

A paratextual analysis of Nurturing Opera Audiences: Transmedia practices, interactivity and historical interpretation in the Welsh National Opera's promotion of the 'Tudors Trilogy'¹

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Abstract:

This article examines contemporary opera marketing strategies in the context of paratextuality and transmedia storytelling using the case study of the Welsh National Opera's (WNO) 2013 'Tudor trilogy' (*Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda*, *Roberto Devereux* by Gaetano Donizetti). The WNO's marketing, and education & outreach campaigns for their Tudor opera performances build on the contemporary manifold 'presence of the past in British society' (Wright 2009: ix) and the widespread use of technologically aided branding in the arts world. We will argue that the WNO's creative and heritagising recourse to the Tudor period as 'usable past' (Jordanova 2006, Smith 1997: 37) and 'playable past' (Kapell and Elliott 2013: 362) not only determines the main branding context for the performed opera trilogy as a cultural product but that there is also a lucrative case of one brand supporting another: the Tudor brand as a phenomenon of contemporary retro-culture bolstering the WNO brand as a not exclusively upper class but accessible and chic brand. WNO's Tudors performance cluster is a project where significant agencies and configurations of the contemporary heritage industry converge: high opera meets Tudormania, digital marketing company Yello brick and the National Trust as they co-opt for a cultural package.

Keywords: branding, opera marketing, arts promotion, paratextuality, edutainment, historical interpretation, transmedia practices, heritage, Tudors, Welsh National Opera, Donizetti, audience development

Current approaches to branding for the arts that is carried out in the spirit of conscious audience construction and maintenance emphasise the prevalence of what Angus Hyland (2006: 10) terms the 'total identity' provided by the brand as opposed to the connotations of what is merely 'visual identity' or 'corporate visual identity'. This broader concept of the brand encompasses more than 'the visual management of the various promotional activities that a company engages in' (Hyland 2006: 10) and indeed it often involves a process of transmedia storytelling, where a fusion of contemporary technology and artistic creativity manufactures and enhances brand identity across various platforms. As Henry Jenkins suggests, transmedia 'extend[s] the potential for entertainment companies to deliver content around their franchises' (2010: 945). While opera marketing has its specificity due to the form's complex local, regional, national and global histories and its intrinsic mixed-media features (see for instance Morris 2012), transmedia and participatory practices are predominant in opera marketing, as they appear in other advertising contexts for the arts.

This article proposes a new model for the joint examination of marketing material and outreach & education projects surrounding a primary product in an arts context employing the concept of paratextuality. For the purposes of this study the term 'paratext' is treated in a more liberal sense than its literary origins in Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests*, and more aligned with the media and communication studies use of the term (see for instance Barker 2017 and Carter 2018). While the main focus of our enquiry is on the producers' and/or their artistic associates' creative planning rather than audience responses to the promotional texts, our emphasis is strongly on the company's communication with regular opera-goers and potential spectators, and both short term and long term nurturing of audiences. As a pertinent case study the article will discuss the marketing campaign for the Welsh National Opera's (hereafter WNO's) 2013 'Tudor trilogy' from the perspective of conjuring up the historical period for a potential audience, focusing in particular on the interactive and multiple platform marketing strategies which targeted through clear market segmentation a broad demographic in the lead up to the premiere and tour. The WNO's separate education & outreach unit have the ongoing development of audiences more strictly as their remit, and their project also ran with the Tudor theme as lead idea for their own paratextual activity. As Pedro Ramos Pinto and Bertrand Taithe put it:

History has become a pervasive cultural commodity, widely and eagerly consumed in the form of heritage, education and entertainment, even explicitly as an aid to the construction of new forms of identity. (2015)

The WNO's marketing, and education & outreach campaigns (handled separately by the WNO's respective departments) for their Tudor opera performances build on the contemporary manifold 'presence of the past in British society' (Wright 2009, p ix) and the widespread use of technologically aided branding in the arts world. We will argue that the WNO's creative and heritagising recourse to the Tudor period as 'usable past' (Jordanova 2006, Smith 1997: 37) not only determines the main branding context for the performed

opera trilogy as a cultural product but that there is also a lucrative case of one brand supporting another: the Tudor label as a phenomenon of contemporary retro-culture bolstering the WNO brand as a not exclusively upper class but accessible and chic entity. WNO's Tudors performance cluster is a project where significant agencies and configurations of the contemporary heritage industry converge: high opera meets Tudormania,² digital marketing company Yello brick and the National Trust as they co-opt for a cultural package. Appealing to the current penchant for Tudor culture in Britain and much beyond, the WNO website read at the time: 'The Tudors combines all of the drama and intrigue of the best historical novels with some of the most sublime music in opera' (WNO 2013a). Our case study is thus an example of the broader cultural phenomenon of Tudorism: 'a cousin of the much-better-studied medievalism' that revisits and celebrates the Tudor era as one 'standing on the threshold of the modern age' (McSheffrey 2015: 55).³ The article thus explores strategies in contemporary opera performance marketing that seek to establish new audiences while retaining existing opera going audiences, and it does so with the aid of a series of detailed practitioner interviews. What the article will not do is appraise the opera performances themselves or work with audience responses (analyzing questionnaires, conducting audience interviews, viewing figures and so forth).⁴

Using the WNO's marketing, and educational & outreach campaigns for their 2013 Tudors trilogy as a case study this exploration of present industry practice sets out to identify and account for ways of reaching existing and potential spectators via participatory activities, including edutaining heritage site visits and interactive online activity (in this case, the *I Am Tudor* quiz). We will enrich the analysis with reflections drawn from practitioner interviews and will argue that the marketing and outreach material around the operas participates in a postmodern historical interpretation of the Tudor era, developing into a transmedia cluster of texts and practices fairly independent of the aesthetic features of the opera productions themselves that they were designed to advertise to audiences. Taking a broader perspective, the article contends that as historical prose fictions, dramas, operas, films and other media drama shape our knowledge of historical eras, paratexts of a kind – such as visual and verbal materials (for instance publicity materials) and interactive side-projects, cultural and creative offshoots accompanying a production (including live interpretation of historical figures or events), can also have their much deserved place in the academic study of how a historical period is reinterpreted and communicated to audiences living in another era. While we might very briefly refer to various aspects of the productions to highlight how the historical era is reinterpreted for contemporary opera audiences, our main perspective will be the intricate and manifold marketing campaign and outreach package structured around the performances to evoke the epoch.

