

# render

**DIGITAL  
MEDIA**  
Culture Lab



# To create an exhibition “space” which relates contemporary creative practice with contemporary technological culture.

## Acknowledgements

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# 1. Introduction

## What is Render?

*Render* is a proposed, publically accessible “space” for creative digital media practice in the North East of England.

## Who are we?

We are a research group based within the department of Digital Media at Culture Lab, Newcastle University, funded by Newcastle University’s *Enterprise Fund*.

Newcastle University is one of the UK’s leading research-intensive institutions of higher education, based in Newcastle upon Tyne in North East England.

Culture Lab is a unique research infrastructure providing an environment for academics and practitioners working beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Culture Lab promotes socially and economically valuable synergies with artists, creative industries, cultural and scientific institutions and the development of innovative research with digital tools.

The Digital Media Master of Research (M.Res) programme is a creative course in the latest interactive technologies, new media theory and exploratory media art practice. Based in Culture Lab’s interdisciplinary research facility, the course gives students the opportunity to pursue specific research interests, whilst developing a range of transferable skills for contemporary creative production.

## What do we mean by ‘creative digital practice’?

Digital technology has profoundly affected contemporary artistic practice.<sup>1</sup> Since Ben Laposky photographed electronic waveforms that he had produced on the oscilloscope in the early 1950’s,<sup>2</sup> artists have not only been utilising digital technology creatively, but have also been actively involved in its research and development. Early innovators included Steina and Woody Vasulka who developed various digital video-imaging techniques, which served to release the creative potential of video, articulating a dialogue between artist and digital technology.<sup>3</sup> Artists and technologists, driven by countercultural ambition in the 1960’s, “...created the circumstances that produced the Personal Computer and by extension much of digital culture”.<sup>4</sup> ‘Creative digital practice’ therefore serves to categorise artistic experimentation with digital technology. It has an extensive and autonomous history, which is intrinsically linked to the development of computer technology and forged concurrently and in conjunction with techno-artistic genres encompassing film, video art, sound art, Internet art, photography and experimental sculpture.

Throughout this document, the term ‘creative digital practice’ will be used interchangeably with ‘new media art’ and ‘digital media art’.

## Contextualising the digital

Creative digital media practice supposes a multitude of contexts. Works are exhibited across many platforms and with multiple iterations. Artists have strategically utilised televisual and virtual platforms to both create and exhibit work, reconceptualising broadcast technology as an artistic platform and revealing increased potential for the creation and dissemination of artwork online.<sup>5</sup> Artists have also transformed contexts, with which art and creative digital media practice is not initially presumed. Traditionally, the art gallery has been the repository of the tangible, original and authentic art object, but the emergence of interdisciplinary art forms, including performance, site-specific installation and of course digital media art, has directed practice away from gallery contexts and demanded new curatorial strategies from existing contemporary art galleries.

Throughout this document, you will see some examples of how digital media art has been contextualised, regionally.

## 2. Document Objectives

- To consult regionally-based practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice
- To assess a number of regional models for the programming of creative digital media practice
- To determine where and how creative digital media practice is facilitated, regionally
- To broach the feasibility of a regionally-based digital media exhibition “space”
- To provide a range of recommendations for a regionally-based digital media exhibition “space”

## 3. Project Objectives

- To create an exhibition “space” which relates contemporary creative practice with contemporary technological culture
- To facilitate the exhibition of creative digital media work in the region and beyond
- To provide a platform from which a diverse programme of exhibition can be delivered, which serves and involves both emerging and established practitioners and curators of digital media work

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<sup>1</sup> Wands, B. (2006) *Art of the digital age*, Thames & Hudson, London, p.8

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Electronic Arts Intermix (2009) <http://www.eai.org/eai/artistBio.htm?id=299>

<sup>4</sup> Gere, C. (2002) *Digital Culture*, Reaktion Books, p.119

<sup>5</sup> Cook, Sarah (2008) Curatorial Statement, *Broadcast Yourself*

## 4. Methodology

This research is informed by a number of interviews and correspondences with regional practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice and representatives from dedicated regional organisations. Website content, online archives and reports also supplemented the research. The document objectives were to determine where and how creative digital media practice is facilitated, regionally and to broach the feasibility of a regionally based digital media exhibition “space”. N.B. Summaries of these findings can be found in the Appendix.

Findings were categorised according to regional context, physical space, financing, management, staffing, programme, ethos and exhibition timescale. Interpretations based upon these criteria were synthesised to form the basis of the recommendations.

