Popping the museum: the cases of Sheffield and Preston

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Abstract

This article excavates the 'problem' of popular culture in museums, with particular attention to Sheffield's National Centre for Popular Music and Preston's National Football Museum. In both cases, profound issues are raised for information and knowledge experts who must manage and negotiate the contradictions of the popular. These two case studies are contextualized through both urban regeneration policies and sports tourism strategies. Both institutions were situated in the North of England, and both faced extraordinary obstacles. What is interesting is that Sheffield's Centre was termed – derisively – a Museum. It failed. Preston embraced the label of a National Museum, and after profound threats to the institution, has survived. Part of the explanation for these distinct trajectories is found in understanding the specific challenges that popular culture presents for the presentation of history, narrative, identity and space.

Key words: Popular culture, creative industries, urban regeneration, sports tourism

Introduction

A museum of popular culture is tested by the dynamic and fickle nature of its subject. When the present is all that matters and a glorious, nostalgic past is all that is required, a complicated problem emerges for a museum curator of pop. This article excavates the problem with the popular, with particular attention to Sheffield's National Centre for Popular Music and Preston's National Football Museum. These two case-studies are placed in the context of urban regeneration policies and sports tourism strategies. In both cases profound issues are raised for information and knowledge experts who manage the contradictions of the popular. Both institutions were situated in the North of England, and both faced extraordinary obstacles. What is interesting is that Sheffield's Centre was termed a 'museum' as a term of derision. Such an ambivalent label prophesized its failure. Preston embraced the label of a National Museum, and after profound threats to the institution, has survived. Part of an explanation for these distinct trajectories comes from an understanding of the specific challenges that popular culture offers for the presentation of history, narrative, identity and space.

The goal of this research is to track two institutions of popular culture. Neither justified their purpose in terms of cultural value or the presentation of 'art'. Operating outside of the enlightenment project, these institutions gently probe and question the definition, limits and trajectory of the museum. John Carey, in his provocative book *What Good are the Arts?*, states that 'the arts have traditionally excluded certain kinds of people as well as certain kinds of experience' (2005: x). In reorienting his intellectual vision to museums, the 'people' and the 'kinds of experience' that are excluded may include the ephemera of popular culture, including music and sport. Yet this article is not primarily interested in modes of exclusion, but in the justifications for that exclusion. The disciplinary framework that we bring to this work necessitates not only the deployment of popular cultural studies and media studies, but theories of city imaging and creative industries. The source material that was consulted and generated

– including interviews, newspapers and photographs – summons alternative voices, visions and views which help us to explore what happens when 'museums' featuring popular culture fail, and how policies and strategies have been used to ensure success. The argument which follows below is constructed in two parts, using two case-studies to group the evidence and present the analysis. The first part sets the parameters of the discussion. The second section demonstrates not only the problems of popular culture in museums, but the value of literacy theory in addressing these challenges. My approach that is best described, *pace* Mary Macken-Horarik, as *critical* literary theory. This approach, which Macken-Horarik demonstrates in relation to schooling, 'problematises the relationship between meaning making (reading and writing) and social processes' (Macken-Horarik 1998: 75). Transposed into the language of Museum Studies, she explores the link between meaning-making within the environment of the museum and how museum meanings connect to the lived experience of the visitor. In other words, an everyday familiarity with popular culture cannot seamlessly (and concurrently) facilitate an awareness of ideological gaps and silences in a discourse. Consuming popular culture does not intrinsically or inevitably creating critical thought about popular culture. Museums can be the space where this movement between the stages of literacy takes place.

Pop time

The tight embrace between theory and practice, alongside a public fascination with heritage, has triggered an explosion of museums and a diversification of their activities. A new mapping of the field is taking place and it is one which has brought museums and museum studies into productive dialogues with cultural studies, tourist studies, design, the visual arts, internet studies, public, community, social and oral history and popular memory studies. Museums are active in creating a distinctive vocabulary of design and knowledge. Museums remain intellectually interesting because they are selective and compressed presentations of history. Popular culture, the working class, women, immigrant and indigenous communities are volatile interventions in this museum discourse. Yet music and sporting museums have garnered little critical attention. There are some analytical questions to address in museum studies before sport and music can flood the field.

The method and rationale of the collecting policies for popular culture are difficult to standardize. Through these challenges and decisions, museums are important thinking spaces for popular culture. Kevin Moore is the curator of the National Football Museum in Preston, and has written one of the major academic investigations of the role of 'pop' in the institution, has stated,

> Museums offer an environment to explore the meanings of popular culture in ways that academic texts cannot, primarily because the material culture can be directly experienced. (1997: 104)

Museums are an ideal space to collapse the gap between the academy and society. The popular cultural objects in a museum provide a way to transform public consciousness for shared objects into shared directives for change. The assumptions of daily life are interrupted by tactical pleasures and local resistances. Football museums, in displaying memorabilia from the 1966 World Cup, are able to capture a residue of these sharp moments where individuals build transitory moments of identity and community. Yet they are transitory and create nostalgia for these short, shared experiences. Given these contradictions and paradoxes, it is obvious why Sharon Macdonald would remark that 'museums face an unremitting questioning about whom they are for and what their role should be' (1996:1). Museums not only display past objects but also past thoughts. The reason for the preservation of some items – without their context – is often inappropriate, particularly in a postcolonial environment. Debates about museums are arguments about cultural value and the selection of historical facts and interpretations. When the objects from the past are displayed in the present, the challenge is to ensure that the original contexts for these objects are summoned not merely as a means for passive nostalgia, but as the beginning of a discussion about how these concepts, images and sounds have been challenged through history. Popular culture, because of its ephemeral nature, is a delicate source in museum discourse because it encourages nostalgia but requires

curatorial work to bring the critique and questioning into the visitor's vista.

