Guide to Best Practice in Commissioning Digital Art: Proposal for a Collaborative Commissioning Tool

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Contents

Summary

The guide for best practice in commissioning digital art took as a starting point the data gathered by Dr Michale Johnson as part of the Re-Growing Digital Arts project with NEoN. Through interviews of participants in the recent commission, *Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine,* he gathered reflections on the project's development and delivery as part of Ars Electronica's Kepler Gardens 2020.

The analysis of the data suggested a few areas, which were particularly highly valued by the artist and the production team. Building on these, I propose a collaborative modular curatorial tool for formulating commissions. Firstly, the tool consists of core elements, reflecting fundamental values for the commissioning institution. These are Accessibility, Sustainability, Documentation and Preservation.

Beyond the core values, the tool suggests formulating a commissioning brief further by considering a series of modular, open elements, to be discussed between the commissioned artist and the institution as part of the project. These reflect some of the common qualities of digital art and were formulated as a result of desk research. They are Interdisciplinarity & Location, Hybridity, Commons & Open Source, Collaboration, Participation & Interactivity. The proposal draws on scholarship in the field of digital art, as well as contemporary art and curatorial practice more broadly.

The expectations and outcomes of the guide are that, in a further stage, it could be designed as an interactive digital tool used in the process of collaboratively formulating a commissioning brief with invited artists. In such a form, the tool will serve as a timeline to explore various elements of the commissioned project, a type of collaborative conversation prompt to facilitate discussions about the production and delivery of the project, and a recording device to document the commissioning process itself.

Introduction

In the context of contemporary artistic practices and within cultural production more broadly, there is a certain level of concealment of internal institutional operations. The practices, policies and working models of cultural institutions are often hidden and not readily available to the rest of the sector and the wider audience. This, in effect, speaks to the profound lack of resources and materials addressing the processes of producing culture. While feeding into a narrative of immaterial labour and upholding particularly harmful working practices, this lack of transparency and the gap in documenting non-public processes hinders the development of new tools for cultural organisations.

This text serves as a guide and commentary on what constitutes good practice in the process of commissioning artistic projects, particularly in the context of digital art at festivals. It considers multiple elements, which speak to particular necessities and responsibilities when commissioning and producing artistic work. The resulting guide sets the scene for what good practice in commissioning could be and proposes a framework for a collaborative modular curatorial tool, which expands the standard format of a commissioning brief to consider the significance and meaning of various dynamic elements.

The guide begins with an overview of the recent participation of NEoN Digital Arts in Ars Electronica's Kepler Gardens 2020, which led to the commissioning of this text. Drawing on data about the project, gathered by Dr Michael Johnson as part of the Re-Growing Digital Arts research project with NEoN Digital Arts, the text gives a synthesis of the reflections of collaborators on the production process. The overview emphasises the elements which appeared to have contributed to the success of the work. Based on this synthesis, I propose a modular curatorial tool for collaboratively composing commissioning frameworks, which consists of core and secondary, or open, elements. The text concludes with a section on expectations and outcomes of this tool.

Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine

The starting point for this guide is the data which emerged from Dr Michael Pierre Johnson's Re-Growing Digital Arts research project with NEoN Digital Arts. The current analysis of the development and delivery of art commissions and subsequent proposal for a good practice commissioning tool draws on a recent commission by NEoN Digital Arts - *Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine* by the artist B. D. Owens.

