Understanding Audiences

This symposium, organized by the European Centre for Cultural Exploration and the Department of Sociology, University of York, is concerned with different methodological approaches – and diverse methods – to understanding audiences.

Wednesday 28th May 2014
RCSS Building (6 Innovation Close, University of York, YO10 5ZF)
Admission is free but spaces are limited due to the size of the room and we also need numbers for catering. So please book at: http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/understanding-audiences-tickets-9812027037

<u>Programme</u>
9.15 Coffee and welcome
9.30 Introduction

9.45 Session 1: Space, museums and visiting

Bill Hillier (Space Syntax Laboratory and Barlett School of Architecture, University College London): ***Space syntax, museum design and visitor behaviour***

Space syntax is a set of techniques for analysing spatial configurations at all scales, from single building interiors to whole cities, coupled to a set of theories linking space to society. The aim of space syntax studies is to bring to light and explain the part played by space in human affairs. One of the fields to which it has been applied is the museum: how space plays a role in how museums and their exhibitions are structured, and how this affects visitor behaviour. In this presentation, I will use a study of a particular museum to explain how space syntax works and how it can be used to study museums, and then present a number of results from studies of other museums which show the interaction between spatial design and observed visitor behaviour.

Laurie Hanquinet (ECCE and Department of Sociology, University of York): ***The spatial configurations of cultural capital: the example of art museum visitors***

The links between place and cultural capital has often been discussed in literature, showing the importance of the latter for cities as 'symbolic economies' (Zukin, 1996). In the establishment of people's lifestyles, places, and especially cities, have become central arenas for display and consumption, and have become part of the aesthetic experience itself. This seems to imply the existence of an 'urban cultural capital' (Savage and Hanquinet, forthcoming) whose aesthetic structures would feed into an urban context. This makes us reflect upon the complex nature of cultural capital, underlying that it cannot simply be reduced to the opposition highbrow-lowbrow *à la Bourdieu*. We then need to explore further the multiple relationships between cultural capital and place. Based on a survey of 1,900 visitors of the six main museums of modern and contemporary art in Belgium, this paper will focus on the distribution of the audience characterized by their cultural tastes and activities across Belgian territory (through their postcodes). It will show that visitors mainly come from areas with high and moderate density and that the socio-demographic but also urban characteristics of their place of residence can be related to the way visitors' cultural capital is composed.

11.15 Coffee

11.30 Session 2: Visiting history and heritage

Katia Dauchot (Matrice Memory Project, Pres Hesam, Paris): ***Representing History in a Memorial Museum: what do visitors get out of it?***

In the Matrice program, we seek to understand how visitors react to proposed representation of History in the Caen WWII Memorial. We measure visitors' attraction to various items in a highly emotional section of the Memorial – a section that deals with the prosecution of Jews, concentration camps, and mass murders by Japanese armies. The presentation will describe how a two-scale measure of attraction is realized through two novel technologies. With Mobile Eye-tracking, we measure the exploration of individual pictures by selected visitors, relating attraction to gaze fixation time. With a fixed head-tracker (INSPOT), we measure the exploration of larger topic-specific panels by all visitors; attraction in this case being related to the time visitors remain in front of panels. Attraction measures are then interpreted in relation to items' low-level features (size, color..) and hi-level features (cognitive and emotional content). Results show that these novel technologies are effective tools for understanding visitors' behavior in museums, as measures are clear correlates of exposed items informative and emotional contents.

Mads Daugbjerg (Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University): ***Understanding Audiencing: ethnographic insights from the heritage sector***

In this presentation, I will argue for the need for understanding wider processes of 'audiencing' rather than mere 'audiences'. By doing so, I want to stress the need for attending analytically to the wider situational contexts and frameworks that surround any given audience and its relations – social, material, temporal – to whatever 'it' is witnessing. I draw on several years of anthropological research devoted to the exploration of heritage sites and museums as complex locales of interaction between 'hosts', 'guests' and 'places', including classical ethnographic tools but also more unusual video methodologies. As symbolic localities that explicitly relate to past histories and narratives of identity, heritage sites constitute complex cultural prisms through which we may study the detailed entanglements between human communities, particular places and points in time. Addressing various visitor practices and perceptions at such sites, I will attend both to the qualitative challenges connected to this kind of research and, briefly, present a few key findings on 'audiencing' from the historic (1864) battlefield of Dybbøl in the Danish/German borderland.

13.00 Lunch

2.15 Session 3: Consuming musical products and performances

David Beer (Sociology and ECCE): ***Exploring the classificatory imagination in culture: audiences and digital by-product data***

This paper explores the possibility of using digital by-product data, or big data, to understand audiences. Taking the example of music, the paper will focus on the potential of these new forms of data for understanding genre and other cultural categories. A number of examples will be used to show how audiences can be understood by the media content they create in response to cultural forms. These examples will include the use of social media data aggregators and the use of vernacular forms of analysis that explore tagging and ground-up genre formations.

Stephanie E.Pitts and Katy Robinson (Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre and Department of Music, University of Sheffield): *First impressions: audience exchange in opera, jazz and chamber music*

Building on recent studies of jazz and chamber music audiences, our AHRC Cultural Value project on 'audience loyalty and its limitations' aims to understand how people become engaged with particular art forms, and form connections with specific repertoires, performers or venues. We will report briefly on the findings of a questionnaire with arts audiences across Sheffield, and then focus in more detail on our 'audience exchange', in which we took audience members to unfamiliar arts events and consulted with them about their expectations, first impressions, and intentions for future arts engagement. We will consider the apparent differences in motivation and engagement between regular attenders of the musical genres that our audience exchangers experienced, and the first impressions reported in the focus group discussions. Finally, we consider the implications of these findings for audience development strategies and for future research on the notions of audience open-mindedness, consumption and loyalty.

3.45 Tea

4.00 Session 4: Understanding audiences - discussion:
How can we understand audiences and 'audiencing' (Daugbjerg)? What works for what? What kinds of data do different methodologies produce – and what are most convincing, and to whom? Are there other techniques, or mixes, that we should consider? In this last session, we will hold a general discussion of approaches, their aims, methodological strengths and weakeness. Participants are welcome to introduce further approaches and cases, as well as to contribute to the overall debate.

5.00 Wine reception

Organizers: Katiana Le Mentec and Sharon Maconald