It should come as no surprise that popular culture has infiltrated museums. Notions of cultural value have radically shifted in the last fifty years, and this movement has been tracked by both cultural and media studies. Museums, born out of the social changes of eighteenth-century Europe, displayed in the public sphere the objects and ideas of the ancient regime. Through such a project popular culture was marked as inferior and ephemeral. Instead, canonical notions of art and excellence were meant to inspire an aspirational working class. However, simply because these museums were 'public' did not mean that they were accessible. This confusion and ambivalence triggered an odd dance between 'the popular' and 'the national,' and 'museums' and 'entertainment'. Even before the Sheffield's National Centre for Popular Music opened, journalists were foreshadowing doom.

> For curators, the problem with rock 'n' roll, with pop, punk and whatever you've got, is that they are pretty much meaningless if restrained. Institutionalize pop and it dies the death of OBEs, knighthoods and those embarrassing moments sharing jokes with prime ministers. (Glancey 1999)

The consequence of this negativity is that too often pop is simply excluded from museums. There are alternatives to exclusion or 'dying a death' through institutionalization. Once we come to the realization that *everything* has potential value, depending on the perspective of the viewer, the focus for a curator changes. What emerges from a growing desire for public involvement at the museum is the recognition that popular culture is a site and source of negotiation.

It is remarkable how little record of past modes of working, playing and thinking have survived. The signs of manufacturing - including the workers, the equipment and the materials that it produced - have been lost amidst the shiny surfaces of new leisure complexes in old industrial cities. Perhaps the most significant task of museum theorists is to monitor how these institutions represent the abstract, silent resistance, the staunch refusal, or that which did not happen. Curators' tasks are made difficult because they must communicate not only to scholars, but to many new audiences. Material cultural objects – particularly those from popular culture – facilitate memory production and the building of identity. To examine what happens when this connection fails, we travel to Sheffield.

Sheffield is not sexy

> Sheffield is not sexy. It is old and dirty (Michael Fabricant: 2001).

The Conservative Member for Parliament, Michael Fabricant, endorsed the view that Sheffield's lack of glamour held back the city's campaign to be the venue of the World Athletics Championships in the early 1990s. The distillation of his thoughts into a media grabbing headline of bumper sticker proportions captured a common perception of post-industrial northern British cities in the pre-millennium period. The push for global interaction, where commerce and service are deemed high-end goals, is compromised by the unfashionable image of an archaic and moribund landscape. The struggle for control and re-branding of its urban image embraces Sheffield's historical and recent past and is indicative of the role played by cultural industries in redefining post-industrial economies and infrastructures. In terms of museum studies, the question is how Sheffield's sonic landscape and popular music was positioned in an economic, social and cultural narrative and how the 'sound' of the city became pivotal in its push for regeneration. Museums were part of how city planners created solutions for the city's re-industrialization through creative production and consumption. Two of these solutions were Sheffield's Cultural Quarter and the failed National Centre for Popular Music.

Sheffield, like other northern industrial cities, carries the burden of 'those dark satanic mills' - until recently left as empty husks - as a reminder of an earlier model of globalization and industrial hegemony. As a city, it has defined itself aurally as much as visually, characterized both to itself and to the rest of the world via sonic parameters. The city has become a paradoxical fusion of the sounds of metal and soul, steel and electronica, industrial bleeps and lyrical mockery, it is popular culture wrapped in the tarnished glamour of self-deprication. Through this

noise of iron and irony, Sheffield steel became not only a manufactured by-word for the city, but also a convenient rubberstamp which encapsulated the reification of an urban sound.

If the city had been mono-cultural in its economic make up, then it was more diverse and complex in its social and ethnic configuration. Sheffield had shown an acceptance of cosmopolitan sounds in the pre-war period. During the embryonic period for Sheffield's popular music in the sixties and seventies, the West Indian Social Club, situated in the industrial heartland of Attercliffe, was representative of a nascent cultural fusion and the beginnings of an adjustment to a perceived exotic alterity. Though largely accommodating white working class youths, Sheffield also maintained position in the Northern Soul circuit.

The appropriation and consumption of sounds and rhythms from America and the West Indies were symptomatic of social and cultural mobility. These new sounds confirmed both the growing mediation of urban environments and the hybridization of the internal sounds of the city. The Sheffield soundscape is as much defined through its work environment and historical narrative as its patterns of social interaction and consumption. The 'sound' of the city is framed by its industrial corporeality, by its rolling mills and blast furnaces which are Sheffield's elemental essence forged in fire and steam. Sheffield's primary production base occupied a large working class demographic, socially embodied in its two football teams and politically expressed through close ties to the Labour Party. Apart from two years in the late 1960s, the Labour Party has controlled the city since 1926 (DiGaetano and Lawless 1999). The political narrative of Sheffield is symptomatic of global economic shifts, national economic policies, anomalies of demand and patterns of employment through the last hundred years. As an integral part of Britain's nineteenth- century industrial boom, the city provided the raw steel for the regional and global manufacturing industries, but as a mono-culture and primary producer it was quick to feel the effects of economic downturns and shifts in demand with their residual human effects on a labour intensive steel industry. The significant economic and social displacement began during the 1970s with global effect and with national policies consolidating the decline of Britain's manufacturing base. The nation's long term industrial decline highlights a number of factors from entrepreneurial conservatism, early embedded practices, lack of education and training leading to skill shortages, entrenched family business structures, post-war free trade practices, union-management relationships (Dintenfass 1992: 546-77) and significantly a movement of investment towards finance and commerce in London at the expense of northern manufacturing.

