

Teaching Visual Sources Workshop Report

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University of Manchester

The workshop, organised by Max Jones and Robert Poole of the North-West Network of Historians, included a full programme of varied and informative sessions. This brief report will aim to give a flavour of the different talks and resources offered, along with links to material and websites discussed by the speakers.



In his introduction, Robert Poole noted that the idea for the workshop came out of a previous North-West Network event, and

would include a number of talks on late nineteenth and twentieth century topics. However, the first talk, by Jonathan Davies, focused on the Renaissance period and how he has encouraged his students to critically engage with visual sources and provide them with the skills to analyse images within their studies and question what they see.

The core of the session was an effective reproduction of teaching practice, taking us through the steps used to encourage students to not just look but see the purpose, context, content detail and story of an image. Deliberate use of familiar images (such as Holbein's Henry VIII) helps to overcome resistance amongst students, and at the same time effectively opens up the idea of how images were read in the past: 'seeing' differences according to time, location, group and context. Jonathan's powerpoint presentation 'Reading Images', is available on this workshop's eLibrary resource page, and details the background to his course and questions used with students: an excellent starting point for anyone introducing students to visual sources. In addition, the following article was recommended: James W. Cook, 'Seeing the Visual in U.S. History', *The Journal of American History* 95.2 (2008), 432-441 (p.432).

James Thompson opened an extensive section of the workshop, which looked at the use of different media, with a discussion on political posters. The obvious perception is the advertising context of posters, but James focused on the importance of getting across to students the fact that posters have a wider subject range than this, allowing for historical investigation into politics and the visual culture of politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The relationship between words and images in a poster can be a powerful tool in teaching a range of topics within cultural and political history in particular.

The next presentation, by David Clampin, moved to the use of historical commercial advertising as taught within a first year module. David pointed out that on the surface, learning through visual sources is appealing, but can prove difficult for the student when going deeper. Students are familiar with, even cynical about advertising, and perhaps more willing to criticise adverts than they would a painting – a 'piece of art'. It is important to teach them that advertising speaks within the context of the time: not always honest, but aspiration through advertising is a useful reflection on the social culture and people of the time. How much do we and how much did people historically trust advertising? In discussions of bias and propaganda, using advertising images can be an advantage as the bias of the company is obvious and

blatant. Recognition of this allows the students to move on quickly to the context and deeper significance of the resource.

These two interesting perspectives on how to read advertising were followed by Clare Horrocks discussion on how we read key cultural moments: teaching students to discover the visual skills of the past to advanced their studies, but also to relate to current issues, after all, the power of 'visuals' has always been in their ability to reach a broad audience, in magazines, newspapers and journals. Looking at the subject from her position in a department of media and cultural studies, Clare raised the question of how we can use visual sources to help set up a more complete historical picture for our students: filling in the gaps of the historical narrative.

This panel demonstrated that visual advertising sources are rich in historical context. Visual, conceptual grammar is easy for students to 'look at', as they have an existing visual literacy in advertising: a useful hook to getting them to look deeper. It is then up to the tutor to encourage further analysis and help them past the stage when they become aware of just how much they don't know.

The second session looking at different media began with Till Geiger and the use of films beyond their subject matter. Like posters and advertising they reflect contemporary society at the time of production. However, Till found that when screening films in isolation during the course of a module he taught, the students viewed them largely in terms of entertainment. Setting the context is important and will be incorporated more comprehensively in future within the course structure, with a wiki/written analysis of a film or other resource studied. The presentation, including example films covered, that accompanied this talk can be found on the eLibrary resource page: 'Films by Till Geiger'.

Gareth Crabtree, a PhD student tutor introduced us to the potential value of war gaming in historical study. The quality and realism of video games is now very high and has a huge audience. They contribute to 'theatres of memory' whether we like it or not, and Gareth made the telling point that such games are no longer child's play, the average age of a gamer is 30! There is a strong section of the market aiming at historical authenticity, using primary and archival images, records and locations. How much they achieve this is open to debate, particularly in cultural terms, but uniforms and weaponry may be very accurate and useful to help students visualise a relevant area of study. To see some of the gaming images from Gareth's talk, his 'Computer Games' presentation can be found on the eLibrary resource page.

Filippo Nereo closed this session looking at digital texts. His work concentrates on promoting student engagement with nineteenth century German linguistic purism. Students have (understandably) no knowledge of previous forms of the German language, and there have been problems in motivating them in the study of this subject. This has been reflected in feedback on engagement, with original resources and links to employability skills not perceptively high. Using digital texts through visual sources has led to a greater understanding of the subject as well as IT and analytical skills, leading to greatly improved student satisfaction figures. The key has been in integrating visual sources more fully into a course, in this case, bringing the old language more to life. Filippo's 'Digital Texts' presentation can be found on the eLibrary resource page.

To accompany Filippo's presentation, the list of additional resources at the end of this report includes details of an interactive, automatic feedback tool used with students: voting pads. This was found to be very productive in engaging the students on an immediate and thought-provoking level – please take a look.

After lunch we were introduced to two fascinating archives, storing a wealth of visual resources, well worth taking a look at what they have to offer!

Many people present were aware of the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC - <http://bufvc.ac.uk/>), but Luis Carrasqueiro opened our eyes to the vast database on offer. Primarily the BUFVC connects people with moving image and sound content to use in teaching. Over half a million hours of TV has been recorded, and ALL programmes from terrestrial channels are recorded daily, in addition to a massive radio archive under UK broadcast listings. All this is free on request for use in teaching. A recent facility – BOB – can be used to simply record clips from available programmes for re-use: <http://bufvc.ac.uk/2009/12/11/subscribe-to-bob-national>. Film and Sound Online includes specific teaching resources and a new development is 'Film and the Historian' using film as a witness/evidence of history. The aim is to encourage people to take film seriously as a historical research resource, therefore all films are cited and contextualised.

