

MEDIA ONLINE *focus*

Managing Agent and Advisory Service for Moving Pictures and Sound (MAAS Media Online)



Summary of Progress

Education Media Online has continued to develop over the last few months. Collections now available include: 50 hours of content from Education and Television Films Ltd; close to 50 hours of Films of Scotland from the Scottish Screen Film Archive; John Lowenthal's THE TRIALS OF ALGER HISS; 47 hours from Sheffield University's Learning Media Unit covering a wide range of academic subjects; archaeology programming from Anglia Television; 9 hours of medical content from St George's Hospital Medical School and finally, Logic Lane, a series of six films on philosophy, aesthetics and cultural theory made by Professor Michael Chanan (UWE) while at Oxford in the 1970s. (See page ii of this issue of *Media Online Focus* for more information on this collection.)

In addition a proportion of the collection of material from Healthcare Productions is now online and by the end of June 2003 it is expected that the majority of the material selected from the Imperial War Museum and the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film (IWF) will also be available.

New Collections

Contracts have also been signed for two new collections. The first of these is an initial selection of six hours from the Open University Worldwide. MAAS has placed specific emphasis on acquiring medical content, but has chosen titles which span a wide area of bio-medical sciences. There are therefore titles relating to psychology, the human body, mental illness, health-

care in the developing world, skills in communication and counselling, and the logging of patient's medical information. Encoding of this collection will begin shortly and the material should be online by the end of the summer.

The second collection also has interest for students and lecturers in medical schools, but will be of use to the wider life sciences academic community as well. It consists of the extensive collection of historical video and audio material held in the Biochemical Society Archive. It charts the development of biochemistry in the later twentieth century through the experiences of some of the subject's most celebrated practitioners, including J.W. Cornforth, R.A. Peters, A. Neuberger, P.D. Mitchell, J. Lovelock and P. Clarke. The material consists mainly of extended interviews, but also has a selection of recorded lectures, including H.A. Krebs Nobel lecture given in Miami on the History of the Tricarboxylic Acid Cycle, and the 1986 Biochemical Society Hopkins Lecture given by Cesar Milstein on Antibody Diversity and the Maturation of the Immune response. The collection is a unique resource, of great value to the Society itself and to all scholars in the history of the biomedical sciences. MAAS will aim to transfer the oral history components of the archive to digital formats prior to encoding, in particular the rich collection of videotape interviews, which are now at risk of deterioration. Transfer to digital videotape and encoding will make dissemination of this important archival collection possible for the first

time, both within the molecular life sciences community and the wider academic community. The collection consists of at least 100 hours of material and, because of the specialist subject matter, it is expected that preparation of the metadata will take a considerable time and that it may take some time before it will be ready for delivery on Education Media Online. Fortunately, in preparing catalogue information for the collection, we are lucky enough to have the help and advice of the collection's curator, John Lagnado.

MAAS is now close to concluding negotiations for a number of other important collections and we hope to be able to announce these in the next issue of *Media Online Focus*.

Staff News

At the end of May 2003 Greg Newton-Ingham, Head of the Advisory Service, Moving Pictures and Sound in UK Higher and Further Education, changed his role and returned to a full-time post as Director of Web Learning and Future Technologies at the University of East Anglia. In the meantime Luis Carrasqueiro is managing the Advisory Service until a new appointment is made. Greg will continue to contribute to courses held at the British Universities Film & Video Council.

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Oxford Philosophy on Film

LOGIC LANE is a series of six films made by Professor Michael Chanan (University of the West England) while at Oxford in the 1960s and was made available via Education Media OnLine in April 2003. The first title traces the development of philosophy at Oxford University from the 1930s to the early 1970s. The rest of the series uses debates and conversations between pairs of philosophers as its basic format and features many eminent scholars including Sir Alfred Ayer, Bernard Williams, Iris Murdoch, Sir Isaiah Berlin, David Pears, Stuart Hampshire and Gilbert Ryle. The films provide a cross section of their views on many issues, including ethics, freedom and determinism, philosophy and science, linguistic theory and the philosophy of mind.

The material will be useful to lecturers and students of Philosophy in higher education, but will also be of interest to those with an interest in Psychology, Aesthetics and Cultural Theory, as well as Language and Literature.

