Prototyping Heritage: Collections, Materials and Emerging Approaches to Engagement

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Prototypes?

- Early version of product / stage in design process / archetype
- Materialise and test idea or vision
- Thinking and learning by doing
- Tool for open and participatory innovation
- Boundary object where meanings are negotiated
- Prototyping in grassroots communities: co-creation, tools for deliberation on science and technology
- Objects for critique, persuasion, debate
- In art history: associated to visions of art as social project
Heritage and Prototyping

- Digital Humanities, data visualisation, Research through Design, curation: contributing new ways of experiencing collections.

- Prototyping culture values openness to transformation, is populated by objects in flux, and processes of co-creation.
Newcastle University acquires the Bloodaxe Books archive as a resource for scholarly research and creative work.

Aims: creating experimental interfaces enabling new kinds of interactions with the archive, particularly during the archiving process itself.
Experimenting with ways of searching / associating information / viewing
Experiencing materiality and liveness related to the process of cataloguing and digitisation

The Marginalia Machine
**Interglacial/Erratics**  *(John Bowers and Tim Shaw)*

Performing Collections – The Pacitti Company residency 2014 (natural history/geological objects from the Ipswich Museum)
Museum artefacts as raw materials

Aims: incite curiosity, imaginative and playful interpretation; creative appropriation.
Outcomes: new sonic devices and displays
Juxtaposition of materials and data to vary interpretative possibilities (eg. fossil samples associated with real time meteorological data; simulations of geological and atmospheric processes).

Expanded sensory engagement: sonification, visualisation, new quasi-instruments; recordings; new exhibition arrangements showing loaned items alongside new assemblages, devices and outputs (sensorium).
Why prototyping? Unfreezing collections, opening them to transformation in their meanings and materiality; inventing machines, devices or interfaces to generate new interactions; sites of collaborative work.

Values: serendipity, exploration, playfulness, transformation, materiality.
Subversive logics

- From didactic approaches to generative ones > objects support further creative work or research.
- Items become relevant for qualities different from the ones at the origin of their inclusion in the collection (e.g. from antiquity or literary value to sensorial aspects, creative potential, juxtapositions).
- Use of technology: from aids to interpretation separated from the museum objects, to integrated arrangements.
- From objects of knowledge to materials of making (and knowing).
Problems

• Cross-disciplinary tensions
• Conflicting approaches to preservation
• Hybrid status: artworks/interfaces/temporary assemblages/displays?
Thank you

Image credits:
Tom Schofield
John Bowers & Tim Shaw at Test Department, part of Performing Collections by Pacitti Company, photo by Mafe Valen