These interviews and correspondences were not intended to be exhaustive. The sample group was relatively small and aimed to establish individual, organisational or institutional backgrounds, current activities and future plans.

Conclusions based on these research directives are provided in section 7, “Recommendations and Possibilities”.

## 5. Context

An established network of practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice exist in North East England. Predominantly sustained by regional institutions of higher education and facilitated by dedicated arts organisations and regional galleries of contemporary art, creative digital media practice is a burgeoning element of the cultural sector in the North East. Its development is concurrent with that of digitally driven industry, which now contributes significantly to the regional economy. Since 2006, the North East has seen the highest number of new technology start-ups in the digital media and animation field, outside London.<sup>6</sup>

### Regional institutions of higher education

Dedicated research infrastructures including Culture Lab at Newcastle University and the Institute for Digital Innovation (IDI) at Teesside University have emerged in recent years, establishing essential physical and communicative platforms for regional practitioners and serving to diversify creative digital media practice. The IDI “...is a centre in which postgraduate research and enterprise projects collaborate with the regional digital media industry to stimulate innovation in the digital media field.”<sup>7</sup> The IDI also supports graduates with commercial aspirations through the *Digital/City* initiative, providing fellowship opportunities, specialist facilities and business development support.<sup>8</sup> For regional practitioners of creative digital media practice, the IDI offers an environment in which to expand knowledge of current digital technologies and to develop physical concepts.

Based at the University of Sunderland, CRUMB, a postgraduate research group and online resource for curators of creative

digital media practice, publish and lecture widely on the subject.<sup>9</sup> Established in 2000 by Prof. Beryl Graham and Dr. Sarah Cook, “CRUMB members run a lively discussion list on curating new media art with 800 international subscribers...”<sup>10</sup> and “...also curate exhibitions and organise workshops, master classes and conferences for the professional development of curators and the discussion of new media art curating.”<sup>11</sup> They represent a significant international authority on this subject and sustain crucial communicative links between practitioners and facilitators of creative digital media practice, regionally.

Sunderland Digital Media Research Lab (/sLAB) is also based at the University of Sunderland. “/sLAB undertakes research into digital media through a programme of curated projects, commissions, artist residencies, exhibitions, off-site projects, research papers, online projects, talks, events and presentations, working with emerging artists and established figures on the international arts scene.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Regional organisations dedicated to creative digital media practice**

ISIS Arts and Locus+ represent two regional organisations, which exist to facilitate creative digital media practice. Initiating and managing residencies and exhibitions, whilst working with artists on collaborative events and projects, ISIS Arts “... promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the use of new media in the arts.”<sup>13</sup> Arts Council North East, Newcastle City Council and Northumberland County Council fund the organisation, which has also received support from the National Lottery and Northern Rock Foundation, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Recent projects have included residencies by Marina Zurkow and Kevin Carter and the citywide event, *There is No I in Team* (2008), which included “...installations and screenings of artist’s film, video and animation work...”<sup>15</sup> by numerous contemporary Chinese artists.

The Basement Group, which was established as Locus+ in 1993, were amongst the first nationally to programme performance, video art, installation and experimental film and sound works. The organisation remains a key regional, national and international agency for the development of cross-media art projects.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> London Business School (2007)

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Digital Innovation (2009) <http://www.idi-uk.org/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> University of Sunderland (2009)  
[http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/faculties/adm/research/artanddesign/fine\\_art/crumb/](http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/faculties/adm/research/artanddesign/fine_art/crumb/)

<sup>10</sup> CRUMB (2009) <http://www.crumbweb.org/getBiosContacts.php?id=4&sublink=3&ts=1252269452>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> University of Sunderland (2009)  
[http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/faculties/adm/research/artanddesign/fine\\_art/slab/](http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/faculties/adm/research/artanddesign/fine_art/slab/)

<sup>13</sup> ISIS Arts (2009) <http://www.isisarts.org.uk/index2.html>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Locus+ (2009) <http://www.locusplus.org.uk/index2.html>



## Major regional contemporary art galleries

Over fifty gallery contexts for modern and contemporary art exist regionally. Several have a remit that presently includes or could potentially include the exhibition of creative digital media work. However, no gallery context specifically dedicated to the exhibition of creative digital media work currently exists in North East England.

