

Sheffield is not Sexy.

By Stephen Mallinder

Abstract

The city of Sheffield's attempts, during the early 1980s, at promoting economic regeneration through popular cultural production were unconsciously suggestive of later creative industries strategies. Post-work economic policies, which became significant to the Blair government a decade later, were evident in urban centres such as Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield in nascent form. The specificity of Sheffield's socio-economic configuration gave context, not merely to its industrial narrative but also to the city's auditory culture, which was to frame well intended though subsequently flawed strategies for regeneration. Unlike other cities, most notably Manchester, the city's mono-cultural characteristics failed to provide an effective entrepreneurial infrastructure on which to build immediate economic response to economic rationalisation and regional decline. Top-down municipal policies, which embraced the city's popular music, gave centrality to cultural production in response to a deflated regional economy unable, at the time, to sustain rejuvenation through cultural consumption. Such embryonic strategies would subsequently become formalised though creative industry policies developing relationships with local economies as opposed to urban engineering through regional government.

Building upon the readings of industrial cities such as Liverpool, New Orleans and Chicago, the post-work leisure economy has increasingly addressed the significance of the auditory effect in cities such as Manchester and Sheffield. However the failure of the talismanic National Centre for Popular Music signifies the inherent problems of institutionalizing popular cultural forms and resistance of sound to be anchored and contained. The city's sonic narrative became contained in its distinctive patterns of cultural production and consumption that ultimately resisted attempts at compartmentalization and representation through what became colloquially known as 'the museum of popular music'. A personal narrative that is inextricably bound up in the construction of the city's sound has informed many aspects of the article, providing subjective context to the broader discourse, that of sound and the city image.

How to Retune a City

Attempts to resurrect a cultural phoenix from the extinguished ashes of Sheffield's moribund industrial past were unsympathetically derided by the words of Conservative Member for Parliament, Michael Fabricant. Unwilling to acknowledge the growing momentum of the leisure economy in urban regeneration, Fabricant's headline-generating

assessment that, “Sheffield is not sexy, it is old and dirty”¹ reinforced the perception of sclerotic post-work northern cities that defy restoration. The politician’s belief that an engrained deficit of glamour held back the city’s pursuit of the World Athletics Championships in the early 1990s suggested that cities like Sheffield, once the engine room of the nation’s manufacturing hegemony, had atrophied irredeemably. The city’s push for global interaction, through an international sporting event where commerce and service are deemed high-end goals, was compromised by the unfashionable image of an archaic and corroding landscape. The struggle for control and re-branding of its urban image is one that provides a narrative of well-meaning, but flawed, urban engineering in which the city attempts to negotiate its popular cultural present through its industrial past. The process also signifies the centrality played by the cultural industries, of leisure, sport and music, in redefining post-industrial economies and infrastructures. Sheffield sought cultural redemption in and through a sonic landscape continually shaped and stretched through osmosis by the once relentless rhythms of the city’s industrial pulse and emerging popular pastimes. Sheffield’s working class consumption and production practices grew from the dancehalls and working men’s clubs, through sixties’ northern soul, to eighties electronica and millennial super-clubs, refracted through the sardonic pop and rock from Pulp to the Arctic Monkeys and Richard Hawley. In the hiatus of post-work Britain popular music forms began to occupy the tarnished shell of Sheffield’s disappearing economy to become valuable collateral in the push for its sustained regeneration.

The indivisibility of the city’s political and economic narrative from its social and cultural history inevitably resulted in Sheffield’s creative production and consumption being built upon the bones of its past. The significance of this auditory culture, turned bankable commodity, is in the city itself. Sheffield’s municipal infrastructure, in the

¹ Source: *Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport Minutes of Evidence*. Examination of Witnesses (Questions 20 - 39) 16 October 2001 B. Kerslake and S. Brailey <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmcmums/264/1101607.htm> Accessed:15.11.05.

absence of any effective entrepreneurial mechanism, became inevitably enmeshed in the reification of the city's sound and unconscious celebration of its popular cultural forms. The sonic landscape, constructed upon its urban topology capturing the sound waves and rhythmic eddies, shapes their movement, reception, incubation and production within the community's shared past. Emerging from its embryonic industrial and wartime soundscapes, Sheffield's cultural narrative became most clearly identified in the 1980's where the effects of industrial deceleration spectacularly encountered the dialectic force of accessible technology and its promises of modernity. The centrality of music as cultural currency, and as a solution to urban regeneration, lies at the heart of the pioneering attempt in the development of Sheffield's Cultural Quarter. Significantly the city elected to regulate and administer nascent creative industry strategies, in a deflated economy with a meager history of local entrepreneurialism. The subsequent failure of the city's talismanic National Centre for Popular Music signifies the inherent problems of institutionalizing popular cultural forms and resistance of sound to be anchored and contained.

Metal Machine Music

A subjective assessment of the transformations that have taken place in the configuration of the city's popular music requires justification. Therefore, I confess to a personal narrative that is inextricably bound up in the sound of Sheffield. Born and raised in the city, I had, through working in the traditional steel mills, first hand knowledge of the strident, though decelerating rhythms of the city's primary industry.² I led a dual life from 1982 commuting on an almost weekly basis from London to work and record before finally severing physical ties in 1995 when I moved to Australia. I returned frequently, and permanently returned to the United Kingdom in 2007. However, my periods of absence could not erode a perception of me being identified with a specificity of time and place. My musical heritage has rendered me hermetically sealed and subsequently experience schizophrenic feelings of dislocated personal identity. An increasingly

² On leaving school, in 1973, I spent a year as a labourer in the city's oldest cutlery manufacturers, Sheffield Metal Company, which closed as a smelting works and relocated in the early 1980s. The brand name is still used and retails through an outlet in central London: Sheffield Metal Company, 5 Cavendish Place, London, W1

connected and mediated world has left a 'past' self orbiting as a perennial present; my musical legacy has been re-packaged, re-marketed and commodified to the extent that I, like many others, have fallen prey to a sonic and visual 'reverse Dorian Gray' syndrome. Digital simulacra has left, as with most first-world people today, a virtual-self untarnished by the encroachment of linear time, free to move through an on-line world. Nevertheless in my case this simulated self has been a *virtuality* fixed largely at the point of others choosing. It has however left me with a sense of my personal embodiment of sonic mobility, a paradigm of human movement – sonic consumption, incubation and translation – transcending time and space. I am like, like everyone, a mobile encoder and decoder, the sum of my social and cultural interactions, which manifest themselves, in the sonic realm, through music production. Consequently, I have become synonymous with a spatial and chronological Sheffield, significantly one that has been central in informing the construction of the contemporary, self-regenerating city.

