

A visual arts perspective on open access institutional repositories.

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Abstract

Open access digital repositories now enable researchers to communicate their research output by means of the WWW, contributing to the 'culture of abundance'. However, repository development in the visual arts remains undeveloped. In this paper, based on my work on Goldsmiths Research Online in the SHERPA-LEAP project and as a subject librarian for visual cultures, I explore the qualities of research in the visual arts, which affect how we represent it in repositories.

What is a visual arts perspective? Research may be practice-based, documentation may be created specifically for the archive. The research environment extends beyond the university into the art world, the web and media. Visual artists are concerned with representation; context matters. How does the repository act in comparison to other contexts?

How do the criteria of the academic research environment i.e. publication, validation, citation, peer review translate into the visual art sector? What constitutes an adequate representation of research? I will show examples of an exhibition, event/performance, lecture, video, installation, database, software and visual work and consider activities such as citation in literature, mimicry and mockery as citation, ephemerality, the online CV, gallery talks, teaching and blogs, with reference specifically to visual practices of researchers at Goldsmiths.

Visual arts research produces diverse digital objects, which are often in complex, multimedia formats. What are the technical issues we need to address to enable us to present and preserve these materials? How do the conventions of the repository environment map onto this subject area? How do metadata standards developed in museums and galleries reflect concerns of these different domains? I give examples of the use of generic standards to help with decisions.

My conclusion is that work in this area is at an early stage. I advocate a pragmatic approach, backed up with further reflexive research.

Institutional repositories are used to give open access to research output produced by academics, making it freely available on the web, for scholarly, non-commercial use. The principles and methods used are common across the repository movement. There has been rapid growth of repositories in the UK recently, influenced by factors such as the advocacy and funding provided by the JISC Repositories and Preservation Programme¹, the requirement by UK Research Councils for research output that they have funded to be made available in repositories², and the guidance and sense of community provided by the various SHERPA projects which have assisted the development of repositories in UK research-led institutions³.

The repository at Goldsmiths is called 'Goldsmiths Research Online' (GRO)⁴. The site uses EPrints⁵ open source software and was set up as part of the SHERPA-LEAP⁶ project, in 2006. At that time, when we set up the repository at Goldsmiths, few repositories held research output from visual arts departments, and there was growing speculation about how this could be done⁷. I was interested in the problem as the editor of GRO and because, as I was simultaneously a research student in the Art Department at the college, I could view the repository from a visual arts perspective. Institutional repositories were established by building on authors' rights to self-archive their work. Whilst some repositories are literally compiled by academics who self-archive, what is more usual is a kind of mediated self-archiving. This has been my experience, and in this paper I will discuss issues that arise when we consider representing visual arts research in institutional repositories in this way.

Research in art is often, though not always practice-based. It may, although it does not necessarily, have related documentation, and relationships between different modes of research vary⁸. What I am concerned with, as the repository editor; a mediator for self-archiving, is how I can facilitate the representation of artist's research in this context? What constitutes an adequate representation? How do the concepts of an 'online repository of research output' translate in this milieu? Aspects that I will consider include: how do the academic measures of validity and authority, citation and peer review appear from a visual arts perspective? How do qualities inherent to the digital archiving and repository environments: sampling, surrogacy, countering ephemerality, the heterotopic character of the space, affect the archive?

Context matters: the research environment is important institutionally and it supports creativity. For visual art, this context is not only academia, but the art-world. The repository can, therefore, be compared to models of the gallery or art site archive which conventionally 'represent' artists. Gallery profiles of artists are usually organized with the artist as the subject, as in the Art Department's staff research profiles at Goldsmiths⁹, where the artist's statement, the online CV, and the showcase of images are displayed. The interface of the repository, however, is based on the format of the bibliography. For the artist in academia, this can be adapted to incorporate different kinds of activity; peer review, for example, may be indicated by participation in gallery talks and teaching as well as in literature. GRO is arranged by department or year, and we customized it so that it could be browsed by person. If we look at the page for Prof. Janis Jefferies, who participated in the pilot stage of the project, we can see how the format accommodates research projects which have multiple outputs. Prof. Jefferies is the recipient of several major funding awards for research projects which encompass computing, performance, sound, text, textiles and haptics. Each research project has an entry, and different digital objects: pdfs, presentations and images are attached to them. The artist is represented both as 'author' and 'subject'. Because the repository is part of an open access network, using Dublic Core metadata and OAI protocols for its harvesting, art research is presented amongst other kinds of research, and is widely retrieved through Google as well as specialized portals such as OpenDOAR¹⁰ and OAIster, and this juxtapositioning can reveal both differences and potential synergies between research in art and other domains.

