

BFI InView

In September 2009 BFI InView, a new JISC-funded educational website, joined the ever growing range of digital film resources available to academics.

Patrick Russell of the British Film Institute looks at the aims behind this new project.

'A New Source of History' – This bold prognosis for the infant medium of 35mm projected film was made by camera operator and fledgling theorist Boleslaw Matuszewski in 1898. He further urged that specialist repositories – film archives – should be founded to handmaiden this historic mission.

Matuszewski's prescient manifesto subsequently acquired a certain fame among the archival film research community. But its implementation has been slow indeed. It wasn't until the 1930s that film archiving grew into a vibrant international movement – with many financial, cultural and ideological odds stacked against it. Britain, via the collecting work of the Imperial War Museum and the BFI, can reasonably claim to have taken a pioneering lead in preserving the non-fiction 'film of record' on an equal basis with the 'art of cinema'. As for Matuszewski's first prediction – that film would prove a mould-breaking source of evidence and illustration for historians, geographers and scholars across the curriculum – following decades of patchy developments, the paradigm shift is finally, perhaps, upon us. While a generation of fully visually literate historians has contributed, advances in digital technologies and network distribution are of course at the centre of this revolution, whose repercussions are yet to be fully understood. September 2009 saw the launch of a new JISC-funded educational website, *BFI InView* (www.bfi.org.uk/inview), joining the ever growing suite of digital film resources available to academics.

Driving *InView* was the BFI's desire to see its collections used far more extensively across HE – beyond its traditional film and media studies constituency. Thus, the resource makes available

over 800 hours of non-fiction films and programmes for streaming and download, carefully selected from the BFI National Archive's collections to benefit scholars and students across the curriculum. With the support of JISC, *InView* was able to digitise its film and video masters in high definition, with concomitant benefits for the quality of the output digital files.

Central to the project's objectives is the juxtaposition of content from different sources, representing different viewpoints on comparable topics. Thus, two complementary grids were used both in selecting and presenting the content. A 'vertical' cut through the material allows users to explore it thematically: charting the progress of education, industry, health, law & order, the environment or immigration, race & equality across the 20th century. Meanwhile, a 'horizontal' cut represents the same films as *collections*, with distinct archival, cinematic and televisual histories.

Indeed, these collections map several important, overlapping traditions in the use of the screen for socio-political purposes. *InView* illustrates the silent film era's tentative, frequently unintentional coverage of social issues, then captures the arrival of the self-conscious social documentary of the 1930s and the blossoming of this 'Griersonian' tradition during World War Two. But also



From the Channel 4 series, *AFTER DARK* (1987-91).



IRELAND – BEHIND THE WIRE (1974).

represented are the postwar filmmakers developing on such traditions whose work remains relatively unknown, despite its scale. The film and television output of the Central Office of Information from 1946 to the present dwarfs that of the wartime Ministry of Information. Meanwhile, postwar industry prompted in Britain a boom in industrial filmmaking. Alongside the increasingly familiar film output of the great state corporations (the transport network and the National Coal Board), *InView* includes highlights from the film unit of John Laing & Sons, the major construction firm whose film collection is a recent BFI acquisition.

Concurrently, television was bringing the moving image into ever-closer association with *journalistic* practice. *InView* presents a rich mix, with examples from the BBC's *Tonight* and *Panorama* alongside a large assortment from Thames's *This Week* and *TV Eye*. The discursive use of the screen was a further TV innovation. The site makes available over fifty editions of the much-missed Channel 4 series *After Dark*. Equally enticing is another new Archive acquisition, the 300-strong collection of Bernard Braden's unbroadcast *Now and Then* interviews with figures from all areas of 1960s public life. Finally, filmmaking was part of the political process. On *InView*, selected films and broadcasts originating with British political parties sit alongside selections from the last two decades' video-recordings of our national legislature in session.

These two interpretations – 'vertical' and 'horizontal' – are both

complementary and mutually enriching. The true worth of films and programmes is revealed only when an understanding of their subjects is applied. Conversely, subject specialists will yield far greater value from the sources if informed by an understanding of their production, distribution and intent, and of how technology, conventions and creativity combined to produce meaning.

To this end, another innovation of *InView* is its emphasis on contextualisation. Authoritative essays were commissioned both from staff curators and from academic experts. These contextualise all of the overarching collections, and a selection of the individual titles, and offer far more than just a distillation of received wisdom. Much of this information, the fruit of years of curatorial and scholarly activity, has never been published before. Sometimes, curatorial context transforms the import of certain productions. For instance, the archival history of *THE UNION OF POST OFFICE WORKERS* (1927), indicating that it was produced over several years, adds a dimension to its unusually ambitious (for the time) coverage of its subject matter. Appreciating the large scale of the distribution of the Ministry of Health film *SMOKING AND YOU* (1963), while knowing that the Metropolitan Police's *TIME OF TERROR* (1975) was never distributed at all, affects our interpretation of these two short films. Armed with a working knowledge of how film historians have 'placed' such disparate films as *THE DIM LITTLE ISLAND* (1948) and *IRELAND – BEHIND THE WIRE* (1974), political or social historians can embark on their own enriched interpretations – and, hopefully, will have a few things to tell the media scholars in their turn.