The city's reliance on a single industry created large scale unemployment during this period. The industrial workforce fell by 187,000 (60%) between 1971 and 1997. Even in 1999, unemployment in Sheffield was 2% above the national average with thirty-three percent of the population existing on state benefit (Moss 2002: 211-19). The re-organization of the steel industry in the UK lead ultimately to a national strike of steelworkers in 1980 and to the subsequent loss of 50,000 jobs in the industry in Sheffield alone (Moss 2002: 213). The significance of these patterns of unemployment lies in the degree to which they perpetuated a regional demarcation that shaped subsequent local policy for re-generation. The burden of unemployment and its solutions were shifting to a new generation which reacted via creative channels manifested through sub-cultures and popular modes of expression. The rhythmic noise of punk, although quickly commodified, was a knee-jerk response from a section of urban youth disconnected by social and economic forces over which they had no control, but connected through the common language of music and its ability to translate this dislocation. Academic attention to punk, which is often associated with Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (1979), originated in Birmingham. The recent success of the film *Twenty Four Hour Party People* recreated Manchester's punk history. Yet Sheffield's punk scene was visible and varied. What made it distinctive was the quickness with which it adopted more electronic modes of expression. Early manifestations of bands such as the Human League and Clockdva articulated their non-conformity through modernist forms. The political and economic friction filtered social interaction and expression. Few musicians were unaware of their position within the local and national polemic, and most were actively involved through fundraisers and benefit shows and records. The dismantling of the steel industry and subsequent miners' strike of 1984-85 provided daily reminders of the impact of government policy, punctuated by didactic speeches from politicians that warned of 'the enemy within'. The sonic nexus of electronic

technology and regional dysfunction was seemingly analogous of the city's duality: global industry juxtaposed with local social forms. The consequence was a distillation to a perceived generic 'Sheffield sound'. The evolution of this 'sound' cannot be reduced exclusively to local factors of physical environment, economic practices and social interactions and infrastructures. Rather, it should be termed the Sheffield 'effect' where such local factors frame the creative process and can permit license for production.

If macro-economic forces were producing local, urban outcomes for creative expression, they were mirrored in some northern cities by political non-conformity. Although perhaps not as vitriolic or combatant as Liverpool's response, where the Trotskyite Militant Left confronted Thatcherite policies, Sheffield's Labour City Council saw that local initiatives were to be paramount for re-structuring policies that would successful counter the economic consequences of de-industrialization. The rapidity of the process saw the city transformed from 24-hour shift-based production practices to abandoned post-industrial wastelands, exacerbated by the subsequent dismantling of the region's coal industry during the mid-1980s. Parts of Sheffield, like other old city centres, were left abandoned leading to 'the consequent shattering of local and regional identity brought on by this economic crisis and which this dereliction powerfully symbolized' (Lovatt and O'Connor 1995: 127). Lack of national strategies to counteract the economic and social consequences of this urban decline led to the symbolic cessation of accountability to the national government with the locally declared, ironic epitaph: The People's Republic of South Yorkshire.

The combatant climate of this period configured a strong regionalism that permeated community attitudes and fashioned creative responses, significantly the music sector's sense of inclusion. The Thatcher administration, as part of the overhaul of local government structure, enacted budget restrictions and created quasi-national government organizations that assumed responsibilities previously administered by local authorities but now came under the jurisdiction of government-appointed boards dominated by private-sector representatives. This effectively undermined the city council's ability to continue on its path of social reform, with the Metropolitan County of South Yorkshire abolished by the central government in 1986 (DiGaetano and Lawless 1999:553). National initiatives fell short of needs and expectations. In 1981, Sheffield City Council set up the first Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) in local government in the UK. This was as Moss described, 'the first manifestation of UK local government attempting to take responsibility for shaping the future prosperity of the city' (2002: 213). The resources available to the employment department - £18 million in its first seven years of existence - were minute in comparison to the massive disinvestments in steel and heavy engineering. As DiGaentano and Lawless observed, if Sheffield were to perpetuate a radical program of local economic intervention, it would travel a lonely road (DiGaetano and Lawless 1999: 566).

Sheffield, an early victim of economic rationalization, became a pioneering model of attempted resolutions. The shift from manufacturing to service industries could never be immediate, or transferable as a simple paradigm of economic and social regeneration. Yet Sheffield's lead would provide an advanced if somewhat premature mode of urban reconstruction through embryonic cultural industries initiatives. The importance of music's role in this regeneration was the extent to which it could act as not only a talismanic force to push through the initiatives but also the degree to which it was a proven success at a time of local economic deceleration. Estimates show that Sheffield achieved a 5% share of the recorded music singles market in 1982 (Brown 1998: 2).

Although the rationale was primarily economic - to find workable solutions to long-term unemployment - implemented policies were symptomatic of a nascent shift in working culture towards casualisation, flexible and temporary forms of working, often involving fixed-term contracts, seasonal, casual or part-time employment (Hobbs *et al.* 2000: 701). Policy was also intended to address the broader issue of community and identity, with city centres becoming what O'Connor and Lovatt described 'as focal points for, and as symbolic of, a specifically urban way of life seemingly eroded in the 1970s' (1995: 127). Music would quickly become a currency in negotiating urban renewal through night-time economies, but Sheffield's early initiatives would structure a cultural quarter that focused not on consumption but production, therefore developing strategies with inherent shortcomings.

Officially, the Cultural Industries Quarter in Sheffield was set up in 1981. A local government initiative, it was regarded at the time as an either brave or reckless use of public money. A gradual evolution, the first step began with the opening of the Leadmill, as an all-purpose music venue, in 1982. The appropriation of an abandoned industrial shell was allegorical for the city's re-industrialization and was funded by a partnership of the City Council and UK Urban Programme (Moss 2002: 214). Red Tape Studios opened in 1986, with the express purpose of job creation and music production training, followed by the leasing of space to existing producers, film and photographic collectives.

Importantly for the organization and development of the cultural quarter, its configuration and co-ordination was fragmented due to local government restructuring and national government's encouragement to the contracting out of services. The closure of the Arts Department of the City Council in 1997 and its replacement a Museums Trust was a typical result. In Moss's analysis, 'no public body had overall responsibility for the Quarter, despite its continuing dependence on public funding' (2002: 215). It was in this disjointed policy environment that plans to open the cultural quarter's apogee were declared. The hub of the city's regeneration would be its most nationally and globally recognized product of the post-industrial period, its symbol of regional resilience and its most effective economic cultural tool – music. Given this context, success for the National Centre for Popular Music seemed assured. Significantly, this narrative of innovation and survival against the odds reveals an ambivalent and disappointing conclusion.

