Reviewing and Open Sourcing *Visitors Studio*

Creativeworks PhD in Residence Project 2013

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Introduction

This project report results from a 3 month Creativeworks PhD Residency at Furtherfield Gallery, seeking to seeking to inform a redesign of *Visitors Studio* (VisitorsStudio.org): multi-media co-creation software for networked polemic, dialogue, co-creation and play first developed in 2003 by Neil Jenkins (creative director, designer and software programmer), Marc Garrett and Ruth Catlow (creative directors).

Currently, *Visitors Studio* is free, browser based software that enables users to upload 8 layers of audio visual content and collage this in a live, real-time mixing space online; working either individually or as part of a group. Content includes images, animations and short video and audio loops.

This residency project, entitled 'Reviewing and Open-Sourcing *Visitors Studio'*, aimed to inform a review of *Visitors Studio* in the context of contemporary developments in software and changes in social interaction and exchange associated with ubiquitous mobile technologies; and to ascertain the possibility of rebuilding the site as a Free and Open Source project.

Research for the project was spilt into two principal parts. A survey and analysis of 30 cultural co-creation projects comparable to *Visitors Studio* was first undertaken, followed by consultations with 13 diverse members of the Furtherfield community, through user-testing and informal interview. This paper also makes and draws on a theoretical overview of the relationship between digital co-creation in wider contemporary society.

Results from this project aim to help orientate a technical and aesthetic re-design of *Visitors Studio* in relation to the needs of the Furtherfield community, contemporary changes in software and interaction design and wider socio-political trends in cultural co-creation today. It seeks to support the wider mission of Furtherfield to engage more people in creative and critical engagement with practices in art and technology, to inspire and enable them to become active co-creators of their cultures and societies.

Definitions of Key Terms

Collaboration: The act of working with someone to create something. Synchronous collaboration refers to individuals working together in real-time on the same project or piece of work. Asynchronous collaboration refers to working non-simultaneously on the same project or piece of work.

Co-Creation: The collective production of meaningful content either online or offline.

Crowdsourcing: The act of outsourcing tasks traditionally undertaken by professionals to a wide range of people either online or offline. In this paper, crowdsourcing is differentiated from co-creation. Crowdsourced material can be content-driven but often refers to the outsourcing of superficial, 'safe-to-fail' or administrative tasks to the public.

Gamification: The use of statistics, awards and data visualisation to incentivise users to upload content to digital sites. This strategy generally produces a hierarchy of user-generated content on digital sites, where the most popular content is most visible.

Open Culture: According to the International Centre for Contemporary Art in Montreal Open Culture is a concept according to which knowledge should be spread freely and its growth should come from developing, altering or enriching already existing works on the basis of sharing and collaboration, without being restricted by rules linked to the legal protection of intellectual property. In a context of globalization, the consequence is that all citizens should have equal access to information (http://bit.ly/15UAlw2)

A Theoretical Context for Reviewing Visitors Studio

Furtherfield aims to work towards social change by empowering the public to shape their own discursive world through the arts and technology. To ensure a redesign of *Visitors Studio* helps achieve this aim, it seems important to take into account an understanding of the relationship between digital co-creation and wider contemporary society.

Analysing this dynamic, it is important to recall that power in contemporary capitalism functions principally horizontally and through collaborative networks, rather than through hierarchies and top down control. As Eran Fisher states: the rigid hierarchized Fordist mode of production which previously structured society has now been replaced with 'a dehierarchised, cooperative, agreeable and inherently inclusive model of networks…the productive process becomes more democratic and collaborative and is geared towards personal fulfilment' (2010, 6/7).

As a form of late Biopower, contemporary societal norms are also mediated through the internalisation and acting out of certain ideals, which are policed both through self-surveillance, and through normalisation via peers and organisations (Bauman, 2013, 59). Subjective expression and active self-disclosure are therefore an essential way to maintain dominant discourses within society. As Zygmunt Bauman states: 'having one's complete being, warts and all, registered in publicly accessible records seems to be the best prophylactic antidote against the toxicity of exclusion – as well as a potent way to keep the threat of eviction away' (2013, 24).

As a consequence of this societal dynamic, it is complex to effect cultural co-creation capable of working towards social change. Horizontal collaboration and self-expression are not radical as processes in themselves, and rather mirror the power structure of wider contemporary capitalism.

For this reason, it seems important to incorporate a strategic, critical and directed mode of collaboration into a re-design of *Visitors Studio*, perhaps through developing carefully curated discrete projects, around particular topics and themes, suggested both by Furtherfield and *Visitors Studio's* online community. By focusing and directing the collaborative process inherent in *Visitors Studio* strategically to critical ends, it might be possible to mobilise the hegemonic societal trope of collaboration progressively. Without such a focus, there is a danger of uncritical co-creative practices serving merely as reproductive labour for hegemonic uses of collaboration in wider Network Capitalism.

A critical and curated approach to co-creation on *Visitors Studio* could mean building on previous directly critical uses of the site such as the 2004 Dissention Convention, which brought together 20 international net-artists to produce an 'art-polemic' focusing on the negative global impact of the Bush Administration (http://bit.ly/duPIbd). Bearing in mind the close relationship between self-expression, surveillance and power in contemporary society, it could also be helpful to employ a strategic approach to content exhibition and archive visibility in a redesign of *Visitors Studio*, carefully choosing what should be publicly visible, when and how.

Play and experimentation within *Visitors Studio* might be considered a critical end in itself, functioning against the imperative for constant productivity within society. In this way, Furtherfield might choose to make these aspects of the site publicly visible. However, given the appropriation of ideals such as experimentation and failure by hegemonic digital discourses of labour such as agile production and the lean start-up, it might also be helpful to critically contextualise uses of play within the site.

The role of Furtherfield as a structuring organisation within this project is also interesting to negotiate in relation to Network Power. As Manuel Castells states, within networks, it is the structuring programmer who holds ultimate power (2009, 52). Furthermore, all participants within a given network must either concede to follow the

program set up, or be excluded from the network in a binary way. As programmers of the network and its motivations, Furtherfield inherently have structural power over *Visitors Studio*, even though this power is used to facilitate co-creation. However, interestingly, as Castells states, the network can also act as its own programmer (2009, 53).

Open-Sourcing *Visitors Studio* would enable a power shift in programming to occur on a technical level. In terms of content, users might be more involved in defining and negotiating the aims and community guidelines of this site, as well as specific projects undertaken within it. Meanwhile, a strategy to counter the consensual nature of network power as defined by Castells might be to write an imperative for disjuncture and productive challenge into the community guidelines of this site itself.

The relation between individualism and collectivity is another interesting thing to negotiate in relation to wider power structures within society. Collaboration within current Neoliberal Capitalism is a common buzzword, but is often employed individualistically, so that working with others becomes a competition which is simultaneously collective and egotistical. One clear example of this dynamic within digital projects would be *Vimeo* (Vimeo.com) a creative social media site where individual community members upload content in relation to collective topics, and vie for visibility and popularity within a project through peer regulated statistics, determining which content is most 'liked', and therefore gains highest visibility.

This individualistic participation creates a new hierarchy of visibility based in meritocracy. However, in the production of participatory work, it also seems important not to value inclusiveness in place of aesthetic or critical excellence, something Claire Bishop cites as an ongoing concern in the evaluation of participatory arts practices, where 'consensual collaboration is valued over artistic mastery and individualism, no matter what the project sets out to do or actually achieves' (2012,20).

In light of this recognition, it seems a redesign of *Visitors Studio* would need to strike a difficult balance between inclusiveness and aesthetic excellence or criticality, something which would necessitate a carefully positioned interpretation of the concept of hierarchy. If this balance could be achieved alongside a related strategic negotiation between visibility and privacy, play and criticality, it seems a redesign of *Visitors Studio* could function very effectively as a tactical site working towards Furtherfield's goals of social change through the arts and technology.

Reference List

Books
• Bauman, Z (2013) *Liquid Surveillance* Cambridge, Polity
• Bishop, C (2012) *Artificial Hells* London, Verso
• Manuel Castells (2009) *Communication Power* Oxford, Oxford University Press
• Fisher, E (2010) *Media and New Capitalism: The Spirit of Networks* London, Palgrave Macmillan

Websites
• *Furtherfield* Furtherfield.org
• *Vimeo* Vimeo.com
• *Visitors Studio Visitors Studio*.org

Visitors Studio Project Survey

Overview of Project Survey Undertaken

30 projects related to *Visitors Studio* were surveyed to help give an indication of contemporary strategies of design, interaction and exchange in examples of digital co-creation, cultural collaboration and tools for creative work online[1]. Sites and projects surveyed were a diverse mixture of artistic co-creation and collaboration projects functioning online, offline or in hybrid form, wider cultural, charitable or commercial co-creation projects, collaboration software tools and non-collaborative online artistic creation tools such as *iMovie* and *ArtStudio* (Chart 1).

Of these projects 56% could be defined as aiming to work fully or partially within the vein of Open Culture. It was also interesting to note that of the collaborative projects surveyed, 51% utilised purely asynchronous collaborative methods where individual and independent contributions helped create a multifaceted overall project, while only 30% used purely synchronous methods of collaboration. A further 19% relied on a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration methods to produce content (Chart 2).

19% of projects did not include any form of public archival documentation on their site. Of the projects with archives, 44% were partial, meaning only highlights of generated content, or screenshots of previous live performances were kept, either for marketing purposes or as a way of generating confidence in the functioning of the site. This leaves 37% of projects which function with full archival documentation of work, often using this archive as an engine for the logic of a project itself (Chart 3).

In terms of access to site information, 64% of projects allowed full public access to information housed on the site. 14% of projects allowed greater content access to members of a project, while a further 18% of projects only allowed a paid user access to their content, unless these users chose to share their work on social networks or email. The final 4% of projects were more highly striated, allowing different levels of functionality to the public, registered members and paying users of a site (Chart 4). 90% of projects would only allow user-generated additions to a site with membership to the project and a valid email address provided.

All projects surveyed had some form of user generated content available within them, and 70% of projects involved some level of explicit project leadership, aside from the inherent leadership involved in programming a site and the tools available on it.

64% of projects enabled some sort of discussion, whether this was through commenting or a chat forum. Meanwhile, 78% of projects employed some sort of specific community making strategy, whether this functioned through gamification, the production of personal profile pages and/or data visualisation of projects underway.

However, the average scores both for discussion and community making strategies were low: 2.7 and 2.6 out of 5 respectively, something which reflects a general trend in the projects surveyed to individual contributions to sites and appraisals of these contributions by peers, rather than collaborative and dialogic work by groups of people.

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[1] For a detailed surveys, and data, charts and tables as well as definitions and criteria for assessment used, please see Appendix One.
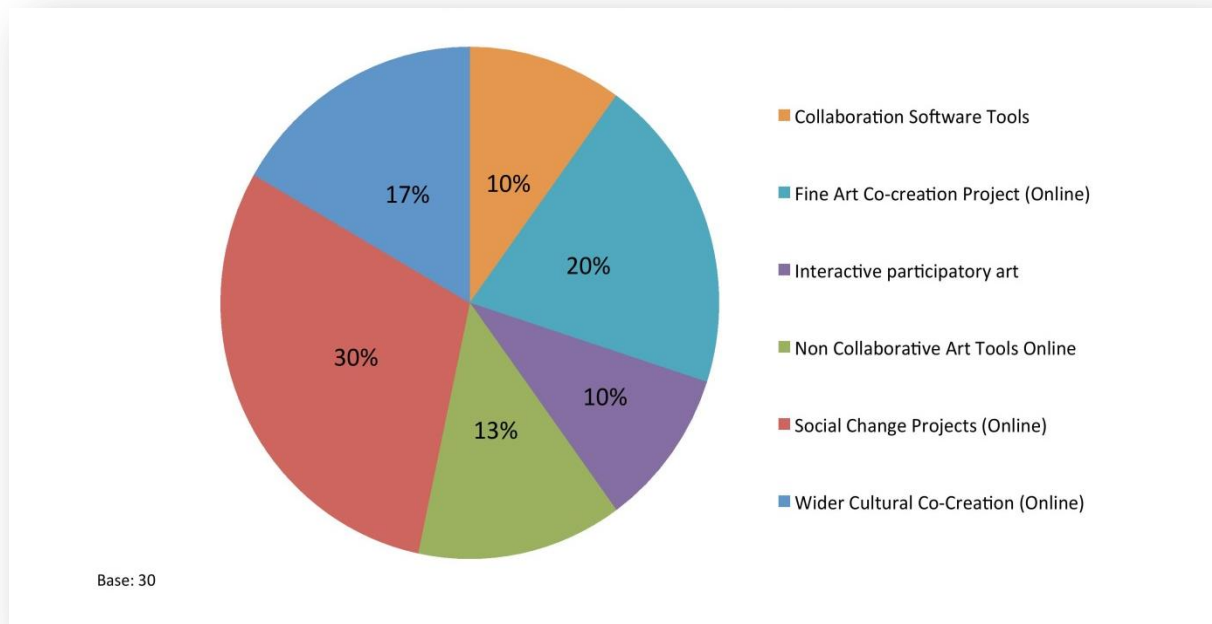
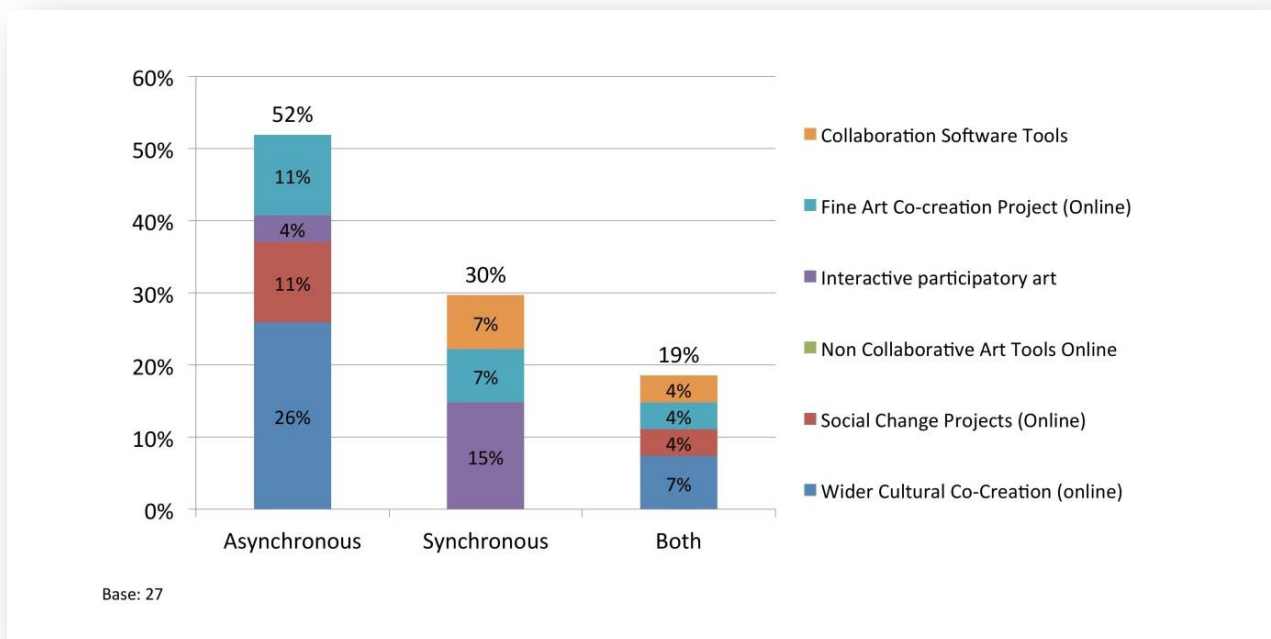**Chart 1: Types of Projects Surveyed**

Pie chart:
- Collaboration Software Tools — 10%
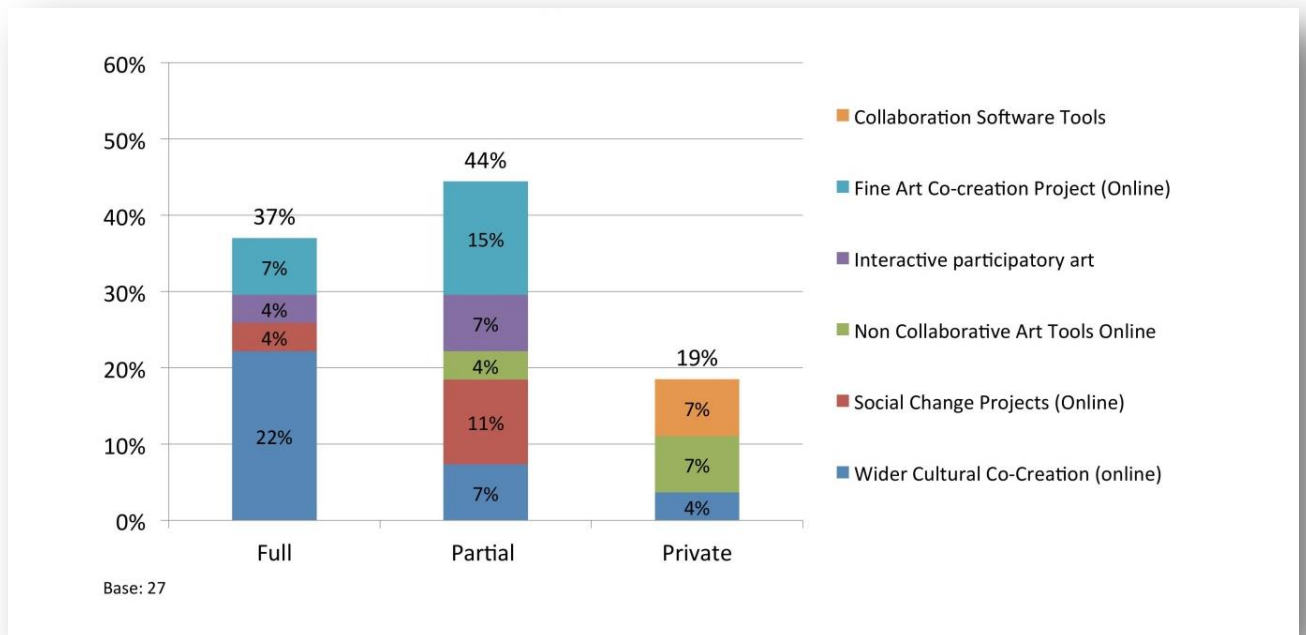- Fine Art Co-creation Project (Online) — 20%
- Interactive participatory art — 10%
- Non Collaborative Art Tools Online — 13%
- Social Change Projects (Online) — 30%
- Wider Cultural Co-Creation (Online) — 17%

