

HUMANITEC initiative to find digital home for scarce material

HUMANITEC and Digital Repository Committee: Institutional repository
Work achieved, 2009 to 2014

Article written by Colin Tredoux, Faculty of Humanities, with the assistance of the committee, UCT Libraries, and grant recipients.

UCT is home to a number of important collections of South African art, photographs, music, audio recordings, and artefacts from a range of disciplines. The enormous increase in worldwide digital connectivity has made it possible for us to share this work with a wide audience: to help preserve South African heritage, and to make it available for research and teaching across the globe. There are of course additional benefits, in particular for the UCT brand: we signal that we have unique collections of great significance, and that part of our scholarship is to make this work accessible to the wider world. We also attract international scholars and students who want to work with the materials we provision. But these valuable collections need to be digitized, and curated for us to have maximum impact.

The significance and need for an institution-wide repository of this kind has been recognized for some time in the Humanities Faculty, and there are several extant initiatives within the Faculty to exhibit and make available its work (see the excellent display at www.arc.uct.ac.za, for instance). The Humanities Information Technology Committee (HUMANITEC) helped found a cross-faculty working group in 2008 to champion a repository, and to bring it into being. The working group met and considered possible models, and took advice from a range of people, including experts from Duke and Rhodes Universities. It worked particularly closely with UCT libraries, and ICTS. In 2010 the working group was awarded a multi-year grant from the Vice-Chancellor's strategic fund.

The model pursued in the four years of the grant has been to separate the intellectual work of getting materials into a digital repository from the purely technical aspects of curation. Monies awarded are used to make awards to applicants for digitization of important materials, on the basis of intellectual justification for the proposed work. Successful applicants do the bulk of the digitisation and meta-coding of materials, consulting closely with the Digitisation and Digital Services of the UCT Libraries. A cross-faculty managing committee oversees the awards, reviewing applications, and making policy and business decisions. In sum, the initiative is intended to unify the multiplicity of digital activity around the university by providing a scalable location where material can be stored and managed. The aspiration of the working group has been to facilitate the intellectual work of others, to widen the lane rather than to congest it. A number of outstanding projects have been funded in this way, and we report their work in brief detail below. UCT Libraries is in the process of creating a showcase for the work, which will be accessible from their new Internet page. The collections can be accessed in 'raw' form through the portal at www.uctscholar.uct.ac.za, or directly at <http://tinyurl.com/nwp68dh>.

1) Repeat photograph of landscapes: Botany Department, Plant Conservation Unit.

Repeat photography is an emerging discipline within the Global Change research community. Staff and students within the Plant Conservation Unit (PCU) use historical photographs to document the extent and rate of change in the vegetation of southern Africa. This in turn,



Photograph on the left of Site 2 in the Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area was taken in 1973 while that on the right was taken in 2013. Copyright CSIR & UCT; honours thesis by Nicola Kuhn, 2013.

is used to contribute to our understanding of land use and how climate change impacts on the ecosystem. The basis for this work is the accessibility of a comprehensive set of

photographs which depict historical southern African landscapes. In this project, which ran over two years, over 4,000 landscape images were digitized, and added to a database now containing over 15,000 items. This is probably the largest collection of its kind in southern Africa.

2) Oral History Audio collections from 1980-2000: Historical Studies. During its



Poster in the CPM collection - interview with Mary Nongauza

existence as a research centre within Historical Studies, the Centre for Popular Memory assembled an oral history and audio archive of first person interviews within the UCT community. This forms an invaluable part of the recording of our country's history through the voices and experiences of people living in South Africa during times of oppression and violence. The audio collections contain over 3000 original interviews, with full text transcriptions and translations. Related material in the form of photographs, journal articles, newspaper clippings and other ephemera are also recorded within the collections inventory.

3) Plant species illustrations: Botany Department, Bolus

Herbarium. The Bolus Herbarium, established in 1865, is the oldest functioning herbarium in the country. Louisa Bolus, niece of the eponymous benefactor, Harry Bolus, served as curator until her retirement in 1955, and she employed two expert botanical artists, Mary Page and Beatrice Carter to illustrate the plants she was studying (the plant family Aizoaceae). Both artists had illustrious careers as Bolus Herbarium artists and together produced more than 2,000 illustrations. These are currently stored as reference works together with the herbarium sheets of the original plants from which the illustrations were produced, and are highly regarded within the world of botanical illustrators and botanists. They are undoubtedly an extremely valuable asset to UCT. This project delivered more than 3,300 scans of original artworks housed in the Herbarium, together with their associated meta-data.



