

The Baring Foundation

Digital Arts and Older People

What is distinctive about working with
older people using creative technology?

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Summary

This paper was produced as a discussion document to aid a roundtable meeting on *Digital Arts and Older People* that was held by the Baring Foundation on 13th September 2012. This roundtable intended to consider the question: '*what is distinctive about working with older people using digital arts and creative technology, and how might this field be developed?*'

This paper outlines some early thoughts of the author on this theme, and incorporates suggestions and elements of the discussion that followed. It begins by taking a view on what we should consider digital art and creative technology, and distinguishes between the use of technology as a *tool* and as a *medium*. The paper then goes on to outline some of the issues that digital artists work with older people to challenge and explore. It outlines three of these: the digital divide; isolation and loneliness; and the relative disengagement of older people within an increasingly important part of mainstream artistic practice.

Section 3 considers whether there are particular forms of participatory arts practice that digital technology facilitates, identifying two in particular: intergenerational projects; and memory and reminiscence work. After this, section 4 attempts to identify any particular groups that digital arts interventions could be particularly suited to. It suggests that two such groups are people living with dementia, and older people with limited physical function.

Section 5 discusses some of the perceived disadvantages and limitations of the use of digital arts with older people, including a lack of 'immediacy'; older people's fears around the use of technology; barriers to digital arts being used in care homes; and the relatively high resources required.

Finally, section 6 concludes, and outlines some of the areas that have emerged as priorities for overcoming the challenges identified, and increasing the digital arts offer to older people.

Digital Arts and Older People

Section 1: Introduction

This paper was originally written in order to put forward some early thoughts for a roundtable discussion to be hosted by the Baring Foundation on Thursday, September 13th 2012. This was one of a series of meetings in which the Foundation attempts to deepen our understanding of the field of arts and older people, so enabling us to refine the direction of our programme. In the light of this discussion, key themes, arguments and future priorities which emerged, have now been incorporated into this final version. A list of attendees is included at Appendix II.

The theme of the discussion was *digital arts and older people*. The Foundation wished to consider what is distinctive about working with older people using digital arts and creative technology, and to discuss how this field of work might be developed.

This paper does not suggest any definitive answers to these broad questions, nor does it attempt to classify or outline the many different ways in which creative technologies have or could be used with older people. Instead it identifies common themes that the Foundation has encountered in its grant-making, and highlights particular lessons and concerns which have arisen in our discussions with organisations working in this field.

The paper builds on previous reports produced by the Foundation, most notably *Ageing Artfully* (2009). It has been written on the evidence available to the Foundation from grantees, alongside a series of telephone interviews and our roundtable discussion with grantees and other important organisations working in this field.

1.1 Digital arts and creative technology

The first challenge we face when discussing the use of digital arts with older people is the definition of our terms. There is some discussion as to where the line between 'digital art' and more traditional media can be drawn.

One distinction useful to understanding different conceptions of what constitutes digital art, is between the use of technology as a *tool* and as a *medium*. Technology, when it acts as the *medium*, is essential to the production of an artwork, which could not otherwise have been created. For older people, an example of technology as a *medium* could be the use of an iPad to record sound, video and images, manipulate and edit these, and to display the result.

Where technology acts as a *tool*, it enhances the practice of analogue or more traditional media. The technology may be part of the process that leads to the creation of the artwork, but is not the primary method of production or performance of the final piece. An example of this could be the use

of Skype and social media to bring together older people to discuss and write a play, which is then performed on stage.

These distinctions are hardly definitive, and many participatory projects with older people would be hard to categorise in one or the other. However, some of our grantees who use digital technology as an important part of their work with older people, have said that they don't consider their output to be '*digital art*'. Most often this occurs when these artists appear to be using technology as a *tool*.

For the purposes of this paper, and the broader discussion, we are interested in '*digital arts*' in the broadest sense, when digital technology acts as a tool or as a medium, and when its use adds something distinctive in the process of creative engagement with older people. For this reason, the paper refers to both the creation of digital art and the use of '*creative technology*' largely interchangeably.