Sheffield's form, as a northern industrial city, has been mythologized through function. The footprint of heavy industry has remained despite the encroachment of economic rationalization, which left behind its steel mills and factories as empty husks, a reminder of an earlier model of globalization and industrial hegemony. However, as a city it has redefined itself aurally, characterized through a bricolage of archaic industry and shiny technology, the city's rhythms have reverberated through popular music forms. A paradoxical fusion – the sounds of metal and soul, steel and electronica, industrial bleeps and lyrical mockery – popular culture wrapped in the tarnished glamour of self depreciation: the noise of iron and irony. 'Sheffield Steel' became not only a manufactured label for the city, but also a convenient brand, which encapsulated the reification of an urban sound that somehow embraced everything from the post-soul of Joe Cocker and heavy metal of Def Leppard to early techno of the Warp label. The arcane bleeps of The Forgemasters and Sweet Exorcist fused the soulful affections of Detroit and Chicago with sonar pulses of an industrial city in its death throws have continued through to Sheffield's present incumbent, the specific 'niche' sound³. However

³ Emerging from the garage, 2-step and dub-step rhythms, the city's Niche Club has developed a minimalist sound that has become branded the 'niche sound'.

this construction of a mythologized city and its onomatopoeic sound fails to address the heterogeneous cultural makeup of an urban centre impacted by cultural forces both real and commodified. A city with a diverse ethnicity, compounded by industry to produce a strong working class bias, Sheffield's inclusivity has produced complex cultural production and patterns of consumption.

The perception of Sheffield's totemic sound as being self-referential, internally constructed upon industrial idiosyncrasies, problematizes all meanings of the mobility of sound. The city had been mono-cultural in its economic construction, however it was more diverse and complex in its social and ethnic make up. Sheffield, as regional web chroniclers *ayup.co* observe, had shown an acceptance of cosmopolitan sounds in the pre-war period, where the 'big band' sound had been swept aside by the influx and impact of Jazz on the city.⁴ Subsequent post war colonial shifts were beginning to characterize the demographic make up of many urban centres. In the case of Sheffield, the bias towards a primary, rather than secondary, consumer manufacturing, meant that industry did draw fewer and later migrants. Research by Sheffield University's Paul White indicates early resistance to post-war migration and an untypical ethnic composition, in which migrant figures still lag behind the national average.⁵ Figures infer but perhaps fail to account for the true cultural effect of migration into industrial regions, which until the post-war period remained largely homogenous. The most recent 2001 census indicated a population of almost one million with 3.7% Black, 7.9% Asian and significantly a full-

⁴ Source: www.ayup.co.uk.

⁵ The 1951 census showed only 32 people born in Jamaica and by 1981 ratios of Pakistani and Indian migrant considerably above and below the national average respectively. The 2001 census indicates Sheffield's migrant population of 5.8% born outside the EEC is below that of comparable cities for example Manchester, Nottingham and Birmingham. Source: P. White and Dr S. Scott, *Migration and Diversity in Sheffield: Past, Present and Future*, (Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, Monday 20 November 2006)

Accessed online:

<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/EasySite/lib/serveDocument.asp?doc=92399&pgid=106674>

Viewed: 06.08.07.

time student population of 25.6%.⁶ The use of statistical evidence to quantify social and cultural effect is inherently problematic. Within urban centres the very visible and frequently pro-active roles played by migrants in the city's social milieu and subsequent creative industries are contextual, not merely statistical. During the embryonic period for Sheffield's popular music in the sixties and seventies, the West Indian Social Club, ironically situated in the industrial heartland of Attercliffe, suggested a nascent cultural fusion and the beginnings of an adjustment to a perceived exotic alterity. With rising purchasing power, white working class youth progressed popular music's cultural cachet. The city's position in the Northern Soul circuit was clearly being recognized. Dave Berry, a local R&B singer and an established pop star in the 1960s, acknowledged the growing allure of youth, music and status, describing *The Mojo Club* as "wild and fashionable", *The Esquire* as "sophisticated and jazzy", and *The Black Cat* as, Peter Stringfellow's "thriving club."⁷ The predominantly black American music played in these clubs was progressed through fringe scenes such as Sheffield's, where the post-war growth of a specific consumer demographic, working class youth, in manufacturing regions. Built upon the dancehall and record culture of the big band era, the flow of records through ports into northern cities, where new surplus income encouraged, for both white and migrant communities, increased consumption. Soul, ska, and blue-beat, sold through independent record shops with the most iconic being Violet May's⁸, became a significant component of the city's cultural collateral.

My epiphany, in respect of music's mobility and cosmopolitan potential, emerged at an early age. Growing up on the adjacent street to my own was a young basketball player, Michael Grudge, who despite failing to make the grade on college circuit, remained in the USA to become a founding member of seminal funk band Brass Construction. An acknowledgement emerges that music, though spatially defined, was nevertheless built

⁶ Source: <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/guide/seat-profiles/sheffieldcentral> Accessed 06.08.07.

⁷ Interview with journalist Martin Lilleker - www.ayup.co.uk

⁸ Violet May's Record store remained the chief stockist of rock and roll, R&B, soul and reggae in South Street in the city's market area between from the 1950s. Moving in the early 1970s to a city centre location, the store finally closed in the late 1980s.

upon a more chaotic cultural collision. Music that I perceived to be cosmopolitan was being created by something as prosaic as a local boy; an innate fluidity that enabled sound to transcend the limitations of geographical place, here reified through the movement of people. Soul music, through its global dissemination, had created a community that reached from the California to South Yorkshire through the shared experiences of consumption and dancing. As a teenager my identity was purposely built upon reggae and soul music; the clubs previously mentioned by Berry were off limits to a high school pupil, but tantalizing nonetheless. *The Mojo* club was not only on my route to school, taunting me daily with the nocturnal pleasures of soul music, but was also enshrined when at 15 years of age – my age at the time – Stevie Wonder had apparently bewitched the crowd with his piano and harmonica skills. Little surprise then when a year later I risked ejection from the Sheffield City Hall by walking up to the stage to shake hand with soul singer Martha Reeves as she performed with her Vandellas. The need to find some way of grounding this distant and esoteric music was done through a display of physicality that could supersede mere consumption. I was unaware that I was being acknowledged by someone who was from a fragmenting urban environment and comparable economic mono-culture – ‘Motor-City’, Detroit – which would later negotiate a parallel sonic path to Sheffield in its techno evolution.