1922 illustration of *Drosanthemum speciosum* by Mary Page

4) **Cape Argus image archive: UCT Libraries.** This significant, under threat and



Alfred Basin, Cape Town harbour, 1900. From Cape Argus collection.

extensive archive of about 850,000 images, now housed at UCT, spans a period from about 1940 – 2000. The archive is housed and managed by UCT Special Collections and has been identified as having highly significant social history and heritage value with a particular connection to Cape Town, the Western Cape and UCT. Topics

range from social conditions in and around Cape Town, key protests in pre- and post-apartheid periods, as well as a broad spectrum of political activity, sport and a very large collection of images on prominent figures (sport, social, political). In this project, the ‘best’ 5,000 images were selected, digitized, and their metadata captured. It complements other collections on the history of Cape Town and the Province in Special Collections at UCT. It intersects with History, Film and Media Studies, Sociology, and African Studies, and is a valuable portal to our regional social history.

5) **Ian Ford Archive: School of Architecture.** After

graduating B.Arch. at UCT, Ian Ford studied landscape architecture at Edinburgh University. Ian's design work includes several highly significant heritage sites - Groot Constantia, Steenberg, Vergelegen (notably the iconic Octagonal Garden), as well as landmark urban developments – St George’s Mall, Thibault Square, Victoria and Alfred Waterfront,



Ian Ford, circa 1961

and the Cape Town International Convention Centre (among others). He was an exceptionally talented designer whose work is a valuable resource, documenting many high profile and culturally significant places. Moreover, many of the drawings are fine examples of technical drafting, illustrating fine hand-crafted skills. The goal of the project was the digitization and archiving of Ian Ford's original landscape architectural presentation and technical drawings - pages of various sizes (A2, A1, A0) as a teaching and learning resource and repository of heritage information.

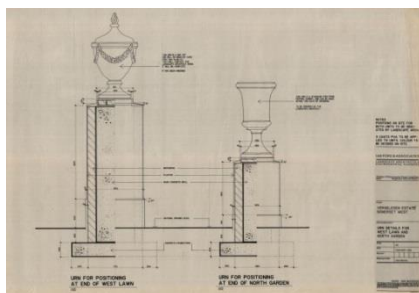
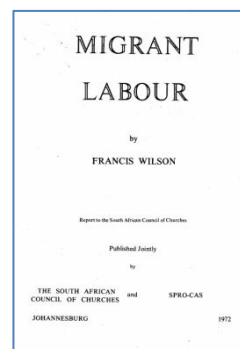


Diagram detail for urn in North Garden, Vergelegen Estate

6) **Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) document archive: School of Economics.**

SALDRU has been producing evidence on South African poverty since it was established in 1975. However, nearly all of SALDRU's work from the apartheid period is available in hard copy only. This work is of huge value as a record of the apartheid period. Particularly important are the papers from the 1976 SALDRU Farm Labour conference, the 292 papers from the Second Carnegie Poverty Conference held in 1984, as well as early titles from SALDRU's

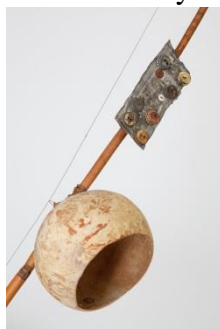


Monograph by Francis Wilson, in SALDRU collection

Working Paper Series. These ground-breaking conferences and working papers set the stage for future quantitative research on poverty in South Africa. This project digitised all SALDRU resources currently only available in hard copy, to provide better long-term access to these for the research community.

7) **Kirby Collection of Musical Instruments: South African College of Music.**

Percival Kirby was an internationally acclaimed historian and musicologist and is



Rattle and gourd resonator on an *nkoka*, a musical bow from Mozambique.

regarded as a pioneer in the field of South African musicology. In the early 1930s, while Professor of Music at the University of the Witwatersrand, he began a study of the musical practices of South African people and became aware that the music of many local communities was disappearing. Through field trips, he built up a large collection of musical instruments made and played by indigenous Southern African groups prior to 1934. This collection of more than 1,000 musical instruments is housed at the South African College of Music. It includes instruments made and played by all indigenous Southern African groups. This project commenced digitization of these artefacts. Items in the collection

were photographed professionally in digital format, and captured to a database, along with high quality metadata. This project aligns centrally with the University of Cape Town's aims of promoting and disseminating excellent research in an Afropolitan niche (in this case, southern African music).

8) **Non-Bantu Click language, Westphal holdings: Centre for African Language Diversity (CALDI)**

Ernst Westphal, Professor of African Languages at UCT from 1962 to 1984, was a



Ernst Westphal

world authority on the non-Bantu Click languages of Southern Africa. The Westphal holdings at the UCT Libraries Special Collections include about 200 audio recordings of various African languages, among them several spoken by San communities. Some of the languages recorded by Westphal in the 1960s and 1970s have since become extinct. These audio recordings are rare, and of critical importance to linguists. The project managed by CALDi, enabled the digital preservation of these recordings, which are on extremely

fragile tapes and shellac. An expert on non-Bantu Click languages, Dr Bonny Sands, assisted in generating scientifically sound metadata to the recordings.