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Cinéma et audiovisuel :  
quelles mémoires numériques pour l'Europe ?

## CHANGEMENTS DANS LES PÉRIMÈTRES DE LA CULTURE

### Wales in its own image

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*I think that anything about cinema or television should begin with drapes. You don't have drapes so I brought my own with me today. I have a feeling that many of you know little about Wales; forgive me if I am mistaken.*

*Where is Wales and what is it?*

*Wales is a national region, it is one of the countries which make up the United Kingdom, it is bordered to the East by England and to the North and the West by the sea, and it is on the Celtic fringe. Wales is depicted by Aunt Gwen; a poor hardworking old lady dressed in national Welsh flannel carrying a heavy burden. Aunt Gwen now has about three million children, born to her or adopted, most of whom live in the North or the South East and the South. About 23% of them speak both Welsh and English. Welsh being the native Celtic language of the country which is related to Gaelic, Gallic in Scotland and being very closely related to Breton. We can almost read Breton, the words are so similar. The Romans knew Aunt Gwen but the Normans conquered her. The next 600 years comprised a strange mix of rebellion, subjugation, conformity, oppression and more rebellion. Wales was the birth place of the industrial revolution and the South became synonymous with heavy industry, coal, iron and steel. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a huge rise in the population by means of inward and internal migration to the South on a massive scale. People from around the globe came to South Wales to seek a better living via the uncontrolled exploitation of the natural resources.*

*The terrain which had for centuries kept most people out was now drawing them in to exploit the coal hidden under its mountainous folds. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had an incredibly mixed population and it had changed from a rural economy to one dominated by heavy industry, totally reliant on heavy industry and the population gravitated down to the South. Naturally during this period the Welsh language began to decline.*

*The popular image of Wales generally drawn during these turbulent centuries was one of the romantic landscape, the Wales of ancient myths of terrifying and sublime landscape shrouded in the ancient history. Such a view of the country is epitomized by this Turner oil of Dolbadarn Castle which features the mountains, a native Norman castle and a tragic episode from early Welsh history. Painters, poets and composers often visited the country to draw inspiration for their work without really taking into account the true condition of the people and the land. Intrigued by the myths, legends and searching for sublime experiences, there followed in their path via the new railways, the tourist, and they like the poor are with us still. Had Turner come to Wales to document its social and*

*industrial life rather than create a myth, this is the kind of scene he would have noted; these old ladies in the poor house.*

*John Thomas was the first and only indigenous photographer to truly document the Wales of the ordinary people during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many others visited Wales but really for commercial and aesthetic reasons they perpetuated the image of Wales as a rural idol. Why do we only have John Thomas as an indigenous photographer taking ordinary people? It is partly due to a Royal commission in 1847, known in Wales as the treason of the blue books. Three non-Welsh speaking Anglican commissioners were dispatched from London to report to the Crown on the education and moral life of the Welsh-speaking non-conformist Wales. Their report was three things:*

- *Overwhelmingly damning of Welsh morals*
- *Somewhat wrong*
- *Extremely biased because they failed to bridge the cultural, religious and linguistic differences which existed between them and the Welsh.*

*The result:- only way to civilize the Welsh was to change them into English-speaking Anglicans.*

*[Sound clip about the Blue Books]*

*The report had a profound effect on the Welsh psyche which can still be seen today; they became obsessed with their own image and a desire to be compliant, understood and be seen as respectable by their English neighbours. Wales therefore began to take its own image seriously from 1848 onwards. It framed itself as "The Land of White Gloves", alluding to a crime-free zone where the circuit judge would be presented with a pair of white gloves to symbolize that no crime had taken place in an area. Also, the land of the "Welsh Not", a token placed around the neck of school pupils to discourage them from speaking Welsh. John Thomas however made a conscious statement refuting the prejudice from the blue books. However, some of the biggest political, cultural and social changes occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and many of those changes are reflected by the modern media. Some would argue that the modern Wales has actually been created and shaped by the media.*

