiences. In 1918, as a consequence of the Russian Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, German war cinematographers were



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deployed in the newly-occupied territories of the Baltics, Ukraine, and even the Caucasus. While this engagement was short-lived, ending with the German armistice signed on November 11, 1918, it resulted in a number of documentary shorts filmed on the territory of the former Russian Empire. These films were originally distributed by Bufa, the immediate precursor of UFA – Universum Film AG. Beyond 1918, the films were again circulated in the Weimar Republic, despite their original purpose as war propaganda – and they continue to be drawn upon even today as illustrative material in commercial film and television productions about World War I. The paper provides information on

Bufa, the body of films in question, and their legacy in film archives until the present day. The author argues that Bufa productions transitioned between very different archival, political, and ideological systems, and may serve as an example of the changing significance and historical value attributed to historical film across the profound societal and cultural transformations of the 20th century.

Key words: film archives, film heritage, film propaganda, October Revolution, remembrance culture, war reporting, World War I.

Introduction

In 1918, as a consequence of the Russian Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, German war cinematographers were able to travel the newly-occupied territories of the Baltics, Ukraine, and even parts of the Caucasus. While this opportunity lasted for just a few months and came to a very sudden end with the German armistice signed on November 11, 1918, it resulted in a number of German documentary shorts filmed on the territory of the former Russian Empire. These films were originally produced and distributed by the so-called *Bild- und Filmamt* (Bufa), the immediate, state-sponsored precursor of UFA – Universum Film AG. They continued to be circulated in the Weimar Republic, and later served as illustrative material for compilation films and documentaries about World War I. This paper will provide some background information about Bufa's film activities, and will also look at its legacy in film archives until the present day. The films in question transitioned between very different archival, political, and ideological systems, and can serve

as an example of the changing significance and historical value attributed to historical film documents across the profound societal and cultural transformations of the 20th century.

German film propaganda during World War I

While earlier military confrontations had been documented on film – notably the two Balkan Wars of 1912/1913, the first time that the new medium of film had been used for war reporting on a larger scale –, the First World War was marked by the widespread use of film for the purpose of both war reporting and war propaganda. Germany, however, was rather late to adopt film as a means of propaganda. By 1916, other states had already set up centralized film production and distribution agencies, many of which monopolized military film and photography in their respective countries. Examples included the War Office Cinematographic Committee in Great Britain, formed in 1916, and the Austrian *Kriegspressequartier*. Until 1916, German film reporting on the war had been handled chiefly by the newsreel companies,



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ILLUSTRATION 1: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1983-0323-501. German military cinematographers in a trench on the Western Front, 1917.

whose civilian cinematographers were, for the most part, unable to obtain actual battle footage. As civilians they had to work under strict guidance of the military, which mostly restricted their operations to the rear of battle and the occupied territories. German propaganda efforts also profoundly lacked in coordination. Prior to 1916, at the German Foreign Ministry alone, 27 different offices were tasked with foreign propaganda – none of which was required to coordinate its efforts with any of the other outlets¹. German au-

¹Hans Barkhausen: *Filmpropaganda für Deutschland im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Hildesheim 1982. P. 2.

thorities at the time felt that they had nothing to match the foreign film propaganda, especially in terms of influencing public opinion in the neutral countries of Europe.

This state of affairs changed in early 1917 with the founding of Bufa – *Bild- und Filmamt*. Officially created on January 30, 1917 by the German Supreme Army Command (*Oberste Heeresleitung*), Bufa was set up with the explicit purpose to monopolize war reporting on the German side. Bufa's activities included front-line filming and photography, the distribution of films for domestic and foreign audiences, and the operating of cinemas for the soldiers in the field. Bufa



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fielded its own military cinematographers, and it ran its own chemical printing plant to develop and duplicate films. A crucial individual for the founding and subsequent operation of Bufa was Hans von Haeften, who previously had been the head of the military film and photography department at the Foreign Ministry. With Bufa, the German government began to produce its own war films which gradually supplemented – if not replaced – the coverage of the war that the civilian newsreels had so far provided².

Bufa film production and production characteristics

Although neither the refined techniques nor the terminology had been fully developed at the time, Bufa aimed to produce films for what is commonly referred to today as psychological warfare, and to use film as an instrument for mass persuasion. The films produced were mostly documentary shorts. Of these, some were quasi-newsreels with short segments of reporting on current military events; others can be characterized as military instruction or training films. Only a few productions had the length and complexity of documentary features. In addition to films based on footage shot by Bufa cameramen, the company also licensed and distributed a number of films from other production companies – mainly shorts on cultural subjects and even a handful of fiction films, many of which had propagandistic undertones³. The significance of Bufa's film producing

²For an overview of German film propaganda during World War I, see Christoph Makowski: *Deutsche Filmpropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg. Entwicklung, Hoffnung, Versagen*. Baden-Baden 2014.