The repository acts as a showcase for the institution, and for the individual is a home repository which is simple to use, which makes work available and accessible, and provides services such as on-the-fly bibliographies. It represents the artist as a subject and author, visually and textually, in a shift from practice to archive. It is used by artists,

as archives are, to archive art projects and as the host for archival, artistic practices. The Engaged Magazine web archive for example, deposited by the editor, Rachel Steward, is an archive of an arts magazine that “aimed to examine and promote other relevant forms of publishing whilst remaining within the familiar and enjoyable realms of the magazine format” The web archive contains information and extracts from the six issues published between 1994-1998, including extracts from the short films and animations of Video Issue 5. and the (no longer fuller accessible) 1995 digital experiments of the artists featured in CD-ROM Issue 3 (fig 1).



Fig. 1. *Engaged Magazine* (1994-1998) web archive.GRO [Screengrab].



Fig. 2. Johnny Spencer (2000) 'Inquiry Unit' *Century City*, London, Tate Modern. [Freestanding panels, installation shot].

As well as issues of representation of the subject, there are the technical qualities of research output in the visual arts to consider, when we record them in the repository. Researchers in visual arts produce: edited books, chapters in books, journal articles and contributions to exhibition catalogues. They also produce visual and digital products, exhibitions or events, performances, conference contributions (presentation or paper), web publications, research databases, software, compositions, artefacts, practice-based theses and they do 'other'¹¹ kinds of research activity such as running projects, which range from curating a gallery space to managing digital resource creation. We aim to make research output accessible in the institutional repository. Whilst it is possible to make metadata only entries, in principle we aim to attach a digital object to each entry, which may be digital surrogates. To document an exhibition, for example, we would describe the event in the record, then we could attach a pdf of the exhibition catalogue or a digital photo of the installation, such as this image of Johnny Spencer's 'Inquiry Unit', at Tate Modern (fig. 2). This image is of an art work commissioned as part of *Century City* at Tate Modern in 2000, but which was intended to appear as gallery information, and so was not included in the catalogue.

One marker of the shift of context from art practice to documentation is the way we map a description of the event to a citation format. The terminology too is altered. 'In press' properly becomes 'in progress', 'published' becomes alternatively 'made public' – as with Naomi Salaman's visual work, a microfilm *Changed pressmarks of the Private Case in the British Library* (fig. 3) recording books moved from the 'Private Case' of the British Library into the main library, a material object which was itself put into stock in several libraries.



Fig 3. Naomi Salaman (1999). *Changed* *pressmarks of the Private Case in the British Library*. [Microfilm]. GRO.



Fig. 4. FN. 'Articultural Show' (1999) One Sheep currency note. EPHEMERIS

Citation in art can appear as visual allusion. The One Sheep Note (fig. 4), produced by FN for the Articultural Fair may cite Monopoly money, or refer to notions of counterfeiting and value in works such as Marcel Duchamp's Tzanck cheque of 1919 or Cildo Meireles' alternative currency project, Zero Dollar [1978-84]¹², a critical mimesis which enables the transformation of what it mimics. I have not tried to represent this kind of citation structurally in the metadata of the repository, but it may be described in notes.