If the dissemination and consumption of sounds and rhythms from America and the West Indies, of ska and soul, were evidence of social and cultural mobility, then they were symptomatic of increasing media incursions into urban spaces to fuse with the internal sounds of the city. The reduction of music to merely popular cultural phenomena risks excluding a broader sonic context. The complexity of our reception of sound invariably overlooks the peripheral, environmental and subconscious which can become manifest in local and regional nuances. Urban ambience can instinctively inform regional sounds and permeate through to popular texts. Traditionally environmental sounds have been translated into cultural forms, indigenous and folk music have grounded their authenticity by their incorporation. Jon Hassell’s⁹ reading of South East Asian gamelan gives

⁹ Jazz musician Jon Hassell, spent considerable time incorporating the indigenous music of South East Asia into his recordings. The most notable being *Earthquake Island*

recognition to the sounds of the elements, in this case water, in indigenous music, and so the elements of the urban environment become more obliquely incorporated into popular music's syncretic form. The need to find meaning in sound requires wider contextual reading, the incursion of auditory place into the spaces of production becomes part of this constructed meaning. Anthony McCann, in addressing a tangential issue of copyright, cautions against music's homogenous labeling, to enable convenient compartmentalization suggesting, "in many disciplines, 'music' is often analytically separated and abstracted from social context in order to justify the validity of using the category as a universal label."¹⁰ If social and personal components play a formative part, we must avoid, in McCann's words:

A systematic exclusion of people, relationships, power, meaning, emotions, and the dynamics of social interaction from all relevant discussion.¹¹

The construction of sounds and rhythms is contextual, encompassing all aspects of daily life not merely confined to the perpetuation of existing paradigms. 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, its elemental essence contained in rolling mills and blast furnaces.

Growing up in the city like my peers who produced music and formed bands in the late seventies and eighties,¹² I was suffused with stories of the Sheffield's recent past. Along with London, Liverpool, Coventry and other strategic centres, the city had been a target for German bombers during World War II, primarily focused on the industrial epicenter,

(Tomato Records, 1978) and *The Dream Theory of Malaya* (EG Records, 1981), which utilized the sound of the region including water as percussion.

¹⁰ *Beyond the Term "Music"* November, 2002 Anthony McCann, p.2 Accessed online: 22.08.07 <http://www.beyondthecommons.com/aaa2002.pdf> p.2.

¹¹ *ibid.* p.3.

¹² In this period my partners and I in Cabaret Voltaire – Chris Watson and Richard Kirk – were part of a close knit community with others who went on to form bands such as, The Human League, Clockdva, Heaven 17, BEF, Comsat Angels, Chakk and ABC

the Don Valley, but with several incursions into the city's commercial heart.¹³ Mythologized by a war time generation, the raids has emanated largely from anecdotal stories of the community spirit fashioned, particularly in blitz torn London¹⁴, by a collective identity constructed through adversity. The residual effect of these stories was a sonic implant, an urban and industrial landscape mediated by the unpredictable rhythm of technological warfare. The Blitz not only produced an onomatopoeic punctuation to existing aural delineation of steel and heavy industry but in Sheffield it became mythologized by its collision with the city's social and cultural life when a bomb hit the Marples, a talismanic hotel and dance hall in the city centre.¹⁵ The accepted tenet, that visual images help form an integral part of spatial and chronological narratives, seems to be marginalized with sonic counterparts. Aural and olfactory idiosyncrasies of a particular location should be a vital part of that constructed landscape and not fall prey to sensory hierarchies. Conversely soundscapes should not be assembled through purely cultural representations. The city's image is structured within the context of its built environment, its history inextricably linked to the commercial and industrial infrastructure that, in the case of Sheffield, would eventually accommodate the creative businesses and cultural industries of re-generation, still resonating with sounds of the past.

¹³ The first Bomb fell in Sheffield on the night of August 18th, 1940, and the last fell on July 28th, 1942. The raids on Sheffield is really the story of the blitz nights of December 12th and 15th, 1940 when German aircraft dropped somewhere in the region of 450 high explosives bombs, land mines and incendiaries. During these two nights 668 civilians and 25 servicemen were killed. A further 1,586 people were injured and over 40,000 more were made homeless. A total of 3,000 homes were demolished, another 3,000 were badly damaged and 72,000 properties suffered some damage.

Source: www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com

¹⁴ "Nightly, a community of 60,000 would convene underground in London."

Source: www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwtwo/blitz

¹⁵ Marples Dancehall was hit on the night of December 12th 1940. The most accurate estimate is that 77 people were in Marples at the time of the explosion and 70 died as a result of the injuries they received.

Source: www.chrishobbs.com/marples1940htm

Note: The hotel reopened after the war and became an occasional venue for electronic bands in the 1980s.

The People's Republic

The Sheffield epithet: “The Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire.”¹⁶

Any analysis of Sheffield's cultural narrative must acknowledge the region's economic and political heritage, which frames its social interactions and fashions its sense of community. Geographically situated along the perimeter of the Yorkshire–Nottinghamshire coalfield and at the confluence of the Don and Sheaf Rivers, Sheffield's pre-industrial history dates back to the Roman settlement, Templeborough, the heart of the subsequent steel industry during the 19th and 20th centuries. The city's primary production base generated a predominantly working class demographic, which to the present day remains embodied in its two football teams and through close ties to the Labour Party. Apart from two years in the late 1960s, the Labour Party has controlled the city since 1926.¹⁷ This engrained self-perception of an industrial heritage, of identity through work, of a community constructed through labour and its political representation shaped the city and its surrounds. Regional disengagement from Tory rule became signified by the slogan, referenced by Ian Gazely and Andrew Newell, “The Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire”. The sense of localism intended to produce meaning for a

¹⁶ I. Gazeley and A. Newell, *Unemployment in Britain since 1945* (School of Social Sciences, University of Sussex, 1999) p.212.

¹⁷ A. DiGaetano and P. Lawless *Urban Governance and Industrial Decline: Governing Structures and Policy Agendas in Birmingham and Sheffield, England, and Detroit, Michigan, 1980-1997* (Urban Affairs Review, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1999, pp. 546-577).

region, which was in actuality incorporated into a wider dynamic. The micro politics of the city were emerging from the macro economics of a globalizing world.