For Ars Electronica's Kepler Gardens 2020, in collaboration with the Regional STARS Centre at the University for the Creative Arts, NEoN delivered a commission by the artist B. D. Owens. The artist was invited by NEoN to consider the sharing of public and private space in the context of wider environmental and societal ecologies and with particular reference to surveillance technology. B. D. Owens built on previous work and developed *Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine* to ponder the reality of living near the Faslane nuclear submarine base. The new commission included two new films, an interactive walk, and a conversation with research psychologists from the UK as part of the artists ongoing, multifaceted project *Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine.*[1] [2]

In 2018, for the duration of 50 days, B. D. Owens undertook a daily performative pilgrimage from his house to the main gate of the naval base covering 224 miles in total. During the walks, he drew an "Undesired Line" with his body, along the ground next to the perimeter fencing including the surveillance activity and the entire ecosystem around the base in the work. The artist continues to develop the work with sound, video and writing and viewers can interact with elements of the work on Twitter at #UndesiredLine.[3]

Using interviews, Dr Johnson mapped the reflections of the artist and other participants on the project. In the space of these conversations with Donna Holford-Lovell, director of NEoN, and Dr Johnson, the participants shared reflections on the commissioning process, which was particularly praised.

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[1] The interactive project *#UndesiredLine* was originally presented at NEoN's 2019 festival edition on the theme of *Share, Share Alike*. https://twitter.com/hashtag/undesiredline?src=hash&f=live.
[2] "Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine - North East of North," accessed June 17, 2021, https://northeastofnorth.com/gare-loch-duality-and-the-undesiredline/.

[3] "Gare Loch Duality and the #UndesiredLine - North East of North."

Participants Reflections

As part of Dr Johnson's research interviews, the artist and other collaborators expressed appreciation for various aspects of the commissioning process. These have been formulated in different categories, namely New Audiences, Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity, Artistic Autonomy and Accessibility.

New Audiences

The audience reach surpassed NEoN and the artist's expectations and they received feedback on the multidisciplinary approach to the work. There was engagement with the livestream from new audiences, through Ars Electronica, while also engaging existing audiences which had been at the NEoN React Symposium, B. D. Owens' previous work with the organisation. These new audiences are particularly important since for small size organisations, such as NEoN, it could be challenging to resist the echo chamber of local art scenes and to connect to international audiences. Expanding the institution's network and reach through collaboration and partnerships with other institutions, in this case Ars Electronica and the University for the Creative Arts, provides artists with opportunities to engage with new audiences on a global scale and to present their work internationally. The event saw reach in North America and Europe and attracted academic and professional audiences from outside of Dundee. The international reach was achieved due to the online aspect of the project and while digital arts are no strangers to online environments, the conditions of lockdown due to COVID-19 created unprecedented increase in access to cultural activity because of online programming.

Collaboration & Interdisciplinarity

The artist identified the opportunity to consider their practice in multi- and interdisciplinary way particularly valuable. The opportunity to show work as part of Ars Electronica encouraged interdisciplinary collaborations between art, science and technology which enhanced the artist's practice and contributed to a more robust and rigorous project. At the same time, such international collaborative activities elevate the institution's profile and reputation, therefore creating more value for its programmes and more opportunities and exposure for participating artists.

Artistic Autonomy

The person-cantered approach when working with Donna Holford-Lovell as a curator made the artist feel support and understanding. B. D. Owens reflects on his working relationship with the curator, emphasising the learning process and approaches around communication and the autonomy and space they were given to meander between ideas and develop the original concept. Building that confidence in an artist while giving them space and aligning expectations appears to have been crucial for the success of the project. Building that confidence through artists-led curating and person-cantered approach allowed for freedom to approach researchers for collaboration.

Accessibility

As part of the reflections on the commissioning prosses, the artists emphasised the strong mutual understanding between themselves and NEoN that the work should be as accessible as possible. NEoN demonstrated great efforts in providing captions and visual description in the audio recordings, using artificial intelligence technology as initial entry point which was then edited to avoid confusion and machine mistakes. Helen King, responsible for NEoN production, also reflected on the logistical and technical delivery of the project. She emphasised the importance of technical delivery and the necessity to achieve quality of production in order to achieve other goals. She delivered the accessibility requirements of the project, including securing a live typist and producing a transcript, alt-text, and captions on YouTube content. The feedback on accessibility was positively reviewed by users and NEoN should be well positioned to achieve the same level of quality in delivering accessible programmes in the future.

