Living Archives and Creative Engagement Online

An EIRA-funded Report on Digital Interactivity in the Arts

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Preface

Every arts organisation founded in the analogue era has to find its digital purpose, making the most of the opportunities to increase reach and depth of engagement. This has come most clearly into focus in 2020 as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the tipping point for digital as an essential medium rather than an optional extra had already been passed.

For performing arts organisations with the greatest resources and running the highest-profile programmes, the solution is clear: stream performances and productions via cinema networks, organisations' own YouTube and Facebook channels, and third-party subscription channels.

Meanwhile, for organisations with smaller budgets and work less heavily weighted towards performance, finding the best way forward is a more complex challenge.

Based at two historic locations on the Suffolk coast of eastern England, Snape Maltings and The Red House, Aldeburgh, Britten Pears Arts is best known as the producer of the internationally renowned Aldeburgh Festival, as one of the leaders in the field of development for musicians, and as an organisation continually expanding the pioneering and progressive vision of its founders, composer Benjamin Britten and his partner, singer Peter Pears.

Over recent years, a key focus for the organisation has been the gradual expansion of its campus, becoming a hub not only for musicians' residencies, but also for interdisciplinary explorations of music's many roles in society, convening artists, health practitioners and scientists, among others.

As Britten Pears Arts prepares to increase the number of residencies and participants on its physical sites, Britten Pears Arts needs to create a robust digital strategy to extend by digital means the reach and engagement of this remarkable work, created in a place that is both inspirational in its beauty and relatively remote in its rural location. We have created a simple 'Digital Campus' as part of our website, where we document the work that is being made here, offering participants support to capture their projects using the most appropriate media and with flexibility around mediated and unmediated approaches.

For Britten Pears Arts, the motivation to partner in this EIRA R&D project has been to explore the horizon of similar initiatives and define ways to develop our digital documentation further. The Digital Campus is rapidly becoming a rich living archive which we hope will interest a number of different groups: our project participants present, past and future; people working in similar areas of practice around the world; and a broader, non-professional audience too. We are highly interested in the extent to which we can build digitally on the communities created around each project and the creative 'collisions' that occur when residencies on the physical site overlap.

Before committing to further investment in digital and online infrastructure, we want to learn from what other organisations are doing and ensure that our future plans are rooted in best practice recommendations. We also, in collaboration with the University of East Anglia, want to share our findings with the sector as a whole.

Shoël Stadlen
Head of Communications, Britten Pears Arts

Introduction

The world of the 21st century Web seems to present unlimited options for recording artistic practice and fostering digital interactivity between artists and audiences across the globe. But is this picture too idealistic, too much indebted to the utopianism of the early Internet?

We suggest in this report that with the ongoing rise of what Nick Srnicek (2017) has dubbed 'platform capitalism', opportunities for online interaction in the performing arts are increasingly being limited to a small number of prevailing social media sites. The digital economy, as Srnicek points out, exerts a hegemonic influence that has its most obvious manifestation in the emergence of the platform — a new business model 'capable of extracting and controlling immense amounts of data' that has given rise to monopolistic firms such as Google and Facebook (2017, 6).

This report begins with a discussion of the theory and practice of documenting performance in the digital age, focusing in particular on the development of online 'living archives'. The living archive model, as Eric Kluitenberg notes, aims at 'the discursive dispersal of the archive' by foregrounding user-generated content and mutability (2020, 387). Employed to document highly charged political events such as the recent Black Lives Matter protests, this model is also relevant for the performing arts, where events are always at risk of being lost owing to their ephemerality. A living archive would piece together 'experiences gained by those present at the actual event, published commentaries and reviews, discussions of the work over time, reinterpretations, controversies, [and] media reports' (Kluitenberg 2020, 388).

Our collaborative project set out to map the possibilities of an online platform that would afford new kinds of creative interaction, establishing a living archive of performances and artist residency projects. Yet what we found as a result of targeted interviews with stakeholders across the sector was that such a space, although enticing, would ultimately not be able to compete for attention with existing social media platforms. Indeed, two major living archive projects that are discussed in this article ultimately failed to provide sustainable spaces for online connectivity.

Such questions about the potential of new digital spaces were brought into particular focus given that this research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. With restrictions put in place to combat the spread of the virus, galleries, museums, and arts organisations turned to the online sphere as a way to open up their collections and events to a wider audience via the Internet. We document some of the successes of this experiment in audience engagement here. But it is worth balancing this excitement surrounding new forms of online possibility with Srnicek's caution over what he portrays as 'a tendency towards monopolisation... built into the DNA of platforms' (2017, 95). As users spend more and more of their time online for work or recreation, they contribute to the economy of these platforms, in turn increasing the likelihood that their spaces will come to dominate our digital mediascape.

Research Questions

To orientate the project's aims and scope, we focused on three questions:

1. How do arts organisations in the UK use digital technology to cultivate interaction among artists and encourage the documentation of work?

2. Which approaches to digital dissemination and creative interaction work best to foster audience engagement online in the 21st century?

3. How do UK arts organisations deal with work in progress and intellectual property rights in a contemporary online environment?

Methodology

This project used a mixed-method approach involving three main areas of activity. First, a horizon scan of current online platforms was pursued in consultation with Britten Pears Arts. Second, a critical literature review of the fields of performance documentation, digital archiving, and audience engagement was undertaken. Third, a series of targeted interviews with stakeholders across the UK arts sector took place. Finally, a draft of this report was read, revised, and agreed with Britten Pears Arts.

Case Studies and Interviews

The following case studies were selected in consultation with Britten Pears Arts; interviews were conducted and transcribed by Patrick Young on behalf of Britten Pears Arts. Transcribed excerpts can be found in the Appendix to this report.

Britten Pears Arts Digital Campus
– Matthew Jolly, Digital Manager, Britten Pears Arts (30 September 2020)

Battersea Arts Centre 'Scratchr'
– Katherine Jewkes, Freelance Digital Producer (23 October 2020)

Pervasive Media Studio at Watershed, Bristol
– Luke Emery, Studio Community Lead, Pervasive Media Studio (13 October 2020)

Somerset House Studios
– Eleanor Scott, Senior Digital Producer, Somerset House (29 October 2020)

British Music Collection, run by Sound and Music
– Heather Blair, Creative Project Leader, British Music Collection (12 October 2020)

– Alex Noble, Executive Administrator, Sound and Music (12 October 2020)

The Hub at Wellcome Collection
– Sarah Ewans', Associate Director, Heart n Soul (5 October 2020)

– Justin Spooner, Digital Associate, Heart n Soul (5 October 2020)

Documenting Performance

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance... Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as 'different'. The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present (Phelan 1993, 146).

This declaration was made by the influential performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan in her 1993 book Unmarked: The Politics of Performance. Performance, Phelan stresses, 'becomes itself through disappearance' — not only comes into being as a kind of inevitable disappearance, but also is perhaps made beautiful as such, as something ephemeral and evanescent. Attempting to archive or document performance, then, would seem to be an ineffectual or redundant pursuit.

But, as Philip Auslander notes in an article responding to the kind of claims that Phelan makes, this is emphatically not the case. Following Phelan's lead, we have tended to think of the relationship between performance and its documentation as representing an ontological difference — performance always necessarily in the moment, preceding any attempt at documentation, which turns the event into a thing, reifies it. What Auslander argues is that this presumption is in fact 'ideological' and based on the illusory concept of 'liveness' (2006, 2008; see also Giannachi and Westerman 2018). Performance artists, he points out, became aware early on of the necessity of staging their work for the camera as much as for a live audience.

