

The Team in the Stand: building new community heritage sites through interactive multimedia

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Abstract

A team of staff and students at the Portsmouth School of Art, Design and Media came together to research the potential for interactive multimedia in museum programs to contribute to community regeneration. The project was part of the exhibition *Play Up Pompey!* which celebrates the centenary year of Portsmouth Football Club. The School's contribution was *The Team in the Stand*, a visitor-authored multimedia environment, as a newly created site of the cultural history of the supporters who have shaped the life of the city. Throughout the duration of the exhibition period the supporters' memories, everyday experiences and memorabilia were digitized as the multimedia objects on public display to create a living history archive in an immersive sound environment. The aims of the exhibition were to build new audiences amongst the large sector of the city's population for whom the museum affords little or no significance and to provide public access to new technologies within the context of New Labor's widening participation policy to make lifelong education available to under-represented and disadvantaged groups. National studies on the social impact of the arts have informed the exhibition and the three month outreach program.

Introduction

This paper reflects on the role of cultural imagination in the construction of interactive exhibitions through a case study of a recent exhibition, *Play Up Pompey!* at the City Museum, Portsmouth in England. It suggests that successful interactivity is primarily dependent on an understanding of the processes by which cultures are embodied and reproduced by individuals and communities. Non-recognition of the imaginative work of making by human beings suggests a need for experimentation in this field. The paper explores the idea that successful interface design for community-based exhibitions will emerge from a sympathetic and intimate understanding of the material culture of the intended audience. The complex networks of knowledge and experiences that structure and are structured by a community and its members will have to be taken into account if the process of interactivity is to be fully apprehended. Content and presentation driven by such objectives will generate sites of entertainment which are built out of the embodied knowledge of communities and individual members and produce empowerment as a process of self recognition and identity politics.

The exhibition, *Play Up Pompey!*, a collaboration between Portsmouth City Museum and The Portsmouth School of Art, Design and Media was staged to celebrate the centenary of Portsmouth Football Club and was designed in two sections: one section was predominantly object-based, the

other was intended as its complement, utilizing electronic media. The museum's contribution, the first section, represented the history of the club, its key events and personae through a collection of memorabilia, souvenirs, scrapbooks, programs, famous footballs, all contributed by the club, its players, staff and fans. It included some video material and an ambient soundscape, displayed within the context of the work of a contemporary photographic artist who had been commissioned to spend three months photographing the life of the team and club; the second gallery display, which was named *The Team in the Stand* and which is the primary focus of this paper, was built by a research team from the University of Portsmouth's School of Art, Design and Media, and created as an exhibition of interactive multimedia and sound installations representing the football clubs' supporters as heroes. Above all, the exhibition was to be a celebration of the knowledge and creativity of people. The concern was with the micropolitics of leisure pursuits which are enjoyed by millions and for many are more important as real life than activities which occur in the work place. It is in leisure activities where hearts and minds, emotions and interests are genuinely engaged (Rojek, 1995). The design for the exhibiting evolved from the concept that the fans would be interviewed and as visitors to the exhibition would have their testimonials and selves played back to them in the public space of the gallery.

The Team in the Stand

The exhibition, as a visitor-authored multimedia environment and newly created site of social and cultural history for the city, had several aims: to enhance the University's standing amongst those who are disaffected by education or hostile to the University itself, to build new audiences amongst a large sector of the city's population for whom the museum affords little or no significance, to provide public interactive access to new technologies as an experience which visitors would not have experienced in the city before, to make an intervention in a space normally associated with display presented from the perspective of experts trained in cultural classification and programming, to give expression and visibility especially to contemporary life experience as a contribution to a major history of the city which has been produced and reproduced by the fans themselves since the club opened in 1898. Nationally renowned for their chant-led passion and loyalty on and off pitch, Portsmouth's supporters have shaped the life of the city but have rarely been recognized as a cultural force. Consequently an aim was to recognize publicly the value of this large community and its contribution to local cultural politics, leisure and society. The exhibition emerged out of research, utilizing ethnographic method into the cultural imagination of the fans and the spaces in which they enact their lives.