The National Centre for Popular Music (NCPM) agitated not only on issues of cultural policy and urban regeneration but also challenged any easy affirmation of music's relationship to the creative industries. The Centre's failure invites questions about music's function within the community and its role in regional identity. Such questions highlight the delineation of production and consumption, and raise issues of where the divide between creative production and leisure consumption is drawn. Music is fundamentally bound into issues of mobility and identity - human and sonic movement within urban spaces - and the construction of post-work identity, through use and access of the revitalised 'cultural city'.

As an ironic echo of the environmental residue of 1970s and 1980s de-industrialization, the NCPM currently stands as an appropriated folly and in the virtual world an empty shell. As an embodiment of Sheffield's re-industrialization strategies, this state of the art construction and cornerstone of a cultural quarter whose expressed intention was to reclaim the abandoned infrastructure of the city's past was in turn acquired by Hallam University in February 2003 to house its students' union (Wainwright 2003). To log on to the digital NCPM is to tour not only the cultural quarter but to move through a 'virtual' empty husk of the deserted site. The cyber tumbleweed brushes past the online visitor, a memento of its ephemeral existence. Opened in March 1999, with £11 million UK Lottery funding, the Centre was in financial trouble before the end of the year and closed by 2000, a brief and baffling lifespan. The Centre was committed to closure before most people had chance learn of its existence.

The Centre's free-standing design was based around four buildings in the shape of drums, each housing a separate concept installation: dance music, religion, love and rebellion, and unique singers (curiously including Pavarotti plus a chance for the visitor to stick their ear in a hole and guess the singer). Although the title was specific – Centre – the building since its inception was known locally as 'the museum'. The latter term denoted a perception of a static, sedentary, space that despite its intention of being highly technological and interactive exuded a mausoleum ambience. The problem of presenting popular culture in a museum is captured in the movement between these two words. As it was not supported through newspapers and radio, and was seen to be an unpopular presentation of popular music, it was not a 'centre' for historical discussions or economic development. It became a 'museum' of failure, contradictions and without a clear purpose. The Centre operated as a curiosity, thematically closer to a science park that institutionalized - rather than aestheticised - popular music. As Jonathan Glancey stated in *The Guardian*,

> At Sheffield, instead of sex, drugs and dodgy business deals, we get neat videos depicting the history of dance from jive and jitterbug through the twist (and mashed potato too) to disco and 'E'-driven dementia. Nicely made, but soulless. (Glancey 1999)

Not surprisingly, Jarvis Cocker – lead singer of Pulp - was prepared to announce to an audience at the Doncaster Dome at the time of the Centre's opening that, he regarded it 'a complete waste of money' (Lilleker 2005). Practicalities of access and use summoned further deathknells. Writer and journalist Martin Lilleker expressed his disappointment.

> At £7.25 per head, it wasn't cheap, especially when you consider that if you were lucky you could manage an hour and a half in the place without running out of things to do ... What was glaringly missing was the lack of any celebration of Sheffield, a city with a long history of producing innovative music. The final exhibition, and the most popular, was of Sheffield's history, from the Sixties, Seventies and early Eighties with photographs, Sheffield records, fanzines and various other bits of nostalgia. (Lilleker 2005)

The rapid demise of the Centre was symptomatic of a lack of public support, both local and national, an inability of bureaucratic infrastructure to construct a facility that captured popular music's function in the community and incorporate appropriate long term strategies to combat short term recalcitrance. Importantly, the Centre repeated the cultural quarter's inherent defects, most notably its location and objective. Once more, a lack of sustained support facilitated through long-term strategic policy initiatives lead to the failure to attract the anticipated numbers of 400,000 in the first year (Moss 2002).

This failure was fundamentally due to the Centre's advisors and curators mis-reading the public perception of popular music, its representation and consumption. Nicholas Barber highlighted the impracticality of the Centre's design: 'a virtual encyclopedia is nice to browse through on your home computer but you're not going to get much reading done with 500 people pushing behind you' (cited in Moss 2002: 218). Music's representation through such modes and media of interactivity failed to meet visitor's expectations of how they would choose to consume popular culture. In its failure adequately to address music's esoteric nature and in its reduction of the creative process to a series of mechanical prompts the Centre failed to take into account music's broader contextual effect and its cultural potency.

Although lessons can be learnt retrospectively, it does appear that a lack of functional multiplicity contributed in large part to the Centre's collapse. On a more pragmatic level, there were intrinsic local and regional factors which inhibited not only the centre, but also the cultural sector of which it formed a part. The quarter's location in the south of the city centre was within easy access of rail and bus stations, but was historically comprised of small self contained industrial units. Also, regardless of the proximity to Hallam University, the area had little or no passing trade, which in turn was inhibited by a road network which was designed to circumvent the city, offering pedestrian's little by the way of access. People's movement into the quarter was largely destination driven and few other incentives were offered to encourage activity in the sector. Local producer and DJ, Winston Hazell, confirmed the quarter's lack of animation and cultural consumption: 'You've got no reason to go there unless you're called to a boring meeting or to have an office there' (cited in Brown 1998: 15). The area does not meet Montgomery's criteria, based on the study of four international locations, for successful regeneration where 'cultural quarters will share the attributes of good urban places in general, offering beneficial and self-sustaining combinations of activity, form and meaning' (Montgomery 2004: 10). Rather, the quarter was primarily focused on production, whereas the city and the south west (West Street / Division Street) areas offered multiple facilities, shops, bars and cafes with the latter close to Sheffield University and residential zones. This undesignated cultural quarter focused on leisure, consumption and an evolving night-time economy and benefited from higher density and mobility through the city tram network. This unofficial cultural quarter was the result of proactive strategies by commercial and entrepreneurial sectors, as opposed to the municipal infrastructure associated with the official cultural quarter.