³For an overview of Bufa productions, see the official *Filmliste* published in October 1918: Bufa, *Inlandsdienst, Filmliste Nr. 2*, Berlin, 1918.

has been interpreted differently. On the one hand, the films often appear crude in the persuasion techniques they employ, and clearly lack the refined propaganda methods developed in subsequent decades. On the other hand, a handful of Bufa films has been characterized by later scholars as the "first German documentary films", especially titles which incorporated elements of dramaturgy and aesthetization⁴. Today, the Bufa films remain of considerable interest to military historians, but their quality as a cinematic experience – and as effective propaganda – must be called into question⁵.

The effects and consequences of the Russian Revolution

In 1917, when the Tsarist system of the Russian Empire was overthrown by the February Revolution, it resulted in the immediate toppling of the monarchy and the creation of the Provisional Government. The October Revolution then installed the Bolsheviks as the new leaders of Russia. The Bolsheviks promptly announced that Russia would be withdrawing from the war. A ceasefire with the Central Powers was declared, and an armistice – one of several – came into effect in December 1917. By this agreement Russia effectively exited World War I. However, Germany made demands for territory it had previously oc-

⁴For this assessment, see Uli Jung, Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, *Ästhetischer Wandel. Dokumentarische Propagandafilme*, in: Uli Jung (ed.): *Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland. Part 1: Kaiserreich 1895-1918*. Stuttgart 2005, pp. 444-445.

⁵Gerhard Paul, *Krieg und Film im 20. Jahrhundert. Historische Skizze und methodologische Überlegungen*, in: Bernhard Chiari, Matthias Rogg, Wolfgang Schmidt (eds.), *Krieg und Militär im Film des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2003, pp. 3-78 (9-11).



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cupied. Trotsky, as leader of the Russian delegation in Brest-Litovsk, famously declared a "neither peace nor war" policy, and on 28 January 1918 announced that Soviet Russia considered the war to be over, and that territorial demands should not be discussed. This was unacceptable to the Central Powers, who mounted another offensive, *Operation Faustschlag* ("Operation Fist Punch"), lasting from February 18 till March 3, 1918. Due to the ongoing turmoil of the Russian Revolution and the resulting civil war, Russian forces were unable to put up any serious resistance, and the armies of the Central Powers captured vast territories in the Baltics, in Belarus, and in Ukraine. In some cases Central Power forces had advanced nearly 250 km within a week, without facing serious resistance. It was only after Lenin intervened to push for acceptance of the German terms, that hostilities were finally ended with the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. Bufa produced at least three films about the negotiations and resulting Treaty:

- DER WAFFENSTILLSTAND VON BREST-LITOWSK // *The Armistice of Brest-Litovsk* (Bufa 1917, 35 mm, 142 m)
- DER ERSTE FRIEDENSVERTRAG DES WELTKRIEGES // *The First Peace Treaty of the World War* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 197 m)
- FRIEDENSVERHANDLUNGEN IN BREST-LITOWSK // *Peace Negotiations in Brest-Litovsk* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 202 m)

The third film, FRIEDENSVERHANDLUNGEN IN BREST-LITOWSK, is especially notable because it not only documented the negotiating parties and their delegates but also includes scenes of fratern-

ization between German and Russian soldiers in the nearby trenches⁶.

With the Treaty in effect, the Central Powers' advance in the Baltics and northern Ukraine was halted, but it continued in southern Russia. During the next few months, the southern Central Powers forces advanced almost 800 km, capturing the whole of Ukraine and even some territory beyond, into the Caucasus. It is this background against which Bufa activities on Russian territory must be seen. Vast new areas had become accessible to the Bufa *Filmtruppen* – its cinematography units –, and Bufa was quick to seize this opportunity. The following list provides a selection of Bufa documentary shorts filmed on occupied territory of the former Russian Empire and its successor states⁷:

- BESICHTIGUNG DER ERSTEN UKRAINISCHEN DIVISION DURCH DEN HETMAN GENERAL SKOROPADSKI IN KIEW // *Review of the First Ukrainian Division by Hetman General Skoropadskyi in Kiev* (Reichsfilmstelle 1921/1922, 35 mm, 118 m⁸)
- BILDER VON DER HALBINSEL KRIM (VON BALAKLAWA BIS BAIDAR) // *Scenes from the Crimean Peninsula* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 195 m)
- FLUGPOST BREST-LITOWSK – KIEW (560 KILOMETER) // *Airmail Brest-Litovsk – Kiev (560 Kilometers)* (Reichsfilmstelle 1921, 35 mm, 214 m)

⁶Online at <http://www.filmportal.de/node/74955/video/1205353>.