As visitors entered the exhibition gallery they walked through a tunnel of sound, experiencing the roar of the crowd heard by the players as they run into the pitch. They could then move to the chant machine, manipulating recordings of the songs which have made the Portsmouth fans renowned. A vibration box provided seating and when visitors rested they could feel the roar of the crowd and the chants vibrate through their body. The immersive sound environment simulated the noise of the match, recreating the experience of being in the actual space itself. At the multimedia shrine supporters could project images of fans, the geography of their lives was captured, the pubs in which they drank, and the friends with which they analyzed the latest scores and club fortunes, the modes of fandom across the world, images of young supporters playing football dropped into players cards: the fan turned hero. The memory bank, an electronic store for capturing people's recorded experiences and stories and scanning their objects was on display throughout the duration of the exhibition. Supporters' memories, everyday experiences and memorabilia were digitized as the multimedia objects on display to create a living history archive

which grew weekly as more visitors left their testimonials. Research students developed an outreach program, making contact with community groups, elderly men's groups, the disabled, children with learning needs and special school groups, all of whom were interviewed and recorded. In other words the key players in this section of the exhibition, named *The Team in the Stand*, were the fans and visitors themselves. They produced the material for the objects on display and in one sense they were the objects on display. Their interaction with the research team, the parts they played, their achievements, experiences and learning through engagement with the project as producers and consumers was intended to produce recognition, identification, confirmation and consolidation amongst the communities who visited. Thus the exhibition, presented in an institution which for many was apprehended as unfamiliar and intimidating, was offered and developed as a democratic civic space which, through expression and experience could be appropriated and shared as a process of objectification and identity construction.

The Club as Context for Responsive Spectatorship

The exhibition occurred during a major crisis in the history of the club, which was threatened with bankruptcy due to financial mismanagement by the owner. A narrative unfolded throughout the winter months whilst the exhibition was running which provoked the fans into political action as they consolidated in an effort to rescue their club. During the period of the exhibition Portsmouth lost some of its key players to help fund the mounting interest on the owner's debts and its popular manager was humiliated many times. These events produced an emotional and politicized climate that heightened the fans' experience of the exhibition. Most certainly the events had a major impact on the ways in which the exhibition was received and used as the visitors' book attests. 24000 people visited the exhibition, an unprecedented number for the museum, which became a cultural public space in which the politics of the fans' world could be played out, expressed and documented. This influenced in significant ways the fans concept of the museum as a space sympathetic to issues close to their hearts. Here truly the world of the community, the sense of belonging, was displayed and the significance of the phrase, "It's my club, it's my life" made meaning. Above the chant machine was suspended an enlargement of a newspaper article entitled, 'Pompey Fans find comfort in protest'. For more than half an hour after the end of one

Cultural Heritage Informatics

match some 1,500 Pompey followers were still in the ground, singing purely in support of their club. In the politically objectified and mediated environment of the exhibition they could continue to mix and sample their own music, recall the experience of being at that match, sense their pride and enjoy public honor and recognition.

The Curators: Stanley and Livingstone

The collaboration between the two institutions, representing the museum and education sectors, produced a creative tension in terms of objectives, visual ambition and ideology from which both were to profit, one literally, the other confirmed in the risks it had taken as a challenge to its own institutions dominant perspectives. As suggested earlier there is a measurable degree of hostility towards the university amongst a large part of the population which sees it as elite, socially intrusive, contributing little to its wellbeing and as a threat to the communities' esteem.

The museum from its side is seen as space for the better off and better educated, despite a policy to attract family audiences and to display, record and archive Portsmouth's economic, domestic, industrial and maritime history. It presents itself to its public as archiver and provider of knowledge, predominantly privileging thematic, object-based exhibitions and largely relating stories about the city from an institutional perspective of how the world should be defined. In the early 1990s it recognized that to retain a space in the market place it needed to relate to the changing configurations of its audiences and began to present exhibitions that would attract more diverse social groups. Themed displays of popular culture sometimes built from the testaments of people in the city, whilst artificially rich from mining the cupboards and display shelves of citizens' homes, have been less successful as sites of interaction and interpretation. Objects traditionally sit behind glass facades, a display policy that privileges individual contemplation signifying the museum's conferment of power on objects to speak through the mediations of traditional curatorial ideology. Exhibitions designed to create a space for dialogue amongst communities are rare.

