

## Audiences, museums and the English middle class

Brian Longhurst \*  
Salford University

Gaynor Bagnall \*  
Liverpool John Moores University

Mike Savage \*  
Manchester University

---

### Introduction

The increasingly accepted way to analyse any media product is to consider production, text and audience processes. In a deceptively simple way, a television programme, for example, can be examined in the institutional, social and political context in which it is produced and with respect to the organizational framework that provides its immediate production environment. Second, its textual structures and strategies can be analysed using different approaches, such as structuralism or (in certain respects) content analysis. Third, the way in which the audience understands (or decodes) the text can be considered, as can the make-up of the audience, in terms of standard factors such as class, gender, age, ethnicity and so on. There are many variations on this sort of approach.

This paper starts from such a premise. It suggests that in addition to the well formulated approaches to the study of the museum that focus generally on the institutional and wider social context for museums, or on specific museums and the processes that occur within them, or on the much studied strategies for display and narration of texts, the audiences for museums are also important.

Furthermore, despite significant advances in museum audience studies (see, for example, Bagnall, 1999; Ross, 2003) this area of research is still relatively underdeveloped. This paper is therefore, in the first instance, a contribution to the wider understanding of the audiences for museum processes. However, having said this it is important further to clarify the approach to the museum audience that will be taken here. As will be explained further in the next section, our approach develops the arguments concerning the diffused audience made by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998). Crucially, it is important to emphasise that we will be considering museum audiences in the context of everyday life (see Bagnall, 1996; 1999; 2003 and Ross, 2003). In accord with the strategy of the research project from which the data discussed in this paper derive, we start our analysis from the individual circumstances of interviewees. Therefore, we did not consider visitors to any particular museum and we will not discuss audiences in that way. This is not to critique the study of museum visiting *per se*. For example, good studies exist which have integrated environmental, social, and cognitive perspectives on visitor behaviour, (Goulding, 2000); considered the museum experience in terms of nostalgia (Lowenthal, 1985) and memory (Kavanagh, 2000); or examined visitor behaviour in terms of the learning experience (Falk and Dierking, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). More recently visitor behaviour studies have considered the influence of social interaction, or the social context of the visit on the ways in which visitors experience museums (Vom Lehn et al., 2001; Newman and McLean, 2002).

However, we want to suggest that an alternative methodology has value in the study of the audience. Our approach facilitates consideration of the role of the museum in audience processes in everyday life, rather than the nature of visitors to a particular museum.

To fulfill these aims our paper is divided as follows. In the next section we identify the key aspects of the approach initiated by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998). We follow this with a section that outlines the methodology used in the research. We then work through the narratives from our research that made reference to a variety of practices of museum visiting. We will include extensive extracts from these narratives to enable the reader fully to consider

---

their context and our interpretation of them. We finish with some conclusions that point to the value of the approach adopted in this paper.

### **The spectacle performance paradigm.**

In *Audiences*, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that while the move toward greater research attention to audiences is important, further research will be hampered unless it is reformulated to take account of the changing nature of audience processes and the way in which such processes are conceptualized. They argue that the two most significant ways of conceptualizing the audience, which they term the behavioural paradigm and the incorporation/resistance paradigm, are deficient in crucial respects. The behavioural paradigm tends to consider the audience as individuals in two ways. On the one hand individuals in social context are either affected by the media (often in a pernicious way), for example by propaganda, or by particular representations of sexual activity, violence and so on. On the other hand individuals are seen to use the media to satisfy certain wants and needs (in the so-called uses and gratifications approach). There are a number of problems with this paradigm, such as its relatively restricted understanding of social life, its inattention to power relations and its lack of attention to the textual nature of media products. Such an approach was extensively criticised by what has been called a critical approach to the study of the media (Hall, 1980), or what Abercrombie and Longhurst called the incorporation/resistance paradigm.

The incorporation/resistance paradigm, reflecting its Marxist origins, takes the operation of power in society very seriously indeed. It pays particular attention to the way in which society is structured, especially in the earlier work done within its parameters in terms of class, but subsequently with respect to gender, race and age. Its key research problem concerns the extent to which such social structuring and social location influences particular modes of decoding of media texts (rather than media messages or stimuli in the behavioural approach) in ideological terms. To explain further, a key concern of this paradigm is the extent to which audiences resist or are incorporated by media texts. The classic studies showed that resistance, while hugely significant would then be relocated as part of a wider process of ideological incorporation into the dominant structures of society (for example, Radway, 1987). However, the approach tended to overemphasize the coherence of the response to different texts, often in accord with one of the social bases identified above, or to conflate an active response to media with a critical one. In Abercrombie and Longhurst's view these difficulties arise from the findings of research that had been carried out (at least initially) from within the context of the paradigm. Empirical studies were leading to a potential questioning of their initial premises, or interpretation was becoming increasingly strained. In this context, Abercrombie and Longhurst speculated that such empirical strains could only be properly understood through the formulation of a new paradigm for audience research.

The argument for the spectacle/performance paradigm (SPP) rests on the recognition that both audiences and conceptualizations of the audience were changing. They propose that there are three different types of audience that currently co-exist: simple, mass and diffused. The simple audience as represented, for example, by a theatre audience or that at a football match, involves relatively direct communication from performers to audience, the performance takes place in a confined locale, tends to be highly ceremonial in the sense that it is a special event and the space of performance is ritualistic and the site has a high level of meaning for participants. The performance and the audience response take place in public and the performers are separated from the audience by clear boundaries. The attention level of the audience with respect to the performance is high.

The development of mass audiences reflects the growth of more mediated forms of communication.<sup>1</sup> The 'classic' case of a mass audience is that which has been made for television. Here, communication is highly mediated in that performance takes place a long way from the audience spatially and is normally recorded at an earlier time and place. The relatively direct connection between 'live' performance and audience is broken. The texts of the television industry are globally available and are not restricted to a one-off performance in time and space. The ritual aspects of the simple audience decline as the mass audience becomes used to texts and media being part of everyday life. While, for example, aspects of

television viewing are highly ceremonial and 'meaningful', e.g. a group or a family may make a clear point about viewing a particular programme at a certain time, much TV viewing is distracted or done while other things are going on (see, for example, Ellis, 1983 and Grossberg, 1987). The mass audience tends to exist in private rather than public spaces. Television viewing, once the medium is established in a society, predominantly takes place in the home. Highly performative occasions such as watching football in a pub are exceptions that prove the rule of the domesticity of the medium and the audience. Likewise, the attention of the audience can vary from highly engaged, focused viewing to complete distraction. Finally, the distance in spatial and time dimensions of the audience from the performance is high.