In their reflections on the project, Camilla Barker and Lucy Bunnell from the University for the Creative Arts, who invited NEoN to participate in the Ars Electronica project, said they would look to work with NEoN again and are interested in growing the collaboration. Additionally, they said they will use NEoN's work with B. D. Owens as an exemplary commission, which demonstrated what could be achieved and set a standard for developing commissions in the future. Particularly, they reflected positively on the accessibility success of the commission and the sustainable working NEoN demonstrated, although working with small restricting budgets

could be challenging with ambitious projects. Overall, this fostered a fruitful context to strengthen existing relationships and to form new ones in a network of organisations.

Proposal

Based on the analysis of participants' reflection on the commission, I propose developing a framework, or collaborative tool, for formulating commissioning briefs. It consists of core elements, embedded in each commission, and modular elements allowing for flexibility of what constitutes good practice. The tool is expected to be used as a collaborative, negotiation tool in the process of producing new artists commissions. As a collaborative tool between NEoN and the commissioned artists, this commissioning tool is expected to reflect the particular circumstances of a given commission.

It is always important to consider the immediate context of commissioning a new work and to reflect on its conditions. As such, it is perhaps useful to think about these scene-setting reflections in the form of questions. In her text *Document 0,* Teresa Cisneros provides a set of questions as a reflective framework for cultural practitioners.[4] Drawing on her writing, I suggest the following questions as tools to reflect on the process of a commission:

- What do you care about in this process?
- What are the conditions allowing you to be here?
- Who is this work for?
- What is your context? What is the institution's context? How do they converge and diverge?
- How is equity, diversity and inclusion incorporated into your practice and the current project? How does that sit with the institution's practices?
- What do you value in your process of cultural production/creation? What is the value you want to communicate to your audience?
- What does it mean for you to be taken care of as an artist and cultural worker?

These guiding questions could serve as discussion points for establishing the boundaries of the new commission within the artist's wider practice and within the institution's activities.

The proposal of this guide is that the collaborative commissioning tool includes core elements, which will have to be considered within individual projects in a conversation between the organisation and the artist(s) but will remain non-negotiables as institutional values for every

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[4] Teresa Cisneros, "Document 0," Inhibitions, 2020, https://inhibitions.org/posts/document-0-by-teresa-cisneros/.

commission. This tool will serve as a foundation for the artist to develop their work while having autonomy and agency during the commissioning process. The ambition and outlook for the tool is to set a standard for good practice in commissioning and to guide every commission to achieve a high standard of delivery and knowledge exchange. The suggested core elements are Accessibility & Sustainability and Documentation & Preservation.

Proposed 'core' elements:

- Accessibility & Sustainability

The art world is built on notoriously inaccessible spaces while claiming strong aspirations for inclusivity and accessibility. These barriers are embedded in the operational structures of traditional art institutions. Simon Sheikh criticises the desire for the art world to be assimilated by a larger socio-cultural world system while still upholding an exclusionary art world space. "Who exactly is this 'we'? If the art world is seen as part of a generalised institutionalisation of social subjects (that in turn internalises the institutionalisation), what and where are the demarcation lines for entry, for visibility and representation?" [5] He suggests an expanded notion of institutional critique, situated outside its history within the artistic canon. Thinking through excluded practices and subjects, whether as an active willful act of separation or a passive marginalisation by an established structure, digital arts seem to hold a valuable space outside of the mainstream art world structures.

In that sense, digital art organisations and institutions have agency in platforming emerging artists, experimental practices and fostering collaborations with other institutions in an expanded digital network, while being sensitive to issues of access to technology and accessibility more broadly. Resisting assimilation by the canonical traditional art institutions and their often-harmful practices could be increasingly challenging and difficult to sustain. Therefore, a level of resilience and sensitivity to sustainability is paramount for working successfully. Thinking through the B. D. Owens commission and its successful elements,

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[5] Simon Sheikh, "Notes on Institutional Critique," in *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*, ed. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009), 31.

accessibility and sustainability appear to be key values, which need to be embedded at the core of each new commission.