For both institutions there are problems of identity in a world of cultural drift. Both are professional but they are also required to show commitment to their communities. What Ivan Karp (Karp 1992) has said with regard to museums can also be read as opposite for the universities, "Responsible...curatorial obligations...seek to por-

tray the social world in terms that honor their sense of purpose and identity. Yet they are also members of communities, and bring to their world personal and communal histories that often relate and interact with the communities that compose their constituency." Karp goes on to suggest that this creates a post modern problem for museums.

First, they must fashion exhibitions that can present multiple perspectives on the world. Then, they must ensure that those perspectives respect but are also critical of not only museums' own worldview but also the worldview of the people whose lives, culture, knowledge, and objects they are exhibiting. This will require exhibitions that encompass all aspects of cultural experience, both the typical (a culture or community's idea of what it is to be a person, to be a member of that culture or community) and the unique (what it is to be an individual in that culture or community and have experiences that are different from another's).

Play Up Pompey! and *The Team in the Stand* produced a unusual dialectic between a public unfamiliar with cultural institutions and the inhabitants of those institutions. The exhibition was made a specialized site for the exchange of communal experience and expertise and, consequently, enhanced the university's and the museum's relationship with those people who visited it. They attracted into the museum space a significant group who would normally not visit the museum, nor possess nor ascribe value to cultural capital and presented the stories which the community had told. The community's history and knowledge were researched and recorded, reproduced and managed by the institution but authoritatively owned and monitored by the fans. The Pompey visitor came to the exhibition as connoisseur of complex knowledges, well prepared to enter into interactive dialogue. How true Appadurai's observations (Appadurai, 1992) are of the football fan when he suggests that people do not come as cultural ignorants or empty sheets, they arrive as news watchers, newspapers readers, they have absorbed the merchandising in the shops, have set-up shrines and adorned their own bodies and clothing in idiosyncratic and symbolic ways, they construct, visualize and narrates the history of their community.

A Portsmouth Demography

In order to more fully contextualize the impact of the exhibition, the rationale which informed its address and appreciate its aims and objectives, a few statistics concerning Portsmouth's population,

Swales & Golya, *The Team in the Stand: community heritage sites...*

social makeup and educational achievement are needed. Recently Portsmouth applied to be an educational action zone to redress the long-term disadvantage in its schools. Statistically, areas of Portsmouth are some of the poorest in the country with accompanying high levels of social and cultural deprivation. The University of Portsmouth carried out a needs analysis for Further Education in 1997 to identify areas of particularly high under representation in order to assist in the devising of projects to implement a widening participation policy. Surprisingly even affluent Southsea, home to the Royal Navy characterized by distinctive domestic late 18th Century and early 19th Century architecture was revealed by the survey as also marked out by broad areas of highly concentrated unemployment, single parent families and educational underachievement. The findings add to the data produced in the Department of the Environment deprivation index which shows typically for inner city Portsmouth that 86% residents are in receipt of some form of state benefit, 19% people are unemployed, 21% households are headed by a lone parent, the average family income is less than £200 per week, 35% residents are under 16, 85% children are under 10, 6% children in inner city Portsmouth obtain 5 GCSE grades A-C compared with 42% in the county Hampshire. These are grim figures when considered within the context of the national picture. A third of Britain's population now live below the poverty level. Housing, education, health, employment, security are no longer available to many and its young people are the poorest in Europe, lag behind in education with high numbers excluded from school, and have the worst sexual health record.

In recent years Government in Britain has addressed itself to this increasing polarization in society and has expressed a commitment to widening participation for young people from disadvantaged and disaffected groups by encouraging agencies to offer training and support. Attempts to deal with these problems have largely been through economic regeneration such as employment for single parent families, back to work schemes for the jobless and creation of business infrastructures. However increasingly the need not just to provide economic benefits but also social benefits has been recognized, although clearly these are less easy to measure. Government has identified social and cultural developments as major factors in regeneration. The Learning Society is a major Government initiative to stimulate strategies and policies to create a skilled workforce in Britain. The objective is to increase substantially the number of thirty-year-olds who will have received or

be in higher education in the early years of 2000. Training and lifelong learning are now part of the social policy agenda to encourage access to education and post 16 education institutions are required to recruit from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups as part of the widening participation strategy. Equally there has been pressure for museums to assess their position in and relevance to their local communities. Central government has questioned the usefulness of museums in the local community during the last ten years and they have been found lacking in educational and social relevance.