If local population movement into the quarter was slight, then nationally and regionally incentives were even lower. Despite the Centre's intention of heralding its national strategy to attract visitors from around the country, besides the venue itself there were few other attractions. By comparison, nearby Manchester with a higher density population had not only more comprehensive transport facilities, but an international airport which placed it higher in the

regional hierachy. A well-established cultural melting pot, augmented by a media infrastructure including Granada Television and a creditable newspaper industry incorporating *The Guardian*, Manchester was effectively positioned to capitalize on its own popular music boom of the late 1980. With a blossoming night-time economy, the City's subsequent cultural sector development (North Quarter) was propelled by local entrepreneurialism and disconnected approach from municipal policy makers. Manchester provided an appropriate modality, not only for cultural production and consumption, but also for accessing music within the context of the cultural and built environment. From clubs and bars, through to universities and cultural collectives such as the Manchester Institute for Popular culture alongside music-focused events and fora such as 'In the City,' the integration of Manchester's urban economies and cultures captures an organic growth symptomatic of the city's social and economic multiplicity. A commercial centre with a diverse economic foundation, it contrasts markedly with the Sheffield's mono-cultural configuration that required financial public support to initiate the city's re imaging and de-industrialization.

The roots of Sheffield's sonic culture may seem distant from debates on cultural funding and museums, but the path between the two takes us to the essential role of sound in the representation of contemporary urban culture. There is a growing awareness that popular music is an agent of cultural change and a determinant of identity. Urban economies in the past twenty-five years have appropriated music to revitalize and re-image the contemporary city through the cultural industries. The Sheffield model of regeneration confirmed the importance of the embedded economy of a city's culture, fashioning a cultural quarter out of the old micro-economic practices of the industrial period. Although seemingly a victim of its pioneering status, it is a manifestation of unique social, economic and cultural circumstances, constructing solutions to high unemployment and economic implosion through available infrastructures. The policies implemented were symptomatic of a shift from the traditional servicing roles of local government, to activities of cultural partnership which instigated and channeled developments, rather than simply monitoring social and economic practices.

Spatial inadequacies and municipal strategies aside, the fundamental flaw in the ill-fated National Centre for Popular Music was its inability to satisfy local and national requirements for music's bodily representation. The decision to construct the Centre in the city was not accompanied by a suitable incorporation of Sheffield's unique 'effect'. Rather, it became enmeshed in a populist attempt to represent 'music as a tactile craft' within a museum setting. To regard music as a curiosity defined largely through commercial parameters is to disregard not only the mobility and dynamics of sound but also the past and future role of music as a force of social and cultural change. A multi- functional centre which fused the real and the virtual, the aesthetic, academic and populist strands, positioning sound and music within a broader cultural context would seem to have been a more suitable represent ion of local and national requirements. For Sheffield, 'The Centre' was popularly transformed into 'the Museum'. Such a labeling is not only inaccurate, but is a trace of the failure, disconnection and inappropriate form of the institution. It became one of many 'Lottery-funded flops' (Crow 2004). By contrast, the next case-study of museums and popular culture shows how the National Football Museum, although facing similar funding and regional challenges, has been successful.

Popping football

> Football Museums have a handicap that the British Museum or the Science Museum does not. An antique pot or painting is a direct and meaningful articulation of an ancient culture, and a working model of a steam engine is an adequate and instructive representation of the real thing. But football is necessarily about movement, athleticism, fleeting moments and huge crowds; a couple of old medals, a few international caps and a pile of old programmes – the staple of football collections – hardly capture the essence of the game. (Nick Hornby 1994: 43-4)

Hornby published these words in 1994. He could not have foreseen how remarkable the new museums were to become and how not only material culture would be deployed but also evocative footage, significant oral testimony, tactile objects and viewer interactivity. Hornby

romanticized the 'authenticity' of football that is of the present and must be experienced. Yet most 'experiences' of football are already mediated through television and the internet. Therefore a museum – because of its open interpretative framework and plurality of objects and ideas – can summon the complexity and diversity of football.

Football, like popular music, has a problem. Because it *is* life, and not only a *part* of life, it embeds itself into daily conversations, clothing choices, meals and metaphors. The chants become clichés and the colour of a player's kit transforms into a signifier of place and identity. This tight weaving of players, managers, great wins and embarrassing losses into the fabric of identity poses a dilemma. When creating public institutions like museums, an historian or curator is not only mobilizing aloof facts and cold objects, but the throbbing life and joy of fans' lives. In most popular culture, fans know more than academics, journalists and museum curators. Sport – like music - is the intense confirmation of this principle.

The National Football Museum opened in Preston in 2001, two years after the National Centre for Popular Music. It faced many of the challenges and policy concerns that confronted the Sheffield's NCPM, but has survived. Unlike Sheffield's experience with popular music, Preston's Museum is a structurally evocative, interactive celebration of football. It uses lighting and music to not only present the scores, winners and losers in the game, but also the context in which it is played. But it has confronted problems. Eighty thousand visitors were expected in the first year: only forty thousand attended. While costing £15 million pounds to build, it was left with inadequate resources to meet its day to day running costs. The current high profile football stars with money and personal stature to contribute (and donate) have not visited the Museum, yet every surviving member of the 1966 World Cup squad has acknowledged the institution's role and purpose (Davis 2002: 57). There is a significant point to be made here. Popular culture is of its present. While fans remember the Premierships, Championships, cups and medals, only a particular type of celebratory history is summoned, one which is directly relevant to present performances.