Context and presentation are often considered as part of the work by artists, and work is conceived for a particular context. A video may be intended for the web, or to show in a gallery. There are, in the field of performance art, tensions between ideas of practice and of archiving which the artist may have already explored. The web screen shot (fig. 5) accompanies a record for a performance of Anita Ponton's performance 'Unspool' at the Whitechapel Gallery, collected digital ephemera. There is often a translation in terms between art practice and research environment, such documentation may function as proof that the event happened, rather than as a representation of the event, although the description (visible in the screen grab and included as the 'abstract' in the metadata) may, as here, be evocative:

A melodramatic and film nourish performance. A woman on film and a woman emerging from film interact. The voices speak of discomfort, suicide and madness. They seem to be trying to menace the live female – as if she were not disordered enough already. As she struggles to keep hold of herself, of her voice, of her composure, she is always taken over by a voice that constantly undermines her. (Anita Ponton, artist's statement)



Fig 5. Anita Ponton (2005) 'Unspool', *Wormhole Saloon*. London, Whitechapel. [Announcement. website screen grab]. GRO



Fig 6. Anita Ponton (2006) 'Unspool', *Stills*. Slideshow for PhD viva voce. [Powerpoint]. GRO

A still image (fig 6) from a slideshow that the same artist put together for the examination of her practice-based thesis accompanies the written thesis, in the repository. The artist has deposited her thesis, together with two slideshows which were shown at her examination, and a video of a her performance at that event, an effective way of representing her work in the context of the repository.

Varied approaches to documentation of practice and research are shown in the collection of electronic theses of PhD research in visual arts in GRO. Yosi Anaya's thesis is not included in electronic form, it was conceived of as a material object, with illustrations on transparent paper, but we have an abstract and a clip of one of her art works shown at her examination (fig. 7), with a statement. Although described textually, it is the video clip, the sound, the textures and the movement represented, which enables the affect of the work to be experienced.

Wearing a celebration dress that is out of place, walking in circles in the winter snow of a foreign land. Relato II is about the experience of migration through an inner struggle and determination to fit in with the outside. This work is part of Museo del Imaginario /imaginary museum, a major art project by Yosi Anaya. (Josefina Anaya-Morales, artist's statement)



Fig. 7. Anaya, Yosi (2004) *Relato II: The Wandering Tehuanita*. [Still from video, excerpt]. GRO

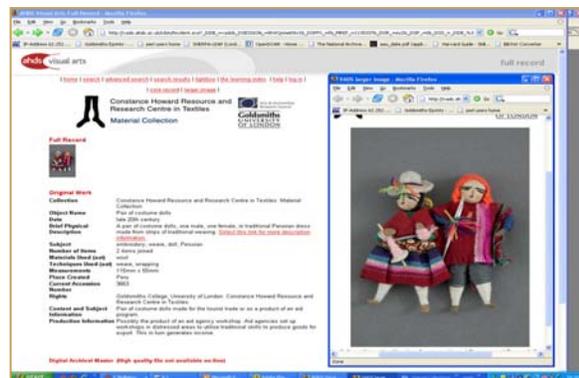


Fig. 8. Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles (2003). Materials database. Screenshot.

Visual and digital formats

Digital formats for archiving images, sound and video are evolving. We use standards for still digital images¹³, but for videos these are less certain. Following the release of the archival PDF/A, we should use that rather than other versions of PDF writer. Ideally, open-source software would be used, however we use Quicktime and Powerpoint, when Flash might be more universal, because these are used by the community who contribute to and access the archive. Repository managers are often concerned that they should prescribe minimum standards, but we have found that visual material deposited is of very high quality, and that it is the need to transfer from high quality to lower quality, compressed versions of objects for web delivery which is the problem, as it runs counter to the 'archival' role of the repository. We may want to keep the file size as low as possible due to storage space, but do we also keep a high quality copy for archival reasons; a high resolution image, high quality video, uncompressed sound file? What has happened at Goldsmiths is that we are building up a digital archive on CDs and DVDs, which we also curate.

However decisions have to be made for web delivery, less standard formats may provide more vivid or accurate representations of concepts and sensibilities. Digital object formats are variable, often technically complex and experimental. Different digital objects document different manifestations of the research, reflecting textual, visual and conceptual processes. The entry for Janis Jefferies and Tim Blackwell *Sound you Can Touch* project in GRO shows this. They include a report on the project, a Powerpoint slideshow and an full-screen image 'Swarm techtiles' which together document the project described here, in which images are woven from live sound, the effect of each object enhancing that of the others.

