Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University
Unit of Assessment: D35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
Title of case study: Space Engagers: The impact of arts and technology on place-based research
1. Summary of the impact   This case study documents the initial impacts of a site-specific theatre project: *Fortnight* that was conceived and developed by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) contemporary artist Peter Petralia between 2010 and 2012. The project exemplifies research that seeks to explore engagement with place, locality and community using pervasive digital technologies, and utilises these methods to enhance the creative potential of individuals and organizations. *Fortnight's* impact is social, cultural and economic as documented by the 800 participants and producers involved in the project so far. Fortnight has also generated impact within the creative industries through the innovative application of its use of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. To date *Fortnight* has been curated and hosted in Lancaster and Bristol (2011), Manchester (2012) and Oxford (2013).

2. Underpinning research

Dr. Peter Petralia's (MMU: 2006- 2012, Visiting Research Fellow 2013 - present) research has been disseminated through publications and Practice as Research (PaR), as writer and director of Proto-type Theater. He engages with the potential effect, affect and impact of digital technologies on individuals and their experience of place **[1 - 4].** *Fortnight* is a PaR project that develops this approach, building research that was initially explored in the theatre performance *Whisper* (2006) **[1].** *Fortnight* delivers a bespoke "experience" to participants over a two-week period using pervasive media technologies. *Fortnight* has engaged 200 participants in each of the four cities that have hosted the event to date. *Fortnight's* approach means that impact is embedded throughout the process and therefore some of the references to impact appear in this underpinning research section.

The research originally stemmed from arguments that modern technologies disengage individuals from their surroundings by creating, what has been called, a 'secure media cocoon' (De Cauter, *The Capsular Civilization*, 2004). The secure media cocoon phenomena seeks to describe the way that our mobile devices mediate everything about our experience of being in a city. *Fortnight* set out to explore whether engagement with pervasive digital technologies creates experiences of isolation or intimacy with locality, community and self, and consequently demonstrated that it is possible to make an art project that turns this 'media cocoon' into a tool that encourages engagement, instead of isolation. **[1 - 4]**

Fortnight explores the boundaries of theatre experience using digital technologies in a site-specific context **[3].** It uses Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) badges and SMS, QR codes and text-based technology to engage participants in experiences that prompt them to rediscover local communities and urban environments. The research exploits the notion of the 'Sandbox', a gaming environment in which the player/participant can roam freely and explore without purpose, but which can also set up "side quests" allowing for engagement with familiar environments from new perspectives.

Fortnight beat off 97 other applications to receive research and development funding from an annual commissioning scheme called *Theatre Sandbox* in 2010. *Theatre Sandbox* supports theatrical companies 'to explore pioneering ideas using new technologies' and is led by Watershed, the UK's first dedicated media centre based in Bristol **[A].** The research questions spatial boundaries as well as boundaries of reality: it engages participants in both virtual and physical spaces, and tests their relationship to these spaces.

Initial research involved a three-day pilot in Lancaster 2010 with funding support from Nuffield Theatre Lancaster, advice from the Storey Creative Industries Centre and volunteer 'test subjects'. The findings from the pilot led to the design of more complex technology to enhance an

engagement with notions of place, locality and being 'local' as well as the further development of a narrative framework.

Petralia worked in collaboration with the founder and director of Matter2Media, a ubiquitous computing company, who devised coding for the project in such a way that it could easily be adapted to different cities without new programming. He also worked with Infolab, who provided RFID expertise and equipment. Petralia developed a form of RFID technology that has been innovatively applied; as the founder of Matter2Media argues: "Petralia has developed a polymorphic experience that is more creatively impactful on the participant". **[B]**

3. References to the research

Key Outputs:

[1] *Whisper* (2008) a PaR project: http://proto-type.org/archive/whisper

[2] Petralia, Peter (2010) 'Headspace: architectural space in the brain' in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 20:1, pp. 96 – 108. **DOI:** 10.1080/10486800903453061

[3] *Fortnight* (2010) a PaR project: http://proto-type.org/fortnight

[4] Petralia, Peter (2012) 'Reach Out and touch Someone: Technology and the Promise of Intimacy'. Conference paper presented at TaPRA available at http://mmu.academia.edu/PeterPetralia

Key Grants / Commissions of Fortnight to indicate research quality:
Various *Fortnight* commissions 2010 – 2012: £28.000
£11,000 commissions from Theatre Sandbox, iShed/Watershed Bristol
£7,500 Mayfest, Contemporary Theatre Festival, Bristol
£5,000 Lancaster Institute of Contemporary Arts
£3,500 Contact Theatre in Manchester
£1,500 Cornerhouse Arts Centre, Manchester

4. Details of the impact

Fortnight delivered impact in terms of its involvement with and support for professional organizations seeking to adapt to changing cultural values: *Fortnight* has had impact on Arts Council England's (ACE) ten year strategy (2010) that reports a need to identify ways to engage theatre audiences with changing technologies. ACE's report **[C]** identifies *Fortnight* as having impact because of its 'formal technological innovation'. Annie Warburton, in her *Some Kind of Magic* report on the Theatre Sandbox scheme, notes that *Fortnight* demonstrated a 'thirst for discovery, a spirit of openness, deep generosity, and a meticulous quest for excellence'; she goes on to describe the project as having a 'deep attention to and care for the audience experience.'**[D]**

The project has had direct positive impact on the audience/participants and their individual lives: One participant (details included in section 5) stated that '[i]t created new lasting social networks in my local community.'**[E]** Its impact has also extended to influence enterprise: The Director of iShed, stated that the RFID technology created in *Fortnight* had 'been turned into a business' by Matter2Media. **[F]** The impact of the project is particularly evident in the way in which the RFID and QR technology was developed and applied. Matter2Media and Infolab, collaborating creative industries, helped realize the Proto-type technology and the founder of Matter2Media, stated that Petralia:

> …created a software platform that enables the triggering of experiences when participants touch their electronic tokens (RFID tags) to 'portals'. I have since benefited by generalising this platform, and have applied it commercially both in the arts and promotional sectors. **[G]**

Specifically, Matter2Media has subsequently utilized the technology with events for Ford Focus cars and the Ledbury Poetry Festival 2012 **[B]**; in addition, technological framework developed through *Fortnight* has also had an impact on the arts community: theatre company Mercurial Wrestler are working with similar technology as a direct result of *Fortnight*.