A further aim of the article is the juxtaposition and testing through application of critical concepts when discussing various aspects of the multi-faceted marketing campaign and employing the vocabulary of paratextuality and transmedia to its different activities and texts. Paratextuality, a term originating in the work of Gérard Genette and derived from literary studies, has been applied broadly within film and media studies (see for instance

Stanitzek 2005 and Klecker 2015) and latterly in the study of transmedia universes (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz 2017). While some extant approaches link the concept of the paratext to authorship and the authenticating function (see Klecker 2015: 405) and/or see it as a tool in ‘track[ing] the trajectory of the marketing campaign itself’ (Carter 2018: 56), what we emphasise in addition is the paratext’s own textual integrity, in line with Jonathan Gray’s (2010) thinking about the recognition of advertising materials as culture: ‘Paratexts [...] invite us to study promotions not only as *commercial* culture – though of course we should still do so – but also as *commercial culture*’ (2010: 323). We perceive the promotional products and processes to be discussed as cultural artefacts. They may be called ‘ephemeral texts’ (Grainge 2011: 13) aptly, as they tend to be ‘short or otherwise fleeting text[s]’ (Grainge 2011: 1), but despite their potentially transitional and transitory nature they can also be seen as formulating largely independent, robust, self-sufficient cultural artefacts and experiences that can live – even if only shortly – separately from the primary cultural product they directly or indirectly draw attention to, and their close intertextual connection with the principal product may or may not be known or profoundly appreciated by the individual consumer. In this respect, the article joins the broader contemporary cultural project of rehabilitating the status of what is ‘evanescent, transient [...], short-lived’ (Grainge 2011: 2) about promotional material by placing the emphasis on the relative independence of these products and processes in relation to the central or initial product.

Tuning in to the Tudor theme

During opera’s long history, European thinkers commenting on the genre often debated whether it was historical or mythological subjects that were more suitable for operatic treatment. It was after Rousseau’s significant critical intervention in the ‘Opéra’ section of his *Dictionnaire de musique* that ‘[h]istorical subjects had [...] become completely legitimate’ in the contemporaneous reception of Italian opera (Di Benedetto 2004: 40).

Anna Bolena, first staged in 1830 at the Teatro Carcano in Milan, was the Romantic composer’s first international success as well as his first significant tragic opera. Drawing a predominantly sympathetic portrait of the complex and highly controversial figure of Anne Boleyn, Donizetti’s lyrical tragedy gives us a glimpse into the queen’s final days and envisages an alleged late re-encounter – staged by the monarch Henry himself – between her and her first love, Lord Richard Percy. A deeply disappointed Anne finally forgives Henry and his new wife-to-be, Jane Seymour (Giovanna), who, in this version of history, tries to persuade Henry to spare Anne’s life. The 1835 *Maria Stuarda*, the libretto of which is an adaptation of Schiller’s classic play *Mary Stuart* from 1800, is concerned with the downfall of Mary Queen of Scots and presents the two contrasting personalities of Mary and Elizabeth, borrowing from Schiller the conceit of the meeting between the two before the death of Mary (see also Dobson and Watson 107-108). Taking a fair degree of creative license, the 1837 *Roberto Devereux* explores the relationship between Elizabeth I – here, a woman of passion – and the Earl of Essex. Elizabeth is presented here as falling for Essex, while Essex’s interest is in someone else (a certain Sara, who is forced into a marriage of

convenience with Essex's best friend, the Duke of Nottingham). Essex is beheaded for treason (and, in the logic of the drama, also because he let the queen down on a personal level), and Elizabeth herself is so devastated that she abdicates the throne.

The WNO's 2013 mounting of Gaetano Donizetti's 'Tudor trilogy' (*Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda* and *Roberto Devereux*) was the first attempt to stage these three Tudor themed operas in Britain. We have found no evidence of Donizetti writing these consciously as a trilogy, but it is noteworthy that in terms of programming and marketing the WNO made a point of marketing the performance cluster as the first British performance of the entire 'trilogy'. This can be seen as a nod to the prevailing interest in the Tudor era in contemporary Anglo-American culture and beyond and as a reasonable rhetorical device to support a bold – and perhaps somewhat risky – programming choice which features items that are not on the eight- or nine-strong shortlist of reliable and saleable opera favourites (Hutchings 2017). The three queenly operas were directed by young South African director Alessandro Talevi (*Anna Bolena*, *Roberto Devereux*) and young Austrian director Rudolf Frey (*Maria Stuarda*). They premiered in the WNO's home, the Millennium Centre in Cardiff, and went on to tour Great Britain (Swansea, Oxford, Liverpool, Bristol, Birmingham, Llandudno and Southampton).

When elaborating on the programming choice, it is worth noting that the 'Three Donizetti Queens', as they are often mentioned, did not only feature in these three works by the composer; Donizetti wrote at least one more opera betraying his interest in the Tudor era: in 1829, just before the composing of *Anna Bolena*, Donizetti wrote an opera entitled *Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth*. Strongly inspired by Walter Scott's 1824 *Kenilworth*, Andrea Leone Tottola's libretto dramatises Elizabeth's visit to the Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth. In this opera Elizabeth discovers that her much favoured friend has got a new wife whom he nervously tries to hide from Her Majesty. The Queen forgives him, forgives the intriguer character, blesses the marriage and order is restored. From this we can see that producing a Tudor tetralogy would have been just as interesting for the WNO's audiences as working with the idea of a trilogy. There was however a fourth item in the WNO's 2013 autumn season: the Tudor triple bill was accompanied by a widely known piece, Puccini's *Tosca* – the four of them opening what the WNO intended as a three year exploration of the *bel canto* style.

In our day, the Romantic composer's batch of historical operas seems to fit in with the contemporary trend for historical and biographical screen and stage performances (within which broader trend Tudormania is a significant strand). As the operas' original emergence and first performances tied in with a Romantic fascination with the Tudors across Europe, and generally with the prevalence of historical fictions across various genres and media at the time, the recent WNO productions also largely capitalize on today's Tudormania.⁵ Their revival of the famous and infamous historical players of the Tudor era should also be considered within the broader context of the current penchant for historical and biographical narratives, fictional, factual and indeed factional alike. The stage and television representations, namely the RSC's adaptation of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and

Bring Up the Bodies, and the *Tudors* television miniseries may be perceived as influences on the programming of the operas about the 'Three Queens'. The popularity of the Tudor historical figures today may be perceived in the context of an English panopticon of fame – a canon of famous personages that is revisited, reinterpreted and reorganised at different historical moments, just as canons of literary and other cultural texts are. Famed Tudors may be thought of as constituting a *crème de la crème* of sorts of English (and by extension, British) historical celebrities, tied in with the making of the nation.