Most important to the Abercrombie and Longhurst argument is the development of what they term the diffused audience:

The essential feature of this audience-experience is that, in contemporary society; everyone becomes an audience all the times. Being a member of an audience is no longer an exceptional event, nor even an everyday event. Rather it is constitutive of everyday life. This is not a claim that simple audiences or mass audiences no longer exist, quite the contrary. These experiences are as common as ever, but they take place against the background of the diffused audience' (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 68-69).

Several social processes are related to the development of the diffused audience. First, people spend increasing amounts of time in media consumption. Second, such consumption is increasingly woven into the fabric of everyday life. Third, western societies have become more performative in the broadest sense. A good example of this is the extension of performance and consumption around contemporary weddings (Boden, 2003). This mode of performance is specific to contemporary and highly mediated societies, though it has developed from the performance that is endemic in everyday life in previous historical periods.

The development of the diffused audience of everyday life is the product of the interaction of two general social processes that intertwine. First, there is the increasing spectacularisation of the social world. Second, there is the way that individuals are constituted as narcissistic. Abercrombie and Longhurst discuss these processes at length. The diffused audience is very different from the simple or mass audience. Most importantly the social (and indeed sometimes physical distance) between performers and audience is increasingly eroded. Consequently, communication between performer (or producer) and the audience is 'fused' and the roles of mediating institutions becomes almost non-existent. Social distance tends to be eroded. Such diffused audiences are both local and global as the performances of everyday life tend to be enacted in the local (everyday) settings but draw (at least partly) on global processes for the resources that fuel the imagination. The level of ceremony in diffused audience processes tends to be relatively low. This is because they are enacted in the context of the flow of everyday life. However, certain aspects of that everyday life become highly ceremonial and invested with great meaning. Thus, for example, there is the rapid development in Britain in recent years of roadside shrines at accident points and the tendency to promote certain key birthdays by banners on the outside of houses. Attention is also subject to a degree of variability, as everyday life and audiences switch from intense involvement to relative indifference, or to what Goffman (1963) theorized as 'civil inattention'. Performance in the diffused audience is both public and private and the tendency is to blur the distinction between these historically separated spheres of social life.

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that in studying audience processes it is crucially important to consider the interaction between simple, mass and diffused audience processes. The previous two paradigms that they identified were not up to this task. They proposed that the spectacle/performance paradigm provided the more adequate account of audience processes. This paradigm which they saw as emergent in both theoretical and more empirical studies (most notably Gillespie, 1995; Hermes, 1995 and Silverstone, 1994), would pay greater attention to how the audience was socially constructed and reconstructed (rather than being determined or structured) through the twin processes of everyday spectacle and narcissism. Attention would focus on the way in which media interact to form as

mediascape (Appadurai, 1993), rather than media messages or texts *per se*. This does not rule out the study of texts, but relocates any such analysis into an alternative framework. Rather than considering the effects, functions or ideological operations of the media, the SPP pointed to the need to understand the interaction between everyday life, audience processes and identity formation and reformation. It is worth pointing out that this does not mean that concepts such as class are irrelevant to this paradigm, rather it suggests that the analysis of the construction and reconstruction of, for example, class identities requires rather more attention that it has hitherto attracted (see further, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2001).

In elaborating the SPP, Abercrombie and Longhurst argued that there were a number of potential positions that audience members could occupy (for further elaboration and critique see Hills, 2002 and Crawford, 2003). At one end of this audience continuum was the consumer, who interacted with the media in a relatively generalized and unfocused fashion. It is important to stress that the term consumer is not intended to have pejorative connotations in this respect. The next step along the continuum is that of the fan (again without any intended pejorative connotations), who becomes particularly attached to certain programmes or stars within the context of relatively high media usage. At the next point are the cultists, who build on such attachments to focus their media and audience activities around certain key programmes. Cultists also tend to interact more directly with those who have similar tastes. Enthusiasts tend to be more involved in actual production of artefacts connected to their fan and cultic activities. Classic studies such as those of *Star Trek* fandom, point to the writing of stories and the making of videos and paintings (see, for example, Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1992). The final point on the continuum is that of the petty-producer who is reaching the point where enthusiasm is becoming professionalised into a full-time activity (see Moorhouse, 1991). The identification of this continuum allows further differentiation in contemporary audience positions than had hitherto been the case.

In arguing for the SPP, Abercrombie and Longhurst were clear that they could identify how social life was changing to produce the paradigm and that research studies were appearing that could be best understood and used from within this context. To some extent, however, their work was necessarily speculative. At the conclusion to their book, they set out the principles for a new way forward in research. Here it was maintained that in accord with the way that everyday life is lived out, it is important to begin research on the local level. This does not rule out considering the place of global media, or mean the resurrection of under-theorized concepts of face-to-face community (see further, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, in press), but facilitates the analysis of the interaction between the local and global in concrete places, where most people live (see also, for example, Morley, 2000). Second, they pointed to the role of identity formation and reformation in everyday life. It is important to stress that one of the key research questions is the *relative* importance of the connection to particular media in this sense, rather than any assumption that any one medium is of most importance (for example on the relative importance of radio, see Longhurst, Bagnall and Savage, 2001; and on the relative importance of popular music to young people see Carrabine and Longhurst, 1999 and Laughey, 2003). There is always a danger that those who are studying any one medium may overemphasize its importance across the social spectrum and to individuals. Finally, Abercrombie and Longhurst pointed to the need to consider the role of the media in the generation and reconstitution of social trust. This argument has increasingly been taken forward in the context of recent debates about social capital (see for example: Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000 and 2002), where the decline in social trust and the interconnected decline in social participation in civic organizations is attributed in strong measure to increased television consumption. However, this completely neglects the actual processes of interaction with television as generated by several decades of audience research. This conclusion left the SPP with a research agenda and a set of issues to explore. These issues will be considered in this paper with respect to museum visiting (for other media, see Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, in press). The data on museum visiting are drawn from a particular study to which we now turn.