Base: 30

Chart 2: Types of Collaboration

Stacked bar chart:

Asynchronous — 52%:
- Wider Cultural Co-Creation (online) — 26%
- Social Change Projects (Online) — 11%
- Interactive participatory art — 4%
- Fine Art Co-creation Project (Online) — 11%

Synchronous — 30%:
- Interactive participatory art — 15%
- Fine Art Co-creation Project (Online) — 7%
- Collaboration Software Tools — 7%

Both — 19%:
- Wider Cultural Co-Creation (online) — 7%
- Social Change Projects (Online) — 4%
- Fine Art Co-creation Project (Online) — 4%
- Collaboration Software Tools — 4%

Legend:
- Collaboration Software Tools
- Fine Art Co-creation Project (Online)
- Interactive participatory art
- Non Collaborative Art Tools Online
- Social Change Projects (Online)
- Wider Cultural Co-Creation (online)
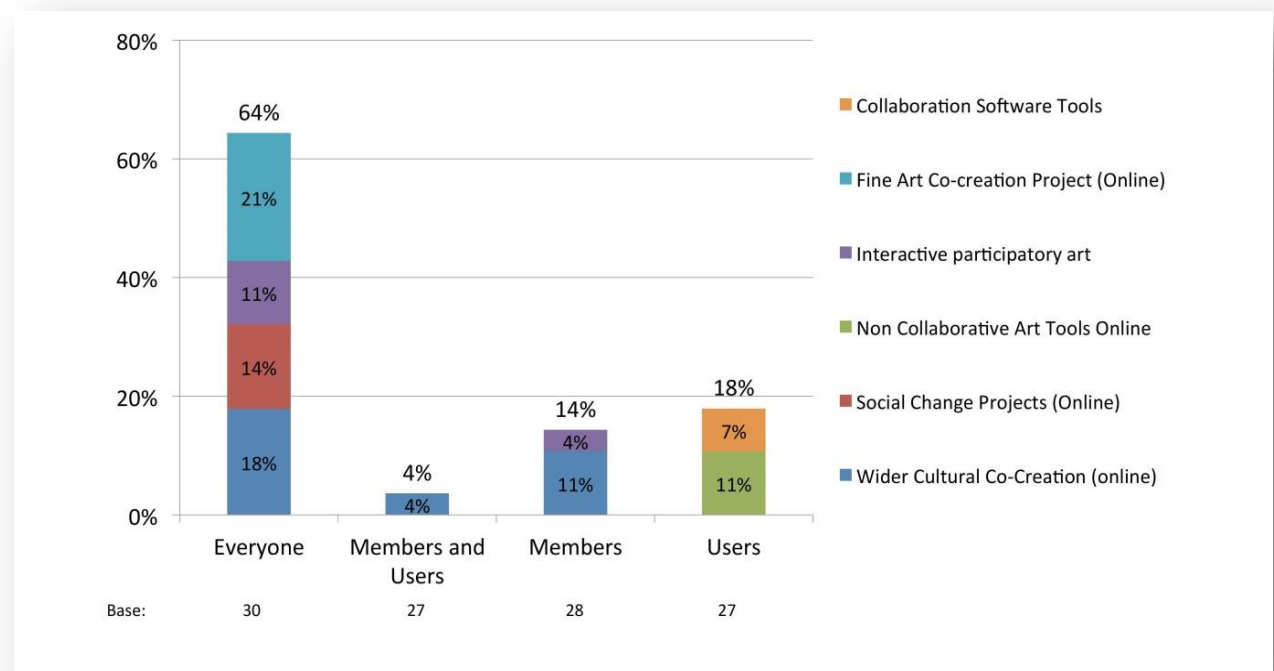
Base: 27

Chart 3: Types of Archive

Base: 27

Chart 4: Modes of Access

List of Projects Surveyed

1. *Adobe Connect* Video conferencing software from Adobe (2003/2006) http://adobe.ly/19KktwP
2. *Artstudio*: a non-collaborative digital drawing and painting tool by Lucky Clan (2013) iphoneclan.com
3. *Avaaz*: a collective charitable project for petitioning global causes (2007) avaaz.org
4. *Change by Us*: collective projects for social good in New York by Local Projects and the City of New York Council (2011) nyc.changeby.us/
5. *Conceptboard*: an online team collaboration for businesses (2011) conceptboard.com
6. *Cowbird*: a collective citizen storytelling project by digital artist Jonathan Harris (2011) cowbird.com
7. *Glyphiti*: a collective online artwork by Andy Deck constantly changed by its participants (2001 –Present) http://bit.ly/15Rwz33
8. *Good For Nothing*: a project aiming to produce collective projects for social good online (2013) goodfornothing.com/
9. *Hackney Hear*: a geomapped audio project by Matt Hill and Francesca Panetta exploring London Fields through stories, history and personal testimonies from citizens using Amblr technology (2012) hackneyhear.com
10. *Historypin*: a collective online history making project by non-profit organisation We are What We Do (2010) historypin.com
11. *iMovie* Apple's online tool for film making (1999/ IOS 2010/ iPad 2012) (http://bit.ly/12u2RDk)
12. *Learning to Love You More*: a website and series of non-web presentations comprised of work made by the general public in response to assignments given by artists Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher (2002-2009) learningtoloveyoumore.com
13. *Make History*: a collective oral history project around 911 developed by Local Projects and the 911 Memorial Museum (2009) makehistory.national911memorial.org
14. *Mapping Main Street*: a collective 'community arts project' documenting roads called Main Street in the USA by Kara Oehler et. al (2009) mappingmainstreet.org
15. *Maquila Region* 4: a hybrid on and offline collective art project highlighting wage exploitation in imported materials from Mexico to the US by artist Amor Munoz (2012) maquilaregion4.info
16. *Newstweek*: a tool to hijack Wi-Fi networks and alter news websites (2011) newstweek.com/
17. *Open Ideo*: an online project aiming to produce collective design projects for social innovation (2010) openideo.com
18. *STIKTU*: a free LAYAR app that lets you superimpose images and text onto photographs of the world around you and share this with an online community (2011) stiktu.com
19. *Stories of the* Underground: an art project by artist Michael Landy aiming to collect stories of kindness from the London Underground (2011-Present) art.tfl.gov.uk/actsofkindness
20. *Storyboard Composer*: an application to facilitate storyboarding online developed by Cinemek (IOS 2009/ iPad 2011) cinemek.com/storyboard
21. *The Embroidered Digital Commons*: a participatory art project embroidering and exhibiting digital terms by artist Ellie Carpenter (2009-Present) open-source-embroidery.org.uk/EDC
22. *The Johnny Cash* Project: a collectively produced music video by Aaron Koblin and Chris Milk where each participant works on a frame of the Johnny Cash song 'Ain't No Grave' (2010) thejohnnycashproject.com
23. *This Exquisite* Forest: an animation project between artists and the public modelled on the Exquisite Corpse, developed by Aaron Koblin and Chris Milk (2012-2013) exquisiteforest.com
24. *Tow Truck*: an open source software for collaboration online from Mozilla labs (2013) towtruck.mozillalabs.com
25. *Udemy*: a collaborative educational project online (2010) www.udemy.com
26. *Upstage*: an online platform for real time cyberperformance (2003-Present) upstage.org.nz
27. *Waterwheel*: a site for collaborative projects and artworks exploring the concept of water by artist Suzon Fuks (2011) water-wheel.net
28. *Wikitude*: a collective AR tool to locate events and destinations in a geomapped environment (2013) wikitude.com
29. *WJ-S*: a tool for multi-screen streaming and exhibition by artist Anne Roquiny (wj-s.org)
30. *24 hour Foucault*: an installation by artist Thomas Hirschorn at the Palais De Tokyo in Paris exploring the work of Michel Foucault in an immersive and multifaceted way (2004)

Project Survey Analysis

1) Aesthetic of Site Design

A craft-like, D.I.Y or childlike aesthetic was often employed in the participatory sites surveyed. *Cowbird* (fig 1), *Good for Nothing* (fig 2) and *Hackney Hear* (fig 3) are examples of this sort of accessible design.
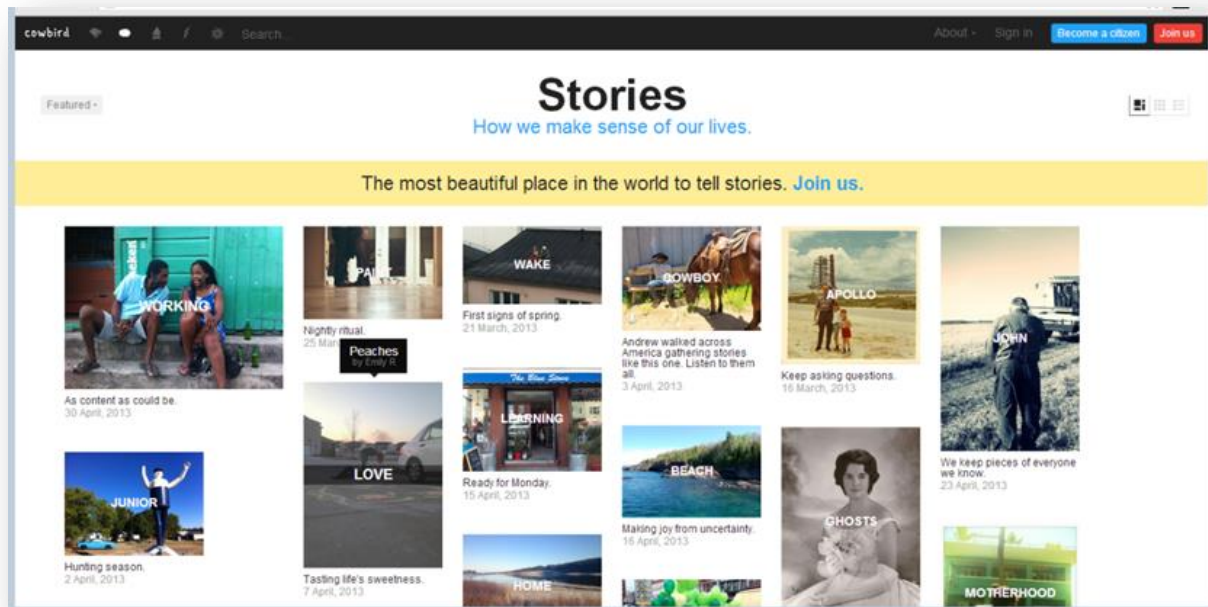
Fig 1: Cowbird (cowbird.com)
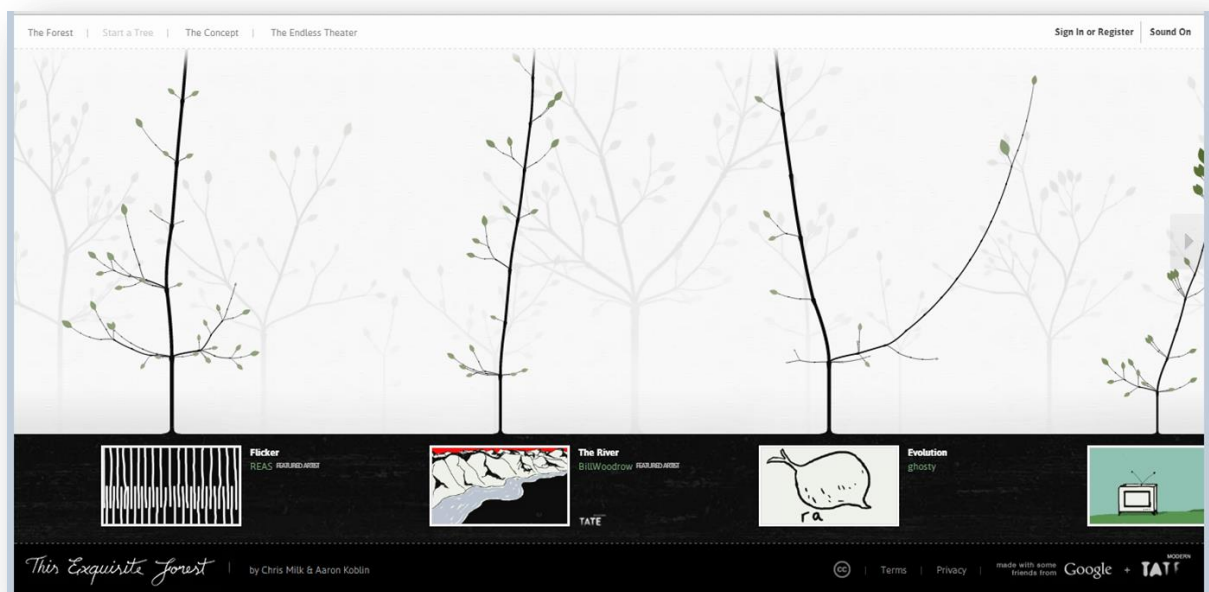

Fig 2: Good for Nothing (goodfornothing.com)

Fig 3: Hackney Hear (hackneyhear.com)

Cowbird and *Good for Nothing* also use self-consciously innocent language to describe their project aims. *Good for Nothing* even uses the word 'interweb' to describe the internet on its homepage (goodfornothing.com).

Interestingly, the work produced in co-created sites such as *This Exquisite Forest* (fig 4)*, Upstage* (fig 5) and *Glyphiti* (fig 6) also has a similar low-fi aesthetic attached to it.

Fig 4: This Exquisite Forest (exquisiteforest.com)

Fig 5: Upstage (upstage.org.nz)

Fig 6: Glyphiti (http://bit.ly/15Rwz33)

The Johnny Cash Project (fig 7) is unique in that it does not employ these craft based design strategies, and rather aims both in design and output to work towards a less naïve aesthetic. As problematic as the project is,

Make History (fig 8)*,* which aims to produce a crowdsourced history of 911, also has a less DIY aesthetic attached to it, perhaps as it deals with a subject of such gravitas. Similarly, the commercial and corporate project, *Adobe Connect,* though not inspiring in its aesthetic, is seemingly designed to appear to have more serious connotations (fig 9).