In what they call a 'narrative cultural history' (2002: 12), *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy*, Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson suggest that Elizabeth 'is perhaps the nearest thing England has ever had to a defining national heroine' (2002: 1). Indeed, in *Brit Myth: Who Do the British Think They Are?* the distinguished scholar of celebrity, Chris Rojek reminds us of the BBC's 'top ten Britons' poll from 2002, where Elizabeth I occupies the unsurprising 7th position (2007: 88-90). (She is the only monarch on the list and one of only two famous British women – the other is Princess Diana.) Recent academic scholarship has re-assessed the fascinating character of Elizabeth I and has 'exposed[d] how much the popular image of Queen Elizabeth owes to biased, Protestant historiography and English myth-making', rendering her as 'a rather more tarnished icon than traditional scholarship, and Hollywood, have maintained' (Hunt and Whitelock: 1-2).

Elizabeth's mother, the very controversial and elusive Anne Boleyn, has become somewhat of a role model for twenty-something women today. According to Susan Bordo, Anne Boleyn appeals to young women as a 'third wave' feminist icon; many perceive her as empowered, intelligent, beautiful, demanding, sexual and sometimes playful. As Susan Bordo writes: 'This Anne winks at young women across the centuries and understands the challenges they face and the questions they ask' (2015: 255).

Beyond standing for quintessential Englishness, the Tudors seem also to be associated with 'sex, blood, guts and gore' today. As one reviewer of the opera performances remarks:

This was also a period which saw, for the first time, a woman wearing the crown of England. For these and other reasons, the Tudors are worthy of all the attention they receive but it remains true that sex, blood, guts and gore sells and this often takes centre-stage in dramatic portrayals. (Morley 2013)

Importantly, the main marketing strategy used was not to do with the composer, librettist, director or indeed singers but – tying in with a broader renewed interest in the Tudors in Britain – with the time at which the action is set and the fascinating historical characters tackled. This choice emerges directly from the WNO's programming strategy (developed not long prior to the Tudors project) to operate with thematically structured seasons (Massey 2013). For an opening example of their rhetoric, one may look at how the WNO website begins the online feature on the Tudors trilogy. Under the rather sensationalist and populist heading 'Heads will roll', the website proclaims:

The Tudors are coming back to rule Britain once again. This autumn, Henry VIII, Jane Seymour, Anne Boleyn, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex will grace the stages of theatres across Wales and England.

The creative minds behind the WNO's Tudors trilogy and both strands of the complex marketing campaign (the more dystopic and the more historicised one) have been conscious of the place the Tudors occupy in national consciousness. As an academic contributor to the Tredegar House (Newport) 'Fact and Fiction' session in relation to the trilogy, historian Anna Whitelock explains:

The Tudors were in many ways the first of this country's celebrities – notable for their goings-on – or rumoured goings-on behind closed doors in their beds and bedchambers as much as in the corridors of power. These are larger-than-life characters that then – and since – have certainly maintained powerful appeal and hold on the popular imagination as countless films and novels bear witness to. (Morley 2013)

The programming of the queenly operas tunes in to the broader middlebrow and popular culture revival of the Tudors and also coincides with – and to some extent taps into – the major scholarly re-evaluation of the Tudor house.

The posters in the context of the WNO's rebranding

The three opera performances were preceded by the WNO's systematic rebranding project under the respected opera director David Pountney's artistic directorship. According to Pountney, the overarching aim of the rebranding was to redefine the WNO's identity, with one major purpose being the securing of alternative funding:

WNO's rebranding exercise is an integral part of its overall strategy to make itself as fit as possible to face the many challenges of the current environment. This includes a reinvigorated artistic programme, a rigorously tight management of our financial outgoings, and a positive search for alternative funding. The branding exercise is far more than creating a new logo. It has resulted from detailed consultations within and outside the company on its mission and its identity, and has resulted in a renewed image that will serve for the next decade. Central to this is of [*sic*] a re-designed website, together with a new style of programme book to reflect the company's themed seasons. (WNO 2013c)

In order to give the institution a strong and visible brand identity the image of the brushstroke was adopted for the WNO logo and various marketing materials, which became prevalent first with the large-scale marketing of the Tudor project. The logo is composed of

three letters and the 'O' is a brushstroke. The logotype condenses the identity of the opera company into three letters, one of which is a painted 'O' and as such it is an example of gestalt: a condensed version of the meaning of the product (Williamson 1978: 79).

The brushstroke was inspired by the work of contemporary abstract artist, Howard Hodgkin and he, in turn, was inspired by the new logo to create a new painting, which the WNO then employed on the cover of their 2013 brochure and on their website. In the case of both forms of media, brushstrokes were applied to Tudor paintings and photography by Rebecca Sutherland and Sarah Harrison. In Harrison's words, the brushstrokes were 'key to the visual identity' and were 'used to transform images and reflect the passion and stories of the operas' (Montgomery 2013). The brushstroke device has been used since then on WNO publicity materials during Pountney's artistic directorship (posters in particular; see **Images 1 and 2** below, of posters for *The Barber of Seville*, 2016, the WNO's seasonal posters from 2017 shown in **Images 3 and 4**, and **Image 5** depicting *Tudors! A resource for teachers*). In this manner, the brushstroke device unifies and reaffirms the WNO's brand identity.