Projects the Foundation has encountered which fulfil this definition have used a variety of different techniques and approaches. These include digital photography and film-making, and the manipulation or sharing of these using technology; digital production, recording and manipulation of sound; and computer-generated art. In addition, projects have made use of digital technology in a variety of stimulating ways in order to share and display older people's artwork, to bring older people together in the creative process, and to challenge the particular disadvantage that older people face in an increasingly '*digital*' society.

1.2 Participants

Not only is the field of digital arts extremely wide-ranging, the range within the category '*older people*' makes it hard to draw any universal conclusions about the specific benefits of this approach.

Indeed, many of the features of digital arts and older people covered in this paper apply differently to people in different circumstances: what is appropriate for people in their active Third Age is not necessarily appropriate for those who have reached their Fourth Age, and who therefore have fewer capabilities.

The scope for day-to-day digital engagement may be quite different for active and mobile older people living in their own homes, than it is for those who are residents in care homes or hospitals. For organisations working with digital arts and older people, it is frequently the case that such settings have a strong bearing on the type of arts interventions they do, and the ways in which these are implemented.

Section 2: What issues can the use of digital arts with older people challenge and explore?

2.1 Digital Divide

It is often claimed that engaging with participatory arts projects gives older people new skills. For those organisations that make use of digital art, this claim is especially powerful. Fifty-five per cent of UK citizens aged over 65, and over seventy per cent of those over 75, have never used the internet (Office for National Statistics, 2010). This generational ‘digital divide’ is becoming a well-established feature of the UK’s social and political discourse. Many arts organisations working with older people argue that a specific benefit of the use of creative technology is that it provides older people with transferable skills that can help lessen this divide.

Adult learning and ‘Silver Surfer’ courses have become increasingly popular in recent years, however classroom-based courses are often seen by older people as overly ‘formal’ and too intimidating to ensure broad participation. The “gateway” role of the arts in helping to engage older people with a broader learning process has been identified elsewhere (Richard Gerald Associates, 2002), and it may well be that the creative process acts as a more social, collaborative and enjoyable way to impart these new digital skills.

Case study: bridging the digital divide

The Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT) is a national centre for media arts, based in Liverpool. Alongside Your Housing Group and Liverpool residents, FACT co-produces tenantspin: a twelve-year-old community media programme that began as an arts-led internet TV channel, and which has evolved into a broader community media and arts project.

In 2010, FACT published its ‘Digital Manifesto for Older People’ which contained recommendations specifically aimed at tackling the digital divide:

Tackling the Digital Divide

- 1. Give older people access to enter the digital world** - Residential care homes, sheltered accommodation, clubs for the elderly and care centres should be digital hubs - providing mental stimulation and opportunities to explore and learn new creative media skills. Digital technology can help older people get socially connected, with lessons in how to surf, blog, make short films or even DJ.
- 2. Let's open the doors to the online Town Hall** - Community activity is increasingly happening online via forums and websites for the local population. Democratic debate and participation is thriving on the internet. Older people should have greater access to the tools and skills needed to participate in their online neighbourhood.
- 3. Online Freedom Passes for over 65's** - The Internet is now the primary source for public

service information. From collecting pensions to legal advice, everything is going digital. To ensure pensioners can make the most of the opportunities available, the Government and Internet Service Providers should provide over-65s with subsidised Internet access, and make access to super-fast broadband for the most vulnerable a priority.