Some non-fiction productions have already been inducted into media history's canons, the products of generations of scholarly research, debate and teaching. Others are best known to the archivists who have interacted with them as part of their daily work and

research. Now, historians, geographers, sociologists and economists are set to evolve their own canons. Since its release, *HOUSING PROBLEMS* (1935) has enjoyed a special status in the documentary film canon for its pioneering use of direct speech and the testimony of 'interviewees'. But has it ever assumed such importance for historians of housing? And what about other films on the same subject which have failed to make it into the annals of film appreciation: for example, Matthew Nathan's semi-professional production *HOUSING PROGRESS* (1937)?

Still, comprehensive online access to vast collections like the BFI's archive remains a distant dream. Projects like ours operate within the universal resource constraints and those particular constraints that inform all moving image archival work: the survival and technical status of materials and the copyright in their contents. The BFI gratefully acknowledges its partners in the project who have granted educational rights: the National Archives, the Parliamentary Recording Unit, Open Media, the BBC and Fremantlemedia, as well as all the main (and some other) political parties.

And if, even on a small scale, the canons of media history are set to be reshaped, and to begin revealing new meanings to new audiences, how will they look in five years' time? And how will we know? Alongside its benefits, the explosion of access offered by resources like *InView* carries its dangers, one being that with access increasingly arms-length, film specialists or curators might engage less, not more, with scholars in other fields of study. Such atomisation would be regrettable. Instead, for the sake of sharing and growing knowledge and releasing film's full potential as a new source of history, the era of online access should represent not the point at which the dialogue should cease, but the point at which it should finally begin.

Patrick Russell

Patrick Russell is senior Curator (Non Fiction) at the British Film Institute.

Access to *InView* is only available via UK Federation authentication. For more information, visit: www.bfi.org.uk/inview

MOVING IMAGE GATEWAY

Selected from the Moving Image Gateway (www.bufvc.ac.uk/gateway). All sites are tested on a Mac Mini OSX 10.4.11 with a 1.8 GHz processor, with 100 Mbps online connection.

BBC WILDLIFE FINDER

www.bbc.co.uk/wildlifefinder/

A new site from the BBC using footage from the Natural History Unit archive to show wild animals, their habitats and behaviour. Starting with 370 animals, the collection of still images and video clips includes footage from series such as PLANET EARTH. Images are organised by animal, habitat, adaptation and ecozone.

THE EDUBLOG AWARDS

<http://edublogawards.com/>

The Edublog Awards website can be a good way of discovering new blogs relating to education. The Awards, now in their sixth year, can also be used to see how blogs and other electronic educational tools have developed over that time. There are nineteen categories in the 2009 Awards, covering aspects such as best educational use of audio/video/ audiovisuals and best educational use of a virtual world/social networking service.

LEARN.GENETICS

<http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/>

A site from the Genetic Learning Science Center at the University of Utah. Learn.Genetics delivers educational materials on genetics, bioscience and health topics that are designed to be used by students, teachers and members of the public. Clear animated videos, interactive exercises and printed explanations cover DNA and protein synthesis, cell biology, genetic technology, as well as epigenetics and addition. Virtual laboratories illustrate DNA extraction, PCR, gel electrophoresis and DVA microarray analysis.

STEADISHOTS.ORG

www.steadishots.org/

Devoted to the art of the **steadicam**, a stabilising rig introduced in the 1970s to allow shots photographed with a handheld camera to appear as smooth as if they were filmed on a dolly. It focuses in particular on the efforts of the camera operators and their crews. Starting with extracts from 1976 right up to the present day, along with all the relevant clips (there are hundreds) displayed in full, there are commentaries from those who photographed the shots. The site can be searched by production title (including feature films, television shows, commercials and music videos), date and by the name of the camera operator.



Steadicam operator (2005).

STUDYING ECONOMICS

<http://studyingeconomics.ac.uk/the-little-bits-we-like/>

The Economics Network of the Higher Education Academy has set up the Studying Economics web site to provide support, help and assistance to undergraduates of economics. The 'Distractions' section links to sites streaming clips of videos relating to economics, some of them comic and some more serious. There is also an interesting list of feature films with economic content, and links to online games with subject relevance.

VIDINOTES

www.vidinotes.com/

Vidinotes is a web-based tool that allows users to create their own notes on an online video or one they have uploaded. Up to thirty images can be captured directly from the video, and titles and descriptions added. The vidinote can then be printed or shared as a PDF. The site provides examples of the product's capabilities. The upload limit is currently fifty megs and videos should be in Flash format.