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead and NGCA, Sunderland represent significant contexts for contemporary art exhibition at both a regional, national and international level and both have made substantial contributions to the expansion and profile of creative digital media practice in the North East. From its outset, BALTIC not only programmed exhibitions of creative digital media work, but also collaborations with other regional galleries and organisations, held research symposia and hosted residencies.<sup>17</sup> From 2000 to 2006, BALTIC had an established AHRC-funded partnership with CRUMB at the University of Sunderland, which supported a doctoral studentship in curating new media art and a post-doctoral adjunct curator of new media art, both held by Sarah Cook.<sup>18</sup> Through that partnership, they organised the first symposium on curating creative digital media work in the UK and published the proceedings as a B.Read book to international acclaim.<sup>19</sup> They also undertook an online commission as part of their pre-opening programme, of the work of net-artist Vuk Cosic as part of the city-wide festival, *A History of the Future* (2001) in collaboration with Waygood, Tyneside Cinema and Northern Architecture.<sup>20</sup> In addition, BALTIC has partnered with Amino, Forma, AV Festival and NAVIGATE to present a range of works, including a re-creation of John Cage's *Variations VII* (1966), *White Plains*, a two-week immersive installation and an extensive live performance art series.<sup>21</sup>

Before the opening of BALTIC in 2002, NGCA was the largest contemporary art gallery in the region. Established in the 1970's as an artist-run space, the gallery was incorporated into local government in 1995 and administered through Sunderland City Council.<sup>22</sup> The gallery showcases a substantial programme of creative digital media work, which largely encompasses digital video, film and installation by both emerging and established artists.<sup>23</sup> Regionally, NGCA have collaborated with numerous institutions and organisations including Sunderland University and /sLAB, whilst the gallery's programme of exhibition is aligned with that of AV Festival, during the biennial event.<sup>24</sup>

## Other regional contemporary art spaces and venues

Several galleries and venues within the region, including Tyneside Cinema, The Star and Shadow Cinema, Workplace, Vane, Dance City and the Hatton Gallery, have all programmed creative digital media work and all have a remit that either presently or could potentially include its exhibition.

The Star and Shadow Cinema, an entirely volunteer-led venture, which primarily serves to screen independent film, has showcased digital media art and installation, including work by students, emerging artists and also established artists including Cory Arcangel. The Star and Shadow Cinema have an open-system of participation, which actively encourages both students and emerging artists to organise events. The recently refurbished Tyneside Cinema, which screens both independent and mainstream cinema provides a venue for *Datarama*, an open forum for the presentation of art, design and technology



projects as part of its *Pixel Palace* programme, a project “...designed to embrace new partners from a range of platforms,”<sup>25</sup> essentially bringing non-traditional notions of the cinema to the organisation. *Datarama* is hosted by The Polytechnic, an artists’ group based at The Star and Shadow Cinema, which re-purposes technology and explores open source methods of project development. *Datarama* provides a crucial communicative platform on which practitioners of creative digital media work can inform one another of their practice. *Pixel Palace* has also organised the symposium *Clicks or Mortar?* (2009), which discussed the role of cultural buildings in the digital age and presented work by a selection of emerging creative digital media practitioners.

Workplace aims to show critically engaged art from emerging and established local artists, many of whom work with digital technology, and to represent those artists’ interests outside of Newcastle within the art market.<sup>26</sup> This is achieved through its gallery programme, curatorial projects and international art fairs.<sup>27</sup>

Vane was established in 1997 as a volunteer-led organisation with an open access submission policy. Initially administered from an artist’s studio, between 1997 and 2000, Vane organised four large-scale annual events, which acted “...as an umbrella for a number of diverse exhibitions...”<sup>28</sup> inviting students, emerging artists and graduates from a range of genres to showcase work across Newcastle and the surrounding region. Indeed, the inaugural Vane project, ‘VANE97’, “...consisted of almost fifty artists in thirteen exhibitions and events, including exhibitions in the Waygood Gallery, Newcastle Arts Centre, The Buddle Arts Centre, Wallsend, in vacant buildings and shop windows and an event at Byker City Farm as well as three open studios.”<sup>29</sup> Between 2002 and 2003, their programme involved a series of curated exhibitions, involving invited national and international partner curators and galleries, before they opened a permanent gallery space in Newcastle city centre in 2005.<sup>30</sup>