The idea of liveness, in other words, is established through process of technological mediatisation. Documentation becomes part of the very fabric of the work itself, and vital to its apparent ephemerality. Indeed, Auslander's suggestion is that the documentation of performance is in fact another kind of nested performance: 'the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such'. Acts of documentation, in short, are inherently performative. 'Performance art documentation', Auslander claims, 'participates in the fine art tradition of the reproduction of works rather than the ethnographic tradition of capturing

events' (2006, 5, 6). What Auslander ultimately shows is that the most significant relationship is not between audience and live event, then, but between an audience and the documentation that seeks to establish this performance as a performance.

The decades since Phelan's book have seen a remarkable proliferation of interest in performance documentation spurred on by the possibilities presented by new digital technologies and the shift to a more user-orientated or participatory Web 2.0. From the notion that performance and the archive are necessarily at odds — one transient and embodied, the other static and textual — have emerged ideas such as 'living archives' and 'performing archives'. The latter is a term that Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade use to indicate 'the moment or situation where the archive is transformed into a dynamic and self-reflective medium' (2013, 25–6). Similarly, David Carlin and Laurene Vaughan (2015) use the concept of a 'living archive' to identify a new paradigm beyond mere acts of conservation, denoting a shift from the recording of an event to a dynamic articulation of current practice drawing on new forms of public engagement and interactivity.

Such ideas arose from the pioneering development of a Circus Oz Living Archive, an interface that sought to assist in the preservation and cultivation of circus skills by opening up performances to an online audience for remarks and annotations, allowing 'performers, as well as expert and lay publics, to view, comment upon, annotate and discuss specific circus acts and routines'. These interactive spaces in which knowledge is contributed by users across the globe who then become part of the archive itself, they note, are hence always 'in a constant state of evolution and adaptability' (Vaughan et al 2013, 145, 152).

Another pioneering project in the field of living archives was the Battersea Arts Centre's digital 'Scratchr' interface, developed at a similar time in London. This was, as Jonathan Mandell describes it, 'an online platform designed to plug into existing social networks to increased audience feedback to theatrical works in progress' (2013, 78). Most significant was its attempt to push beyond the use of social media for marketing purposes and employ its unique affordances to drive and inspire creativity. The platform was designed to elicit public feedback via online updates, videos, and interactive tools at an unusually early stage of the creative process — including ideas that could then be selected for further refinement and developed into theatre pieces. As a result, Scratchr evolved into a platform for identifying and subsequently commissioning new work, democratizing the commissioning process and encouraging the earlier and more open sharing of work-in-progress material (see Fig. 1).

As a report on the platform by Eric Meyer and Isis Hjorth points out, however, many audience members did not wish to be involved with the creative process in this way — those who did tended to be fellow practitioners rather than the general public. Meyer and Hjorth suggest that it is therefore not necessary for such a tool to engage everyone equally: 'attempting to do so carries a risk of creating a platform that in trying to be fit for all purposes instead becomes fit for none' (2013, 72). Instead, they maintain that arts organisations need to experiment with a wide range of approaches to public engagement. Their report on the Scratchr project identified transferable lessons that still speak to arts organisations today. These include:

– **New technology projects need to clarify interests, motivations, and expectations amongst collaborators early in the development of the new technology.**

– **Technology use and usability are different things; to fully succeed, technologies must do more than function according to spec — they must be usable by the intended participants.**

– **Language and jargon can be a barrier, so identifying individuals who can span boundaries and speak the jargon of multiple partners should be a priority.**

– **Audiences are diverse, and meeting their widely varying expectations is both a challenge and an opportunity for unanticipated ways to engage new audiences.**

– **Organisations comfortable with risk and experimentation can carry those values into experimenting with technology. (Meyer and Hjorth 2013, 5-6)**

Living archives, they note, present a host of unexpected challenges beyond those encountered by traditional archivists — from collaborations across the boundaries of humanities and computer science to the composite interests of an online audience.

IDEA
Story/Vision/Challenge

PLANNING
Plan idea to a point
where it can be tested

TEST
Experiment/Creative Risk

FEEDBACK
Listening/Gathering responses

ANALYSIS
Filtering/Deciphering feedback

TIME
Space to think about
something else

SCRATCH

Figure 1: The 'Scratch' model developed by Battersea Arts Centre
www.batterseaartscentreblog.com/2018/03/22/uncommon-ground

Despite the multitude of possibilities opened up in a digital world, however, living archives have not tended to succeed as anticipated. Soberingly for creative digital innovators, neither the Circus Oz Living Archive (archive.circusoz.com) nor Battersea Arts Centre's Scratchr (scratchr.net) are at present operational or even available to view. Unlike many conventional archives, online spaces carry the risk that they will simply and silently disappear. A key issue in the building and subsequent maintenance of such digital platforms is hence sustainability. In the next section we address why such projects have tended to fail. This will involve turning from a focus on the utopian possibilities of digital technology to assist in generating archives and interactivity to the pragmatics of online audience engagement.

Indeed, putting the online audience first or at least on an equal footing with artists in the development of any such platform is vital. As Ben Walmsley has recently pointed out, there is a widespread ambivalence surrounding audiences in the performing arts: 'audiences have been systematically, and sometimes cynically, sidelined, undermined and alienated by scholars, artists, managers, producers, arts organizations,

policymakers, and society more broadly'. He argues for 'a more sustained, more authentic, more relational, and ultimately more effective engagement with audiences', acknowledging that 'digital communications technologies are giving audiences more agency than ever before to signal and tailor their leisure and entertainment preferences' (Walmsley 2019, 2, 5-6). What he advocates for, impelled by a democratic political philosophy underpinned by empirical research, is a shift in emphasis from dissemination from on high towards the cultivation of perspectives from below. Such a focus aligns with the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière (2009, 2017) — in particular, his concept of the 'emancipated spectator' that strives to underscore the historically overlooked capacities of the population at large.

We might follow Walmsley in calling this approach 'audience-centricity' — that is, 'placing audiences at the heart of artistically led and artistically vibrant organizations, and engaging them actively in all aspects of organizational activity'. Such a perspective seeks to promote an open culture of artistic exchange in which audiences are no longer passive recipients, but active partners.
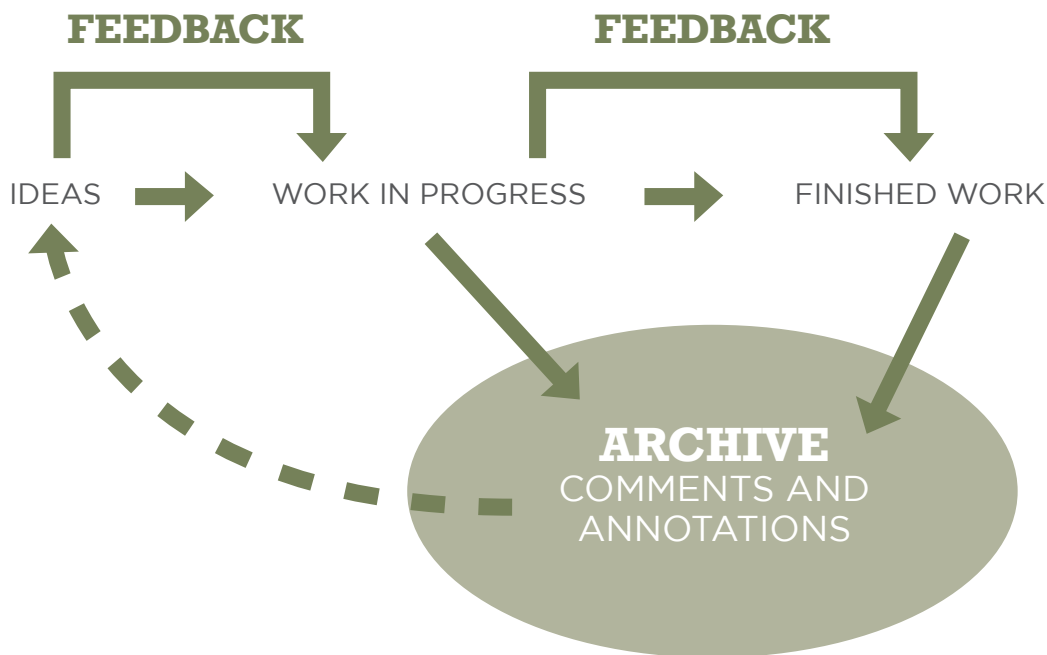
FEEDBACK   **FEEDBACK**