WORLD RADIO NETWORK

www.wrn.org/

Launched in 1992 and then re-launched in January 2003, the London-based company provides International digital radio services in English, French, German, Russian and other languages. Its content is mainly world news and current affairs and is available online and through selected cable outlets in the UK. It archives its content at present for up to thirty days. It can be used freely by individuals, but institutions will need to obtain a licence.

ONLINE CATALOGUES

Selected from Find DVDs database (www.bufvc.ac.uk/dvdfind).

ANGEL PRODUCTIONS

www.angelproductions.co.uk

Video-and DVD-based packages on equality and personnel issues for business education. Topics include flexible working, harassment at work, diversity at work, recruitment and selection, working with disabled staff and customers, and equal opportunities. Each package consists of at least 2 videos and a resource pack. Hire or sale. Also recent networkable resources for the education sector on viva technique and the student/supervisor relationship, produced in conjunction with Birkbeck.

DEMAND MEDIA

www.demanddvd.co.uk

A distributor of DVDs on motor and other sports, military history and transport. Of particular interest are television programmes, many broadcast on the Discovery Channel, on topics such as archaeology, anthropology, designers, commercial fishing and the Bear Grylls survival programmes. Sale direct or through retail outlets.

DONOR CONCEPTION NETWORK

www.donor-conception-network.org

A range of video tapes and DVDs on issues relating to donor-assisted conception as they affect prospective parents and offspring. Loan to members or otherwise sale.

EUREKA: MASTERS OF CINEMA

<http://eurekavideo.co.uk/moc/catalogue/>



Founded in 2004, Eureka Entertainment's 'Masters of Cinema' series is a carefully curated DVD and Blu-ray label based in the UK. The collection already consists of over 100 films, focusing primarily on silent or

foreign language films. These range from rarer, less well-known films equally deserving of visibility among a wider audience to full-blown masterworks such as FW Murnau's 1927 SUNRISE; Kenji Mizoguchi's UGETSU MANOGATARI (1953); Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS (1927) and Michelangelo Antonioni's LA NOTTE (1961). The selection aims to represent worldwide cinema at its best. See also the review on page 25. Sale.

FIRST NATIONS FILMS

www.firstnationsfilms.com

First Nations Films creates award-winning television documentaries by, for and about native Americans on topics such as land rights, spirituality, traditions and identity. Sale on DVD.

ICARUS FILMS

<http://icarusfilms.com/>

A US distributor with an extensive collection of mainly independently-made documentary films from around the world on social, arts and humanities topics. Dedicated to distributing films about people and ideas too often unseen or unheard. Not all titles are for sale on DVD or digital streaming outside the US. Previously known as First Run/Icarus Films.

PLATFORM FILMS

www.platformfilms.co.uk

Platform Films is now distributing on DVD a number of their social history programmes produced for television or campaigning purposes over the last ten years or so, including the acclaimed 5-part series THE PEOPLE'S FLAG on British labour movement history, and THE CAUSE OF IRELAND, exploring the divisions within the working class in the North of Ireland. Platform are also selling on DVD many of the social action films made by Cinema Action. These films, unavailable for many years, represent a rich and historically important archive of British documentary filmmaking, exploring many of the political and social struggles that Britain faced between 1968 and 1981.

THE SCREENWRITER'S STORE

www.thescenewritersstore.net

An online retailer selling an extensive range of books, DVDs, and CDs relating to all aspects of film and television production including story development, screenwriting, budgeting & scheduling, directing, editing & utilities.

ONLINE SUBJECT NEWS

This is a round-up of new online material selected from the Find DVDs database (www.bufvc.ac.uk/dvdfind) for its potential value and use in Higher and Further Education.

ARCHITECTURE

GREG LYNN ON CALCULUS IN ARCHITECTURE

Greg Lynn talks about the mathematical roots of architecture and how calculus and digital tools allow modern designers to move beyond the traditional building forms. A church in Queens (and a titanium tea set) illustrate his theory. (19 minutes)

Available free online.

Streamed from:

http://www.ted.com/talks/greg_lynn_on_organic_design.html
Requires: Flash
TED

NUMBER 24 BEIZONGBU HUTONG

This documentary displays the dilapidated state of the former 20th Century hutong residence of Mr. Liang Sicheng and his wife Ms. Lin Huiyin in Beijing. The couple were among China's most famous art and architecture experts, particularly in exploring Chinese ancient architecture.

Available free online.