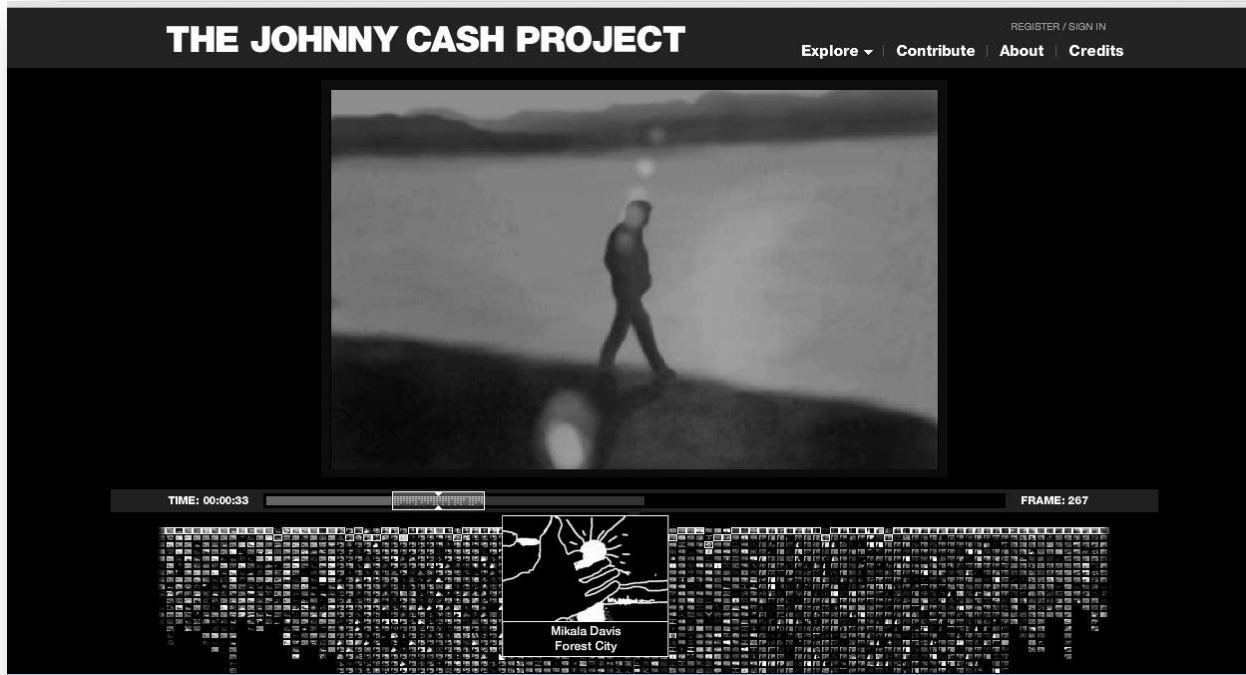**Fig 7: Johnny Cash Project Aesthetic (thejohnnycashproject.com)**
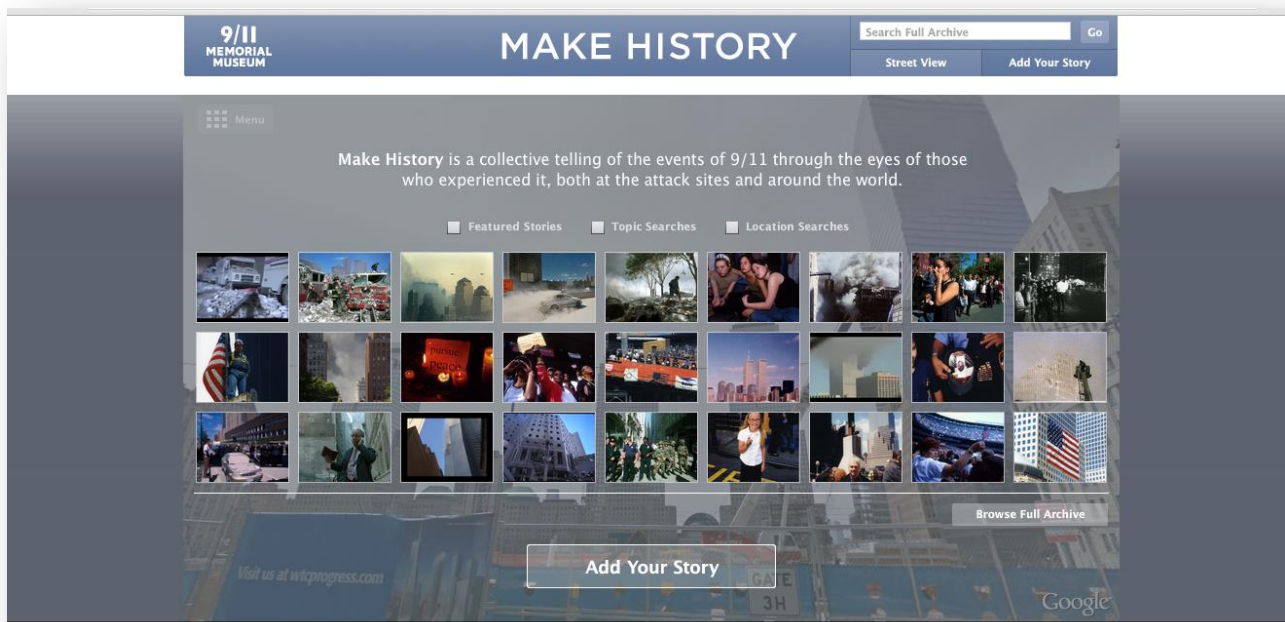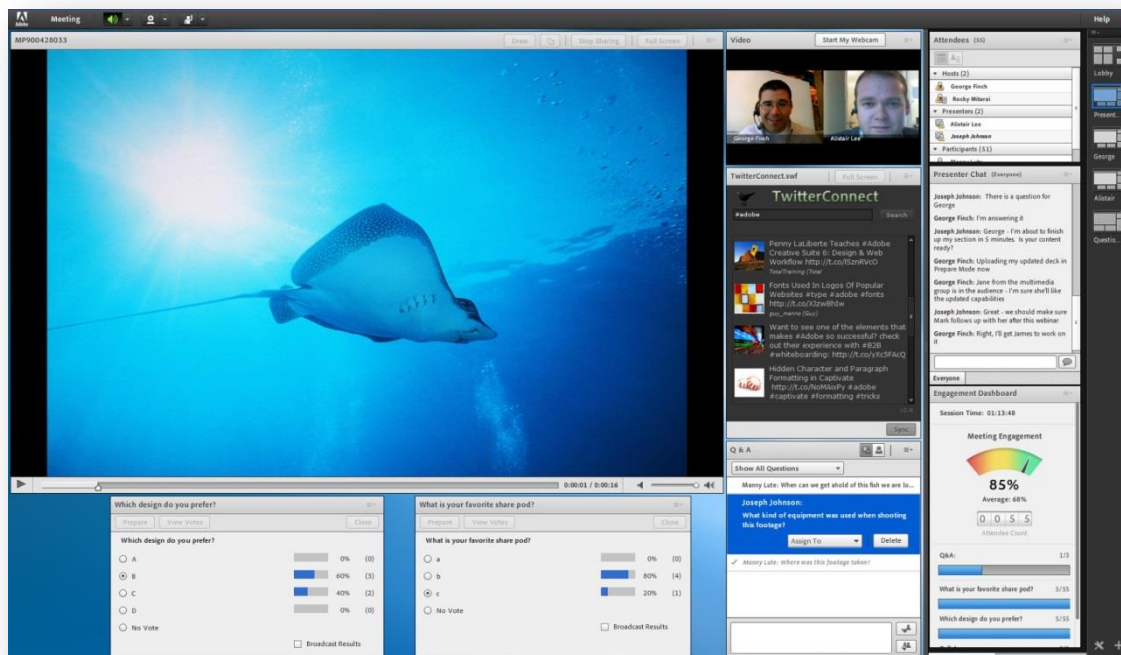

Fig 8: Make History (http://bit.ly/SBwTE)

**Fig 9: Adobe Connect** *(http://adobe.ly/19KktwP)*

Points to Consider in Relation to *Visitors Studio*

- It seems important to consider the connotations of the redesigned aesthetic of Visitors Studio in relation to Furtherfield's wider goals of aiming towards social change through the arts and technology
- DIY, childlike and naïve aesthetics used uncritically can arguably detract from serious and complex cultural questions, making site content appear lightweight, innocuous and simplistic
- To help *Visitors Studio* further the goals of Furtherfield by aiming towards social change, it might therefore be appropriate to avoid DIY and childlike aesthetics in a redesign of *Visitors Studio*, unless this is being used self-reflexively as a strategy for critical practice.
- One option would be to hijack the design of web based projects which aim to garner connotations of gravitas from their users. This is a technique used regularly in Tactical Media, including Interventionist Art as an appropriation and subversion of powerful cultural tropes
- Another option would be to aim for a neutral aesthetic, perhaps drawing from projects such as the *Johnny Cash Project.* This site uses a similar palette and set of clean lines to *Visitors Studio*, but feels extremely contemporary.

2) Content Development Tools

The projects which had the most effective upload facilities and content development tools were either commercial applications devoted to non-collaborative creativity, or recent co-creation sites. *ArtStudio* (fig 10) has 16 different drawing tools, 450 brushes, 150 fonts and 40 filters.

Fig 10: ArtStudio (iphoneclan.com)
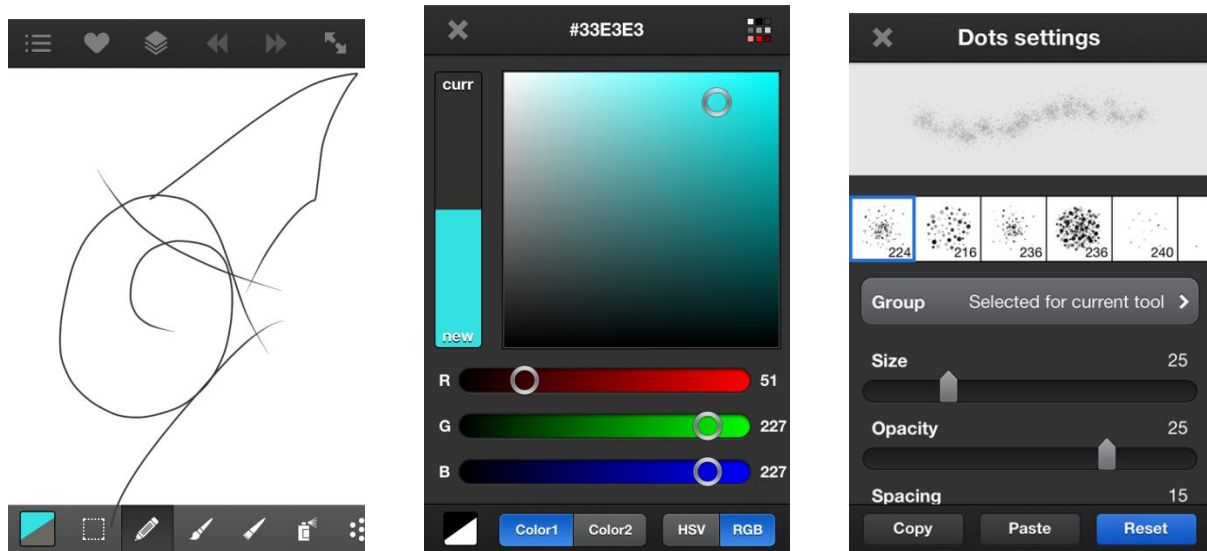
Meanwhile, *iMovie* (fig 11/ 12) has a very clear and easy to use upload facility for audio, photos or video, which opens and accesses an existing archive of media on your personal device. Using the same functionality it is also possible to record sound or film or to take photographs on the mobile versions. The site also allows users to visualise the work they are carrying out very clearly on a timeline beneath the film, using a mixture of photographs, video and audio extracts**.**

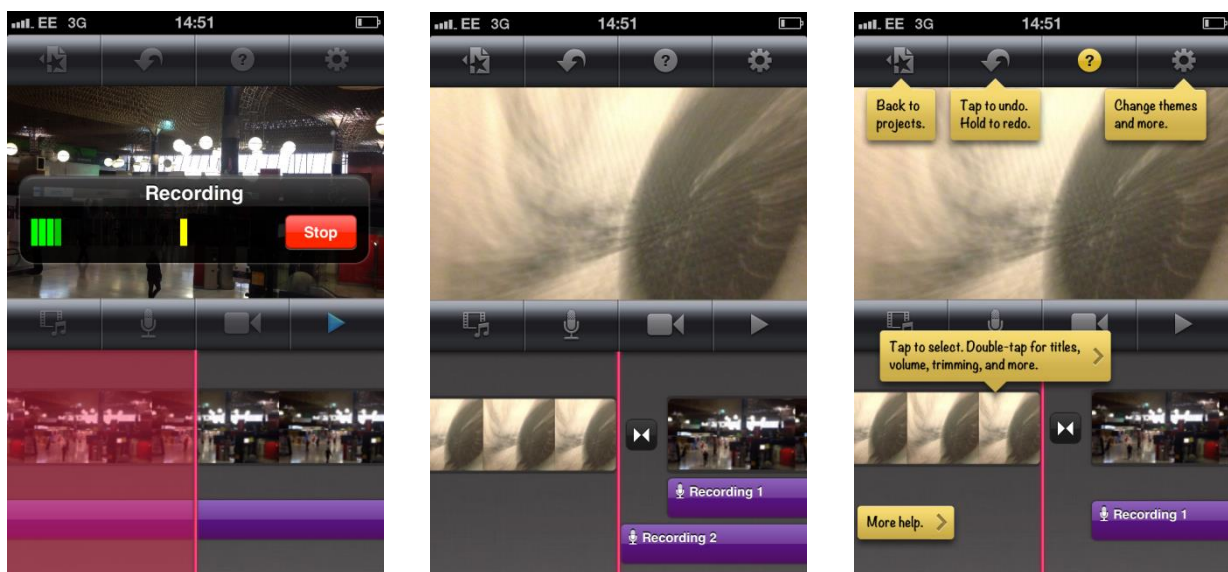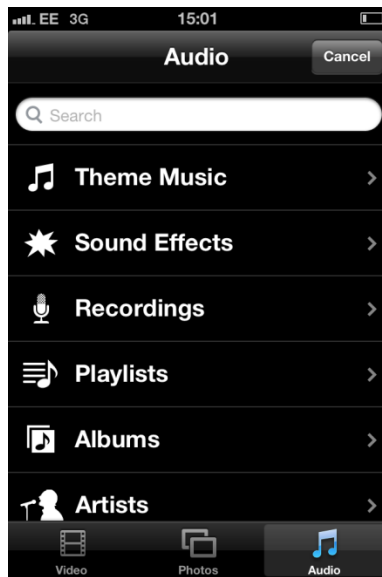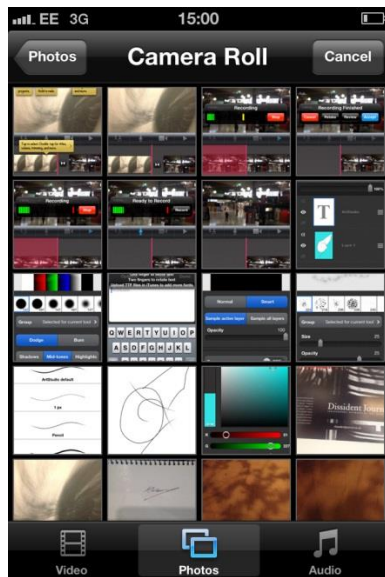**Fig 11 iMovie tools and functionality 1 (apple.com/uk/apps/imovie)**

Fig 12: iMovie tools and functionality 2 (apple.com/uk/apps/imovie)

The *Johnny Cash Project* uses a tracing tool which enables users to copy the frame they are working on - or choose not to do this if they prefer. This is very helpful in terms of producing accurate images even with a free drawing interface. This project also has a good range of different drawing tools for participants to use (fig 13). *This Exquisite Forest* also has a particularly user-friendly interface in terms of the production of animations. Again, Koblin has produced bespoke tools which enable the user to trace previous frames (fig 14).

Fig 13: Johnny Cash Project frame tracing tool (thejohnnycashproject.com/#/contribute)

Fig 14: This Exquisite Forest Tracing Interface (exquisiteforest.com/create?parent=2139021)
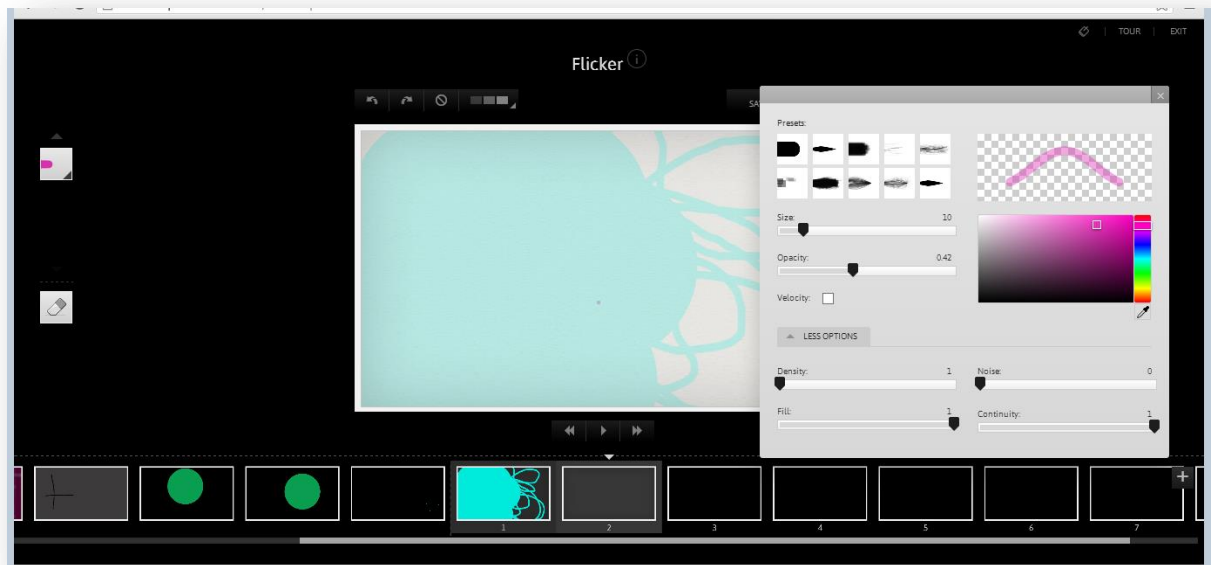
Historypin enables users to upload data very easily through a simple interface enabling exploration of personal computer files, dragging and dropping these onto the site interface. This interface also ensures data uploaded by the user is copyright cleared as part of this process by asking for copyright details as part of the upload process (fig 15/ 16).