4. **End digital illiteracy** - 10 million people in the UK lacking basic digital skills is a social injustice and an economic liability. The government should set a target for eliminating digital illiteracy by 2020, establish a national helpline to get older people on the internet and require that as part of the Government's national youth service, young people "buddy-up" with the elderly online.
5. **Social networking across the ages** - Conversations between the generations are fundamental to a well-functioning, happy society - and the Internet is the perfect place for those conversations to take place. From webinars which bring older people into the classrooms to online Q&A's, the young and the old should meet in the digital ether - actively promoted by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Many of the organisations we have spoken to have talked about the alienation and nervousness that many older people feel when confronted with the new technology that is becoming more pervasive in people's everyday lives. Indeed many argued that even where digital arts projects do not aim to give their older participants new skills *per se*, they help to break down the linguistic and confidence-related barriers which contribute to the digital divide.

2.2 Isolation and loneliness

Similar to, but distinct from, the use of digital arts projects to address the digital divide, this field of work may also be particularly suited to helping lessen the isolation and loneliness felt by many older people. This problem is extremely pressing: it is estimated that around 2.1 million people aged over 60 in the UK have less than weekly contact with family, friends or neighbours, and 1.3 million of these have such contact on a less than monthly basis.

There are multiple reasons for this problem, however it is compounded by the fact that our society is increasingly one which communicates digitally. For many people today, email, mobile phones, Facebook, Skype and Twitter have become the primary channels of communication, bypassing even 'analogue' forms of technologically-aided communication such as landline telephones.

For many arts organisations using creative technology, their artistic interactions with older people are made all the more meaningful by addressing this issue. Aside from the broader benefits of familiarising older people with modern technology, enabling older people to confidently use modern technological methods of communication such as social networking or Skype, can help to connect them more easily with relatives, with friends and with one another, and in the process to erode this driver of loneliness.

Case study: using technology to connect communities

The Baring Foundation currently supports FACT and *tenantspin* to develop their *Electric Blanket* project. *Electric Blanket* draws on the nostalgic image of a patchwork quilt to connect sheltered housing residents across Greater Merseyside. Using digital media workshops, training and support for older people, the project will result in a collectively produced piece of work: the ‘electric blanket’. The ‘blanket’ will then tour each scheme, alongside an online database of the artwork produced by individual participants, encouraging and enabling older people “to connect with one another across geographic restrictions through digital means”.

While giving older people the skills and technology to communicate more easily with others is important, for many older people in their Fourth Age, these technologies are not particularly appropriate. Instead of seeking to give these older people *skills* with which to communicate more easily, other arts organisations have focused on the use of creative technology to stimulate communication and interaction by using them as a creative hook, and a practical aid, for family, friends and carers.

Many arts organisations state that one of the most important aspects of their work with digital arts and older people is their capacity to confront and question limiting assumptions about older people and their engagement with technology. By challenging perceptions of the abilities of older people, and by enabling their creativity through these unexpected media, they are often seen in a new light by their carers, relatives and friends.

Defying stereotypes and shining a light on older people’s individuality and creativity is a purpose common to most participatory arts work with older people. However given the limiting expectations around older people’s preferences and abilities around technology, digital arts could be a powerful means for eroding these causes of isolation.

2.3 Engaging older people with current developments in wider practice

An important purpose of many arts organisations working in this area reflects the fact that digital and new media art are an increasingly important part of the artistic landscape. It is striking that while older artists such as David Hockney see creative technology such as iPads as at the cutting edge of his field, older people in the community do not appear to be naturally associated with digital arts practice. It is clear that arts bodies and funders have concentrated resources on digital arts with younger participants, begging the question: should this same interest not have been applied to a greater extent to older people as well?

On the one hand the growing relative prominence of digital arts clearly means that older people should have more opportunities to engage in the appreciation and consumption of digital art. However another motivation expressed by arts organisations for addressing this issue, is that

stereotypes around older people's tastes and creative abilities should be challenged. Some of those we spoke to referred to an unthinking assumption that older people equate to 'old-fashioned' media, and argued that in fact this simply reflects a lack of opportunities for older people to be active in this field.

Section 3: are there particular forms of participatory arts practice that creative technology facilitates?

