



CoSTAR

THE UK R&D NETWORK FOR CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

ForesightLAB



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

Future in Praxis

Tracing Changing Creative Practice Around Three Areas of Complexity

*An exploration of what creative practitioners' negotiations
around machine learning, platforms, and labour
reveal about emerging patterns of change*

A Foresight Lab report

Noemi Ponzoni, Jac Sanscartier, Arina Mnatsakanyan, Jonny Freeman

November 2025



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Driven by the UK's leading Creative Industries experts, the [CoSTAR Foresight Lab](#) is researching the adoption, use and impact of new, emergent and convergent technologies in gaming, TV, film, performance and digital entertainment.

Our findings will inform research, development and innovation across the Creative Industries, including the R&D taking place through the convergent screen technologies and performance in real time (CoSTAR) programme, the UK R&D network for creative technology.

[CoSTAR](#) is a £75.6 million national R&D network of laboratories that are developing new technology to maintain the UK's world-leading position in gaming, TV, film, performance, and digital entertainment. Delivered by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council, the programme is supporting new innovations and experiences that will enrich the UK's creative industries, economy, and culture. The network comprises the National Lab, the Realtime Lab, the Live Lab, the Screen Lab and the Foresight Lab. CoSTAR is funded through UK Research and Innovation's Infrastructure Fund, which supports the facilities, equipment and resources that are essential for researchers, businesses, and innovators to do groundbreaking work. You can find out more by visiting www.costarnetwork.co.uk.

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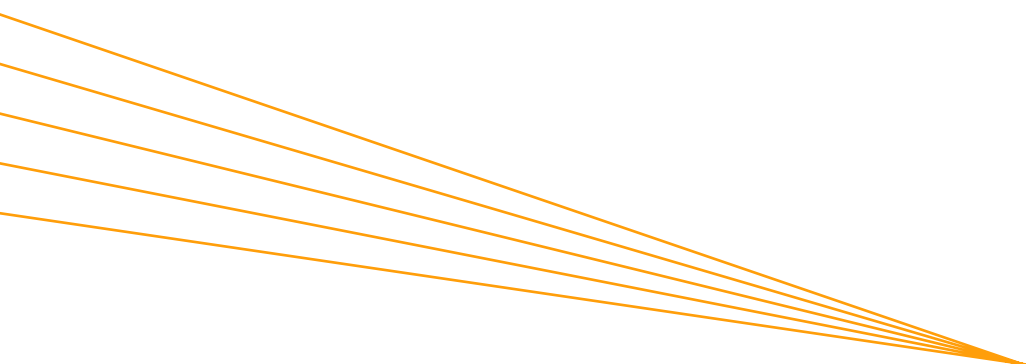
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Arina Mnatsakanyan; Jodie Pearton; Noemi Ponzoni; Anna Stewart; Lewis Turner-Brown (i2 media research)
Leon Forde; Marta Moretto; Joshua Dedman; Emma Openshaw; Peter Cobb; Kiera Obi; Lili Ruzsiczky (Olsberg·SPI)
Patrick Bradley (Station12)

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Acknowledgements

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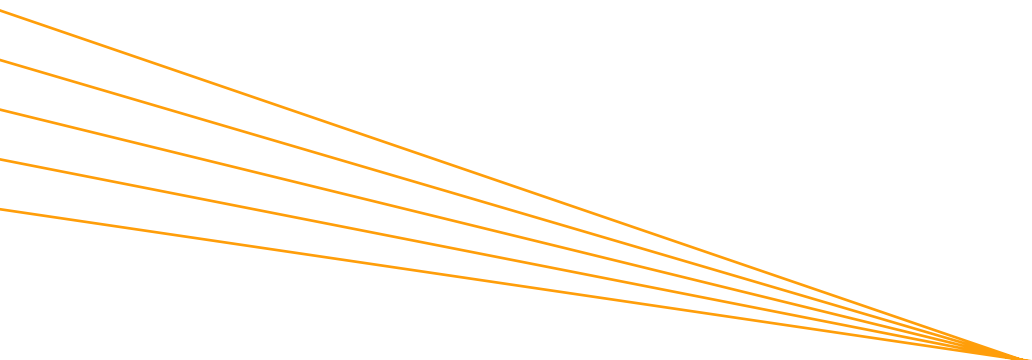
Deborah Williams OBE, independent in the creative industries

Alex Wills, Chief Experience Officer at disguise

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Audiences Cross-Lab Group

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Foreword by Professor Jonny Freeman

The creative industries are entering a period of profound transformation. Technologies once confined to speculative fiction are now embedded in the workflows of artists, producers, and creative organisations. Yet, as these tools accelerate, so too do the questions they raise: Who owns the systems that shape our creative futures? How do platforms influence not just what we make, but how we live and connect? And what does creative work look like when the boundaries between human and machine, physical and digital, dissolve?

Futures in Praxis is our first step in answering these questions from the ground up. It complements our earlier *Moments* report by moving from systemic foresight to the lived realities of those designing, shaping, and experiencing these futures. Through conversations with practitioners, innovators, and cultural thinkers, we uncover patterns that matter, not as predictions, but as signals of possibility.

This report is not about declaring certainties. It is about opening dialogue, surfacing tensions, and amplifying voices that challenge the hype with nuance and imagination. In doing so, we aim to equip the CoSTAR Network, and the wider Creative Industries with insights and foresight to inform responsible innovation, inclusive practice, and bold experimentation.

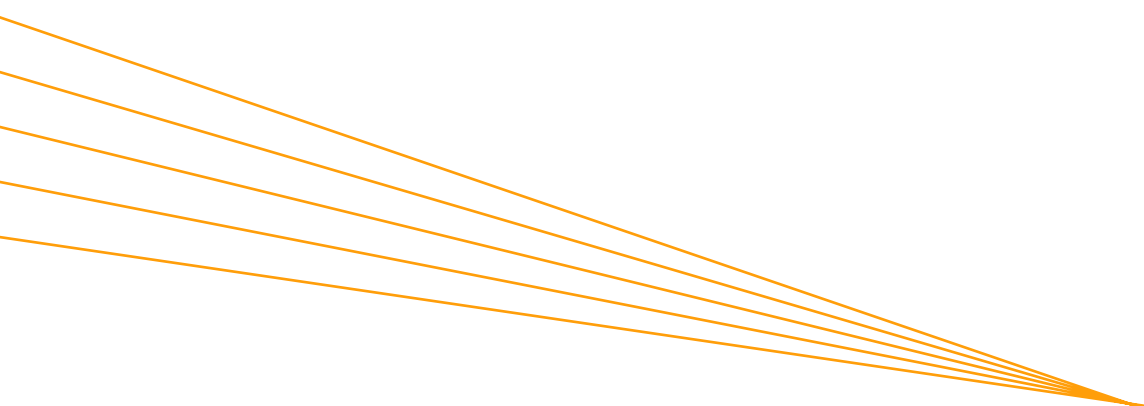
The future of creative technology will not be written by algorithms alone. It will be co-authored by people, by their values, their desires, and their capacity to imagine otherwise. This report is our invitation to you to join that conversation.

Professor Jonny Freeman

Director, CoSTAR Foresight Lab

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Executive Summary

This report introduces a new work stream (*Humans*) within our foresight work, responding to and expanding on the inquiry initiated in Introduction to *Moments* (2024). As Moments identified three areas of complexity shaping the future of convergent media (ownership of machine learning, the power of platforms, and the evolution of creative work), this report examines how these tensions are lived and negotiated in practice.

Drawing from extended horizon scanning as well as from nine in-depth conversations with creative workers, industry leaders, and cultural experts, this report explores how people across the creative ecosystem are grappling with change. It situates artificial intelligence, platformisation, and threatened creative labour not as abstract forces but as lived conditions shaping daily decisions, career trajectories and visions of the future. The report translates these observations into Patterns (recurring dynamics and tensions) and Design Principles (strategic orientations for innovation), which then informed a participatory co-design exercise undertaken with our Foresight Board.

Each Design Principle captures a tension: between automation and authorship, openness and control, scale and intimacy, experimentation and responsibility. Collectively, they express a set of shared values: modularity in systems and collaborations; the centrality of the creative worker; investment in the “middle” layers of the ecosystem; sensitivity to audiences’ embodied and evolving experiences rather than a technology-first logic; and a commitment to transparency within a potential parametric paradigm of design.

In the final phase, the Foresight Board translated these Design Principles into four possible interventions: *Capture the Body*, *The Independent Playbook*, *Threshold Licensing*, and *Art as Ensemble*. Each offers a very early prototype illustrating how abstract principles might materialise as new forms of creative practice, governance, or technology.

Across these inquiries, a coherent picture begins to emerge. The future of convergent media cannot be defined by technological capacity alone, but by how human agency is distributed within it: who authors the tools, who owns the infrastructures, who defines the terms of participation, and who benefits from creative labour.

This report is written for those designing, funding, and enabling creative innovation (from policymakers and investors to cultural organisations, studios, and startups). It translates qualitative insight into principles and practical ideas that can inform strategic decision-making about where and how to invest in human-centred innovation.

Ultimately, *Future in Praxis* (and this work stream more generally) argues that foresight in the creative industries must begin not from technology, but from people. It begins collecting the capacities, rights, and desires that will determine what kinds of creative futures we choose to build.

Introduction to *Humans*

Moments and Humans

Published by the CoSTAR Foresight Lab, *Moments* focuses on sector and technology foresight from a systems lens, using strategic foresight, investment awareness, speculative design, and technical expertise across CoSTAR to make sense of complex change in the sector.

Moments sits alongside *Humans*, a complementary workstream exploring foresight from an experiential lens, for workers and audiences. *Humans* explores emergence using foresight, UX research, psychology, and design.

Both research workstreams are informed by a board of leaders across the sector, comprising our Foresight Board, a diverse collective reflecting creative convergence.

This is the first report of the *Humans* workstream.

About this work stream

“We live in times where every technological choice we make as society has exponentially impactful consequences & so we should value more the voices that instead of pushing further (often misinformed) hype, help us grow more inquisitive & resilient to the truly expansive challenges we are & will be faced with.” – M. Bielskyte¹

The *Humans* work stream moves the areas of enquiry from *Moments* into empirical investigation. It does so by using a mix of UX research, Foresight, Psychology, Design research and Media studies.

Humans centres the experiences of those designing, shaping, and interacting with these futures.

Humans prioritises understanding of behaviours, needs, aspirations and the affective responses of individuals and groups of people as the foundation for meaningful innovation.

Humans asserts that this inquiry should guide the direction of innovation, ensuring that emerging technologies align with the intentions and values of those they impact.