Sheffield's economic and political history is symptomatic of the residual effects imposed by broader mechanisms, of policies and structures externally driven. The city became amongst the first to feel the consequences of global economic shifts, national economic policies, anomalies of demand and their subsequent impact on patterns of employment throughout the last hundred years. A fundamental component of Britain's industrial growth, the city provided the raw steel for the regional and global manufacturing industries. However, as an industrial mono-culture and primary producer. Sheffield and its local feeder coal industry were to become economic canaries as globalization and monetarism elicited regional downturns and shifts in demand. The labour-intensive economy of the city and its adjacent region were to be foremost amongst the communities scarred by national policy, and trans-national structures, with residual human effect. The significant economic and social displacement began during the 1970s with global monetarism and national policies consolidating the decline of Britain's manufacturing base. To reduce the national condition to a series of currency movements, market fluctuations and short-term government policies is spurious economic determinism. The complexity of Britain's industrial decline remains deep-seated and contentious. As Dinfentass emphasizes the complexity of dynamics at work in market economy resist reduction to single formula. The nation's long term industrial sclerosis comes as a result of multiple factors, many institutionalized in the political economy of Britain as a nascent industrial and manufacturing force. Dinfentass logs significant factors of decline from

entrepreneurial conservatism, early embedded practices, lack of education and training with consequential skill shortages, entrenched family business structures, post-war free trade practices, union-management relationships¹⁸ and, significant in regional disparities, a movement of investment towards finance and commerce in London at expense of northern manufacturing.¹⁹ Post-war Sheffield, a mixed economy of nationalized industries and private companies, would embody the transformations in late-capitalism Britain.

Loads Money, We Got Loads Money ...

Football chants during the 1980s and 1990s frequently involved traveling fans from London teams like Chelsea, West Ham and Tottenham, waving, and on occasion, anecdotally claimed, burning, bank notes in front of their rival northern supporters. In reference to a character from comedian Harry Enfield, fans boast of the easy money available in the supposed affluent south. They had, they claimed, “loads money ...”. The national perception was of a divided country, the banking and consuming south, the unemployed and impoverished north. The long established term of ‘two nations’ is divisive, initially a criteria of class²⁰ it has been appropriated as a metaphor for spatial division between the industrial north and commercial south or even a demarcation of the

¹⁸ M. Dinfentass, *The Decline of Industrial Britain 1870-1980* (London, Routledge, 1992) p.13-67.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 68.

²⁰ The term derives from Benjamin Disraeli’s 19th Century novel and social critique *Sybil*, or *Two Nations*.

capital and the remainder of the Britain.²¹ Nevertheless, despite its ambivalent use, behind the term lies an entrenched regionalism, an expression of social and cultural difference, deriving in part from economic specialization and subsequent patterns of employment. These spatial and economic divisions were more clearly defined in times of depression, and significantly during the period from the 1970s to the early 1990s when employment patterns became the human consequence of industrial decline and national policy, markedly during the Conservative governments of the 1980s²². National unemployment rose through the 1970s and 1980s, peaking at 13% in 1986 in response to a sequence of macro-economic shocks. The effect of the OPEC oil crises of 1973 and 1979 caused governments of all the major Western economies to adopt firm deflationary policies in the early 1980s,²³ and in Ian Gazeley and Andrew Newell's words: "undermined the post-war settlement and destroyed the Keynesian paradigm."²⁴ Despite by the 1990s recession, unemployment no longer biased towards the north²⁵, regional patterns were long established, with sustained perceived divisions.

The city's reliance on a single industry would reflect the shortcomings of such a monoculture through large scale unemployment during this period. The industrial workforce

²¹ This uneven spatial impact of unemployment in the United Kingdom has led some to speak of 'two nations': roughly speaking, a line drawn between the Bristol Channel and the Wash.

Source: I. Gazeley and A. Newell, *Unemployment in Britain since 1945* March 1999 (School of Social Sciences, University of Sussex) p.3.

²² Margaret Thatcher's period in office, 1979-90, was marked by a dismantling of nationalized industries (regionally British Steel Corporation and the Coal Industry), a push for privatization and reduced public spending.

²³ I. Gazeley and A. Newell, *Unemployment in Britain since 1945* March 1999 (School of Social Sciences, University of Sussex) p.3.

²⁴ Ibid. p.1.

²⁵ Ibid. p.4.

fell by 187,000 (60%), between 1971 and 1997 and even in 1999 unemployment in Sheffield was 2% above the national average; 33% of the population existing on state benefit.²⁶ The re-organisation of the steel industry in the UK, led ultimately to a national strike of steelworkers in 1980 and the subsequent loss of 50,000 jobs in the industry in Sheffield alone.²⁷ The significance of these patterns of unemployment lies firstly to the degree to which they reflected regional demarcation shaping subsequent local policy for re-generation, and secondly they illustrate the impact on new entrants to the labour market. In the 1970s and 1980s, about a third of all male unemployed were young workers aged less than 24 years, whilst by the mid-1970s one third of all unemployed men and two-thirds of all unemployed women were under twenty-four years old.²⁸ The implication was that the burden and solutions to unemployment were shifting to a new generation.

The immediate reaction to the social situation, directed through creative channels would become manifest through sub-cultures and popular modes of expression. The nihilistic rhythms of punk, although quickly commodified, were a spontaneous reaction from a section of the community who were capable of providing a response. A youthful demographic felt increasingly 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. Sheffield's punk scene was visible and varied, but

²⁶ Figures from the South Yorkshire Objective 1 Single Programming Document, 1999, quoted in L. Moss, *Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: what can be learned from a pioneering example?* "International Journal of Cultural Policy," (Routledge Vol. 8, No. 2 / 2002 Pages: 211 – 219).

²⁷ Ibid. p.213.

²⁸ ibid. pp.4-5.

interestingly many were quick to adopt more electronic modes of expression, early manifestations of bands such as the Human League and Clockdva articulating their non-conformity through modernist forms. With a drum machine, sequencer or super-8 projector, frequently cheaper or more available than a guitar amp or drum kit, access and affordability gave modernity an ironic appeal. A translation of disaffection through the panacea of technology would appear to summon, albeit unlike Aldous Huxley's application, a brave new world. The political and economic reality nevertheless shaped social interaction and expression. Very few musicians were immune to an awareness of their position within the local and national polemic, most were actively involved through fundraisers and benefit shows and records²⁹. The dismantling of the steel industry and subsequent miners strike provided daily reminders of the direct effects of government policy, punctuated by didactic speeches that warned of 'the enemy within'³⁰ and offered solutions to unemployed workers by telling them 'to get on their bike.'³¹ The sonic nexus of electronic technology and regional dysfunction seemed analogous of the city's duality - global industry juxtaposed with local social forms. The consequence of this conflation of micro and macro determinants became a distillation to a perceived generic 'Sheffield sound'. The evolution of this 'sound,' resistant but still nevertheless responsive to local factors of physical environment, economic practices and social interactions and

²⁹ Example- Keith Leblanc, *Enemy Within* (Rough Trade Records, 1984)– see below. Miner's benefit shows were a constant in most cities during the strike.