3.1 Intergenerational projects

Many arts organisations working with older people use their work to help bridge societal divides, particularly those between generations. One rationale for doing so is to counteract a decline in intergenerational 'bridging' or 'linking' social capital, and therefore to help reduce the effect of this driver of older people's isolation. In *Ageing Artfully* we outlined a series of benefits of an intergenerational approach, two of which were:

- 'an exchange of experience, of skills and knowledge, of ways of being and behaving'; and,
- 'an opportunity to discover the real people behind the stereotypes.'

These benefits are of particular relevance to organisations working with digital arts with older people. As outlined above, challenging the stereotypes around the ability and willingness of older people to engage with technology, is an important part of this field of work. In addition, the disparities between different generations' language, skills and knowledge about digital technology, makes this a particularly rich seam for creative collaboration.

Case study: using digital arts to bridge generations

Creative Arts East are an arts company who work with rural and disadvantaged communities across Norfolk, Suffolk and the East. With the support of the Baring Foundation they are leading an intergenerational stop-frame animation film project with older people who live in Robert Kett Court, a residential care home in Wymondham; and students from two local schools - Robert Kett Junior and Wymondham High School.

The final film of the project included footage of and by the participants, who made animated films from stories they shared, modelling the characters and effects with plasticine. Creative Arts East have stated that through this work they intend to demonstrate 'that ambitious creative projects can be an effective catalyst for new ideas, perceptions and relationships', and that the project would change 'the way the people involved think about themselves and about others'.

You can see the film here: bit.ly/QfWCws

For these, and for very practical reasons too, many digital artists have found intergenerational approaches to be interesting and rewarding ways to address the issues of loneliness and the digital divide. The shared intergenerational ownership between a grandchild and their frail grandparent of an animated film they have created together, is not only a practical and fun way for the older person to express themselves, but can help the younger person to see them in a different light, fostering better communication and mutual understanding between the two.

3.2 Life stories, memory and reminiscence

Much of the participatory arts work done with older people focuses on memory and reminiscence. Reminiscence work can cover an array of different art forms, and does not necessarily include the use of the arts at all. The use of creative technology can be particularly suited to this kind of work in various ways.

Creative technology, for example, can aid the creation of a multi-sensory experience, including sound, video and touchscreen technology. Some digital artists said that this meant that they could help recreate a fuller reflection of the older person's memory and experiences. Similarly, the use of digital sound recording can allow reminiscences to be heard in the older person's own voice, allowing the creator a greater sense of personal ownership and connection to the process and their final creation.

Case study: using technological prompts to aid families and friends

B-Arts is a participatory arts company based in Newcastle under Lyme with a strong record of developing multi-arts projects in collaboration with a range of diverse and disadvantaged groups. Supported by the Baring Foundation it is currently working on a project to research and design a platform for *digital continuing biographies*, envisaged as an alternative to the physical memory boxes which are currently used in many care homes.

The precise shape of these biographies – for example whether they are accessed on a personal computer, touchscreen device or another interface, is yet to be finalised. However the platform could enable:

- a multi-sensory experience, including video and sound;
- the representation of an ongoing set of experiences, memories, photographs, and preferences, rather than being a medium limited to the past;
- the stimulation of collective experiences between the older person, their family and friends, and their carers.

An important aspect of this project is designing a platform which can engage and involve the primary carers, relatives and friends of a person living with dementia or leaving their home. The application

could be accessible at home for the relatives to remain ‘connected’ to the person living in care, to share experiences, and to provide a range of prompts and ideas for conversations to support relatives visits, overcoming the fear of ‘*what will we talk about now she no longer recognises me?*’

Digital technology is clearly not a necessary condition of meaningful and creative reminiscence work. However, it can often lead to the creation of a ‘product’ which is replay-able - with digital photos placed alongside videos, sound recordings or animations on DVD or CD for the older person to be able to experience again and share with others.