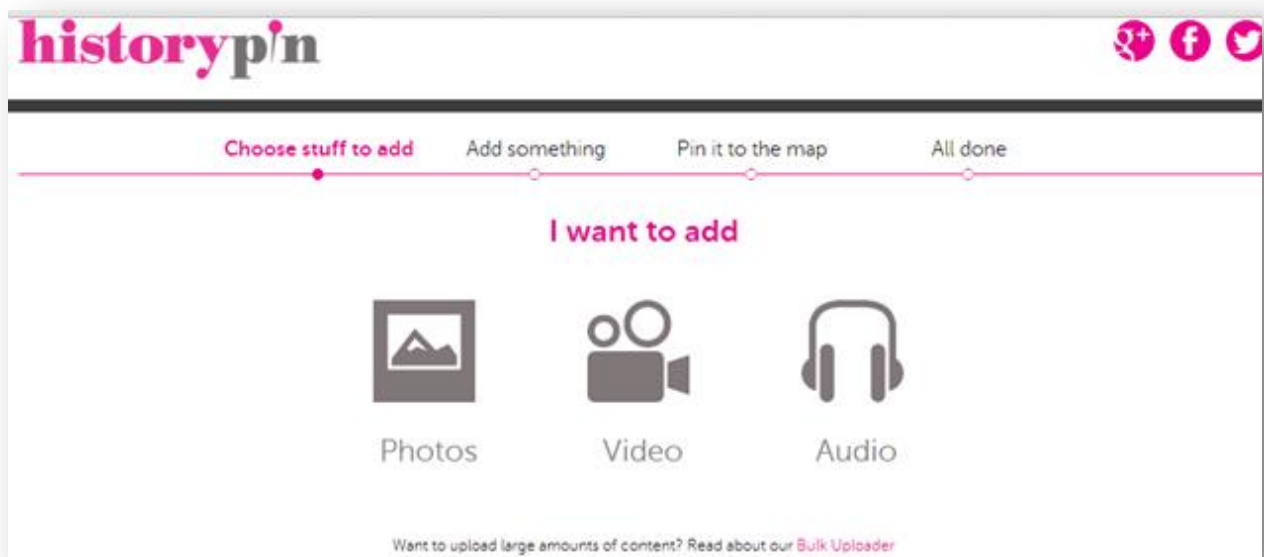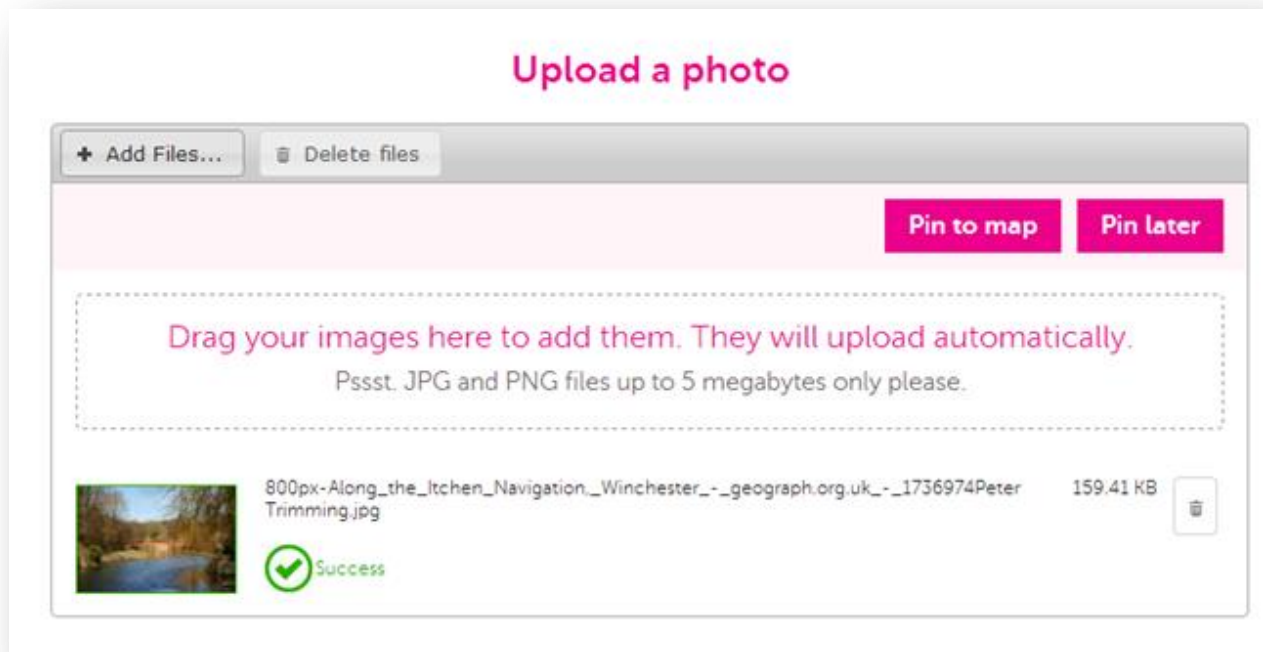**Fig 15: Historypin upload (Historypin.com)**

Fig. 16 Historypin Upload 2 (Historypin.com)

Points to Consider in Relation to *Visitors Studio*

- *Visitors Studio* could theoretically develop functionality onsite through the addition of longer film and audio sections, free drawing and animation tools onsite, and include a range of different brushes and effects. This would bring the site up to date with current developments in technology

- A technically simpler option to develop functionality would be to provide links from *Visitors Studio* to other sites offering free image, audio and video manipulation, and to enlarge and diversify the file types which can be uploaded onto *Visitors Studio*

- A redesign of *Visitors Studio* could borrow from clearly navigable user interfaces on commercial projects such as *iMovie* or *Photoshop*. This would help ensure the redesigned site is as user friendly as possible

- Different mixing environments could be developed in a redesign of *Visitors Studio* to allow the user more flexibility in terms of the kind of work they can produce, and clearer options about what they can achieve onsite

- For instance, a film studio, painting studio, dark room or animation room could be developed alongside an exhibition space where it is possible to collage different aspects of work together or upload single media works

3. Modes and Methods of Collaboration

As abovementioned, 51% of surveyed participatory projects utilised purely asynchronous collaboration, while 30% used only synchronous collaboration. A further 19% used a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration methods to produce content.

For instance, *This Exquisite Forest* allows users to add to branches of animated narratives collaboratively, but each part of the narrative occurs asynchronously and in isolation from the rest, as in the Exquisite Corpse (fig 17). *Cowbird* is also interesting in this respect, enabling users to add individual contributions to overarching topics known as 'sagas' (fig 18). This mode of functionality gives a diverse participatory cultural interpretation of a single cultural phenomenon or event, but all contributions actually function in isolation from one another.

Fig 17: This Exquisite Forest (exquisiteforest.com/forest)
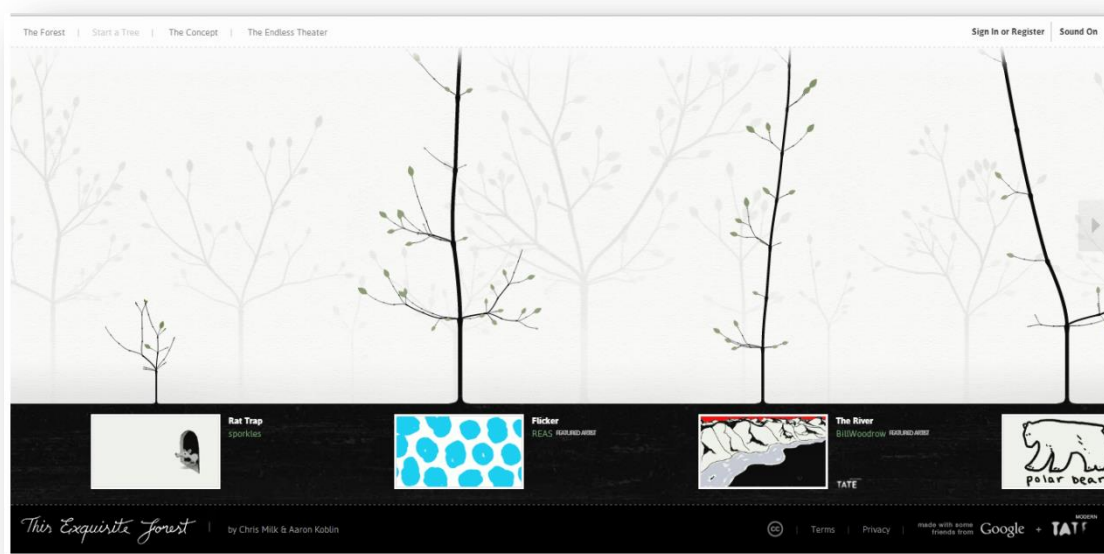
Fig 18: Cowbird Sagas (cowbird.com/explore)
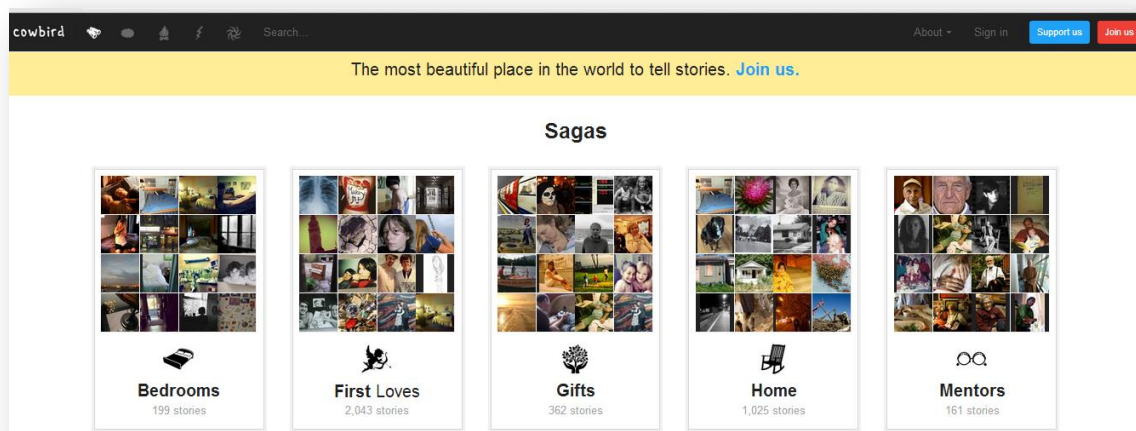
Cyberformance sites such as *Upstage* and *Waterwheel* (fig 19) function primarily synchronously, through face-to-face workshops and meetings both on and offline, leading to synchronous performances. *Embroidering the Digital Commons* is also primarily synchronous, functioning through carefully designed workshops, which are facilitated via a work-pack produced by the artist herself. In terms of the use of technology to facilitate synchronous collaboration, it was also interesting to look at the design of commercial sites such as *Adobe Connect*, which includes a multimedia workspace, web streaming and Instant Relay Chat (fig 20).

Fig 19: Waterwheel Tap Performance (http://bit.ly/13gGXFt)
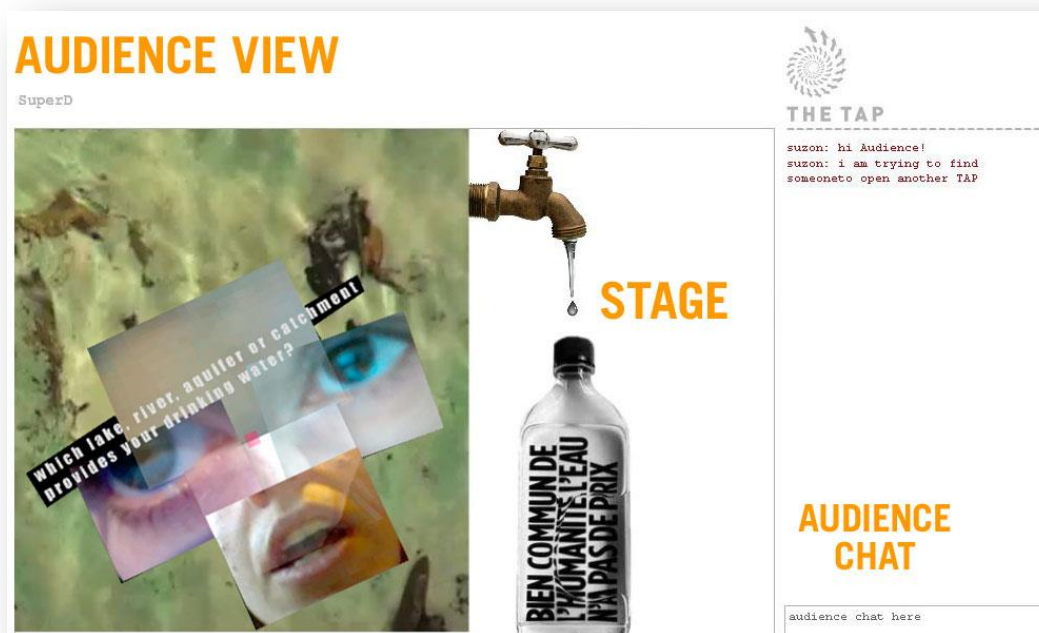
Fig 20: Adobe Connect (http://adobe.ly/19KktwP)
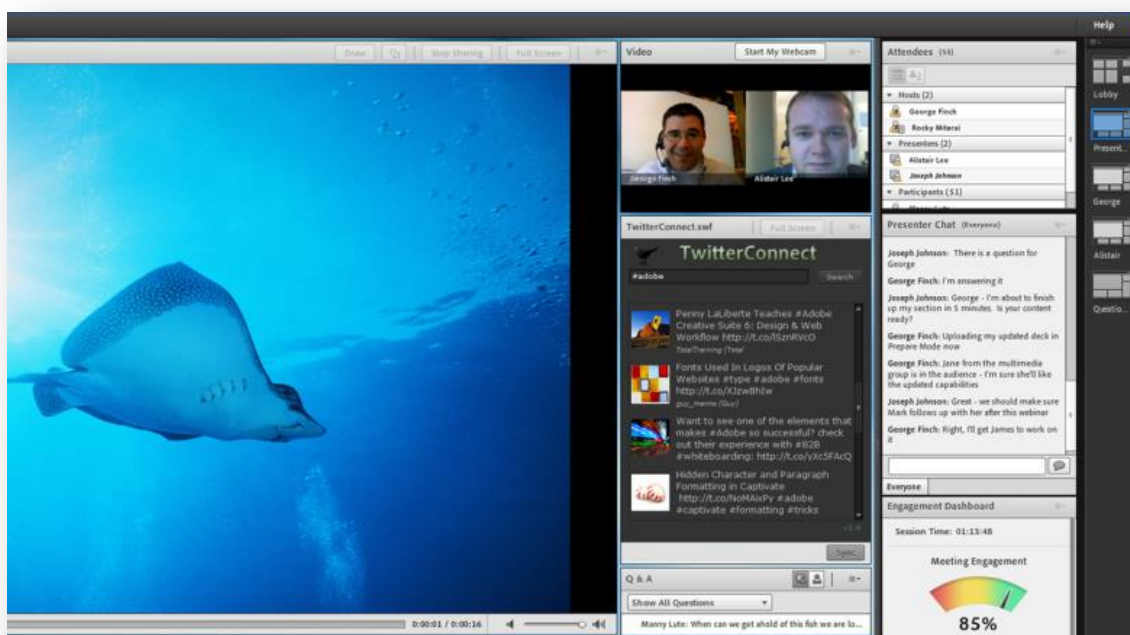
Points to Consider in Relation To *Visitors Studio*

- A redesign of *Visitors Studio* could meaningfully pick up on the current trend towards asynchronous collaboration as employed in sites such as *This Exquisite Forest* by enabling users to add material to specific topics and themes onsite over time. Having these themes could also help structure and direct both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration
- *Visitors Studio* could also follow the example of projects such as *Upstage* and *Embroidering the Digital Commons* by writing offline collaboration and workshops more fundamentally into the site structure. This would enable more flexible engagement with the site and might facilitate the development of networked communities around VisitorsStudio
- In terms of producing a clear and intuitive online interface for collaboration it could also be helpful to borrow from more recently designed commercial and creative projects such as *Adobe Connect* and *Waterwheel*. This would help ensure *Visitors Studio* was as user friendly as possible

4. Discussion Features

Although 64% of projects allowed for some form of chat between users, it was noticeable this was the least well developed aspect of the projects surveyed. Most sites, such as *Change by Us* (fig 21) and *Historypin* (fig 22) only allow for commenting functionality, which does not lend itself to real-time dialogic communication.

Fig 21: Change By US Discussion Function (http://bit.ly/15QX9JA)
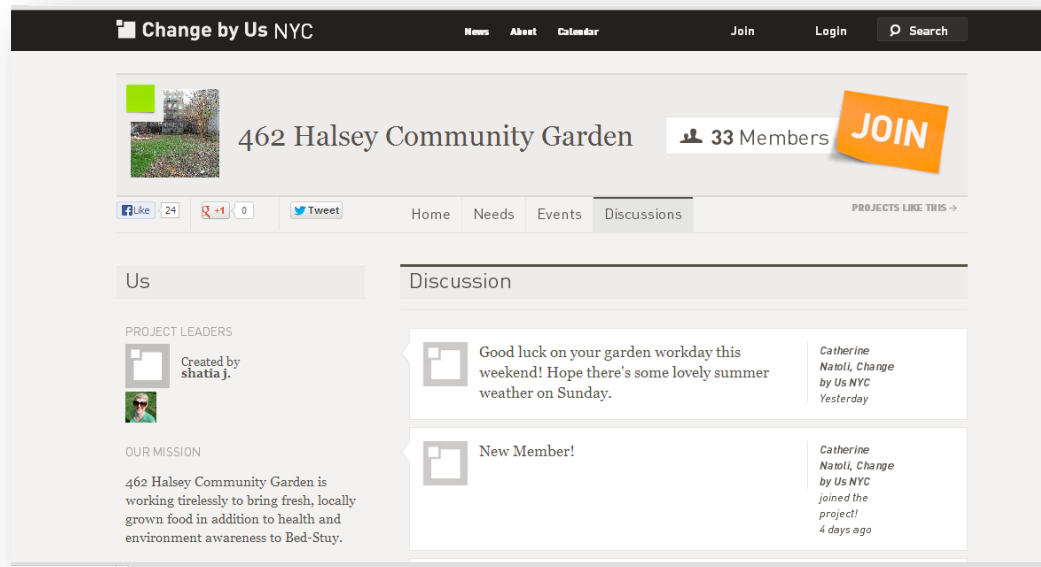
Fig 22: Historypin Commenting Features (http://bit.ly/126e3l5)
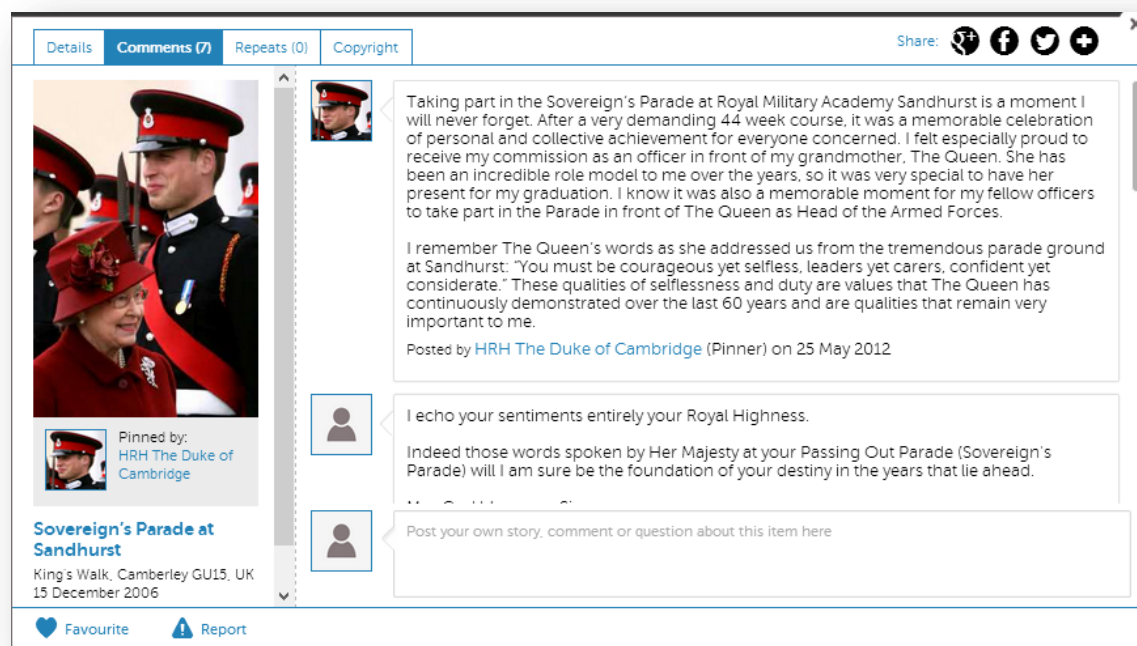
Upstage (fig 23) offered one of the best levels of functionality in terms of discussion. This site allows text to speech, webcam streaming and on site conversation. As project leader Helen Varley Jamieson herself stated in a recent workshop these tools, such as the robotic text to speech voice could be redesigned in a more contemporary manner. However, the chat function and web cam streaming in particular is flexible, easy to use and clearly visible onsite. The same can be said for *Waterwheel* where it is possible to simply drop the webcam into a workspace, and to address either the audience or fellow actors through chat.

