

## “GREAT STUFF!”

### BRITISH PATHÉ’S YOUTUBE CHANNEL AND CURATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR AUDIOVISUAL HERITAGE IN A COMMERCIAL ECOSYSTEM

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**Abstract:** In 2014, British Pathé launched its YouTube channel with more than 85,000 items of audiovisual heritage from the 20th century. This article analyses the curational strategies of this channel as developed by the German multi-channel network Mediakraft in consideration of YouTube’s algorithms and supposed user expectations. This article argues that, in the context of YouTube’s commercial ecosystem, Mediakraft’s curation emphasizes celebrities, spectacular historical events, and curiosities to attract users online.

**Keywords:** British Pathé, Mediakraft Networks, digital curation, audiovisual heritage, YouTube, multimedia channel networks, algorithmic culture

In her article opening the very first issue of the *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, Sonja de Leeuw stated, in the context European audiovisual archives going online, that:

[i]nstitutions and digital libraries are challenged to meet the needs of users, to construct new interfaces not only in-house but also through online platforms. This requires fresh conceptual thinking about topical relations and medium specific curatorial approaches as well as user-led navigation and the production of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

De Leeuw added – back in 2012 referring to public initiatives and platforms such as **Europeana**, **Video Active**, **EUscreen** and **Open Images** – that “[t]hese developments have just started; but once realized will support the necessary transition from inward to outward service, from curators to users.” Only six years later, audiovisual heritage, it seems, is available all over the Internet, including on the popular commercial platforms Facebook and YouTube. These platforms have, as well, invested in ‘conceptual thinking’ and ‘medium specific curational approaches’ to foster user engagement.’ However, within the commercial ecosystems of the Internet, curational

<sup>1</sup> Sonja de Leeuw, ‘European television history online: History and challenges,’ *VIEW: Journal of European History and Culture*, 1, 1, 3–11, here p. 7, (retrieved 03 March 2018), DOI: 10.18146/2213-0969.2012.jethc002.

strategies seem to privilege more traditional content- and programme-led forms for navigation. In the following, I review one prominent example of this new ecosystem: **British Pathé's YouTube channel** with its over 85,000 invaluable heritage items made accessible at once in April 2014.<sup>2</sup> While British Pathé's YouTube channel is – next to **British Pathé's professional platform**, its subscription channel **British Pathé TV**, its Social Media outlets, and its other channels on YouTube, such as **The Great War** – only part of the whole British Pathé ecosystem online, I will here focus on British Pathé's YouTube channel and will discuss, next to the home page of the channel, only two thematic sections as cases for further discussion. Choosing only two cases implies that this review will only touch upon surface of the whole construct, or, rather, the tip of the iceberg, of this rather complex channel with more than 85,000 heritage items and their incomprehensible links to other items, channels, social media platforms, playlists and other forms of re-use and re-circulation. However, these two cases will illustrate the curational strategies for heritage material developed by Mediakraft Networks for British Pathé given the constraints of YouTube's commercial algorithmic culture.

## 1 The Digital Publication of "the Finest Newsreel Archive in Existence"

When British Pathé (BP), in April 2014, uploaded 85,000 thousand historical newsreels and documentaries to YouTube covering 80 years of history between 1896 and 1976, this generous act of making a major source of audiovisual heritage accessible online was embraced enthusiastically by the British national press<sup>3</sup> and professionals in the creative sector. The digital publication of "the finest newsreel archive in existence" – as BP, itself, promotes its archive on its **Wordpress site**<sup>4</sup> – seemed to make a dream come true for the Free Culture movement. For example, Los Angeles-based writer and filmmaker Jonathan Crow noted in his blog entry on **Openculture.com**<sup>5</sup>:

The archive – which spans from 1896 to 1976 – is a goldmine of footage, containing movies of some of the most important moments of the last 100 years. It's a treasure trove for film buffs, culture nerds and history mavens everywhere.<sup>6</sup>

Though Crow is critical about the Anglo-centric perspective of the channel's teaser, a compilation of significant moments in world history with the catchy title "A Day in History that Shook the World," he also expresses his particular fascination with the 'ephemera' of what could be called the cultural history of everyday life:

But the really intriguing part of the archive is seeing all the ephemera from the 20th Century, the stuff that really makes the past feel like a foreign country – the weird hairstyles, the way a city street looked, the breathtakingly casual sexism and racism.<sup>7</sup>

Crow's choice of four films from BP's YouTube channel to illustrate such ephemeral aspects coming alive with historical footage showcase what could be labelled as 'attractions' and 'curiosities': footage of touristic sights and technological innovations in **Virginia 1967**; a film showing an **Amphibious Water Scooter** cruising on the river Thames in front of the Houses of Parliament in London; a clip with the title **Bess Truman Tries to Smash a**

2 See, for more details, Luke McKernan, 'Pathé goes to YouTube,' British Library: The Newsroom blog, 23 April 2014, (retrieved 11 March 2018).