Humans centres people not conceptually but as stewards navigating our post-Anthropocene reality toward awareness of our rights, roles and responsibilities within the broader ecosystem where we coexist with the planet and machines – recognising that our responsibilities towards both are fundamentally intertwined with our collective livelihood and survival.²

1 M. Bielskyte on LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/monikabielskyte_linked-in-hive-mind-i-am-reaching-out-for-activity-7302704006840147968-tcme/, accessed on 19 August 2025

2 The researchers involved in this work stream recognise the importance of ecosystem-based design approaches, which consider humans as part of broader interdependent systems. While other parts of the programme engage with this more expansively (e.g. *Moments* and *Carbon*), this work stream focuses deliberately on the human not to assert their centrality, but to rebalance the technology discourse.

This Report

Serving as an introduction to the *Humans* work stream, this report aims to put forward a format of investigation for this work stream and of its dialogue with *Moments*, both of which will co-evolve as will be reflected in subsequent publications.

The investigation in this report begins in direct conversation with *Introduction to Moments* (published one year ago), where three emerging areas of complexity were introduced as embodying “intense future uncertainty with no clear answer at present”.³ These areas (re-introduced below) are highly relevant to the future of convergent creative media technologies. For this reason, they invite open questioning and exploration which were initially pursued within *Introduction to Moments* itself, and which we are continuing to pursue in this report through different lenses.

The three areas of complexity identified are:

1. **Who gets to own machine learning?** It is unclear what shapes machine learning will take in the creative industries, and what implications it will have on both socio-economic dynamics and artistic workflows and outputs.
2. **What platforms will facilitate culture?** Media production and distribution is transformed by digital platforms, which drastically influence both industry and human relationship with expression.
3. **How will creative work evolve?** We live in a complex time of drastic changes to creative work. The chaos in creative workforce has direct impact on high level dynamics like labour organisation, the role of creative industries, identities and cultural taste.⁴

This report begins to explore how these questions are currently asked in practice, across different creative spaces, communities and industries. By examining real-world cases, we seek to trace and understand how people are grappling with the three emerging complexities in ways that challenge, reinforce or transform existing paradigms.

This exploration is naturally structured around the three questions above. Each question is unpacked in three conversations that focus on the lived experiences of different stakeholders: creative workers, business, and audiences (in the form of cultural and audience experts). These three ‘roles’ capture and reflect experientially distinct perspectives within the creative sector and act as nodes of the wider system.

All conversations are ultimately about infrastructural technologies though, because of their exploratory nature, they bleed into adjacent areas of interest. Similarly to *Introduction to Moments*, the aim here is not to come to a univocal conclusion; instead, we are opening conversation that may surface patterns that unify different perspectives across the areas of complexity. We are recognising patterns, speculating and therefore negotiating the future through conversation.

The format of the report also reflects this aim: the nine interviews (originally 60-minute semi-structured) have been edited to maximise clarity while preserving the centrality of the human (and therefore subjective) perspective. Once again, one of the objectives of this report is to shine a light on a number of people working at fruitful intersections to investigate what is on their minds, what challenges they are facing and what excites them.

3 Sanscartier, J., Ponzoni, N., & Freeman, J. (2024). Introduction to Moments. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14420085>

4 Id.

In addition to a conversation, we asked the three creative workers interviewed to write their own mini-scenarios rooted in the area of complexity they were speaking to. As introduced in our previous report, the scenarios are a glimpse into a plausible vision of the future: their scenes are often driven by intuition, emotions, meaningful signals, emergent technological possibilities and socio-political trajectories. These stories reveal what is on the minds of a small cohort of creative workers for whom the evolution of these complexities hold high stakes, and capture in particular those images that can't come into focus yet via more structured interviewing, as they correspond to more uncertain, almost intuitive, territory.

Initial directions (often referred to as patterns in this report) have been elaborated into five Design Principles (p. 33). There are, of course, more insights the reader can elaborate from the text, and it is our open invitation to you to do so based on your own experience and areas of interest.

In foresight, patterns represent the nascent themes that emerge from qualitative research, offering both analytical insight and generative potential for innovation. They serve as the connective tissue between discrete observations and broader systemic understanding⁵ and hold multiple possibilities and contradictions – allowing for a nuanced interpretation of complex phenomena.⁶ They are always partial and emerge from specific perspectives and contexts rather than claiming universal truths, but offer a bridge between research insights and strategic direction (and can often spark ideas for tactical application).

These patterns were elaborated into five Design Principles, summarising a strong tension that emerged from the interviews and proposing a path forward that addresses it. The principles are fundamental rules that may be applied to vastly different interventions.

In turn, these were used as a baseline of both a number of practical implications and of a generative activity with the Foresight Board focused on outlining possible practical interventions (and which makes up the last section of the report). In October 2025, the Foresight Board was invited to develop early concepts for possible interventions: products, services or programmes that embody the design principles and exemplify innovation within convergent media. The activity aimed to synthesise how one or more design principles may be operationalised into tangible formats that respond to current lived experiences and express possible practical orientations.

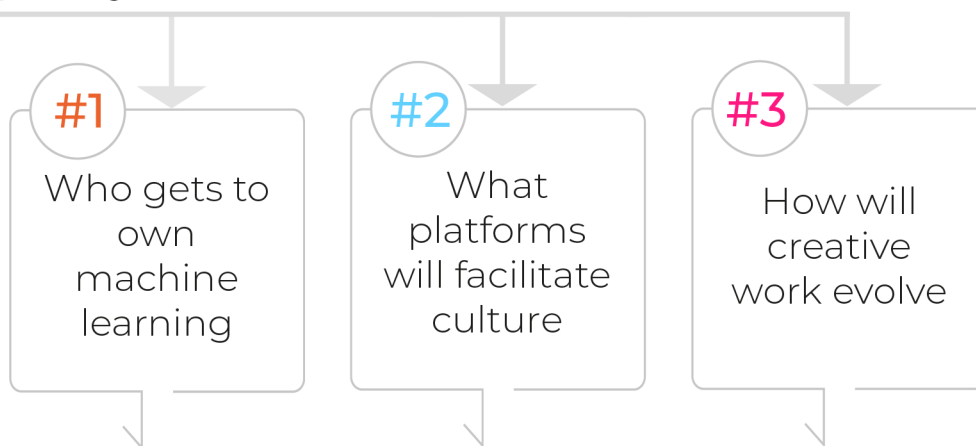
As a final introductory note, this report is written for anyone shaping the future of creative innovation: from policymakers and investors to studios, startups, and cultural institutions. It aims to equip decision-makers and practitioners with grounded insight into how technological and human capacities are evolving together, and where strategic intervention could enable more equitable, imaginative, and sustainable forms of creative production.

5 Schwartz, P. (1991). The art of the long view.

6 Le Guin, U. (1986). The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/mirror/u/uk/ursula-k-le-guin-the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction.pdf>

Areas of Complexity

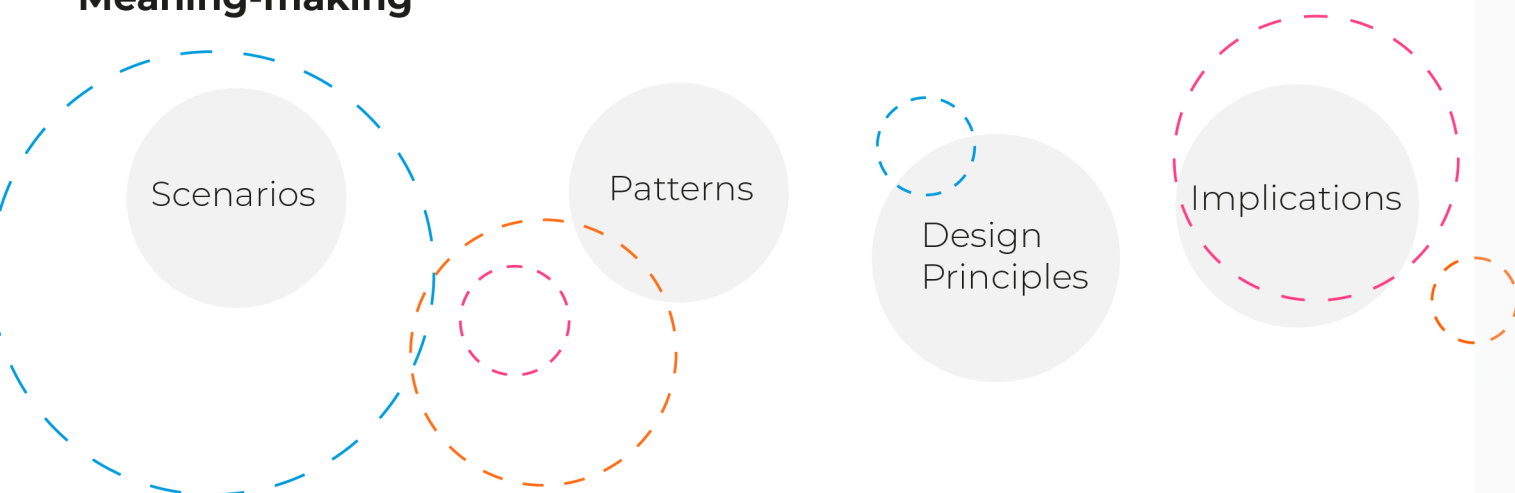
This report's starting point:



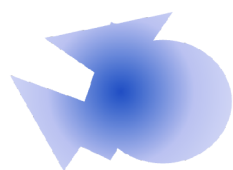
Interviews

Creative Worker	Marco Gillies	Lore Oxford	Halina Rice
Business	Delphos AI	Olyn	MONOM
Culture & Audiences	Domestic Data Streamers	Tiara Roxanne	Andy Crysell

Meaning-making



Foresight Board workshop



Artefact #1



Artefact #2



Artefact #3



Artefact #4

Who gets to own machine learning?

In *Introduction to Moments*, we explored how machine learning might transform creative production (from automation and augmentation to the invention of new expressive forms). This report revisits the question through the lived realities of practitioners working with, and sometimes against, these technologies. Across three conversations, we hear how creators, businesses, and cultural intermediaries are redefining authorship, navigating opaque infrastructures, and pushing against extractive data economies. Together, they continue our exploration around ownership, accountability, and imagination and propose useful perspectives on fruitful (and less fruitful) ways forward.

How can the creative industries move from reactive adaptation to deliberate design and authorship of their technological infrastructures?

Creative Worker

AI, Games and the Future of Creative Interaction *with Prof. Marco Gillies*

Prof. Marco Gillies is co-director of the Master's degree in Virtual and Augmented Reality and the Social, Empathic and Embodied Virtual Reality Lab at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he leads pioneering research at the intersection of machine learning, virtual reality, and immersive interaction. His work focuses on designing systems that learn from embodied human action (particularly movement) rather than from code, opening new possibilities in fields like gaming and immersive storytelling. Prof. Gillies has developed influential tools such as *InteractML*, which lowers barriers for artists and designers to work with machine learning, and has collaborated with game studios to make virtual characters more socially responsive. His publications, including *Immersive Machine Learning for Social Attitude Detection in Virtual Reality Narrative Games* (2022) and *Understanding the Role of Interactive Machine Learning in Movement Interaction Design* (2019), highlight his vision of machine learning as a co-creative partner that amplifies, rather than replaces, human agency.

