

# Streaming Visual Literacy

**Kevin Wilson**, Subject Librarian for the Institute for Management Studies and Audiovisual Librarian at Goldsmiths College, asks, what does video streaming mean for the higher education library?

**T**here is growing acceptance that the use of video in learning and teaching has clear educational value and can engage and motivate students, while allowing them to develop important cognitive skills. Video use is already prevalent in higher education. Greg Benfield et al's 2009 article 'Student Learning Technology Use: Preferences for Study and Contact', investigated students' e-learning activities and discovered that 'high usage activities involve multimedia use, particularly listening to audio and watching video', while Jack Holland in 'Video Use and the Student Learning Experience in Politics and International Relations' (2014) studied video use and the student learning experience in Politics and International Relations, noting that 'digital native' students are already fluent in using these technologies, and academic staff themselves expect to make greater use of video in class.

(SCONUL) includes visual literacy within the umbrella term of information literacy. SCONUL believes an information literate individual should demonstrate 'an awareness of how they gather, use, manage, synthesise and create information and data in an ethical manner and will have the information skills to do so effectively.'

Changes in technology have made video increasingly available and accessible. Streaming services such as **BBC iPlayer**, **Netflix** and **Amazon Prime Instant** have changed how audiences consume television programming. Ofcom's 2015 Communications Market Report revealed that six in ten adults use 'video on demand' services - 4.4 million households subscribe to Netflix, while 1.2 million households subscribe to Amazon Prime Instant. It also found that 16-24 year olds use computers and smartphones to access on-demand services more frequently than using set-top boxes and they watch short-form

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While it is clear that using video enriches the student learning experience, it also allows students to develop visual literacy skills. Visual literacy is a term first coined by John Debes in 1969, which he defined as 'a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences'. In 2001, the Association of College and Research Libraries defined visual literacy standards in higher education. The ACRL believe that a visually literate individual should be able to determine which materials he/she needs and how to find, access, interpret, analyse and use them both effectively and ethically. The Society of College, National and University Libraries

video (e.g. YouTube) more often than any other age group. Students are already streaming for recreational purposes, so using it for educational purposes seems perfectly logical.

As iPlayer and Netflix are changing how video is consumed, providers of educational video have followed suit. Many readers will be familiar with **Box of Broadcasts (BoB)** (<http://bobnational.net>), a shared online off-air TV and radio recording service available to subscribing institutions. Box of Broadcasts has over 2 million programmes in its archive, which are kept indefinitely. For higher and further education libraries, services such as BoB have been liberating. In the past, librarians would manually record

programmes, create catalogue records, print labels and find sufficient shelf space for multiple copies of videos and DVDs. Now, users can log-in, set a programme to record within seconds (or find one recorded by another institution) and view it once it has been broadcast. Users can stream programmes, wherever they are in the UK, no matter which device they are using.

#### Alexander Street Press

(<http://alexanderstreet.com>) seeks to transform how we research, learn and teach in various disciplines by providing access to a number of video collections, ranging from Art and Architecture to World Newsreels from the twentieth century. **Artfilms** ([www.artfilms.co.uk](http://www.artfilms.co.uk)) offers more than 5,000 films in various art forms from all over the world, while **Concord Media** ([www.concordmedia.org.uk](http://www.concordmedia.org.uk)), a non-profit provider of films on topics of social concern allows films to be purchased or rented on-demand via Vimeo. In many cases, these films are only available from these suppliers and only for streaming.

Although students are confident and capable of streaming video, there is still a role for the librarian. When libraries take out subscriptions to video collections for streaming, making these resources discoverable and usable is vital. If students know we subscribe to a specific film for streaming, they can search the library catalogue or the supplier's platform, but it is more likely that a student will find a documentary film more serendipitously, when they are searching the library catalogue on a topic that interests them. With the rise of discovery and delivery tools such as Primo and Summon, which provide access to all the collections that a library subscribes to in a single search, students can search for a topic and immediately restrict their searches, making the streaming process simpler.

Regarding usability, a resource like BoB is intuitive, has straightforward searching and playback features, as well as a high degree of functionality, allowing users to create clips and playlists. Many other streaming services have similar features. When Goldsmiths first subscribed to BoB, I invited academic staff from our Media and Communications department for training, demonstrating and explaining

the different features and highlighting how programmes can be embedded into VLEs or shared by URL.

I have successfully run sessions teaching students how to use audiovisual resources in their learning and research. Last year, I used specific examples of how students might use video to supplement text-based research. Using the example of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, I showed how **Jisc Media Hub** (<http://jiscmediahub.ac.uk>) can retrieve primary news footage of historical events. Since these resources are not available through library discovery tools, students might not initially know where to find such footage.

There are an increasing number of video archives making their films available. The role of the librarian is increasingly curatorial, selecting and evaluating content relevant for our audience. Goldsmiths is particularly strong in the fields of art, design and visual cultures, so a resource like **Arts on Film Archive** (<http://artsonfilm-beta.wmin.ac.uk>) is a stunning treasure trove. Developed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of Westminster, it provides access to approximately 450 films on art produced in the UK since the 1950s, combining rare material about individual artists or definitive coverage on specific art-related subjects. **BFI Player** (<http://player.bfi.org.uk/>), however, is a curious hybrid. Primarily, it looks like an art-house equivalent to Netflix, with recent independent and world cinema

films for rental. However, dig a little deeper and there are numerous fascinating documentaries that reveal the history of twentieth-century Britain. During our celebration of Black History Month in October 2015, I compiled a list of ten documentaries made between 1950s-1980s that depicted the Black and Asian experience in post-war Britain and highlighted an important era for race relations and immigration. The BFI has also developed its Britain on Film feature, delivered through BFI Player, which allows a viewer to search for any location in the UK to discover what is in the BFI National Archive.

Video streaming has been one of the most exciting technological advances of recent years, and which our users are experienced in browsing through programmes on iPlayer or finding shorter content on YouTube, there is still a role for librarians in acquiring relevant resources, promoting and raising awareness of them, and ensuring that they are discoverable and usable. The challenge for librarians now is to keep abreast of the increasing number of archives that are digitising video and making them available. Visual and text-based resources are not in competition; they complement each other perfectly. Video can breathe life into subjects, giving new perspectives and first-hand accounts, and it has the potential to reinvigorate the role of the librarian who can act as gatekeepers for this wealth of new information.

**Kevin Wilson**



THE UNSEEN MARCH – QUESTIONING THE MILITARISATION OF SCHOOLS is just one of hundreds of films available to stream from Concord Media (2015 © Concord Media).