

Principal Investigator's Report: Artists' Film and Video Database/Digitised Collection Projects: Addressing Sustainability and Historiography

1. A description of the activities of the network/workshops and the themes explored:

The project set up the Future Histories of the Moving Image research network (www.futurehistories.net). The network was convened in order to address two key issues: (a) securing the future of artists' moving image e-resources in the UK, beyond any project specific funding, and (b) maximising both their visibility to and use by all possible user groups both inside and outside the academy. It was also envisaged that the network would facilitate an online linking of those e-resources to allow researchers to approach the study of the field in new ways.

The Future Histories network activities comprised:

- a. Five day-long closed workshops where the issues regarding the sustainability and visibility of artists' moving image e-resources were discussed and a range of possible approaches and strategies identified. These were facilitatory, brainstorming sessions with outline morning and afternoon agendas, rather than formally structured meetings.
- b. One two-hour open workshop, held after the second closed workshop and hosted by the Future Histories of the Moving Image conference. At this workshop, the network disseminated the findings of its first two workshops and solicited feedback from a wider academic and non-academic audience (approx 50 attendees). Dissemination of findings was facilitated by four position statements by network participants, and then opened up to chaired discussion and input from the floor, with a respondent summarising the key findings.
- c. Hosting the two-day Future Histories of the Moving Image conference to help explore new approaches to the histories of moving image culture by allowing cross-fertilisation between disciplines and professional sectors, and across national boundaries.
- d. One day-long pilot skills training workshop, held at FACT in Liverpool, open to both network and non-network participants.
- e. A sixth and final day-long closed workshop to consolidate new network memberships, agree the mechanisms for the continuation of the network, and agree/draft a future funding bid to the Arts Council.
- f. Drawing up recommendations about how funding agencies might fund sustainability and preservation (stipulated as a condition of the grant).

2. Overview of the people and organisations involved and the frequency and type of collaborations:

The aim was to bring together representatives from e-resources relating to artists' moving image, officers from national arts/film organisations (eg the Arts Council, the BFI, the Tate) and people with technological/digitisation expertise (the AHDS, the AHRC ICT Methods Network). This was achieved, but as noted in the End of Award Report, the original list of agreed participants changed in the course of the award period due to retirement, maternity leave, changing jobs, end of contract, death, returning to PhD study, and the defunding of the AHDS. However, these changes became part of an ongoing self-sustaining process.

Current active participants:

Steven Ball (British Artists' Film & Video Study Collection, University of the Arts London)

Simon Bradshaw (Foundation for Art & Technology/FACT, Liverpool)

Campbell (Project Manager, LuxOnline)

Mark Duguid (ScreenOnline, British Film Institute)

William Fowler (Artists' Moving Image Curator, British Film Institute/National Film & TV Archive)

Lorna Hughes (Deputy Director, e-Research methods, Centre for e-Research, Kings College London) [formerly of the AHRC ICT Methods Network]

Julia Knight (Film & Video Distribution Database, University of Sunderland)
Nick Lambert (Computer Art Context History etc/CACHe, Birkbeck, London)
Alison Lloyd (Head of Visual Arts & Literature, Arts Council East Midlands)
Adam Lockhart (REWIND: Artists' Video in the 70s and 80s, University of Dundee)
Barry Parsons (Capturing the Past, Preserving the Future: Digitisation of the National Review of Live Art Collection, University of Bristol)
Ali Roche (Picture This, Bristol)
Peter Thomas (Film & Video Distribution Database)
Ian White (Freelance & Whitechapel Gallery Curator and Consultant on Arts Council Legacy and Learning Initiative)

Past participants:

Daisy Abbott (Performing Arts, University of Glasgow) [formerly of the Arts & Humanities Data Service]
Mick Eadie (Visual Arts, Farnham College of Art & Design) [formerly of the Arts & Humanities Data Service]
Amy Goring (FACT, Liverpool)
Jackie Hatfield (sadly, Jackie Hatfield died in the course of the funded period, but contributed significantly to conceiving the network) [formerly of REWIND, University of Dundee]
Peter Knott (Director of Arts & Development, Arts Council East Midlands)
Lucy Reynolds (formerly Content Manager, LuxOnline)
Barry Smith (formerly of Capturing the Past, Preserving the Future: Digitisation of the National Review of Live Art Collection, University of Bristol)

Over the 26 month award period, the above current and past participants took part in the six closed facilitatory/brainstorming workshops, the open dissemination/consultation workshop and the conference. Workshops took place in April, September and November (open) 2007; in March, May and November 2008; and in February 2009

The pilot skills training workshop held at FACT:

This was facilitated by Campbell (LuxOnline) and took participants through how to audit their e-resource including: thinking about target audiences, marketing and utilising web stats; possible business models and monetizing content; content strategy and analysis; open source vs commercial software; resource updating; digital asset management; developing collaboration, partnerships and sharing. The workshop was attended by:

Steven Ball (British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, University of the Arts London)
Elaine Burrows, Arts on Film (University of Westminster)
Amy Goring (FACT, Liverpool)
Matt Heath (Bang! Short Film Festival, Nottingham)
Julia Knight (Film & Video Distribution Database, University of Sunderland)
Adam Lockhart (REWIND: Artists' Video in the 70s and 80s, University of Dundee)
Barry Parsons (Capturing the Past, Preserving the Future: Digitising the National Review of Live Art Collection (University of Bristol)
Ali Roche (Picture This, Bristol)
Peter Thomas (Film & Video Distribution Database)

Given the practical nature of the workshop – that participants could work through ideas in relation to their own resource at the workshop, and that they should be able to take practical outcomes away with them at the end of the workshop – numbers were limited to a maximum of 14. In addition to the above, the following were also scheduled to attend, but had to cancel at short notice to illness or other unforeseen commitments: Mark Duguid (ScreenOnline), Nick Lambert (CACHe), James Patterson (Director, Media Archive for Central England, Leicester) and Torsten Reimer (Development Manager, Community Infrastructures and e-Learning, Centre for e-Research, King's College London).

Informal links:

Partly through network activities (especially the FACT workshop and the conference) and partly through network participants' own networking, informal links have been developed with the following:

Elaine Burrows (Arts on Film, University of Westminster)
Stuart Comer (Film Curator, Tate Modern, London)
Ross Harley (University of New South Wales, Australia)
Matt Heath (Bang! Short Film Festival, Nottingham)
Linda Kaye (British Universities Film & Video Council)
Jo Lanyon (Picture This, Bristol)
Steve Mapp (Broadway Cinema and Media Centre, Nottingham)
Stephen Partridge (REWIND: Artists' Video in the 70s and 80s, University of Dundee)
James Patterson (Director, Media Archive for Central England, University of Leicester)
Rick Prelinger (Prelinger Library and Archives, USA)
Torsten Reimer (Development Manager, Centre for e-Research, Kings College London)
Gaby Wijers (Montevideo, Netherlands)

3. An evaluation of how the thematic area has been advanced through the network:

3.1 The main thematic area addressed by the research network was identifying strategies to help ensure the long-term sustainability of the online resources relating to artists' moving image that have been produced both within and outside of academia. We identified three strategies:

(a) Network members, both individually and collectively, to lobby for funding and access to repositories wherever appropriate and possible, both within and outside the academy. The AHRC ICT Programme Report on the Sustainability of Digital Outputs for AHRC Resource Enhancement Projects was published in draft form during the first year of the network (Sept 2007) and the report was welcomed by network members since it echoed many of our concerns and the reasons for setting up the Future Histories research network. The report evidenced that the most secure digital resources – in terms of their sustainability – are those that are firmly embedded within large institutions. Hence access to institutional repositories is key to the issue of e-resource sustainability. While there is greater awareness across a range of sectors of these issues now than when we set up the Future Histories network, progress remains uneven, particularly in HEIs where levels of technical support are still variable.