When Prof. Gillies began working on virtual humans in the late 1990s, the line between “AI” and “game AI” was stark. The latter was shorthand for clever but limited algorithms, while the former still felt like science fiction. Yet, as Prof. Gillies recalled, even then the seeds of today’s generative moment were present.



Prof. Marco Gillies as his analogue self, and as his algorithmic self.

Toward Fully Responsive Digital Beings

While procedural content generation isn't new, Prof. Gillies explains that machine learning is supercharging this process, and today generative AI is used to create everything from textures to entire 3D environments (though 2D content is still more developed than its 3D counterpart). Beyond creation, machine learning is fundamentally changing how we interact with games. The evolution in non-traditional interaction exemplified by gestural freedom (think Microsoft Kinect or PlayStation 2's EyeToy) is all due to machine learning-driven computer vision, and is a capability that has been quietly maturing for years.

Yet, the most compelling area of evolution is around the future of virtual characters. Game studios are increasingly experimenting with large language models (LLMs) to create characters that can engage in truly conversational dialogue. But, as anyone who has played a game with clunky AI knows, a character that only talks isn't enough: the next great challenge is mastering non-verbal communication. For a virtual character to be truly convincing, it must have realistic body language that not only emotes but also responds to the player's own actions. It's a complex, multi-layered evolution, but one that promises to make our interactions with digital worlds much more believable and engaging.

"A talking character is one thing, but if it can respond to your gestures, your body language...that's the next big step."

Artists as Data-Crafters

The recent disputes on the meaning and value of labour in creative production lead Prof. Gillies to a salient point around the impact of fast-paced technological advancements (in particular machine learning and generative AI) on the definition of artistry. Where it was once about 'direct creation', it now increasingly revolves around curating and shaping data.

"I've always felt that machine learning doesn't have to be difficult or technical, because it's not about code as much as it is about gathering data. The data for textures are photographs and images: the stuff that artists know about. The data for animation or movement recognition: that's things that actors and dancers know about. The data for LLM conversational interaction: it's what scriptwriters know about."

The raw material of machine learning is what creatives are experts in, hence why creative skills "are at least as important, if not more, in machine learning as technical understanding". Yet this world and its tools have been and remain largely inaccessible, designed for Python programmers, rather than artists. **The challenge of the next decade, Prof. Gillies suggests, will be building AI systems that truly work at the level of creative practice.**

More on raw materials: it is important to pay attention to the growing focus on real-world capture, as physical environments and people become easier to scan and plug into games. Prof. Gillies sees here a **shift from 3D modelling to reality capture** (including via Gaussian splatting): this is an area where technical skills are still paramount to get it working before it gets easier for people to use it.

These reflections are even more poignant in the context of the tension between job loss and creative expansion. Prof. Gillies observes the pressure first-hand in his students' struggles to find roles as tasks like coding and asset production become automated. Research around the impact of AI on the job market confirm the fears that Prof. Gillies picks up from his students, a cohort that effectively is at higher risk: a recent publication from Stanford indicates that "since the widespread adoption of generative AI, early-career workers (ages 22-25) in the most AI-exposed occupations have experienced a 13 percent relative decline in employment".⁷

New Forms of Manipulation

If Prof. Gillies is hopeful about creativity, he looks with alarm to the effect of the 'commercial creative' as it lives in the world today. The advertising-driven or advertising-heavy model of media production has had deep repercussions already and, Prof. Gillies warns, this will pale in comparison to what an AI-driven virtual characters (just discussed above with hopeful feelings) may achieve. It's become popular to mention AI girlfriends (ed: it is always *girl*-friends), but this thread expands to other social conventions and relationships. Prof. Gillies makes reference to the book *Our Reality* by A. W. Graylin and L. Rosenberg, where the possibility of a social metaverse in which some of the characters are fake is introduced: "what if there's just people at the next table talking about how great the latest car they've bought is, and they're 'fake' people? That's the advert". The more AI can mirror our gestures, conversations, and intimacies, the more persuasive it may become (and the more appealing to the advertising industry).

A Future of Divergent Paths

The next 5-10 years, Prof. Gillies admits, are hard to predict. Few would have foreseen the dominance of LLMs even five years ago. But his central hope is clear: that AI in creative production enables the impossible, rather than automating the generic. "Since the 1960s people have used AI to make art that couldn't exist otherwise. That's what I hope continues. The danger is ending up with vast amounts of generic, mass-produced content."

He cites innovators across the spectrum: Dream Reality Interactive for their pursuit of new interactions; Dimension Studios for high-end volumetric capture; Ready Player Me for quick avatar creation; Conveai for pushing conversational characters. So, an ecosystem that is diversifying rapidly, but its future hinges on whether AI establishes itself as a tool for creative exploration or becomes a conveyor belt of sameness.

Prof. Gillies' reflections map both a lineage and a crossroads. The lineage: from procedural to LLM-driven embodied interactions, from motion capture to Gaussian splatting. The crossroads: between AI as an engine of new cultural possibility, or as the infrastructure of manipulation and one that reinforces much less exploratory and curious patterns.

7 Brynjolfsson, E., Chandar, B., & Chen, R. (2025). Canaries in the Coal Mine? Six Facts about the Recent Employment Effects of Artificial Intelligence https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Canaries_BrynjolfssonChandarChen.pdf

A Scenario by Prof. Marco Gillies:

Bring Me to Life

Creative workers become trainers of the new synthetic heroes

The increasing use of AI language models has fundamentally changed the fictional media we consume. Games have moved away from simple physics-based mechanics to complex social interactions with nuanced characters, while film and theatre have become increasingly interactive until consumers come to expect rich, interactive social experiences across the board. At the centre of these experiences are AI characters that can talk in real time to audiences and have with realistic, generative body language and animation.

The role of scriptwriters and actors has morphed into one of trainers of AI character models. Scriptwriters become prompt engineers who craft not the specific lines of a character's dialogue, but the parameters of the generative model that generates dialog. Actors perform a similar role using motion capture to train the character's mannerisms and vocal styles.

Business

Composition, ownership and prototypes with *Delphos AI*

Delphos AI is a London-based music startup promising a way for artists to work with artificial intelligence while remaining in control of their creativity and rights. Founded by father-and-son Roman (software developer) and Ilya Tolchenov (mathematics-educated composer and musician), the company helps users generate compositions using AI while retaining ownership rights to their music. Delphos' system allows artists to train personal AI models using their own stems. Each artist's model is trained only on material provided by the artist and creators retain full ownership, earning royalties when a generated composition is used. We spoke to CEO Ilya Tolchenov.

The acceleration of the music industry

"Twenty years ago, you could pitch a record label with a simple demo" Tolchenov explains. "Now, a demo has to be a finished track".

The pressure artists face is high: ever-increasing demands in an environment where streaming is abundant, attention is scarce, and revenue still lies in live performance. But even live performance is under threat: going to a live performance means caring enough to spend substantial money to see a specific artist you like play live, rather than buying in bulk the experience of a large festival⁸. And, more and more, listening does not equate to caring – **virality, streams and clicks are less likely to translate into sustained fandom or financial support**⁹. It is in this landscape that Tolchenov argues that AI emerges as an infrastructural necessity: a way for musicians to meet the accelerating tempo of production without burning out.

It is common knowledge that the recent history of AI in music is rife with controversy and lawsuits. For example, Suno's (ed: a generative music start-up) outputs were impressive: fully formed songs with instrumentals, vocals, and lyrics, produced from textual prompts. Yet, when users discovered they could prompt to near-identical versions of copyrighted tracks, the lawsuits came swiftly.

Copyright's Long-standing History

"The music industry operates on copyright," Tolchenov emphasises. "Anytime you do anything with music, somebody has to get paid."

Tolchenov reaches backwards in time to provide the historical evidence of a continuous battle between copyright and illegitimate use. In the 1700s, composers realised they could no longer rely solely on concert hall audiences; sheet music became the new medium of distribution and income. With that came the need of new forms of protection against piracy, which at that time equated to making copies of the music sheets without permission. As technologies of reproduction evolved into vinyl, radio, digital streaming, so did the mechanisms for ensuring illegitimate use was limited, and composers and performers were paid.

So, AI-generated tugs at the existential fabric of the music sector itself (as it does with other sectors). But what feels different now is the scale of risk: if AI-generated outputs can bypass enforceable copyright altogether, it's not just about leakage or piracy, it's about the collapse of the very structure that underpins the industry. If models trained on copyrighted music produce

8 DESTINATION: MUSIC The contribution of music festivals & major concerts to Tourism in the UK. (2023). https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Destination_Music.pdf

9 MIDIA (2025). All eyes, no ears. Why virality is not building fandom.

outputs without enforceable copyright, the structure collapses. “Why would I go through the stress of recording an album if some AI company can just do it themselves?” Tolchenov asks. This is the message already expressed by many artists so far, in initiatives such as the [silent album](#) released earlier in 2025 by hundreds of artists including Kate Bush, Damon Albarn and Hans Zimmer in response to an announcement of the UK government’s plans to change copyright law.

An AI Understudy for Every Artist

Delphos’ intervention is to work at the level of composition rather than audio. Their models require as few as five tracks from a composer to learn stylistic patterns. The result is not an anonymous corpus scraped from the internet, but a **“personalised understudy”** – one tethered to the original composer.

Though the high costs mean it is currently out of reach for most individual artists, record labels and publishers are already using the tool: one example is Zaytoven, the US producer known for collaborations with Gucci Mane and Future. A Zaytoven beat commands upwards of \$6,000, pricing out countless aspiring rappers. With Delphos, Zaytoven’s style can be scaled. Hip-hop artists who could never afford his time now access beats shaped by his compositional DNA, at prices more aligned with their budgets¹⁰. The implications extend beyond pricing. In one case, a producer trained a model remotely and, when a major vocalist arrived at the studio, he generated several beats from the model, chose one, and recorded on the spot. Within hours, a new track was complete – and, critically, the original producer retained credit and royalties. “It functioned exactly as a normal song would,” Tolchenov explains. “Composition, master recording, streaming distribution, royalties: all intact.” Unlike ‘scraping’ models, the human source remains embedded in the process.

This brings Tolchenov to our original question, which he also considers the central issue: ownership. **Who owns the outputs of machine learning models, the user, the model creator, or the data source? His answer is unequivocal: “the data source”**. He distinguishes between models whose outputs differ from their training data (e.g. beat detectors or tempo analysis tools) and those whose outputs compete with the originals. In the latter case (generative composition) ownership must remain with the original composers.

(Who is the artist?)

Where, then, is the balance between human creativity and machine support? Once again, history becomes a rich resource that Tolchenov invokes to challenge assumptions and to sharpen what is unique about this era of technological innovation: in the 1980s, sampling was initially dismissed as the death of music, “now we see that that hasn’t happened, it just allowed us to have way more diverse music”. And again: In XIV century Europe polyphonic composers were venerated as divine vessels, but as music theory was democratised, more people found out that this was something they could do, too.