IDEAS ➤ WORK IN PROGRESS ➤ FINISHED WORK

ARCHIVE
COMMENTS AND
ANNOTATIONS

Figure 2: The 'living archive' model of online audience engagement

Bespoke digital spaces would seem to offer the ideal opportunity to deliver this vision of an open social forum allowing audiences to participate more fully in the performing arts and drawing them 'into the future creative life of an artist or organization' (Walmsley 2019, 234, 10). As he demonstrates through a case study involving online engagement with dance, such interfaces cultivate a surfeit of positive outcomes: 'responsive digital platforms can democratize critical exchange; foster slower, more reflective critique; and positively shift perceptions of unfamiliar artforms amongst non-attenders' (2016, 66). The result is not only positive in relation to the arts themselves (encouraging deeper connections between artists, arts organisations, and the public), but also in relation to broader interpersonal skills and even the nurturing of empathy among participants.

So where does this leave, or take, us? From the literature on performance documentation and audience engagement, we can discern a shift in archiving practices since the 1980s towards what Simon Popple et al refer to as 'a more fluid and pluralistic conception of archives that better reflects the diversity of the societies that create them' (2020, 1). We have witnessed the rise not only of 'participatory archives' (Benoit and Eveleigh 2019), but also what Libby Smigel calls 'artist-driven archiving' (Smigel 2016; see also Ribeiro et al 2017), in which artists are encouraged to take an active role in documenting their own work.

As Toni Sant points out, contemporary archiving involves a turn away from seeing 'document' as a noun towards 'a verb describing the act of creating and collecting documents' — an active process of storing things with the intent to do more than simply conserve or sequester them (Sant 2014, 6; Sant 2017). In this model, feedback from the public is central to the process in which an idea becomes a work in progress, and then a finished piece. Artists respond to this feedback at each stage, archiving their creative journey on a digital platform where further comments and annotations are then elicited from users. Finally, these discussions may inspire new ideas, beginning the cycle again (see Fig. 2).

Platforms in an Evolving Mediascape

But this ideal vision of audience engagement imagined through the living archive model, as we have already touched upon, is increasingly being forced to confront the changing mediascape of the 21st-century Internet.

Figure 3: Britten Pears Arts 'Digital Campus'

As Walmsley concedes in relation to the dance case study mentioned above, 'it proved challenging to maintain engagement amongst online participants' through an interactive platform called Respond designed specifically for this purpose (2016, 66). This section turns from a review of the literature to a discussion of current digital practice in arts management and online audience engagement, drawing on a series of interviews with stakeholders involved with a variety of UK arts organisations. Where sources are not cited below, the quotations come from these interviews (see Appendix for further information).

Our project partner Britten Pears Arts launched an open-access Digital Campus (see Fig. 3) in early September 2019 as a prototype online platform designed, as Digital Manager Matthew Jolly explains, 'with the initial intention of presenting work that happens during artists' residencies, and fostering conversations around that work'. Developed under the working title of a 'living archive' using Wordpress, this website presents an ideas-led interface arranged by recurrent themes, offering a cross-section of activity particularly focused on the Residency Open Sessions. The primary aim was to encourage artist-led interactivity while fostering audience engagement.

Taking inspiration from the functionality of external platforms such as Medium and Soundcloud, the Digital Campus provides a space where the public can comment upon elements of a project or work arranged by a limited number of tags. The analytics for these tags during the first year of operation (a period that includes the first UK COVID-19 lockdown beginning in March 2020) are as follows:

music-for-health-and-wellbeing	131
music-and-theatre	65
developing-new-work	52
music-for-community	51
old-music-reimagined	43
interactive-performance	40
music-influenced-by-current-events	36
music-influenced-by-science	33
professional-development-for-musicians	11
improving-musicians-health-and-wellbeing	6
sound-design	6
building-an-installation	1
extended-recording-techniques	1
interdisciplinary-arts	1

Figure 4: An excerpt from the British Music Collection's extensive tag cloud

Only one tag has gained over 100 views, largely owing to the pandemic and an intensified interest in health and wellbeing. The majority attracted fewer than 50 views, and several fewer than 10 despite the widespread move into the digital sphere during this period. Whereas these tag options are fixed by Britten Pears Arts, other organisations have developed a different approach. The British Music Collection (a discovery platform for contemporary music in the UK run by Sound and Music), for instance, has adopted an artist-led 'free tagging' approach that seeks to be more autonomous and democratic — though faces other difficulties such as variations on the same tag, metaphoric descriptors, gaps, and a surfeit of minority themes (see Fig. 4).

Britten Pears Arts encountered further problems with their Digital Campus platform in its current state, as Jolly points out: 'the commenting isn't working at all, as no one wants to do it, either through lack of clarity or lack of interest'. The British Music Collection encountered similar issues, removing a commenting function once integrated into their website owing to a lack of engagement. In Heather Blair and Alex Noble's view, however, this lack of engagement in fact stemmed from their large social media presence on Twitter, which tended to divert public attention away from the commenting functions originally embedded in their website. This suggests that online audiences are far more likely to use existing channels to discuss and interact with new work than to comment directly on the websites of individual arts organisations. It is a view confirmed by Eleanor Scott of Somerset House, a major centre for the creative arts in London, who notes that as they fast-tracked their digital presence during lockdown there was 'no need to develop a chat room functionality on our own site when the user experience is optimised on these pre-existing sites'.
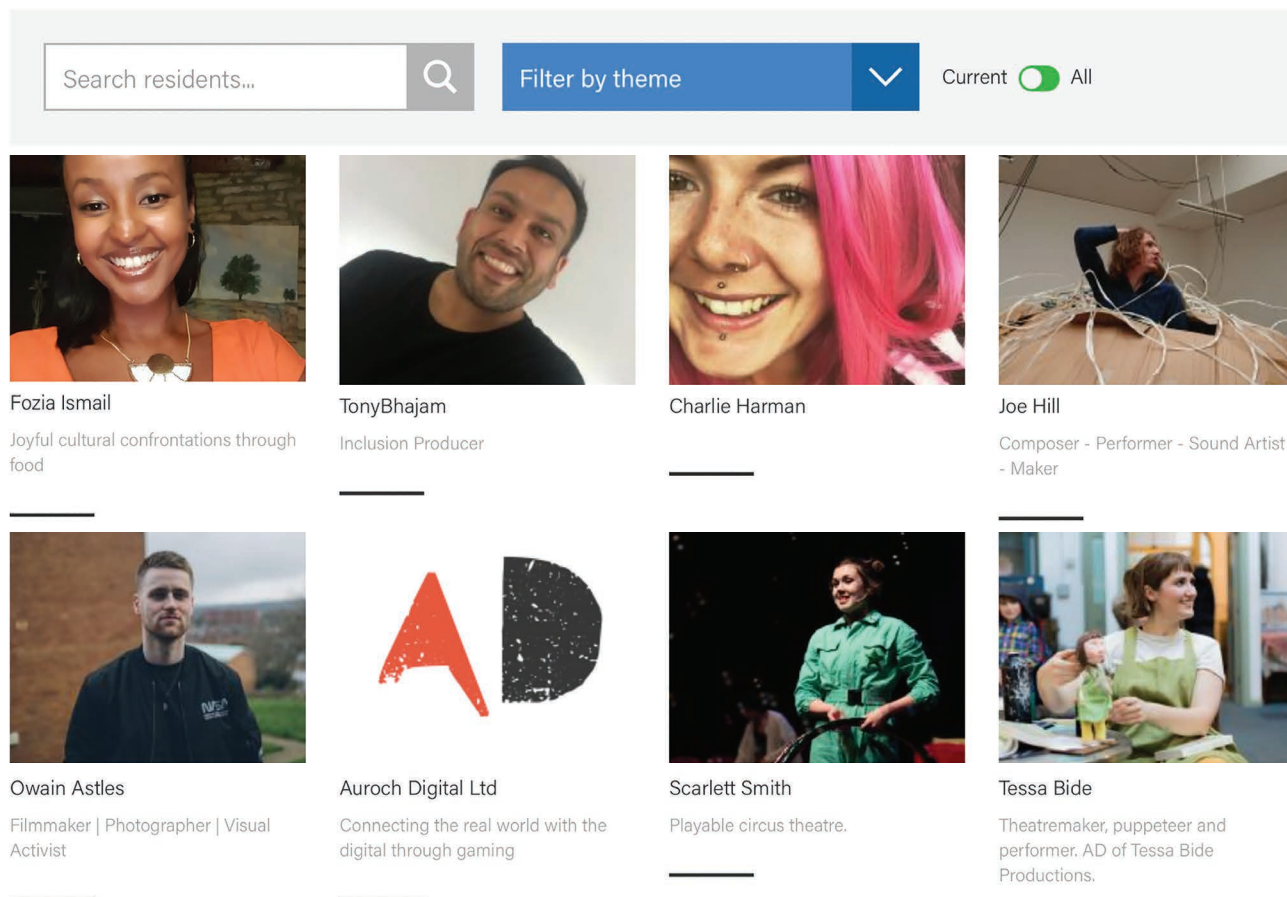
Figure 5: Pervasive Media Studio's 'Residents' page