Historically, sport has always been a means of controlling the working class and interest in football is largely clustered in the lower income groups. Indeed, *The Team in the Stand* depended for its value on the socio-economic background of the fans since it determined and structured the interpretation and design as a process of inclusion, building on the ways in which the audience shaped the meaning of its own lives. However, as an integrative participatory sport it is the space where boys, especially, learn the cultural values of class, age, gender and education. Time and time again boys are told that they do not need brains to be in sport. Class and gender inequalities and insecurities can be overridden through the gaining of confidence by earning respect for skill and power on the pitch. (Messner, 1990)

The phenomenon of "laddism" is a social and cultural blight in the UK, which to a large extent, has been promoted and exacerbated by mediations of the bad behavior in public of sports players. The archetypal football hero has low cultural capital and will organize aggression towards those teammates who have higher education and a critical interest in culture and politics. As stars who are adored and emulated by hundreds of young fans they must take responsibility for the anti-learning culture which now has become a crisis for the educational establishment in Britain, where male children in particular associate learning and success at school with femininity and inferiority. It is interesting in this respect to note that Portsmouth libraries offer reading sessions with footballers for its young readers.

The *Team in the Stand* was specifically targeted at the community of football fans who reject high culture and its institutions as well as at the large social group in Portsmouth who have discontinued schooling after 16. The exhibition wished to demonstrate that all members of the community have a right to use the museum, even those who do not think they want to. The objective was to

create an opportunity for the visitors to encounter the experience of seeing their lives and achievements celebrated publicly as a means to raise self esteem, which is the first stage in encouraging people to return to education.

Cultural Imagination, Embodied Knowledge, and the Politics of Identity

If, as Karp (Karp, 1992) has advised, the best way of changing the relation between museum and communities is to think about how the audience, a passive entity, might be turned into a community, an active agent, then one way of doing this is to articulate a community point of view. The researchers and designers working together on *The Team in the Stand* set out to research into the fictionalized world of the football, record and representing the lives of the football supporters and the relationships which they constructed imaginatively with the club, the ground, the players, each other, family and friends. Ethnography as a methodology for accessing the microworlds of individuals was used to gain understanding of the attitudes, habits, customs and mindsets of their audience to be. Most importantly appreciation of its knowledges and beliefs and never underestimating the ordinary and everyday became the focus.

Ethnography affords a means of reaching into individuals' imaginations, into their bodies, their cultural and artifactual worlds, thereby expanding awareness of the delicate complexity of lived lives. It also aids in revealing the ways in which the imagination, in the creation of the artifactual made world, operates both to embody the sentient desires of individuals but also how the reciprocal processes of disembodiment work to disguise the origin of creation in the human body. In so doing, the mental and materialized action of making appears as a natural given and thus makes it possible for the artifactual world to exist as mimesis, a reality whose success is attributable to its non-framing by the self consciousness of the body.

Elaine Scarry (Scarry, 1985) has written of the imagination's role in the making of the world as entailing a framing intentional relationship between physical pain on the one hand and imagined objects on the other, a framing relationship that, as it enters the visible world from the privacy of the human interior becomes work and its worked object. The now freestanding made object is a projection of the live body and itself reciprocates the live body ... the created object itself takes two different forms, the imagined ob-

ject and the materialized object: that is, "making" entails the two conceptually different stages of "making up" and "making real". In the first of these the imagination's work is self announcing while in the second she completes her work by disguising her own activity. ... the imagination first "makes a fictional object" and then "makes a fictional object into a non-fictional object".