⁷Cf. the references at filmportal.de, and the entries found in the Bufa Filmliste Nr. 2, as above.

⁸A number of Bufa films were either rereleased or released for the first time in the Weimar Republic by *Reichsfilmstelle*, effectively a successor organisation of Bufa.



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- DER HAFEN VON SEWASTOPOL (DIE UKRAINISCHE HAFENSTADT SEWASTOPOL) // *The Port of Sevastopol* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 163 m)
- DIE HAUPTSTADT DER UKRAINE, KIEW // *Kiev, Capital of Ukraine* (Bufa 1918, 313 m)
- DER HETMAN DER UKRAINE, GENERAL SKOROPADSKI // *The Hetman of Ukraine, General Skoropadskyi* (Reichsfilmstelle 1922, 35 mm, 88 m)
- MINSK, EINE DER NEU BESETZTEN STÄDTE IM OSTEN // *Minsk, One of the Newly-Occupied Cities in the East* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 136 m)
- DIE SÄUBERUNG DER UKRAINE: DEUTSCHE TRUPPEN IM KAMPF MIT DEN BOLSCHEWIKS // *The Cleansing of Ukraine: German Troops Fighting the Bolsheviks* (Reichsfilmstelle 1921/1922, 35 mm, 130 m)
- DIE STADT CHARKOW IN DER UKRAINE // *The Ukrainian City of Charkow* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 136 m)
- UKRAINER SPEISEKARTE // *Ukrainian Menu* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 72 m)
- UKRAINISCHE PRESSEVERTRETER BEI DER BESICHTIGUNG DES DEUTSCHEN FLUGZEUGDIENSTES AUF DEM FLUGPLATZ DER HEERESGRUPPE KIEW // *Ukrainian Mem-*

bers of the Press Visiting the German Aeroplane Service at the Air Field of Army Group Kiev (Reichsfilmstelle 1921/1922, 35 mm, 67 m)

- UKRAINISCHES MILITÄR // *Ukrainian Military* (Bufa 1918, 35 mm, 79 m)

Clearly, the focus of this film activity was on Ukraine, where the German occupation forces had installed a puppet regime – essentially a provisional dictatorship – led by "Hetman" Pavlo Skoropadskyi, known today as the "Ukrainian State" or "Hetmanate". A few examples of Bufa's film activities should be given. Leutnant Beyer of Filmtrupp 2, who previously had been deployed on the Western Front, traveled to Ukraine in August 1918, where he shot film on several occasions: 390 meters of unspecified footage between 26 August and 1 September, then 100 meters of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi in Kiev, followed by 95 meters of "Sea life at Odessa", and then another 475 meters in Odessa, "the Russian Riviera". Of Filmtrupp 7, Leutnant Suse was equally sent to Ukraine in August 1918. From there he traveled further east, filming a total of 740 meters while stationed in Rostov-on-Don, and in October shot 110 meters about festivities in the city of Azov in Rostov Oblast.



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Bundesarchiv, Bild 104-11421
Foto: o.Ang. | 1918

ILLUSTRATION 2: Bundesarchiv Bild 104-11421. Bufa camera operator filming in Tbilisi, summer of 1918.

Other filming did occur, especially in the Caucasus. Lieutenant Solty of Filmtrupp 1, who at first had been stationed in Sevastopol during May and June of 1918, moved on to Tbilisi during the first week of July 1918. While stationed in Tbilisi, Solty shot at least 318 meters of film, and was then deployed in the surrounding area for another week, before returning to Berlin⁹. Solty's footage may have been used for the Bufa short *BILDER AUS DEM KAUKASUS* (*Scenes from the Caucasus*,

⁹The author wishes to thank Hans-Gunter Voigt, Potsdam, for supplying detailed information about the Bufa Filmtruppen and their activity reports.