Tony Steer of the ITV Border TV Archive introduced us to a new and evolving website collection under construction at www.itvborder.archive.com. Following Border TV's closure/merger with Tyne Tees, Cumbria University stepped in to save the archive footage. This is now available commercially (but with a strong focus on academic and student research), offering some fantastic historical footage offering a local perspective on both regional and national events. If you are interested in finding/using a resource in the short term please contact Tony directly at tony.steer@cumbria.ac.uk. Tony's powerpoint presentation in the eLibrary resource provides more detail about the range of material available.

Richard Hawkins discussed the pros and cons of setting up an academic visual resource within a Generative Learning Object (GLO) maker. It is a platform that incorporates images/film clips along with contextual study information. Richard noted his part in the project, and the use made of the facility to put together teaching materials on 'Kinder Transport' during World War II. Some restrictions with the GLO platform were noted, as it limits the amount of text per page and the image software is not user-friendly. However, it is an option that could be considered for producing concise, informative online resources if your university has not invested in Blackboard, or another VLE.

Ian Boutle went on to discuss newsreels as historical resources which can provide different perspectives to other news material: not just bolstering arguments and reports from the contemporary written press. Ian's description of using such visual sources in his research was a useful culmination of the days discussions about the scope and practical application of visual sources in historical study. At this point Max Jones recommended the article 'The Newsreels: The Illusion of Actuality', by Nicholas Pronay in Paul Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge UP, 1976).

The final presentation by Andrew Dawson was a rousing call for historians to colonise Film and Media Studies resources and methodologies as part of the decade long move in HE to work cross-disciplinarily. As a historian who moved into a Film and Media Studies department, Andrew asked 'why is film so important to us?' As the novel was the key cultural text of the nineteenth century, so film (and increasingly television) provides the cultural text for the twentieth century. This visual media reflects the shifts in popular culture which we as historians need to examine: "film is consumed by the populous"; studying it can aid our research on society.

Film Studies has great strengths but a historical perspective could use film to widen the scope of popular historical study: what was going on in the background behind the screen; audience reception? There is space for 'the historical turn' in studying popular culture. Andrew noted that a quick search of UCAS reveals only seventeen institutions where history and film can be studied together, and many of these will be bolt-ons, not thematically fused ... go out and 'cross the border'!

Andrew has produced a teaching guide: Hollywood for Historians for the Subject Centre. It can be viewed online at: <http://www.historysubjectcentre.ac.uk/publications/focusonteaching/hollywoodforhistorians/>

Lynne Walker of the IHR provided some thoughtful closing comments before a roundtable discussion. Following the examples and ideas given during the day, Lyn encouraged taking images seriously in historical study, giving them effective contextualisation. But, there is still a long way to go in using images in our publications if we are to reflect their significance in our research.

The main point raised in the roundtable centred on how to teach digital/visual literacy. Yale Film Studies has produced some good material (Film Analysis WebSite 2.0 <http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/>). Jonathan Davies' comprehensive questions on viewing images are in effect an introductory guide to 'seeing' visual sources. Max suggested running a seminar within modules looking at textual sources to see if different or similar arguments are raised: breaking down pre-conceptions that students bring to visual sources. The day highlighted the wealth of visual material available now in digital form, and if we want to keep it (or ensure our universities continue paying for the services) we need to encourage colleagues to use them.

Thanks to everyone (well over half the delegates) who returned feedback forms at the end of the event: all were very positive. The value of the material and resources highlighted in the presentations was singled out by many in a comprehensive, full day. Over a third noted in particular the blend and range of subject content and experiences, providing greater awareness of what is out there and practical examples and strategies of how to use them. We hope the workshops aim to share resources and practices has been realised with a quarter of the feedback forms stating that delegates intend to use a greater variety of visual resources from the examples presented.

Finally, the Subject Centre must thank Max, Robert and CEEBL in Manchester for putting together and hosting a very productive event in an excellent facility.

Resources suggested during the day:

- BFI – In View - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/inview/>
- BUFVC - <http://bufvc.ac.uk/>
- EDINA Educational Image Gallery: <http://edina.ac.uk/eig/>



- Film and Sound Online – <http://www.filmandsound.ac.uk> This includes a range of documentaries from a number of sources including the Imperial War Museum collection. F & S invites academics to produce teaching materials contextualising their collections .. paying a fee.
- Film Literature Index – <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/fli/index.jsp>
- Internet Archive of free movies- <http://www.archive.org/>
- ITV Border TV Archive - www.itvborder.archive.com

- Making Sense of Films – <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film>
 - NASA - <http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/>
 - Newsfilm Online: <http://www.nfo.ac.uk/>
 - Reel American History – <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/reels/>
 - Screening the Past – <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast>
 - Yale Film Studies: Film Analysis WebSite 2.0 - <http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/>
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- A video explaining how Filippo Nereo’s colleague in Linguistics and English Language have used ‘voting pads’ in teaching (click on ‘Guest Login’ and select the screenshot in the top right-hand corner) – <http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/exemplars/exemplar.php?id=2>
 - Turning Technologies – the company that sells the voting pads for university use: http://www.turningtechnologies.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=4
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- James W. Cook, ‘Seeing the Visual in U.S. History’, *The Journal of American History* 95.2 (2008), 432-441 (p.432).
 - The Newsreels: The Illusion of Actuality’, by Nicholas Pronay in Paul Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge UP, 1976).