

FRIDAY 17 AUGUST

1pm-6pm

Alfredo Jaar, *Introduction to a Distant World* (Brazil, 1985, 9mins30sec) screening in a loop. Admission free

Screening at 6.30pm

Bill Morrison, *Dawson City - Frozen Time* (US, 2016, 120mins) £5 / £2.50



SATURDAY 18 AUGUST

12pm-3pm

Alfredo Jaar, *Introduction to a Distant World* (Brazil, 1985, 9mins30sec) screening in a loop. Admission free

Screening at 3pm

Charles Chaplin, *The Gold Rush* (US 1925, 85mins) £4 / £2



SUNDAY 19 AUGUST

1pm-6pm

Alfredo Jaar, *Introduction to a Distant World*, 1985, 9mins 30sec, screening in a loop. Admission free

Screening at 6.30pm

Ben Russell, *GOOD LUCK* (UK/ FR 2017, 143mins, English subtitles) £5 / £2.50

Sincere thanks to Dr Chris Gair
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Our thanks also to:
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THERE'S TALK OF GOLD



FILM OVER THREE DAYS

We remember history through the media that represented it at the time: the Trojan War through Homer's epic verse; the American Civil War via the photography of Matthew B. Brady and others, which captures the first modern war through images of men (both alive and dead); the Great War in its double-time films of neatly uniformed young soldiers marching optimistically to the front. Media also helps to shape historical events: it is hard to imagine the Civil Rights struggle ending as it did without the arrival of television in American homes, and the witnessing of white Southern brutality by millions of viewers across the nation. Likewise, the emergence of photojournalism and the invention of technology in the 1880s made it economically viable to reproduce images on printing presses and paved the way for investigative reporters such as Jacob Riis to show affluent readers 'how the other half live.'

Given humankind's fixation on gold throughout history, it is probable that the discovery of gold on one of the tributaries of the Klondike River in the Yukon region of northwest Canada in August 1896 would have drawn people to the frozen northlands in any circumstances. The lust for and acquisition of gold have been staples of western mythology and history dating back to antiquity: Croesus, the king of Lydia, has been credited with issuing the first 'gold' coins to be made with a standardised mix of gold and silver, an essential step in creating a viable marketplace; at the other extreme, Midas, king of Phrygia, whose power to turn everything he touched into gold became the curse that ultimately led to his starvation. The stampede for the Klondike contains elements of both stories: on the one hand, some prospectors did earn fortunes, which they then used back in the United States in order to build even larger fortunes; on the other, the thirst for gold tempted large numbers of *chechaquos* – or newcomers – to the Klondike. These figures, ridiculed by the old-timers in the Northlands as soft Southerners, whose lack of basic survival skills was matched by their arrogance, were attracted by the promise of easy riches and generally returned home (if at all) chastised and empty-handed. The Californian writer Jack London's Klondike tales are full of such figures and – like the unnamed *chechaquo* who is the protagonist of *To Build a Fire* (1908), one of his best and best known stories – many of them die as a result of their naïve inability to cope with the dangers inherent to this world.

While the Klondike Gold Rush occurred at the very moment when moving pictures were invented (the Lumière Brothers held their first

screenings in 1895), the location was too remote and the technology too primitive for more than the most basic moving images to have been filmed. By the 1920s, film production and reception had undergone spectacular transformation (as documented in beguiling form by Bill Morrison's *Dawson City: Frozen Time*). Fueled by a mix of photographs and Jack London's still immensely popular tales of the north, the memory of the goldrush remained fresh in the collective memory. Like the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925) took recent history as the setting for its narrative. And, while Chaplin clearly strayed from historical 'truth' in ways that differ greatly from Eisenstein, he drew upon his own interest in photographic images of the goldrush (such as of men traversing the Chilkoot Pass) and representations that bear striking resemblances to London's work in the construction of the film. The lengthy cabin scene in which Big Jim starts to hallucinate, appears to be a parody of London's *In a Far Country* (1899), in which two men are driven to mania as they winter together in a cabin. Likewise, the film's conclusion, with the Lone Prospector finally united with Georgia, mirrors closely the formula for popular romance that London expounds in his semi-autobiographical novel, *Martin Eden* (1909).

What seems most remarkable about *The Gold Rush* and the other films being screened at CAMPLE LINE is that their interest in gold itself is peripheral. Like London's tales, or Eric Hegg's Klondike photographs, the true fascination is with the psychology of the miners: what is it that motivates them? How does the quest for gold change them and their relationship with others? What is the relationship between appearance and reality, or between what people say and what they feel? How has the shift from the lone prospector to the incorporation of mining changed the corporeal or facial features of the worker? The extended close ups of men's faces in *Good Luck* (2017) share a genealogy with Brady's scrutiny of the faces of Civil War soldiers or Eric Hegg's of Klondike prospectors; *Introduction to A Distant World* and *Good Luck* trace the ecological disasters wrought by mining, rather than the wealth that it can bring, resonating, once more, with London's concern with the destruction of a finely balanced relationship between native peoples and the northland. In all, the director of *Good Luck*, Ben Russell's explanation that 'I spent months in these mines simply because I wanted to better understand how men persevere' could be applied equally well to London's characters, or to Chaplin's construction of the Lone Prospector, in which the search for gold is less important in itself than in how it helps to reveal truths about desire, determination and the often uneasy relationship between individual and collective ambition.