Bristol-based arts research and development hub Pervasive Media Studio (based at Watershed) have likewise acknowledged that their website is essentially a 'database and record' signposting its activities to the public 'as opposed to a platform we are trying to generate a high traffic rate towards', as Luke Emery points out. Featuring artist-generated profiles (Fig. 5), this website has tabs for 'residents' and 'projects' organised via a clear graphic layout filtered by a set of themes including 'cities', 'connected objects', and 'play'. To facilitate dialogue between residents, Emery notes, Pervasive Media Studio initially set up a 24-7 Google Hangouts channel, 'but quickly found that this doesn't work' as there would rarely be enough people in the room at one time. Although they moved to using digital tools such as Zoom to engage artists around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, they encountered familiar issues relating to digital fatigue — an awareness 'that constant video calls… can be really bad for mental health because you are always viewing an approximation of reality', reminding users of the absence of proximate physical interaction.

What has proved more effective, however, has been moving their Friday lunchtime talks programme online during the pandemic. What used to attract a physical audience of no more than 30 people is now open to audiences across the globe via YouTube and has gained around 10,000 views in fewer than six months. In particular, the YouTube chat function has assisted interactive questions during these talks, though they have found audience engagement to be somewhat unpredictable. Emery notes that this shift online in turn had an effect on the nature of the talks themselves — this new permanence driving a move away from informal discussion towards ideas-focused 'provocation talks' and an emphasis on presenting completed research.

ASSEMBLY 2020 PROGRAMME

Read more ∨
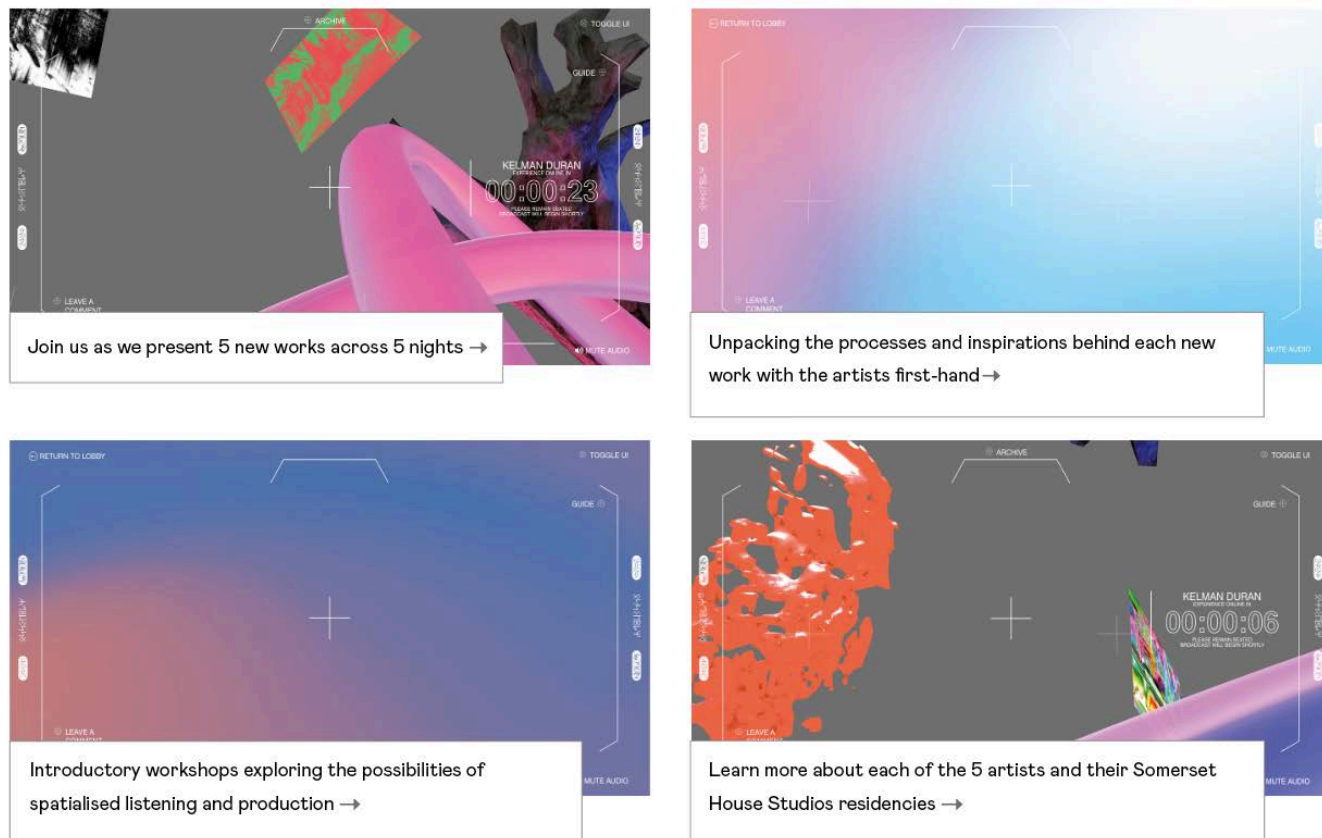
Figure 6: Somerset House's 2020 Assembly Festival homepage
https://www.assembly2020.co

Another success story with regard to work being forced online due to COVID-19 restrictions has been Somerset House's annual ASSEMBLY festival (see Fig. 6). Though set to take place in real life, the programme was moved online via an innovative virtual reality microsite and a programming structure that set out to mirror a live performance event. The aspiration, as Senior Digital Producer Scott puts it, was to make this microsite the equivalent of a venue, with events taking place each night over one week and a live online talk to help drive audiences to this new virtual space:

We premiered ASSEMBLY works at 7 each evening, with a countdown to release and chat function for the release to foster a sense of community and sense of experience watching something alongside other people. The work would be available to midday the following day and then the countdown would begin for that day's premier. This model meant we could give focus to each artist's work, their practice and process.