3 Richard Gray, 'Nine best videos from the British Pathé archive,' *The Telegraph*, 21 April 2014, (retrieved 01 March 2018); Dona Westlund: 'British Pathé Uploads 85,000 Historical Videos to YouTube', *The Guardian*, 27 April 2014, (retrieved 03 March 2018).

4 **British Pathé Updates**, (retrieved 01 March 2018).

5 **Open Culture**, (retrieved 01 March 2018).

6 Jonathan Crow, 'Free: British Pathé Puts Over 85,000 Historical Films on YouTube,' *Openculture.com*, 14 April 2014, (retrieved 03 March 2018).

7 Ibid.

*Champagne Bottle* filmed at a ceremony to launch new bombers (with Bess not succeeding in smashing that bottle on one of the bombers – haha!); and, finally, the coverage of an *Unusual Wedding* of a three-foot-tall man and a six-foot-tall woman on a beach in Miami.<sup>8</sup> Ephemera and curiosities refreshing our memories of past everyday cultures – would that be the essence of audiovisual heritage shared online?

Reactions to Crow's blog-entry on *Openculture.com* share his enthusiasm. For example, user *Daniel* writes: "I think this is wonderful, as a filmmaker and as an avid student of history. Kudos to British Pathé for doing this." And user 'Leon g pellaton' notes the same day: "It sounds to good to [sic!] be true." However, only a few days later, the probably authentic user 'Barbara Waxer' – with a LinkedIn profile as 'Copyright and Fining Media Educator' – waters down the shared enthusiasm with the following post: "Unfortunately, these works are not in the public domain and require a license agreement, the terms of which are unknown." However, the next comment to this strand by user 'John Yetman' – dating from almost two years later in February 2016 – refers back to the initially shared enthusiasm and the particular fascination with the characteristic of the heritage material: "Great stuff! The biases are so clear and blatant. These work great for teaching history. The footage is very real and the propaganda is very clear."<sup>9</sup>

BP going YouTube, Jonathan Crow's blog-entry, and the few user reactions quoted above illustrate some of the dilemmas of sharing historical footage outside the well-protected safe of the material archive on a commercial video-sharing platform, such as YouTube. Crow's blog-entry and the few comments reflect BP's commercial strategy for its YouTube channel aiming at creating a significant and returning public/viewership. As Sonja de Leeuw has argued – as quoted at the outset of this article – one of the challenges for online television history is the creation of interfaces that are designed to suit users' needs.<sup>10</sup> BP's YouTube channel is, given the sheer quantity of the footage and the particular quality of its historical significance, an interesting example of such a 'new interface' and its 'medium specific curatorial approach.'

In the following sections, I wish to discuss the channel's curatorial strategies for its unique archival footage on YouTube. I take here for granted what John Ellis<sup>11</sup> and Pelle Snickars<sup>12</sup> and others have contained regarding the nature of heritage material online: once digitized and shared online, the object has not only changed its material identity, but is also subject to varying contextual meanings, created by curation, user interpretation, and the commercial and algorithmic logics of online platforms. What I will focus on here are the curatorial strategies of BP's YouTube channel as a commercial endeavour in the context of visions of participatory cultures<sup>13</sup> and the emergence of the "dynarchive."<sup>14</sup> Or, as Sonja de Leeuw has suggested in her article, the increasing accessibility of audiovisual heritage online "will support the necessary transition from inward to outward service, from curators to users."<sup>15</sup> However, what needs to be considered in this context are the particular layers that mediate between the online archive and their users, namely business models and the algorithms shaping curational strategies of online archives.

8 See a similar approach by the British *Daily Telegraph* selecting eight videos from the 85,000 that showcase curiosities and catastrophes to introduce their readers to British Pathé's YouTube channel, (retrieved 01 March 2018).

9 All quotes above are comments to Jonathan Crows blog-entry on *Openculture.com* from 14 April 2014, (retrieved 03 March 2018).

10 Sonja de Leeuw, 'European television history online: History and challenges,' 7.

11 John Ellis, 'Why digitize historical television?', *VIEW: Journal of European History and Culture*, 1,1, 2012, 27–33, (retrieved 03 March 2018), DOI: 10.18146/2213-0969.2012.jethc005.

12 Pelle Snickars, 'If content is king, context is its crown,' *VIEW: Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 1,1, 2012, 34–39, (retrieved 08 March 2018), DOI: 10.18146/2213-0969.2012.jethc006.

13 Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, & Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York University Press, 2013.

14 Wolfgang Ernst, 'Underway to the dual system: Classical archives and digital memory,' In: Wolfgang Ernst, ed, *Digital Memory and the Archive*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, pp. 81- 94; Julia Noordegraaf, 'Crowdsourcing television's past. The state of knowledge in digital archives,' *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 14, 2, 2011, 108 -120.