(b) To adopt a grass-roots/self-help approach by running our own training workshops as and when required, responding to skills/areas of expertise identified by network members that are needed to help sustain our resources and keep them current. Based on our own experiences both inside and outside of academia, it was identified that there was a need for such workshops, which needed to be affordable, oriented to communities of subject interest, and preferably run by practitioners with subject knowledge. A pilot was run (see above) which proved very successful, with unanimously positive feedback. The pilot workshop was task/problem solving orientated and explored ways of developing an entrepreneurial ethos in order to help us sustain our respective projects, rather than offering a global solution to the issue of sustainability. Possible future workshops could address:

- technical and practical issues (metadata, MySQL, CMS)
- marketing/promotion to get resources on course reading lists etc
- metadata descriptions for specific subject areas (such as artists' film and video)
- ethics and IPR issues, addressing for instance how to digitise moving image works while keeping the integrity of the work and sustaining the context/intellectual knowledge that goes with it.

(c) To undertake activities to increase the visibility and public profile of our e-resources in order to build up and expand the user groups for the resources. We discussed a range of possible activities, including:

- setting up an online Future Histories portal either independently or in collaboration/partnership with a high profile national organisation, such as the Tate
- setting up a physical/real world presence to raise awareness of our e-resources, such as a stand at the biennial AV Festival, a Future Histories curated exhibition, or an equivalent to the BFI Mediatheque
- using social networking sites like FaceBook or MySpace
- ensuring effective meta-tagging to create online findability
- getting linked to by existing portals, such as the BUFVC Moving Image Gateway or Intute
- establish methods for pooling and documenting our existing user information and for collecting quantitative data about findability

However, the network agreed the need for dedicated resources to develop these and is now in the process of applying to the Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts scheme for funding to employ a consultant. If the funding application is successful, the consultancy brief will be to audit our existing resources and needs, research further profile raising and audience/user development strategies, and in consultation with network members devise and implement the most productive profile raising activities.

3.2 A secondary thematic area was addressing questions of historiography raised by the large number of emerging digitised/online moving image resources. All the e-resources represented by the membership of the Future Histories research make available material that has previously been difficult to access and this has implications for the kinds of histories of the moving image that can now be written. This issue was primarily explored at the Future Histories of the Moving Image conference, where panels and papers explored cinema itself as a form of database, strategies for online sharing of moving image material, ways of working with online archival footage, re-interpreting socio-political history through newly available footage, constructing moving image archives, and new exhibition possibilities. In addition, conference panels also explored new fields of moving image analysis and history that are emerging as a result of the massive online availability of moving image footage, such as the implications of the YouTube model (particularly for political activism), the unavoidable tension between real world national governments/boundaries and online global moving image distribution, and the emergence of participatory moving image culture and its implications for distribution and exhibition, as well as for production.

However, several of the papers presented at the conference also highlighted the fact that the seemingly massive availability conceals processes of selection and restrictions on access that inform and structure what is uploaded to the web, such as: the use of taster clips, ac.uk access only, copyright, costs of transferring celluloid and video to digital formats, hosting costs, loss/lack of funding, poor meta-tagging/findability, selection criteria, desires to monetise web content, technological obsolescence, unstable file formats, negotiating/navigating through abundance, and loss of voluntary support/labour. These issues in turn fed back into the network workshop discussions in that the ability to develop new histories of the moving rested on access and sustainability of the e-resources. Whilst the network identified strategies that it felt best suited to its own subject area – artists' film and video – there was recognition of the fact that multiple approaches to ensuring sustainability was most likely to secure long-term access to a more diverse moving image culture and facilitate new histories.

In both 3.1 and 3.2 network members have reported that they have taken ideas discussed at the network workshops and fed them into their own teaching, research, practice and resource development.