Platforms in an Evolving Mediascape

These interactive works featuring cutting-edge spatial sound and 360-degree video were later archived online and remain available for a year. What seemed to be most effective overall was the feeling that with these live online events everyone was encountering the work simultaneously across the world, more like a physical audience. Along with moments such as Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' broadcast of their album Ghosteen for the first time on YouTube in October 2019, this suggests that online events can engender new forms of community, intimacy, and liveness.

The challenges encountered by these organizations have tended to revolve not only around audience engagement, but also the practicalities of digital content production (not always built into artist residency programmes) and a general reluctance among artists to present their works in progress online in case they are confused with the final outcome or succumb to digital permanency.

As Blair and Noble attest, artists are generally reticent to showcase anything other than the finished article. Although a diversity of opinion exists: Scott points out that 'different artists are willing to share different parts of their creative process for different amounts of time', but Jolly also found the hesitance to give open access to their creative process a significant obstacle. As Justin Spooner and Sarah Ewans of the creative arts charity Heart n Soul point out with regard to their residency at London's Wellcome Hub, careful selection is vital. Documentation, they argue, should be 'a creative team process' in which attention is direction to the 'magic moments' in a project and what 'conveys the story the best'. Their residency is another example of an organisation finding creative ways to present material online – in this case, through an interactive tour of a gallery (Fig. 7).
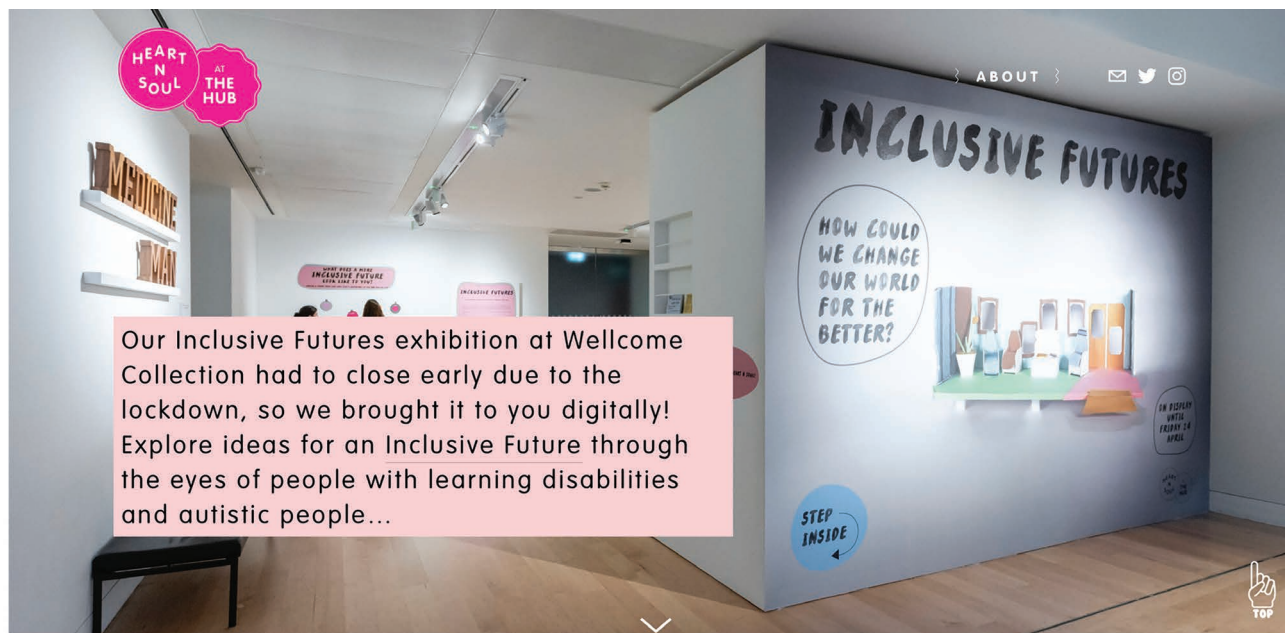

Figure 7: Online exhibition as part of Heart n Soul's residency at the Wellcome Hub
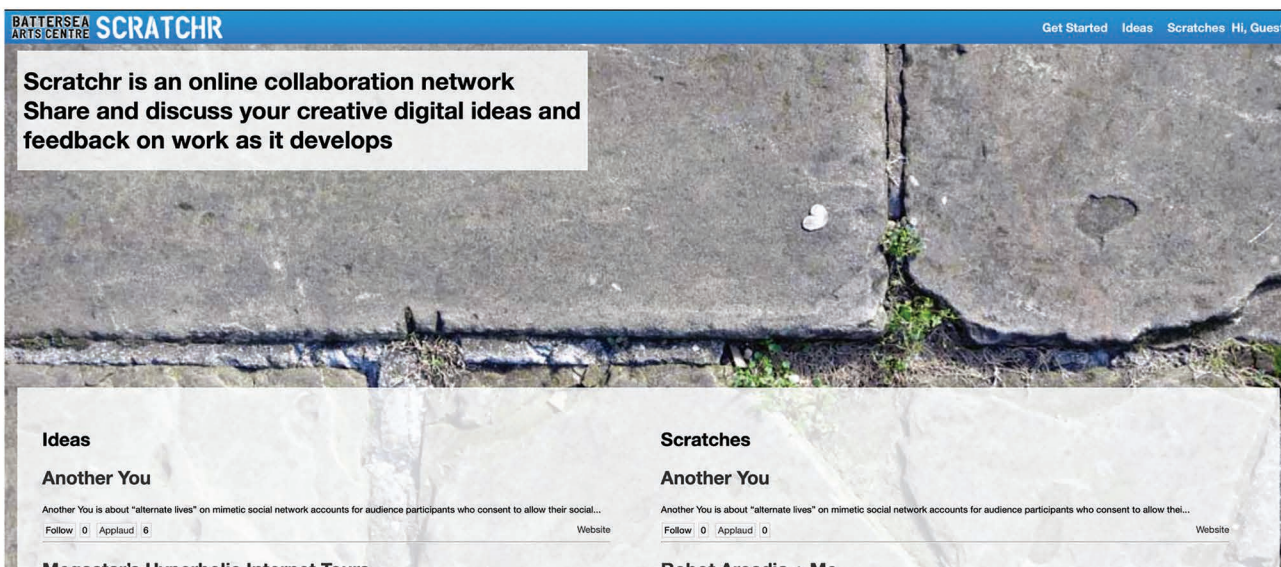
Figure 8: Battersea Arts Centre's 'Scratchr' page as it was in 2015 (via Wayback Machine)

The freelance digital producer Katherine Jewkes, who worked on Battersea Arts Centre's prototype Scratchr interface discussed earlier (Fig. 8), has developed a productive framework for thinking about this process. Her vision of digital strategy in the arts revolves around three strands: create, extend, and communicate. *Create*, for Jewkes, describes when something digital 'is inherently embedded into the fabric of the work, anything from projection mapping a waterfall to making a VR app'. In short, it is about 'using a technology in an interesting way within the work itself'. An example would be the immersive VR environment of the ASSEMBLY festival this year. Extend involves taking a core idea and using 'technology to share it with a wider audience', for instance by live streaming or tweeting one word of a poem each day. Finally, Communicate is 'thinking about how to cluster and build a community around your ideas' and find 'ways to foster a network who feel part of the organisation and are able to impact the direction of work'. In the Scratchr project, although the aim was to disseminate work online, they found that 'what was more interesting was the Create strand' – exploring new ways to use technology within the works themselves.