Among the exhibition themes which were used to structure the designs too which are relevant to this paper were the supporter as hero of a made world and the supporter's body as instrument in the stand. A key finding which has often been related in other texts is the first moment of realization that one has become a fan. It would seem from accounts that there is an identifiable moment, often as a child accompanied by the father to a match. Fans spoke about the memory of feeling the power of the football player's body, the speed, the muscles in huge thighs, the extraordinary and apparently superhuman skill. Acknowledgment that a foundational and structuring experience has occurred heralds the making through time and space of a lifetime of incorporated practices bound up with the game. When interviewees recounted such a moment with the father they often reenacted the scene as they remembered with awe their first realization of the possibility of such human achievement on the football pitch. From that moment, as they express it, clasping their breast, they feel a passion for their club through all the vagaries of its fortunes that structures their lives.

The decision to become a supporter brings with it a way of life made across spaces and through objects which gradually shape the sentient body. There are many aspects to this which change over a life cycle. For example when young football players were asked to play a game in front of the camera and to try to kick and make shots like their favorite football players they were able to organize their bodies to attempt the task. They had in their bodies a knowledge built up incrementally from attendance at matches, media images seen and commentaries heard on the radio where the real space could be imagined. Older fans could recount in great detail memories of journeys to away matches and the fun they had joshing with people from the opposing teams. Women were able to proudly attest to their ability to cope with swearing in the stand.

Focus on the gameday itself has shown the ways in which as a culturally created artifact it is made as the projected objectification of the imagination's creation of the sentient body. Watching men,

women and children walking to the stadium on a Saturday afternoon, on one level connotes old images of workers streaming through the factory gates for the next shift, but postures, groupings, the palpable atmosphere of anticipation and purposefulness, the talk, create a very different sharpened, alert ambience.

The dominant drive on Saturdays is the feeling of anticipation, which lends the imagination its fictional extensions. Fans in the interviews talked about waking up on Saturday morning with excitement, the whole day to be devoted to participatory spectatorship. Even the literal incorporation of a substantial breakfast becomes a part of the preparation. Clothing is carefully selected not only to protect the body but to signal affiliation and for private and intentional symbolization. Special items of dress and colored strips which hold personal historic significance remind the fan that their presence has contributed to momentous, heroic occasions where great combat, loss and victory, the extremes of exhilaration and disillusion have all been known in the body. Through such strategies the transience of the game past is captured and made real in the present.

Anticipation of the game is about imagining what might come to pass, it is an idealized fiction, often of hope against reality, despite the canniness with which supporters way up their team's chances. Of course fans cannot win the game but they perform a role in the stadium based first in the imagination of desire of what they want to happen. They create an occasion out of the raw material of the dizzying roller coaster of feelings that they experience. Despite new stadium designs with obligatory seating, the body cannot stay sitting, it defies the chair's containment, it has to stand and sway. Nor can the body be silent. Thrill, admiration, anger, frustration squeeze sounds out of the body with remarkable and improvised force. The repertoire of ritual chants and songs, the mocking of the opponent as a shared culture amplify the opportunities to release signifying noises into the air, to make something powerful and poignant. As Fred Inglis (Inglis, 1977) has written of his first memory, "it was a beautiful day; the football was colorful and glamorous, the crowd was immense ... the football: the goals and the sacred cup were the operatic climax of two days of the most intense, purposeful living I had known."

Scarry (Scarry, 1985) has observed, as we have seen, that material objects are an exteriorization of human sentience and taken in this sense the occasion of the football match is a projection of the supporters' aspiration and belief in the intrinsic

worth of the players' skill. But more than this the whole event, the making of the match, brings with it a sense of the body as alive, a move towards the interior of the felt-experience of sentience.

Yet fans do not talk with each other about their contribution to the making of the match as an artifactual extension of their imagination. They will, however, recount repeatedly the experience of being there more as receivers of the event, albeit active ones, since the noise making is a part of the occasion. To reference Scarry again artifacts function most successfully if they are 'real' or 'self-substantiating' and do not always declare their origins as human projections.

What this small detail has shown is that for every imaginative projection onto the world, in general individuals receive back from the world a far greater reciprocation than they might think they have the right to expect. Yet it is their own making coming back to them manifold, although they do not see it as their own. A large breakfast, a pint in the pub before the match, the homemade costumes, the purchased colors, shouting their hearts out for an hour and a half are rewarded by benefits which are enduring over a lifetime, they build familial and social relations, they produce a sense of cultural scale, of purpose and emotional commonsense and construct an overarching feeling of wellbeing from Saturday to Saturday and across the years.