³⁰ Margaret Thatcher's reference to the miners as 'the enemy within' polarized the community subsequently became the title of an electro track released to raise funds for the striking miners, produced by Keith Le Blanc and with a locally produced film clip, which myself and Richard Kirk helped edit.

³¹ In a quote by Employment Minister Norman Tebbit the problems of unemployment could be resolved by lazy workers simply moving to another city – by pushbike if necessary.

infrastructures. The complexity of creative production forging subjective dynamics with contextual effect; the dialectic of conscious intent and unconscious consequence. It should perhaps be termed the Sheffield 'effect' where such local factors frame the creative process and permit license for generality.

If macro-economic forces were producing local, urban outcomes for creative expression, then 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 Conservative centralizing policies directly. Sheffield's long established Labour City Council saw local initiatives were paramount in structuring policies to negate the process of de-industrialization. The rapidity of the process saw the city transformed from 24-hour shift-based practices to abandoned post-industrial wastelands, reinforced by the subsequent dismantling of the region's coal industry during the mid-1980s. Parts of Sheffield, like other older city centres, were left abandoned with, in Andy Lovatt and Justin O'Connor's words:

The consequent shattering of local and regional identity brought on by this economic crisis and which this dereliction powerfully symbolized.³²

Lack of national strategies to counteract the economic and social consequences of this urban decline led to the cessation of accountability to the national government. The previously mentioned epitaph, known locally as, The People's Republic of South

32 A. Lovatt & Justin O'Connor, *Cities and the Night-time*, Economy Planning Practice and Research, (Vol. 10, No. 2, 1995) p.127.

Yorkshire,³³ a symbolic strategy to cauterize the wound inflicted by government monetarist policies.

The combatant climate of this period frames the strong regionalism that permeated community attitudes, fashioned creative responses, and significantly the music sector's sense of inclusion. The Thatcher administration, as part of the overhaul of local government structure, effected budget restrictions and created a number of quasi-national government organizations, quangos, which 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 reform³⁴, with the Metropolitan County of South Yorkshire abolished by the central government in 1986.³⁵ National initiatives fell short of needs and expectations, in 1981, Sheffield City Council set up the first ever Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) in local government in the UK. This was as Linda Moss has pointed out, "the first manifestation of UK local government attempting to take responsibility for shaping the future prosperity of the city".³⁶ However the resources available to the employment

³³ Described by Linda Moss as the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire. L. Moss, *Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: what can be learned from a pioneering example?* International Journal of Cultural Policy (Routledge,/Taylor & Francis Group (Vol. 8, No. 2 / 2002) p.212.

³⁴ A. DiGaetano and P. Lawless, *Urban Governance and Industrial Decline: Governing Structures and Policy Agendas in Birmingham and Sheffield, England, and Detroit, Michigan, 1980-1997* (Urban Affairs Review, Vol. 34, No. 4,1999) p.553.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.553.

³⁶ L. Moss, *Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: what can be learned from a pioneering example?* International Journal of Cultural Policy (Routledge,/Taylor & Francis Group (Vol. 8, No. 2 / 2002) p.213.

department, £18 million in its first seven years of existence, were minute in comparison to the massive disinvestments in steel and heavy engineering.³⁷ As Alan DiGaetano and Paul Lawless observed, if Sheffield were to perpetuate a radical program of local economic intervention, “it would travel a lonely road.”³⁸ The path that the city followed was one which became constructed upon the specificity of its political economy. In contrast to other regional centres, such as Manchester, the absence of an effective entrepreneurial infrastructure subsequently required municipal strategies to catalyze regeneration through local creative production.

The Cultural Quarter Shall be Built

Solutions during the 1980s and 1990s to the economic ills of de-industrialization in urban centres catalogue not only defiant regionalism in response to national policies and global forces, but also the important synergy between local entrepreneurialism, political infrastructures and creative currency. Sheffield, an early victim of economic rationalism, became a pioneering model of attempted solutions. The shift from manufacturing to service and creative industries could never be immediately effective, or implemented as a simple paradigm of economic and social regeneration. Nevertheless Sheffield’s lead would provide an advanced if somewhat premature modality for urban reconstruction through embryonic cultural industries initiatives. The significance of music’s role in this regeneration was its capacity to effect media attention facilitating wider audience

³⁷ A. DiGaetano and P. Lawless, *Urban Governance and Industrial Decline: Governing Structures and Policy Agendas in Birmingham and Sheffield, England, and Detroit, Michigan, 1980-1997*.

(Urban Affairs Review, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1999) p.565.

³⁸ Ibid. p.566.

response to municipal initiatives. Additionally the city's music was a proven success at a time of local economic deceleration - estimates show that Sheffield achieved a 5% share of the singles market in 1982.³⁹ The city's cultural production, rather than being an arbitrary economic indicator appropriated during a period of stagnation, was proving to be a sector of vitality at a time of transition.

Although the policy rationale was fundamentally economic - to find workable solutions to long-term unemployment, implemented policies were symptomatic of a nascent shift in the working culture. Casualization, where flexible and temporary forms of employment often involving fixed-term contracts, seasonal, casual or part-time employment, signaled transformations to urban working practices.⁴⁰ It was also intended to address the broader issue of community and identity, with city centres acting in Justin O'Connor and Andy Lovatt's assessment.

As focal points for, and as symbolic of, a specifically urban way of life seemingly eroded in the 1970s.⁴¹

Music would quickly become currency in negotiating urban renewal through nighttime economies and a return to urban clusters within cities, but Sheffield's early initiatives

³⁹ A. Brown, Research Fellow, MIPC *Music Policy in Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool* (Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University and Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool August 1998) p.2.

⁴⁰ D. Hobbs, S. Lister, P. Hadfield, S. Winlow, and S. Hall, *Receiving shadows: governance and liminality in the night-time economy*. (British Journal of Sociology, Volume 51, Issue 4, 1 December 2000) p.701.