15 Sonja de Leeuw, 'European television history online: History and challenges,' p.7.

## 2 Turning an Audiovisual Archive into a "Highly Mechanized Business"

Compared to earlier publicly funded initiatives, such as **Video Active** (2006–2009)<sup>16</sup> and **EUscreen/EUscreenXL** (2009–2012/2013–2016),<sup>17</sup> making high-quality content from the holdings of major European film and television archives accessible online, BP jumped at a rather late moment onto the band wagon of sharing audiovisual heritage online. As press coverage on the occasion of BP going online reports, after 1976, when BP stopped producing newsreels due to television's takeover of the audiovisual news business, there was no promising business model for BP's material archive until the emergence of digital media and the infrastructure for streaming audiovisual content via the internet. Businessman Roger Felber, former owner of BP and now its CEO again, repurchased BP from the Daily Mail and General Trust in 2008, but, as Felber is quoted in an article on the occasion of the launch of BP's online subscription service **British Pathé TV**<sup>18</sup> in 2016, "[i]t took a lot of revitalisation' [...] to turn it back into a 'highly mechanised business.' [...] 'It had passed from pillar to post' [...] and 'no one knew what to do with it.'"<sup>19</sup>

Starting in 2002, the entire BP archive with 90,000 audiovisual objects of approximately 3,500 hours film was digitised, funded partly by the UK National Lottery. BP launched its first channel on YouTube in 2009, offering some original news reels, and, in March 2010, made the whole archive accessible for the creative industry and general public on the company's platform.<sup>20</sup> Collaborations with *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* featuring topical content from the archive were used to promote the online archive as a site for casual entertainment and a source for professional filmmaking and journalism. Felber also changed the traditional way archival footage was sold to professional production companies in order to build strong business relationships with the creative industry, as Ashford reports,<sup>21</sup> based on his interview with Felber. Instead of standard fees for a certain length of a clip, BP started offering flexible deals depending on the nature of a production and the chances to create revenue from its future international sales:

Footage was provided either at a low price point, or for nothing. It would be shown in TV in one country, but rights for the rest of the world would be retained by British Pathé, or else TV rights would be granted for a certain time period, before reverting to the parent company.<sup>22</sup>

While the accessibility of BP's whole archive online and the flexible approach to licensing with production companies and museums revitalised BP's business within the professional sector, the public's access to the archival material on BP's online platform was free and, thus, did not generate any revenue. The strategic launch of BP's almost complete audiovisual holdings of 85,000 individual items with a total length of more than 3,500 hours on its refurbished YouTube channel in April 2014 and the launch of BP's TV subscription channel in early 2016 filled this gaps in BP's business strategy. As BP General Manager Alastair White was quoted in *The Guardian* on occasion of the launch of BP's YouTube channel:

the hope is that everyone, everywhere who has a computer will see these films and enjoy them. [...] This archive is a treasure trove unrivalled in historical and cultural significance that should never be forgotten. Uploading the films to YouTube seemed like the best way to make sure of that.<sup>23</sup>

16 **Video Active**, (retrieved 08 March 2018).

17 **EUscreen**, (retrieved 01 March 2018).

18 **British Pathé TV**, (retrieved 01 March 2018).

19 Holly Ashford, '**British Pathé goes OTT**', *TVBEUROPE: Business, Insight & Intelligence for the Media & Entertainment Industry*, 19 August 2016, (retrieved 03 March 2018).

20 **British Pathé company platform**, (retrieved 01 March 2018).

21 Holly Ashford, 'British Pathé goes OTT.'

22 Ibid.

23 Dona Westlund, 'British Pathé Uploads 85,000 Historical Videos to YouTube.'

By that time, YouTube had started offering premium content partnership programming for companies and popular YouTubers promoting their content on its platform and sharing advertising revenues with them. However, since the logic of today's commercialized YouTube resembles that of traditional commercial television,<sup>24</sup> it needs quite some expertise to build a commercially successful YouTube channel. Therefore, BP commissioned the leading Germany-based multi-channel network company Mediakraft Networks to build and curate BP's channel.

Mediakraft Networks, founded in 2011 by YouTubers for YouTubers, is known as a successful creator of multi-channel networks for YouTube.<sup>25</sup> A multi-channel network is a third-party service that aggregates diverse YouTube channels and content producers and manages their strategies in collaboration with YouTube. Multi-channel networks are a crucial layer in the commercialisation of YouTube. These are:

intermediary firms that operate in and around YouTube's advertising infrastructure. A common business model is for MCNs to sign up a large number of popular channels to their network, then, using YouTube's content management system, to sell advertising and cross-promote their affiliated channels across this network, while also working with popular YouTube celebrities to develop them into fully fledged video brands.<sup>26</sup>

YouTube fosters these multi-channel networks on its platform, helping to generate unique and attractive content and a significant and predictable viewership. A multichannel network offers various services to YouTubers including the enhancement of a channel's viewership, the marketing of the channel, and support in channel, community, and social media management. A network also manages contracts with the advertising industry and functions as a mediator between content producers and YouTube.<sup>27</sup> As Gugel reports, YouTube guarantees networks access to YouTube's content-ID and management systems, which allows the network to administer all copyright questions and assets related to its partner's content. Advertising revenues are shared between YouTube and the network: 45% go to YouTube, and the remaining 55% are distributed between network (16.5%) and YouTuber or channel (38.5%).<sup>28</sup> YouTube makes individual deals with multi-channel networks, and their channels are privileged by YouTube's algorithm once they generate marketable communities and a significant viewership for their channels and videos.