Fig: 23 Upstage Discussion Features (upstage.org.nz/blog/)
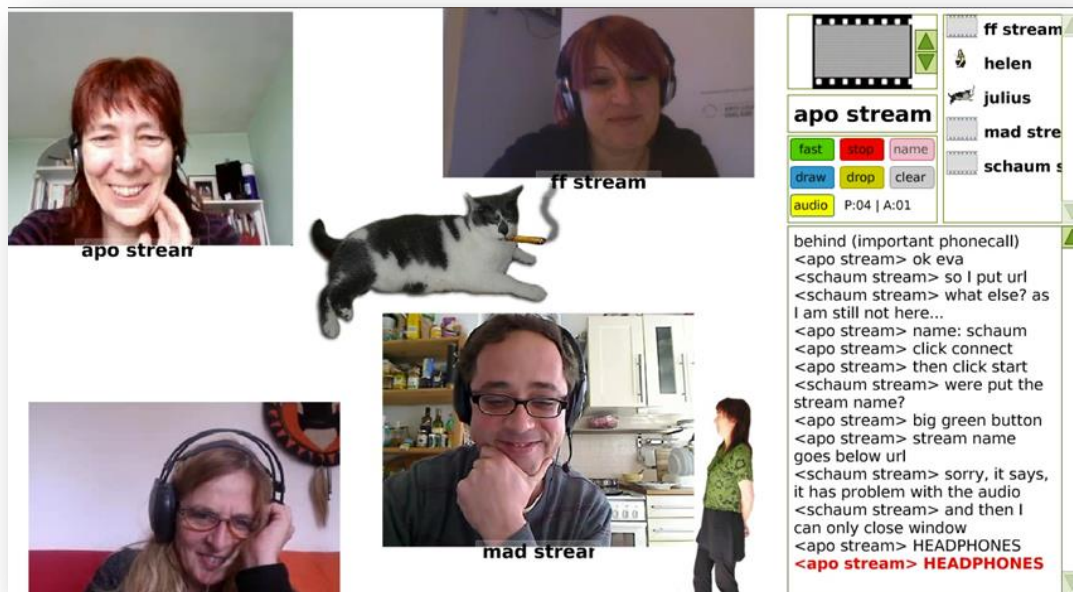
It might also be helpful to borrow from *Adobe Connect*. Although this site has a business like aesthetic attached to its chat functionality, the designed use of space here is effective and clear (fig 24).

Fig 24: Adobe Connect Discussion Features (http://adobe.ly/19KktwP)

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Points to Consider in relation to *Visitors Studio*

- A lack of discussion seems to be endemic to the sort of individualistic soundbites of asynchronous communication common in participatory online projects today.
- As suggested in the theoretical overview, this phenomenon also has interesting links to wider neoliberal culture, where individualistic and competitive work is often cloaked in collaborative rhetoric.
- To depart from this problematic trend and foreground discussion as a part of co-creative work, *Visitors Studio* could borrow from functionality in *Upstage* and *Adobe Connect* whilst rendering the chat design more contemporary and creative.
- It would also be helpful to draw from the flexibility of chat functionality on these sites. Asynchronous commenting could be supplemented with webcam functionality and private or public IRC.
- This would give users the maximum possible scope with which to communicate during performances or as viewers of site content.

5. Community Formation through Personal Profiles and Gamification

78% of projects incorporated some form of evident and directed community formation and retention strategy. Strategies included gamification techniques such as 'liking' or 'commenting', the production of personal profiles, highlighting site material, and the visualisation of data from live or finished projects.

Projects such as *Cowbird* (fig 25) and *Historypin* (fig 26) use individual profiles or 'channels' which can be personalised and archive all material a user has uploaded whilst including information about the community member: including name, gender, location and interests. Material uploaded on these sites can also be 'liked', and it is possible to join the audience of other users. Statistics drawn from this information are shown on profiles and uploaded content. Both these projects also feature and highlight site material, while search is enabled via popular contributions to the site. Similar functionality is also present on the *Johnny Cash Project*, (fig 27) where it is possible to search via popular frames.

Fig 25: Cowbird Profiles (cowbird.com/leigh-raiford)
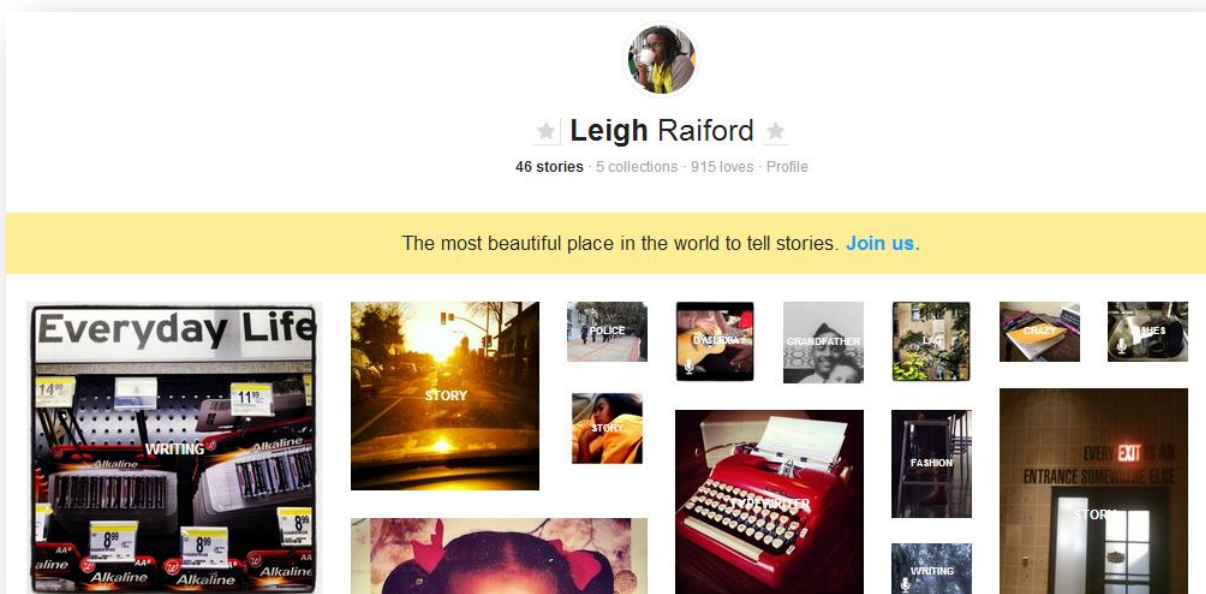
Fig 26: Historypin Channels (historypin.com/channels)
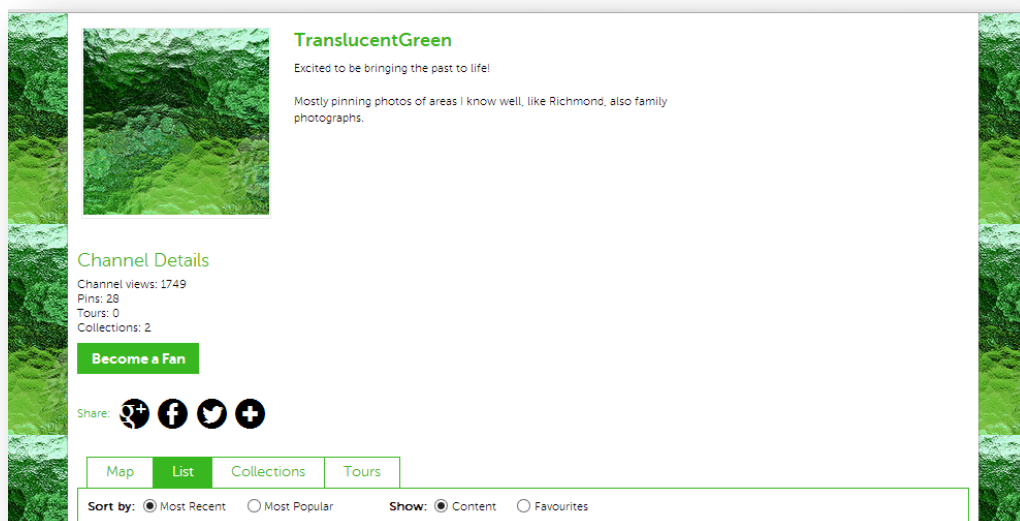
Fig 27: Johnny Cash Project Search Criteria (thejohnnycashproject.com)

Open Ideo functions slightly differently, by producing competitions around specific challenges, and gamifying the process of working towards particular goals through data visualisation (fig 28). *Change by Us* also uses data visualisation to shows how many people are involved in each project, and links to their personal profiles (fig 29). *Good for Nothing* is particularly interesting in this respect, as it notes people's skills onsite to help aid collaboration. Users can choose between 'think' 'design' or 'code' (fig 30).

Fig 28: Open Ideo Data Visualisation (http://bit.ly/11Qn2eJ)
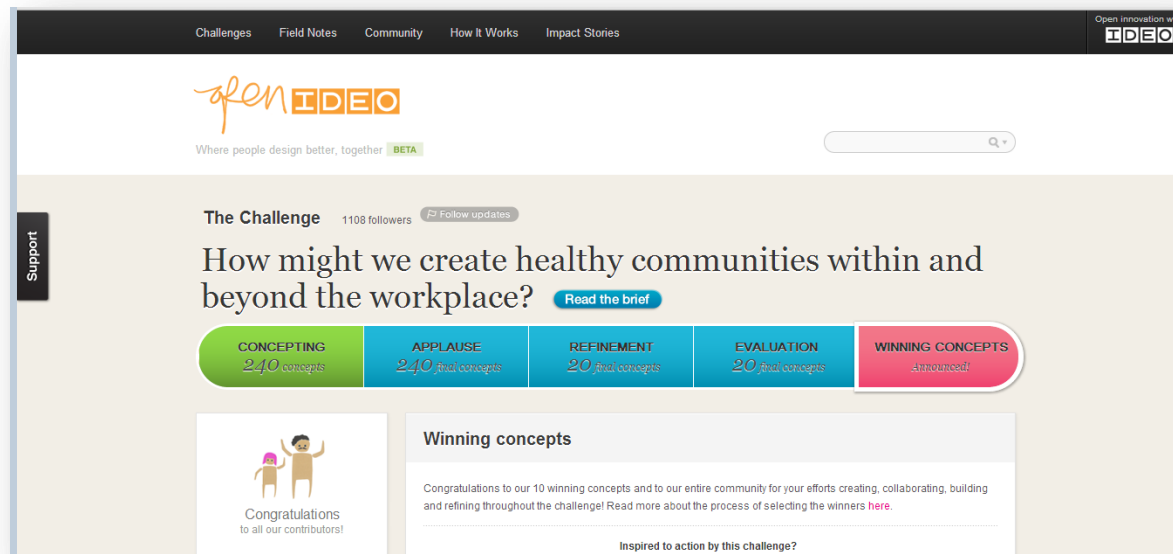
Fig: 29 Change by Us Project Statistics (nyc.changeby.us/search#projects)
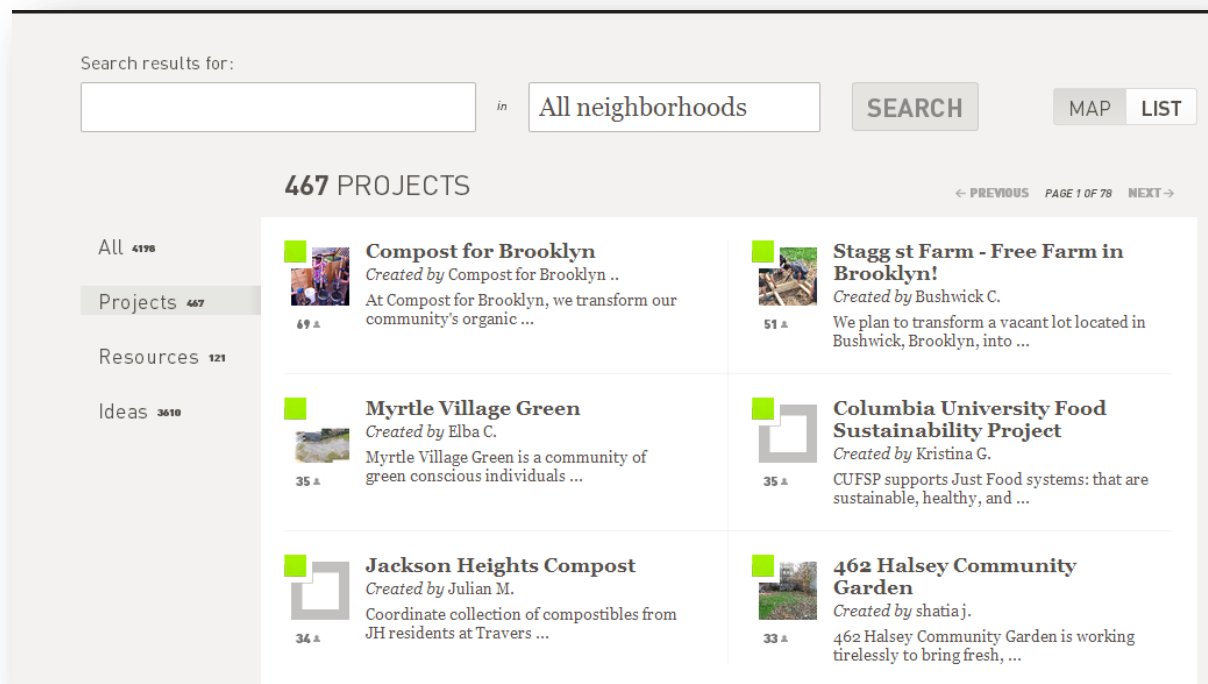
Fig 30: Good For Nothing Collaboration Skills Tool (goodfornothing.com/members)
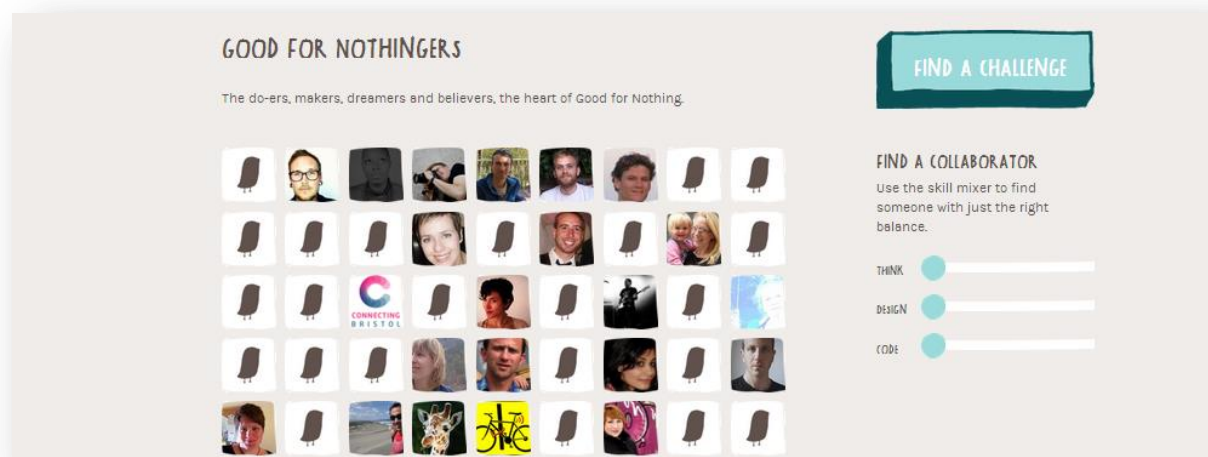
Points to Consider in relation to *Visitors Studio*

- Personal profiles can help garner a sense of community onsite, and render visible the onsite community
- *Visitors Studio* could develop its ID card system by adding specific skills to user profiles, as in *Good for Nothing*. This seems particularly helpful as a way to encourage collaboration with new community members

- *Visitors Studio* could also include an archive of previous work and uploaded material in its personal profiles, as in sites such as *Cowbird*. This would help users locate the interests of other community members and distinguish who would be most relevant to collaborate with
- Gamification tends to be competitive and individualistic, playing on a contemporary neoliberal imperative for self-branding and visibility and often creating an elite who have garnered most visibility
- Therefore it would be important to consider critically whether to include gamification in a new version of *Visitors Studio*
- However, gamification does also help filter information, and rewards users for their efforts onsite
- Perhaps it would be possible to use competition as an engine for more effective and critical practice in a new version of *Visitors Studio*. This would help ensure the work created is as critical and meaningful as it is inclusive
- Perhaps on *Visitors Studio* it would be possible to interpret 'liking' in a more differentiated way, so the hierarchy produced onsite functioned more around criticality or creativeness of content

6. Archive Formation

As mentioned above, only 19% of surveyed projects did not have an archive or documentation of some form on their site. 44% had partial documentation, meaning only highlights of generated content, or screenshots of previous live performances were kept, either for marketing purposes or as a way of generating confidence in the functioning of the site. This leaves 37% of projects functioning with full archival documentation of work.