⁴¹ A. Lovatt & J. O'Connor, *Cities and the Night-time*, Economy Planning Practice and Research, (Vol. 10, No. 2, 1995) p.127.

would structure a cultural quarter that focused not on consumption but rather on production, therefore developing strategies with inherent shortcomings. The deflated local and regional economy would require economic strategies that, in their initial stages, were not dependant upon high levels disposable income or subsequent consumption. Sheffield, a city with an entrenched working culture, saw employment and production as the mechanism of regeneration.

Music production accommodates the post-fordist model of cultural industrialization and de-regulated patterns of employment. Frequently sole traders, such as those in creative industries, inevitably fit into the casual, short-term employment infrastructure. The dominant [mis]conception remains that of art being its own reward. As a consequence, the creative process involves little or no pay and seeks no long term security or conditions. Subsequently, strategies designed to involve local producers was somewhat arbitrary and attempted to construct regeneration on cottage industry policies which suggested niche involvement doing little to encourage broader community access or consumption. The appropriation of disused city centre space – the Kennings Building – as the focus for local music production in a nascent cultural quarter involved offering lucrative studio space to established producers, The Human League, Comsat Angels and Fon Force,⁴² plus the community recording facility of Red Tape and spaces for local photographic and film production collectives. As O'Connor has pointed out, "the

⁴² Fon Force was a successful production team during the 80s and 90s based around Robert Gordon, founder of WARP records and Mark Brydon of Chakk and later Moloko. Axis studio was developed by members of Comsat Angels.

economic aspect [of cultural industries] was mostly used opportunistically by arts agencies or city cultural agencies concerned to bolster their defences against financial cuts and ideological onslaught by the conservative government.”⁴³ Nevertheless the expedient use of music’s assumed ability to create wealth in a revitalised economy stemmed from a desire to acknowledge the importance of popular culture, specifically technology-based music, in redefining Sheffield’s image in a local, national and global context.

Officially, the Cultural Industries Quarter in Sheffield was set up in 1981. A local government initiative at the time anecdotally referred to as an extraordinary leap in the dark, either an ambitious or potentially reckless use of public funds. The initial stage saw the opening of the Leadmill, as an all-purpose music venue, in 1982. The appropriation of an abandoned industrial shell seemed allegorical for the city’s re-industrialization and was funded by a partnership of the City Council and UK Urban Programme.⁴⁴ 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 previously mentioned. The strategy of accommodating nationally recognised artists and producers, whilst providing much needed community facilities, appealed to parochial sentiments, whilst disarming critics of popular production being a purely confined to London’s media epicenter.

⁴³ J. O’Connor, ‘*Cultural Intermediaries and Cultural Industries*’, in J. Verwijnen and P. Lehtovuori, (eds.) *Creative Cities*, (Helsinki, University of Art and Design Publishing Unit, 1999) p.14.

⁴⁴ L. Moss, *Sheffield’s cultural industries quarter 20 years on: what can be learned from a pioneering example?* International Journal of Cultural Policy (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (Vol. 8, No. 2 / 2002) p.214.

Importantly, for the organization and development of the cultural quarter its configuration and co-ordination was fragmented due largely to local government restructuring and national government encouragement to contract out services. The closure of the Arts Department of the City Council occurred in 1997 and was replaced by a Museums Trust. Significantly municipal perceptions of the most suitable infrastructure in which to accommodate the new creative industries had moved from ‘arts’ to ‘museums’. The position of popular culture was lost in government restructuring and inappropriate branding. In Moss’s analysis, “no public body had overall responsibility for the Quarter, despite its continuing dependence on public funding.”⁴⁵ It was therefore in this disjointed and uncertain bureaucratic climate 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.

From Panacea to Pariah: The National Centre for Popular Music

The story of the ill-fated National Centre for Popular Music encompasses not only issues of cultural policy and urban regeneration but also challenges any conjecture of music’s relationship to the creative industries. The Centre’s dramatic account questions music’s function within the community and role in regional identity, highlighting the delineation of production and consumption, and raises issues of where the divide between creative production and leisure consumption is drawn. It is fundamentally bound in issues of

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.215.

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 left behind from the 1970s and 1980s de-industrialization, the NCPM today stands, in the real world, an architectural folly, and, in the virtual world, as 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 appropriate the abandoned infrastructure of the city's past, has itself in turn has been acquired by Hallam University in February 2003 to house its student's union. Log on to any number of websites to tour not only the cultural quarter⁴⁶ but also move through a 'virtual' empty husk of the deserted site where it is possible to feel cyber tumbleweed brush past the online visitor, a memento of its ephemeral existence.⁴⁷ Opened in March 1999, with £11million UK Lottery funding, the Centre was in financial trouble before the close of the year and closed by 2000, a brief and baffling lifespan, the Centre committed cultural seppuku before most people had chance learn of its existence.

The Centre's free-standing design⁴⁸ was based around four drums each housing a separate concept instillation: dance music, religion, love and rebellion, and unique singers – curiously including Pavarotti – with the opportunity for visitors to stick their ear to a hole and guess the singer. Interestingly although the title was specific – Centre – the building since its inception was known locally as the 'museum'. The latter term denoted a

⁴⁶ Source: see Sheffield Cultural Industries Quarter - <http://www.ciq.org.uk/>

⁴⁷ Source: <http://www.made-in-sheffield.com/places/landmark.asp?PlaceName=NMusic>

⁴⁸ The centre designed by Branson Coates Architects was designed by Branson Coates Architects.

perception of a static, sedentary space that despite its intention of being highly technological and interactive, instead exuded a mausoleum ambience. The Centre operated as a curiosity, thematically closer to a science park that institutionalized rather than aestheticised popular music. As Nicholas Barber reported in *The Independent*,

The fact that it offers you the chance to edit a Phil Collins live video only confirms my worst suspicion: this millennial celebration of popular music is stuck in the 1980s.⁴⁹

Barber went on to add, “I can’t see what the NCPM has to do with Moloko, Babybird or the rest of Sheffield’s current bands. And I shudder to think what Jarvis Cocker would make of it.” Not surprisingly Cocker 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.”⁵⁰ Practicalities of access and use reinforced the unsuitability of sound, even through translation into popular cultural texts, to an institutional environment. Providing the facilities of tactile manipulation and play fails to appreciate the largely discrete levels at which most sounds and rhythms are processed. 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.”⁵¹ He added

What was glaringly missing was the lack of any celebration of Sheffield, a city with a long history of producing innovative music. The final

⁴⁹ Quoted from interview with writer and journalist Martin Lilleker 14.05.05.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

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.⁵²

The rapid demise of the Centre was symptomatic of a lack of public support, both local and national, the inability of a bureaucratic infrastructure to firstly construct a facility that adequately reflected popular music's function in the community and secondly to incorporate appropriate long term strategies to combat short term recalcitrance.