### 3 Mediakraft Network's Curational Strategies to Attract YouTube's Users

On the occasion of the launch of BP's YouTube channel, *The Guardian* reported that, according to Mediakraft Networks' then CEO, Christoph Krachten, Mediakraft's objective was to:

create new content in both English and foreign languages by using the archives 'in a contemporary context to fit the demands of a modern audience.' The company's overarching objective is to 'attract a global audience to the content of British Pathé material.' [...] Mediakraft believes that YouTube's one billion worldwide users along with the ability it has to allow users to share, embed, and make comments will 'add another dimension of context.'<sup>29</sup>

24 José Van Dijck, *Cultures of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

25 Bertram Gugel, 'Sind YouTube-Netzwerke die neuen Sender?', Die Medienanstalten, eds, *Digitalisierungsbericht 2014, Alles fließt! Neue Formen und alte Muster*, Vistas, 2014, 19–31, (retrieved 08 March 2018).

26 Ramon Lobato, 'The cultural logic of digital intermediaries: YouTube multichannel networks,' *Convergence*, 22,4, 2016, 348–360, here p. 345, (retrieved 08 March 2018), DOI: 10.1177/1354856516641628.

27 Patrick Vonderau, 'The video bubble: Multichannel networks and the transformation of YouTube,' *Convergence*, 22,4, 2016, 361–375, (retrieved 08 March 2018), DOI: 10.1177/1354856516641882.

28 Bertram Gugel, 'Sind YouTube-Netzwerke die neuen Sender?'

29 Dona Westlund, 'British Pathé Uploads 85,000 Historical Videos to YouTube.'

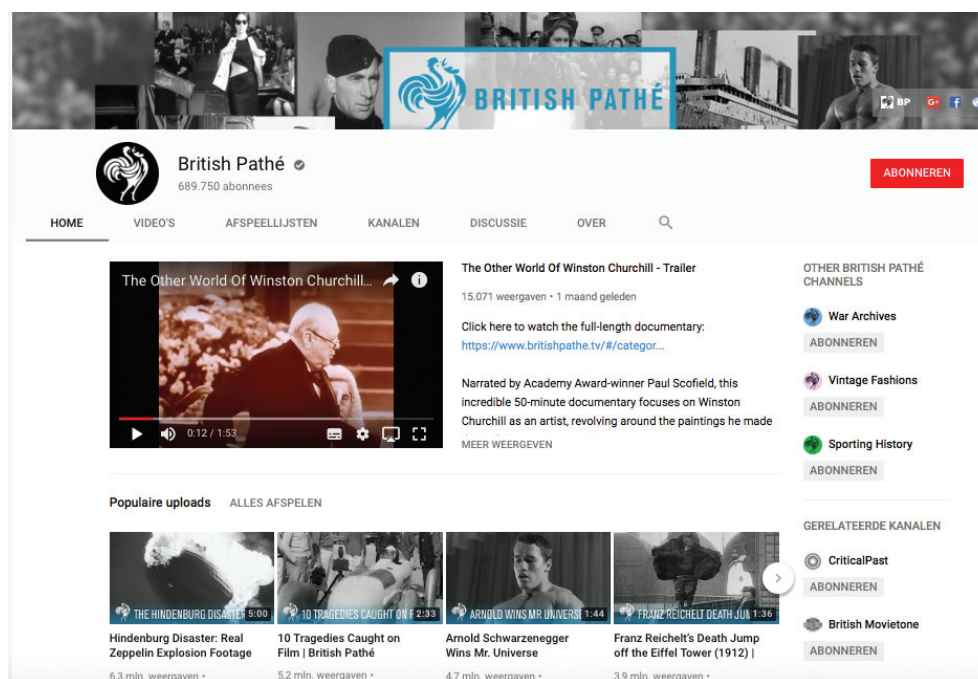


Figure 1. Screenshot of the homepage of British Pathé's YouTube Channel, March 2018.

A closer look at BP's YouTube channel, as it is curated in early 2018,<sup>30</sup> illustrates Mediakraft's strategies to 'attract a global audience' and engage it in re-using audiovisual heritage online. I will focus here on just the homepage of **British Pathé's YouTube channel** and discuss only two of BP's topical suggestions as illustrations of that strategy, while I will address what David Beer has called the "technological unconscious"<sup>31</sup> of participatory web cultures only on the surface of the curational strategies that assume a certain understanding of YouTube's undisclosed proprietary algorithms.