*[Timeline]*

*The 20<sup>th</sup> century is in some respects an era of backlash to the fallout from the blue Books; a long period of rebuilding self-esteem in the national consciousness, and of building new, more independent political and cultural structures.*

*On this timeline you will see that Wales' national institutions began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they did not exist before. You will also see a few poignant events, such as the Senghenydd disaster, also Welsh Church Disestablishment; Wales was an almost totally non-conformist country but it was dominated by an Anglican Church. Broadcasting comes into it from the mid-50's onwards and gradually increases in prominence until we arrive at 1982, when a Welsh language television authority was created.*

*The first thing in this new, 21st century; we [NSSAW] were created!*

*It is no coincidence that the first thing of the century was the Welsh National Anthem, then followed by the creation of cultural bodies such as the National Library and National Museum. This is a small clip from first recording of the anthem, made in 1899. The anthem now of course brings dismay to Danish football fans and strikes terror into the hearts of French rugby players.*

*[National Anthem Clip]*

*I have chosen one disaster; from 1913. Wales' history is populated by massive pit disasters, in the Senghenydd disaster there were 423 men and boys killed. The mine owners were totally responsible and had to pay, on appeal, only five pounds, five shillings in compensation. On the left-hand side is the stark image of a grieving widow, on the right, from the same time, so-called "Dai Jenkins from the Rhondda" poking fun at the miners and their language.*

*By the fifties we had things like the Tryweryn; the Liverpool cooperation decided to drown the Tryweryn Valley to get water for industrial purposes on Deeside. Everybody in Wales and Scotland, - all the Welsh MP's were against it, however it went ahead and the Valley was drowned. Here is Gwynfor Evans leading a protest in Liverpool. We have some amateur footage in the collection and this is a family being turfed out of their home. An eviction; the family had lived and farmed there for 300 years.*

*[Video clip]*

*Then we have a rather important lecture; by the 60's Wales had Welsh language broadcasting for about an hour a week. Lewis Saunders was a great Francophile; his mother was French, he gave a BBC lecture on the situation on the Welsh language. He said the only way to save the language was by revolutionary means, and that saving the language was more important than other single goal. "The main thing was saving the language". He does not sound like a revolutionary when you hear his voice. Following this speech, the Welsh Language Society (Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg) was formed and became the most active pressure group in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Wales.*

*[Video clip]*

*We had so many mine strikes but this was a very important one because it came in the middle of Thatcherism; Thatcher was determined to close down the mines, and by going on strike the miners played into her hands. Here is some amateur footage showing how naïve the poor mining communities were to actually take on Thatcher. They lost and the mines were closed down, and the economy and communities are still suffering because there was nothing in their place.*

*[Video clip]*

*Going back to the 60's I would like to draw your attention to the main recording company in Wales, "Sain"; as an audiovisual archive we work closely with them, and their cooperation has been invaluable. If you are interested in Welsh music from all genres, dare I say it, from the terrible to the wonderful, visit their website (<http://www.sainwales.com/>). The company was set up to prove that such a thing as a Welsh language business was viable, and it has proved its case.*

*Next, we have devolution. The biggest thing since 1282. On the referendum night, (the referendum was a "Yes" vote for devolution by the narrowest majority), we have Ron Davies, the architect of the devolution settlement, responding to the events of the evening.*

*[Video clip]*

*This is a picture of Sir John Williams, the founder of the National Library Wales in 1911 laying the foundation stone, and here is the library nowadays. The archive is in the far corner opposite the car park, usefully next to the canteen! The building actually stretches about three times further back than you can see. That is where all our collections are kept.*

*NSSAW (The National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales) is an integral part of the National Library of Wales, founded in 2001 it adds to the already rich holdings of the library in the fields of manuscripts, records, art, mapping, documentary, photography and so on. The remit of NLW is worldwide, but the collection we at NSSAW have is all to do with Wales and the Welsh, we don't go beyond that. You can see we have got about five million feet of film, a couple of hundred thousand hours of sound and so on.*