Image 1: WNO, *The Barber of Seville*, 2016 (author's photograph)



Image 2: WNO, *The Barber of Seville*, 2016



Image 3: WNO, Season Poster, 2017

(author's photographs)



Image 4: WNO, Season Poster, 2017

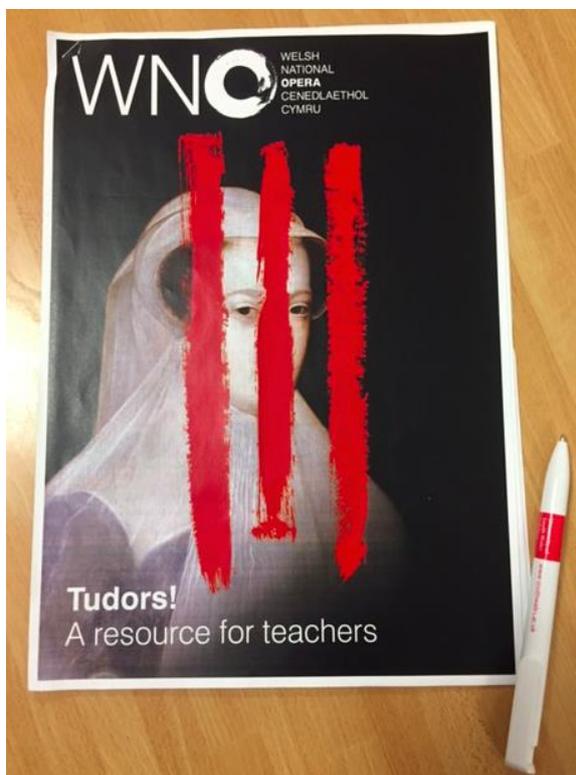


Image 5: WNO, *Tudors! A resource for teachers*, 2017

(author's photographs)

The visual shortcut of the brushstroke made an appropriate contribution to the lead images in the Tudors publicity material. Looking at the posters for the three performances, it can be seen that the brushstroke across the neck of Anne Boleyn connotes decapitation; the three brushstrokes across the face of Mary Queen of Scots remind us of her forced incarceration and the brushstroke around the finger of Roberto Devereux refers to a ring given to him by Elizabeth I, which he was to present if he ever needed her help. As each one of the brush strokes is red, they connote blood and gore. They also draw on a long tradition of someone being marked for execution or, as they say, being 'a marked man'. Allied to that, David Massey (2013) at the WNO has discussed how the brushstroke signifies creativity, moving forward and dynamism. Therefore, it shares similarities with Nike's Swoosh logo. It is almost as if the WNO were trying to reaffirm the high cultural value of their institution, while trying to seem edgy and fluent in the language of contemporary art at one and the same time.

A painted brushstroke is made by an artist's hand and it connotes authenticity and passion; it is almost as if the WNO are attempting to stress in their mass produced, digital and impersonal publicity, the value of live performance in a world whereby recorded music is a click of the keyboard away. As a brand signifier it places emphasis on the live opera as a significant creative act in a postmodern world populated by simulacra. The brushstroke image is therefore an intricate device that is laden with meaning both in its more general appearances and its specific application to marketing material around the three Tudor operas. As mentioned above, advertising works as a gestalt. Gillian Dyer discusses how advertisements perform an act of symbolic exchange: 'the meaning of one *thing* is transferred to or made interchangeable with another *quality*, whose value attaches itself to the *product*' (Dyer 1982: 116-117, emphases in original). An act of symbolic exchange occurs transferring the meaning of one text to another. As John Berger elucidates in *Ways of Seeing*:

Publicity images often use sculptures or paintings to lend allure or authority to their own message [...] a form of dignity, even of wisdom, which is superior to any vulgar material interest [...]. (1972: 135)

Similarly to the purpose of another type of paratext, the television ident, the brushstroke device appears in the more traditional format of the poster and production photography on the opera company's website as well as the *I Am Tudor* online game, giving a sense of omnipresence and marking out the new brand visibly and pervasively.

The paratextual function of Tudor portraits is evident in the WNO's *The Tudors and Tosca* programme. For example, the programme includes a reproduction of the Hever Castle portrait of Anne Boleyn which operates as another allusion to Anne Boleyn's decapitation (Welsh National Opera 2013: 13). The WNO cropped the oil painting along Boleyn's bosom so that only her hands clasped against her torso remain. This representation not only connotes the noblewoman's fate but also emphasises her hands and by so doing reminds the reader of the Tudor court's propaganda about the young Queen's physical

imperfections. Cropping the portrait disempowers the subject; she has no head, so she is less than human, she is merely a pawn in her family's ambitious plots to accrue power and wealth. Indeed, she is no longer able to 'wink' at her fans. The red rose pressed against her breast signifies not only Anne Boleyn's romantic intrigues but the fragility of her situation, too. Thus, the sensational tragedy of Henry VIII's second wife is played out in the WNO's programme with this one image alone.

A Digital Game as a Paratext: Yello brick's *I Am Tudor*

The WNO employed the popular technique of gamification in their promotion of the trilogy and the genre itself in order to appeal to a new audience segment. Visitors to the WNO's website were able to participate in the *I Am Tudor. Are You?* quiz. The WNO commissioned Cardiff based digital marketing agency Yello brick to produce a project marketing the Tudor trilogy – and more broadly raise awareness of the opera genre – particularly among the so-called 'urban arts eclectic': the eighteen to thirty-five year old tech-savvy, risk-taking demographic, people who are estimated to constitute a mere 3% of the contemporary British arts audience (John 2016, Arts Council England 2008). According to Yello brick's producer Alison John (2016), the brief from the WNO was considerably open: they were commissioned to create a digital game in relation to the three operas for the 'urban arts eclectic' demographic – a game that would make the WNO relevant to them and would hopefully encourage them in the longer run to see some of the WNO's work. Yello brick joined what we might call the paratextual periphery of the Tudor trilogy's marketing campaign at a relatively late stage and had a few weeks at their disposal to prepare the game, which went online about a week before the opening of the first Tudor show. They set out to produce something very much in the vein of the set and costume design of the stage performances. They wanted to stay within the same ambience, having studied set and costume design plans, including colour patterns carefully, respecting the greys and blacks of the productions in particular. Their intention was to expand the Lynchian world of the Tudor performances (John 2016), the interconnectedness of which is guaranteed by the work of designer Madeleine Boyd on all three shows), albeit in a different medium rather than offer an utterly different take on what the Tudors might mean today.

The format of the game was a citizenship test. The individual participants' answers to the questions determined whether they were loyal to the Tudor court and therefore deserving of citizenship or if they were treacherous. Depending on the result, participants were provided with either an identity card or execution papers as the game concluded (see Image 6). A character led the participant through the series of questions. The gamer was invited to share their deepest darkest secret by typing it in, and if they did so, the character also shared their own with the player. 'Moments of magic' (John 2016) designed and facilitated for the participant included the possibility to talk to the character on the telephone. The weaving of this project through different platforms is a signal of a wise contemporary marketing decision that intends to maximize the involvement of young consumers of culture in areas of the arts they may not be regularly drawn to. In the game

the participants are offered a sustained opportunity to construct themselves an alternative identity (from themselves but with a degree of freedom) within the confines of the world of the game – a feature inherent in many video games and many games of various sorts involving a role play element.