Despite finding some language at the intersection of music and AI “dehumanising”, such as calling music ‘training data’, Tolchenov hopes that AI may enable easier drafting and prototyping: “composers often become emotionally entangled with first drafts; the way we often work is: you write something and then you hate it, and then you spend a week thinking about what a terrible composer you are, and then you finish it”. Tolchenov’s hope is that AI may promote an “emotionally healthier way of working” for artists.

¹⁰ This raises interesting economic questions around demand and supply that are outside the remit of this report.

Culture & Audiences

Data, Civic Engagement and the Importance of Visibility with *Domestic Data Streamers*

Domestic Data Streamers (DDS) is a Barcelona-based studio. DDS transforms data into tangible, emotionally resonant experiences focused on storytelling and civic engagement. Founded twelve years ago, DDS has grown into an interdisciplinary studio of about thirty people (a cap deliberately set by the founders). Their work has been commissioned by the United Nations, UNICEF, and city governments; they have also collaborated with foundations, NGOs, and, occasionally, big technology companies like Google¹¹. The multi- and inter-disciplinary approach of DDS is exemplified in the recent project *Forever Frequencies*, a piece presented at the Barbican this year as part of the *Feel the Sound* exhibition. As part of the installation, visitors were asked to complete a quick survey about a past memory where music was involved and that the visitor would like to relive. The installation leverages locally run AI to analyse the responses and create a unique melody. For this piece, DDS also collaborated with four creatives, each contemplating their own personal bond with music and memory – their rhythms were available to visitors to listen.

The work of Domestic Data Streamers stands out in a world where technology processes have become so opaque for the individual user that they are recognisable. In this context the means are either sublime or hostile, reflecting the dualism between techno-evangelism and luddism explored in *Introduction to Moments*.

¹¹ It is interesting to point out that it is common for critical work in this space to be funded by the corporations who are directly or indirectly at the centre of the critique. Vara, V. (2025). *Searches: Selfhood in the Digital Age*. Random House.



Forever Frequencies, DDS at the Barbican (2025)

We spoke to Pau Aleikum Garcia, co-founder and director of DDS

Assimilation vs. Accommodation

The studio's long-standing focus is how data is instrumentalised, misinterpreted, and used to reshape reality. Their projects often grow into independent entities, such as *Sixteen Times* (air quality monitoring for hospitals and schools), *Synthetic Memories* (using generative AI for memory reconstruction in dementia care and displaced communities), and *Cedra* (developing ethical AI practices for international cooperation and public services). These spin-offs illustrate DDS's strategy of letting research mature into infrastructures for social impact. At the root of these projects there is the belief that audiences are never passive recipients. Here, Garcia invokes the psychological framework of assimilation versus accommodation: the difference between new information that fits existing beliefs, and knowledge that disrupts and restructures them.

This orientation towards audiences is embodied in the core of their methodological process:

1. Gathering data from unexpected places
2. Extracting insight from this unconventional data
3. Cultivating curiosity rather than over-explaining upfront
4. Building spaces of debate that ask good questions instead of simply presenting data
5. Promoting impact by providing tools for people to translate research findings into action or behavioural change

“People take sides very quickly now. Our job is to create spaces where complexity can be felt before it's rationalised away.”

Politics of Visibility and Resistance via infrastructure

A persistent thread in the conversation with Garcia is the politics of visibility. **He draws a provocative analogy between electricity and artificial intelligence: both infrastructures are designed to be hidden, embedded within walls or interfaces, naturalised to the point of invisibility. This concealment is not accidental but functional:** “the invisibility is functional, it generates less discussion and creates an imbalance of power.”

For DDS, then, visibility is both an ethical stance and a design tactic. Many of their cultural projects deliberately open the “black box,” rendering legible the data pipeline through disclaimers, physical installations, or transparency in process. These acts are not only pedagogical but political: they resist the asymmetry of platforms where the transactional exchange of data is hidden.

There are examples where the **asymmetry was exposed and things were done differently as acts of reappropriation**. Garcia mentions *Te Hiku Media* in New Zealand: a Māori radio station that resisted the commodification of their language by an American entertainment company, instead mobilising community participation and philanthropic support to develop a language model under their own governance. The example is poignant not only as a model of resistance, but as an exemplar of **design and engineering to achieve self-sovereignty** by a group historically outside of infrastructural authority.

What platforms will facilitate culture?

As digital platforms have reshaped how culture is made, distributed, and experienced, they are also often invisibly determining what is visible, profitable, or valued. In this section, we examine how practitioners working across media production as well as community and audience engagement are contending with platform dynamics. Their reflections move between pragmatism and critique: recognising the utility of platforms as creative scaffolds while questioning their asymmetries. Through their experiences, we begin to see how cultural agency might be rebuilt within and beyond these architectures.

What are the online spaces, tools and modes of coming together that reroute cultural power without replicating extractive and homogenising logics of existing platforms?

Creative Worker

Control, Physics and Holographic media *with Lore Oxford*

Lore Oxford is a researcher, strategist and theorist with deep knowledge on the relationship between digital platforms and culture. She is particularly interested in understanding the architecture of online communities, the application of hype technologies, and the juxtaposition between desires for a digitally-enhanced society and a society in-sync. Currently leading insights and cultural intelligence at Reddit, she was previously Head of Cultural Insights at We Are Social, and throughout her career she has worked with all the mainstream platform and technology brands including Apple, Google, Netflix, TikTok and Meta. Her work has been featured on BBC News, D&AD, Campaign, Vox and more.

But before this, she was a teenager on the internet.

Oxford's first contact with a digital cultural space was with Neopets: not as a space for cultural production, but as a way of learning how to navigate social dynamics with strangers online. Then came Myspace, circa 2004.

“Myspace became a space to almost cosplay a new version of myself. It was where I constructed my first projection of self online, a way to navigate awkward social structures around me as a teenager, meeting other young people outside my immediate environment, and having more agency over who I wanted to be in the world.”



Lore Oxford as their online (platformed) self, and their offline self.

Culturing Online

Oxford's critical engagement with platforms began during her university studies in fashion journalism. Analysing fashion collections trained her to connect aesthetics with broader cultural contexts. Around the early 2010s, this sensibility expanded to memes and viral media, which no longer felt like mere reflections of culture but engines actively reshaping it. This pattern, of **culturing where we spend time and make connections**, grounds our reflections here.

"At the time, people still wanted to draw a line between online and offline," she notes. "That separation feels almost impossible now."

What has changed is not just the scale but the ontology of digital culture. Online platforms have become spaces where culture is constructed in real time, less an archive of social life than a generative force. **Myspace, she argues, was an early template for how this was democratised. Its aesthetics, subcultures, and scenes demonstrated the seductive power of a fully curated world** (i.e. long before worldbuilding became a buzzword in strategy decks).

"We talk now about the vibe economy, where you can construct a world and sell people into it: the way Charli XCX did with Brat or tradwives do on Instagram. Myspace was technically a music platform, but I was more interested in the style and social worlds it created. It felt like an entire lifestyle, a value system. Seductive in the way a Wes Anderson film is: a coherent, orchestrated vibe. Platforms are brilliant at letting people curate a distinctive aesthetic others can instantly recognise and opt into."

Where people gather, culture crystallises, and platforms accelerate the process into lifestyle and economy.

Control: A User's Search

If early platforms consolidated cultural life into singular hubs (e.g. Facebook rising as Myspace collapsed), today's landscape shows a recurring pattern of users distributing themselves across multiple, bounded spaces. Oxford reads this not just as diversification but as **a tactic of control: feeds are chaotic, so people manage the overwhelm by splitting their identities** – professional updates on LinkedIn, a film diary on Letterboxd, a creative archive on Are.na.

Research underscores this impulse. Studies link surveillance and collapsing contexts to negative affect^{12 13}; fragmentation can be read as a coping strategy to reduce the psychic load of being constantly visible. Smaller, intentional platforms like Goodreads or Letterboxd feel bounded and safer, while at scale, Reddit's subreddit model shows how communities carve governance structures to define their own cultural rules.

This and tangential dynamics also suggest that users are retreating from larger spaces. Oxford mentions Yancey Strickler's *Dark Forest Theory of the Internet*, inspired in turn by Liu Cixin's prominent sci-fi *Three Body Problem*: in a dangerous universe, survival depends on concealment. Applied online, it suggests that **users increasingly retreat to private or semi-private spaces to avoid surveillance, extraction and manipulation, and to reclaim agency over their participation in culture.**

12 Loh, J., & Walsh, M. (2023). Time Heals: Context Collapse, *Social Media and the Waning of Negative Affect*.

13 Xuan Vu Huong. (2023). Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health from a Psychological Perspective: A Review of the Contemporary Literature. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 066(10). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/v6-i10-05>

Platform Physics¹⁴

If compartmentalisation provides a sense of control, it doesn't resolve the tension between media production and consumption. Oxford describes today's media environment as one of "binging": a seamless flow of videos, sounds, and images consumed almost passively. For audiences, engagement feels implicit. **For producers, however, the audience is always explicit: its presence, feedback, and demands are inescapable.**

At the heart of this lies platform design. Oxford draws on Caroline Busta and Lil Internet's concept of platform physics: the idea that each platform has its own design forces shaping how content moves through it¹⁵.

On Netflix, "gravity" is strong: when something spikes, it spikes hard, propelled by algorithms tuned for virality. "These differences aren't cosmetic," Oxford argues. "They change the very speed and flow of cultural circulation, which in turn shapes what and how producers make".

Oxford makes reference to another of Busta's ideas, that of *holographic media*¹⁶: media ecosystems where communities themselves become a form of media, acting as filters through which multiple platforms are accessed, refracted, and linked¹⁷. In this model, content is not bound to a single environment but distributed, networked and composable.

"Barbienieimer" (the viral coupling of the Barbie and Oppenheimer films at their release) or the universe around Charli XCX's Brat both exemplify this new cultural form. **They were not simply works of art or entertainment but gates to modes for participation.** "The universe exists wherever your audience is," Oxford notes. "It's not unlike performance art, where the audience's response is part of the work." **Remix culture, a cult mode of cultural interaction online once about subverting or recontextualising media, now finds itself pre-designed into the cultural product.** Success means designing for dispersal, knowing the audience will multiply and mutate the work across platforms.

14 Busta, C. & Lil Internet. (2023). Holographic Media - Outland. *Outland*. <https://outland.art/new-models-holographic-media/>. Accessed 21 August 2025.

15 Content is not the preferred word of the writer, but it is effective here to encompass different types of media, as well as how it is perceived by both industry and audiences online.

16 Id.

17 Id.

Scenario #1 by Lore Oxford:

Liquid Media

Amid radical personalisation, all media becomes iterative

It's 2040, and media streaming platforms now sync with neural interfaces that can read biometric responses to narrative elements in real-time, allowing stories to adapt moment by moment, bending to meet you where you are.