Bufa 1918, 35 mm, length unknown). Unfortunately, no Bufa film footage from the Caucasus appears to survive today. With the hostilities at the eastern front finally ended by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Bufa moved from reporting about war-like events to documentary shorts about the newly-accessible land and its people, essentially producing, for the most part, cultural films and travel shorts – a curious result if one considers the fact that all its cameramen were still uniformed soldiers and subject to military orders from Berlin. But all official German film activities on Russian territory rapidly came to an end with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918 – the end



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Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-P012379
Foto: o. Ang. | 1930/1939 ca.

ILLUSTRATION 3: Bundesarchiv B 145 Bild-P012379. The Reichsarchiv in Potsdam, established in 1919, where the Bufa collection was stored until 1934.

of World War I and the complete defeat of the German Empire. It also signaled the end of other plans for the Russian film market which the Germans had considered. Back in August 1918, it had been proposed that UFA would not only supply films to the new Soviet government (it was hoped that UFA could sell approximately 200 films per year at ten copies each), but that it would "produce and develop Russian fiction films in Moscow" – a far-fetched idea that ultimately was not carried out¹⁰. At the end of World War I, Bufa it-

¹⁰Quoted in Hans Traub: Aktenauszüge über Filmpropaganda während des Weltkrieges. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Feindpropaganda und der Orga-

self was disbanded, but its legacy of films remained.

New custodians: the Bufa films after 1918

In 1919 all Bufa films were deposited at the newly-formed Reichsarchiv in Potsdam. The origins of this archive were purely military: In July 1919 Colonel General Hans von Seeckt had suggested to convert the military history department of the German General Staff into an archive,

nisationen von Bufa, Deulig u. Ufa. Aus dem Reichsarchiv und dem Heeresarchiv in Potsdam", Berlin 1938 (unpublished manuscript), p. 35.



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and in September 1919 a cabinet resolution was enacted to bring the new archive into existence.

Its initial workforce, consisting of approximately one hundred staff members, had been drawn entirely from the German officer corps, with trained historians and archivists being recruited only afterwards. This strong dependency on the German military – and in fact, the far-reaching personnel continuity – is best exemplified by General Major Hans von Haefen: previously the head of Bufa, he went on to work at Reichsarchiv, and became the archive's president in 1931. The fact that von Haefen, as well as a number of other individuals who had previously been involved with German propaganda efforts during World War I went on to work at Reichsarchiv, also helps to explain what may be called a resurgence of Bufa films during the Weimar Republic of the 1920s: Together with *Reichsfilmstelle* – the direct successor of Bufa, now subordinate to the Interior Ministry – the Reichsarchiv made a coordinated effort to resubmit many Bufa films to the film censorship authorities (*Filmprüfstelle*). This resulted in about a hundred Bufa titles being readmitted for public viewing, with the archive acting as the sole distributor¹¹. Archivists at Reichsarchiv thus played a central role in the renewed popularization of Bufa films during the Weimar Republic. This effort to redistribute films from the imperial era is particularly noteworthy in light of the severe restrictions imposed on German military spending and troop strength by the Treaty of Versailles: While the Treaty had enforced

¹¹For references, see the list of Bufa/Reichsfilmstelle films published in Walter Günther: *Verzeichnis deutscher Filme*. Grundaussage, Part 1: Lehr- und Kulturfilme. Berlin 1927; see also the references at filmportal.de, which as of 2018 however still contain numerous filmographic inaccuracies.

mass-scale demobilization, with the German army limited to 100,000 men, and strict bans on tanks, military aircraft, and chemical weapons, the readmission and public screening of Bufa films at that time may appear at first glance to have been a remedial effort to keep alive Germany's very recent imperial military past. But many of the archivists involved had experienced the horrors of war firsthand, and were hardly given over to jingoist tendencies. In March 1928 Arthur Seehof published an article titled "Films at the Reichsarchiv" in *Film und Volk*, a periodical published by the *Volksfilmverband* (People's Union of Film). He noted that a number of Bufa titles thus far had not been released again and remained unavailable: "They are still stored even today in the film cabinets of the Reichsarchiv in Potsdam. All of them were officially produced by the government. (...) As far as we know, these films, shot at the frontlines, depict the war in all its bestiality and cruelty, and were only removed from circulation a number of years ago to prevent anti-war propaganda (...) these films belong to the millions of the German people, because they depict the terrible misery of the nameless"¹². It is remarkable that the Bufa productions, originally the product of German's official war propaganda, were now being drawn upon for pacifist purposes.

The next transition of the Bufa collection occurred in 1934 with the founding of *Reichsfilmarchiv* (RFA), the first state-level film archive of Germany. It was founded on the first anniversary of the Nazis' rise to power, on 30 January 1934, as an adjunct to *Reichsfilmkammer*, the Nazi forced-membership organization for film professionals.