## Other venues of note

There are examples of regional galleries, including Zone and alt.gallery, established as dedicated venues for the exhibition of creative digital media work, that no longer operate. Founded in 1992 by David Sinden and Kate Tregaskis to showcase lens-based and digital media art in a critically engaged context, Zone expanded the definitions of digital media art practice in the region and across the UK .<sup>31</sup> It boasted the first public Internet access in Newcastle and the debut UK exhibitions of significant

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<sup>17</sup> Cook, Sarah (2009) E-mail correspondence

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Robinson, Alistair (2009)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Vane Gallery (2009) <http://www.vane.org.uk/archive/vane97/>

<sup>26</sup> Moss, P. McFarlane, L. Elvin, C, WorkPlace Gallery (2009)

<sup>27</sup> Workplace Gallery (2009) <http://www.workplacegallery.co.uk/information/>

<sup>28</sup> Vane Gallery (2009) <http://www.vane.org.uk/company/About.php>

<sup>29</sup> Vane Gallery (2009) <http://www.vane.org.uk/archive/vane97/>

<sup>30</sup> Vane Gallery (2009) <http://www.vane.org.uk/company/About.php>

artists working in the field, including Orlan and new live performance by Stelarc.<sup>32</sup> Susan Collins and Paul Sermon both featured in *Ex Machina* (1996), a major exhibition of Japanese and UK interactive art commissioned by Zone Gallery and Camerawork, London.<sup>33</sup> *Ex Machina* accompanied *Across 2 Cultures: Digital Dreams 4* (1996), a three-day citywide event, which explored “...electronic arts in the context of a changing relationship between art and science.” Through a conference programme, specially commissioned installations and exhibitions, which also included *Serious Games* (1996) at the Laing Art Gallery,<sup>35</sup> *Across 2 Cultures: Digital Dreams 4* represents a seminal event in the development of creative digital media practice in the North East.

Michelle Hirschhorn, curator of Zone Gallery from 1995 until its closure in 1998, felt that after its closure “...it was no longer necessary to have a media-specific venue,”<sup>36</sup> as new technologies were increasingly being employed across mainstream culture and in “...the production and presentation of the visual and performing arts.”<sup>37</sup> However, Hirschhorn now believes “...that there is an argument for creating a space for experimentation and public dialogue...”<sup>38</sup> In her opinion, “... a substantial lag...” still exists “... in both the available resources for, and discourse surrounding, new and experimental creative digital practice in many visual arts venues...”<sup>39</sup>

alt.gallery was created by Rebecca Shatwell and situated in the alt.vinyl record shop, Newcastle. It presented “...work by international artists working at the intersection of visual art, music and sound,”<sup>40</sup> representing the only gallery in the UK with a remit specific to this field. Shatwell is now the director of AV Festival '10, whilst the space, reconceptualised as Satellite, is now operated by Workplace Gallery. Satellite is a non-media-specific gallery, focusing “...upon solo exhibitions of artists at any stage in their career, located anywhere, who are engaged with current contemporary practice.”<sup>41</sup>

## Regional festivals and events

AV, the North East's biennial digital media art festival, is epitomic of the spirit of collaboration, embraced and nurtured by practitioners and curators of digital media art regionally. AV Festival is the UK's largest festival of digital media art, featuring “...commissions, exhibitions, concerts, performances, film screenings, workshops and debate”<sup>42</sup> hosted by the region's major cultural venues, including BALTIC, The Sage, The Hatton Gallery, Culture Lab, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens and MIMA, whilst events are also organised in public spaces. Other regional galleries of contemporary art align related exhibitions alongside the festival in order to take advantage of above average visitor numbers to the region. “AV Festival is delivered by Audio Visual Arts North East,”<sup>43</sup> an independent charitable company whose primary objective is to deliver AV Festival, though it may undertake other activities and projects.<sup>44</sup>

The UK's first 'Maker's Faire' was held in Times Square, Newcastle in March 2009. A well-established event in the USA, the Maker's Faire invites artists, technologists and computer scientists to present their work to the general public. The Maker's Faire featured projects including *The Chip Tune Marching Band*, envisaged at Culture Lab, which constituted a workshop and performance, inviting anyone to make electronic sounds and present them outside.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hirschhorn, Michelle (2009)

## 6. Findings and interpretation

This research is informed by a number of interviews and correspondences with regional practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice and representatives from dedicated regional organisations. Website content, online archives and reports also supplemented the research. The document objectives were to determine where and how creative digital media practice is facilitated, regionally and to broach the feasibility of a regionally based digital media exhibition “space”. Summaries of these findings can be found in the Appendix.