One mother's evening ritual begins when her biometric reader detects her stress levels and adjusts tonight's episode of her favourite series: the protagonist's anxiety is diffused through slower pacing, a warmer colour palette. Her eight-year-old daughter experiences the same base story but sees a world painted in brighter hues, with challenges that stretch her just beyond her current developmental stage.

The technology emerged from therapeutic applications but has revolutionised all narrative media. Digitised books rewrite themselves based on reading age, speed and emotional response. Films exist in billions of versions, each one a unique conversation between human and algorithm. All media is iterative, and creatives are expected to build malleable narrative shells, rather than rich and nuanced worlds. The monoculture has dissolved altogether.

Grassroots creative movements concern themselves with the question of whether genuine art can be experienced without friction, driving an uprising of intentionally controversial and un-alterable content. Meanwhile, cultural preservation societies emerge, hosting debate nights where groups experience identical, unmodified content, and are encouraged to argue about it. Hot takes from Letterboxd become a thrilling relic of nostalgia.

Scenario #2 by Lore Oxford:

Creative Sanctuaries ***As platform burnout peaks, creative wellness is commodified***

By 2035, artists looking to protect their craft have migrated from engagement-driven platforms toward closed creative communities focused on process rather than output.

These creative communities provide a relief from the rat race of the attention economy, and inevitable audience capture. On platforms discovered through peers in other forums or offline, writers gather for hours-long sessions where they share rough drafts without fear of screenshot or viral mockery. Musicians collaborate on works that may never see public release, finding joy in the process of creation itself. These platforms serve as both artist residencies and therapy groups: intimate, supportive, focused on craft.

But while these spaces emerged from the exhaustion of performing creativity in public, only those with existing financial security can afford to access them. These platforms are highly exclusive, invite only, and charge substantial monthly fees, without monetisation tools, creating a clear boundary between creative practice and commercial performance. This is the wellness economy applied to creative fulfilment: proposed as healthy, but ultimately divisive. Meanwhile, younger artists and those without established revenue streams remain trapped in the attention economy, forced to optimise their crafts for algorithmic visibility while watching their more privileged peers disappear into protected ecosystems.

Business

Creative flows, Infrastructure, and Disintermediation *with Olyn*

The transformation of media production and distribution over the past two decades is inseparable from the rise of digital platforms. Streaming services, social networks, and algorithm-driven ecosystems have altered how culture circulates, how value is extracted, and how audiences relate to expression itself. Yet as these platforms mature, cracks appear: homogenisation of content, the retreat from higher risk productions, and growing dissatisfaction among factions of creative workers who feel alienated from both their work and their audiences.

Olyn is a direct-to-audience streaming platform positioned as an independent distribution service where creators get up to 90% of revenue. Its promise is to grant filmmakers control over their work and revenue share, while building direct audience relationships. By embracing decentralised, referral-driven distribution, Olyn aims to align niche storytelling with scalable monetisation. Films on Olyn have unique branded pages and analytics, with viewership being driven by social sharing rather than algorithms.

We spoke to Ana Maria Jipa, co-founder and CEO of Olyn.

Systems that don't flatten

Jipa has been fascinated “by the invisible mechanisms that shape our world” since she was a child in awe with how water and air moved. Circulation and flow became poles of enquiry that guided her to focus on both engineering and behavioural studies. The two concepts then became what underpinned Olyn: the ideas that the cultural flow wasn't working properly and that “systems operated against the human experience, rather than for it”. So, **Olyn emerged as an offer designed to “identify individuals rather than flatten them”, and to enable cultural participation to flow with more agency from filmmakers.**

Jipa's analogy between streaming platforms and retail consolidation (with Olyn being dubbed as “the Shopify for filmmakers”) illuminates structural constraints in contemporary distribution systems. “Imagine Netflix, HBO, Prime, and other streaming giants as the Walmarts of the entertainment industry,” she observes. This comparison reveals how platform aggregation creates bottlenecks analogous to those that historically limited product innovation in consumer goods markets, where dominant distributors constrained variety and innovation by controlling market access¹⁸. The algorithmic curation systems that define streaming platforms optimise for engagement metrics and demographic categories, systematically undervaluing content that fails to conform to predetermined formulas.

¹⁸ Dobson, P. W., & Waterson, M. (1999). Retailer power: Recent developments and policy implications. *Economic Policy*, 14(28), 133–164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0327.00048>

Disintermediation and value chain restructuring

Traditional streaming platforms extract value through their role as intermediaries, capturing audience data and revenue shares while maintaining algorithmic control over discovery processes. Olyn's architecture instead positions technology as utility infrastructure that enables direct relationships between cultural producers and audiences. This disintermediation operates across multiple dimensions simultaneously.

The platform's referral system monetises human curation and establishes it over algorithmic recommendation. Viewers who share films through referral links receive revenue shares, transforming passive audiences into active distribution participants. This mechanism crowdsources the curatorial function that platforms typically reserve for proprietary algorithms.

Case studies demonstrate the practical implications of this disintermediation. Katja Meier's TV series *\$hare* was rejected by streaming platforms because its target audience (women over 50) was deemed commercially invalid. Using Olyn's infrastructure, Meier bypassed these gatekeepers and successfully connected with her intended demographic. Similarly, Brady Corbet's *The Brutalist*, which won seven Golden Globes after being labelled "un-distributable", exemplifies systematic failures in established evaluation mechanisms.

These examples reveal what Jipa characterises as the suppression of “middle-tier” films, i.e. culturally significant content that doesn't conform to either art house or blockbuster categories. **The disintermediation model potentially serves cultural niches that platform-mediated systems systematically undervalue due to their optimisation for mass-market engagement.**

Platform design as economic architecture

Olyn's affordances may function as economic instruments that reconstitute fundamental relationships within cultural production systems¹⁹. **The platform's design embeds specific assumptions about value creation, circulation and capture that diverge from the extractive mechanisms characteristic of many digital platforms.**

The referral link architecture exemplifies this principle. By embedding revenue-sharing mechanisms directly into content distribution URLs, the platform transforms every recommendation into a potential economic transaction. This technical design choice eliminates the traditional separation between cultural advocacy and economic participation. Arguably, the technical affordance of automated revenue distribution thus constructs and formalises a new form of cultural labour. Similarly, the platform's granular access controls and geo-blocking capabilities function enable creators to implement territorial and temporal release strategies previously available only to major distributors. These technical capacities reconstitute the filmmaker as an autonomous economic actor rather than a dependent content supplier. Effectively, the platform transforms creatives into creative shops with a direct channel to audience.

Jipa identifies peers experimenting with reconfiguring product and infrastructure design: *Kinema* (community screenings), *Seed&Spark* (crowdfunding and audience building), and *Creator Camp* (grassroots training) – initiatives pointing to new formats of interactions between funders, producers and audiences that propose reshaping of creative and financial control.

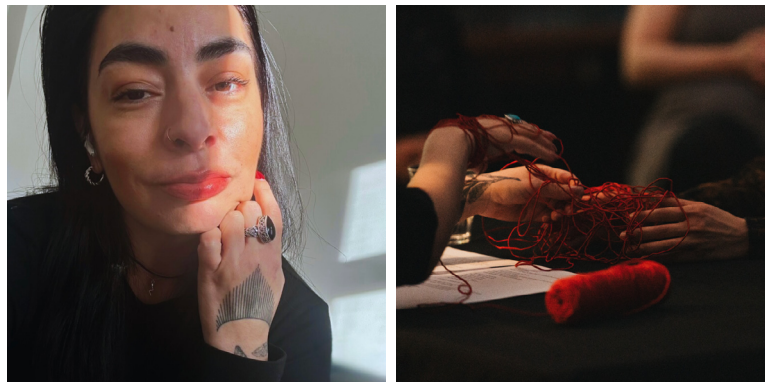
19 Hutchby, I. (2001). Technologies, Texts and Affordances. *Sociology*, 35(2), 441–456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/s0038038501000219>

Culture & Audiences

Mirrors, Digital Attunement and the Body with Dr. Tiara Roxanne

Dr. Tiara Roxanne is a scholar and artist working across research, activism, and art. Their work interrogates the deep entanglements between platform dynamics, surveillance, and the body. Dr. Roxanne is currently completing their book *Digital Attunement and the Technological Haunt*, which brings together Indigenous knowledge systems, neuroscientific research, and cyberfeminist theory to interrogate the relationship between digital technologies and nervous system modification. Their performances and research have been presented at leading venues and institutions including Transmediale (Berlin), Images Festival (Toronto), European Media Art Festival (Osnabrück), the University of California San Diego, Duke University, SOAS (London) and the Münchener Kammerspiele.

We spoke to Dr. Roxanne about their concept of **digital attunement** as the physiological and psychological adaptation processes that occur through sustained platform engagement. This concept **draws from attachment theory and trauma studies to examine how digital interfaces shape not only behavioural patterns but fundamental neurological responses**. By positioning "the body as the first technology," she establishes a theoretical foundation that privileges embodied knowledge systems over abstract technological determinism.



Dr. Tiara Roxanne as their online (platformed) self, and their offline self.

Platform Opacity and the User's False Sense of Security

Dr. Roxanne characterises the contemporary relationship between audiences and platforms as fundamentally “uninformed”, which is attributable to **systematic opacity** implemented by technology corporations. This opacity and lack of information are the foundations for “misuse”: a structural relationship where platform architectures actively obscure their operational mechanisms from users while extracting maximum informational value.

This vision also features “**a sense of false security**” within digital environments: users develop attachment patterns to technological interfaces that simulate interpersonal connection while lacking the reciprocal vulnerability and spontaneity that characterise human relationships. This phenomenon generates what they characterise as “falsified ideas of reality”, where technological interfaces provide consistent validation and responsiveness that human relationships cannot match.

This theoretical framework extends attachment theory into digital environments by examining how platform interfaces shape fundamental development. **The concept of “false security” suggests that digital platforms create attachment relationships that may interfere with users’ desire (or even capacity) for authentic interpersonal connection.** The implications extend beyond individual psychology to broader questions about social formation and collective bonding mechanisms in digitally mediated societies. These dynamics also underpin some of the media production from digital creators on platforms: they build **work and communities within systems that can withdraw visibility or access overnight**, increasing precarity, volatility, and dependence. In this sense, the implications move beyond individual psychology to broader questions of social formation, collective bonding, and the conditions under which culture itself is produced and circulated in digitally mediated societies.

Temporal Disruption, the Nervous System and the Body

When relating to and attuning to digital environments, Dr. Roxanne’s framework holds the body at the centre. For example, it positions breath as both diagnostic tool and therapeutic intervention when relating to digital environments. Inspired by Fred Moden’s work on gathering and fellowship, breath functions as what Roxanne refers to as “a comma to the body”: a physiological mechanism that regulates temporal experience and nervous system activation. This conceptualisation draws both from Indigenous ceremonial practices and contemporary understandings of nervous system regulation.