On the channel's landing page, a static banner displays diverse stills of well-known historical moments and prominent public personalities, such as Queen Elisabeth and Winston Churchill, as well as stars from the popular culture, such as Elvis and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Under the standard menu bar, with links to 'home,' 'video,' 'playlists,' 'channels,' 'discussion,' 'about,' and a search function, the channel features changing videos, which, in the first week of March 2018, was the trailer for the documentary *The Other World of Winston Churchill*, available on BP TV by subscription. When the 'auto-play' function is switched on, two other videos from BP's archive play, both featuring, again, during this week, Winston Churchill.

The homepage features in the right margin three specific BP channels dedicated to generally attractive content: *War Archives* with 82,786 channel subscribers, and *Vintage Fashion* and *Sporting History* with, respectively, 50,080 and 15,715 subscribers, while the main channel has about 690,000 subscribers (March 8th, 2018). Furthermore, the landing page promotes videos with thumbnails and catchy titles under diverse categories, such as 'Popular uploads,' 'YouTube Series British Pathé,' 'Themed Months collection British Pathé,' 'How we made the news,' 'Work we've been involved with,' and, again, topics related to World War II, the British Royal Family, catastrophes, and vintage curiosities. The category 'Popular uploads' features the most-watched videos, among others it contains coverage of *The Hindenburg Disaster* (6.3 million views), a video compiled particularly for this channel with the title *10 Tragedies*

<sup>30</sup> All observations were made during the first week of March 2018, all figures provided date from March 8th, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> David Beer uses this term to refer to Scott Lash's concept of 'power through the algorithm,' see David Beer, 'Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious,' *New Media & Society*, 11, 6, 2009, 985–1002, here p. 987, (retrieved 08 March 2018),

**Caught on Film** (5.2 million views), and the short clip **Arnold Schwarzenegger Wins Mr. Universe Bodybuilding** (4.7 million views). The chosen thumbnails of the videos support the focus on canonical historical events, celebrities, catastrophes, and curiosities, as the screenshot above illustrates.

Other categories, for example, the 'YouTube Series' or the 'Themed Months collection,' which I would like to discuss here in more detail as illustrations of the curational strategies, feature less popular videos. However, most of these are, again, compilations produced particularly for BP's YouTube channel covering historical events, celebrities, catastrophes, and curiosities. For example, the series "Archives Picks" with, in total, 29 videos, are montages of newsreel footage of 5 to 10 seconds in length picked from consecutive days of a month, but from different years. This series explicitly offers 'appetizers' to journalists and wishes to motivate them to cover the selected events in their news reports using the archival material. For example, the episode for **12–30 April 2017** covers ten historical events, again including catastrophes, war history, sport events, and politics. Once in a while, a banner in the upper right corner prompts the user to request a license for the material, and, at the end, the user is advised to follow the 'links below' to the original footage. While the commentary is taken from the original newsreels, the footage is presented with overlay titles indicating the date and event in question.

The same approach to re-contextualizing archival footage for the users of BP's YouTube channel can be observed for the category 'Monthly themes' with, in March 2017, on the occasion of the International Women's Day on March 8th as topic, "Girl Power - Women's History Month." The first video out of six in this category is a trailer of only 37 seconds in



Figure 2. British Pathé's *YouTube Series*, episode 9, compiling British Pathé's newsreel covering events between 12 and 30 April in diverse years.



Figure 3. Screenshots from British Pathé's "YouTube Series," episode 9: April 12th to April 30th.

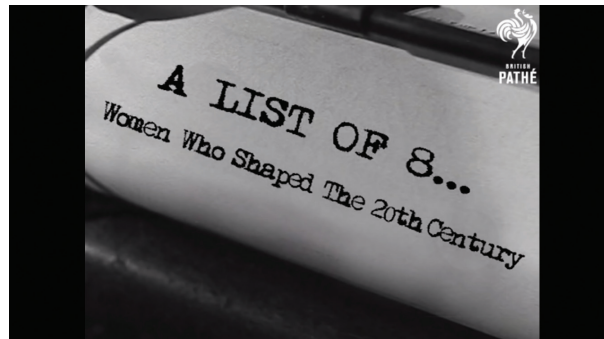


Figure 4. British Pathé's compilation for its YouTube Channel: "8 Women Who Shaped the 20th Century".