Below, is a summarised interpretation of the findings, categorised according to regional context, physical space, financing, management, staffing, programme, ethos and exhibition timescale.

### Interpretation

#### Key

<b>Regional Context</b>	Regional context refers to current creative digital media practice and infrastructure, regionally
<b>Space</b>	Space refers to the physical environment utilised by the gallery or organisation
<b>Finance – Physical Infrastructure</b>	Finance – Physical Infrastructure refers to the outgoings of the “space” and different opportunities for revenue available to the “space”
<b>Finance – Salaries and Fees</b>	Finance – Salaries and Fees refers to the outgoings for artists and curators
<b>Management and Staffing</b>	Management and Staffing refers to how the “space” is organised
<b>Programme and Ethos</b>	Programme and Ethos refers to the “space’s” curatorial practice and culture
<b>Exhibition timescale</b>	Exhibition timescale refers to the length of programme usually employed by the “space”

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rhizome (1996) <http://www.rhizome.org/discuss/view/29230>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Hirschhorn, Michelle (2009) E-mail correspondence

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> alt.gallery (2009) <http://www.altgallery.org/about.html>

<sup>41</sup> Satellite Gallery (2009) <http://www.satellitesatellite.org>

<sup>42</sup> AV Festival (2009) <http://www.avfestival.co.uk/about>

<sup>43</sup> AV Festival (2009) <http://www.avfestival.co.uk/about/avane>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Chip Tune Marching Band (2009) <http://chiptunemarchingband.com>

## Regional Context

- It is clear that an established network of practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice exists, regionally
- Practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice have nurtured and embraced a spirit of collaboration
- Creative digital media practice is a burgeoning element of the cultural sector in the North East and this development is concurrent with that of digitally driven industry
- Regionally, creative digital media work has been programmed across multiple platforms, from vacant buildings and shop windows to gallery and web-based exhibitions
- This network is largely supported by the region's cultural venues, indicated by the collaborative nature of events such as AV Festival
- This network is also supported by regional organisations dedicated to creative digital media practice
- Creative digital media practice is led from and largely sustained by regional institutions of higher education
- Several communicative platforms for practitioners and curators of creative digital media work exist regionally, including CRUMB, *Datarama* and mailing lists including NewcastleGraft
- Some of those consulted, stated that there had been a lack of communication between groups responsible for creative digital media practice, regionally
- There is a consensus that a “*space*”, dedicated to creative digital media practice would be positive for the region

## Spaces

- No gallery context, dedicated to the programming of creative digital media work currently exists, regionally
- Zone and alt.gallery are examples of galleries, dedicated to the exhibition of creative digital media work, that no longer operate
- Some stated that it might be good to have a dynamic space to provide a hub or central point for creative digital media practice, regionally and also a supportive platform for discussion and exhibition
- Some stated that presently operating cultural venues could provide the infrastructure and/or physical location necessary for such a venture
- Although numerous cultural venues, regionally, have programmed creative digital media work, this has commonly

encompassed the exhibition of lens-based media. Few venues have the infrastructural capability to showcase installation and other large scale projects

- Spaces, rather than being simply the chief financial burden on a cultural venue, gallery or organisation, can also be a source of revenue. The architecture and infrastructure must both be considered in those terms. For example, the proceeds from an internet café could fund the maintenance of the gallery space or purchase of equipment
- Temporary spaces, while removing the immediate, regular cost of renting a permanent space, can also be costly to refit and are time consuming to source

### **Finance: Physical Infrastructure and Salaries and Fees**

- Most venues had different approaches to acquiring funding. Some aimed to be self-sufficient, some already were, whilst others existed by the regular support of funding bodies
- Most supplemented their income through events, space rental or by providing a service
- Some of the venues had salaried directors and staff, whilst others were entirely volunteer-led

### **Management and Staffing**

- Many of the spaces and venues had dedicated directors, whilst others were entirely volunteer-led
- Volunteers can facilitate the management as well as day to day running of spaces. The personal contacts of staff or volunteers can bring skills to the institution and augment the programme
- Many of the volunteers are students or graduates

### **Programme and Ethos**

- The majority of spaces and venues had an active programme of exhibition, which included work by emerging and established practitioners and in some instances, students
- Many of those consulted were curious as to how a “*space*”, dedicated to creative digital media practice would be defined
- Most of the spaces and venues had an active events programme and devoted time and money into publicising private views and openings to re-assert the presence of the space or venue

### **Exhibition timescale**

- Exhibition timescales varied due to the scale and nature of the exhibition or event, but most were available to view for one month or longer

## 7. Recommendations and Possibilities

Interpretations of the findings were synthesised to form the basis of these recommendations.