The game also allowed the participant to facilitate a partially user-shaped bridging between the historical past and a possible future vision of national culture. History and heritage are becoming more frequent subjects to games – or, to look at it from another perspective, games are used increasingly as a ludic pedagogical tool.⁶ As Jeremiah McCall argues, digital games used in history education have the potential to steer students away from establishing ‘the unfortunate habit of intellectual passivity’ (2011: 9) when studying history.

In order to gain players and draw attention to the digital project that they created Yello brick designed and directed what we might, in loose, Performance Studies inspired terms, define as a performance event or action (see **Images 7 and 8**). The performative event, which Alison John (2016) modestly calls a marketing exercise, involved the appearance and semi-choreographed movement of eight actresses under the age of thirty-five dressed up in ‘Tudoresque’ costumes, engaging with different spaces in the city for a whole day. Their activities, which can be placed on the less complex end of the ‘acting’ spectrum included marching around in town, merely standing, organizing themselves in an outward looking circle in the central area in Queen Street, Cardiff and handing out leaflets. Yello brick did not plan any intrusive action for the performers, they were ready to hand out the *I Am Tudor* flyers to any passer-by without actively approaching them. The reactions they noticed during the day were varied: some stood and stared, some tried to initiate conversation or made a comment as they thought the performers were representing a cult or a religion. While this was a marketing event drawing attention to an even more significant marketing event that advertised the ‘main’ product – the opera performances and the genre of opera itself – for those who (first) encountered it as a stand-alone performance action it still carried particular force. One of us saw it out of context, without any background information at the time that would have connected the street action to the opera performances, and found it foreboding, giving the observer the Tudor effect that Yello brick, inspired by the WNO’s vision, wanted to mediate, as the actresses dressed in black made the author halt in the street. This placing of women in ‘Tudoresque’ costume in the Cardiff cityscape combines the ordinary with the extraordinary and as such provides an instance of the Freudian notion of the uncanny. In this manner, we are encouraged to re-view the familiar and face the possible terrors of Tudor rule. This scene was played out in the *I Am Tudor* online advertisement, too. As a web-based advertisement for the opera performances, the WNO and the opera format itself, this articulation of the uncanny is massaged by the medium by which it speaks to us. Rosemary Jackson’s (1981: 64) interpretation of Freud’s uncanny as ‘the effect of projecting unconscious desires and fears into the environment and onto people’ is exactly how the internet provides an almost limitless universe to surf enabling us to experience the uncanny possibilities of cyberspace.

We can see that in this complex transmedia web around the marketing of the Tudors opera performances a side product of a side product can itself be seen as a cultural artefact worthy of commentary as it communicates to audiences on its own.

When asked to contextualise the style of the *I Am Tudor* in-town marketing exercise and some of their other performative projects, including the Wrexham-based *Silent State* also for the WNO, and situate them in relation to contemporary immersive performance for example the work of Punchdrunk, Alison John is clear in making a distinction between the more theatrical aspect of site-specific and immersive performance as opposed to principles of 'games' that govern the *I Am Tudor* related Cardiff performance and their Wrexham street extravaganza. In terms of the games they are inspired by (among other cultural forms), Yello brick are open-minded; these range from street games (particularly in their two opera based projects), school ground games and videogames. John (2016) acknowledges the long history of the street game genre, tracing it back to the large-scale treasure hunts in the US during the roaring twenties. Yello brick are part of the contemporary British street game scene, which is a buzzing cultural scene with festivals and seasonal projects (for Halloween and various other parts of the year). Yello brick's *I Am Tudor* is at least as much indebted to the street game as a cultural form as it is to kindred contemporary theatre genres or styles such as immersive and site-specific performance. While – in broad terms – Punchdrunk creates sets from particular spaces that can be brought into dialogue with their creative ideas, for Yello brick the set is 'the outside world' (John 2016). Offering audiences different journeys, different experiences is a common feature between companies such as Punchdrunk and Secret Cinema, and Yello brick's street games (John 2016). John (2016) defines their own relevant work as gameplay and the work of Punchdrunk and similar companies as theatrical experience, yet to a critic approaching these Yello brick projects from the angle of performance or theatre studies they appear to proximate immersive performances with a twist (that twist comes from game culture). Their reliance on interaction with spectators and ultimately offering them a world with its own rules in which they can immerse themselves, these Yello brick projects (*Silent State* and both the physical and the main, digital, aspect of *I Am Tudor*) have a strong performance aspect to them that emphasises audience participation and the creation of particular ambiances and Zeitgeists.

The quiz itself is dominated by a female performer in Tudor costume (see **Image 6**). The blurred vision of her face looking straight to the camera and her dialogue recall Big Brother's instructions to the inhabitants of George Orwell's *1984*. The premise of the introduction is that the city has been seized by the Tudors and is now under command. Later on the camera focuses on the woman's mouth and, then, her lips. This specifically facial emphasis connotes the espionage, the gossip and general intrigues of the Tudor court. During the quiz, images placed in unusual juxtapositions flicker across the screen; there is a scene from the promotional performance in the streets of Cardiff by women in Tudoresque costume, images of lobsters, rings, trellis work, a stag's head, a rose, etc. flit across the screen (see **Image 4**). Thus, Yello brick play with Freud's notion of the uncanny again, for

they combine the ordinary with the extraordinary once more. The quality of resolution varies; images are sometimes grainy and pass in rapid succession and the film fluctuates between black-and-white and colour. This placement of images in unusual juxtapositions in rapid transitions and the actual resolution quality of the film recalls the unstable, fragmented and arenaceous paradigms of Eisenstein's montage style in his *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The use of montage enhances the totalitarian and dystopian mood of the quiz, since photographic montage is a tool associated with socialist propaganda; the fitfully projected images portray apocalyptic possibilities and by so doing, they bring death and destruction to life, as well as the Tudor past, the present and a Lynchian vision of future Tudor dystopia. This elision of time, and life and death, is a paradox of Roland Barthes' (1993: 79) description of photography as a 'living image of a dead thing'. In this instance, the filmic representation is a projected nightmare of a future dystopian Tudor state. The quiz invites the participant to make certain choices. If one makes the right choices, one can receive Tudor citizenship and enjoy 'unity' in the Tudor-run state, but failure to answer correctly leads to execution. Thus, the participant is offered the opportunity to make a symbolic exchange; they can become a Tudor, or they can perish. This act of participation invites the consumer to fill a semiotic gap:

[...] there is a space [...] where the speaker should be; and one of the peculiar features of advertising is that we are drawn in to fill that gap, so that we become both listener and speaker, subject and object. This works in practice as an anonymous speech, involving a set of connections and symbols directed at us; then on receiving it, we *use* this speech. (Williamson 1978: 14)

Yello brick's *I am Tudor* and the in-town performance event preceding it are in line with the ambience the WNO already created for the performance cluster – their contribution blended in with the vision of the Tudor world as envisaged by the WNO. Indeed, the WNO's emphasis on the re-emergence of a powerful regime, a totalitarian state, is present in the already cited 'Heads will roll' and 'The Tudors are coming back' online proclamations. Yello brick's close alignment with the WNO's vision is additionally affirmed by the inclusion of the WNO's new brand signifier, the brushstroke (see for instance **Image 9**).

The broader aim of the *I Am Tudor* project is without doubt the widening of the opera audience stratum of the urban arts eclectics, speaking their language and showing them that opera may be something that has the potential to appeal to them. While being an individually focused single-player game (see **Image 10**), the *I Am Tudor* paratextual project and its stereotypical for-or-against rhetoric can be interpreted to have aimed to forge a community – here, a primarily virtual community, which may translate into an actual physical opera-going community. In his study of opera fanatics Claudio E. Benzecry describes the process of initiation into the opera experience by way of emphasising the level of prior preparation that brings about the devotion to the genre:

[F]ans not only get interested in the practice once they are socialized into it; they partake in a cycle of enchantment that starts with a visceral connection to the music or an interest in opera as spectacle. Fans get hooked when they are still outsiders, before having an active apparatus developed to interpret the experience, or before being thoroughly socialized in what constitutes the enjoyment and how they should decode it. (2011: 82)

Beyond gamifying Tudor history, in *I Am Tudor* the emphasis is on the construction of would-be opera devotees – catching their attention while they are still outside, on the periphery of the medium. We might borrow the concept of remediation as defined by Bolter and Grusin (2000) here, if only to the extent of identifying that a newer medium (the internet) is utilised to draw in its own loyal audiences to an older medium (live performance and more specifically the opera). The impression that newer media appear to control the marketing and formulation of taste across the creative industries even in the older media is at times voiced by consumers of culture. For example, one of Benzecry’s interviewees (identified as ‘an art high school teacher in his mid-sixties’) in *The Opera Fanatic* opines: “‘I feel like the media controls the new audiences, like they would accept anything that looks like a show, be it movies, tv or theatre. Opera is just one more thing!’” (Benzecry 98).⁷

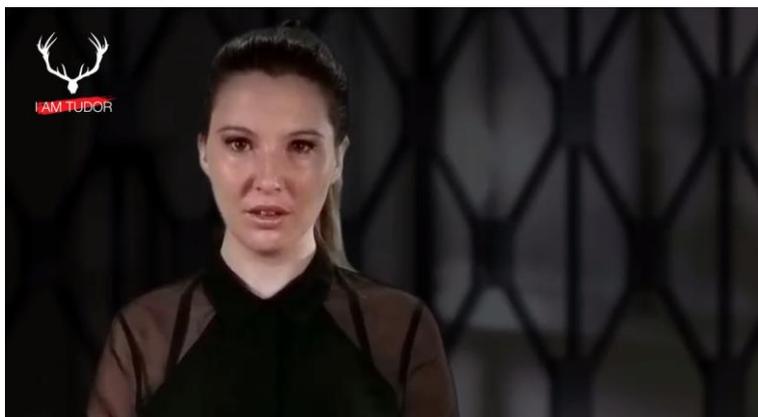


Image 6: *I Am Tudor*, 2013 (courtesy of Yello brick)

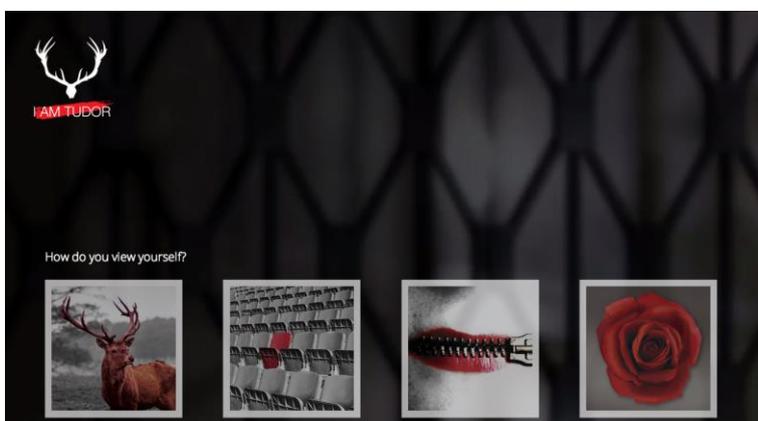


Image 7: *I Am Tudor*, 2013 (courtesy of Yello brick)

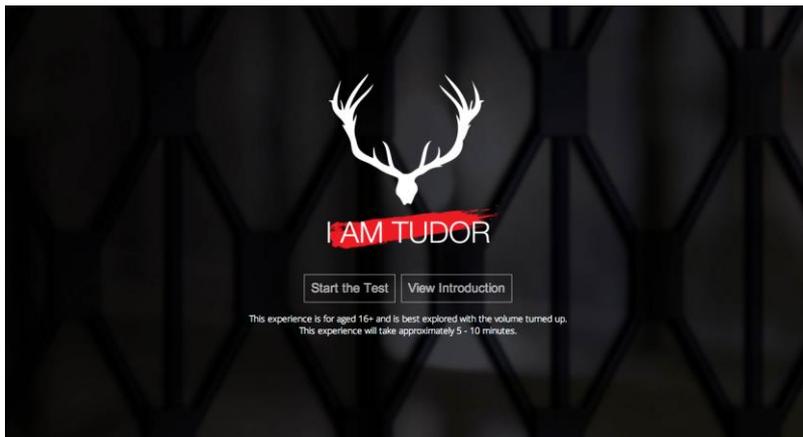


Image 8: *I Am Tudor*, 2013 (courtesy of Yello brick)