A museum can translate and confront these historical and national challenges. Its symbolic spaces activate social and community dialogue. Popular cultural museums provide an opportunity to create belonging and allegiances for nontraditional audiences. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has reported that ethnic minority populations are highly under-represented in museum attendance (Hooper-Greenhill 2003). Kevin Moore has confirmed that 20% of the UK population never visit a museum, 50% visit at least one museum or gallery a year, and only 2% visit eleven or more times (Moore 1997: 15). While museums synthesize experience, social and cultural barriers may still block access and understanding. Football fans need to be talked to, not talked over. The National Museum of Football at Preston is described as 'the spiritual home of the beautiful game' and 'completely devoted to football worship' ('Take a Trip to Football Heaven' 2002). It is highly appropriate that the Museum is in Preston, as the North End FC was the first winner of the world's oldest professional league in 1888-9. Although opened in 2001, it faced financial difficulties from the start. On the front page of the *Lancashire Evening Post* in October 2002, there was speculation that 'The National Football Museum at Preston's Deepdale today faced crisis amid speculation it could move to London' ('Final Whistle' 2002: 1). Poor attendance figures were seen to threaten the institution. Moreover, there were travel problems during this period, including strikes called by the railway unions and the outbreak of foot and mouth disease amongst British farm live-stock. This poor attendance level was no surprise, as the National Football Museum was the only national British museum out of nineteen where an admission fee was charged. Kieran Howlett believed that attendance fees were the major problem blocking success: 'if entrance were free, thousands more people would visit the attraction, especially poor families who struggle to pay £6.65 for adults and £4.95 for children' (Howlett 2002: 2). In January 2003, with continued disappointing attendances, a decision was finally made to allow free admission for children from the local Preston area. Not surprisingly, after this resolution was made, attendance increased. In March 2003, following a remarkable local campaign, the government endorsed a financial package from the Football Foundation and the North West Development Agency which provided for free admission. In the first Easter bank holiday weekend with the new arrangements, nearly four thousand people visited the Museum (Karlsen and Baybutt 2003: 3).

Further success followed this bumper Easter weekend. In the 2004/5 period, a target of 80,000 visitors was set by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Museum not only met this target, but attracted over 100,000 visitors.

The economic pressures felt by the Preston Museum since opening are not peculiar to that museum. For example, Ian Lawley has identified the conflicting demands placed on curators to both 'service' the economy and 'serve' life-long learning initiatives. He has also confirmed that, through the New Labour 'modernizing' initiative, these contradictions are becoming more severe (Lawley 2003: 83). There is intense, centralized scrutiny of museums, with government demanding accountability and efficiency. Corporate sponsorship is one way to alleviate the stress on institutions and facilities, but too often this economic imperative has resulted in facilities being (re)located in London.

The fate of Wembley Stadium provides an evocative example of this pull to the south of England, confirming the diverse administrative, governmental and fan agendas within football. The old Wembley Stadium was closed on October 7, 2000. By December 2000, the syndicate that was meant to create the new national stadium failed to gain the necessary bank finance. The plan was simply too large and unwieldy. The stakeholders in the project, the Football Association (FA), Sport England and the Government, all backed away from responsibility. The FA for example, saw their major role as a governing body, not as a stadium developer. Yet it was the FA's influence that discredited the well-funded and developed plan for a national arena in Birmingham. They believed that 'premium seating' would be responsible for 70% of the stadium income, and this 'will be significantly lower at Birmingham than Wembley' (Carter 2001: 13). Also there is a nostalgia associated with Wembley, a desire to literally revisit the site of past glories that worked against Birmingham's strategy. Of the alternative schemes that were offered, the successful bid was 'a new simplified design at Wembley based on the design submitted by the Birmingham bid team' (Carter 2001: 7). In other words, the plan assembled by the Birmingham consortium was so successful that it was actually used. The only element changed was the location. The stadium model headed south.

Beyond the questions of location and entrance fees, there is a more wide ranging difficulty recognized by the Museum's marketing manager, Mark Bushell. He has stated that 'many people do resent the fact that the museum is in Preston and not London or the south of England' (Bushell in Howlett 2002: 2). A serious concern that the Museum would be lost from the region was expressed in a number of stories reported in the *Lancashire Evening Post.* On December 17, 2002, Kim Howells, the Minister for Tourism, stated that,

> there is good historical reason to locate it at Preston at the home of one of the Football League's original member clubs. But we must recognize that location has played a part in the museum's financial difficulties. ('MP points finger at "shadowy figures" who want to take museum to London' (2002: 2)

The Member of Parliament for Preston, Mark Hendrick, believed that there was a concerted governmental plan to move the museum to London, and for it to be located in the refitted Wembley Stadium. While creative industries aim to revitalize the local, particular and peripheral a centralizing imperative remains in the organization of contemporary football.

The irony of the museum's early financial failure is that it was highly successful judged by any other criteria. The display was (and is) carefully presented, well theorized and deploys a considered use of interactive technologies. It is the only national football museum in the world, and after seeing it, football officials in Brazil, Germany and Norway are planning similar projects. Hunter Davis, the *New Statesman* correspondent, visited the Museum and found it 'brilliant'. He also recognized the problems.

> If it's so brilliant, as I maintain, and if football is so successful, rich and popular with millions, why have people not been queuing all the way along the M6? I wish I could answer that … Football-wise, as all football historians know, being in Preston is justified, but perhaps not otherwise. Who wants to go there? I've had specific reasons for four visits in 40-odd years, but I wouldn't have gone there otherwise. (Davis 2002: 57)

Tourists, neither from the United Kingdom nor from abroad, have made Preston into a priority for visiting. These problems also emerged in Sheffield. While the tourism industry is now highly sophisticated and specialized, the youth market is an important part of the sector. Researchers have shown that younger tourists are not interested in museums (Davis 2002: 57). With approximately 20% of all international travelers identified as young people (Carr 1998: 309), this is a sizeable slice of Preston's (and Sheffield's) prospective visitors. If they are not showing historical interest in football, then that is a concern for the long term future of the National Museum. However the Manchester United Museum has many children visiting and an entry charge is made there. But Manchester is a different tourist destination to Preston. Publicity for 'The Quays' at the Greater Manchester waterfront links Salford Quays, Trafford Wharf and Old Trafford as 'the ideal destination for culture, sport & shopping' ('The Quays' 2002: 1). The Lowry art gallery, the Imperial War Museum North and the Manchester United Museum and tour are linked. By means of this strategy, sports tourism has been granted a wider context and attractiveness.