A key aim of *Fortnight's* approach is to demystify technology and participants engaged with RFID, QR codes etc. as part of an immersive experience involving missions to discover and re-discover parts of their city; however, the engagement with technology was woven into the fabric of the experience and was deliberately not made too explicit. *Fortnight's* Twitter and Blog platforms enabled participants to instantly feedback on the impact of the cumulative experience. **[H,I]** The Pervasive Media Studios, a collaboration between the Watershed, University of the West of England and University of Bristol dedicated to showcasing the best in new technology, selected *Fortnight* to feature in their "cookbook", describing it as 'cutting edge practice'. **[B]**

To date *Fortnight* has resulted in a three-day and a one-week test run in Bristol, and 4 x two-week runs in Lancaster, Manchester, Bristol and Oxford. Total direct engagement with participants is close to 900 people as each of the 4 x two-week projects directly engaged 200 participants from the local community; in addition, posters with QR codes, and an alternative SMS address located throughout the cities has created a database of over 1,000 individual responses. This database tracks the movement of participants through the host cities and also identifies their decision-making. Many of the posters are still up in Bristol, Lancaster and Oxford and the impact of the project continues to be monitored **[H].**

Fortnight has had an impact on arts-based audience development and has created a sense of place for many participants who have met new people in their communities. In some cases, *Fortnight* encouraged participants to make major changes in their life. For example, *Fortnighters,* have started to meet regularly generating art-related tasks. One participant reconnected with a daughter that he had not spoken to in 20 years; two people changed jobs; one person started an artistic practice and associated blog and another person disclosed, for the first time, that she had cancer. One participant commented, '[o]n an individual level it's been like therapy. Nothing less than transformative'. **[H,I,E]**. Maddy Costa from *The Guardian* was a participant in the Bristol project and described it as 'absorbing, tender – and requiring no technological skills whatsoever'. **[J]** The co-director of Bristol's Mayfest, told the Assistant Producer of *Fortnight* in Bristol, that:

> during the project it appeared that Proto-type had accessed a nameless 'non theatre' crowd… it seems that the ambiguity of the project created a varied audience. **[K]**

She goes onto state that 'A *Fortnight* community had developed and was now active beyond the limits of the planned events' **[K]**

As part of the original "Sandbox" commission, *Fortnight* created links with Bristol's Old Vic Theatre and the Pervasive Media Studio **[B]**; dissemination events included three 'salon' events and a final showcase attended by 196 delegates, including technologists, funders, venue commissioners, journalists and theatre makers. Proto-type have subsequently been invited to France to work with Compagnie Derezo engaging in a European collaborative project which continues their investigations into 'The City' and its inhabitants all of which started with *Fortnight*.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] Links to video clips of Petralia introducing the concept of *Fortnight*: http://watershed.co.uk/dshed/content/proto-type-theater demonstrating the research methodology and its unique approach; and Reddington on the funding scheme: http://www.watershed.co.uk/dshed/content/theatre-sandbox-2010-panel-discussions?show=0

[B] Corroborating evidence of *Fortnight's* success as a research and development project see inset Arts Council video of Petralia explaining the *Fortnight* concept. The founder of Matter2Media highlights the innovative use of RFID technology at 11.07 minutes into recording: http://pervasivemediacookbook.com/392/fortnight/

[C] Corroborating evidence supporting impact of *Fortnight*: Report: Reshaping New Horizons: Seeking new opportunities and growth Digital Opportunities (p.11): http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/funded-projects/case-studies/reshaping/

[D] Warburton, Annie (2010) *Some Kind of Magic An Evaluation of Theatre Sandbox 2010* Final report available online: http://www.watershed.co.uk/sites/default/files/publications/2011-06-27/Theatre%20Sandbox%20FINAL%20Report%20110311.pdf

[E] http://amylouisewebber.com/2011/05/21/hello-world/
Full statement on file from Fortnight participant.

[F] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8Y8Qn3E0o4#t=142
Clare Reddington speaking at Digital R&D Fund: Digital day (Bristol) (quotation at:1min 50 secs)

[G] Web site for collaborating technologist working on *Fortnight* including short video introducing the *Fortnight* concept to Manchester http://matter2media.com/2012/news/fortnight-in-manchester
Full statement on file from Founding Director, Matter2Media

[H] Various quotes about the impact that Fortnight has had on participants: http://bit.ly/18k7S70
More evidence of impact on participants available at: http://proto-type.org/fortnight

[I] The *Fortnight* Project Blog records comment and feedback from individuals involved in the project: www.fortnightproject.com/ This is the official site that participants use to initially sign up for the project and then engage with the project for the duration (further feedback is available from *Fortnight* projects on request)

[J] Review in *The Guardian* (9.11.10) Maddy Costa 'Click for curtain-up: technology and theatre': http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/nov/09/theatre-of-the-nerd?INTCMP=SRCH

[K] Extract from Fortnight Assistant Producer's blog corroborating impacts on audience development http://hannahjanesullivan.wordpress.com/article-1-immerse-yourself/