Jefferies and Blackwell collaborate on an on going practice based research named as A Sound you Can Touch, "woven sound" refers to the weaving of images from live sound. Incoming sound is digitised by the computer into a stream of left and right audio samples. In performance, sound is woven in real time; each image representing several seconds of sound. Woven sound emanating from saxophone multiphonics and bristles is projected so that the players' and the audience can see (and hear) the unfolding texture. (Jefferies and Blackwell, Abstract)¹⁴.

Where a collection of digital objects are attached to a record, or different versions of research are presented, there should be clear indications of the relationship between versions. While the software can display a collection of digital objects with one metadata record, such as thumbnails, previews and abstracts, or artist's statements, and describe temporal relations between versions, other relationships such as whether a video clip is part of a longer work, are currently described textually.

The representation of art practice in an institutional repository requires that we engage in processes of mapping and translation. The concepts of publication, citation, validation, peer review, intellectual property, archiving and preservation are all stressed as we transpose art into the archive.

Libraries, it was suggested by Foucault, are a kind of *heterotopia*. These, Foucault says, are real spaces "that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect"¹⁵ The repository, a new kind of library, does this

in several ways. The tendency of a heterotopia to preserve states which may subvert, or undermine each other, in a non-hierarchical structure, can be exploited in the repository.

The repository holds 'other' spaces, both material and virtual, it could record the curation of an artspace (fig. 9), it can provide web space for web-sites which would otherwise disappear, as we have done with Engaged Magazine (fig. 2) It can re-create and preserve virtual space, as shown in the 'Public lavatory' gallery space (CD-ROM Issue 3.), which was made as a Quicktime VR file in 1996, for that issue, and is partly still visible, through GRO (fig. 10).



Fig. 9. Document of space. *Rosy Wilde gallery*, digital photo. EPHEMERIS.

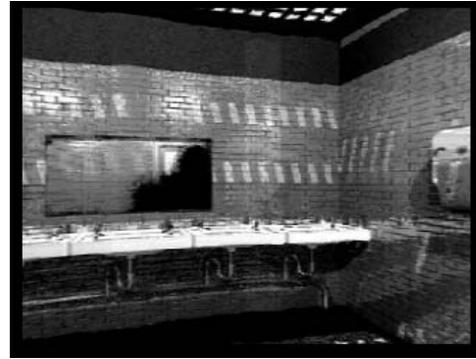


Fig. 10. Virtual space: *Public lavatory gallery*, Quicktime VR. GRO.

Complex digital objects such as databases are currently a challenge to our repository. The Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles was the recipient of an AHRC Resource Enhancement Grant to digitize its material collections (fig. 8) and archive of student's work, in 2000-2003, and the database is currently hosted at AHDS/Visual Arts¹⁶. The size and the structure of this resource, and the metadata schema it requires (MDA Spectrum) mean that we have decided to preserve it separately, using our archives management system, and link to that from the repository.

When they are juxtaposed in the repository, it can be seen that different metadata schema and standards for writing records, inherited with the digital objects we collect, reflect concerns of different domains. The repository standard is based on Dublin Core, which has a focus on access and delivery. Dublin Core is generic, but standards and methods used in specialist cataloguing, can supply strategies to help our presentation, and give us established procedures to help with decisions. In art library cataloguing, based on MARC21 and AACR2, for film and video, we would work from the object, take summary from the object/case and other sources in that order of preference and quote the source if it was not the object. The development of taxonomies for versions of digital objects, under consideration by the The Version Identification Framework Project¹⁷ is one example of potentially useful standardisation.