A key part of the value of reminiscence work is its ability to reinforce a sense of self and to enable others to see the older person’s point of view and value their individuality. Digital technology can allow reminiscence films to be broadcast or shown to a wider audience, strengthening older people’s sense of self and making them feel that their lives are worth listening to.

Section 4: Are there particular communities or groups that digital arts interventions are particularly suited to?

4.1 People living with Dementia

Many arts organisations using digital arts or creative technology with older people focus their projects on people living with dementia. Digital technology has given rise to many forms of ‘assistive technology’, which help people with dementia and their carers to overcome the day-to-day effects of its main symptoms: memory impairment, and reduced cognitive and executive functioning.

The development of every-day ‘assistive technology’ has been mirrored, to a lesser extent, by the emergence of ‘leisure technology’, which is designed to allow people with dementia access to leisure activities that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to undertake (Riley, Alm and Newell, 2008). However relatively few technological innovations have been pioneered thus far that could more easily enable creative expression by older people with dementia.

Some arts organisations with a background in new media and digital art, have begun to adapt creative technologies to this purpose, and many have convincing reasons as to why these interventions are particularly suited to older people with dementia. There are almost as many reasons given as there are projects, so few general conclusions can be drawn, however some common themes do emerge.

Some arts organisations claim that digital technology allows them to design participatory programmes which stimulate participants’ senses in more or different ways. This is claimed to be useful for older people living with dementia both to allow participants a maximum amount of free

choice in how and to what extent they wish to engage in the creative process, and also more simply to compensate for the loss of some physical and sensory capacity.

Case study: multi-sensory stimulation for people living with dementia

The Spare Tyre Theatre Company, a community theatre and participatory arts company based in London, works across a range of ‘voiceless communities’, including adults with learning disabilities, women who have experienced sexual violence as well as people aged over 60.

Spare Tyre claim that their *Once Upon a Time* programme is particularly suited to people with dementia as it is an immersive process, which contains a range of different sensory stimuli. The programme involves storytelling that incorporates the layering of touch, sound, taste, light, smell into the process. Participants actively engage along the way, in part by interacting with multimedia projections that respond to clapping and vocal sounds.

The use of the interactive digital projection permits the fully immersive experience to be realised, as well as enabling older people with dementia to participate in the creative process itself.

Another argument often made, is that with touchscreen devices of simple design becoming increasingly common, the basic functionality of everyday technology is intuitive enough for use even by those living with more advanced stages of dementia. Upton et al (2011) found for example, that participants in their group sessions perceived the iPad to be much easier to use than traditional PCs, although it was recognised that ‘full interactive use’ of the iPad is considerably more complex.

Case study: developing apps for creativity

Memory Apps for Dementia is a partnership set up in 2010 that seeks to identify and share ideas for how touchscreen technology can benefit individuals with memory difficulties.

They argue that the iPad ‘opens up a completely new world of opportunities that will fundamentally change the way older people interact with technology.’ In addition to working directly with care homes and older people living with dementia, through its website the partnership recommends the apps that it has found most useful, and links to the research underlying its work.

The website states of the organisation that it ‘aims to give people with dementia the opportunity to unleash their creative potential. We want to challenge the negative stereotype relating to memory difficulties and use this technology to enhance an individual’s quality of life.’

This evaluation certainly reflects the findings of many digital artists spoken to for this paper, who noted that one of the key benefits of touchscreen technology (identified by many as a key benefit of digital arts more broadly) is its ‘immediacy’. The consensus appears to be that touchscreens create a more directly connected feel for older people with dementia, who in general find one-step-removed inputs such as a mouse or a touchpad confusing. In this sense then, modern creative technology can

more accurately recreate what Belinda Guidi, an artist working with Glasgow-based organisation *Art in Hospital*, terms the ‘immediacy’ and the ‘therapeutic ... physicality’ of paint, pencil or crayon on paper.