## Research

In accord with the strategy of the SPP, we took four contrasting locations near Manchester, in the North West of England, as the site for between 40 and 50 in-depth interviews. In each case we took the electoral register as our sampling frame, took a one in three sample of particular streets and arranged interviews by letter, telephone and through knocking on doors. Our overall response rate of 34% is in line with other research of this type. However, although our research was based in particular locales, it was not predicated on the existence of bounded living. Rather, we saw the four places as sites from which we could empirically investigate the nature and extent of people's connectivity and its relationship to people's everyday life and experience.

It was central to our interest in understanding the significance of social and cultural practices in their contexts that we needed to be able to relate people's narratives to the sites of their work, residence and leisure. Our interview schedules were concerned to ask people about their daily routines around work, household, kin, friends and leisure, so that we could ascertain both the kinds of spatial ranges of such practices, and the extent to which people's narratives spontaneously invoked any other kinds of issue as they talked.

Our interviews were, therefore, semi-structured and covered the following topics: neighbourhood and locality; leisure practices and household relationships; work and work histories; and we concluded by asking for specific attitudes regarding class, ethnicity and other discrete topics. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. They lasted for between 45 minutes and two hours, with around one hour fifteen minutes being usual. We ended up with 182 transcribed interviews, approximating to 1.5 million words of transcription.

The four places we studied were each chosen to represent a different cultural milieu. The four areas were:

- **Wilmslow.** This is a market town twelve miles south of Manchester, which was located in the desirable north Cheshire suburban belt focusing on Macclesfield and Altrincham. We expected to find high status, affluent middle class. We interviewed in areas of detached housing, where properties were valued in 1997 at between £250,000 and £750,000 (see Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2004). We chose Wilmslow as a location where those with unusually large amounts of economic capital were located
- **Ramsbottom.** This is an old Lancashire mill town twelve miles north of Manchester and close to Bury. The area had been subject to considerable new building and had emerged as a popular commuter belt location. We interviewed in large older terraced and newer semi-detached housing, which sold for between £50,000 and £150,000. We chose this as an area where we expected to find those with reasonable amounts of economic and cultural capital to be located
- **Chorlton.** This is an area of urban gentrification close to the centre of Manchester, clustering around an area with new cafes, winebars, restaurants and specialist shops. We expected to find large numbers of academically well-qualified public sector workers, and interviewed in 'desirable' streets where properties ranged in price from £50,000 for small terraces to £200,000 for the largest terraced houses. We expected to find large numbers of respondents with high levels of cultural capital
- **Cheadle.** This was selected because it conformed to the stereotype of an inter-war suburban estate of three bedroom semi-detached housing. In 1997/98 houses were valued at between £50,000 and £65,000, and we expected to find large numbers of intermediate class white-collar workers.

**Table 1: Key Features of Achieved Sample**

Dimensions	Cheadle	Chorlton	Ramsbottom	Wilmslow
<b>Av Household income</b>	£23k	£30k	£36k	£68k
<b>% Graduates</b>	14	60	19	45
<b>% Upper service class</b>	3	18	26	42
<b>% service class</b>	24	60	62	63
Interviews	43	47	47	45
<b>Response rates</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>41%</b>

**Table 1** indicates the key features of our achieved sample, including the occupational class distribution of respondents, that of the main household earner, levels of household income and the educational qualifications of respondents.

**Talking museums**

Our research did not focus specifically on museums and we very rarely asked respondents direct questions about it. This is of significance as it enables us to discuss those points in the interviews where respondents ‘spontaneously’ spoke of museums and the practices associated with them. In total the topic of museums arose in this way in 23 interviews of the total of 182 analyzed for this topic, i.e.12.6%. These mentions were differentially distributed across the sample as follows: Chorlton 8; Ramsbottom 8; Wilmslow 4; and Cheadle 3. It is almost certain that this underestimates the extent to which museum visiting would have figured in the lives of this sample. However, it is unlikely that the way in which it would have been talked about would differ significantly from what we have found, as if the topic had been very important to the interviewees we would have expected them to talk about it further.

There are several different contexts in which discussions of museums arose: first, with respect to the nature of Manchester as a city; second, in connection with children and activity; third, with respect to the nature of the weekend; fourth, in the context of holidays; fifth, with regard to paid employment and work and finally in connection with particular enthusiasms of the type examined above. We shall discuss each of these contexts in turn, though of course they very often flow into each other, taking each context in turn. In what follows, the respondents are numbered and the letters C, D, R and W refer to Cheadle, Chorlton, Ramsbottom and Wilmslow respectively.

**1. Manchester and museums**

In our interviews we asked respondents for their views on Manchester as a place, their connections with it, ‘pride’ in it and use made of it for different purposes. This produced some narratives involving museums, which we will now consider. C71 had the following to say:

*Q: Just a question about what it’s like living in an area around Manchester. What do you think of Manchester as a city?*

A: It’s always nice to come back, wherever you’ve been, to Stockport or Manchester. I’ve seen some places all over England, working in them, and they’re all just as scruffy as Manchester, there’s nothing more scruffy than going through London.

*Q: Do you think Manchester’s changing at all?*

A: Oh I think it’s changing for the good. When I’m saying that, they’ve got G-Mex and they’ve got the Nynex, it’s changing all the time. Let’s hope that we get something done with these Commonwealth Games, because that’s going to bring in a lot of revenue to Manchester.



Q: *What use do you make of Manchester as a city?*

A: I don't. I just don't go in it at all. It's so vast that if you did go, you'd have to spend a full day there, and a full day doing shopping bores me. To walk round the museums, I've already done it, so I know I could go and see more art, but I've already done that.

Q: *You don't go in to use the pubs or the restaurants or anything like that?*

A: Well I go into Rusholme for the curries, yes, quite often.

