Kultivating Kultur: digital repositories for creative arts research
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Introduction
The purpose of this paper is to describe the UK-based project to create the first ever digital repository for creative arts research, Kultur. This will provide the framework for exploring the engagement of the creative arts community with repositories, and more generally for questioning whether there is potential for a subject-based approach to repositories within our discipline.

The paper is divided into four sections:
• Contextual information about the repository movement and the take-up of Institutional Repositories by creative practitioners;
• An overview of the Kultur Project as a seminal project to establish a transferable model for Institutional Repositories in the visual and applied arts;
• The development of the University of Arts London Institutional Repository post-the Kultur Project as a case study of a repository for the creative arts;
• Exploration of Institutional versus Subject Repositories.

Context
‘A digital repository is a managed, persistent way of making research, learning and teaching content with continuing value discoverable and accessible. Repositories can be subject or institutional in their focus.’
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/topics/digitalrepositories.aspx

This definition of repositories is taken from JISC. JISC is a government funded body in the UK that seeks to inspire universities in the innovative use of digital technologies. As such it has provided most of the public funding to support repository developments in our country.

Historically take-up of repositories within the UK has been consistently high in science, technology and medicine, whilst the humanities and particularly the creative arts continue to be less represented. The Opendoar chart shows how this trend is echoed internationally with just 2% of repositories being for fine and performing arts in March 2010.
For the creative arts, this is because of both technical and cultural reasons. Repositories are often aesthetically unappealing and there has been limited interest until recently in accommodating multimedia forms and practice-based research within these. Instead they have traditionally focused on capturing printed research outputs, with a focus on those disciplines that have a strong publishing tradition and where the use of technology is often an integral part of their research. Hence there has been little to motivate the creative arts researcher to engage with the institutional repository movement.

However, it has become ever more evident that this is not a desirable nor a sustainable position to hold as the drive to make publically funded research accessible is being constantly advocated by funding bodies and institutions worldwide. Within the US, institutions to introduce mandates include Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a number of Harvard faculties. In the UK, all the research councils require the work they fund to be made open access and 11 UK universities have adopted institution-wide mandates, a figure that is going up almost monthly.

Furthermore, it is increasingly important that we showcase and celebrate the rapidly expanding research activity within art and design through online means as advocated by the RAE2008 (Research Assessment Exercise) Panel for Art and Design in 2009:

‘Encouragement towards the development of institutional repositories of physical and digitized research outputs would significantly enhance the visibility of, and access to, art and design research in the future.’

The Kultur Project came about in response to these imperatives for digitally capturing, disseminating and preserving the research outputs for the creative arts.

**Kultur Project (http://kultur.eprints.org)**

Kultur was a two-year JISC funded Project that ran from 2007 to 2009. The lead partner was University of Southampton, an institution with significant experience of Institutional Repositories and developer of e-Prints repository software. Two arts specialist universities were partners – University of the Arts London and University for the Creative Arts – along with VADS (Visual Arts Data Service).

The Kultur Consortium aimed to create the first ever transferable and sustainable institutional repository model for research outputs in the creative and applied arts. In doing this, the Project sought to develop a generic policy and technical framework for creating arts-based institutional repositories.

A major output of the Project was the creation of two new Institutional Repositories, one at University of the Arts London and one at University for the Creative Arts, and an enhanced Institutional Repository at University of Southampton to incorporate the outputs of researchers at Winchester School of Art as this institution had recently merged with the University.

Other significant outputs included:

- A clearer understanding of what are research outputs within this community of practice, something that is not always clear cut and caused much debate;
- Greater acknowledgement and recognition of practice-based research outputs, rather than purely text-based outputs, so the project had to deal with numerous multi-media and time-based outputs;
- An improved understanding of the application of technical standards and metadata to digital objects in art and design, although this is still ‘work in progress’;
- An exploration of specific rights issues that apply to the creative arts, an area that VADS were able to lead on as they had significant expertise in this area.

It was highly important to the Project Team that this was user-led as it was recognized that the pro-active engagement of the research community would be key to the successful outcome of the Project and to the ongoing population of the Institutional Repositories with new content.