Image 9 (courtesy of Yello brick)



Image 10: *I Am Tudor*, 2013 (courtesy of Yello brick)



Image 11: *I Am Tudor*, 2013 (courtesy of Yello brick)

Audience participation and historical interpretation

Another significant ramification within the WNO's attempts to foster audience loyalty worked mostly beyond the digital realm and focused on Tudor site visits, operating with the opera–heritage association many contemporary consumers hold in their minds. In our interpretation, these heritage-focused live events aimed at the consumer segment of the 'traditional culture vultures' who, according to the Arts Council's 2008 report, make up 4 % of the arts-consuming public. At the same time, for the younger generations a similar but much more interactive experience was facilitated by the education and outreach office of the WNO under the leadership of Rhian Hutchings, who aimed at immersing the relevant pupils from participating schools in a reimagined Tudor court with an extensive semi-improvisatory drama game. Firstly, we will introduce the adult oriented programmes of this kind, then focus in more detail on those for child audiences. The former mostly added to the cultural package for regular opera-goers and/or Tudor history enthusiasts, while the latter is an example of long-term audience generation as part of the remit of a publicly-funded arts organisation.

In an apparent attempt to maintain the interest of and offer a composite and pleasing cultural package and a sense of community to some of their returning audience members, the WNO organised a series of off-stage events tying in with heritage tourism and historical edutainment to compliment the tour. Edutainment – a concept often used in the discourse of games studies, museum studies and of foreign language education, among other areas – refers to practices that blend the entertaining with the educational often, but not exclusively by the provision of a virtual environment. Events labelled as 'WNO extras' such as 'At Home with the Tudors', 'A Tudor Day Out', 'The Whole Story – The Tudors' were advertised. Among several Tudor themed ones there was only one 'extra' advertised about Donizetti as a *bel canto* master, which again illustrated to what a significant extent the content and setting of the operas provided the marketing and outreach campaigns' primary direction.

The WNO, in part, achieved this strand of the programme's marketing by forming a partnership with the National Trust – with whom there is a degree of complementarity between audiences (Hutchings 2017) – and organising a series of excursions to National Trust owned Tudor properties 'where Tudor history would have been played out for real', in order 'to bring these courtly dramas to life' (WNO 2013 Press release).⁸ The Tudor house venues included Tredegar House in Newport, Packwood House and Baddesley Clinton near Birmingham and Plas Newydd Country House and Gardens, Anglesey. The events explored notions of fact and fiction in relation to the operas' narratives. This included reading out excerpts from Anne Boleyn's trial speech and Mary Stuart's letter the night before she was executed. Further excursions to notable Tudor houses included the Tudor Merchant's House in Tenby ('At home with the Tudors'), and Speke Hall and Little Moreton Hall near Liverpool ('A Tudor Day Out'); the historical context of Donizetti's operas was framed by a speaker or more at each of the locations (including historical novelists such as Suzannah Dunn and academic experts such as Anna Whitelock) and singers in Tudor costume performed to Donizetti's music (Dunn 2015 and March 2013). An events package such as this is clearly designed to appeal to and promote opera to avid Tudor fans with an unquenchable thirst for Tudor history, and to educate and entertain opera connoisseurs about the operas' historical context. Therefore, this events package is an obvious example of the growing trends of edutainment, experiential learning and cultural tourism around a performance event. While the manor house visits may arguably have appealed to only certain strata of the potential opera going audience and pools of Tudor enthusiasts, the WNO also targeted the younger generations, who were offered a number of participatory experiences of a similar kind.

In addition to the above work conducted by the marketing department, the notion of edutainment was extended to seven to eleven year old school children in South Wales, Bangor, Birmingham and Liverpool with the WNO's TUDORS! project carried out by a different branch within the WNO, namely those working in education and outreach. The interactive programme took place at several National Trust properties, including Tredegar House in Newport and Plas Newydd Country House and Gardens, Anglesey where local school children participated in a two day intensive experience. The project, devised by Rhian Hutchings, writer-director Martin Riley (also of Alive & Kicking Theatre Company) and composer and musical director Helen Woods, included time travelling and transformed the participants into members of the Tudor court. Experimenting with what is called first person interpretation in contemporary heritage and museum practice, the project was, in Riley's description, a 'site specific two day interactive [...], a Tudor Time Travel adventure for Welsh National Opera' (Alive & Kicking 2018). The project was conceived in the spirit of what Hutchings terms the 'creative adventure model' in education and outreach, which was not as widespread at the time as it may be today. Hutchings was adamant to move away from the less participatory school workshop popularising operas which typically consists of a singer in costume singing an aria or two with children around them pretending to be chorus or crowd. Hutchings chose a method that had the potential to empower students and place them at the centre of the action by fully involving them and immersing them in a situation

with the help of the creative imagination. This ambition materialised as a Mantle of the Expert style immersive creative exercise with the children about Tudor-era politics and ethical dilemmas that have relevance in our lives (Hutchings 2017).

The title of this experiment mixing historical fact with fiction and allusions to popular culture (for instance *Doctor Who*) was *Killing Cousins!*. The project encapsulated the conflict between the two cousins, Elizabeth and Mary. The participants were mostly year five and six students (school children aged nine to eleven). They first had a preparatory day in the school where the narrative frame to the drama exercise was communally set up with the leadership of the facilitators. Even Elizabethan etiquette was encouraged to maintain the historical ambiance during the lunch hour: 'You can carry your sword but don't use it to eat with' (Welsh National Opera 2013e). The frame to the immersive experience was that there were two contemporary children, Chloe McCool and Rhys Morgan. They are cousins who study together and constantly bicker with each other (not unlike the Tudor cousins who feature in the operas). They go on a school trip together to a Tudor castle where Mary Queen of Scots was murdered. Because of some mishap they fall back in time and find themselves in Tudor England where Riley, playing the part of the Master-General of the Ordnance recruits them and tries to influence them to persuade Elizabeth to spare Mary. The children did not fully act out all the proceedings but 'hotseated' and improvised around many 'what would you do/say if ...' questions, creating the sensory experience of a Tudor market with soundscape (thanks to Helen Woods), smells and so forth and forming a Tudor square from the four corners of which speakers can emerge for discussions, rehearsing ideas, political interventions. They had a taste of Tudor English fused with contemporary youth sociolect. Day one of the intensive learning experience ended on a cliffhanger (the children's characters were thrown into prison), and the following day was spent 'on site': at a genuine Tudor venue, a heritage site. The students were asked to create a court masque to perform to the queen on the second day. For this purpose the teachers of the participating classes had a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) session with Woods who gave them a malleable structure they could create the court masque around with the children. The drama game on the second day included the final confrontation between Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart. The children were invited to try and mediate in the dispute between Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, who were played by female members of the performance trilogy's chorus in full Tudor regalia. The two singers sang the relevant arias of Elizabeth and Mary by Donizetti. *Killing Cousins!* does not change the well-known ending (Martin Riley acted as executioner) but the children have had their opportunities to influence the political (and ethical) positions involved in the conflict between the two famous women. With a playful cultural nod to *Shakespeare in Love* on behalf of the paratextual activity's devisers, the drama involves Christopher Marlowe as a key character and Shakespeare ('William Shake the spear'), the quintessential Renaissance bard, in a small supporting role, helping the children learn both about Tudor politics and dramatists' status at the time. It is the Wizard Earl (Henry Percy) who helps the children get back into 2013 and back to their history class. Back in class, the cousins no longer argue, while the history