**(C71: Male, Kitchen and Bedroom Fitter, self-employed joiner, age 54)**

For this respondent (C71), museums were part of the social fabric or the mental map of the city, even though he was not now engaged with the city very much, perhaps due to the size of the city. An explicit contrast is drawn between Manchester and London. Likewise D23 discussed museums in the context of things to do in the city, especially with children (see further below), and also made some explicit comparisons. Manchester is also considered as a convenient place in this respect and is at the centre of this respondent's narrative, in a way that contrasts with the previous comment:

Q: *Do you think Manchester is changing?*

A: Yeah, I mean, it's got to change anyway. I mean, everywhere changes. I think it often changes without you realising anyway because you tend to be a little bit wrapped-up in your own life, I think. My brother, he lives in London, so when he comes up he sees a huge change, whereas I don't. It really doesn't look that much different to me, but I'm sure it does all the time.

Q: *What use do you make of Manchester itself?*

A: I work there. I suppose I socialise there all the time. Obviously, we go to the museums and the galleries and whatever with the children.

Q: *Is that something you do a lot?*

A: Well no, because I think once you've been once or twice a year that's enough because there's not enough of them to go. I mean, more often than not we'll drive out to places as well, because there's like Eureka! in Huddersfield and the Zoo in Chester, so Manchester's good because it's close to get to anywhere; there's a lot of places around it, whereas in Manchester itself, I think there's quite a few things lacking like that for the size of the city. I do think there could be more family orientated things, which we could go to.

**(D23: Male, Operations Manager, Age 34)**

R145 exhibits a similar set of themes. The city is narrated through a set of 'consumption' practices or spaces. We found that this is a very common way of discussing the city in our research more widely, rather than, for example in terms of the politics of the city. Museum visiting is on a par with shopping, or visiting a theatre in the 'morass' of the city.

Q: *What about Manchester as a city?*

A: It's a bit disturbing at works, because there's a morass of people spreading out in all directions and I find it difficult to get into it. When you get to know it a bit more you realise that there's districts, which have their own identity. I think it's quite an

attractive city in a lot of ways, it's bigger than Leicester, although in Leicester we had theatre things of course, but not the big theatres. We occasionally go to the theatre.

Q: *Anywhere in particular?*

A: At the Opera House or the Palace, we've also been to the Bridgewater Hall. So from that point of view there's a lot more amenities in Manchester but I don't feel that we've got to know it properly yet. I know the layout of the city and that, but we're still learning really, even having been here for four years.

Q: *So you do make use of Manchester, for shopping and other things?*

A: Yes, we go shopping or we go to the theatre, the Bridgewater Hall, we've been to the science museum and places like that.

Q: *Are those one offs so far, like the Bridgewater Hall for example?*

A: We've only been once so far, but we were so impressed we will go again; it's a wonderful place.

**(R145: Male, Chartered Electrical Engineer, Age 62)**

R158 discusses the place of the museum in the city in a similar way. Again the activity is on a par with shopping and connects to weekend and child centered activity:

Q: *What about Manchester, do you use Manchester at all?*

A: Yes we used to more before the bombing I think and we've started going back a little bit more now.

Q: *Is it for shopping?*

A: Shopping mainly, yes. We do go to the science and technology museum and then there's the one with the mummies and the animals, so if we do have a spare day on a weekend or it's half term we will have a run in to Manchester, not just for shops but for other things.

**(R158: Female, Housewife –previously clerical and bank worker, age 37)**

R4 develops these points and exemplifies some measure of pride in the city. This is connected to ideas of identity and especially to being northern (see Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, 2004). Again, museum visiting is on the same level as shopping. It is also something that is connected to the experience and activity of being a parent.

Q: *What do you think about living in an area around Manchester? D'you have any questions about living around Manchester? Has Manchester ever played any part in your life at all?*

A: Yeah I like being connected to Manchester really 'cos if I go anywhere and people say, Oh where d'you come from, like it will be when we go to Norfolk, I will tell them we lived near Manchester, even though we're like classed as Lancashire, I like to think as a city it's lovely. It's got a lot going for it, you know theatres and museums and stuff sort of like the music, the bands that have come out of Manchester. And I think it's just got its own identity really.



Q: *You quite liked it. Do you think it's changed in Manchester?*

A: Yeah I think it probably has over quite a few years really and it's become more trendy hasn't it really? That's the main thing. More sort of money coming into it really 'cos it's roots are really in industry aren't they and things have changed all over the North West in a sense. I mean at one point, when we were buying the house here people were wanting to move up to commuter London really um 'cos London was the one place that was seen as very different, but I think that's spread to various cities hasn't it? And I think Manchester particularly has been influenced by London really and has changed.

Q: *Right. What use do you make of Manchester? Do you go there a lot?*

A: Yeah I go there for shopping and theatre. We go in for the museums to take E. Yeah and um what's it called, the main museum in St. Peter's Square that's got the Egyptology bit in it.

Q: *Yeah that's the Manchester museum.*

A: The Manchester museum is it. And then like to concerts and that.

Q: *Would you say once a month, once a week, once every couple of months?*

A: Once every couple of months. Yeah I would say.

Q: *And would you say you were proud of living in the area?*

A: Yeah. Yeah I am. I know that a lot of things have been said about it, but yeah I think it's nice really. Like I say I would always own up to belonging to Manchester really.

Q: *Yeah*

A: And even though we're moving away now, I always say it's not because I don't like living in the north. It's just life really, it's got to be the next step for us really. I'm proud of my roots really when people say, like when I've been in Norfolk people say, oh you've not got a local accent and you sort of see yourself as a northerner.

**(R4: Female, Housewife, age 30)**

These aspects are also connected in the following extract, which includes interchanges between the interviewee R30 - A1 - and his partner - A2:

Q: *So would you go ...apart from going to clubs, would you go to Manchester for other instances?*

A1: China Town. We go down.

Q: *For a meal?*

A1: To eat and to shop. We use the supermarkets down there don't we? And if there tends to be something on it's...