It is rare for visitors to come to a city for a singular touristic purpose – such as visiting a single attraction. Contemporary tourists typically make multi-destination trips so that they increase the benefits of their travelling. There is a desire to formulate a list of visits and itineraries, forming a coordinated approach to a region and heterogeneity of travel experiences. It is a way to rationalize the economic and time constraints: slotting as much into a trip as possible. Therefore, destination familiarity plays an important part. If Preston is seen as presenting little of 'multidestination value' except for the National Football Museum, then that will not be enough to encourage a trip. Preston is a fascinating place, in easy reach of Manchester, Liverpool and the Lake District. Yet this closeness to other population centres has not been sufficient to give Preston a multi-destination appeal of London or even Manchester.

The exhibition of football as a subject also poses specific problems. Because of the low fan participation from women, 'family' tourism is more difficult to attract. The Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research reported that 'the proportion of adults attending with their partners or spouse has increased from 17% in 1997 to 20% in 2001' ('New findings in FA Premier League 2002 National Fan Survey' 2002: 3). To expect women to make up 50% of visitors, or to encourage their partners to take them to Preston to see the Football Museum, is stretching the limits of contemporary feminine interest. Similarly, the Centre reported that 'lower earners seem more strongly committed to their clubs than higher earners' ('New Findings in FA Premier League 2002 National Fan Survey' 2002: 6). Therefore higher earners, who were less committed but were more able to afford the Museum's entry fees and travel expenses to get there, would be more likely to visit the exhibition if it was 'easier' to access in London. The highly committed fans – earning less – were more circumscribed by the high admission fees when it opened. Preston's attendance suffered on gender and class-based grounds, increasing the 'issue' of the Museum's distance from London. When the financial barrier was removed, some of these social obstructions to increasing the attendance were removed.

Sport, while part of cultural tourism, possesses its own specificities. Because sports tourism is not often recognized, greater coordination is required at all levels of government. It appears accidental or incidental, as revealed through such 'enterprises' as the Barmy Army's tour of Australia for the Ashes test series or the plane loads of New Zealanders who fly to Australia, and Australians who fly to New Zealand, for the Bledisloe Cup. The English Tourism Council claimed that up to 20% of tourist trips are related to sport, with up to 50% of holidays containing some associated sporting participation. Sports tourism includes active sporting holidays, such as cycling, golf or fishing, but also more 'passive' viewing of games and events, and visiting sports museums. The question is, as Ritchie, Mosedale and King realized, '[a]re sports tourists motivated by the event or match itself and leave the destination contributing little to the tourism industry?' (Ritchie, Mosedale and King 2002: 34). In other words, do visitors attend the museum or the game, and then depart, leaving little financial benefit in the surrounding economy? This question will continue to arise until definitive planning of sports tourism can be coordinated. The National Football Museum has the advantage of being located in a functioning football stadium. Such a strategy works for Manchester United, with their superstore, ground and museum all integrated to warrant a visit to Old Trafford. There are problems with Preston's transportation, image destination and subject matter that are restricting

the attendance and influence of a remarkable museum. Such a problem may be resolved when Preston North End is able secure a place, and perhaps even more significantly, a secure place, in the Premier League. The regular pattern of home and away matches, televised to a global audience, will increase the number of visitors in Preston to view a game and then see the museum. However, as is confirmed by the case of Sheffield's Centre, success and recovery can not be assumed. The region is economically depressed and finding money for regular Premier League Game attendances has proved difficult. This pattern has only become more marked through the subsequent decade.

Football is well suited to being represented in displays of material culture. Fans objectify their allegiance through scarves, colours, kits, balls, programmes and endless knowledge of match statistics. This enthusiasm and passion can provide the basis for developing a museum experience. With the recognition of the commitment of fans it becomes possible to see football is a framework for welcoming non-traditional visitors to the museum space. Such a goal and educative function is embedded in the structure of the Preston Museum. The key imperative with popular culture in a museum is to move visitors from a nostalgic comfort in their assumed knowledge systems and into a space of critical reflection about identity, community and history. Consuming popular culture does not intrinsically or inevitably create critical thought about popular culture. For museums, this passage between modes of knowledge can be accomplished through the architecture of displays and the selection of media which are sensitive to the lived experience and 'literacy' of the visitor.

The National Football Museum in Preston enacts a translational and transformative literacy process through an intricate dialogue between media and modes of knowledge. The Museum's displays are organized so that social and historical events are presented on the left of the visitor as they enter the Museum, with footballing history on the right. Architecture, music and lighting move the visitor between everyday and reflexive literacies. Personal assumptions about football history are questioned by placing games, players and results into context. To embody this relationship, the museum is structured in two halves. The first half is a presentation of football history. This interactive display is also the most elaborate presentation of football memorabilia in the world. The second half is an active, 'hands on' space for playing the game. Visitors can play table football, complete a Match of the Day commentary, conduct a virtual visit of every league ground in England, and see the history of Preston North End Football Club, in which the museum is situated.

Fig 1. The Entry

Turning a style into an argument is the greatest challenge of popular cultural museums. Sheffield failed to meet this challenge. Preston succeeded, and against the odds. The National Football Museum carefully configured a context for objects. Museums have often been sites

of storage for the artefacts of the past, but the structure and architecture plays an important role in framing and representing the aims and goals of the institution and encouraging a movement in literacy modes from visitors. The use of stucco, concrete and ball imagery adds difference and distinction to the museum's entrance **(Fig. 1).**

Lighting is also an important feature. It signals many ideas in the exhibition – participation, a significant object, or change of era. Visitors stand on floor panels which then light up to provide information about the exhibition. Evocative iconography and a strong design sense combine to offer an innovative experience. It has subtlety and simplicity.