Roxanne suggests that sustained platform engagement fundamentally alters users’ capacity for embodied presence and temporal regulation. She projects that continued platform saturation will produce irreversible changes in nervous system functioning, potentially compromising users’ ability to “come back to the body” in ways that have been previously accessible. **Media consumption is increasingly mediated by fractured temporalities and disembodied interaction, and studies have shown that rapid content switching show worse performance on memory tasks (which is argued is linked to a cost to temporal continuity in cognition)**²⁰.

20 Chiossi, F., Haliburton, L., Ou, C., Butz, A., & Schmidt, A. (2023). Short-form videos degrade our capacity to retain intentions: Effect of context switching on prospective memory. *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 30. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3580778>

Chatbot-Enabled Self-Mirroring

Conversational interfaces are increasingly shaping media production as well as discovery, and chatbots now feature in the production and distribution ecosystem. Roxanne's analysis of chatbot interactions invites a broader reflection on how artificial intelligence-enabled interfaces may function as "mirrors" that may reflect users' psychological patterns while creating illusions of interpersonal engagement. **Chatbots provide consistent validation through algorithmic processing of user input, providing a sense of reassurance for anxious attachment styles through predictable responsiveness.**

However, this apparent benefit masks a fundamental distortion in relational experience. Human relationships involve spontaneity, emotional variability, and true otherness that chatbot interactions do not provide. The result is what Dr. Roxanne describes as "mirroring yourself over and over again in a loop": a feedback system that reinforces existing psychological patterns rather than facilitating genuine growth or challenge.

Somatic Platform Architectures

This analysis suggests that sustainable technological development requires fundamental restructuring of platform architectures to support rather than exploit human nervous system functioning. Such restructuring would necessitate platform designs that support embodied presence, authentic interpersonal connection, and environmental regeneration rather than extractive attention capture.

Dr. Roxanne is also arguing that platform analysis requires integration of neurological, ecological, and cultural perspectives to understand the full implications of digital technological development. The concept of digital attunement provides some of these analytical tools for thinking critically about how platform engagement shapes human development while offering practical methodologies for maintaining embodied awareness within digital environments.

How will creative work evolve?

The future of creative work is unfolding amid instability: automation, precarity, and new hybrid roles are transforming what it means to make a living from imagination. In these conversations, we hear from creative workers, executives, and culture experts about shifting professional identities and changing relations between creativity, labour, and value. Their accounts, focused on the live performance sector, surface both exhaustion and possibility around what creative work could be when redefined around meaning, mutuality and experimentation.

What are prototypes of fairer and adaptive modes of creative labour that match the sector's appetite for experimentation with equivalent thoughtful innovation in working conditions and governance?

Creative Worker

Tech convergence, workflows and the reconfiguration of live performance *with Halina Rice*

Halina Rice is a London-based electronic music producer and audiovisual artist. She toured internationally including at MUTEK Montreal, Amsterdam Dance Event and LEV Madrid. Her work has been presented at major venues including the Southbank Centre, where she collaborated with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on *The Path*, and HERE at Outernet. She integrates sound design, spatial audio, 360 visuals and metaverse environments crafting layered works that transcend conventional disciplinary and genre boundaries.

Rice's creative practice emerges from the interaction of two paradigmatic influences: the meticulous, sharp work of electronic producers like Jon Hopkins who prioritise high-fidelity listening experience and textural precision, and the immersion proposed by installation art, particularly exemplified by Ryoji Ikeda.



Halina Rice in her silent mode and sound-on self.

Recalibrating the Workflow

The evolution of Rice's creative process reveals an emergent trajectory for artists. Instead of "music and visuals [being] parallel tracks", workflows become more integrated. **Artists are more inclined to think in systems as performance is reconceptualised.** "Sound, light, projection and space interact" as interdependent variables within the experiential architecture that artists envision and that they arguably now can directly execute. **Rice herself has "become more interdisciplinary" since the start of her practice and describes herself as a "DIY artist".** This creative ethos allows her to bring her creative vision into existence without depending on large crews. As a shift in creative labour organisation, individual practitioners are increasingly functioning as designers and technologists, making independent work more economically viable.

The implications for creative education and professional development are significant. Rice's experience suggests that successful creative practitioners are increasingly required to be **"technical polymaths"** with sufficient depth across multiple domains to maintain creative control while collaborating effectively with specialists where possible.

Currently, artists tinkering with innovation in AV performance connect and support and learn from one another through informal networks. Rice calls for formal investment and formalisation of these "very people-driven and at times siloed" formations to enhance collaborative efficiency and resource access. The challenge involves maintaining experimental flexibility and free knowledge flow characteristic of informal networks, while providing institutional stability and resource access that individual practitioners can't achieve individually.

From Niche to Mainstream through Hardware

While artists are encouraged to include technological infrastructure in their performances, access is still limited. For example, hiring LED screens for venues that aren't equipped with them is often not viable for niche and emerging artists. This is why Rice is so positive about the rise of purpose-built venues (e.g. HERE at Outernet and Aviva Studios) that are plug-and-play for artists designing immersive experiences, albeit with different technical set-ups.

We are witnessing a tipping point: some of the live performance technologies that artists are incorporating in their practice will move from niche to mainstream. When that happens, "like it happened with mono to stereo", Rice comments, **"it won't matter if artists or audiences care or not" because the tech industry will have decided.** And when they have decided that the new generation of AirPods is enabled with spatial audio, "ultimately nobody will release records that don't match the higher standard. Records labels will change their approach, and audience expectations will adjust".

The Evolution of Audiences' Yearning

Rice is clear that artists feel the significant transformation of audience expectations and behaviours revealing a fundamental reconfiguration of experiential priorities. She identifies **a move towards experiential formats that prioritise presence, embodiment and emotional processing. The rise of sober raves, pitch-black playback events and ritual-integrated performances points to a demand for experiences of introspection and connection**, where the broader cultural currents of our time surface with unusual clarity in artistic and creative forms.

Rice gives a couple of popular examples of this move towards signifiers of wellbeing seeping into entertainment: Jon Hopkins' *Music for Psychedelic Therapy* and Kate Fleur Young's rituals. In Rice's words: "[Kate] incorporates ritual and ceremony in her work with music. She has a beautiful, unearthly, almost archaic voice, and a friend of hers was playing some electronic music. The set up included some flashing lights, and people came with their yoga mats. At the end, some people were in tears: it was a moment for people to feel what they felt."

This direction has been traced by others^{21 22} and has **significant implications for venue programming, what competition creative venues face, artist training, and funding streams.**

The Polarisation of Live Performance

The contemporary landscape of live performance presents to Rice as "split": at one end, high-investment, large and technologically advanced venues and, at the other, grassroots venues operating in precarity and struggling to make and maintain technical investments.

Purpose-built immersive venues represent significant capital investments that require consistent high revenue streams to maintain viability – typically leading to commercially-proven programming choices. Conversely, grassroots venues often lack the set-up necessary to present experimental audiovisual (or similar) practice effectively (or affordably).

To counteract this dynamic, grassroots venues (historically ingenious) are implementing **strategies toward a more varied programming offer and multipurpose spaces to thrive** as they recover from the aftermath of Covid-19. The result is **modular venues** that accommodate both club nights and yoga classes, studio spaces and shoot locations demonstrating a search for new models of economic sustainability.

21 For example it has been documented by Theresa Smith's piece "Can raving and wellness go hand-in-hand?" for Dazed, available at: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/article/68491/1/can-raving-and-wellness-go-hand-in-hand-lost-village-festival-2025-energy-garden> (29 August 2025) as well as by previous CoSTAR Foresight Lab reports

22 Sanscartier, J., Ponzoni, N., Turner-Brown, L., Stewart, A., & Freeman, J. (2025). Scenarios in creative convergence: Media production and its role in future resilience. CoSTAR Foresight Lab. <https://doi.org/10.5281/15782240>

Scenario by Halina Rice:

The Spiritual and the Stadium

Technology finds new ways to facilitate the human pursuit for meaning in connection and grandiosity.

In response to a world saturated with easily generated content a greater desire for escape to meaningful connection emerges.

At a grass roots level, small venues evolve to become multipurpose event spaces with modular formatting catering to an audience interested in experiences that heighten self-awareness, well-being and the spiritual.

Collectives of a new genre of interdisciplinary artist forge cross immersive audio with visual and interaction technologies - blurring national boundaries they work together remotely; new music scenes derive from interests rather than locality.

High-end sensory 'experiential shows' comprising 360 visuals, spatial audio and lighting catering for large audiences are funded by large scale corporate investment to service a desire for stadium size spectacle.

Business

Spatial sound, collaboration and multi-sensory ecosystems *with MONOM*

MONOM is a Berlin-based experimental performance venue and spatial sound recording studio working across sound art, music, theatre, opera, dance and immersive. It houses the original 4DSOUND system: an omnidirectional audio environments using 48 speakers arranged in a grid and subwoofers placed under an acoustically transparent floor, immersing up to 400 listeners physically and sonically. MONOM hosts both artist residencies and public performances, and its team collaborates with artists and festivals globally from ideation to exhibition. MONOM's mission is to "provide space and time for anyone who wants to expand the dimensions of their creative practice and to enrich communal and individual experiences of sound and art"²³.

23 About MONOM — monom. <https://www.monomsound.com/aboutmonom> accessed on 11 September 2025



We spoke to William Russell, founder of MONOM.

This conversation provides insights into how creative enterprises are born around a technology system, and how labour practices, collaborations and audience relationships transform alongside it. As spatial sound sits at an inflection point between an innovator's playground and broader adoption, it is a useful case study for understanding how this technology has reconfigured habits and economics so far, and where this fits within the performance ecosystem and changing audience demand.

The Immersive Potential of Sound

Not dissimilarly from the other two interviewees in this section of the report, Russell notes a stark division in live performance spaces between large commercial venues and grassroots. His critique focuses on what 'content' is facilitated in this polarised landscape, where visuals and spectacle take the main stage and acoustics becomes a lower priority, often in competition with monetisation and logistics priorities. We have encountered this idea before in our interviews, such as the idea of commodified sound as background rather than foreground (p. 13), but is proposed by Russell here under a different angle which is both cultural and technical, and speaks to the promise of spatial sound as a force that ties together live performance.

The integration of spatial sound with other technologies illustrates how convergent media creates new possibilities for creative practice. Russell describes current explorations with AR and VR where their system "can recreate sound in virtual reality without headphones" and where "the hologram of the sound [is] *in* the room", synchronised with visual elements. **This is innovation for audience experience, but it is for creative work, too.** Creators can "grab and "throw" sounds around the space – Russell himself uses a glove sensor to move the sound around in a way that is "more organic". **Embodied interaction models crop up again as emergent and creative-led formats of interaction with technology.**

Co-Production Hub Model

MONOM's evolution to a co-production studio reflects broader transformations in cultural labour. Early on, MONOM paid artists to present works. Over time, it shifted toward collaborative creation: onboarding artists into its 4DSOUND system, supporting them through iterative processes, and having stakes in the resulting works, often completely new.