Jewkes gives a number of important reasons for the failure or digital obsolescence for why the Scratchr platform wasn't taken further, following the completion of the R&D prototype. In 2009, she reminds us, 'the tech and digital landscape was completely different'. No arts organisations were then live streaming, as the concept was only just being pioneered via Apple's HTTP Live Streaming protocol. It would take until 2013 for YouTube to launch a public live-streaming platform, followed in 2015 by the American app Periscope (acquired by Twitter), and the unveiling of Facebook's live-streaming API in 2016. The National Theatre was one of the first arts organisations to explore live broadcasting around this time, though few such institutions were utilising digital avenues successfully, generating interest among the tech sector given the prospect of funding for exploratory digital development in the arts. The Scratchr team had attempted to build something similar to current social media live video — what amounted to a radical step at the time. As Jewkes recalls, 'there would be a video and then a chat function, and there could be a live virtual audience'. But because 'none of the artists were familiar with short video content creation' they found it 'stressful to add this to the mix' during the creative process.

The overriding problem is that the technology made for Scratchr is now effectively redundant. This has primarily been due to the ever-increasing ascendancy of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn, and (more recently) Instagram, Whatsapp, Snapchat, Viber, and TikTok. A number of other sites including Reddit, Pinterest, Tumblr, Flickr, and Vimeo have also usurped the vast majority of online interactivity, along with their international equivalents in China, such as WeChat, QZone, and Baidu Tieba. These platforms attest to the rise of the smartphone from early 2007, when Apple introduced the first-generation iPhone, as well as to what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) calls 'the age of surveillance capitalism' — a newly pervasive economic logic predicated on the corporate hijacking of personal experience for the sake of ever-more-powerful behavioural prediction products.

Jewkes remarks that 'if I was engaging in the Scratchr project again I wouldn't compete for comments with the dominance of the social media platforms that already exist'. It is very difficult, she points out, to drive Internet traffic towards new websites, 'so keeping all your assets (artists) in a curated way on your website feels reductive'; what is needed is 'to think more about how you can blow your own organizational work out of your own website' into the broader online sphere. Restricting artists' work and public interactivity to only one platform, in other words, feels increasingly conservative or unwise in a sphere dominated by sophisticated social media tools with billions of networked users across the globe. 'People have so many spaces they can give their opinions online', Jewkes states, that 'commenting functions on arts organisation platforms won't get engagement'; instead, 'successful arts organisations work across different social channels and maintain one voice'.

What those involved with Scratchr learned in the process of developing the platform was to incorporate social networking functions into the site by, for instance, encouraging artists to write a blog about their work and share media-rich content: 'If you have a writer get them to do lots of Medium posts. If you have someone who wants to experiment with film, then put it out on film platforms (YouTube, Vimeo).' Jewkes's strategy is thus to invest in 'skills and artists rather than technical web development' with the intent to share content across existing social forums using a cohesive branding that identifies it with one organisation. Vital to such a process is full and accurate metadata tagging, cross-posting, and an awareness of how users engage with social media — an example being the need to add subtitles to Facebook video content as the majority of people browse the newsfeed without sound.

Ultimately, Jewkes argues in favour of arts organisations becoming 'platform agnostic' about content generation. Individual arts platforms should instead act 'as a gathering space but not the final destination' of a project. Although showcasing work in progress online can sometimes be 'a psychological barrier for artists' and 'nothing to do with the platform', she notes, such issues can be overcome through clearly defined intellectual property clauses in commissioning agreements (including assigning first rights of exploitation to the host organisation) and by commissioning an external partner (a filmmaker, for instance) to document residency projects. She stresses the importance of creating new roles such as 'digital producer' or 'digital dramaturg' within arts organisations that would bring in technical expertise within the field of audience engagement, online behaviour, and design functionality. Alongside such roles, she suggests, organisations should aim to make a wide range of digital resources available to artists in the spaces being used, encouraging the integration of such tools into their project from the outset. The most important lesson from the Scratchr project, she notes, was that arts organisations should focus less on website development than on putting 'raw digital tools and expertise at the disposal of residency artists'.

Conclusion

There is a fundamental divergence between an ideal vision of audience engagement based on a living archive model and the pragmatics of an online sphere dominated by major tech corporations and powerful social media platforms.

These platforms have effectively ushered Internet users into a small number of defined spaces and used their resources to keep them coming back for more — in turn, driving their revenues and the sale of lucrative behavioural predictions products (Zuboff 2019). To compete for people's attention in this brave new world of surveillance capitalism is tough.

The attractions of a solution that involves, for example, a new interface bursting with creative design innovation, are clear. But in the current environment, such a website would be expensive, outmoded, and essentially unsustainable. It transpires that not many people from outside the relevant scenes actively engage with individual living archives. And in a few years, as we have seen in relation to both Circus Oz and Scratchr, nobody can look at them, let alone use them. We thus reach an impasse where the utopianism inherent in Ben Walmsley's vision of audience engagement clashes with the pragmatism of the approach advocated by Katherine Jewkes.

However, the situation is not as bleak as it may seem. As Somerset House and other UK arts organisations have demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, the online world offers a wide array of options for interactivity — from the development and sharing of residency-specific microsites and virtual gallery spaces to the hosting of online talks and festivals. Resident artists working with the producers interviewed were keen to document their finished work as a promotional tool, though less keen to share work in progress online at an earlier stage of the creative process. Sharing such work digitally may be most successful when they are presented as one-off live-streamed events, replicating the transient nature of an event in the physical world.

Yet these moments of interaction are increasingly reliant on a mediascape and digital infrastructure shaped by the demands of competition within a digital platform economy. If they are to succeed, arts organisations need to blend their use of technology with the power of current social media in order to foster audience engagement, sharing their content widely and harnessing existing commenting functions rather than attempting to draw audiences to their own individual websites. As hubs for artists in residence, these sites can exert a centripetal force on online interaction at the same moment as they generate a centrifugal dissemination of content through existing channels. As they do so, they remind us of the extent to which we provide the material for an economic revolution fuelled by data.

Recommendations

Based on the research undertaken, we make the following recommendations:

Technology

1. Arts organisations need to harness the power of existing and future social media platforms and their commenting features. This might involve live streaming, sharing individual microsites, and the curation of online festivals. Such content should be branded so that it is identifiable as the product of one coherent entity.

2. Online accessibility is essential. This will involve making content mobile-friendly, providing detailed metadata tags, and the use of video subtitles. Arts organisations need to be 'platform agnostic' in their approach to content generation.

3. The technology and infrastructure used to archive work and projects online should be sustainable. Investment will be required to maintain any website and increase storage capacity over time, including provision of backup facilities.

Artists

4. Content must be shared and archived with the express consent of all involved, with rights clauses clearly outlined as part of the commissioning process. The imaginative potential of Creative Commons could be explored further.

5. Creative documentation of residency projects requires a new digital content production role within organisations; that is, investment in a dedicated post. This process might also involve commissioning filmmakers to record work in progress.

6. Investment should be directed towards further cultivation of digital literacy among artists. Digital tools should be made available as part of any project, encouraging artists to incorporate them into their creative process from an early stage.

7. Organisations should be sensitive to the challenges presented by documenting work in progress, understanding that project participants are keen to get feedback on unfinished work, but wary of it being made permanently accessible. For many artists, the goal will be promotional assets to be shared across social media platforms.

Audience Engagement

8. Arts organisations should aspire towards what Ben Walmsley (2019) calls 'audience-centricity' in their approach to engagement, i.e. placing audiences at their heart and drawing them into the future life of the organisation.

Further Research

9. Further research in collaboration with arts organisations would be of benefit to the broader cultural sector and the field of digital humanities alike, in areas including: artists' experiences and perspectives; IPR, work-in-progress and open access; changing audience behaviour and interactivity online.