Importantly the Centre also mirrored the cultural quarter's inherent defects, most notably location and objective. Lack of support and failure to attract the anticipated numbers⁵³ was fundamentally due to the Centre itself misreading the public perception of popular music, its representation and consumption. Cosmo Landesman describes the experience:

The NCPM is being promoted as an 'education and arts centre' devoted to popular music. But in reality it just mixes the button-pushing, learning-can-be-fun experience of the Science Museum with the trivia treasures of the Hard Rock Café.⁵⁴

Whilst Nicholas Barber in *The Independent* 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.⁵⁵

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ The Centre predicted it would attract 400,000 visitors in the first year. Source: L. Moss, *Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: what can be learned from a pioneering example?* International Journal of Cultural Policy (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group (Vol. 8, No. 2 / 2002) P.218.

⁵⁴ From interview with journalist Martin Lilleker.

⁵⁵ *ibid*.

The need to address music's functionality, its social engagement, its mechanisms of reception and consumption, were clearly absent in the centre's design. The subsequent transformations in media technology reinforced sound's resistance to its anchoring in time and place. The appearance of MP3s, digital downloads, shared software, social network sites, driven by *MySpace* and *YouTube*, and the ubiquitous presence of mobile technologies would signify early attempts by the Centre to contain, regulate and regionalize music's use as prosaic and parochial.

In providing guidance and instruction into music's meaning fails to respond the listeners need for subjectivity. To inadequately address music's esoteric nature and reduce the creative process to a series of mechanical prompts marginalizes music's contextual effect and cultural potency. The pressure of public funding, the need to be immediately effective and populist, resulted in a lack of strategies in response to any public inertia. Alternative approaches did exist, offering options as to how popular music and cultural texts could be used to best serve the community. The Manchester Institute for Popular Culture's more academic approach, without the pressure of populist engagements and consumptions, offered alternative trajectories to the presentation and discussion of music and/in policy. The increased mobility and multiple nodes of access for music necessitates greater awareness of both movement and context. Any attempt to construct popular culture through provincial or regional platforms requires it to embrace music's increasingly trans-national nature rather than spatial and chronological compartmentalization, in which music appears as a series of loosely related events.

On a functional 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 to the south of the city centre was within access of rail and bus stations, but historically comprised of small self contained industrial units. Similarly, regardless of the proximity to Hallam University, the area had little or no passing trade, which was in turn inhibited by a road network designed to by pass the city, offering little pedestrian incentive to access from other areas. On the margins of traditional retail and leisure facilities, bars, gardens and cinemas, the human movement into the quarter was largely destination driven offering few other incentives to encourage activity in the sector. Local producer and DJ Winston Hazell summed up 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.⁵⁶

The area does not conform to John Montgomery's criteria 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."⁵⁷ Rather the

⁵⁶ Dr A. Brown, *Music Policy in Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool* Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University and Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool, August 1998.

⁵⁷ J. Montgomery *Cultural Quarters as Mechanisms for Urban Regeneration. Part 2: A Review of Four Cultural Quarters in the UK, Ireland and Australia* Planning, Practice & Research, Vol. 19, No. 1, February 2004. p.10.

quarter was primarily focused on production whereas the city and the south west, the West Street – Division Street area, offered multiple facilities like shops, bars and cafés with the latter close to Sheffield University and related residential zones. This unofficial cultural quarter provided the necessary leisure and retail potential with an evolving night-time economy. Benefiting from higher density and mobility through the city tram network, the area was the result of proactive ‘bottom up’ strategies by commercial and entrepreneurial sectors as opposed to municipal infrastructure top down’ policies actively pursued in the official cultural quarter.

If local movement into the official cultural quarter was moderate, then nationally and regionally incentives deemed the area even less attractive. Despite the Centre’s intention of heralding its national strategy to attract visitors from around the country, other than 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 also an international airport which moved it up in the regional hierarchy. A long established cultural melting pot, augmented by a media infrastructure including Granada Television and a creditable newspaper industry incorporating *The Guardian*, Manchester was well positioned to capitalize on its own popular music boom of the late 1980. A traditional manufacturing region, with greater economic diversity and an embedded entrepreneurial culture, Manchester was positioned to capitalize on growing service and creative industries. With a blossoming nighttime economy, the city’s subsequent cultural sector development (North Quarter), was propelled by local entrepreneurialism and a hands off

approach from municipal policy makers. Steve Redmond, editor of *Music Week* argues that Manchester's approach represented:

A much more laissez faire one than Sheffield [to] suit the nature of the music industry, which thrives on being left to its own devices.⁵⁸

Manchester, in short, 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 nationally renowned clubs and bars, such as The Hacienda and the Dry Bar, through to universities and cultural collectives (MIPC and MDMA) Manchester effected a more cosmopolitan infrastructure. Reinforced by music-centred events and forums such as In the City, the integration of Manchester's urban economies and popular cultures indicate an organic growth symptomatic of the city's social and economic diversity. A commercial centre with a diverse economic base, it contrasts markedly with the Sheffield's mono-cultural make up that required strategies that required financial public support to initiate the city's re imaging and de-industrialization.

In Linda Moss's analysis of left-wing politics, giving centrality to employment, was conditioned by a culture reliant on public funding which subsequently encouraged the cultural quarter to develop upon a narrow model of cultural regeneration.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ A. Brown, *Music Policy in Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool* Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester, Metropolitan University and Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool, August 1998.

⁵⁹ The Centre predicted it would attract 400,000 visitors in the first year. Source: L. Moss, *Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: what can be learned from a*

In comparison, Manchester and other cities have developed:

Cultural quarters, which embraced a broader mix of social and economic activity leaving the Sheffield experiment as anachronistic.⁶⁰

The publicly-funded early strategies, symptomatic of the city's unique economic and political make-up, also point to more deeply entrenched attitudes to such infrastructure driven solutions. Despite adoption of the term 'creative industries' as a direct attempt to counteract the traditional belief of the arts and culture as a financially dependent activity the perception remains. Music clings to its dogma of being ideologically unsolicited. In an interview with Adam Brown, Dave Haslam - a Manchester DJ and writer - argues that:

There' s cities, like Sheffield, where the Council has taken years trying to figure out how they can develop the music scene and where's it got them? The minute the Council started getting involved in Sheffield, no-one was interested in the city.⁶¹

Such critiques of cultural policy are also suggestive of music's reluctance to be compromised by accountability to national and regional party policies. Scepticism towards the inherent provincialism of regional regeneration strategies was acknowledged

pioneering example? International Journal of Cultural Policy (Routledge,/Taylor & Francis Group (Vol. 8, No. 2 / 2002) P.211.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*.p.211.