¹²Arthur Seehof: *Filme im Reichsarchiv*, in: *Film und Volk* 1 (March 1928), issue 1, p. 30; Barkhausen 1928, pp. 188-189.



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As with many institutions created primarily for ideological purposes, this new film archive started out as an empty shell, and the people involved in establishing it were scrambling to obtain suitable films for its collections. Perhaps the most important part of this initial, haphazard collection was obtained from Reichsarchiv, which transferred all the Bufa titles in its possession (including the original camera negatives, some 850 reels of film), as well as a number of other documentaries and newsreels¹³. At Reichsfilmarchiv, the Bufa films formed the core of its collections. Starting with inventory number one, approximately 230 Bufa titles were accessioned¹⁴. The surviving descriptions found in the RFA card indices, now located at the German Bundesarchiv, indicate that the collection was primarily regarded by the Nazi film archive as an invaluable documentary record of Germany's military past, with many films receiving only succinct remarks about their content and significance. There are no surviving records on which of the films were loaned out, or how often. A number of times, Reichsfilmarchiv made Bufa materials available to other productions, and occasionally acted as co-producer in these productions. One example was the instructional film STELLUNGSKRIEG IM WELTKRIEG (*Trench Warfare During the Great War*) compiled in 1937¹⁵.

¹³Barkhausen 1982, p. 183.

¹⁴Cf. Reichsfilmarchiv, Filmverzeichnis, Berlin 1941, section K (Kriegsfilme), silent films, pp. K/a/1 to K/a/59. The actual number of Bufa films accessioned may have been higher as not all films were properly identified in the catalog; the number of 230 titles is a conservative estimate.

¹⁵Cf. filmportal.de, https://www.filmportal.de/film/stellungskrieg-im-weltkrieg_638a0de56e614e54b120365fcdc9357c.

Around 1942, as a result of the growing threat of aerial warfare, Reichsfilmarchiv began to move the most valuable parts of its collections from the film vaults in Berlin and Babelsberg to more remote locations. This included the Bufa negatives, which were sent by rail to a disused bunker of the so-called *Ostwall*, a line of fortifications between the Oder and Warta rivers in what today is part of western Poland. By the time the relocation was completed, in 1944, the Wehrmacht commandeered the *Ostwall* fortifications again as part of a defense line it was setting up to halt the advancing Red Army. This forced the archive to move out all of the films again. Various delays and a lack of available freight space meant that the bunker could not be cleared out before early 1945. Ultimately, RFA was forced to fully vacate the installation and ship the films westward to other, makeshift vaults, some of which were set up in abandoned brickworks. There is insufficient information as to the fate of the Bufa negatives. As per the records of the Propaganda Ministry, all films were relocated to other storage sites closer to Berlin¹⁶. But Hans Barkhausen in his 1982 study on Bufa notes the negatives must have been destroyed around that time¹⁷. Indeed we must assume that all Bufa camera negatives were destroyed in 1945, either deliberately or by accident. This still left a considerable number of Bufa titles intact in the main film vaults of RFA in the forests outside Babelsberg, where viewing prints – mostly nitrate prints, many of them tinted – had been stored.

¹⁶See the correspondence in German Propaganda Ministry files about the relocation of RFA collections in BA, R 55/1245.

¹⁷Barkhausen 1982, p. 5.



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ILLUSTRATION 4: The main film vaults of Reichsfilmarchiv in the forest outside Babelsberg, where many Bufa films were located until 1945. Still from unpublished 35 mm footage located in the trophy film collection of the Russian State Film Archive Gosfilm.

The unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany on 9 May 1945 also signaled the end of Reichsfilmarchiv. With its staff mostly disbanded or transferred to the south of Germany, the vaults in Babelsberg were swiftly seized by Allied troops. After a tumultuous phase in which both western and Soviet troops attempted to take possession of the archive, it was the Red Army that prevailed. Yossif Manevich, a special envoy of the Soviet Ministry of Cinematography, was dispatched to Berlin to handle the seizure of the archive. After taking root at the archive's compound, Manevich ordered an inventory of the film stocks

to be taken. Over the course of several weeks – perhaps months – a dedicated team of specialists selected films to be shipped to Moscow. This included German features as well as shorts, documentary film as well as newsreels, and a sizeable number of foreign films – many of which previously had been confiscated by the Nazis in the occupied countries of Europe. When the Soviets left Babelsberg, approximately 3,700 films had been removed to Moscow¹⁸. It is unclear how many