*Having an audiovisual collection of this sort within a much larger institution is not without its problems, but Wales is just too small to maintain a separate format-based national archive, and in the longer term the advantages far outweigh the compromises required from audiovisual archivists. As an archive we are free to do what most film and television archives do, we go out into the community, we have film screenings, we have a cinema, we present things in festivals, we distribute films, we do all that but we are actually in the context of the National Library of Wales.*

*In the last couple of years the Library has been trying to bring things together, to integrate all manner of collections within the library. Their web front page is also the portal to the catalogues that have been brought together under one umbrella. Here is an example of that integrated search. We do have virtual access to literally millions of things in the library and most of them are housed in the "digital mirror". However, things are still moving on; we now have a combined system based on VTLS components (Virtua and Vital). They are bringing together all the threads in the library to create one integrated library management and a digital asset management system They work together by swapping metadata. Vital (a DAMS) is in its early stages, but Virtua (LIM) is well advanced.*

*The main digital thrust of NSSAW has been the digital capture of television and radio via its BOB (Box of Broadcasts) system, where we take in the digital DVB stream and record the actual broadcast stream, not just the programs, onto a 16 terrabyte buffer. We pick up most of the metadata we need from the EPG but we can add our own metadata to the objects. As far as digital preservation goes, all our material will into this huge optical/tape library, and three copies are made. One is kept off-site and another in a Faraday Cage in the library.*

*If archives are here to provide the raw materials of history to new generations then there is undoubtedly great value in being part of a greater whole. Being part of an institution such as the National Library, with its rich media-neutral collections, is a liberating experience; it allows a wider view, which goes far beyond what is often possible within an organization whose remit is format-enclosed. Hence I have tried to show you a variety of things which go back many centuries to try and provide a context, to try and show you if you work in a national library with material going back to the eleventh century, that you can actually bring things together in a way you couldn't do if you were just a film library or a video library. This does beg the questions "do we really need separate film and sound archives these days, wouldn't it be better if we united as an archives and library and information delivery sector and forgot about our formats to some degree?"*

*Creating a digital library is core to the National Library strategy. In time, more and more audiovisual items will be added to the digital pot, but no library is an island and it may be that circumstances and further credit crunches will force together most of Wales' audiovisual resources, be they broadcast, national or university. There is a desperate need to "step up the game". Public investment in these resources is already large and why should they (the various av content holders) not group together to create a critical mass for change? We should not cherish our institutions too highly, that fresh thinking and creative solutions to common problems be hampered by older allegiances and biases. Can tiny nations like Wales afford to wait any longer, while the new politics slowly, slowly rolls out? You heard yesterday about the UK's national strategy for film heritage; unfortunately I could not be here but you probably would have heard that Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were not included in this UK strategy. How long do we have to wait? How long do we have to wait for a Pan-European solution which actually includes national regions, nations which are regions of other countries - because they are not represented at the moment?*

*Once Dolbadarn Castle was the seat of a stubborn prince trying to stop an invading force and guard the values of his tribe. It was a stronghold to keep people out, not to keep people in. Today, Turner's Dolbadarn Castle is just a romantic ruin, a relic of the past, and all the true princes are gone.*

*So let not our culture be besieged and left to rot in ivory towers, we must get out of our castle and search for partners, whether they be broadcasters, whether they be businesses, whether they be national museums. Without our international web of archives, the understanding and scholarship which underpins them, how are we to judge ourselves? As we see ourselves or as others see us?*

*This slide illustrates, in an obtuse manner, what I am attempting to say; this is how the people wanted to be represented – they are wearing fine borrowed clothes; this is how those post-treason of the Blue Books women wanted to be seen - respectable and well dressed, but this is how they **really** were [slide shows the women in their own clothes].*

*To truly see Wales in its own image requires both.*