One example of a site with partial form of documentation is *Avaaz*, which only keeps live projects or highlighted site content, presumably to show evidence of the effectiveness of past crowdsourced social change projects. *Upstage* also has a partial archive, only keeping screenshots of past performances. This is partly to give a context to the work and project, but also because the project leaders feel the performances should exist in the moment.

Many projects functioning with full archival documentation of work use their archives as an engine for the logic of a project itself. For instance, *Cowbird* or *Historypin* and the *Johnny Cash Project* use archived content produced by their community to forge the overall logic of their projects. This said it is also possible to save and archive content privately on *Cowbird*.

Projects such as *Newstweek* do not aim to archive material, as their critical impetus comes from the momentary nature of the work they produce. This seems particularly relevant in terms of the relation between critical interventionist cultural production and the impetus on surveillance and self-surveillance in today's society.

Points to Consider in Relation to *Visitors Studio*

- Would a redesign of *Visitors Studio* want a full and public archive? What would the strategic usefulness of this level of documentation be?
- As suggested in the theoretical overview, absolute and uncritical visibility could be considered a tool of Neoliberalism *Visitors Studio* would want to resist
- Projects could be archived privately, and rendered visible strategically in momentary ways in relation to a particular event or cultural moment. This would draw on contemporary methods of Tactical Media, and circumvent the contemporary cultural imperative for visibility and self-disclosure

7. Search and Filtration of Information

Search and filtration of information is best modelled by projects which hold full archives of content. For instance, *Cowbird* filters information in an extremely detailed and flexible way through sagas, projects and tagged metadata search terms. The main search interface also includes geographical location of story or author, time, age of author, gender of author, and can be filtered via beloved, featured or recent stories (fig 31).

Fig 31: Cowbird Search Functionality (cowbird.com/search/beloved/?q=a)
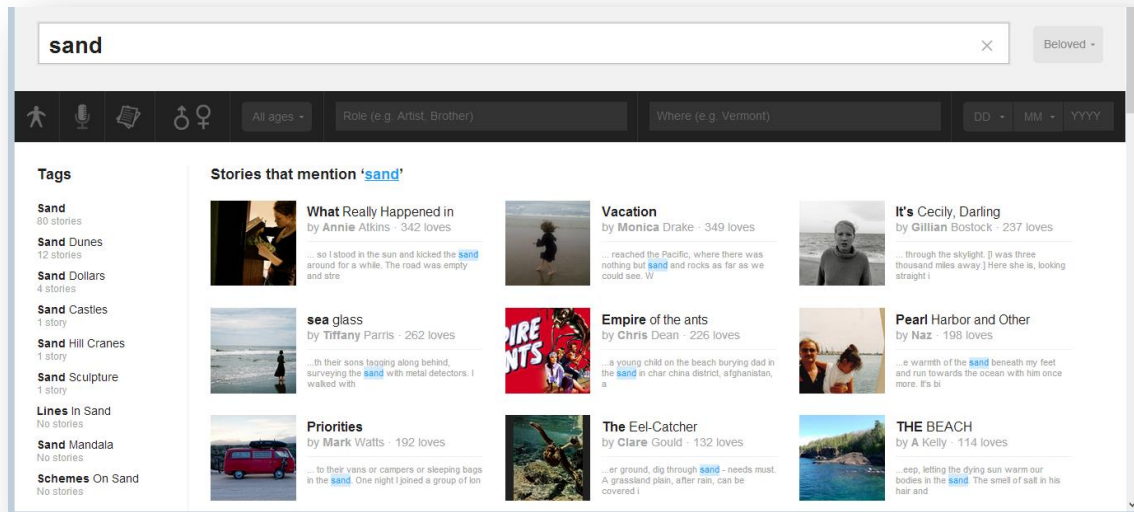
Historypin filters information via a map, through time and place (fig 32). Information is also filtered through personal profiles, collections of content generated by users and tours of curated content. Within a personal profile, it is possible to sort content by most popular and most recent contributions. Meanwhile, the *Johnny Cash Project* has a clickable archive of contributions visible on a timeline in line with the song which structures this project. It is also possible to search via most popular frames and a range of other filtration criteria, such as most brushstrokes used or directors' choice (fig 33). *Good for Nothing* (fig 34) and *Change by Us* (fig 35) both also have an interesting way of filtering information through streams of projects, which fall into particular umbrella categories.

Fig 32: Historypin Search Facility (http://bit.ly/SEHVjX)

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Fig 33: Johnny Cash Project Search and Filtration

Fig 34: Good for Nothing filtering of information via project streams (goodfornothing.com/challenges)
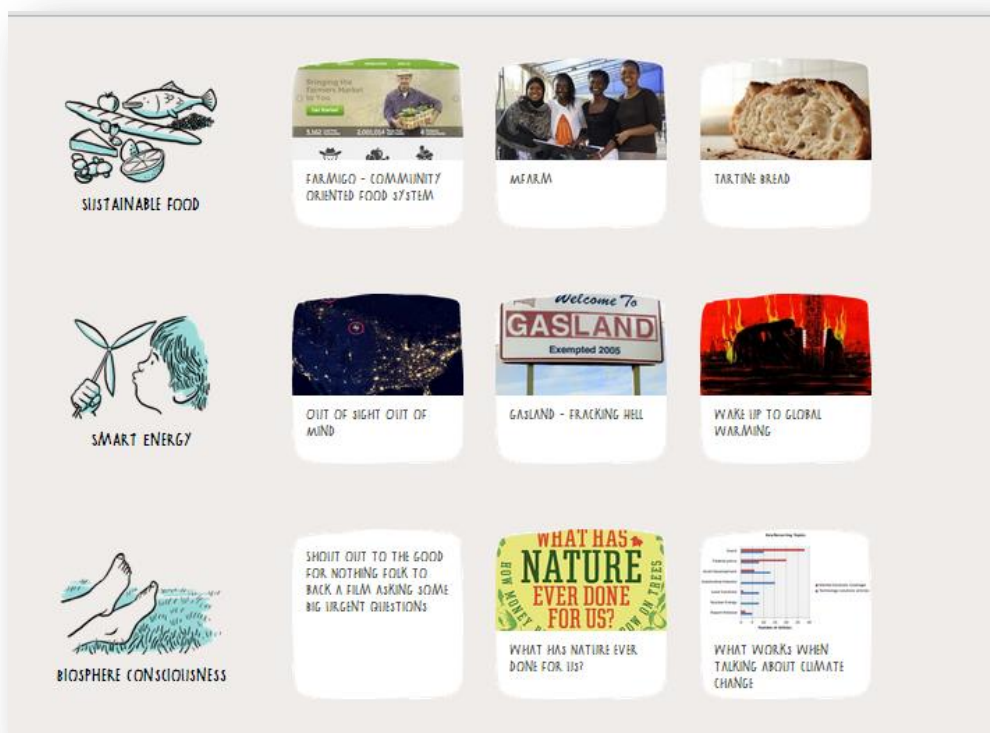
Fig 35: Change by Us Colour Coded Projects (nyc.changeby.us/#start)

Points to Consider

- Projects such as *Cowbird* can be overwhelming in terms of the ammount of different modes of search and filtration offered onsite. Therefore a redesign of *Visitors Studio* might want to develop a more curated and clear set of search and filtration criteria

- Many sites use search and filtration based on popularity through 'likes' and 'views', or through featuring by project leaders. This produces a hierarchy of visibility onsite.

- However, some might feel that a level of excellence in cultural production is important to retain, and that this desire for excellence might be interpreted in progressive terms through more interesting category formations than simply 'liking' material.

- Therefore in a redesign of *Visitors Studio* categories could be 'critically effective', or 'aesthetically beautiful' or 'fun to watch' or 'experimental'

- This is something which bears an interesting similarity to the categories in the *Johnny Cash Project* which sort frames according to categories such as 'abstraction' and 'pointillism' in addition to highest rated or director chosen frames, and could make this project an interesting one to borrow from

8. Content Ownership and Copyright

In the projects surveyed, there were a range of different interpretations of content ownership and copyright within co-creative projects. On the loosest end of the scale was Andy Deck's *Glyphiti*, a generative digital artwork open to reworking by any visitor to the site, without prior consent from the original author. *Glyphiti* also states that everyone who has taken part in the production of this image jointly owns the collective artwork produced.

Other projects produce a variety of autonomously owned individual works displayed within a collective format. Here each individual is responsible for their uploaded material and any copyright clearance attached to it. *History Pin* and *Cowbird* are two such projects, both of which enable the user to choose a level of copyright appropriate to user material. On Cowbird for instance, there is a license chooser function, which enables users to choose a Creative Commons license best suited to how they wish their content to be used (fig 36). On *Cowbird* it is also possible to retell other member's stories whilst crediting the author.

Fig 36: Cowbird License Chooser (cowbird.com/settings/)
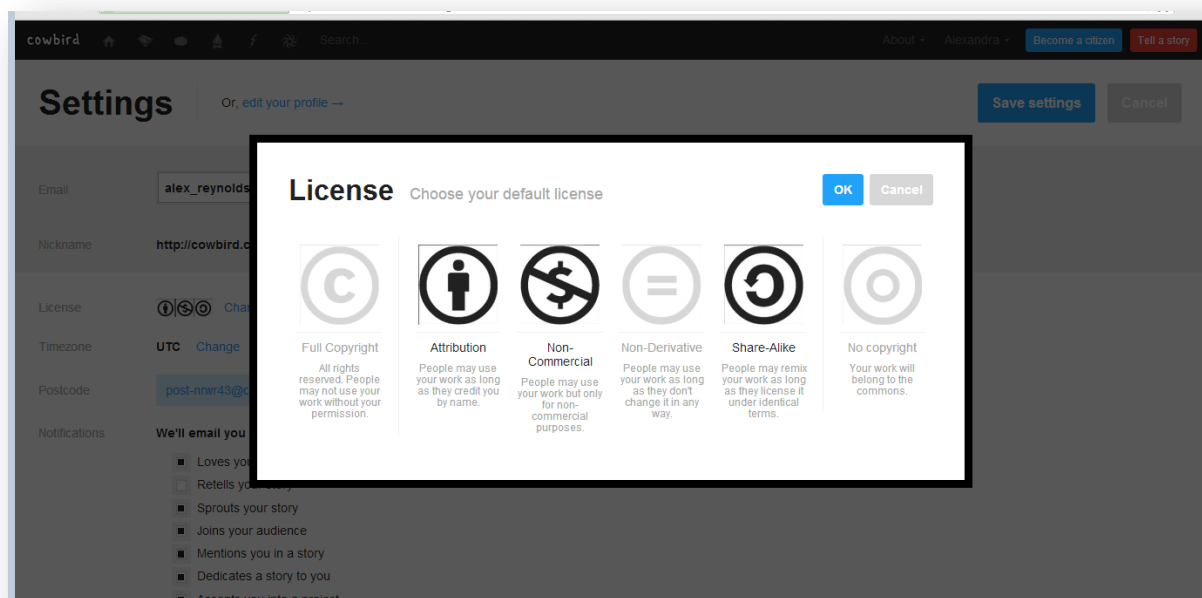
However, in these cases, although site leaders do not assume responsibility for user-generated content they reserve the right to remove it if it contravenes community guidelines or rules and regulations for site use. Project leaders can also use site content any way they wish.

Several sites explicitly state all content is owned by organisations which have funded the projects. For instance, *Open Ideo* states it owns all user-generated site content (openideo.com/terms) while *Avaaz* states it takes responsibility for content uploaded by users (http://bit.ly/14IFZih) A further 9 sites and projects did not appear to state publicly in their terms and conditions who owned the material generated from their collaborative work. These projects included *Maquila Region 4* – an artwork which collaborates with Mexican textile workers to problematize the minimum wage difference in US and Mexico for exported products, and Michael Landy's *'Acts of Kindness'* TFL initiative, where stories of kindness on London's transport system are documented online and in physical locations throughout the city.

Points to Consider in relation to *Visitors Studio*

- In a redesign of *Visitors* Studio, it seems important to avoid oppressive modes of copyright whilst allowing for respectful modes of attribution valuing individual contributions to collective projects.
- The highest level of autonomy afforded a user might be to use creative commons licencing functioning in a similar manner to *Cowbird*, where the user can choose how they would like their work remixed and used.
- It also seems problematic that in many of these projects users have all liability and responsibility for content yet project leaders retain all power over content produced and write the community guidelines and terms and conditions of the sites themselves.
- A redesign of *Visitors Studio* might therefore aim to balance out power and responsibility in terms of content production and ownership

9) Project Leadership Trends

Project leadership and the dynamic between project leaders and participants varied widely between the projects surveyed. Projects which offered little or no direction to users, such as *STIKTU*, tended to generate less meaningful results, which tended to be ludic, but also often incoherent and/or culturally superficial (fig 37).

Fig 37: STIKTU content production (stiktu.com)
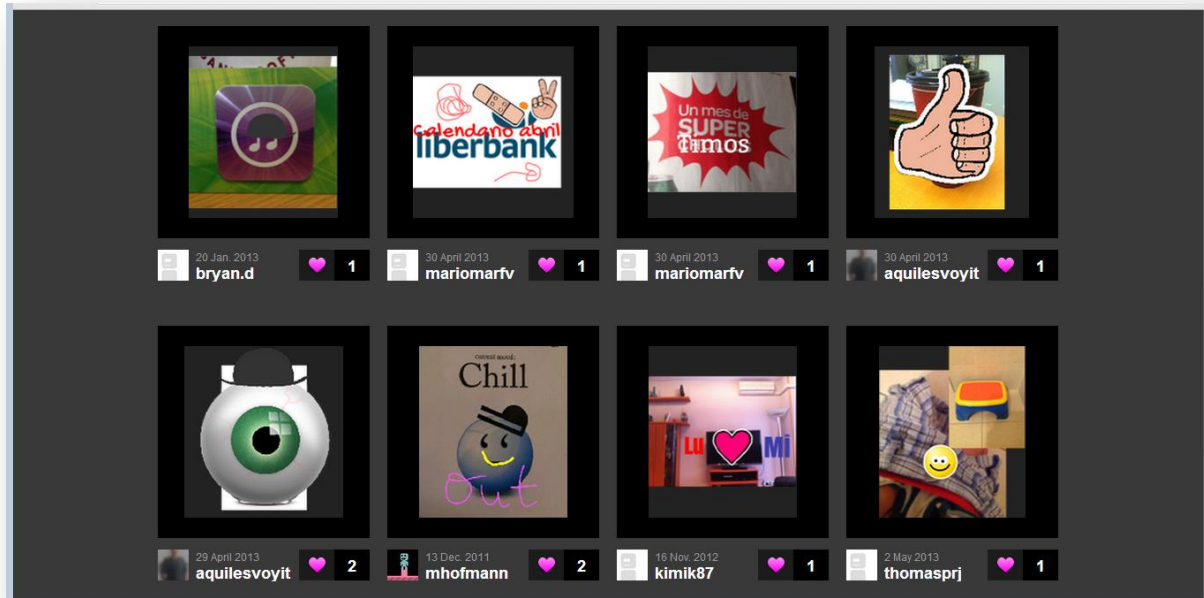
Some sites such as *ArtStudio* or *Towtruck* were only intended to be used as tools or embedded on existing websites. Therefore, project leadership in these sites ended at the facilitation of the technical and skilful use of the tools provided, through good design and usability, and in the case of *ArtStudio* through tutorial documents.

On the other end of the spectrum sites such as the *Johnny Cash Project* or Ele Carpenter's *Embroidering the Digital Commons* offer a clear and well defined structure of participation to the audience and in this way could not fail to produce a coherent project. For instance, *Embroidering the Digital Commons* gives clear instructions to workshop leaders who then guide participants to embroider words and phrases chosen from an artist developed glossary of terms.

Similarly, projects such as *Hackney Hear* heavily curate the user generated content available in the final publicly available project. Here, residents of London Fields, including market-stall workers, artists, writers and historians gave insights into their experience of the London Fields region. However, the stories which make the final cut into this geo-located mobile application are curated solely by the leaders of the project itself.

Other project leaders, such as Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher in *Learning to Love You More* take a clearly defined role, but one which works to provoke or challenge the audience by setting them specific and carefully culturally positioned content based tasks. Examples of such tasks might be to 'enact a News Story' or 'make us an encouraging banner'.

Meanwhile, the developers of co-created performance sites such as *WJ-S, Upstage* and *Waterwheel* often work with participants for an extended period of time to produce a collective performance, around a given theme or set of themes. An example of this would be the recent 'We Have a Situation' *Upstage* performances in London, Graz, Eindhoven and Nantes, each of which took on a different social or cultural question such as e-waste or

food production, and spent between 3 and 5 days researching and devising around this theme before a cyberformance on the topic occurred (wehaveasituation.net).

Other sites, such as *Cowbird* offer the user a certain ammount of freedom over the sort of content produced, but also set challenges and plan projects on specific topics. *Change by Us* also retains a balance between user generated and leader guided content. Here users can suggest ideas for social change projects in New York, but project administrators work in federated groups around specific topics and projects to ensure user-generated content is functioning effectively. Project developers in sites such as the crowd-campaigning site *Avaaz* also have a clearly defined role, speaking of themselves as 'servant leaders', who aim to 'listen to members and suggest actions they can take in order to affect the broader world' (avaaz.org/en/about.php).