A2: We've been to the museum and some of the Art Galleries and things like that. You know for the day out - make a day of it.

- A1 We normally go to the Festival down the, not the festival, the circus in Chorlton - or that was where the festival was in Chorlton wasn't it? Well, it there's something down town we'll go down.
- Q: *Do you think Manchester is becoming a better City? To live in or to shop in or enjoy yourself?*
- A1 It's a bit of a building site at the moment since the bomb. The places that we tend to use.
- A2 It's good.
- A3 It's getting better in't it? There's a pride in Manchester at the moment and I think it might have a lot to do with this. I mean, United are doing well and we're rebuilding ourselves after the bomb; it's getting back together in't it? I used to live in Droyslden so I've said to you many times - I can feel it going back in like. I mean, the streets - I remember the Shambles, before they moved the Shambles and things like that.

**(R30: Male, Printer, Age 37)**

For the previous interviewees, the city is a lived set of contemporary consumption spaces, which include museums. The following respondent had a different understanding in that the museum was more clearly connected to heritage and the preservation of a particular version of industrial heritage:

- Q: *Here's a question here about how the Greater Manchester area has changed and what you think about the way our cities are changing these days. I mean, do you see yourself as having much connection with Manchester?*
- A: No, not really. I think my only connection with a place like Manchester. I love the culture. I love especially the restoration. My only connection with a place like Manchester really and the bigger cities is the fact that they seem more aware of the buildings that are around them as opposed to pulling them down and putting up these concrete jungles. I like architecture; I love to see an old building restored. You take G-Mex, the old railway stations, ok they're no longer functioning as what they were but they're no longer pulling these buildings down, they're looking at restoration now an awful lot. And I love the old Science Museums, love museums and things like that, you know, where they're got cars, planes. So my connection with a place like Manchester would be purely architectural, scientific, museum wise and just to see rather than pull them down, restore them. But apart from that shopping - no. No, don't go much. Very little contact with it, you know.

**(R28: Male, Self-Employed Landscape Gardener, age 45)**

Similar themes were conveyed by R43:

- Q: *I would like to ask you what it is like living around Manchester. What do you think of Manchester?*
- A: I quite like Manchester. Yes I like Manchester.
- Q: *Do you think it is changing at all?*
- A: We don't spend a lot of time in Manchester. We had a conference there last week

and it was organized by my boss. People coming in from outside and they were amazed

Q: What use do you make of it?

A: We have been on a lot of tours round Manchester and that is an eye opener and we have been to the theatres. When the children were small the art galleries, the Science Museum. We don't tend to do that but when the grandchildren come along we will do it again.

Q: Are you proud of living here?

A: Yes I think so

**(R43: Female, Secretary, Age 46)**

The final narratives concerning the city adopt a rather different stance. W1 is more concerned with the 'higher' cultural resonances of the museum in Manchester, as *separate* from the rest of the city, rather than being a *part* of it in the other narratives considered so far:

Q: *I was going to say, what use do you make of Manchester as a city?*

A: No, I don't go very often, not for any particular reason. I, when I was younger I used to go, I think the town centre is certainly in the evenings full of rough people, it's quite a good shopping centre

Q: *How often would you say you went there?*

A: I only go into Manchester, I would never ever dream of going to Manchester um to a restaurant.

Q: *No.*

A: I can't imagine, I mean anything I want to do... I mean I used to live in Manchester

Q: *Do you think it's changed at all?*

A: I don't think it's changed, Manchester... you know I actually know of people who live in Bahrain to come to work with us... and they worked sort of the mornings and they said they wanted to go to Manchester. And I thought what is there in Manchester and I mean I was really stuck you know I drove down there and I finished up in Manchester in the Science Museum.

Q: *Oh yeah.*

A: I went in there because it was of some interest.

Q: *Right*

**(W1: Male, Managing Director Engineering Company, Age 52)**

The following displays some similar themes:

Q: *And what use do you make of Manchester as a city?*

A: Yes. Yes, again the cultural things. I wouldn't choose to go to shop you know.

Q: *No. No.*

A: But as far as museums, art galleries

Q: *Do you visit it much?*

A: Occasionally.

Q: *OK.*

A: Yes. I'm proud of Manchester; I'm not born and bred here

**(W2: Female, Orchestral Musician and Mature Student, Age 36)**

It can be seen that in most of these narratives the museum is part of the flow of the city as a contemporary consumption space. Only for the Wilmslow residents is the museum separated from these sorts of consumption practices as something (perhaps) of greater value. This is significant as the Wilmslow residents have greater cultural capital than those from Cheadle and Ramsbottom. While it is very difficult to formulate such comparisons on the basis of a very small number of cases, there does seem to be some significance to this particular difference. The next general context of discussion connects museums to activities with children, which has already been raised in some of the extracts so far.

**2. Museums and children**

For some parents, for example D50, museum visiting was an activity to be engaged in with children, not just for a local day out:

Q: *Do you take your children to museums?*

A: Yes, they love it.

Q: *Do you go to Manchester or further afield?*

A: No we go further afield, go to museums in London and places like Eureka and the Tate. We go to a lot of museums.

**(D50: Male, Self-employed Designer, age 40)**

D98 expressed a more complex set of concerns, when he examined whom the museum visiting was for and how the situation was changing, as his children got older:

Q: *So that would be something that you'd do with them a reasonable amount?*

A: Yes a reasonable amount.

Q: *Where do you go?*

A: City centre, because again without a car you can get in and get out. We sometimes go to the museums, I'm a friend of the science and industry museum so I can get in there for free, so we sometimes pop along there, more for dad than them really.

Q: *Are they not very keen?*

A: They're not really. The oldest is thirteen and is now doing his own thing, you know,

wherever I lay my trainers, that's my home sort of thing. The middle one's into football on the rec across the road. And the youngest, is again already into doing what he wants to do. So I never push it, I've never been one of those that says we've got to go and do this, if they don't want to do it, the trouble is matching the three really, sometimes one does and two don't or two do and one doesn't. You can get round that easily enough by dumping one somewhere else and going off. We sometimes do things as a family but increasingly it's more fragmented, as their interests and friendship circles change and develop.