Dynamic networks of people and shared rights mean distributed risk. For MONOM, **the shift reduces financial exposure (no longer relying on event ticket sales), and builds an archive of works that can be licensed, toured, and remixed.** When the decision not to put on their own events anymore was made, Russell explains, it was to give more space to the possibility of commission or working with discrete communities that have their own scene. Russell sees this shift more broadly in the industry: venues handing over some of the programming to communities "because they are the ones to bring [groups] into your space and therefore have a better grasp on audience size and ticket sales".

The Evolution of Performance (and the Spaces that Host it)

Conversely, creative spaces are evolving towards “black-box-type spaces”, which invite multiple modes of interaction rather than maintaining the fixed stage-audience relationship. This structural shift reflects a broader **movement towards “interactive, immersive, non-stage, non-binary interactions and towards a holistic multi-sensory ecosystem”**.

This aligns organically with what audiences seem to be looking for more and more: increasingly, people understand the value of spending time at a space like MONOM as places away from the screen of their phone. This desire is becoming well documented, as young people are driving the return to the cinema as a “no-distraction zone”²⁴.

24 Campbell, S. (2025, August 13). 'I don't touch my phone. At home, I'd be scrolling': why young people are flocking to independent cinemas. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/aug/13/why-younger-people-are-flocking-to-independent-cinemas> Accessed 4 September 2025

Culture & Audiences

Scene polarisation, creative labour and the city *with Andy Crysell*

Andy Crysell is a writer, cultural strategist and entrepreneur. He spent the 1990s as a music and subculture journalist interviewing artists from Wu-Tang Clan to Bjork. He later founded insights agency CrowdDNA and built it into a leading global cultural strategy consultancy helping clients such as Nike, Spotify, LVMH and Netflix. The consultancy focused on emerging behaviours across media, technology and entertainment – translating emergent phenomena into cultural strategy. Crysell's recent book, *Selling the Night*, explores exploring the co-evolving role between commerce and culture in nightlife. Alongside his writing, he sits on the advisory boards of the Museum of Youth Culture and the 20/20 Levels charity.

The polarisation of nightlife

One of the prominent themes of *Selling the Night* and of our conversation with Crysell is the hollowing out of the middle ground of live performance. Club culture, Crysell notes (not dissimilarly from the other interviewees) now seems to be split between two poles: the hyper-capitalised and mega-venues on one side, and grassroots and community spaces on the other, with very little in between. This is not a minor shift, and it is reflected in the UK Night Time Industries Association's (NTIA) report last year, which notes the number of night clubs continuously shrinking. Since 2020, "more than one in four late-night venues have shut their doors" and grassroots venues decreased by 125 in 2023, with many of the remaining ones making a loss due to high rent costs.²⁵ Audience behaviour mirrors this polarity: "there's a tendency for going to bigger events (less frequently) over smaller ones (more frequently)", which also speaks to the "festivalisation" impacting attendance patterns.

For artists, this means finding it much harder to build an audience gradually before moving onto bigger stages or to find a way to make a life out of their creative work. While technology democratises access to creative production, the jump is now from 'bedroom producer' to 'headliner' – something immense to bridge for most emergent artists. This creates two polarised figures: the hyper-professionalised and spectacular star, and the precarious two-jobs gig worker.

There are no surprises if one follows the money: **venture capital firms have become very much part of the nightlife ecosystem** and are likely playing a part in this polarisation as they focus on luxury markets and venue investments with high ROI potential.

"A growing number of institutional investors are translating this interest into equity positions in dance music's biggest names. Dubai's luxury focused Five Holdings acquired the Pacha Group (including the Pacha club chain) for \$363 million in 2023". The private equity-backed Superstructure Entertainment (...) has taken stakes in a number of dance festivals, events and platforms including Boiler Room and Sonar. Plus* Equity, an offshoot of Plus* Records (...) bills itself as an investor in 'early opportunities at the intersection of entertainment and tech.'"²⁶

This is interesting for our enquiry for their impact on the nature of creative work and because these investments tend to focus heavily on the role of technology in the production and distribution system as an essential part of what they are investing into (that being hardware or software; ticketing or live-streaming; AI or VR).

25 Makortoff, K. (2025, August 26). One in four UK late-night venues have closed since 2020, figures show. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/aug/26/late-night-venues-closed-uk-night-time-deserts> accessed on 9 September 2025

26 Crysell, A. (2025). *Selling the Night* (p. 307). Velocity Press.

An interesting player in this space is Best Nights VC (BNVC), Jägermeister's venture capital investment unit, who “invest in consumer tech startups that are connected to the global nightlife and entertainment industry with the aim of bringing people together in real life”²⁷. Their portfolio is testament to this inclination towards technology-enabled offers (both software and hardware), as well as other themes explored in the report such as audiences' search of IRL connection and marketplace platforms facilitating in-industry exchanges.

Creative labour and creative workers

Technology has always been very much part of club culture, though Crysell points out that “AI feels profoundly different” from a drum machine or a sampler. Instead of transparently expanding the creative toolkit, as earlier and other technologies have done, AI systems intervene in the very processes of authorship and raise anxieties about originality and ownership. One response that Crysell has noted from artists is the turn of the **spotlight back to the labour behind a creative piece. Increasingly, artists fold process into the aesthetic**, showing the workflow on screen or staging it as part of performance.

The economics of creativity is one of the topics that feels most urgent and unresolved to Crysell, the lingering idea (now at risk of being propelled by AI) that creative work involves “no labour” or “is not hard work”. This has clear consequences on the composition of the work force, as the creative industries remain one of the least diverse sectors across the board^{28 29} despite the huge cultural debt they owe to minoritised communities and the working class whose aesthetics, narratives, and efforts have historically fuelled mainstream creative economies without equitable recognition or reward.

DIY entrepreneurialism

At the roots of this story lies the DIY entrepreneurialism of the Thatcher years. Crysell traces back the atmosphere in which British club culture was born. This spirit (which rebelled against and mirrored the spirit of time), “grafting”, inventive, precarious, defined the energy of the early scene. It is interesting to find this exact terminology in another of our creative worker interview for this area of complexity, AV artist Halina Rice, who described herself as a “DIY artist. “There is a question hidden here then, as the spirit still exists today in grassroots R&D and experimental artists. **Which conditions can be incentivised to encourage, maintain and let flourish creative workers in scenes which manifest enormous cultural and economic value — for decades to come?** This is not a vague opportunity, as Crysell makes clear, it's the foundations of much of the cultural value the UK continues to profit from today.

27 BNVC. <https://bestnights.vc> Accessed on 12 September 2025

28 Creative UK. (2025, April 10). Cultural and Creative Industries Stats – Q1 2025 26. *Creative UK; Creative England*. <https://www.wearecreative.uk/cultural-and-creative-industries-stats-q1-2025-26/>

29 Carey, H., Giles, L., O'Connor, K., Sissons, P., Gowin, ES. (2024). Beyond growth: promoting inclusive development of creative clusters in the UK. *Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (Creative PEC)*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/12795943>

Five Design Principles

A Need for Creative Technical Interfaces ↓

P1. Design modular tools that translate technical complexity into creative-native languages

Polarisation in Creative Ecosystems ↓

P2. Reinforce the cultural middle ground as essential connective tissue for resilient creative economies

Embodied Counter-Practice to Digital Saturation ↓

P3. Creative futures must honour the body and design for embodied presence

Opacity Feeds Creative Power Asymmetry ↓

P4. Transparency is a foundation of equitable creative systems

The Rise of Parametric Outputs and Audience Integration ↓

P5. Design creative systems as parametric architectures rather than fixed products

Patterns → Design Principles

arts and culture remain (...) often reduced to their contribution to GDP rather than their ability to shape an economy.³⁰

The preceding interviews surface recurring dynamics: not fixed conclusions, but patterns of behaviour, expectation, and contradiction. These Patterns form the connective tissue between lived experience and strategic insight. From them, we derive a set of *Design Principles* intended to guide action and experimentation: orientations that can inform how institutions, funders, and creative organisations design policy, investment, and practice in response to emerging change.

Need for Creative-Technical Interfaces →

P1. Design modular tools that translate technical complexity into creative-native languages.

Prof. Gillies' observation that “machine learning doesn't have to be difficult or technical, because it's not about code as much as it is about gathering data” exemplifies a fundamental shift: creative expertise is becoming central to technological implementation rather than peripheral to it. The data that powers machine learning systems (textures for artists, movement for dancers, conversational patterns for scriptwriters) represents the core knowledge domains of creative practitioners.

However, while the conceptual barriers between creativity and technology diminish, practical tools remain (a) at times inaccessible to non-programmers or (b) available to engage with at a “vibe coding” level (with limited replicability, difficulties in trouble shooting, etc) or (c) powered by dubious model training practices and owned by big tech interests. Halina Rice's evolution into a “DIY artist” illustrates the emerging expectation that successful creative practitioners (within the CoSTAR area of enquiry) must develop sufficient technical depth across multiple domains to maintain creative control. This pattern suggests that the future competitive advantage will belong to those who can navigate both creative and technical systems fluently, and to platforms that successfully translate complex technical capabilities into creative-native interfaces.

Implications

- Investment in creative-technical education (e.g. STEAM) becomes critical.
- Investment in creative-native tool development, especially if from UK-based companies can actively support Industrial Strategy goals.
- Organisations that can bridge the gap between sophisticated technical capabilities and creative practice will capture significant market opportunities.
- Develop open creative sandboxes where artists can directly stress-test early-stage technical infrastructure, not just polished tools.

30 Mazzucato, M. (2025). The Public Value of Arts and Culture: Investing in Arts and Culture to Reimagine Economic Growth in the 21st Century. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/publications/2025/sep/public-value-arts-and-culture>

Polarisation in Creative Ecosystems →

P2. Reinforce the cultural middle ground as essential connective tissue for resilient creative economies.

A consistent pattern of polarisation emerges across multiple creative domains, characterised by the systematic elimination of middle-tier opportunities. Both Halina Rice and Andy Crysell observe a split between high-investment, technologically advanced venues and grassroots venues operating in precarity. In parallel, Olyn's Ana Maria Jipa describes streaming platforms as systematically suppressing “middle-tier” films that don't conform to either art house or blockbuster categories.

The economic mechanisms driving this polarisation involve investment patterns that prioritise massive scale with high sought-after returns.

The analysis provided in the House of Commons' Grassroots music venues report published last year demonstrates institutional acknowledgment of systemic crisis, adding observations that this polarisation requires coordinated policy intervention rather than market-based solutions alone.³¹

Implications

- This pattern suggests a possibility for private investors (VC, brands) to begin a conversation with organisations like NTIA (the Night Time Industry Association) and MVT (Music Venue Trust) to identify mutually beneficial investment opportunities around the “middle”.
- With regards to urban planning, the concentration of cultural activity at polar extremes creates cultural voids that fragment the distributed amenity networks that sustain accessible and resilient cities. This pattern may offer an additional case for strengthening proximity-based planning (e.g. 15-minute city) in the UK, and a reminder of the centrality of the city at night when designing urban plans.
- Explore and evaluate mid-term co-ownership or cooperative investment vehicles for cultural middle-ground venues (e.g. community + brand + local authority).