I m p o r t a n t l y, there is a distinct and overarching atmosphere to the museum. It is not a fluorescent-light-flickering experience. The floor covering is an exhibit of its own, marking out spaces and symbolism. It is a subtle, secluded post-industrial presentation, which creates remarkable opportunities for reflection, encouraging visitor's own memories of the exhibits. The darkness encourages nostalgia, as visitors literally pass down the corridor and into the past of football **(Fig. 2).**

Fig 2. The First Half

The use of sound is evocative and appropriate. Music from distinct eras fills the space. 'In the Mood' swings with 'Rock around the clock'. These soundtracks are not necessarily tethered to a single event or exhibit, but arch and float above the space and era. Furthermore, there are booths available for sitting in and listening to oral history and testimony **(Fig. 3)**.
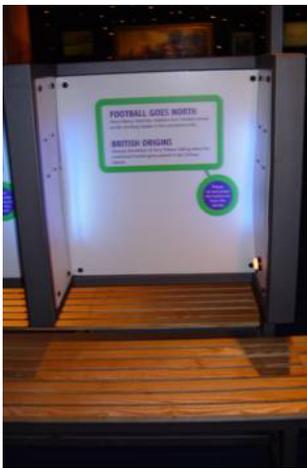
Fig 3. The Oral History Booth

The intimacy of the secluded cubicle is an innovative venue to hear the sounds of history. With the sensory overload of material culture in museums, it is both appropriate and innovative to provide a space and opportunity for reflection from visitors. The Museum's realization is a clear one: oral history is not source material for popular culture, but part of popular culture.

The exhibition space is cut up, individualizing and customizing the passage through the museum **(Fig. 4)**. There are many exhibits that involve the participant standing on a square that lights up at their presence, to trigger oral information about the subject. In this case, the viewer is hearing that this kit was worn in the first English international against Scotland. In terms of literacy theory, visitors use their body to activate a demand for information. This physical selection of relevant exhibitions by visitors – an everyday literacy – then becomes an opportunity for the development of reflexive literacy, as an 'ordinary' item of clothing becomes a site to transform assumptions.

Such a strategy, using light and sound, in increased in 'the Second Half' of the exhibition where objects are deployed that can be touched by a visitor. Once more, a common object and an 'everyday' literacy gains

Fig 4. Interactive Display

a context and a meaning system to provoke thought on the part of the visitor. Visitors learn about the changes to football boots, and the other equipment. The ordinary is granted revelatory power **(Fig. 5)**.

Museums were invented in a different time from ours. Today, funding sources have transformed by a shift in emphasis so that tax subsidy increasingly co-exist with other sources of revenue and income and especially lottery money. This development has challenged the public image and function of the museum. In the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (First Report), the 'problems' of regional museums were raised, along with the lack of direct government funding (Select Committee 2002). Lawley, in his study of the effects of government policy, confirmed that local authority museums in particular 'will need to demonstrate that they do actually deliver more than just visitor numbers. They will need to test themselves against broader, qualitative standards and make clear their contribution to wider strategic objectives' (Lawley 2003: 84). The question raised by our work on Sheffield and Preston is if, and then how, policy and funding should operate in and through a popular cultural museum. Here we would like to reflect on Kevin Moore's questions:

Given the choice, would the public prefer that their taxes are spent on public museums or something else? What would attract those that currently do not visit or come to museums? If museums reflected popular culture more fully would this attract more visitors? Museums have generally acted on the assumption that there is no need to ask such fundamental questions, perhaps from a fear that it might be disturbing or even dangerous to do so. (Moore 1997: 15)

Restricted public funding, and perpetual controversy about the location, meant that Preston's Museum was built on these assumptions. Sheffield's Centre failed on these assumptions. The benefits of the museums can be justified in economic terms, for employment, tourists, and the day trippers. They can bring money into economically-deprived areas. The problem is that the Football Museum and music tourism – outside of the Beatles' Liverpool - has yet to fulfill this great potential. While there are many museums with diverse functions, they are being challenged by a creative industries policy matrix that deploys terms like cost recovery, performance indicators and financial mismanagement.

Fig 5. Tactility and the Museum

Museums face a crisis of purpose. From their modern origins in the crucible of the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century, museums have been based on the notion that an artefact remains of value when removed from its present ownership in private property, and removed from the context that originally gave it meaning. The problem is that sport and music are heavily immersed in context, lived history and identity. Visiting a museum to see objects distanced from daily life is perhaps too strange. Time is required to develop the theoretical

insight and curatorial strategies to move visitors from their 'everyday' literacy of football and music and into a more interpretative realm. Preston was given time to develop and the free entry transformed the institution into a success. Sheffield's NCPM was given neither this time or support. With all the talk of creative industries, cultural hubs and the knowledge economy, it is clear that the old economy and old divisions by region and class are perpetuated. Until the politics of pop – as much as the economics of pop – are valued, there will be more 'Sheffields' and fewer 'Prestons' in the history of culture, art and museums.

This article has explored the relationship between popular culture *and* museums, and popular culture *in* museums. Two examples have exemplified and modeled this research. Theoretical approaches from cultural and media studies and literary theory have been deployed. We have argued that the 'problems' of pop in museums are not only questions of funding and economic support. To address the role and function of music and sport in museums necessitates attention to literacy theory, or how texts are 'read' in context. An approach has been presented that demonstrates how to translate and transform the ephemera of our daily lives into the source of insight, reflection and dialogue about community and history. Preston's Football Museum was able to use objects like boots and jumpers, and sounds like music and oral history, to make these connections. While two case studies – one from music and the other from football – can never 'represent' all the challenges facing the museum as an institution, physical structure or discourse, there is some value in learning from the mistakes and recognizing the successes of Sheffield and Preston. Only through studying such case studies can the consumption of pop be transformed in thinking (about) pop.

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