A final set of benefits identified for digital arts when used with people living with dementia, are the immediacy and replay-ability of the results of the creative process. B arts, for example, when using digital photography, found that they were able to use digital photo printers to almost immediately allow participants to see the results of their creativity, and view a record of the process of creative engagement.

Case study: The use of stop-frame animation with older people living with dementia

London-based film production company Salmagundi Films developed a system of using stop frame animation to produce individual digital portraits for older people living with dementia. *Frames of Mind®* makes use of participants’ simple personal belongings to trigger anecdotes, memories and conversations. These then form the narrative of the animation, which participants create for themselves with simple software on laptops.

Salmagundi claim this process is well suited to working with people with dementia. The software used is easy to operate and allows for immediate playback throughout. This helps to overcome any problems with short-term memory and ensures that the participant remains in control of the creative process.

As Riley, Alm and Newell (2009) state, it is important that activities for people with dementia are ‘failure-free’ in order to avoid participants feeling embarrassed, and Salmagundi recognise this, emphasising the particular suitability of this art form:

‘There are no linear narrative constraints in animation, no right or wrong, anything is possible, and for people with dementia it can be a liberating creative experience.’ (Flynn & Chapman, 2011)

4.2 Older people with limited mobility or physical function

A large proportion of disadvantaged older people, particularly those in their Fourth Age and those living in care homes, live with some form of limited mobility or loss of physical function. While there is not necessarily a relative advantage to digital arts projects in working with older people with these problems, it is certainly true that recent advances in technology have meant that creative technology has become far easier to access physically.

As outlined above, there is evidence that older people find touch screen technology more instinctive than traditional computer interfaces. However even where modern digital technology is still too complex for individuals’ use, the case studies in this paper highlight a number of ways in which simple technologies can facilitate interactive creative experiences for older people of varying physical ability.

Not only are the user interface and software of mainstream technological devices such as camera phones and iPads becoming easier to use, but recent design trends have meant that the weight and form factor of these everyday tools makes them increasingly accessible to people with limited mobility. Many arts organisations have therefore rightly concluded that such tools can, and should, play a more common role in bringing creative opportunities to older people, both within participatory projects, and in their day to day lives.

4.3 Older people uninspired by traditional media

It is indisputable that the use of digital arts adds to the range of creative experiences on offer to older people. It is an obvious point, but nevertheless one worth making, that the greater this range, the more likely it is that older people find the forms of artistic expression that they most enjoy.

Arts organisations we spoke to pointed out that one practical consequence of this, is that through a distinct digital offer, older people who tend not to engage in traditional media projects, may well be excited or interested by such a different medium.

One particular group for whom digital arts and creative technology may have this effect is older men. It is notoriously more difficult for participatory arts groups working with older people to engage men in their work, and artists at our roundtable discussion shared their experiences of technology acting as a particularly successful means of doing this.

Section 5: what are the limitations and disadvantages of using digital arts with older people?

5.1 Lack of immediacy

As has been noted, many arts organisations say that one of the main benefits of the use of digital arts and creative technology are their ‘immediacy’. Artists and organisations appear to disagree on this point, however. Perhaps because of the sheer variety of media and techniques in this field, a lack of ‘immediacy’ has also been noted as a key *disadvantage* of digital art.

In part this comes down to how one defines ‘immediacy’. Those who cite it as a positive feature of digital arts tend to focus on technology enabling the participant to quickly create, replicate, share and display a final ‘product’. In addition, for older people with limited physical function, using creative technology can often be easier as it often doesn’t require a great deal of movement. Anne Bjern Hansen, an artist working with Art in Hospital notes, for example, that for older people ‘it is often more straightforward to achieve immediate results with new media than it is with traditional media, that usually requires hand skills.’

The criticism that digital arts often *lack* ‘immediacy’ tends to focus on the fact that teaching older people the skills to use the technology often creates a barrier to them simply getting on with it. This critique is somewhat dependent upon the physical and cognitive abilities of the participant, however it is certainly true that many creative technologies do require a substantial degree of explanation and learning prior to their use. It was noted by one digital artist that, especially for older people living with dementia, too many instructions and steps can be frustrating and disempowering.