Streamed from:

www.archaeologychannel.org/
Requires: WMP / Real.
The Archaeology Channel

BIOLOGY

SCIENCE NOT STAMP COLLECTING

Video recording of a lecture by Professor Stephen Hopper at the Royal Society on the importance of botany from 1759 to 2059. Arranged in collaboration with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to celebrate their 250th anniversary in 2009. He considers the vital role that plant taxonomy and systematics has played in plant science. In particular, how these fields are transforming to meet the needs of 21st century science as we address the challenges of climate change and global conservation. (60 minutes)

Available free online.

Streamed from:

<http://tinyurl.com/y9hhtvm>
Requires: Flash
Royaletsociety.tv,

BUSINESS STUDIES

PPP ON THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNET

Mario Campolargo, Director of 'Emerging Technologies and Infrastructures' at the European Commission, gives some explanations on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) on the Future of Internet: What

is the Future of Internet? Why has the Commission launched a PPP in this area? How does the PPP work? Do companies welcome this initiative? How will it work in practice and how will it be implemented?

Available free online.

Streamed from:

http://212.68.215.195/europa/ppp_futureinternet.wmv
Requires: WMP / QuickTime
European Commission

DRAMA

TURING'S TEST

A fictionalised account of the final moments in the life of Alan Turing. The audio drama features Samuel Barnett as the Bletchley Park code breaker on his death in 1954 after eating an apple laced with cyanide following his conviction for gross indecency. The play examines the scientist's legacy in the field of artificial intelligence and the personal tragedy of his suicide through a deathbed dialogue with a 'machine' played by actor Paul Kendrick.



Alan Turing

Available free online.

Streamed / Download from:

<http://tinyurl.com/yly5bhw>
Requires: MP3
The Independent

ECONOMICS

LET MY DATASET SAVE YOUR MINDSET

Talking at the US State Department in August 2009, Hans Rosling uses his fascinating data-bubble software to burst myths about the developing world. He offers new analysis on China and the post-bailout world, mixed with classic data shows. (20 minutes)

Available free online.

Streamed from:

www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_at_state.html
Requires: Flash
TED

GEOGRAPHY

WEST MATA SUBMARINE VOLCANO ERUPTION



(NSF/NOAA)

High definition video footage of the underwater explosion of the West Mata volcano, nearly 4,000 feet below the surface of the Pacific Ocean, in an area bounded by Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. Filmed in 2009 by the Jason robotic submersible, operated by the Woods Oceanographic Institution.

Available free online.

Streamed from:

www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=116098
Requires: Flash
National Science Foundation

HISTORY

DAVID STARKEY'S MONARCHY – THE WINDSORS

Dr David Starkey concludes his epic story of the British monarchy by looking at how, in the space of a few decades, our Royal family changed its name, its image and the role it played in the life of the nation. It embraced new technology and found new ways to engage with the people. (73 minutes)

Available free online.

Streamed from:

www.youtube.com/show?p=BYWITon8EpU&s=4
Requires: Flash
YouTube

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

THE STORY OF CAP AND TRADE

A controversial, hilarious critique of the leading 'solution' to climate change. In this 10-minute, animation, Annie Leonard breaks down cap and trade in the way only she can. The film explains exactly how this system is supposed to work and why so many well-meaning people support it. Then it points out the nasty little devils

lurking in the details that make current cap and trade proposals more distracting than a real solution.

Available free online.

Streamed / Download from:

<http://storyofstuff.com/capandtrade/about.php>
Requires: Flash
Free Range Studios

PSYCHOLOGY

HUMAN INSTINCT (4 PARTS)

A four-part series in which Professor Robert Winston examines human instincts and patterns of behaviour.

1. BORN TO SURVIVE
2. DEEPEST DESIRES
3. THE WILL TO WIN
4. NATURAL BORN HEROES

Available free online.

Streamed from:

<http://player.uk.msn.com/documentary/human-instinct/>
Requires: Flash
MSN Video Player

SHAKESPEARE

THE KINGMAKER

This audio comedy-drama by Nev Fountain is a continuation of the Doctor Who television series, with Peter Davison and Nicola Bryant returning to the roles of the Doctor and his companion Peri. The play opens with Elizabethan audiences getting angry with Peri after she gives away the ending to Shakespeare's Richard III during an early performance of the play. It is eventually revealed that the mysterious Mr Seyton' is in fact Shakespeare himself. (139 minutes)

Available online. Download from:

www.bigfinish.com/81-Doctor-Who-The-Kingmaker
Price: £12.99.

Available on CD from retail outlets
Big Finish

TO BE OR NOT TO BE ... IN SHAKESPEARE

Television documentary in which actors speak about the challenge of performing Shakespeare. Ian McKellen believes his first thirty years of Shakespearean acting to have been 'rubbish'. Extracts from YouTube home videos of people reciting from *Hamlet* are interspersed throughout the programme.

Available free online.

Streamed from:
<http://tinyurl.com/ya2wm8j>
Requires: Flash
Channel 4