Points to Consider in Relation to *Visitors Studio*

- At present, *Visitors Studio* allows open co-creation on any topic, and provides tools to facilitate this
- However, *Visitors Studio* has also supported workshops and directly curated projects in the past.
- In relation to a redesign of this site, it is worth considering what form of project leadership would be preferable in terms of the quality of site output and engagement of participants.
- Sites surveyed included various modes of leadership: that which directly empowers and challenges the participant, aims for dialogic horizontality, attempts to step back completely, or aims to work towards a strictly controlled project format
- A redesign of *Visitors Studio* should aim to consider what sort(s) of leadership it wants to foreground
- Another question is whether the use of federated groups would be helpful in a redesign of *Visitors Studio*.
- Groups working around particular themes could allow for collective responsibility around the aesthetic and critical effectiveness of a project, and dialogue between project leaders and participants
- Finally, facilitated workshops on or offline could be helpful as a way to ensure meaningful work is produced for public exhibition.

10) Exhibition

Some projects surveyed did not only function online, but also had some element of offline exhibition attached to them. For example, *WJ-S* uses software which allows multiple computers to project performance work streamed from the internet directly into gallery spaces – and potentially public arenas (fig 38). Meanwhile, *Newstweek* means taking control of Wi-Fi networks and hijacking public news sites through this means (fig 39).

Fig 38: WJ-S performance (wj-s.org)

Fig 39: NewsTweek (newstweek.com)

Wikitude functions through a virtual reality use of space, where it is possible for users to geotag their own

contributions to the world around them and link to websites through this means (fig 40). Similarly, *Hackney Hear* uses geo-mapping audio technology to enable users to experience completed co-created projects in context.

Fig 40: Wikitude (Wikitude.com)

Points to Consider in Relation to *Visitors Studio*

- Public exhibitions and interventions drawn from work produced in *Visitors Studio* could be written into the structural redesign of the site, as in *Waterwheel*
- A redesign of the site could also facilitate collaboration with other projects and technologies and produce performances between platforms. This could occur through links to other sites or through festivals such as *Upstage's* 12121

Community Consultation

Interview Analysis

13 interviews were carried out with diverse members of the Furtherfield Community, including project leaders on co-creative projects similar to *Visitors Studio*, visual and audio artists with experience of working on the site, PhD students, web designers, artists and researchers approaching the site for the first time.

1) Aharon: artist and member of Furtherfield
2) Suzon Fuks: artist and project leader of online co-creation site: *Waterwheel.org*
3) Dr John Hopkins: practitioner of remote-streamed visual-sonic performance work, and early participant in *Visitors Studio*
4) Helen Varley Jamieson: artist and project leader of cyberformance site: *Upstage.nz*
5) Olga Panades Massanet: PhD Student carrying out practical and theoretical research in the field of media arts, and co-editor with *Furtherfield.org*
6) Lucy Mills: visual artist based in Furtherfield's local area, working with video, projection and installation
7) Roger Mills: musician, composer and sound artist, part of the original *Visitors Studio* team
8) Shaziya Niamh: photographer based in Furtherfield's local area
9) Christina Papagiannouli: PhD student exploring cyberformance
10) Ale Scapin: Furtherfield Producer
11) Michael Szpakowski: artist, composer and writer who worked extensively with *Visitors Studio*
12) Chris Webb: web designer involved in building the first version of *Visitors Studio*. Now working in a commercial context for his own firm: Paperheads
13) Rich White: visual artist who undertook a residency in Furtherstudio, the site which preceded *Visitors Studio*

Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour, after a short 15 minute (re)introduction to *Visitors Studio* where respondents could familiarise themselves with the features and functionality of the site as it currently stands. Interviews were informal and conversational, but were structured around 10 key aspects of *Visitors Studio*. Below is an overview of responses from each of the 13 respondents.

1. Aesthetic and Display

The respondents liked the 'retro' aesthetic and typeface of *Visitors Studio* and did not want to lose the distinctive look of the site. As Roger Mills states: 'I'd be loathed to see some of the site's distinctive look and feel – I would not want to see the uniqueness go in favour of the more wide page big white colours type of blogs you often see these days which are all very de rigeur'.

Respondents tended to like the dark colours of the site, and compared its aesthetic to cultural forms such as Teletext, dvds in the 90's and multiplayer games online – Christina Papagiannouli even made a comparison between the site and the darkness of the performance stage. Respondents also liked the fact the site felt like a studio and the simplicity and cleanness of *Visitors Studio*'s current aesthetic, feeling this could be developed. As Olga Panades Massanet states: 'I really like it, it is old school but in a nice way and really clean'.

However, although respondents liked *Visitors Studio*'s aesthetic in essence, many also felt the design of the site would benefit from being updated for the contemporary audience, particularly younger people accessing the site for the first time. As Alessandra Scapin states, 'I really like the aesthetic of it…(but) it depends who is going to use it…If you think about people now who are so used to Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and all of this with their clean, slick interfaces, they are going to struggle a lot with this'. There was also a concern that the darkness of the site, small font and user interfaces currently negatively impacted on its readability.

Overall, the strong feeling was that keeping the site's aesthetic and its 'studio feeling' was important but that its current understated simplicity and clean lines should be developed for a contemporary audience. For

respondents such as Helen Varley Jamieson and Suzon Fuks, the key to successful design of co-creation sites seemed to be aiming for an uncluttered, clear, simple project which is navigable and clear. As Rich White states: 'it does not need to be bells and whistles and pretty design. It just has to be good decent design that performs….I think the simplicity of it is actually key'.

As a web designer, Chris Webb expanded on this contention in a particularly detailed way, suggesting the mixing area itself should be full browser. As he states: 'if the screen is the workspace, the content becomes the aesthetics…the browser area would be the canvas. The design would be as unobtrusive as possible'. In this case, Webb suggested that other aspects of the site such as chat and search functionality could be drawn into the workspace when needed from a simple and clearly defined toolbar.

These recommendations are not radically different from the current site design, which incorporates a toolbar along the top of the workspace. However, many respondents did not currently find this feature of the site user friendly or clearly marked, so felt it would benefit from a redesign, perhaps borrowing from familiar interfaces such as *Photoshop*. As Lucy Mills states:

'I think it might benefit from a tool bar which is fixed within the studio and where everything is, clearly labelled within it. So you can find where pictures are really easily. You have that across the top, but it does not feel like a tool bar. It feels more like a website than a mixing studio. It is probably because in other programs such as *Photoshop*, the toolbar is something down the side'.

Interestingly, both Chris Webb and Rich White suggested the site should be taken out of Flash and redesigned in html5. This was for purely practical reasons. The respondents felt Flash was 'bloated' and difficult to load, and that html5 was a more contemporary software to use.

2) Content Development Tools

All respondents felt the usability of the mixer and the uploading of images could be easier, especially when working fast during performances. Users found the distinction between Mixer, Mixes and Refresh Mix functions confusing, and also did not find the functionality of these features intuitive. New users to the project also found it difficult to access their uploaded material, and felt they would have benefitted from a clearer and more direct interface in terms of finding material which had been added to the site.

For Chris Webb, the mixing space should incorporate a space to preview and pull together images whilst working, and to be able to drag and drop these images onto the mixing space directly. As he states: 'you have a mixing area, and can choose from material to add to it. If you want something, you can click and drag it to put it on the workspace. Then you would have a space where you can see stuff you might like and want to use. Because when you are mixing, you will be mixing lots of things, not knowing how the mix will change further down the line'.

Interestingly, most respondents did not want more than 8 layers to work with onsite, or even if there were more layers, would not want infinite ammounts. As Shaziya Niamh stated: '8 layers right now is plenty. I think if you were to add more layers it could overcomplicate the system…you'd have to make the site as it stands work really clearly and accessibly before then adding more layers to it'.

Nonetheless, many respondents did feel it would be helpful to have more functionality within the mixer, perhaps by adding live webcam streaming or drawing tools. Participants were also keen for file sizes to go up allowing larger images and longer sections of audio and video and for material to be easily compressed to the exact format necessary on site.

Respondents felt the mixer could also be developed in terms of image manipulation and ways in which layers interact with one another. As Lucy Mills states: I think there is room to develop the structure of the mixer: to create more functionality, depth and range of movement in how you can structure the layers and how they can interact with one another'.

Olga Panades Massanet mirrored this statement, saying: 'I don't know technically what it means to make content 'rich' but being able to add effects and motion or have a series of filters would be helpful'. Rich White adds to the conversation, stating that: 'with html5 there would be a lot you could add in terms of editing things in the window. Changing colour to whatever you want, stretching things', while Chris Webb suggests that film ought to be editable onsite.

Roger Mills echoes this sentiment from an audio point of view, stating that although any technology means limitation, developments in technology such as real time audio streaming mean *Visitors Studio* could now be developed further if desired. Michael Szpakowski also suggested the audio features of the site could be improved, perhaps including EQ, reverse, pitch shift, echo or reverb and the reversal of audio in the sounds features onsite.

If *Visitors Studio* enabled greater functionality onsite, it might mean borrowing design strategies from other software and sites such as Photoshop, E-Jamming, Jacktrip or Audacity. However, opinion was split on whether this added functionality should occur on *Visitors Studio* or through free third party software elsewhere on the web.

As Michael Szpakowski states: 'the more opportunities for manipulating images the better [but] I never anticipated that stuff would be produced in the programme, I think this would be overloading it'. Helen Varley Jamieson also comments on this, stating:

'there is a wide range of content creation tools already available to everyone, so I don't think the platform itself needs to provide this. People can create content with whatever tools they prefer to use & then upload it…. However it could be useful to be able to do certain things such as resizing, compressing, volume adjustment, maybe some other minor editing, after something has been uploaded'. Perhaps then in this case, it might be helpful to be direct users to other forms of free software they could use and to broaden the file types it was possible to upload onsite.

Interview respondents were also generally keen to have higher levels of control over the content they uploaded, being able to save, export and delete mixes easily. As Michael Szpakowski states 'it would be good to have the ability to control the resources you uploaded. I would delete my resources afterwards if they were performance specific….another thing I think might be useful and attractive to people is if people could export mixes as moving images in some format, and use the site as a making area'. Alessandra Scapin reiterates this, stating: 'it is important to have a download option, so the artist can save whatever is done, and then leave it for others to work with'.

Rich White made the point that deleting content could be problematic if it was used in multiple mixes, as this could mean material could be lost from more than one piece of work. One solution suggested by Rich would be if content had a cooling off period, where it was private and could be deleted, before entering the public realm. Another option would be to offer users the choice to upload content as either public and shareable or private and deletable. Otherwise, all private content could be deletable, becoming shareable and non-deletable when used publicly.

Opinion was also divided on whether *Visitors Studio* should retain its current looped aesthetic. For Michael Szpakowski the 'whole thing depends on looping – this is the motor of the whole thing. The sound works

because it can loop. Maybe longer loops so that you can have longer sections, but I think it makes it user friendly and gives it an artistic form'.

Conversely, Chris Webb felt the site would benefit from more linear performance options using the webcam. As Webb states if video was longer and recordable straight from the webcam 'you could use it as a platform for doing performances. In this way you would not need to mix anything. This would mean functionality more like a TV channel'. This division of opinion suggests it might be helpful to have different modes the site could work in – perhaps something like a layering mode and a linear mode.

3) Collaboration and Solo Working

Respondents tended to find the collaborative live aspects of *Visitors Studio* particularly engaging. As Christina Papagiannouli states: 'what was interesting today was that I added a picture, then you added your own layer and then I moved it around and we created an image together - this is the most interesting part of *Visitors Studio*'. John Hopkins had taught at university level with the tool, and although students had been reticent to work with the current version of *Visitors Studio* at first, they had been most interested in the software when they realised collaboration in real time was possible.

However, even so, many respondents were keen to retain a private space where they could play and experiment without being in the public eye, or where content produced is forgotten after it is made. As Michael Szpakowski states: 'I think people are always very nervous about people seeing what they are doing from the start - the ability to go in and be able to play is extremely important. I am pretty confident about stuff and even I felt nervous about people watching… I think a space where things can be forgotten after they are produced is very useful, and where people are not on display – a space of privacy'.

Within the realm of private working, many respondents were keen to keep the current solo mode, in order 'to play around with it without anybody altering what you are doing - you might just want to do some stuff'. Meanwhile, other respondents such as Christina Papagiannouli would get rid of the solo mode altogether in favour of a group rehearsal space 'where people would invite each other and work together in closed groups'. Perhaps then, there could be more flexible options for working built into a redesign of the site – public group and solo mode, and group and solo private rehearsal modes.

There was a feeling that *Visitors Studio* could be used for different kinds of solo and group making and collaboration - including use as an artist's tool, a space for independent play, for group improvisation or more structured cyberperformance on the site or even between different co-creation initiatives - and that a redesign should cater flexibly for each of these. As Michael Szpakowski states, 'I think it can be a number of things. It can be a place where people want to generally come and be creative and hang out and also do live work with people at a distance…Also as an artist tool - which maybe needs to be thought about slightly differently'.

4) Discussion

Respondents felt the chat functionality should stay, but were divided on how much they used this function of the site in their own work. For instance Michael Szpakowski did not use this function very much, working more in terms of a 'jazz improvisation' between images and audio. Conversely, respondents such as Olga Panades Massanet and Alessandra Scapin found the chat important and helpful especially if people are mixing and collaborating in real time.

In general, interviewees felt the current chat function could do with being updated. Users found the current interface, which means typing in the workspace for text to appear in text boxes elsewhere on the screen, a little confusing. Additionally, as Roger Mills points out, when there are 20-30 people in the site, their cursors will show up text beneath them on top of work produced in the workspace, obscuring the work itself. Chris Webb also

made the point that he would not use cursors in a redesign of the site, feeling a more contemporary design would be preferable.

Lucy Mills felt the chat should always be visible, perhaps as a scroll on the screen, so it is flowing and in context in one space. Meanwhile Chris Webb felt chat should be redesigned in a more contemporary way, but remain available as a tab on a menu, which would be visible only when needed: 'The chat comes in from the side when you need it and is signalled with a tab above'.

Aharon suggested that chat could be used both synchronously and asynchronously on a redesign of the site, making the point that IRC is used in this way. This is a point Christina Papagiannouli agreed with, suggesting that 'you could add a chat box at the bottom of the ID card… as a private messaging system'.

5) Personal Profiles and Gamification

Overall, interviewees felt personal profiles were useful to have and that it would be helpful to develop these, perhaps by including a database of uploaded material and mixes as part of the ID Card. As Olga Panades Massanet states, 'it is always helpful to tie things to people. When you like a particular mix, you might like to then see the other things that person has produced'.

Roger Mills and Michael Szpakowski also suggested that the profiles could be used to point up particular skills or interests users might have, to help facilitate collaboration outside of one's normal networks. As Mills states: 'it would be good if you could go into *Visitors Studio* and look for a Video DJ who produces work with quite Film Noir Aesthetic for instance, or who has my politics'. It is worth noting that the current ID system has a biography section and so this information might be present. However, the search interface could function in a more structured way to front load this functionality, perhaps using a system of icons to indicate particular skill sets.

Interviewees were much more ambivalent about adding gamification aspects to the site. As Michael Szpakowski states: 'it is important that it feels authentic rather than appearing like a social networking site'. Szpakowski also makes the point that adding statistics to profiles can lead to a false hierarchy of knowledge production, where users who have been on the site for a long time get more visibility arbitrarily.

Another fear is that simply 'liking' content can seem uncritical or disingenuous, as well as being purely consensual. As Lucy Mills states, 'I'm not sure about the like – maybe to comment, but the liking is just too Facebook, and it is so constrained to liking it. You can't dislike it. But comments, it pushes you into the realms of some intellectual comments'. Roger Mills echoes this sentiment, stating: 'voting for things maybe – but I would not want to swap that with good discussion of what people are doing'.

Another more practical concern was it is very difficult to compete with social media, simply in terms of budget and popularity. As John Hopkins states 'it is very difficult to compete with social media on their terms… I think of course you can borrow some of those successful ways of attracting eyeballs, but again, competing for the eyeballs, you are really at a disadvantage from the beginning. So focusing on community development or context development would be a much more empowering strategy'.

However, many respondents also saw potential merit in interpreting social media strategies to show appreciation of other people's work. As Olga Panades Massanet states 'it is nice as a rewarding sort of thing, rewarding what you have done, showing it is appreciated'. Chris Webb echoed this sentiment, stating that 'you should be rewarded for playing with it. It is a good way of forming loyalty and gets people to play with it more'.

One way to negotiate this ambivalence is to find ways of interpreting social media strategies towards genuine intellectual engagement and community development; potentially through commenting, the forging of connections between profiles through participant interests and skills.

6) Archive Formation and Exhibition of Site Material

Respondents felt it was important to have a clearly marked, visible and easily searchable archive of uploaded material - and a separate archive of mixes produced. As abovementioned, mixes and uploaded material should also be visible on each user profile. Respondents wanted all mixes to remain remixable, and felt that remixes should be archived separately as a supplement to earlier forms. Especially, as Alessandra Scapin states, because: 'what has been done before might even have been even better'. It might even be that mixes would be visible in their previous forms as a journey or respond to one another, as in Chris Webb's current 'Meme Catcher' project (meme-catcher.net), or Aaron Koblin's Exquisite Forest (exquisiteforest.com).

Some interviewees such as Roger Mills suggested that users should take more responsibility for uploaded material within their personal profiles, which were publicly visible in the archive: to 'have what they have uploaded as an archive up there and not to think of it just as a workshop, but also as an exhibition space'. Others, such as Lucy Mills felt the site would benefit from a discrete exhibition area. This could be 'an interface or pathway where people who are not part of *Visitors Studio* to view what is going on in *Visitors Studio*… A gallery studio, so if I wanted to have a look what was going on, I would go into the studio and this is where the most recent work is displayed'. It might even be that you could have an exhibition area clearly differentiated from the workshop and archive, so the work archived and made public would be differentiated from the play and experimentation in other areas of the site.