Beyond legal frameworks for the implementation of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), cultural organisations have the responsibility to embed ethical practices in their processes of producing culture as a fundamental part of commissioning new work. In the Scottish cultural landscape, Creative Scotland has provided useful questions and guides in widening access for cultural institutions, which could be an efficient starting point in formulating accessibility practices.[6]

- Documentation & Preservation

Documentation and sustainability could often stand in direct conflict, especially with restrictive budgets and considerations relating to too much documentation and too much data being created. However, I propose that documentation and preservation arrangements are made between the artists and the organisation as part of an initial conversation on how a commissioning brief is to be set up. These needs will vary between artists and artworks; therefore a bespoke approach is appropriate for every commission, ensuring transparency and agreement.

Annet Dekker has provided seven categories of documentation for media artworks: "First, documentation produced for publicity and presentation; second, for purposes of reconstruction or preservation; third, for describing processual changes in the appearance of a work; fourth, for developing an aesthetical and/or a historical "framework" or reference; fifth, for educational purposes; sixth, for capturing audience experiences; and seventh, for capturing the creative or working process of the artist(s)."[7]

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[6] "Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion | Creative Scotland," accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/the-10-year-plan/connecting-themes/equalities-and-diversity.

[7] A Dekker, "Methodologies of Multimedia Documentation and Archiving," in *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives*, ed. Julia Noordegraaf et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 151, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wp6f3.12.

In this instance, the categories could serve as guiding principles for establishing documentation and preservation arrangements, which reflect the institution and the artist's responsibility when creating a new work.

Proposed secondary 'open' elements:

Beyond the core staples, the commissioning tool will be modular, including various elements, to be agreed between the organisation and the artists in an artist-led commissioning process. They will reflect elements of curating and commissioning technology-driven projects, which exemplify good practice and produce outcomes enhancing the project and the artist's experience and development. Considering the expansive scope of digital art, these will largely depend on the specifics of the project in question and will reflect its particular needs.

- Interdisciplinarity & Location

Sabine Dahl Nielsen proposes a terminological shift from off-site curating to multi-sited curating. While off-site curating refers to projects realised in extra-institutional contexts, meaning outside of traditional venues, such as museums and galleries, multi-sited curating suggests that these sites are not just a selection of separate spaces and should be perceived as multiple, as being interrelated, intertwined, and situated within mutual flows and broader networks. This multi-sited curating "allows for the exposure of translocal processes, which are often characterized by asymmetrical power relations, social actors in motion, as well as conflicts, negotiations, and social struggles that extend over multiple locations."[8]

Festivals are inherently multi-sited as a form of cultural organisation or institution, organising and curating their activities at various spaces in a particular location. They often do not rely on a particular physical space for the presentation of their programmes, such as galleries, museums or independent project spaces. Rather, they deliver their programme in a multi-sited way, connecting presentations across a city.

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[8] Malene Vest Hansen, Anne Folke Henningsen, and Anne Gregersen, *Curatorial Challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Contemporary Curating*, Routledge (New York: Routledge, 2019), 79, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351174503-8.

Interdisciplinarity has been pointed out as a particular benefit of B. D. Owens' work with NEoN in collaboration with the University for the Creative Arts. And indeed, digital art practices often sit at disciplinary intersections, perhaps most prominently with science. Art-science is a practical, very tangible artistic framework but it belongs to a larger diverse area of overlapping and interacting disciplinaries at the intersections of art, science and technology and extends to include practices of new media and digital art.[9] Digital art practices are often interdisciplinary, involving adjacent areas from bioengineering, machine learning, informatics to anthropology, law and climate justice. Harnessing these interdisciplinary approaches contributes to a diverse and multimodal artistic process and expands the perceived limits of the work, while reimagining existing notions and narratives.