**(D98: Male, Secondary School Teacher, age 47)**

D98 drew out a number of important themes here showing the complexity of the interface between different life stages and the ages of children. It would appear that museum visiting is an activity for younger children and parents, which might mean that it would be something that is rediscovered by grandparents. So far we have seen how museums are narrated in the contexts of the city and parenting. In addition, to these broad aspects of everyday life, respondents sometimes considered museums more specifically in relation to the use of time and routines.

**3. Museums, weekends and holidays**

Sometimes museums fitted into the pattern of the weekend, as in the following:

Q: *What would you do on a typical weekend, starting with Friday?*

A: Probably at some stage during the weekend we would go for a meal to somewhere nearby. We would spend some time just pottering about, say doing the garden. We usually go to a film or get a video and usually go somewhere, eg this weekend we went to a museum but quite often it would be going to somewhere like Lyme Park and Hall.

Q: *Was it a local museum you went to?*

A: Manchester Museum, we have not been before.

Q: *So usually some sort of activity like that would be part of the weekend?*

A: Yes, generally.

**(D94: Male, Secondary School Teacher, Age 31)**

Such themes were further developed in the context of holidays, which also offer a rather different slant on activities with children. For both D47 and W50 the most recent holiday experienced was not typical or ideal. These narratives also demonstrate again the connection of the museum to the city, but in this sense to cities other than Manchester.

Q: *Where did you go for your last holiday?*

A: Prague - a three-day break.

Q: *Is that a normal way for holidays?*

A: Yes recently, a three-day break.

Q: *Would it be to a city?*

- A: Yes. We like to go to art galleries; actually my last one was not Prague, I took my son to Centre Parcs, just me and him. He really wanted to go, that is not my ideal holiday. My ideal is somewhere where you can go visit museums and art galleries, that sort of thing. But with children, well I would hate to do that so it is a bit tricky, so I took him to Centre Parcs because he has just had a serious operation on his arm, so it was like a treat before the operation. He loved it, I did not mind it. It was not too bad. I thought maybe we would meet other people, kids for him to play with but no and I had to do every activity with him. When we came back I had to sleep for a week I was exhausted but I was amazed that I could do that much so it was good for me.

**(D47: Female, Peripatetic Teacher, age 44)**

W50 likewise explained:

- Q: *Where did you go for your last holiday?*

A: Cyprus.

- Q: *Is that a normal holiday for you?*

A: No we have more interesting holidays. On our holidays we are very into history so we don't normally go on beach holiday we normally go on museums and things. We did the beach holidays when they were young but now we tend to go to a place and go round it so we went to Cape Cod and we went all the way round. They do live in villages like that one in Yorkshire, the national fishes and then we did London and Paris because they are ordinary. So Cyprus was unusual for us we were outside and we did very little. We did Paris at Easter for a week.

- Q: *So generally you like activity based holidays around cities?*

A: Yes

**(W50: Female, Dentist, age 42)**

In each of these cases, museums functioned as part of a higher cultural narrative of the ideal holiday, which was different from the one that the respondents had actually taken. In this sense, the museum becomes part of the narration of a more educational experience and functions as a marker in this respect. It is perhaps significant that these two narratives come from a Chorlton and a Wilmslow resident – the areas of higher cultural capital.

For an older respondent, a recent holiday was connected to the pleasures of grown up children, which reinforces the point made above about life stages:

- Q. *So again whilst what you are actually doing this year, it isn't the first time for you to go on holiday with them, so you do that in different ways?*

A. Yes in different ways because when the children were little we had a holiday home in North Wales and they would come and join us there. We had a very enjoyable holiday with them the back end of last year and my friend retired and gave us all a treat and paid for us to stay in a hotel, we stayed not far from Telford, the purpose was to visit Iron Bridge and we took in two national trust properties, 5 out of the 7 museums that make up Iron Bridge and that was great fun.

**(W82: Female, Retired Clerical Worker, age not given)**



In the narratives considered so far, museums have been considered in the context of consumption and leisure activities. For a smaller number of interviewees, museums were connected to work.

#### 4. Museums and work

In several interviews, museums were considered (usually very briefly) in the context of work. For example, C24:

Q: *Let me ask a few questions about your family and how that affects you social life. Can I firstly ask about other people living in this house? You say you've split up from your wife; she's not living here any more?*

A: No, she's not here any more. My two daughters are here.

Q: *Do they go to school or have they left school?*

A: They're both working.

Q: *What kind of things do they do?*

A: She's a trainee beautician at Debenhams, and the other one works for the museum and artworks, she's a historian, she's still a student really but she still does a bit for Stockport historians.

#### **(C24: Male, Self-employed gardener, age 50)**

Even more briefly, here is another respondent:

Q: You mentioned work, could I ask you what you do and how you got to that point?

A: I'm a manager at Hope Hospital in Salford. I've been working for about eleven years, the first job I did after I finished my postgraduate degree in Manchester, which took an awful long time to finish, I was put on a six month Manpower Services Commission at Manchester Museum of Science & Industry.

#### **(D103: Male, NHS Operations Manager, age 37)**

These were only relatively fleeting references, however, for D50 museums connected in a more significant way with the reality and imagined possibilities of work:

Q: *What are your main hopes for your future employment?*

A: That I never have to work for anybody again. I always want to be my own boss.

Q: *So you want to carry on doing what you are now, carry on at the same level?*

A: No I want to expand it, but not a lot. I would like to get 2 or 3 employees, have a good group of people who are talented but who also get on and that I can keep work coming in and that there is a varied mix of work. I have definitely got an ambition to do a particular type of build and one day I am sure it will happen.

Q: *What sort of building?*

A: It is to do a museum or gallery but do it possibly as a conversion, to do the

architecture and fit it out. That is my dream.

Q: *Do you like museums and art galleries?*

A: Yes. I design mainly museums exhibitions, but I have also done building design. Working with an architectural practice there is a very good chance. We are getting quite close to it; it's not an unrealistic dream.