As well as presenting virtual and material spaces, preserving ephemeral events, media and software, and building networks between different informational domains, the repository is heterotopic in that it exists as a space in relation to both copyright and the 'Creative Commons'¹⁸. In core repositories, work that has already been published in peer-reviewed journals, or has already been presented in a public forum such as a conference, validating the research, is deposited under the author's permission to self-archive. It is on these grounds that permission has been granted by major academic journal publishers. The system works within existing copyright law, research can be

viewed, read, downloaded and used for non-commercial scholarly purposes, under similar principles to a 'Creative Commons licence, promoting the free exchange of knowledge. These demands have a potentially problematic and mutually subversive relationship. In addition to this, some art practices employ methods which may be considered as visual plagiarism, or appropriation and sampling and theses and journal articles may have 3rd party copyright issues, an issue encountered by the EThOS (Electronic Theses Online)¹⁹ project, amongst others.

The mediating digital archivist has to be technically adept, or have access to others with expertise and resources. The most 'appropriate version' (in terms of ownership, skill of presentation, or authenticity) of an object may be archived in another digital archive, or curated on a website, and it is possible to link to that version rather than store it in the repository – however repositories are for the long-term, and digital curation and preservation are the responsibility of the repository managers. We are currently taking part in the SHERPA-DP2 project²⁰, which is developing models for the long-term preservation of multi-media objects. It remains true, as Clive Phillpot said that "art libraries are perpetually engaged in countering ephemerality".

In this complex environment, I take a pragmatic approach, continuing to respond to evolving research, using a visual arts perspective to understand my role. The repository grows, as researchers use it, and this provides opportunities for reflexive research based on collaboration with artists amongst other colleagues.

¹ JISC (2006) Repositories and Preservation Programme.

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/programme_rep_pres.aspx

² SHERPA JULIET (2007) Research Funders' Open Access Policies.

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/juliet/index.php>

³ SHERPA: Securing a Hybrid Environment for Research Preservation and Access (2007). <http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/>

⁴ *Goldsmiths Research Online*. <http://eprints.goldsmiths.ac.uk>

⁵ *EPrints for Digital Repositories*. <http://www.eprints.org/>

⁶ *SHERPA-LEAP: London EPrints Access Project*. <http://www.sherpa-leap.ac.uk/>

⁷ The majority of repositories at time of writing predominantly held full-text journal articles.

⁸ James Elkins (2005). *The new PhD in studio art*. Dublin, Sculptors' Society of Ireland, 2005, gives some possibilities.

⁹ Goldsmiths (2006). *Art Department Staff Profiles*.

<http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/art/research/staff/>

¹⁰ *OpenDOAR: Directory of Open Access Repositories*. <http://www.opendoar.org>

¹¹ This typology is taken from the Research Assessment Exercise 2008 list of output types, available from <http://www.rae.ac.uk/> Policies and Procedures section

¹² see Velthuis, Olav (2005). *Imaginary economics*. Rotterdam, Nai

¹³ Following guidance provided by TASI, <http://www.tasi.ac.uk>. TASI's remit was extended (2008) to cover provision of guidance for moving image standards.

¹⁴ Jefferies, Janis and Tim Blackwell. *A sound you can touch*.

<http://eprints.goldsmiths.ac.uk/128/>

¹⁵ Foucault, Michel and Jay Miskowiec. 1986. Of Other Spaces. *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1. (Spring, 1986), pp. 22-27. Republished in N. Leach (ed.) *Rethinking Architecture: A reader in cultural theory*. Routledge, London, 1997. 350-6

¹⁶ Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles. 2003. *Materials database*. <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/>

¹⁷ LSE Library (2007). *VIF: Version Identification Framework*.
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/vif/>

¹⁸ Creative Commons. <http://creativecommons.org/>

¹⁹ EThOS (2007) *Electronic Theses Online*. <http://www.ethos.ac.uk/>

²⁰ SHERPA-DP. *SHERPA DP2 project*. <http://www.sherpadp.org.uk/sherpadp2.html>

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Figs. 4 and 9, Goldsmiths, Special Collections, EPHEMERIS Collection

Figs. 5 and 5, Anita Ponton

Fig. 7, Josefina Anaya-Morales

Fig. 8, Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles, Goldsmiths