



Co-Creators

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Battledress

BATTLEDRESS IMMERSIVE DOCUMENTARY ENCOUNTERS

Inspired by Genn's autobiographical work 'Streetfighting Girls' (Genn, The New Statesman 2021) about the **socio-economic pressures** on girls approaching womanhood in 1980s Sheffield.



Methodology

Challenge: Develop a form and methodology that would actively interfere with prevalent working-class narratives of '*marginal melancholy*' (Zimmerman, 2022).

Find a co-creative methodology that honoured the autobiographical aspects of the work whilst also enlarging the first-person narrative to explore idea of **personal polyphony**.

Intertwined **archive**, **oral testimony** and **immersive storytelling** across **two screens** to prompt **metaphorical stimulation**, offering a discursive '**encountered**' narrative to disturb and reimagine the way working-class histories are framed.





“Interviews are not only places where researchers learn about other people’s experiences, but where interviewees might arrive at new levels of awareness about their own lives and experiences.”
(Pink, 2012, p. 80)

Sensory memory or the meditation on the historical substance of experience is not mere repetition but transformation that brings past into the present as a natal event.’
(Seremetakis in Pink, 2009, P16)

Testimony

‘Embodied, dialogic’ process –a discursive space to empower participants, ‘and foster a dialogue between the participants’ teenage and present selves as well as with the interviewer

‘The polyphonic personal’ (Genn, 2023) Bahktin 'one actualises oneself 'only' in relation to the other....It is **only the other who can catch us off guard** and see the back of our neck.” “But what if that other is not someone else, but our past self or future self? (Genn , 2023)

Unexpected themes emerged across both interviews of Place and Belonging, Plenitude, Scarcity, Vulnerability, Invincibility, Femininity, Gender, Performance and Stepping Out

*Testimonies were layered“....not privileging one interpretation or perspective but **allowing multiple subjectivities to co-exist in dynamic tension....**” (Starecheski, 2022, P 106) eschewing linear story for polyphonic methods*



A woman with short dark hair, wearing a red shirt, is shown in a close-up shot. She is looking slightly to her left with a thoughtful or concerned expression. The background is dark, with several out-of-focus lights in shades of yellow, green, and blue, suggesting an outdoor night setting. The overall mood is contemplative and cinematic.

Fumbling towards a 'cinematic vernacular,' of fragments, of imperfect memory, glimpses, unpredictable encounters; to start way down the road of a 'story' not to plod through the tired cause-and-effect or beginning, transformation and end.'
Zimmerman (2022, p73 -74)

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Working with Archive

'Metal detected' material that spoke to testimony

Material that acted as a **simulacrum of sensory experience** for the viewer.

Footage that **replicated embodied experience** -

Polarised footage to **highlight discursive narrative** in the audio

16mm film **gaudy with light and glamour**, of young women at fairgrounds, dancing in clubs or stepping out at night in striking outfits and full make-up contrasted with **dirty lo-res footage** on early 1990's digital video formats.

Remixing



Community Archives

Hi8/DV Cam footage from early 90's

Shot at night in youth clubs, queues for clubs and on estates, often produced through community youth arts programs in inner-cities giving first person perspectives of Northern working-class landscapes.

The archivist had never had requests for this type of footage – so recent that is only just being classified as archival

Documents a particular historical moment – many of those programs no longer exist in the UK



- *“Metaphorical construing requires...a rather sophisticated intellectual ability"stereoscopic vision": the ability to entertain two different points of view at the same time.’ (Berggren, 1962, p. 238)*



Editing to Engender Immersion

Experimented with **dialogic interaction** or interplay.

In early iterations archive film played on one screen with bursts of archive stills on the other but the tempo and content of this **impeded** the 'conversational flow.'

Different iterations of the completed archive film played on adjacent monitors broken up with bursts of still images which the audience viewed at head height.

Explored **inducing immersion** through awe by playing with the footage frame rate slowing down to enhance 'dreaminess' apart from a brief unexpected moment at the fairground where they were sped up as a metaphor for the thrill, fear and inevitability associated with fighting described in the testimony.

The audio was panned so that you heard one voice in one ear and the other in the other to create the sense of being in the midst of conversation



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Conclusion & Reflection

- Battledress in its choice of raw material, its use of archive, its editing and presentation, gives a wider margin for **contradiction and unexpectedness *within*** individual working-class voices.
- Vibratory aesthetic, Daniela Cascella (Minor Literatures, 2018) believes that faint signals (voices, however marginalised) should be **detected and amplified and rather than static, voices should be kept 'mobile' and 'vibratory,'**
- The challenge of letting sense be made by randomising the second screen's association with the first, gave rise to a film with **a rich interpretive potential.**
- The capability of metaphor to cope with "what is and is not," helps produce work alive in the mind of the viewer by means of what Uricchio calls a "**generative friction between experiential layers.**" (Uricchio, 2019, in Leonardo)