4. The key advances in understanding that emerged from the discussions:

4.1 When dealing with online e-resource 'archiving' projects and the histories they can facilitate, researchers and resource developers necessarily have to address the paradox of wanting to preserve, sustain, and render permanent a collection of material versus the

inherent impermanence and virtuality of the internet.

4.2 The single most important factor in ensuring the future sustainability of our e-resources is developing and maximising their national and international visibility, thereby building up user groups both within and – wherever possible – beyond academia. It has to be recognised, however, that this is more challenging for some e-resource projects than others due to the nature of the content – some cannot rely on a brand name (as, for example, with the Penguin Archive project) or press coverage/popular interest (as, for example, with The Proceedings of the Old Bailey website). Furthermore, while all e-resources have the potential to make an enormous impact on their interest/research community, the user groups for some e-resources will never constitute a ‘mass audience’. Nevertheless, such resources may have long-term historical and cultural importance beyond their immediate contemporary impact.

4.3 Central to maximising the usage of our e-resources and maintaining user groups is awareness of user needs, particularly maintaining the accuracy and currency of sites so that users will keep returning. At a subject level this is essential in order to maintain both their usefulness and user trust. It is equally important, however, to maintain the web interface in line with technological developments, so that users are not put off by an interface that feels ‘dated’ or ‘clunky’ or difficult to navigate compared to newer sites.

4.4 For the reasons in 4.3 above, it is essential to undertake regular maintenance and development of e-resources, in relation to both the technological delivery platform and the content. Updating content also aids search engine rankings and hence findability. Usually the single largest expense in undertaking this work is the cost of the labour involved, but at the moment there is a dearth of funding available to help meet this cost. While some e-resources have become embedded within institutions, such as HEIs, libraries or museums, that are committed to maintaining the resources, many others have not and are surviving on goodwill, volunteer labour or staff time borrowed from other projects (as demonstrated by the recent AHRC ICT Programme report on the Sustainability of AHRC-funded Resource Enhancement Projects).

4.5 While access to institutional repositories is key to helping ensure the continued availability of e-resources, as yet not all HEIs have institutional repositories. Even in those institutions that do, the level of access can be very uneven – from full open access for internal and external users, though internal access only, to simple off-line back-up storage of data – and does not necessarily support the full functionality of all types of e-resources. Hence in some cases, institutional repositories offer preservation only rather than sustainability and access.

4.6 While technical support within HEIs remains uneven, there is a perceived need for a central support service or agency. Access to such expertise is essential if standardisation and interoperability are to be planned for.

4.7 Sharing of knowledge and skills that are subject specific in relation to development and maintenance of e-resources is crucial to improve useability of the resources, avoid duplication of effort and raise awareness of effective strategies/approaches. Similarly, awareness of the give and take ethos of the online community can assist in maintaining e-resources, so that training or access to courses for instance, can be offered in return for volunteer labour.

4.8 In developing e-resources relating to cultural/creative practice such as artists’ moving image work, it is also essential to consider how to preserve the intellectual context within which the work was produced and circulated. This is crucial in order to facilitate future generations’ understanding of the work and hence the continued usefulness of the resource.

4.9 In most cases collaborating partnerships between HEIs and non-academic institutions with regard to developing e-resources is invaluable and very productive. However, there is little recognition of the time consuming nature of developing and maintaining these relationships and the constraints that can hamper them.

5. Future topics for investigation that were identified:

5.1 How to establish a balance between issues that are best handled at a generic level and those that need subject specific solutions.

5.2 How best to construct and utilise an online portal for subject specific e-resources and establish selection/inclusion criteria for the portal.