Render should constitute:

- An exhibition “*space*” which relates contemporary creative practice with contemporary technological culture
- A bespoke, project-specific, non-permanent exhibition context
- A flexible programme of exhibition, dedicated to creative digital media practice
- To show work, which functions within a critically aware context
- An active online presence, serving as both a platform for exhibition and as a communicative platform for practitioners and curators of creative digital media practice, regionally
- To be staffed by a core group of organised volunteers
- To be funded through a variety of means including corporate sponsorship, public funding and ticket-sales
- Render should emphasise the importance of organising interested volunteers and empowering them with a say in the direction and programming of the “*space*”
- Render should programme creative digital media work in partnership with the region’s cultural venues, where infrastructural capability exists, e.g. BALTIC
- Render should foster partnerships with those responsible for digital media art practice, regionally
- As digital media art practice is predominantly led from and sustained by the region’s major educational institutions, Render should provide a platform for the growing network of both student and graduate practitioners and curators

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# Appendix

## Findings

The summaries below serve as a paraphrase of each interview and correspondence and are supplemented by website content, online archives and reports.

### Arts Council North East,

Amanda Ritson, Visual Arts Officer (Media)

- As part of the Arts Council's 'Digital Opportunities' programme, a three-year research initiative is underway, examining "...public engagement, digital markets and the development of digital art forms."<sup>46</sup> The findings of the first phase of this initiative can be found online at: [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project\\_detail.php?sid=13&id=1091](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?sid=13&id=1091)
- *Consuming digital arts: understanding of and engagement with arts in the digital arena amongst the general public* constitutes part of the first phase of research and assesses "...understanding of, engagement with and aspirations for art in the digital space amongst the general public."<sup>47</sup> The report focuses upon interaction online and it will be of value to consult this document should our venture have an online presence
- "Would welcome more collaborative work with cultural venues, exploring programming of non-visual arts spaces" such as the *Pixel Palace* programme<sup>48</sup>

- "There are established support networks and communities of digital media art curators,"<sup>49</sup> however, what do we know about the technical requirements of installers and technicians? Is this an issue for current providers or a skills gap? Do artists become installers and invigilators? What happens in galleries when specialist staff are not present? Is this a case point for a digital media art gallery with specialist staff?<sup>50</sup>
- Is there more work to be done in equipping and training existing venues?<sup>51</sup>
- Suggested encouraging more digital media artists to work in the public realm with partners, including locations such as Kielder<sup>52</sup>

### The Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle

Debbie Bower, Matt Fleming, Richard Phipps and Sarah Cook, Post-doctoral research fellow, University of Sunderland, New Media Art Curator, Co-founder and editor of CRUMB

- Registered Community Interest Company
- Venue is essentially permanent, though it was leased on the premise of an initial 5-year tenancy
- The cinema is entirely volunteer-led, largely supporting itself through ticket sales and proceeds from events hosted at the venue

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<sup>46</sup> Arts Council (2009) <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/plan/digital-opportunity>

<sup>47</sup> Synovate, (2009) *Consuming digital arts: understanding of and engagement with arts in the digital arena amongst the general public*, [www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project\\_detail.php?sid=13&id=1091](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?sid=13&id=1091)

<sup>48</sup> Ritson, A. (2009) E-mail correspondence

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



- The cinema primarily serves to provide a venue for screening independent film, but has shown digital media art and installation
- Many of their live and screened events are by artists who work with and across media, from film and video to music and performance; Cory Arcangel both screened work and performed there in 2007
- Star and Shadow Cinema used to host Datarama, an open forum for the presentation of digital media art projects, before it moved to the Tyneside Cinema, following its refurbishment
- The first event to ‘open’ the Star and Shadow Cinema was an exhibition of installations/screenings organised by Ele Carpenter, as part of the NewcastleGateshead GLOW event, featuring artists including Honor Harger
- It conducts business on a personal level; it uses an open-system of participation in all its activities from programming to budgeting and anyone is welcome to become a member and put on an event
- Posed the question of how a digital art gallery would be defined