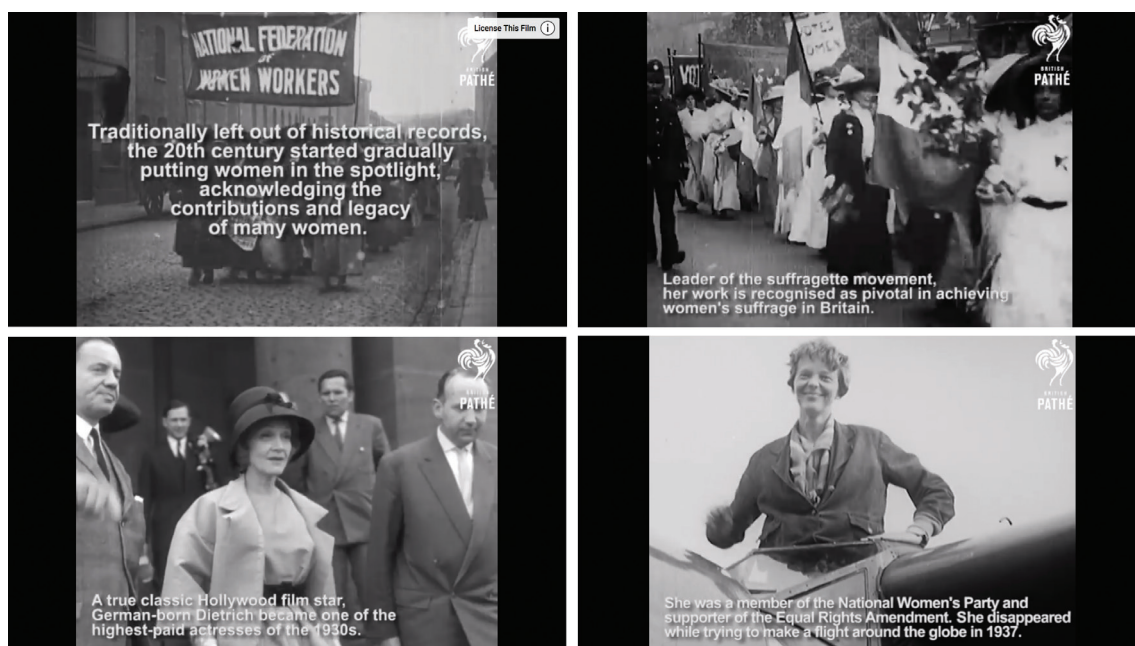


Figure 5. Screenshots of British Pathé's compilation "8 Women Who Shaped the 20th Century" with the title, Emmeline Pankhurst, Marlene Dietrich, and Amelia Earhart being covered next to Constance Markie, Eleanor Roosevelt, Queen Elisabeth, Eva Perón, and Ella Fitzgerald.

length containing a montage of fast- changing footage showing diverse important historical women in action, including coverage of celebrities, sporting events, women's marches, and footage of women working and at leisure, accompanied by the uplifting Overture from Beethoven's Egmont as the musical soundtrack. Throughout the montage sequence, a consecutive overlay of inscriptions say: "We've heard your comments on YouTube... So we'll give you videos on your favourite themes... March is the month of WOMEN's HISTORY on British Pathé... GIRL POWER," concluded with the invitation: "Leave us a comment below."

The following five videos in this category are, again, as their titles indicate, mostly compilations: "8 Women Who Shaped the 20th Century," "The Emancipation of Women," "6 Women Who Defy All Clichés," "Woman at War," and "A Woman's World." However, after one year on YouTube, these six compilations with a total length of 1:18:30, appear not to have been particularly successful in creating user activities. Average views are 10,685 per video (ranging from 7,249 to 17,996) with an average of 213 'likes,' 26 'dislikes,' and 50 comments, which is not much compared to the

above-mentioned popular and highly featured clips on the channel. Yet, without access to any documentation of BP's targets and detailed information about views and the watch time of this and comparable heritage material on YouTube, these figures cannot be adequately be qualified.

The 'YouTube Series' and the 'Themed Months collection' are just two examples that may illustrate Mediakraft's curational strategies, described here with an eye on how BP's archival material is presented to create a notable viewership and significant user activities related to the content. Central to this strategy are catchy titles added to the videos with a preference for compilations that assemble varied footage cut at a quick pace. The selection of the footage focuses on celebrities from political and cultural life, well-known historical events, and, particularly, catastrophes and curiosities. The topics of the compilations speak to the actuality of, or are chosen according to an imagined 'relevance' for, a target audience, which is important for distribution on social media and via a mailing list, which includes links to teasers for the promotion of the archival collection on BP's YouTube channel.

#### 4 Algorithmic Constraints for the Curation of Historical Footage

This curational strategy obviously plays to the supposed preferences of YouTube users and takes YouTube algorithms into account. While YouTube's algorithms are proprietary and, for commercial and public relation considerations, not disclosed by the company, research into the mechanisms of, particularly, the recommendation function of the algorithm has shown that ranking of videos is co-defined "by a multitude of micro-social practices – such as, building playlists, and subscribing to channels – that generate aggregated co-viewing patterns."<sup>32</sup> Also, practices, such as 'liking' or 'disliking,' commenting, and sharing, seem to be relevant for the ranking of a video. As Bernhard Rieder et al. found in recently published research on YouTube's "ranking cultures" for political topics,

**[c]ontrary to the idea that simple popularity metrics and the search for the lowest common denominator drive visibility online, we were able to get a glimpse at complex ranking cultures that reward platform-specific strategies and audience activation through strongly opinionated expression.<sup>33</sup>**