5.3 The benefits of membership access models vs open access with regard to artists' moving image e-resources.

5.4 How to establish quantitative methods to evaluate findability

5.5 Establishing methods for pooling user information.

6. Future collaborations or research projects that emerged from the network:

6.1 As detailed in (3) above, the network is in the process of applying to the Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts scheme to employ a consultant. If the funding application is successful, the consultancy brief will principally be to:

- identify any other resources that would be appropriate for inclusion in the existing Future Histories network, and establish criteria for future inclusion
- undertake an analysis of our existing user information to identify low usage groups and new ones that could be developed, as well as how to expand our existing audiences
- identify the needs of existing and potential user groups
- collate information about the needs of the e-resource creators (including networking and training) to enable us to better serve the needs of our user groups
- devise methods for quantifying use, awareness and findability of our e-resources
- establish who else (eg key agencies and organisations) needs to be consulted and undertake that consultation.
- in consultation with network members, devise and implement a strategy to maximise the public profile of the Future Histories network and the sustainability of its members' e-resources.

It is intended that the findings from the consultancy could also form the basis of consultancy to other projects in the process of being set up.

6.2 Participation in the network and its activities (especially the open consultation workshop and conference) helped to generate ideas being used to develop a British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection-based research project around moving image art and the archive. This in part aims to interrogate the nature of the archive in a digital age and the status of moving image artworks in relation to that. The project is a collaboration with the International Centre for Fine Art Research (ICFAR) at the University of the Arts London. To date this has resulted in the 'Idea of the Archive' study day, the 'Archive Table' at the Temporary Host discussion series, and Mutant Logic, a one day symposium around Australian Artists' use and reuse of the archive. It is being developed as a two year practice based project with a funding submission to AHRC currently in preparation.

7. Plans for further development or action:

As noted above and in the End of Award Report the network has developed its own mechanism for sustaining itself. We have planned to continue meeting three times a year, and these meetings will be arranged in locations that minimise travelling for those with least access to funding. The PI and project partner now share network coordination with the current core membership and if member funding permits, meetings would be rotated around members' home venues. This is seen as a way of sharing the workload but also of

information sharing about projects' host organisations/institutions. At the moment further action is focused on completing and submitting the Grants for the Arts application to Arts Council England, but we intend our flexible makeup to enable us to identify and respond to the needs of our members and their resource users as they arise.

8. Recommendations to funders:

A condition of our funding was that 'the outcomes of the workshops will include some definite proposals about how funding agencies might fund sustainability and preservation'. Based on our discussions, we propose that funding agencies:

8.1 Set up schemes which would make smaller sums available to fund clearly identified 'work packets' which update (by maintaining the currency of or expanding) existing content, useability or web presentation. Eligibility could be linked to qualitative criteria designed to demonstrate the impact of the resource – or its potential to have an impact – on the research and/or non-academic community.

8.2 Continue to broker particular generic requirements to a national service, such as: programming, inter-operability between resources, technical updating, migrating data to new technological platforms, generic marketing and promotion issues (eg how to link e-resources into teaching programmes/courses)

8.3 Ensure support and advice is available/easily accessible to facilitate subject specific requirements in relation to developing digital resources, such as: helping people considering developing e-resources to think through a technological approach to their subject matter; learning how to conceptualise/plan projects from the point of view of the users' needs and findability (eg issues of metadata, presentation, dealing with the future etc)

8.4 Fund networks of e-resource projects if they are demonstrably fulfilling a need. This would possibly involve developing other paradigms of funding that do not necessarily require a research question. However, given that off-line/real world activity is as crucial to promoting the visibility and findability of e-resources as good metadata, as well as to the continued accuracy, currency and useability of the resources, relatively small amounts of funding utilised in this way have the potential to significantly raise the profile and increase the use of more specialist e-resources.

8.5. Implement support and advice for HEIs to help them develop institutional repositories to archive a range of e-resources and digital research outputs in a manner that allows open access, full functionality and appropriate intellectual contextualisation.

8.6. Scope out the need for national repository. The AHDS repository/database became embedded in search engines and well-known among the arts and humanities community. Whilst it did not enjoy full functionality for all types of e-resources, it nevertheless significantly aided the findability of a whole range of arts and humanities e-resources.

Julia Knight/15 May 2009

(This report was drawn up in consultation with the project partner, Steven Ball, and the current core membership of the network)