This series of six films was made over thirty years ago in unusual circumstances. Firstly, when I made them, I was myself a graduate student at Oxford, studying the history of ideas with Isaiah Berlin. Secondly, the films were funded by a private investor as a means of testing the water for independent production, which in those days was still in its infancy. The films were distributed for a time on the American campus circuit, but never made it to television. Perhaps the very idea of a series of films on philosophy, a most unusual subject, seemed faintly ridiculous. What made it worse was that except for the first of the series, the films were not about philosophy, in the form of guides for the inquisitive, and they were not interviews with philosophers, but conversations between philosophers discussing philosophy, films of philosophers doing their job. This is precisely what makes them valuable viewing today for anyone

interested, let us say, in certain styles of thinking, in other words, not just philosophers.

The first in the series is a retrospective account of the development of Oxford philosophy from the 1920s to the start of the 1970s. The narration is divided, a little awkwardly, between a voice-over commentary and the first-person testimony of A.J. Ayer, Oxford's professor of logic at the time. These two strands are punctuated by comments from some of those who appear in other films in the series, including Isaiah Berlin and Stuart Hampshire, Iris Murdoch and David Pears, and Gilbert Ryle; and the film is rounded out with illustrative scenes of Oxford life and some newsreel clips. Today I find the commentary rather quaint, but it represents a young man's attempt to communicate a degree of scepticism about the subject of his film, including the split between philosophy and politics which characterised the Oxford tradition. The main interest is the picture the film

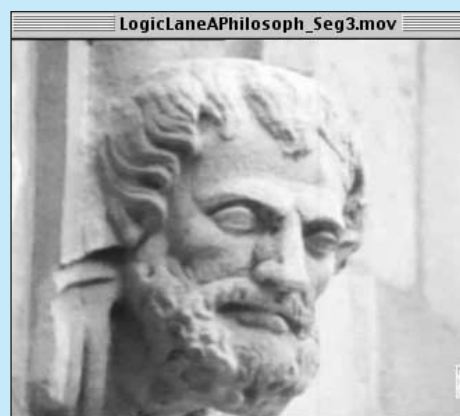


Gareth Evans in his cottage in Wales

presents of the Oxford philosophical sub-species, circa 1970, in their natural habitat. (Here I admit a lapse: that the group of graduate students in the film discussing philosophy includes no women, and they are even at one point talking about abortion! But then Oxford was always a bit behind the times, and this is Oxford before feminism for you.) But the film also presents a paradox: that in spite of the neglect of political philosophy, Oxford



Professor P.F. Strawson



Plato

played a crucial role in British politics: it was responsible for the education of the majority of cabinet ministers throughout the last century of whichever political party. Look out for Iris Murdoch's comment on the link between British political traditions and Oxford's



Professor A.J. Ayer

anti-theoretical stance towards political philosophy.

The other films in the series use a different format. What they do is set up real conversational situations (insofar as anything in front of film cameras and contained by them is real) between pairs of philosophers, and simply to let the cameras run. We used two cameras for these conversations, one on each speaker, loaded with extra large film magazines allowing us



Sir Isaiah Berlin

to shoot for up to half an hour without interruption, and we staggered the moment they turned on in order to avoid the need to break the flow even then (a problem which of course disappears with video). The idea was also to leave ourselves free in the editing to choose which interlocutor to show on the screen at any given moment, and to show non-verbal as well as verbal conversational interaction,

without cheating, without using cut-aways that were shot separately as in conventional documentary practice.

I left it up to the interlocutors themselves to decide how much or how little their conversation would be pre-structured. All that had been determined was the general area of each conversation. We planned to film as much as three hours of conversation for each of the films (which would also include some other sequences for relief), but it turned out to be unnecessary – after all, these were some of the most articulate people you could expect to find anywhere, and they did not



Iris Murdoch

waste many words. In editing, I tried as far as possible to follow the chronology of each conversation, but felt myself free to structure them by my own (filmic and philosophical) judgement. The exception is the conversation between Peter Strawson and Gareth Evans, which by keeping to the chronological exposition of the argument, follows the slowly falling light of a classic Oxford summer evening streaming in through the windows. At least that is how I remember it.

In fine, these films represent a moment in modern philosophy which is now a segment of history but which played a singularly important role in British intellectual culture. And as films, these examples of philosophical discourse offer something different from impersonal texts, but instead show the aspect of dialogue which has always been part of philosophy's practice since its birth in Ancient Greece.