- Hybridity

With the easing of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the practice for delivering cultural programming is exceedingly relying on hybrid events, combining physical and online activities. The increased access to cultural activity as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns and public events happening online has opened opportunities and shifted attitudes towards creating events accessible both on site for local audiences and online for international audiences. Hybrid events have the potential to sustain this higher level of engagement from international audiences for smaller organisations, such as NEoN. While rigorous academic analysis of such hybrid events is still lacking, it is evident that the cultural and events sector is adapting to this sustainable model to be implemented in a post-pandemic context.

However, when approaching the element of hybridity while formulating a commissioning brief, it is important to consider how the physical and digital presence or engagement of the commission sits with the artwork. Potential benefits of hybridity are expanded audiences and multi-dimensionality of the project, allowing for more ways of dissemination and engagement and especially increasing accessibility. A hybrid approach to curation will not be suitable for every project and it is necessary to accommodate the artist and assess whether hybridity would benefit the commission or infringe on the artistic concept and project.

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[9] Andrew Barry, Georgina Born, and Gisa Weszkalnys, "Logics of Interdisciplinarity," *Economy and Society* 37, no. 1 (2008): 38, https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140701760841.

- Commons & Open Source

Christian Paul discusses the concepts of ubiquitous and pervasive computing in the context of public digital art. She claims that these concepts are at the core of many digital projects and have gradually counterbalanced ideas of "cyberspace" as the model for a digital environment. While these two concepts certainly overlap, with ubiquitous computing the emphasis is on connectivity permeating all aspects of daily life and speak to the access to networks enabled through mobile devices as a more vernacular expression of accessing digital environments (rather than immersive experiences). Paul goes on to suggest critical questions which stand as particularly relevant to the broader concerns of this text:

- What exactly does ubiquity mean if large portions of the world remain disconnected from digital networks or are governmentally restricted in their use of these networks?
- How can we gauge the impact of mobile computing, which ranges from enhanced agency and participation to invasive tracking?[10]

Furthermore, as a response to environmental problems and the increasingly restrictive copyright legislations coming from the corporate commercial sector, certain artistic practices' use of free and open-source principles address these issues.[11] Therefore, an attention and care towards accessibility and techno-democracy, advocating openness, participation and collaboration must be a consideration in new artistic technological production.

Ned Rossiter considers the technologies of invention as they centre on durational projects contextualising them in a wider sphere of social life being entangled with institutional framework and technologies. Amongst the questions he asks, a few are particularly relevant to the concerns of this guide:

- What institutional forms might technologies of invention assemble?
- What are the conditions of emergence of these technologies?
- How do they connect to other institutions and what is their economy?

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[10] Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie, *A Companion to Public Art* (Chichester, UNITED KINGDOM: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 206.

[11] Knight and Senie, 206.

- What is the relationship between the construction of the common – understood as processes of translation constituted through struggles of labour – and its differential potential of multiplying effects?[12]

In his essay *Networked Media and the Rise of Alternative Institutions: Art and Collaboration after 2008*, Bill Balaskas charts the institutional shifts and changes that the art world(s) saw after the global financial crisis of 2008. It is perhaps useful to consider this in the context of the current global crisis caused by COVID-19 and the inevitable institutional transformations that are emerging from it. The idea of "commons" has often been at the core of initiatives to endure the crisis, because of its function of subverting neoliberal consciousness.[13]

Balaskas claims that in the post-2008 environment, "commons" should not be conceptualised in terms of common inheritance and what we need to preserve for future generations, such as natural resources, cultural and intellectual production, infrastructure, education, public health etc. Instead, he suggests that the definition of "commons" has radically expanded during the last decade to now describe "everything that we are in a position to jointly research, create, and share – particularly through the production and dissemination tools offered by networked technologies".[14]

- Collaboration

Bill Balaskas considers several institutional examples, such as the Centre of Contemporary Culture Barcelona's LAB, Platoniq, Medialab-Prado, and ColaBoraBora as resisting the ephemeral exhibition projects existing in isolation. Instead, he claims, through their curatorial programming including collaborative and research activities, such institutions manage to "establish a permanent *physical* presence within the city, in parallel to their permanent *online*

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[12] Ned Rossiter, "Autonomous Education, New Institutions and the Experimental Economy of Network Cultures," in *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art,* eds. Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), 328, https://doi.org/10.1080/21502552.2013.766876.