However, the workings and effect of YouTube's recommendation algorithm might be different for other areas of search and exchange,<sup>34</sup> and may, beyond that, also depend on users' accumulated activities shaping the algorithm's function. Rieder et al. therefore characterise YouTube's ranking algorithm as "an intricate mesh of mutually constitutive agencies that frustrate our desire for causal explanation."<sup>35</sup> An exploration of how YouTube's algorithms interactively shape and are shaped by users of BP's YouTube channel would be a complex research project, in and of itself. Beyond that, the algorithms keep evolving and have been updated several times since the launch BP's YouTube channel.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, for the purpose of my discussion on the curational strategies of BP's YouTube channel, I draw here on Mediakraft's own understanding of the algorithms, as far as the company discloses their effects on its online tutorials for YouTubers.<sup>37</sup> Even if this understanding of YouTube's algorithms

32 Massimo Airoldi, Davide Beraldo, & Alessandro Gandini, 'Follow the algorithm: An explanatory investigation of music on YouTube,' *Poetics*, 75, 2016, 1–13, here p. 4, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2016.05.001>.

33 Bernhard Rieder, Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, & Òscar Coromina, 'From ranking algorithms to "ranking cultures": Investigating the modulation of visibility in YouTube search results,' *Convergence*, 24, 1, 2018, 50–68, here p. 64, (retrieved 08 March 2018), DOI: 10.1177/1461444809336551.

34 Guillaume Chaslot, 'How YouTube's A.I. boosts alternative facts,' Medium, 31 March 2017, (retrieved 11 March 2018).

35 Ibid., p. 65.

36 Frederic Lardionis, 'YouTube changes its search ranking algorithm to focus on engagement, not just clicks,' *Techcrunch*, 12 October 2012, (retrieved 11 March 2018); Paul Lewis, '"Fiction is outperforming reality": How YouTube's algorithm distorts trust,' *The Guardian*, 8 February 2018, (retrieved 11 March 2018).

37 See also the strategies YouTube recommends in the *Creator Playbook for Brands: Discover Best Practices and Strategies to Build Your YouTube Audience*, edition 2016, (retrieved 11 March 2018).

might be partial, it still shapes the strategies and material activities of YouTubers, including, as it seems, Mediakraft Network's curation of BP's YouTube Channel.

While YouTube algorithms once rewarded the quantity of views, likes, dislikes and comments, they were changed in 2012 to recognizing the generation of 'watch time' of individual videos and channels.<sup>38</sup> The more 'watch time' a channel generates, the more likely it is that a channel and its videos are ranked higher in YouTube's search function and in the recommended video category, which also feeds YouTube's 'auto-play' feature. To generate more 'watch time,' Mediakraft Networks advises a couple of measures, including the production or selection of videos with 'relevant' and timely topics for the intended target group. Another important strategy is to offer recognisable programming with at least one new video per week, preferably uploaded on the same day and time. Also recommended are snappy titles and appealing thumbnails, captivating descriptions and tags for better search results and rankings, and the organization of videos in thematic playlists. Beyond that, the use of YouTube analytics is suggested to better get a grip on the practices and expectations of the followers of a channel, which should also help provide understanding of when and why users stop watching a video or leave the channel. The channel should be promoted on social media according to a reasoned strategy, and the YouTuber should him- or herself moderate the comments, preferably by posting the first comment, for example, a question that then might help to direct the discussion in a desired direction.<sup>39</sup>

It is obvious that Mediakraft Networks has implemented these strategies for BP's YouTube channel. Not only is the footage, as described above, provided with catchy titles, thumbnails and tags, but the compilations address topics that play to actuality and videos are offered in playlists, uploaded weekly and advertised via mailing lists and also on BP's network of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and Google Plus. Programming strategies and audience analytics resemble the practices of commercial broadcast television, as does the general approach to YouTube as a generator of identifiable target groups for advertisers. Not surprisingly, Mediakraft Networks promotes itself on its homepage:

as the largest online television channel in Central Europe, which entertains and informs - millions of viewers every day with an extensive and professionally produced program. Mediakraft Networks combines the knowledge of experienced staff from the TV production, marketing, social media and media management with the boundless creativity of a new generation of media professionals to create the TV program of the future. Sponsored by precise targeting and audience analysis, it is tailored to the viewing habits and needs of the audience.<sup>40</sup>

YouTube's transformation from an open video repository to a layered commercialized platform for channeled video streaming, or, as Ramon Lobato has called it, to a "hybrid cultural-commercial space,"<sup>41</sup> has been discussed by many commentators in the past years, emphasizing the role of multi-channel networks.<sup>42</sup> As the case of BP's YouTube channel shows, archival heritage footage is used as bait to attract YouTube users. The archival material, in its original

38 Frederic Lardionis, 'YouTube changes its search ranking algorithm to focus on engagement, not just clicks.'

39 Hendrik Sontheim, 'YouTube für Brands: Die Content-Frage & eure perfekte Programmstrategie - Teil 1,' *Mediakraft Consulting*, 20 July 2017, (retrieved 08 March 2018); Hendrik Sontheim, 'YouTube für Brands: YouTube Analytics und der Wert der Metadaten - Teil 2,' *Mediakraft Consulting*, 27 July 2017, (retrieved 11 March 2018); Hendrik Sontheim, '<https://blog.mediakraft.de/kickstart-your-brand-channel-3-fae93f66c9c3>,' *Mediakraft Consulting*, 03 August 2017, (retrieved 11 March 2018); Hendrik Sontheim, 'YouTube für Brands: Content-Verwertung und Ressourcen-Management - Teil 4,' *Mediakraft Consulting*, 10 August 2017, (retrieved 11 March 2018); Christopher Tormyn, 'Warum "Views" für euren YouTube-Kanal nicht entscheidend sind,' *Mediakraft Consulting*, 13 July 2017, (retrieved 11 March 2018).