Q: *You would get a commission to do the whole thing?*

A: Yes and I would also like to be able to have the time to do other things like doing stone carving, keep involved in that. I would quite like to continue doing the teaching although I am going to have to drop that quite soon because of the pressures of work. I think that when I get older I can see me being a visiting lecturer.

**(D50: Male, Self-employed designer, age 40)**

For others, museums were simply part of the routine nature of the working day:

Q: *So lunch breaks, what would you do?*

A: Well I used to work at Salford University branch and I used to go down to the photographic museum, I did quite enjoy that.

**(R164: Male, Bank Official (call centre), age 41)**

Others' work brought them into direct contact with the museum:

Q: *And how did you get into book conservation?*

A: I served an apprenticeship in the 1950s at a jobbing printers in Accrington. In those days a lot of jobbing printers employed crackle binders, mainly doing ledgers for the mills, but also other work. That's very much the exception today, they're still a little bit of that sort of thing, but that's how I got into crackle binding. From there I went to teacher training to go into further education and did a two-year course in London. I then never followed that up full time, though for many years I've taught bookbinding on a part time basis. I joined Her Majesty's Stationery Office about thirty years ago, mainly buying for the public services, mainly bookbinding, we used to see to the judges' libraries, all the courts, in the early day there was a lot of ledger work for all the government offices. Eventually I became the manager of a new binders set up at Chadderton, it did all the work for the British museum and that's really how I got more onto the conservation side. I also realised that conservation would be a growing thing in the future for the general craft work was going down, because of rising costs, and I thought there was a good future in conservation and I put a lot of effort into that, learning more and more about it. Eventually I started with my own business part time from home and eventually took early retirement terms from HMSO and started a full time business here.

**(R76: Male, book Binder, age 58)**

There was a range of ways that the museum connected to work. Some of these seem relatively superficial and almost chance occurrences. Others relate to everyday routines, and the imagination of what work could be.

## 5. Museums and enthusiasms

Our final section considers the way in which museums were connected to interests or enthusiasms. In the first extract, museums come into an exchange concerning aeroplanes:

A: One of the biggest aircraft firms in the world, they were competitors to the Americans; De Havilland's are no more and, you know, gone completely. And they made some beautiful aeroplanes. The Tridents would have been a best seller. It was tailored to meet the requirements, which didn't suit.

Q: *I remember, they've got a Trident haven't they in the museum in Manchester - is that a Trident?*

A: No, it's a big aeroplane the Trident. Well, the Trident three is.

Q: *But haven't they got a part of it?*

A: Just a part of the nose section, yeah.

### (C29: Male, Retired Leading Tradesman, age 71)

D93 was a drawing and gallery enthusiast:

Q: *What about hobbies and interests, things you like to do?*

A: I like walking, I like swimming, I don't really like sport very much, I like art, and I suppose it's my main interest.

Q: *Do you do that a lot?*

A: Yes I do, I like going to art galleries, and I go fairly frequently.

Q: *What got you involved in drawing, is it a long-term thing?*

A: Yes.

Q: *And you would actually go to different galleries as well to look at stuff?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Just in Manchester?*

A: Mainly Manchester but if I went somewhere else, like when I go to London I would go to say the British Museum, not really the Tate or whatever, not really, I mean I have been to those galleries but I wouldn't say I regularly go.

Q: *Where do you go when you go in Manchester then?*

A: The Whitworth, City Art Gallery, that's it really. If I see something advertised, an exhibition or something, I might go and see it.

### (D93: Female, Self-employed glassware maker, age 34)

Having considered key narratives in this section, we now discuss the implications of these narratives for the theoretical perspective that we set out at the beginning of the paper.

### **Conclusions: spectacle, performance, imagination and identity.**

We suggested at the beginning of this paper that audiences were important and needed to be conceptualised in a particular way. In arguing for the significance of the SPP we pointed to the need to look at audiences in the context of everyday activity, suggesting the potential for a move away from consideration of museum visitors. In the terminology of the SPP, museum visitors can be seen as a simple audience. To reiterate a point made earlier, the SPP does not suggest that such studies are insignificant, rather they need to be located relative to mass and diffused audience activity. We think that the data gathered during the course of our study of a range of cultural practices of broadly middle class people (we have not tended to go into great detail on the differences between the areas in this paper – see further Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, in press) makes our case. Museums were considered in the context of the lived and imagined experience of the city, parenthood, routines, holidays and work. Moreover, certain identities came to the fore, particularly those connected to a sense of belonging to place and to parenthood (see Bagnall, Longhurst and Savage, 2004 and Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst, in press). It is the everydayness of these activities that is arresting. Only on relatively rare occasions did the ‘high’ cultural themes of the museum have particular resonance. Museum audiencing is a form of consumption and most people seem to be in consumer mode when they do and talk about it. In the main, museums seem not to be about cultural capital in any narrow sense, though for some emphasis was placed on the higher cultural capital significance of the museum with respect to the city and holidays. For some people museum visiting is a salient part of the identity of the parent. These general issues are key aspects of the SPP.

The museum is part of the spectacle of the city. It is important to emphasise that we are not suggesting that the spectacle of the city is significant in the sense that the spectacle is extraordinary. Buildings in Manchester are not in the main exceptional and the cityscape is not one that attracts the gaze of those concerned with more cutting edge architecture and so on. The reality is more mundane, but nonetheless significant. The city is known as a set of consumption spaces that can be viewed and lived. The city is not mapped in political-economic space, but as a consumption space. Imagination comes into play in the conceptualisation of that space as well as the imagination of alternative forms of work that might be related to the museum. It can also be argued that in important ways the connection of the museum to children involves imagination and performance. For some respondents, the museum visit is part of what defines a good parent, so even if this were not happening (as in the case of holidays) it would be part of what should happen. In the way that cutting recipes out of a magazine can be part of performing being a good cook and mother, so consideration and imagination of a visit to the museum performs a desired state. As we have found in examining narratives of involvement in activity with children, parents talk of activity in ways that suggest their real and imagined ways of performing parenthood. However there are variations here between men and women and between the areas that we studied.