### **Workplace Gallery,** Gateshead

Paul Moss, Co-Director; Laura McFarlane and Catherine Elvin, Gallery Assistants

- Workplace aims to show critically engaged art from local artists and to represent those artists’ interests outside of Newcastle within the art market
- The gallery seeks to explore the role of the art market in a

local context

- The gallery raised the concern that in a specifically digital gallery, technology can precede the work
- The gallery indicated that work in non-traditional formats, including video and installation were as saleable as traditional art objects including painting and sculpture

### **VANE Gallery,** *Newcastle*

Christopher Yeats, Co-Director

Vane was initially volunteer-led

- It had an open access submission policy and was instrumental in giving students post-degree exhibition opportunities
- Vane attracted sponsorship from local banks and businesses
- The gallery held regular marketing events such as a cartoon strip series in *Metro*
- When the gallery became a “Regularly Funded Organisation” they were no longer permitted to show student work
- After several years of locating and fitting temporary spaces, they decided that the time and financial investment in this activity no longer made sense. They acquired a permanent space

### **Ed Carter,**

Director of the *Pixel Palace* programme, Tyneside Cinema

- *Pixel Palace* was envisaged at its inception as a pilot scheme to bring non-traditional cinema into the organisation
- It aimed to maintain the momentum brought about by festivals and events – in particular the AV festival – throughout the rest of the year
- The programme focused on digital media art, which engaged physically with the building
- Ed made the point that the local art community is focused around private views and openings. It is at these events that artists, curators, participants and others meet and network

### **Zone Gallery**, Newcastle

Michelle Hirschhorn, Independent Curator/Producer and Curator of Zone Gallery (1995 – 1998)

- Zone Gallery was established in 1992 as a dedicated venue for the exhibition of lens-based and digital media art
- Zone Gallery was established to exhibit lens-based and digital media art in a critically engaged context
- It was a key part of the development and profile of digital media art in the North East of England and across the UK
- It showcased the work of significant artists working in the field, including Orlan
- It had the first public internet access in the city
- The gallery operated Heaven Café

- Zone closed in 1998

**BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art**, Gateshead  
Chris Osborne, Technical/Exhibition Manager; Laura Harrington, Exhibitions Co-ordinator; and Dr. Sarah Cook, Post-doctoral research fellow, University of Sunderland, New Media Art Curator, Co-founder and editor of CRUMB

- The BALTIC is the largest contemporary art gallery outside of London and is publicly funded
- It has a diverse programme of exhibition, which encompasses both emerging and established artists
- It has no permanent collection but instead delivers an ever-changing programme of exhibition<sup>53</sup>
- Its residency programme forms an integral part of their activities and provides opportunities for artists to engage with the local community<sup>54</sup>
- BALTIC has made substantial contributions to the development and profile of digital media art both regionally and nationally and has a remit and the infrastructural capability to showcase large scale digital media art projects
- During its outset, BALTIC not only facilitated exhibitions of digital media art, but also collaborations with other regional galleries and organisations, held research symposia and hosted residencies
- From 2000 to 2006, BALTIC had an established AHRC-funded partnership with CRUMB at the University of

<sup>53</sup> Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (2009) <http://www.balticmill.com/about/index.php>

<sup>54</sup> Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (2009) <http://www.balticmill.com/about/Vision.php>

Sunderland, which supported a doctoral studentship in curating digital media art, and a post-doctoral adjunct curator of digital media art, both held by Sarah Cook. Through that partnership, they organised the first symposium on curating digital media art in the UK and published the proceedings as a B.Read book to international acclaim

- The BALTIC has a digital media studio which is occasionally used for residencies and exhibition preparation
- Expressed a desire to engage with our venture, but stated that existing venues could be used to programme digital media art

### **NGCA**, Sunderland

Alistair Robinson, Programme Director

- NGCA is an established contemporary art gallery and is publicly funded
- Its programme of exhibition is diverse, though it is largely image-based
- Before the opening of BALTIC in 2002, NGCA was the largest contemporary art gallery space in the region
- Established in the 1970's as an artist-run space, NGCA was incorporated into local government in 1995 and administered through the city council
- Before being incorporated into local government, NGCA exhibited sporadically, largely due to irregular funding, but were awarded sizeable grants

- NGCA shares its premises with Sunderland City Library, which invites a more diverse audience and increases visitor numbers
- NGCA have collaborated with numerous institutions and organisations including Sunderland University and /sLAB, from whom they have also borrowed equipment
- NGCA tries to align itself with regional art festivals including AV