Following on from Christina Papagiannouli's suggestion of having a private rehearsal space, some users also felt that participants in *Visitors Studio* should be able to determine what of their work remained publicly visible within an archive, and what was private. As Aharon states: 'I think people should be able to decide their visibility as they see fit and which parts of their work and uploaded material might be visible'.

7) Search and Filtration of Information

Interviewees found the search and filtration of information onsite quite difficult to use. One of the principal responses was it would be helpful to make the search function more prominent and obviously labelled and to have thumbnails or previews of sound on the search so you could quickly pick things out intuitively. As Lucy Mills states, 'it is like having a palette of paint. You want to see all the colours in front of you, so you can start mixing them together'.

Several respondents were also keen to develop the search via user generated metadata, but made the point this would need to be written into the site in a clearer way in order to function effectively when participants are uploading material fast during performances.

As Michael Szpakowski states, 'It probably needs the software at your end to impose limits on people that allows proper indexing of the images either textually or visually. You can't rely on the user to do it conscientiously because they won't as they are always in a hurry'. Bearing this in mind, it might be helpful to include some very simple categories and a particularly clear interface on a redesign of *Visitors Studio* which users could quickly attend to when uploading material. Categories like topic, colours, media, and description of content might be helpful.

Many interviewees were keen to keep the search functionality via user profile, but some respondents thought the option of searching via recently uploaded content could be less helpful. As Christina Papagiannouli states 'most recent, I am not so sure, as it depends. If you are doing a festival thing, then all your most recent uploads are in relation to the festival. This would be helpful during the festival, but perhaps not to another artist'.

If content was 'liked' it would be possible to search via most popular content, a common search criteria used on many participatory sites. However, as Roger Mills states, there is a danger this would lead to a false hierarchy. It

could also simply lead to the most accessible material being most visible, rather than the most interesting, for example.

One suggested way to negotiate this might be to have a topic led mode of filtration of content, which would not only prevent hierarchies of content production, but would also allow the site to function manageably, allowing for maximum visibility of site content. Overall, it seemed that the most important feature in a redesign of the search of information is to make material as accessible as possible, which might mean offering a diverse range of different search criteria.

8)   Content Ownership and Copyright

The general feeling amongst respondents was that this site is intended for remixing, and that copyright should therefore remain as loose as possible. As Christina Papagiannouli states, 'as it wants to be real time and collaborative and communication, it is not about copyright any more. It is about people collaborating and communicating. Pretty much the aim of this space designates what can and cannot be done in it'. Olga Panades Massanet echoes this idea, when she says: 'I think if you are bothered about people changing your work you need to find another platform… That is what the platform has always been about and we cannot change that, it is quite crucial. There are so many other places where you can protect your work, this is a place to collaborate'.

Nonetheless, some respondents did feel it was important to be able to choose how shareable uploaded content was on co-created platforms. As Helen Varley Jamieson states: 'if people are uploading media then it's good if they can choose at that point to make something freely available for remix/reuse or not'. In relation to this, I would say it might be helpful to be able to choose which content is shareable and which is not, to allow maximum flexibility of content and work.

9)   Project Leadership and Motivations/ Curating of Content

Respondents were keen for Furtherfield to moderate, curate and feature some content on *Visitors Studio*, for the site to respond to cultural events, and to have groups dedicated to exploring particular topics. As Olga Panades Massanet states, 'I have no moral problem with Furtherfield taking an active role in making things happen'.

Lucy Mills felt that including curated topics on the site could help generate conversation and collaboration with new people. Meanwhile, Roger Mills felt work in relation to cultural events would also help *Visitors Studio* to integrate with other online platforms, practices and interfaces exploring similar things, helping facilitate collaborations that would not otherwise happen. Christina Papagiannouli suggested that *Visitors Studio* could include a competition or residency 'so you give a theme and people use *Visitors Studio* to create art on this theme and then the winners work is projected into Furtherfield'.

Another idea, which came out of conversation with John Hopkins, was that of running programming on *Visitors Studio* alongside that of Furtherfield. 'Having an exhibition with several artists, you would then include an extra artist who had some interest in creating a context in *Visitors Studio*, which would then be a part of the overall exhibition and would be a part of the online context for the exhibition'.

To Hopkins, this directed and contextualised approach would also be a helpful strategy in relation to building and sustaining a community around *Visitors Studio*. As he states: 'the wider question of network collaboration is only sustainable if there is an actual community of need that it is embedded in. If there is not really a need, like some kind of compelling need to express in a certain way, then I think a platform will just float and eventually disappear. So having different cultural contexts, whether they are curatorial or educational or thematic or the context of artist workshops'.

Chris Webb also felt having clear leadership and direction on site such as *Visitors Studio* was essential, stating 'you need someone pioneering it, with a focus and a team of people around it' while Roger Mills states: 'it is still functioning quite dynamically by itself, without working in a particular direction. So if it was directed it could only do better I think'.

Overall, it was considered that building a community around a site such a *Visitors Studio* was one of the most difficult things to achieve, but that curated content tied to Furtherfield programming would be one way to help achieve this. Community growth was recognised as a slow and organic process, but one which Furtherfield was in a good position to effect through its existing network.

10) Software and Technology: Open Source/ Mobile

Most respondents felt the site would work well as a mobile initiative. As Roger Mills states 'there is a huge potential for *Visitors Studio* to function in this way'. Helen Varley Jamieson expressed one concern about the level of functionality on a small mobile screen for a project like *Visitors Studio*, and advocated a tablet version of the site for this reason. Meanwhile, to Christina Papagiannouli an iPhone application would be more useful than an iPad version, due to the comparative uptake of the two technologies. Papagiannouli also suggested that the possible addition of streaming would be particularly helpful in the mobile context, enabling work to be undertaken more easily outside.

To Alessandra Scapin, a mobile version of *Visitors Studio* would necessitate a redesign of the current site, as the moveable boxes used in current interface on a mobile phone screen would not function clearly in this format and would need to be replaced with a fixed menu. However, to Chris Webb, a general redesign of *Visitors Studio* could incorporate a mobile, computer and tablet form in one design process.

The response to the possibility of an open source version of the site was more divided. Some respondents, such as Rich White and Helen Varley Jamieson would definitely advocate the rendering open source of *Visitors Studio*. Others liked the idea of open source in principle, but warned against a lack of control over the site, which could lead to the development of inaccessible or ineffective site design. As Chris Webb states 'it totally changes what the project is then and you would have little control over where it goes... It could work if you had a central body yaying or naying what is happening with it'. Roger Mills added to this argument, suggesting that open source projects often require a certain ammount of technical nouse to make them work, and also require very high broadband speeds which might put projects out of the hands of the general public.

To John Hopkins, an open source version of *Visitors Studio* could be possible with the right impetus and funding. However, it would mean starting from scratch and building up a good community of developers, and Hopkins was dubious about the possibility of this without major commercial backing. Because of this Hopkins suggested that a simpler solution 'would be to look at the bandwidth issues, and see if it is possible to loosen up with the file size restrictions, the ways of getting raw content in there to use'.

Conclusion

Overall Recommendations

Taking into account the theoretical overview, project survey and interview based research undertaken there are several recommendations we can make for a redesign of *Visitors Studio*.

1. Aesthetic and Display

- *Visitors Studio* would benefit from being redesigned in a more contemporary way, whilst retaining the dark colours, studio feel, and cleanness of its current aesthetic
- The site should aim to be clear, uncluttered, unobtrusive and simple in its design
- Functionality and user friendliness is the most important thing about the design of the site
- The workspace would benefit from being full screen, with a clear tool bar – perhaps borrowing from *Photoshop* - which would bring up chat boxes and search functionality
- The site should be redesigned in html5
- Despite cultural trends to the contrary, redesign of the site might want to steer clear of a naïve and childlike aesthetic, particularly if it aimed to produce work with a critical cultural intention
- Taking into account the desires of the Furtherfield community to retain a similar aesthetic, a redesign of *Visitors Studio* might borrow from sites such as *Johnny Cash Project* (see fig 7) which uses a similar palette and set of clean lines to *Visitors Studio*, but feels extremely contemporary, or Chris Webb's site *Meme Catcher* (meme-catcher.net)

2. Content Development Tools

- The mixer would benefit from being redeveloped and streamlined so that all mixing takes place in one place onsite
- Uploading content to the site could be more straightforward as a process
- It could be made clearer and more straightforward to access uploaded content onsite
- There could be a preview space in the mixing area where potential material is stored during a performance
- It would be beneficial if it were possible to work directly with images – dragging and dropping them onto the workspace
- Keeping around 8 layers of content was considered sufficient
- Adding webcams, longer sections of video and audio and live drawing tools was considered a good idea, as was the ability to edit film onsite
- It was considered a good idea to develop the mixer in terms of image manipulation and the way layers interact with one another – changing colour, stretching images
- The audio features of Visitors Studio could also be developed perhaps including EQ, reverse, pitch shift, echo or reverb and the reversal of audio in the sounds features onsite
- If high levels of content manipulation were not possible onsite, users should be directed to other free software to develop their material
- File sizes and types should go up and become more diverse
- Users would like to be able to save, export and delete their content onsite
- Deleting content might mean having different upload features where material is either public and shareable or private and deletable, so multiple users would not lose deleted content from their mixes

- Some users wanted to keep and develop the looped aesthetic of *Visitors Studio*, while others were keen to have the option to work in a more linear way. Theoretically, the site could offer different modes of working, perhaps framed as 'film studio' 'mixing space' and 'performance space'
- It would be possible to draw from commercial projects such as *ArtStudio* (*fig 10*)*, Photoshop* and *iMovie* (fig 11/ 12) or *Audacity* (audacity.sourceforge.net/) and *E-jamming* (ejamming.com/) in terms of a redesign of functionality of content tools, or the clarity of the interface on sites such as *Waterwheel* (fig 19)
- In terms of uploading material, it might be helpful to borrow from the simple and clear interfaces of sites such as *Historypin* (see fig 15/16)

3. Collaboration

- Group real time collaboration is the biggest pull of the site, although users also like to use the site alone
- A group private rehearsal space for working should be added in addition to the current solo mode
- A redesign should cater flexibly for different potential uses of the site as an artist's tool, a space for independent play, for group improvisation, for more structured cyberperformances or even co-creation between different platforms
- The focus on synchronous online collaboration in *Visitors Studio* is fairly niche. There is a trend towards asynchronous collaboration in wider mainstream participatory online projects, or forms of collaboration which function in a hybrid way including synchronous collaboration in meet-ups off site
- Many sites such as *Cowbird* (fig 18), and *This Exquisite Forest* (fig 17) build up collective work around topics over time. If *Visitors Studio* was to include asynchronous aspects to collaboration in its redesign, using this technique of collaborating generatively around specific topics with real time mixes would be one possibility
- It might also be interesting to find ways to write workshops into the site more fundamentally as in *Upstage* and *Embroidering the Digital Commons*
- Also to think of ways to highlight the possibilities of collaboration with galleries, other platforms or technologies into the site.
- Although it could be helpful to include some level of asynchronous collaboration onsite, particularly in terms of developing prolonged engagement with the site and topics within it, it seems important to steer away from forms of purely asynchronous collaboration where individual soundbites are uploaded to a site in isolation from one another and make up the entirety of a given project

4. Discussion

- Users were keen to retain and update the discussion feature on *Visitors Studio*, but update its design, redesigning the interface without cursors and inputting text directly into one space on the mixer.
- Some users wanted to retain the tab based chat which popped up only when needed, while others would have preferred a text scroll constantly available on site
- Users suggested they would benefit from a mixture of IRC, commenting, private messaging and chatting via a webcam giving maximum possible scope for communication during performances or as viewers of site content
- It might be helpful to borrow from *Waterwheel's* audience and crew chat functionality, so during performances private chat amongst performers could occur (fig 19)
- It might also be helpful to borrow chat functionality in *Upstage* (fig 23) and *Adobe Connect* (fig 24), but to render the design of this more contemporary and with a creative aesthetic. The flexibility of the chat functionality in these sites might also be helpful to draw from

- Discussion functionality tended to be low on many of the projects surveyed, something which seemed to have linked to individualistic asynchronous collaboration – and to mirror wider neoliberal culture in this way
- In order to work against this trend it might be helpful to find ways to encourage meaningful debate on a redesign of *Visitors Studio*

5. Personal Profiles and Gamficiation

- Users were keen to develop personal profiles to include site members' previous work and uploaded material, as in the personal profile functionality of sites such as *Cowbird* (fig 25) and *Historypin* (fig 26)
- It was also considered helpful to clearly document particular skills of community members to aid collaboration. Perhaps in this sense a redesign could borrow strategies from sites such as *Good For Nothing* (fig 30)
- Gamification strategies such as liking were considered problematic in terms of producing a purely consensual hierarchy, but helpful in terms of helping forge community and rewarding users, as well as filtering site information
- A redesign of *Visitors Studio* should therefore find ways to interpret the trend towards 'liking' in a more critical, disjunctive and meaningful way, accompanied by commenting to encourage intellectual engagement with site content
- On a more theoretical level it is important to consider the relationship between inclusivity and aesthetic/ critical excellence in a redesign of *Visitors Studio*
- Perhaps a more differentiated rating system including a range of criteria would be helpful, including categories such as 'critically effective', 'aesthetically beautiful' or 'fun to watch' or 'experimental'
- This is something which bears an interesting similarity to the categories in the *Johnny Cash Project* which sort frames according to categories such as 'abstraction' and 'pointillism' in addition to highest rated or director chosen frames (fig 27)

6. Archive and Exhibition

- It was considered important to redesign *Visitors Studio* in a way which made the archive more easily accessible and searchable
- It was also considered helpful to design the site with two clearly demarcated archives - one documenting uploaded material and one listing mixes.
- Additionally, it was considered helpful to include exhibition and rehearsal/workshop areas aside from the archive
- Users were keen to have more control over what was publicly visible within the archive and what was archived privately. Borrowing private and public archival forms from projects such as *Cowbird* could be helpful here.
- Some respondents felt that having all uploaded material attached to clearly demarcated personal profiles as a personal archive would help ensure files were kept in order.
- There is a wider cultural question around whether all material onsite should be publicly visible, or whether projects remain visible to members only, with only certain projects being rendered publicly visible strategically in momentary ways in relation to a particular event or cultural moment.

7. Copyright

- The current Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Generic creative commons license was generally considered the right mode of copyright for this project by all respondents.

- However, some users also wanted the choice to upload non-shareable material if they so wished. Therefore the option to choose a particular license might be helpful.
- *Cowbird's* license chooser is helpful in this way (fig 36).

8 Project Leadership and Motivations

- Respondents were happy for Furtherfield to curate content onsite, perhaps in relation to programming in the gallery, and to feature content onsite.
- Artist Residencies, workshops with young people and competitions were also considered useful for the site to foreground, just as it was considered helpful for participants to be able to choose themes or topics around which to collaborate.
- Respondents felt clearer site direction could help direct the project and build the community around it.
- Developing focused cultural projects such as the *Dissention Convention* was also considered a helpful idea, and a way to encourage collaboration between diverse users of *Visitors Studio*. These projects could work in federated groups as in *Change by Us.*
- It is interesting to consider the role Furtherfield would like to take on and whether it is preferable to favour a mode of leadership which challenges the participant, aims for dialogic horizontality, attempts to step back completely, or aims to work towards a strictly controlled project format. It might also be that the project could embody different models of leadership in different sections of the site.
- Many projects give users full responsibility over site content, but maintain a centralised power structure in terms of site terms and structure. For this reason, it could be helpful to empower users to hold power onsite to participate in the writing of community guidelines, terms and conditions and project content.

9. Search and Filtration

- A key area of *Visitors Studio* considered to need work was search and filtration of information.
- Respondents felt that the search facilities were confusing and difficult to access on the current version of *Visitors Studio*, and would benefit from a more prominent interface clearly labelled on a toolbar.
- It was also considered important that search was visual and included thumbnails of images and preview of audio.
- Searches of people, mixes and metadata should be kept and developed. Respondents were more ambivalent about keeping searches by most recent uploads.
- It was considered that metadata searches should impose further limits on people, paying particular attention to the fact that when working quickly people tend not to tag material accurately. Perhaps a series of requests for metadata around colour, topic and type of material should be essential to input.
- Having specific ongoing projects which could be searchable was considered a good way of filtering content without needing to produce a hierarchy of the most popular content.
- Produce a range of different search and filtration terms – some neutral, and some based on skill and popularity seems the best way to approach this aspect of the site.

10. Open Source and Mobile

- Most respondents felt the site would work well as a mobile or tablet version.
- Some respondents felt the small screen of a mobile could be a stumbling block, while others felt a mobile version would be more popular as fewer people own tablets than smartphones.
- Opinion was divided on whether *Visitors Studio* should be open source.
- The fear was that open source projects lose accessibility in terms of their design, and functionality in terms of their power.

- These were seen as compromises which would need to be carefully negotiated, and would require a rewrite of the site from scratch.
- It was considered very important that even an open source version of the site had a central body moderating site changes.

Personal Reflection

I found this project particularly interesting in terms of translating theoretical research into practical considerations around a specific site. One thing I noticed through the project is how much practical research and testing needs to be done to develop a user-friendly and workable cultural site - in addition to the critical and ideological positioning of a project. To produce a successful and critical project, it seems both aspects of research around a project need to be balanced; something which necessitates the mobilisation of many different skill sets, and a negotiation between various divergent interests. In the future, I might aim to work with a web designer and UX designer even during the development process of a scoping project such as this, in order to draw on various skill sets simultaneously as part of an interdisciplinary team.