[13] Bill Balaskas, "Networked Media and the Rise of Alternative Institutions: Art and Collaboration after 2008," in *Institution as Praxis: New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research*, ed. Carolina Rito and Bill Balaskas (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 181.

[14] Balaskas, 181.

presence."[15] He goes on to compare these working models to "independent entities with their own 'headquarters'" as opposed to ephemeral exhibition projects hosted within a larger institution.[16] Such approaches speak to collaboration and hybridity as values embedded in digital art institutions.

In considering the interactive, participative and collaborative nature of digital art, Christiane Paul proposes that the institution is a node in a larger cultural system, supporting the existence of the artwork through collaboration with other nodes. She gives an example of discussions on mailing lists wondering whether new media art has affected a "departure from Institutional Critique towards a form of "transgressive ecology" – an environment of shared resources that allows for divergence, fluctuation, and interpretation between localities and bodies of knowledge."[17]

Echoing Christiane Paul's proposal of the institution as a node, Balaskas suggests collaborative work with other organisations and individuals in the same artistic ecosystem expands the scope, criticality, and audience of networked institutions. These models are linked to hackerspace and the abundance of community-based, non-profit spaces, where people with mutual interests in technology and culture exchange ideas and collaborate. Often such initiatives are symptomatic of a post-crisis moment, such as after the 2008 financial crash, when creatives need to find new ways of research, communication and expression.[18]

- Participation & Interactivity

Interactivity and participation are key characteristics of many public artworks that engage technology and the art itself acts as a facilitator of social interactions and participative collaboration.[19] While this is particularly relevant to new media art and doesn't always extend to

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[15] Balaskas, 186.

[16] Balaskas, 186.

[17] Eduardo Navas, quoted in Paul, "New Media Art and Institutional Critique: Networks vs. Institutions."

[18] Balaskas, "Networked Media and the Rise of Alternative Institutions: Art and Collaboration after 2008," 186.

[19] Sarah Cook, "Stop, Drop and Roll With It: Curating Participatory Media Art," in *Practicable : From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art*, ed. Samuel Bianchini et al. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 379.

other instances of digital art, it is important to highlight that most media, or technology, is inherently reactive. However, what Beryl Graham stresses is that there is a difference between an audience observing an installation or a moving image piece, and an audience having some control over the piece, exemplifying reactivity and interactivity.[20]

The extent of participation is fundamental in the conception and execution of such works, since possible interaction from the audience in, for example, completely open systems means that participants can influence the engagement and change the end result.[21] Essentially, participation crucially shifts the way the audience relates to the work.

In thinking about public media art projects, Mirjam Struppek identifies five categories of major characteristics:

- Promoting Interaction to the fearless confrontation and contact with strangers.
- Promoting the formation of a public sphere by criticism, discussion, reflection on the society.
- Promotion of social interaction and integration in the local neighborhood.
- Perception of current developments, by technology reflecting sensual system experiences.
- Activating conscious participation in the creation of public space.[22]

As Sarah Cook observes, these are particularly sensitive to the issues of location, audience, and participation.[23] Therefore, they encapsulate the modes of *reaction* and *interaction* prompted by technologically driven artforms in public space and are a useful guide for thinking through audience engagement through interaction.

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[20] Beryl Graham, "What Kind of Participative System? Critical Vocabularies from New Media Art," in *The "Do-It-Yourself" Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media*, ed. Anna Dezeuze (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 286.