Interactive and Embodied Spaces

Appadurai (Appadurai, 1992), in examining the creation of cultural literacy and the significance of leisure and learning suggests that sacred objects generate specialized modes of viewing and interaction which is rooted in historically deeper modalities of seeing as a cultural practice. There exists a bond of intimacy and allegiance which transcends the specifics of what is displayed. Reception of specific sites and spaces is a communal experience and the objects of the museum are viewed by communities of interpretation, the isolated viewer is virtually absent. Viewing and interpretation are communal acts in which viewers are not passive. They come with complex ideas and share this knowledge in highly interactive ways.

Appadurai names this a dialogic environment where the usual role of defamiliarization is in tension with a viewer-dominated process. This situation provides a much larger space of freedom for a cultural literacy to emerge out of dialogues in

Cultural Heritage Informatics

which knowledge, taste, and response are publicly negotiated between people from very diverse backgrounds. As he says viewers are free to assimilate new objects and arrangements into their own prior repertoires of knowledge, taste and fantasy.

The design team understood in this context that their vision for the museum was to promote it as a space for the celebration of civic communities. Presentation and reproduction of knowledge and objects of valid and visual interest evolved as a process of accommodating diversity and by embracing and responding in a proactive and creative way to the current trend to cultural deconstruction which affects in profound ways the canons of taste and scholarship, and from which neither the museum, not the university, can be exempted. The museum as public space becomes a site for the play of identity and the playing out of identity experiences. People might come to the museum to be educated, and entertained but equally they assist, by virtue of being there in the defining of civil society bringing with them embodied perceptions and values which are reproduced by being members of communities and cultures.

Play Up Pompey! was just such a space where interactions between groups could evolve. In presenting this exhibition to the people of Portsmouth the museum placed itself in a new relationship to its citizens which problematized its previously assumed functions. The academics, whose discourse had been formed by critical, cultural and sociological theory and a modernist design aesthetic were projected into a space outside the familiarity of its own institutional comprehension with the potential to offer a means to empowerment. The football fans, already constructed through a nexus of popular, populist and academic mediations and themselves inhabiting a particular culture were visitors and object of study. Out of this diverse grouping a dynamic was set in motion which brought degrees of transformation in cultural understanding and self realization to all involved.

As Fleming (Fleming 1999) has stated, little is known about the role that museums play in the social life of the country, a gap which represents a serious knowledge deficit. The socially responsive museum can develop a new and growing audience, and in so doing foster healthy relationships not only between the museum and the communities but also within communities themselves. Museum going is part of the experience of learning to be modern and as Appadurai (Appadurai, 1992) has pointed out, whether they are aware or not visitors to the museum become consumers

of leisure and pleasure. The visit is connected deeply to the pleasures of seeing.

People who have felt intimidated by exclusive/ding culture begin to gain educational and entertainment opportunities as integration brings a sense of ownership. As a previously invisible audience, they become a site of cultural expression in which the struggle for identity is afforded the space vital to existence. (Gaither, 1992) The politics of representation demanded in the context of *The Team in the Stand* a responsible articulation of identities. If communities seek from museums a confirmation of their sense of history and identity, then curators must listen to what audiences say. The culture of a whole city is just that. It represents the whole of a city's life. David Fleming (Fleming 1999) has pointed out that beyond job creation, tourism, development and image improvement it can generate community identity, and pride, and improved educational attainment. It promotes self-development, and equal opportunities, it celebrates cultural and ethnic diversity, it provides opportunities, choices, access and it can help bring about social cohesion from the experience of participating in a cultural event and thus acquiring cultural and visual literacy.

This paper has suggested a way of understanding more about how the processes of interactivity function by showing that beyond the dialogic, the communally embodied imagination creates the objects that are experienced in an interactive space. A collection of cultural histories framed from the perspective of the insider provided the setting for the making and experiencing of identity. The success of *The Team in the Stand* as an interactive space was dependent on this embodied imagination returned doubly magnified. The visitors brought with them into the space their cultural knowledge of their lived history and the work already completed by them was now objectified for them to see and take pride and pleasure in.

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Swales & Golya, *The Team in the Stand: community heritage sites...*

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