40 Mediakraft Networks: 'Frequently asked questions: Is Mediakraft Networks a TV station?' Homepage, (retrieved 11 March 2018).

41 Ramon Lobato, 'The cultural logic of digital intermediaries: YouTube multichannel networks,' p. 357.

42 See, for an overview of the scholarly discussion about YouTube's transformation since its inception in 2005, Jane Arthurs, Sophia Drakopoulou, & Alessandro Gandini, 'Researching YouTube,' *Convergence*, 24, 1, 2018, 3–15, DOI: 10.1177/1354856517737222; Stuart Cunningham, David Craig, & Jon Silver, 'YouTube, multichannel networks and the accelerated evolution of the new screen ecology,' *Convergence*, 22, 4, 2016, 376–391, DOI: 10.1177/1354856516641620; Patrick Vonderau, 'The video bubble: Multichannel networks and the transformation of YouTube.'

context made for newsreels, was created for large audiences with an accessible dramatic or entertaining narrative form. However, within the ecology of online streaming and sharing, the curational measurements of a multi-channel network under the regime of YouTube's algorithm create an extra layer of attractiveness according to the techno-cultural logics of this particular context.

Different from the curational strategies of public archives and repositories, such as EUscreen.eu or Europe's Digital Platform for Cultural Heritage, Europeana.eu, BP has, as the copyright owner of the archival material, the liberty of transforming the material to meet the supposed needs of a commercial platform and its users, while public archives and initiatives follow strictly their public service obligation as custodians of cultural heritage within the restrictions of the particularly complicated copyright regulations for audiovisual material. In the context of public institutions and initiatives, a more conservative approach to preserving and presenting audiovisual heritage online still prevails, while, within a commercial context, as I have shown, a different set of values and constraints shape the curational approach.

## 5 Conclusion

The initial reactions to the launch of BP's YouTube channel as quoted above can be read as a reflection of the curational strategies highlighting well-known political events, celebrities, catastrophes, and curiosities. It is indeed "great stuff," directing a user's attention, in this de- and re-contextualised form, to the 'crude ideologies' and 'ephemeral aspects' of our past. However, the initial reactions to the launch of BP's YouTube channel can also be read as testimonies of what users may perceive of as attractive and exiting about audiovisual heritage online. One can take it for granted that the commercial parties involved would claim that they only serve the audiences' preferences, as these become manifest in 'watch time,' clicks, likes, and comments. As a YouTube spokesman explained after being confronted by Paul Lewis' research into the function of YouTube's biased recommendations algorithm regarding the 2016 presidential campaign in the US:

Our search and recommendation systems reflect what people search for, the number of videos available, and the videos people choose to watch on YouTube. That's not a bias towards any particular candidate; that is a reflection of viewer interest.<sup>43</sup>

Different to 'the good old times' of analogue mass media, the technological layer shaping the interaction between the cultural industry and the audience or users in a digital media ecology, adds a new layer, a dynamic of its own, shaped by both, curational practices and users activities. Here, I have only discussed Mediakraft Networks' strategies, while a comprehensive analysis of BP's archive online would have to take into account the whole ecosystem of platforms involved: BP's professional site; BP's YouTube Channels; BP's subscription channel; BP TV; plus all of BP's social media sites and blogs. Beyond this, all forms of appropriation and reuse, such as clicking, disliking, commenting, play-listing, linking, embedding, and downloading, re-mixing and recirculating the material would have to be scrutinized in their interaction with the platforms, since the most urgent question in the context of - to say it once again with Sonja de Leeuw's words - "the necessary transition from inward to outward service, from curators to users"<sup>44</sup> is whether or not the new forms of popular circulation of audiovisual heritage do create new cultural practices of appropriation and interpretation of the audiovisual heritage in these new contexts. An interesting case not to forget would be a YouTube Channel under the title "**The Great War,**" in which weekly documentary compilations have been reconstructing World War One chronologically week by week since 2014, attracting even more followers than BP's YouTube channel - the source of the archival material being BP's archive and its curator being Mediakraft Networks.

43 Paul Lewis, "Fiction is outperforming reality": How YouTube's algorithm distorts trust.' See, also, Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, New York University Press, 2018.

44 Sonja de Leeuw, 'European television history online: History and challenges,' p.7.

## Biography

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