[21] Cook, "Stop, Drop and Roll With It: Curating Participatory Media Art," 381.

[22] Mirjam Struppek, "Interactionfield - Public Space," 2002, http://culturebase.org/home/struppek/HomepageEnglisch/Kategorien.htm.

[23] Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Leonardo Books (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2'010), 224.

Similarly, Anne Balsamo speaks to the key functional components that public interactive assemblages include: a digital media-rich application; a networked architecture that connects internal elements with external elements; an address within an "Internet of things"; a designed communicative experience; a physical display form; and a mode of address that targets specific users.[24]

She warns that such lists are always incomplete but serve to emphasise her argument that the construction and implementation of a public interactive necessitates the design of a complex system of interrelated elements.[25] While this is underpinning the particular conditions of delivering a public interactive, it also speaks to the broader concerns of good practice and the intentions of this guide in the sense that the engineering of a complex web of nodes in the process of artistic production needs to be scrutinised.

"While any classification system is fraught with limitations because the uniqueness of any specific instance is often elided in the attempt to generalize the pattern, the use of a genre approach to the study of public interactives serves as a first step in organizing the widely disparate antecedents and the wild proliferation of interactive experiences."[26] Like genres of literature, genres of public interactives are definable by key traits describing the category:

- "Material aesthetics: Includes reference to the orientation of screens, input mechanisms, scale of display, and qualities of the built form.
- Mode of interaction: Description of opportunities for interaction between humans and media devices; also refers to the logic of digital media: spatial, procedural, encyclopaedic, participatory.[27]
- Modalities of experience: Description of how the interactive appeals to embodied senses, the temporality/duration of encounter, intensity of engagement, and affective impact.[28]

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[24] Anne Balsamo, "The Cultural Work of Public Interactives," in *A Companion to Digital Art*, 2016, 336, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118475249.ch14.

[25] Balsamo, 336.

[26] Balsamo, 337.

[27] Here Balsamo reflects the work of Janet Murray who delineates these four characteristics as the key affordances of digital media that organize the cultural meaning.
[28] Balsamo notes this list draws on work by Nathan Shredoff (2009) in his work on the constitutive elements of interactive experience design

- Phantasms of the public: Determined by mode of address and the idealized figuration of the user as citizen, consumer, tourist, audience, member of the public or as anonymous, individuated, or member of a mass, crowd, or collective." [29]

This formulation of public interactives genres speaks to a phenomenological approach to understanding the audience and provides a useful guide in thinking through modes of engagement, interaction and communication with audiences.

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[29] Balsamo, 338.

Expectations & Outcomes

The expectation of this commissioning tool is that it will take the form of a commissioning timeline, consisting of various pitstops reflecting significant stages of the process and serving as checkpoints between the organisation and the artist. In this way, the organisation ensures the commissioned artist is supported while paying close attention to keeping up with standards of good practice and adhering to core values.

In this process, it is important to avoid the applications of the tool becoming an administrative burden, which largely increases the workload of the project itself. Rather, it is important that it exists as a collaborative, negotiation tool, ensuring best practice in the process of development and delivery and managing expectations for all sides. Beyond this initial proposal, future development of this commissioning tool could include developing it in a visual, perhaps interactive, form, delivered in collaboration with a designer, in order to enhance usability, accessibility and presentation.

In such digital interactive form, the tool could serve as a method for defining a commission's boundaries and for capturing its development, therefore emphasising process and highlighting it as just as important as outcome. Additionally, while working through the tool's various elements, the organisation and the artist would be able to record the stages of creative development and the conversations around them, therefore using the tool as a recording device. Ultimately, this curatorial tool seeks to establish good practice in commissioning digital art while capturing value emerging in the process of creating the work. Furthermore, it would create societal value for the organisation as it is transforming their ways of working and emphasising good and ethical practices, while allowing for growth and a learning curve.

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