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Appendix

Selected transcriptions of interviews undertaken
by Patrick Young of Britten Pears Arts in 2020.

Britten Pears Arts Digital Campus

Interviewee: Matthew Jolly (MJ), Digital Manager,
Britten Pears Arts (30 September 2020).

*The Digital Campus was released as a prototype
web page on the Snape Maltings website in
September 2019. The intention of releasing it in
prototype form was to both harness engagement
analytics to the ideas-led interface and gain
understanding of how project content creation fits
within Britten Pears Arts' organisational structure
and music programmes. The latter is important in
deciphering the relation between Digital Campus
content and programme-specific web page content.
The same content can exist on both programme-
specific pages and the Digital Campus, therefore a
distinction has to be drawn between the intended
audience for these separate elements to the Snape
Maltings site. While the programme-specific pages
are tailored towards artists with content being
detail- and information-led, the Digital Campus
is intended to be publicly focused with an
ideas-led interface.*

PY: Please outline the background to the Digital
Campus design and the ideas-led interface.

MJ: The current version of the Digital Campus
has always been a prototype to explore what
works and what doesn't. An ideas-led interface
allows producers and audience to distil content by
recurring themes. This then makes the interface less
programme specific and provides a cross-section of
Britten Pears Arts activity.

The Digital Campus audience are people who are
interested in music, how it is created and what
other applications it has. [We] wanted to design an
interface which encouraged interactivity between
users interested in the same ideas and themes...
fostering conversations around work under
these themes.

PY: How have you found ideas-led metadata
tagging, the commenting functionality and
Digital Campus content creation in practice
over the last year?

MJ: [We] wanted to use WordPress' ability for
tagging, the three types of metadata we wanted
to populate were programmes, ideas and artists
involved. Part of the benefit of using these
metadata tags is that they are transferable to
a new system.

[We] wanted to facilitate as much specificity to
the commenting feature as possible. [We] took
inspiration from Medium, where you can highlight a
certain phrase within prose and create a comment
thread. The commenting isn't working at all as no
one wants to do it, either through lack of clarity or
lack of interest. [We] want to persevere with the
ideas-led filter as means of project differentiation,
we believe these will become more effective with
greater audience engagement. The projects and
programmes at Britten Pears Arts aren't siloed and
we want to continue to externally represent cross-
organisation interaction through these ideas tags.

Asking producers to create content for the Digital
Campus has downfalls, because digital content
production is secondary to their involvement with
that project. We have looked to bring in external
people to create Digital Campus content as much as
possible, to facilitate innovation. We have bought in
external illustrators, journalists, filmmakers, bloggers
for content production. This has raised the question
of whether content production for the Digital
Campus needs to become an internal job role.

Battersea Arts Centre 'Scratchr' platform

Interviewee: Katherine Jewkes (KJ), Freelance
Digital Producer (23 October 2020)

*The Scratchr website launched on 31 August 2012.
Scratchr was built on WordPress and released in
the beta phase of development to allow artists to
experiment and play with the functionalities and
digital tools. The web development would then
evolve in an agile way to cater and respond to
artist's needs and engagement.*

PY: Please outline the successes of Scratchr and
what you learned from delivery of the project.

KJ: What we were trying to build then has similarities to social media's current live video. There would be a video and a chat function, and there would be a live virtual audience. At the time this was quite radical. Scratchr was more of a delivery platform for streaming content. We realised we needed to incorporate the social network aspect, allowing artists to write a blog about what they are making or share some photos. At the time, we wanted to stitch together lots of different social network tools and create one central space. A lot of the tech made for Scratchr is now irrelevant. The digital landscape is so different now, if I was engaging in the Scratchr project again I wouldn't compete with the dominance of the social media platforms that already exist.

You cannot prescribe digital outcomes to artists, but if you make digital resources available to artists this will inherently impact the type of work that is made. In the Scratchr project we were effectively extending the projects with a wider digital audience, but what was more interesting was the create strand of digital creativity (how to use technology within the project itself).

You can't always map the audience experience from physical to digital in a clean way. You have to be platform agnostic in the way you design digital projects and represent them online to allow artist options and fluidity. You also require the technical expertise of someone like a digital producer, who can act as digital dramaturg thinking about technology … and the online audience's experience.

The single most important thing learnt from the Scratchr project is that you need to have the raw digital tools and expertise at the disposal of residency artists. You don't need to invest in tech (web) development but in open source kit and people with digital expertise. The process of digital content creation is always artist led and sometimes a project's best digital strategy is no digital involvement. Sometimes things require the intimacy of physical interaction. Having a digital expert as a sounding board and creative producer is really important.

If you are trying to create an organisational platform to showcase artists' work you have to make it clear who the platform is for. [You h]ave to question why you need to showcase your pool of artists on one restrictive web design. It is very hard to drive traffic to your website, so keeping all your assets (artists) in a curated way on your website feels reductive. [You n]eed to think more about how you can blow your own organisational work out of your own website. Think more about creating a cohesive brand across what you are trying to do. Put a stamp on everything and then share that stamp online. [You n]eed a community manager who understands digital to then collate and bring that feedback in. People have so many spaces they can give their opinions online, commenting functions on arts organisation platforms won't get engagement. Successful arts organisations work across different social channels and maintain one voice.

Pervasive Media Studio at Watershed, Bristol

Interviewee: Luke Emery (LE), Studio Community Lead, Pervasive Media Studio (13 October 2020)

Pervasive Media Studio is a thirteen-year-old research and development space, a partnership between Watershed, University of Bristol and University of West England. At time of interview, there are 160 active Residents in the Pervasive Media Studio community, comprised of artists, creatives and business technologists. All Residents are exploring the intersections of creativity and technology. In a pre-pandemic world Residents are provided with access to desk space, event space, workshops, development schemes and meeting rooms.

PY: Please outline the role of Pervasive Media Studio's website.

LE: The website is serving the function of signposting what we do, how we do it and who is involved. Residents build their own profile pages and update their own pages. All residents get their own logins for administrative rights to website. PMS constantly remind residents to keep profiles up to date because the website is used as a database of studio activity. Residents own all the rights for everything they make at the studio. IP specialists and solicitors help Residents with IP issues in timebank slots.

The twelve studio themes, listed on the website, are revisited every five years or so. The process of rethinking the themes is happening at the moment. We recently launched a Future Themes funding round, to fund conversations in lockdown between residents proposing projects they want to work on. The idea being that these conversations may lead to potential future themes.

PY: How have you found the process of delivering the studio's supportive role for Residents during the pandemic with limited access to the physical space?

LE: Pervasive Media Studio is currently engaging in lots of experiments around functioning digitally. Pervasive Media Studio has always been a space which is based on iteration, Residents are encouraged to play on ideas and we look at ways we can inhabit that process with the Residents. We have found that our streams of communication have to be multiple platforms and considered to the needs of the Residents.

We were using Slack pre-Covid, but now it has become the main method of day to day communication between Residents. Slack is a really helpful tool, but we are discovering that not all Residents use it and we have to explore different ways they will interact with us. We have to reach out to Residents via WhatsApp, Slack, email, phone, twitter dms, we have to mould to the communication channels that suit Residents best.

Before lockdown the talks programme was an informal discussion of ideas in development. Now being on YouTube there is a different type of scrutiny as the talks are up for a long time. The focus has shifted to provocation talks, talks about completed research and ideas focused talks, but it still retains the heart of the previous format. We're interested in curious questions, works in progress and new and evolving ideas as much as completed research. The big silver lining of moving our talks programme onto YouTube has been broadened engagement. The predominant physical audience used to be active Residents, now viewing figures are geographically spread over the world and people are able to Watch on Demand which means the live events are not the only source of engagement.