¹⁸Yossif Manevich: *Fremde Beute oder Wie ich das Reichsfilmarchiv nach Moskau brachte*, in: Oksana Bulgakowa (ed.): *Die ungewöhnlichen Abenteuer des*



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Bufa films were included in this cache. Known examples include OESEL GENOMMEN (*Oesel Taken*, Bufa 1917) and JAN VERMEULEN, DER MÜLLER AUS FLANDERN (*Jan Vermeulen, Miller of Flanders*, Bufa 1917, a propagandistic fiction film). The focus may have been placed on Bufa titles depicting the eastern front, especially battles involving the Imperial Russian Army¹⁹. This nevertheless left most of the Bufa titles intact at the vaults in Babelsberg. Their next transition to yet another archive occurred in 1955, with the founding of the East German State Film Archive (SFA). Once again, the collections of an earlier film archive – those of Reichsfilmarchiv – formed the basis of this new institution. Despite the political and ideological restrictions imposed in the GDR, films from Imperial Germany – and even those from the Nazi era – were actively preserved at SFA. While such films typically were not made available for loan, they could be viewed by researchers without further restrictions, and were also made available to filmmakers, even from countries abroad²⁰.

The next – and thus far, final – transition occurred in the wake of German reunification in 1990, when the East German State Film Archive was merged with Bundesarchiv, the Federal Ar-

chives of Germany. The Bufa films inherited from SFA were merged with a number of Bufa titles that had been preserved at the West-German Bundesarchiv. But ever since 1990, the remaining stock of period Bufa film materials at Bundesarchiv – original film elements dating to the 1910s and 1920s – have sharply declined. Like many other film archives, Bundesarchiv for several decades resolved to duplicate the highly flammable nitrate prints onto safety stock, and then destroyed the original elements. As of 2018, only a handful of original Bufa nitrate elements remain²¹.

A resurgence of Bufa films in the digital age

Contrary to this decline in surviving authentic film elements in German archives, the Bufa films have enjoyed another resurgence in recent years. As part of the European Film Gate project, many films were digitized and made available online²². EFG1914 (<http://project.efg1914.eu>), which ran for two years until 15 February 2014, was a digitization project of both films and non-film materials related to World War I. All in all, approximately 700 hours of film and 6,000 film-related documents from twenty-six partner archives were digitized and the materials made accessible through the EFG portal and the virtual library Europeana²³. The project covered all relevant genres and sub-genres: newsreels, documentaries, propaganda

Dr. Mabuse im Lande der Bolschewiki. Berlin 1995, pp. 255-56. According to Manevich, the 'extraction period' lasted from 9 June until 4 July 1945. But Soviet film experts appear to have seized further stocks of film until at least the autumn of 1945.

¹⁹The titles given are based on lists of the German films located at Gosfilmofond, as found in the internal records of Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv.

²⁰Notable use of the SFA collections was made, among many other foreign filmmakers, by Mikhail Romm for ОБЫКНОВЕННЫЙ ФАШИЗМ (*Obyknovennyy fashizm*, 1965), and by Roman Karmen for ВЕЛИКАЯ ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННАЯ (*Velikaya otechestvennaya*, 1965).

²¹For a comprehensive overview on the matter of nitrate film and preservation issues, see Roger Smither (ed.): This film is dangerous. A celebration of nitrate film. Brussels 2002.

²²European Film Gate, EFG1914 project, <http://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/content/efg1914-project>; <http://project.efg1914.eu>.

²³<https://pro.europeana.eu/project/efg1914>.



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films, and fiction films. The project greatly contributed to the renewed availability and visibility of still-extant Bufa productions: approximately 80 titles have been made available online – the majority of surviving Bufa films.

Conclusion

In summary, the films of the Bild- und Filmamt served very different purposes over time: as war propaganda – as a window into Germany's imperial past – as illustrative material of questionable authenticity – as part of recent audiovisual remembrance projects about the First World War. Such re-evaluations notwithstanding, Bufa imagery continues to be widely circulated in films and television documentaries about the Great War. The origin of the footage, and the question of whether these images are authentic scenes of battle or staged, is rarely addressed. At the very least, the handing-down of the Bufa collection from archive to archive into the present age helps to understand not only the changing historical value attributed to documentary film under different political and societal circumstances, it also highlights how fragmentary and shrunken the surviving archival record is by now – and how profoundly the custodians involved have contributed to the survival – or destruction – of these artifacts.