5.2 Older people's fears and uncertainty

A commonly acknowledged driver of the digital divide is the sense that many older people feel deeply uncertain, unconfident and even threatened by many forms of digital technology. In fact artists we spoke to said that challenging these feelings in an enjoyable and creative way is one of the specific benefits of their work.

However it was also acknowledged that this can prove problematic, and that participants feeling threatened by the new technology sometimes undermines the effectiveness of the approach. This viewpoint, however, was a minority one amongst the digital artists we spoke to. The general consensus was that in direct contradiction of the stereotypes, artists are frequently surprised and taken aback by older people’s willingness and enthusiasm to engage with digital media.

A number of organisations emphasised that the novelty of the technology in fact has a unique set of benefits, in that it stimulates a more social and enjoyable experience. B-Arts for example spoke of being delighted by older people passing around iPads with digital photos of each other, zooming in and out and manipulating the images.

Again, it seems that older people’s experiences of engaging with creative technology are far from uniform. One artist summed up the problem of fear of technology well by pointing out that reactions tend to be quite divergent - one likely set of reactions is for older people to display extreme patience and openness, however where there is fear of not knowing or not being able to use the technology offered, this can lead to frustration and disillusionment.

5.3 Care home staff and processes

Artists who attempt digital arts projects in care homes report facing particular barriers in care workers and their ordinary methods of working. While digital artists say that on the whole they encounter little hostility or opposition to technology from older people themselves, the reverse is often true when it comes to their carers. This is not particularly surprising – the work of care home staff is to provide personal and clinical care, and rarely use a computer in their everyday work. Low levels of digital awareness in care home settings can thus create real barriers to entry for organisations seeking to work with digital media.

In addition, arts organisations often report staff nervousness about their projects, and their tendency to view it as not ‘real work’. Without integrating creativity into the everyday lives of older people and their carers, it is difficult to achieve any lasting change. The lack of existing technological resources and digital awareness means that it is difficult for carers – even where the will to do so exists – to integrate such activities into their everyday approach to person-centred care.

Although care home staff can be an obstacle that many digital artists find hard to overcome, at our roundtable meeting it was also pointed out that there are significant opportunities here. As a younger generation more at ease with technology move through the care home workforce this barrier should only decrease. Indeed, some organisations said that in recent years this process has already been noticeable.

It is also true that in the context of an ageing population, the demand for care home staff is increasing. One suggestion voiced at the roundtable was that not only would investment in technological infrastructure, and integrating this into carers’ work be beneficial for older people, but it would also help to attract new and younger carers into these settings.

5.4 Resources

This barrier is a simple, and self-explanatory one. Already, professionally-run participatory arts projects are seen as a costly luxury by many care home operators. While digital media projects which make use of simple creative technologies are not disproportionately expensive for this field, to ensure that older people have continuing or long-term access to creative technology, requires a more significant investment in this technology for the individuals and the settings where they live.

The lack of technological confidence among care home staff has already been described, however an equally pressing problem is the lack of technological infrastructure in these environments. One organisation told us that in homes they work with, there is sometimes not even access to email. The tools required for day-to-day creative technological engagement, such as iPads and PCs, do not usually have enormous unit costs. Nevertheless this investment represents a significant challenge for care homes starting from such a basic position, and which operate on extremely tight margins.

The resources required for digital arts projects with older people is not only a barrier for care homes. Community projects, and those run for older people living independently in their Third Age, can also be undone by such costs. Many older people lack access to basic infrastructure such as Wi-Fi or a readily-accessible PC, and this can present a challenge to projects that mobilise or engage people through existing infrastructure, for which participation can be dictated by social and economic divides.