⁶¹ Dr A. Brown, *Music Policy in Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool* Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University and Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool, August 1998.

by Steve Beckett, one of the founders of successful Sheffield label Warp Records, who argued that in terms of accessing development funds:

It's always much quicker if you need investment money to go to Warners or someone because accessing public money tends to be very slow. Warners can give you it immediately."⁶²

Beckett's inference was that music is accepting of its role within the market and on the whole more comfortable with commercial as opposed to ideological compromise. The label's subsequent move to London also delivered a major blow to the Sheffield's spatial currency by rejecting the image of the city as an accessible and networked location in favour of London's centrality. The music industry's desire to be distanced from public funding appears to be more successful in the Manchester experience where in Brown's assessment:

Actual investment has been generic and not targeted at music; it has built on existing, organic growth; and the area was already an important site for music production and consumption.⁶³

Conversely, in Sheffield, the investment has been highly visible and sought to publicly profile links between funding and music initiatives to establish its measurable effect.

Underlying this need to separate creative production and direct funding is the question of the unholy alliance between culture and industry. Specifically, the capacity of popular

⁶² *ibid.* Interview with Adam Brown.

⁶³ *ibid.*

culture to stand outside public agency is a function which is problematized by visible funding. Bianchini points out “the strategies of the 1980s emphasised political consensus, the importance of partnerships between business and public sector agencies.”⁶⁴ The implied loss of agency to critique through the appropriation of the creative process, in Elly Tams’s view, “feeds into a wider culture in which it is becoming more and more difficult for people with dissenting views to be heard,” reinforcing the belief that, “the rise of enterprise-led cultural and creative policy since the 1980s is part of a rise of right-wing politics across Western societies.”⁶⁵ The reduction of the creative process, in this case music, to ‘craft’ like status risks rendering any critical message redundant or to forcibly push such voices towards inaudible margins. Making the consumption and interaction with cultural industries somehow synonymous with creativity itself blurs the space between culture and commerce, subsequently marginalizing areas of dissent. In Charles Leadbeater’s view “settled, stable communities are the enemies of innovation, talent, creativity, diversity and experimentation.”⁶⁶ Sheffield’s music forms, constructed in an environment of non-conformity, risks an erosion of social and cultural relevance through the gentrification of its urban spaces

⁶⁴ F. Bianchini, “Introduction”, in F. Bianchini and M. Parkinson (eds) *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European Experience*, (London, Routledge., 1993) p. 2.

⁶⁵ E. Tams, *Creativity, Entrepreneurship and Gendered Inequality—A Sheffield Case Study* (City, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2002) p.397.

⁶⁶ C. Leadbeater, *Living on Thin Air*. (London, Penguin 1999) p.15.

The Future Sound of Sheffield

The conflation of Sheffield's sonic delineation and strategies of cultural funding conveys the role of sound in the representation of contemporary urban culture. Popular music operates as cultural collateral and agent of change to continually prescribe identity and community. In the words of Brown, O'Connor and Cohen:

[Music] has provided some of the most powerful, complex, innovative and disturbing cultural products of the last 40 years ... it never received a penny of direct public subsidy and operated completely outside the circuits of official culture⁶⁷

Nevertheless, urban economies in the past twenty five years have appropriated music to varying degrees to revitalize and re-image the contemporary city through the nighttime economies and cultural industries. The Sheffield model of regeneration reflected the embedded economic and social make-up of the city, fashioning a cultural quarter on old micro-economic practices of the industrial period. Although seemingly a victim of its pioneering status, it is simply the result of city's specificity. Sheffield's social, economic and cultural circumstances required the implementation strategies, which addressed issues of high unemployment and economic implosion. The policies were, by necessity, prescriptive, indicating the shift in local government roles from traditional servicing, to one of engineering social and economic change. Significantly strategies were to be

⁶⁷ A. Brown, J. O'Connor & S. Cohen, *Local Music Policies Within a Global Music Industry: Cultural Quarters in Manchester and Sheffield* Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University; Manchester, UK Institute for Popular Music, Liverpool University, Liverpool, UK.

instigated and channeled, rather than simply monitored.⁶⁸ The absence of a dynamic commercial or entrepreneurial sector necessitated a visible and pro-active role from the municipal sector and considerable public funding. Such approaches fed into planned strategies and specific zoning rather than the organic, laissez faire procedures, built on existing areas and economies which characterized Manchester's later regeneration.

The significance for Sheffield's policies of regeneration are not only economic, but also social. Strategies implemented were symptomatic of the construction of a post work identity. The city's early de-industrialization required premature economic solutions strategies that also addressed the residual impact of the community's loss of purpose. The economic transformations effected a search for identity brought on by the casualisation of labour where loss of work required a re-defining of personal and community identity.

Music's role as an expression of such social dislocation became central, manifested through both cultural production and consumption. Sheffield's early strategies understandably compartmentalized these two components. The development of a specific cultural quarter framed by the potency of the city's music production but also contextualized by income levels were sufficiently low as to preclude the necessary kind of leisure spend for most of the city's population. This kind of reflexive consumption

⁶⁸ Sheffield's cultural quarter continues to develop with 7.2% of Sheffield's working population employed in the creative industries, well above the national average of 4% Source: Sheffield City Council Statistics, 2004.

The sector is also home to a cluster of some 300 small businesses related to film, music and TV, design and computers.

Source: Montgomery, J. *Cultural Quarters as Mechanisms for Urban Regeneration. Part 2: A Review of Four Cultural Quarters in the UK, Ireland and Australia*, Planning, Practice & Research, Vol. 19, No. 1, February 2004. p.10.

described by Mike Featherstone as, “the aestheticisation of everyday life,”⁶⁹ would evolve as the city’s economy became revitalized through a growing service sector but would be too late to revive the production based cultural quarter which lacked an adequate flow to sustain cultural consumption, paradoxically leaving the area for a period, with its totemic Popular Music Centre, as semi-derelict.

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