### **Ginny Reed**,

*Lecturer in Photography, Northumbria University*

- Ginny stated that no gallery context currently existed in the North East which was specifically dedicated to the exhibition of digital media art and was in favour of such a venture
- Several of our interviewees have asked how we would negotiate the definition of digital media art in the curation of work, but Ginny thought that the gallery should serve, not as a platform that seeks to define digital media art, rather one, which acknowledges and explores its ambiguity and interdisciplinarity
- We posed the question of how these concepts could be manifested within a gallery context, with regard to its ethos, programme and physical architecture

### **David Butler**, *Co-ordinator, LifeWorkArt Programme Newcastle University*

- Gave an invaluable insight into the dynamics of the local art community and discussed in depth, the feasibility and organisational structure of our proposed venture, based

upon past and current local models

- Discussed the feasibility of a permanent versus temporary space; ISIS, Vane and Locus+ have all had temporary and permanent loci
- Discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a private versus university initiative
- Discussed how Render could deliver a unique programme of exhibition within both a regional and international context; utilising contacts within the university, Render could deliver a programme of exhibition, which encompasses student, alumni and established artist practice. It could also create partnerships with other galleries and agencies, sharing project management and programme costs. Render could also link to national and international digital media art festivals including AV, ISEA and Pixelache and could work with agencies and within contexts, with which digital art practice is not initially presumed, including projects at Kielder Reservoir
- Discussed issues relating to staffing: do we need permanent, dedicated staff or could it be volunteer-led by students? It was acknowledged that this would dictate the scale of the programme
- Discussed our curatorial role; not only could we curate our own shows, but others
- Discussed issues relating to audience and the need to attract a diverse range of individuals
- Discussed our online presence: another space for live work or an archive?

**Dr. Brian Degger**, Digital Media Artist and Interdisciplinary Researcher and **Pete Hindle**, Artist

#### **NewcastleGraft:**

- NewcastleGraft was initiated in 2001 and managed by Cathryn Jiggins
- It constitutes “the unofficial back channel”<sup>54</sup> of the Newcastle Art world, allowing artists to share knowledge and resources via e-mail
- It reaches over 200 subscribers, mostly based within the North East

#### **DAAMN:**

- DAAMN was initiated in 2005 and constituted a mailing list of digital media artists working within the North East. It also organised a residency at the now non-operational Gallery Glue and a trip to *Transmediale*, an annual festival concerning the role of digital technologies in contemporary society, held in Berlin
- It was managed largely by Clare Ruddock and Dr. Brian Degger
- DAAMN ceased to operate in 2007, citing “...a lack of communication between the groups responsible for digital art in the local area,”<sup>55</sup> or a lack of understanding about the tools used in digital media art practice and also due to similar work being professionalised by institutions such as Culture Lab<sup>56</sup>

- DAAMN was a lesson and an experiment in reaching out to groups and individuals<sup>57</sup>

## Sneha Solanki

Artist

Lecturer in Fine Art, Newcastle University

Co-founder, The Polytechnic

### The Polytechnic:

- “The Polytechnic is an independent artist-led organisation...”<sup>58</sup> based at The Star and Shadow Cinema, which re-purposes technology and explores open source methods of project development
- “The Polytechnic is an un-incorporated independent organisation which is bound by a constitution”<sup>59</sup>
- Its activities are targeted at individuals who work with media and technology<sup>60</sup>
- The Polytechnic has played a key role in the field regionally, since 2000<sup>61</sup>
- As an artist-led group, The Polytechnic are able to produce work, labs and events from a “hands-on” and artistic perspective, as opposed to an institution or agency<sup>62</sup>
- Work on a regional, national and international level<sup>63</sup>
- Constitute the only group working in this way, regionally<sup>64</sup>

### Other responses:

- It is a good thing for technology and media-based art “to

break out of the white cube gallery and inhabit alternative spaces” as the nature of digital media art practice is not necessarily gallery/object based<sup>65</sup>

- It may be good to have a dynamic space to provide a hub or central point for digital media art practice regionally and also a supportive platform for discussion and exhibition<sup>66</sup>
- Hubs have worked well for The Polytechnic as well as for Sneha’s own practice<sup>67</sup>
- Perhaps a gallery space for digital media art should be similar to a lab and open to groups, artists and individuals across the region<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Hindle, P. (2009) E-mail correspondence

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The Polytechnic (2009) The Polytechnic Info

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Solanki, S. (2009) E-mail correspondence

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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