We were surprised at how positive some researchers were to the concept. It was quickly apparent that they saw this as a means of raising their profile that would supplement time-limited and site-specific performances and exhibitions. They also hoped that this new visibility would lead to potential collaborations with fellow researchers. Our issue then became one of managing their expectations as they wanted to expand the remit of the Project to include digitizing special collections and large files of research data. This was not in scope as our primary commitment was to capturing research outputs.

We also confirmed through the consultations with our researchers that the aesthetics of the user interface was of the greatest importance and the quality of the digital
representations of their work would need to be of a certain quality to match their needs. The issue here was that those people that were happy for sharing and re-use of their work wanted the highest quality whilst others wanted thumbnails or lower quality resolution to prevent re-use as copyright infringement was a major cause for concern.

The results of all our consultations led to significant technical work to provide a Repository that had the look and feel of a showcasing website rather than a text-based database. The concerns expressed by researchers about visual aesthetics and the challenges of representing multi-media works had to addressed in order to ensure the ultimate success of the project. The following images illustrate sample pages from a standard repository website and from a Kultur partner’s website. Both pages cover content focused on the creative arts but the look and feel is completely different even in this hard copy representation.

Many technical features were developed to create a visually stimulating site. For example, the front page of the repository showcases a rolling display of research outputs and a listing of new additions to the site. Each record has four tabs that take you into images, video/audio, documents and details as appropriate.
Within the image gallery page you can use a light box facility to navigate backwards and forwards, moving between thumbnail and large scale pictures as you wish. The repository also provides you with the ability to listen to sound and watch video clips.

The application of appropriate metadata standards proved to be challenging. A metadata schema and workflow was developed in response to different user needs, striking the balance between the institution’s requirements for research management and the individual creator’s need for flexibility in describing their practice.

At the beginning of the project the partner institutions added their content to a demonstrator site, then in January 2009 the demonstrator site was split and the separate Institutional Repositories were created. At University of the Arts London we renamed ours UAL Research Online.

**UAL Research Online (http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk)**

University of the Arts London (UAL) is made up six specialist colleges with international reputations – Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Art. It is the largest art and design university in Europe with a student population of c18,800 full time equivalent students/c21,700 students, and the University has a robust research community.

We launched our repository as UAL Research Online in February 2010, having appointed a full-time manager and a part-time administrator to support its ongoing development. We also have an Advisory Group that oversees the development of policies and procedures. This consists of library and IT staff, a legal expert, academic researchers and research administrators plus the Chair of our University’s Research Standards and Development Committee. UAL Research Online has top-level support from the University’s senior management plus some researchers that act as our ‘champions’ but we also have some ‘hard to reach’ researchers that have yet to engage with the repository. The University has deemed that uploading research outputs is mandatory, but the reality of achieving this has yet to be tested out.
We currently have c1,500 items in the Institutional Repository, ranging from conference papers to multimedia artworks. We are thrilled with this level of content as it far exceeds our expectations. This deposit rate can be viewed as a measure of the success of the Kultur Project in developing a repository framework that truly matches the needs and aspirations of the creative arts research community.

Our immediate priority is to record the outputs of the University’s Readers and Professors plus any staff that are likely to be put forward for our REF (Research Excellence Framework) Submission in 2012 to obtain government funding for research in the future. It will also include any researchers that are carrying out projects funded by research councils where they expect the research to be publically available.

Currently we are involved in another project led by University of Southampton to address the complex preservation issues associated with repositories. In addition we are a partner in a national project led by the HEA (Higher Education Academy) Art Design Media Subject Centre to explore the feasibility of developing open access teaching materials within art and design that might ultimately lead to ‘UAL Teaching Online’.

However, what continues to be of interest to many of us is the issue of Institutional versus Subject Repositories as one of the incidental discoveries of the Kultur Project was that the research communities of the partner institutions were all disappointed when we separated out the Kultur Demonstrator into separate Institutional Repositories. They had valued being able to scan the research outputs of three institutions in one place so they actually saw this spilt as a retrograde move.

**Subject versus Institutional Repositories**

Within the UK, JISC currently has 21 programmes that can be claimed to support digital repository activities, including a £14million investment in repository and digital content infrastructure. Historically JISC funding has primarily been used to support the development of Institutional Repositories although it has also funded a small number of projects that have sought to establish subject-based models.