In these respects and in discussions of the use of time, very mundane everyday practices, such as what happens at the weekend and in the lunch hour connect to the performance of roles, which are refracted through the experience of the simple audience activity of museum visiting and it might be suggested through the mass audience activity of television viewing. This is important as we wish to connect the ordinariness of museums as part of the audience processes of everyday life to wider themes of spectacle and performance. Everyday life is both ordinary in that people narrate their experiences to shopping, parenting and so on, as well as extraordinary in that people define themselves and who they are in distinction from others through such processes.

It is relevant to note the traces of high cultural modes that exist in this consumption/spectacle space. Museums are valued in this way, but rarely explicitly narrated in these terms. These seem to be traces of a subordinate and perhaps old-fashioned discourse. However, these traces do have some significance in defining the terms of what is to be valued by some people. In addition, it can be seen that some people are museum enthusiasts, who will devote much of their time to the activity. However, it is important not to generalise from this type of person, as the museum experience, as we have shown is much more likely to be narrated

through a consumer lens. This parallels such differences that have been identified with respect to other media.

The study of museum audiences can therefore indicate more that the processes of visiting per se. In taking this topic seriously, we have perhaps shown how museums figure in the popular consciousness of everyday audience activity. We would suggest that further work in the vein would be likely to show the salience of this conceptualisation of the audience. It would certainly be worth asking more specific questions than we did about museum visiting to further explore how the museum is used in the everyday performance of a range of consumption and identity practices. Such research would also facilitate further and more detailed analysis of any narratives so generated than we have been able to conduct in this more exploratory paper.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> For an argument that Abercrombie and Longhurst underplay the nature and extent of communication in the simple audience see Crawford, 2004.

### References

Abercrombie, N. and Longhurst, B. (1998) *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: Sage.

Appadurai, A. (1993) 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' in B. Robins (ed.) *The Phantom Public Sphere*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Bacon-Smith, C. (1992) *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bagnall, G. (1996) 'Consuming the Past' in S. Edgell, K. Hetherington and A. Warde (eds.) *Consumption Matters*, Oxford: Blackwell/*The Sociological Review*.

Bagnall, G. (1999) *Mapping the Museum: The Cultural Consumption and Production of Two North West Heritage Sites*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Salford.

Bagnall, G. (2003) 'Performance and Performativity at Heritage Sites' *Museum and Society*, 1, 2, 87-103, [www.le.ac.uk/ms/m+s/issue\\_1.2.html](http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/m+s/issue_1.2.html)

Bagnall, G., Longhurst, B. and Savage, M. (2004) Children, Belonging and Social Capital: The PTA and Middle Class Narratives of Social Involvement in the North-West of England, *Sociological Research Online*, Vol 8, No 4

Baron, S., Field, J. and Schuller, T. (eds.) (2000) *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boden, S. (2003) *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience*, London: Palgrave.

Carrabine, E. and Longhurst, B. (1999) 'Mosaics of Omnivorousness: Suburban Youth and Popular Music', *New Formations*, 38, 125-140.

Crawford, G. (2003) 'The Career of the Sport Supporter: The Case of the Manchester Storm' *Sociology*, 37, 2, 219-237.

Crawford, G. (2004) *Consuming Sport: Sport, Fans and Culture*, London: Routledge.

Ellis, J. (1983) *Visible Fictions*, London: Routledge

Falk, J.H and Dierking, L., (2000) *Learning from Museums: Visitors Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, California: Altamira Press.

- Goffman, E. (1963) *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*, Glencoe: Free Press.
- Goulding, C (2000) The Museum Environment and the Visitor Experience, *European Journal of Marketing*, 34, 3/4 pp261-278
- Grossberg, L. 1987. 'The Indifference of Television', *Screen* 28: 2, 28-45.
- Hermes, J. (1995) *Reading Women's Magazines*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Hills, M. (2002) *Fan Cultures*, London: Routledge
- Hooper-Greenhill E (ed.) (2000) *The Educational Role of the Museum*, (second edition), Leicester Museum Studies Readers, London: Routledge
- Jenkins, H. (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Kavanagh, G (2000) *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, New York: Leicester University Press
- Laughey, D. (2003) *Music in Young People's Everyday Lives*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Salford.
- Lin, N. (2001) *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Longhurst, B., Bagnall, G. and Savage, M. (2001) 'Ordinary Consumption and Personal Identity: Radio and the Middle Classes in the North West of England' in A. Warde and J. Gronow (eds) *Ordinary Consumption*. London: Routledge.
- Lowenthal, D (1985) *The Past is a Foreign Country*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Moorhouse, H.F, (1991) *Driving Ambitions: An Analysis of the American Not Rod Enthusiasm*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Morley, D. (2000) *Home Territories: Media, mobility and identity*. London: Routledge.
- Newman, A. & McLean, F. (2002) 'Architectures of inclusion, museums galleries and inclusive communities' in R Sandell (ed) *Museums, Society, Inequality*, London:Routledge.
- Penley, C. (1992) 'Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Study of Popular Culture' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P.Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Putnam, R. D. (ed) (2002) *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ross, M. (2003) *Decoding Museum Gazes: A Study of Visitors to Local Museums*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Keele.
- Savage, M., Bagnall, G. and Longhurst, B. (2001) 'Ordinary, Ambivalent and Defensive: Class identities in the Northwest of England, *Sociology*, 35, 4, 875-892.



Savage, M., Bagnall, G. and Longhurst, B. (2004) Place, Belonging and Identity: Globalisation and the 'Northern' Middle Class' in T. Bennett and E. Silva (eds) *Cultures and the Everyday*, London: Sociology Press.

Savage, M., Bagnall, G. and Longhurst, B. (in press) *Globalisation and Belonging*, London: Sage.

Silverstone, Roger (1994) *Television and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.

von Lehn, D., Heath, C. and J. Hindmarsh (2001) Exhibiting Interaction: Conduct and collaboration in museums and galleries. *Symbolic Interaction*, 24 (2) 189-216.

**\* Authors' details**

**Brian Longhurst** is Professor of Sociology at Salford University.

**Gaynor Bagnall** is Lecturer in the Sociology of Consumption at Liverpool John Moores University.

**Mike Savage** is Professor of Sociology at Manchester University.