31 House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Grassroots Music Venues. (2024). <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44704/documents/222242/default/>

Embodied Counter-Practice to Digital Saturation →

P3. Creative futures must honour the body and design for embodied presence.

A pronounced pattern emerges around embodied practices as conscious counter-response to digital overwhelm and content saturation. This doesn't as much point to biometrics as to a broader approach honouring the presence of the body, and manifests across multiple domains: Halina Rice's identification of audiences seeking "experiences of introspection and connection" through sober raves and pitch-black playback events; William Russell's observation that visitors to MONOM are increasingly keen to put away phones during spatial sound experiences; Dr. Tiara Roxanne's emphasis on breath as regulation for our bodily existence in digital environments.

This pattern extends beyond audience behaviour to creative practice itself. The integration of ritual, ceremony, and somatic awareness into creative work represents more than aesthetic choice.

The embodied counter-practice pattern reveals a fundamental tension between technological acceleration and human temporal-biological requirements. Audiences are actively seeking spaces and experiences that restore embodied presence (and practitioners are aware of and delivering on this yearning), suggesting that successful creative technologies must account for somatic and neurological considerations rather than more linearly optimising for engagement or efficiency.

Implications

- Venue operators are invited to audit and consider if reconceptualising their space toward holistic, multi-purpose environments would be beneficial. This includes re-thinking the rigid stage-audience physical configurations that reinforce passive consumption paradigms.
- There are existing models and frameworks rooted in psychology principles that can allow HCI researchers and practitioners to understand how technology designs support or undermine basic psychological needs, thereby increasing motivation and engagement, and ultimately, improving user wellbeing³² – and therefore design tools for healthier technology. Whose responsibility is it to enforce an existing or new model that safeguards users' mental wellbeing and nervous system regulation?
- Artists interested in the intersection between art, wellbeing and embodiment find interdisciplinary development opportunities in competencies spanning neuroscience, somatic awareness, and neuroaesthetics. Conversely, education providers have an opportunity to form artists and creative technologists around these and other related disciplines.
- Develop certifications or kitemarks for embodied/neurologically healthy cultural tech.

32 Peters, D., Calvo, R.A., & Ryan, R.M. (2018). Designing for motivation, engagement and wellbeing in digital experience. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 797. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00797>

Opacity Feeds Creative Power Asymmetry →

P4. Transparency is a foundation of equitable creative systems.

This is far from being new, but it remains a prominent topic. Platform opacity emerges as a deliberate architectural choice that, even when born out of technical complexity or competitive advantage, sustains power asymmetries between technology corporations and creative practitioners. Yet transparency, as discussed here, does not imply full visibility into proprietary systems (a goal that is neither realistic nor always productive). Rather, it concerns the conditions under which creative workers (and, though beyond the scope of this work, the wider population) can understand, contest, or meaningfully influence the tools they depend on. For many practitioners, this may mean functional transparency, i.e. knowing how to use or adapt a system well. For others, particularly where training data or algorithmic biases are at stake, it requires ethical transparency: visibility into how creative and human inputs are sourced, credited and remunerated. These layers are inseparable; each determines who can act, innovate, and claim ownership within media production.

The pattern also reveals emergent counter-practices. Domestic Data Streamers' 'alternative' use of AI processes, Te Hiku Media's community-controlled language model development, and Delphos AI's emphasis on attribution and royalty preservation all represent strategies for 'making the invisible visible' as both ethical stance and competitive positioning.

Implications

- Transparency becomes a differentiating factor in creative technology platforms. Organisations that can provide visibility into their processes while maintaining competitive advantage will capture markets where creators prioritise autonomy and understanding.
- The pattern suggests regulatory pressure toward transparency will intensify, making proactive transparency a strategic advantage. While focused on outputs rather than processes, the recent European Commission launch of a consultation to develop guidelines and Code of Practice on transparent AI systems³³ speaks to this direction.
- Opacity prevents interoperability: following positive examples from other sectors³⁴, could the development and adoption of interoperable standards be incentivised to foster inclusivity as well as innovation?
- The industry may increasingly depend on people who can interpret, mediate and/or monitor opacity.

33 Commission launches consultation to develop guidelines and Code of Practice on transparent AI systems. (2025). Shaping Europe's Digital Future. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-consultation-develop-guidelines-and-code-practice-transparent-ai-systems>

34 E.g. Open Banking Standard

The Rise of Parametric Outputs and Audience Integration →

P5. Design creative systems as parametric architectures rather than fixed products.

Rather than the rarified artist performing for admiring audiences, the role of the artist has shifted to providing content for the benefit of a consumer's profile. Does this song adequately soundtrack someone's reel? Does an exhibition provide a photogenic opportunity for visitors? (...) The role of the artist as facilitator of interactions is not all bad. It's highly likely that, going forward, the conscious production of training data will become a creative medium itself. Rather than producing media for consumption, artists will produce media for the development of bespoke models for consumer/producers to navigate.³⁵

This pattern hints to a shift toward parametric creative outputs, where practitioners design generative systems rather than fixed outputs. Prof. Gillies' scenario provocation on scriptwriters becoming prompt engineers who craft not the specific lines of a character's dialogue, but the parameters of the generative model that generates dialogue exemplifies this transformation.

This parametric approach creates what functions as a creative "master file": a core generative item capable of producing multiple derivative works rather than a singular final product. Delphos AI's model demonstrates this principle: one composer's trained model can generate numerous beats while maintaining stylistic coherence and attribution. In a different way but hinting toward a similar direction, MONOM's co-production approach creates works that can be "licensed, toured, and remixed" across different contexts and venues.

Critically, this parametric architecture integrates audiences directly into both creative workflow and economic structures. Olyn's referral system transforms viewers into active distribution participants who receive revenue shares. While the idea of holographic media considers the centrality of audiences as engines for refraction, distribution, remix. The audience shifts from passive consumer to active participant with agency in both creative process and value generation.

This transformation privileges creative practitioners capable of functioning as "designers": those who can conceptualise their practice as configurable architectures rather than fixed expressions alone. The competitive advantage accrues to those who can design creative systems that generate multiple outputs while maintaining creative coherence and intentionality – or those who provide systems that enable this mechanism.

Implications

- Artists like Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst have been exploring protocol art and collective governance and IP models, as well as actively blurring the lines between production and consumption for years. They, along with other artists and thinkers, have prototyped models and platforms that offer clever expansive, non-binary alternatives to the future of creative production in relationship with technologies. These prototypes provide policy makers, art commissioners and private investors with a wealth of resources to for other (including larger-scale) interventions.
- Investment priorities shift toward tools that enable parametric creative design rather than asset production.
- Revenue models must account for distributed value creation, including involving audience participation.
- Develop parametric commissioning frameworks – funding works as generative engines (masterfiles) rather than single outputs, with obligations to evolve and iterate.

35 Jäger, E., & Busta, C. (Eds.). (2024). Holly Herndon & Mathew Dryhurst. All Media is Training Data. Serpentine & Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz Kong.

Speculating four possible interventions

As a last phase of this exploration, members of our Foresight Board participated in a speculative co-design exercise translating the five Design Principles into possible interventions within convergent media production. Working in pairs, participants were invited to create tangible “what if” artefacts: products, services, programmes, etc. that could emerge if one or more of the principles were enacted. The purpose of this exercise is not to predict or prescribe, but to exemplify what a principle may look like in practice, gauge directions of exploration, and surface tensions between competing interpretation of the principles.

Deborah Williams, Greg Maguire

Threshold Licensing

Creative tools are free. Until your work begins to pay back.

Threshold Licensing reimagines the economics of creative technology through a conditional access model. Drawing inspiration from open-source principles and graduated royalties, it allows creators unrestricted use of software and datasets until their work exceeds a defined revenue threshold, after which modest contributions sustain the shared infrastructure. This approach reframes licensing as a reciprocal relationship between innovation and redistribution. It suggests a cultural economy where entry barriers are lowered, collective resources maintained, and success circulates value back into the ecosystem that nurtured it.

Steve Jelley, Lincoln Wallen

Art as Ensemble

Every creative act now carries its own fingerprint of collaboration.

Art as Ensemble introduces a metadata architecture that records and attributes the full spectrum of contributions within a creative process: from the code that generates an image to the choreography that shapes its expression. It challenges the persistent myth of the solitary author by embedding provenance and recognition into the fabric of creation itself. Beyond technical traceability, it reconfigures value as emergent from relation: artistic worth measured not only by outputs but by the quality of shared intervention. The concept anticipates a creative economy built on transparency, continuity, and mutual acknowledgement rather than singular ownership.

Bill Thompson, Francesca Sanderson

Capture the Body

Audiences are fully immersed in an experience by matching their heartbeat to the performer.

Capture the body imagines the deepest possible engagement between performer and audience by merging the artistic and biological experience. Before the performance audiences are fitted with pacemakers, an intrusive surgical experience that demonstrates their commitment to the work ahead. The pulse of the performer is measured and used to control the heart rhythm of the audience members, creating a temporary physiological synchrony that transforms spectatorship into shared proprioception. The concept explores how art might evolve when emotion is mediated through biotechnological design. As a speculative intervention, it raises questions about agency, sensory ethics, and the thresholds between empathy and control. Will future creative technologies orchestrate feeling? What does it mean to design for the human body?

Gabrielle Jenks, Alex Wills

The Independent Playbook

A living guide for cross-media creation.

The Independent Playbook proposes an open, adaptive set of tools to help independent creators navigate convergent media without sacrificing coherence or authorship. Combining modular production templates with financial and rights models, it enables stories to unfold across film, interactive, and live environments while maintaining aesthetic integrity. The Playbook proposes (and aims to protect) independence and interdependence as a mode of cultural organisation. It suggests a creative future in which sector growth stems not from verticality and scale, but from mutual learning and lateral circulation.

The four resulting interventions reflect markedly different interpretations of human-centred innovation. Each begins from shared Design Principles, yet the directions they take diverge sharply in their implications: some imagine futures that feel generative and humane; others deliberately stretch the limits of what “human-centred” could mean, exposing contradictions and trade-offs within our own principles.

We present these artefacts to invite further reflection: who are the protagonists of these realities? Who is left outside? What kinds of organisations or alliances could make such ideas real, or resist them? They also point toward the material conditions of change: what incentives might foster such experiments, and what disincentives or power structures could contain them? Our foreword to this report asserted that the future of creative technology will not be written by algorithms alone. It will be co-authored by people, by their values, their desires, and their capacity to imagine otherwise. Now we have expanded our thinking for you, and presented the reflections and thoughts of our industry, creative and audience experts, we invite you to join us in reflection, conversation and collaboration to help guide ourselves to a future we want to build.

CoSTAR Foresight Lab
Goldsmiths, University of
London
New Cross
London SE14 6NW

costarforesightlab@gold.ac.uk