5.5 Legal issues

As noted above, the creation of a final ‘product’ that is replay-able, simple to store and easy to share with others, is a significant benefit of many digital arts projects. However in our discussion, it was noted that, particularly for film and photographs which include older people living with dementia, the notion of informed consent makes for significant legal difficulties for arts organisations that wish to display or share the artwork that has been produced.

5.6 Screen-based participation

One concern raised at the roundtable meeting was that for many older people, particularly those who are isolated or living in care homes, watching television is one of the only means of wider cultural engagement they have. However it is also one of the only activities that many of these older people already do, and it would in some ways be a shame to replicate this by using similar screens as the main mechanism for their creative expression as well.

This apparent drawback is not really a reason to limit the use of digital arts, however as has been discussed earlier, digital arts should complement and widen the overall artistic offer to older people, rather than be seen as an alternative or a replacement. We know that some of the main benefits of the participatory work that arts organisations do are in the facilitation of social experiences, often in new settings. To enhance these benefits is clearly a better rationale for the use of technology, than is to replace other forms of artistic expression.

Section 6: Conclusion, and where next?

This paper has outlined some initial thoughts in response to the question ‘what is distinctive about the use of digital arts and creative technology with older people’. It does not claim to have reached any definitive conclusions, nor to represent the opinions of most of the artists working in this field. In responding to this question, the paper has identified that in the field of digital arts and older people, distinctive differences to other forms of participatory arts can be identified within the following broad categories:

- The issues that participatory digital arts projects challenge and explore;
- The particular forms of arts practice that technology can help to facilitate;
- The distinctive benefits of creative technology for working with particular communities and groups; and
- The particular limitations and potential disadvantages to the use of digital technology with older people.

For the roundtable discussion that was held, we set ourselves the challenge of identifying ways in which the field of digital arts with older people might be developed, and the role that the Baring Foundation might play in this. The clearest set of priorities which emerged from this were around the better, and more strategic, use of current opportunities.

6.1 Exploiting major digital initiatives

A general issue in the participatory arts field is the tendency for them to be ghettoised and seen as second rate. An important strategy to challenge this is to use prestigious major venues to highlight their impact and artistic excellence. An example of this, for instance, is the work taking place at the Sage Gateshead. The digital equivalent of this would be for work to be uploaded onto the The Space - a major joint initiative between the BBC and Arts Council England. This programme is 'designed to encourage experimentation, innovation, and provide an opportunity to learn more about how to connect audiences with arts and culture using digital technologies', and hosts a showcase of content across various digital media platforms.

6.2 Funding

Over and beyond widening public exposure to participatory digital arts projects through existing digital initiatives, the field itself can be expanded through the better allocation of funding. Digital arts and creative media are a major priority for the Arts Council England, as are increasing participation and engagement with the arts. There is a clear need, but also an opportunity, for the benefits of work with older people to be reflected within these priorities, just as has been done already for work with children and young people.

6.3 Training

Training for care home staff and other carers, social workers, and community support workers, is constantly developing and evolving. Opportunities should be identified and exploited for 'piggybacking' digital arts and the use of technology for creative engagement with older people onto these training processes, including on-line ones.

The use of digital arts with older people will continue to increase in relevance and importance in years to come. There will inevitably be progress in the capabilities, physical accessibility and ubiquity of digital technology. However alongside the benefits that this will bring in enabling new forms of creativity among older people, it is likely also that this progress will produce new digital divides. A key part of the future picture of this field will be the ability of digital artists to overcome, challenge and explore these issues.

Appendix I: Further resources

Case study organisations

B-Arts	b-arts.org.uk
Creative Arts East	creativeartseast.co.uk
Foundation for Art and Creative Technology	fact.co.uk
Memory Apps for Dementia	memoryappsfordementia.org.uk
Salmagundi Films	salmagundifilms.co.uk
Spare Tyre	sparetyre.org
<i>tenantspin</i>	tenantspin.org

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Appendix II: Roundtable attendance

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