teacher, Mrs Mancini, is amazed at how knowledgeable the students have suddenly become. The creative method of the Mantle of the Expert inherited from the pedagogue Dorothy Heathcote and her followers in Drama in Education worked particularly well in such a context when teaching 'by doing' about history and 'smuggling in' opera as a novelty to many of the participants (including an offer of subsidised tickets through the participating schools). The main aim of such a project is however not an immediate conversion of a paratextual project participant into an audience member but long-term thinking: planting the seed of an interest in opera at an early stage.

Conclusion

As Alexandra Wilson observes in her article on representations of opera in contemporary British culture:

[D]espite the supposed postmodernist reappraisal of cultural categories, opera retains its connotations of upper-class leisure-time. This is presented in a negative light, as if we might somehow strip the artistic core of its narrow societal periphery and return it to the people. (Wilson 2007: 269)

The WNO's marketing campaign for their Tudors trilogy and the parallel education and outreach activities appeared to tackle this general perception of opera in Britain. By boldly aiming to engage not only the 'culture vultures' and primary school children but also the tech-savvy and experimental urban arts eclectics, the marketing, and the education and outreach campaigns for the three Donizetti operas aimed to broaden short-term and long-term audience composition by tapping into contemporary Tudormania and utilising a broad range of platforms as well as current practices in transmedia storytelling, and live and digital edutainment. The promotional materials and interactive historical interpretation programmes underline how the WNO's Tudor trilogy contributes to the overall reinterpretation of the Tudors, at the same time intending to contemporise and heritagise the famous historical characters and edutain and nurture audiences old and new with an emphasis on history-as-experience (de Groot 2009: 141). Several of these paratexts take opera off the pedestal of 'high culture' and democratise it, offering space for 'user-generated' content. They demonstrate that opera is 'a living and breathing art form and not a museum' (Hutchings 2017) – even the more heritage focused events emphasise the experiential and at least to some degree the participatory. The WNO's Tudors paratexts appear to render both the genre of opera and the phenomenon of Tudormania as forms of 'cultured' fandom. The marketing, and education and outreach projects intersect these fandoms. The Tudors paratextual cluster offers something current and chic to the urban arts eclectics and relevant and relatable to child participants in the interactive roleplay. In addition, it maintains the association of the Tudor opera package with heritage and history in a more traditional sense to the 'culture vulture' segment of the spectatorship.

While fans, producers, writers, art directors, and so forth are well aware of the importance of promotional materials around performance, these are still underappreciated in academia as texts and cultural/artistic processes in their own right, with due attention paid to their transmedial and intertextual connectedness. Often multiple layers of meaning around a production escape academic recognition and analysis because this transmedial and intertextual web around it is ignored, and even less credit is given to the more 'transitory' products and processes themselves in their own right, which was something that our article has aimed to draw attention to. Many of the consumers of these paratextual products and processes got a sense of the trilogy, its themes, its style or opera as a performance genre as such, through these promotional products and activities, whether they eventually saw the performances themselves or not. The paratextual products and activities also have their own separate intertextual networks dependent on the consumer's or participant's awareness and taste: they might belong to a genre of culture or art (such as a poster or a street game) where consumer/interpreters may have expectations and memories of their own, which potentially enriches their spectating of/participation in or otherwise consumption of a paratextual product in relation to the advertised text or even without direct access to the advertised text itself.

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Notes:

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² Emboldened by the literary and cultural studies term 'Austenmania' (see for instance Sadoff 2010), we are using the term 'Tudormania' to capture the significant fandom developed around the Tudor phenomenon.

³ For further exploration of the concept of Tudorism see String and Bull 2011.

⁴ This article is based on the plenary presentation the authors gave at the "Representing the Tudors" conference at the University of South Wales (2015). The study has emerged from an independent research project which was neither commissioned nor endorsed by the WNO. The authors would like to express their gratitude to the following for advice or interviews: Alison John, David Massey, Rhian Hutchings, April Heade, Emily Garside, Bridget Keehan, Angharad Evans and last but not least journal editor Martin Barker and the article's peer reviewers.

⁵ Just to give an indicative example, the screening of *The Tudors* miniseries in April 2007 has inspired the creation of a number of Tudor websites and Facebook pages. In June 2008, during the second season of the drama series, the episode depicting Anne Boleyn's execution drew 852,000 viewers and google recorded a distinctive rise in "Anne Boleyn" surfers in 2008 (see Bordo 2015: 249).

⁶ A prevalent and meticulously discussed example of this is the large-scale and ambitious *Interconnections: Revisiting the Future* project (see Walters, Hughes and Hughes 2011), which immerses the participants in a VR environment reconstructing the 1964-65 New York World's Fair and in its special *Future Fair* section invites user-generated material on what the future history of human civilization could be (especially in relation to science and technology).

⁷ The WNO's most recent (installation based) digital paratext is the digital music experience *Rhondda Rebel* (30 August–18 November 2018), which uses augmented reality and was created by virtual reality and creative production agency REWIND around the WNO's all-female opera about suffragette Lady Rhondda, *Rhondda Rips It Up!* (2018).

⁸ See also Arts&Heritage 2014 for the importance of visual arts activities at heritages sites (the report commissioned by The National Trust and English Heritage covers the North of England but has broader applicability).