Somerset House

Interviewee: Eleanor Scott (ES), Senior Digital Producer (29 October 2020)

Somerset House is a creative community; over 100 studio artists work from the building and creative organisations occupy the co-working space. Studios artists use Nexus as their communication channel. Somerset House runs multiple programmatic strands for commissioning digital work. The interview focused on the 2020 digital edition of ASSEMBLY, the Transmissions digital platform, the online programme in response to the pandemic 'I Should Be Doing Something Else Right Now', and the upcoming digital version of AGM. Whilst Somerset House's main website contains a 'Read, Watch, Listen' discovery platform, the majority of digital programming takes place via programme-specific microsites. The microsites' designs create a digital space which considers and curates audience experience of digital work. The relation between digital content production and digital platform design has to be symbiotic, with each informing and being tailored around developments to the other.

PY: Please outline Somerset House's digital programmes during the pandemic.

ES: We provided support during the pandemic and encouraged practitioners not to view the pandemic as a barrier, but as an opportunity to work within whatever means they have. Creatives are agile and can work in a DIY way, but we have that flexibility in the support we can provide to reflect artists' skill sets.

Taking ASSEMBLY online was a big undertaking for the team, and it was a very collaborative process creating the microsite and presentations of the works. One of the key things in the web design process for the ASSEMBLY microsite was not wanting an embed, so that the digital interface feels like a space you are entering. We wanted to think about the ASSEMBLY microsite in the same way to physical production. So we created a Foyer space which would establish a familiarity with the UI design and the navigation, this allowed audiences to go into 3D space where they are in control of their perspective and the sound is spatialised around them. One thing that was really important to us in terms of the online experience was the

release. Instead of just putting all the microsite online at once, we wanted to reciprocate the real-life schedule. We factored into the ASSEMBLY microsite design plain listening spaces, so as not to detract or take away from the listening experience. We incorporated the functionality to switch the UI design off, so essentially you are just in a space as opposed to having text overlays. We ensured there was a palette cleanser to the user experience of transitioning between the foyer and listening rooms. The foyer is very vibrant and has lots of different objects moving around the 3D space, so the user is led to through a neutral space before going into the listener room.

We don't have commenting functions on the main site. We built commenting into the microsites for ASSEMBLY and Transmission. This functionality was important in creating a sense of community coming together for live broadcasts. No need to develop a chat room functionality on our own site when the user experience is optimised on pre-existing sites (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram TV or Live).

It is challenging thinking of hybrid events unless there is the time, resource and skills to tailor that content for digital audiences. [You n]eed to go beyond or extend what is presented physically for the content to resonate in a digital context. [You m]ust think about every project on a case-by-case basis.

British Music Collection, run by Sound and Music

Interviewees: Heather Blair (HB), Creative Project Leader, British Music Collection, and Alex Noble (AN), Executive Administrator, Sound and Music (12 October 2020)

https://britishmusiccollection.org.uk

The British Music Collection, a discovery platform and living archive, was born out of the physical collection of the British Music Information Centre. The physical collection of the British Music Information Centre was acquired by Sound and Music in 2013. Sound and Music entered a partnership with the University of Huddersfield, such that the physical collection could be archived at Heritage Quay. Sound and Music's initial intention

for the British Music Collection was to digitise the whole of the physical collection. However, rights issues have prevented them from being able to do so, with copyright for scores in the collection being spread over multiple publishing houses. The different users of the living archive are composers, researchers, programmers and performers.

PY: Please outline the background and design of the discovery platform.

AN: There are over 3000 composers on the British Music Collection, profile creation on the digital platform is composer-led. The curators and content creators weave together the profiles in different ways.

HB: Free tagging has been a big part of the website's development, it enables composers to define and organise their own work. Free tagging means that the categorisation isn't prescriptive or set by Sound and Music. The system is more autonomous and democratic. Profile creation happens without Sound and Music's intervention, the living archive functions as a self-running design in that respect. The initial design framework was built around physical scores. This is being challenged by the different media of modern music makers. We want to be more driven by embedded links.

AN: The SEO ranking of the British Music Collection profile pages is a huge advantage, we collect a lot of metadata through free tagging…. [However] free tagging means there are variations on what is essentially the same tag, whether this be in phrasing or spelling. Free tagging is not as useful in practice as we'd like it to be.

PY: What is the curatorial strategy for the British Music Collection?

HB: The curators' role is to tease out themes from the collection of composer profiles. The curators make sure the archive has a current and contemporary relevance. The British Music Collection is a living archive, this makes it more responsive to curatorial [input] than a closed collection. We are actively seeking partnerships which look at the collection critically.

AN: New content is driven by composers in the Sound and Music programmes. The British Music

Collection becomes a sister space for Sound and Music's New Voices to write articles, create editorials and content which leads to further work.

Data exporters are integrated into the website design, and this provides composer profile analytics. We periodically update KPIs based around the new profile creation. Over lockdown there has been a sharp rise in composer profile creation.

In some places the British Music Collection feels like a library catalogue for researchers, where you can see what is inside the physical collection at Heritage Quay rather than look at the content itself. In this respect, the research objective of the web design is not served by the actual available content.

Heart n Soul at the Hub (Wellcome Collection)

Interviewees: Justin Spooner (JS), Digital Associate, and Sarah Ewans (SE), Associate Director, Heart n Soul (18-21 October 2020)

The Wellcome Hub is a transdisciplinary research centre, with the aim of facilitating research projects with a particular focus on health and knowledge creation. Heart n Soul were in residence at the Wellcome Hub 2018-2020. Resident organisations and researchers are not prescribed to create a certain digital legacy from their time at the Wellcome Hub. Digital plans are kept flexible and open. Whilst there is a case for a Hub platform with a thin layer of templated archival material such that people can see what the different hub projects have been, there is little or no desire to create a homogeneous digital approach which transcends research projects and restricts them to a predefined format. In part due to the pandemic, Heart n Soul at the Hub have committed to a primarily digital approach for their research. The Heart n Soul at the Hub team is differently abled, and includes members with learning difficulties and autism. The interview was focused on digital delivery and presentation of outcomes through the design of a new discovery platform.

PY: Please outline how Heart n Soul at the Hub have been using their Wellcome residency.

JS: Heart n Soul are asking the framing question 'what does society think about people with learning disabilities and autism?' One of the most important discoveries of the project has been that the research itself needed to be designed by people with learning difficulties, with a co-research and co-design process to make that happen.

[We] are building a completely new discovery platform. This will be specifically designed to be an exploration zone for a range of different audiences. The discovery platform will be a selection of material which tells the story, not an archive of everything Heart n Soul have gathered with filters.

PY: How are you creating an accessible discovery platform?

JS: Heart n Soul's default premise is about accessibility. [We] don't obsess over whether the digital platform is accessible, we obsess about whether the ideas, language and voices presented are accessible. A lot of functionality options have been written out of the design because they are too complicated, too difficult to grasp and too difficult to engage with conceptually. You can create an interpretive layer with voices in the digital world. Storytelling and mapping are the two major verbs for us in web design. The accessibility of ideas never gets thought about in normal approaches to designing an accessible website which passes standards test. Our philosophy is if learning disabled and autistic people are at the heart of the development process, with their creative vision working alongside everybody else, then what you come up with will be high quality and engaging for everybody.

SE: Putting the learning disabled voices up front on the website is hugely important. Heart n Soul will run live events connected with the website, the material created through these events will be reabsorbed into the website. All aspects of our programme, whether that is a music jam or live event, are part of the broad engagement with the research questions: [you] don't always have to use the formal research methodologies.

JS: The selection process of telling the story is a creative team process rather than an analytical one: what are the magic moments? What people at the heart of the project feel are the most significant aspects of what's happened. We want to tell the story in a way that involves the audience.

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