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A philosophical conversation between Professor Gilbert Ryle and J.O. Urmson

Preparing Film Material for Online Delivery

The preparation of film material for online delivery, from celluloid or tape to video file, raises a number of issues. The following article identifies the key issues and how the Managing Agent and Advisory Service (MAAS) has tackled them in the process of preparing the content now available from the Education Media OnLine service. A more detailed account of each of these issues can be found at www.bufvc.ac.uk/maas

Rights

The first step is to consider the ownership of film collections and negotiate the terms for a contract to be drawn between the rights holders and the higher education funding councils. This contract, known as the 'mother licence', determines which uses are allowed for the content being negotiated. This framework of permitted and restricted uses of the film collections form the sub-licence agreement which each higher and further education institution needs to sign to be able to access Education Media OnLine.

Film to Tape

The master content, which is frequently on film needs to be transferred onto an appropriate videotape format through a machine process known as telecine. Important factors to be taken into account at this stage are the format and condition of the film. This can result in additional treatments and increased cost in the telecine process. For example, film with sound runs at 24 frames per second, whereas material originally produced on PAL format videotape runs at 25 frames a second. Dirty or scratched film can require re-washing or ultrasonic cleaning prior to telecine.

For the Education Media OnLine service, MAAS is willing to accept original film material in different film formats and will process them according to their specific requirements. In terms of videotape format, MAAS has used Digital Betacam and has accepted pre-telecined film material supplied on Beta SP. (For more details on the differences film formats make to telecine visit the MAAS website.)

Cataloguing information – Metadata

The MAAS team concentrates a large amount of its resources in creating cataloguing information for all the video files it produces. This enables users to search for a specific item, provides context and increases the accessibility of the final service. As well as producing descriptive metadata such as title, producer and synopsis, time codes are registered to allow for the files to be split up into small segments of between three to five minutes.

Segmenting is carried out in order that users can easily select, access and view parts of a film which are relevant to their interests as well as to make file sizes more manageable. Subsequently, even in cases where catalogue information has been submitted with film content collections, (such as with the Films of Scotland and the Imperial War Museum collections), MAAS must still work through the entire film in order to segment it.

There are currently no universal standards or guidelines for the development of metadata for the online delivery of moving images and sound. As such MAAS metadata has been developed using three main components, 'collection', 'title' and 'segment'. (For further guidance visit the MAAS website under 'content').

Encoded Files

To deliver and view film collections online the videotapes' content must be converted into data files, which can then be delivered online and played back. Given that raw video data files are extremely large – and require enormous network and computer resources for delivery – they must be compressed in an encoding process.

Encoding film is a time consuming and costly exercise. To encode the hundreds of hours of material available through Education Media OnLine, MAAS developed partnerships with commercial companies. These companies adhere to the MAAS technical specifications for encoding and metadata embedding (see website for the latest version of the specification) which have been designed to enable use across different systems. On the occasions when MAAS obtained ready-encoded

material that did not comply with the technical specification, it was necessary to re-digitise the content from master footage.

EDINA

Once a selection of video or audio files is ready for online delivery, the next consideration is how users will identify, find and access relevant titles and segments. In order to protect the interests of the rights holders care must be taken to ensure that only accredited users have access to the service. The national data centre EDINA developed systems which address these issues. Both metadata and the video files are transferred to this data centre, where they are integrated into a database designed to house Education Media OnLine content.

This database is the backbone of Education Media OnLine's web interface which enables searching, browsing and downloading the video files. The system developed by EDINA uses ATHENS to identify and grant access to users from institutions which have signed the sub-licence agreement and guarantee controlled access to restricted materials (for a guide to the web interface and access issues see *Media Online Focus* – Issue 11, March 2003).

End User Experience

A final point to consider is how the content will be delivered, either allowing users to stream or to download content. Currently content from Education Media OnLine is only available for download, however the data files are enabled for streaming.

Institutions may download material to their servers and offer streaming as a mechanism for local delivery. Whichever method is chosen, content from Education Media OnLine can be viewed in Apple QuickTime or Windows Media Player formats. Previously inaccessible material can now be used flexibly in presentations, classrooms or e-learning environments.

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