The reason for this focus on Institutional Repositories is possibly that the institutional framework provides a solid foundation for repository developments that assures the
longer term sustainability of any repository projects and a stronger guarantee that
publically funded research will be accessible to the wider community. Also, Institutional
Repositories are seen as a key way of raising a university’s profile in this increasingly
competitive world so Vice Chancellors are keen to put their political weight and
institutional money behind such developments.

In contrast, Subject Repositories promote the discipline first and foremost, and hence
often cut across institutional considerations. They are more aligned to the aspirations of
the researchers but they are also highly dependent on the voluntary effort of individual
researchers so their future sustainability can be precarious. There are already some
examples of high profile and transformational subject-based repositories in other
disciplines that might provide interesting role models to look at. Many, but not all, are
American in origin:

- arXiv (physics/maths/statistics/computing)
- CiteSeerx (computer science)
- RePEc (economics)
- SSRN (social sciences)
- PubMed Central (biomedical and life sciences)
- Economists Online (economics)

Some have been publically funded e.g. Economists Online is EU funded and includes
some high profile universities such as Cambridge University, the London School of
Economics and Columbia University. Whilst others are really kept alive by the
enthusiasm of the researchers themselves and involve very little funding e.g. RePEc,
which is hosted by Cornell University and contains research papers on economics from
over 70 countries.

Within the UK there have been a small number of arts-based repository projects, albeit
many are fairly modest in scale:

- SAFIR (Sound Archives Film Images Repository)
- JazzHub (jazz research)
- PRIMO (Practice as Research in Music Online)
- LIROLEM (non-textual materials for research, teaching and learning incl.
  architecture and design)
- The Storage Space (student work in the visual arts)
- Kultur (creative arts research)

The Kultur Project features amongst these. This project quickly revealed that our
researchers really value the potential to share their research with fellow artists and
designers as they clearly relate far more to their discipline than to their institution. This is
especially true as a large number of staff in UK art and design institutions and faculties
are either part-time or visiting lecturers. In turn, many see themselves as practitioners
more than academics. Within the UK there is an additional imperative that makes
Subject Repositories worthy of consideration. The smaller art and design colleges do not
have the infrastructure or resource to establish their own repositories so a collaborative
approach may be their only option.

With this in mind, in 2009 the original Kultur Partners submitted a new bid to JISC for a
project entitled ‘Kultivate’. This sought to develop a portal for creative arts research and
to establish a community of practice for those staff involved in repository developments within the arts. We saw this as a win-win solution as it allowed the Institutional Repository to still be core but then linked these through a portal that allows people to search across these Institutional Repositories. It also provided a way-in for those smaller institutions that couldn’t afford to develop their own repository. We thought this might initially be a sector-based solution but in the longer term we hoped it might expand to include galleries and museums. Equally we thought it could be international in scope. However, we were unsuccessful in our bid for public funding despite widespread support from our various professional and subject-based communities.

We still feel quite strongly this is worthy of consideration so a revised bid was submitted to JISC in April 2010 and we currently await the outcome of this. In the meantime, we continue to populate our individual repositories with new content and an informal network of UK-based repository managers within the creative arts are now part of the ‘Kultur Klub’, a community of practice that brings people together to share ideas and to support one another. We are also interested in talking to other institutions and funding bodies that might be interested in exploring this concept. Hence my intention in bringing this paper to the Boston Conference was to stimulate discussions with ARLIS/NA colleagues on Institutional versus Subject Repositories, but sadly cancelled air travel due to volcanic ash meant that I was unable to attend the Conference so this was not possible. However, my email details are stated below if any reader wishes to contact me on this topic.

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Image Credits:

Page 1: Kultur Banner (left to right)
Clio Padovani, Winchester School of Art (2006). ‘Madre (white time)’, texture mapped animation
Anna Vickers, University of the Arts London. ‘Grey Matters One’, oil on linen
Gillian Golding, University College for the Creative Arts, detail from ‘Allsorts’, digital print.
Christopher McNulty. ‘Kultur für Alle!’, from Flickr

Page 4: UAL Research Online

Page 6: UAL Research Online
Keir Williams, University of the Arts London (2008). Digital is dangerous debate: digital vs analogue.