Art Museum Knowledge and the Crisis of Representation

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Introduction

Gallery education has been directed, or has volunteered itself, to perform the feat of constituting the creative conditions of reception through acts and constructions of making audiences visible. In doing this, gallery education makes claims for overcoming the problems presented by the exchange value of art collection, as well as representing an alternative to monocultural modes of address. Gallery education aims to realise the creative agency of the conditions of art's reception, through a process of creating multifarious voices within a heterogeneous diversity. In this endeavour, it is possible, in practice, to distinguish the elements of gallery education and research practice that aim to transcend two important aspects of gallery experience: a) the *passive* role of substitution (of the singular production and reproduction of creativity); and b) the *active* role of regulation (of the control of intended or preferred meaning). Such transcending elements constitute themselves as new and relatively autonomous forms of production – producing meaning, which is to say producing identity. Within this aim, it is possible to discern, in gallery education, a set of contradictions between the drive for transformation, on the part of the individual aided by Gallery Education and the division of specialist knowledge in the production and consumption of the work of art. It is in the cauldron of these tensions and contradictions that we can discern the continuity of the discourse of radical practices.[1]

The above quotation is from a paper published in [E]dition 2, of the research project *Tate Encounter: Britishness and Visual Culture*, as part of an examination of the relationship

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[1] The paper was entitled *Making Audiences Visible: Gallery Education, Research and Recent Political Histories*.

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between gallery education, collection and acquisition at *Tate*. Eight years on this entanglement of understandings and purposes surrounding the transformative aims of Gallery Learning can still be discerned, only now in very different circumstances. This paper attempts a characterisation of the current relationship between the art museum, its audiences and educators in the ongoing crisis of representation.

The paper approaches the question of the mediated representation of education in the art museum and academy rather obliquely, by grounding the discussion in the texture and findings of two related mixed methods research projects at *Tate*. The first project, *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture (2007–2010)*[2] marked the first time *Tate* had collaborated with the social sciences on any scale, by inviting academic researchers into the museum, over a three-year period, ostensibly to investigate what was understood at the time to be the lack of cultural diversity of *Tate's audience*. The second project, *Cultural Value and the Digital: Practice, Policy and Theory*,[3] took place over six months during 2014, and focused upon how the art museum was responding to digital technology and network culture and with what impact upon established forms of cultural value.

The two research projects involved a series of specific empirical studies including documenting the first encounter with *Tate Britain* by over 200 undergraduates; ethnographic studies of how twelve students and their families with migrant family background focused on their response to art and the art museum over a two-year period; an organizational study of how the agency of the concept of audience was mobilised by *Tate professionals*; and recorded public dialogues with art museum practitioners, learning curators, policy makers and new media theorists about both the art museum's relationship to education, visual culture and the internet. These studies, undertaken

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[2] *Tate Encounters* was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as a major project of the Diasporas and Migration and Identities Programme. It was a collaborative project between London South Bank University, *Tate Britain* and the University of the Arts. The investigators were Andrew Dewdney, Victoria Walsh and David Dibosa.

[3] This project was also AHRC funded as a collaboration between *Tate Research*, Royal College of Art and London South Bank University. The investigators were Victoria Walsh, Andrew Dewdney and Emily Pringle.

between 2007 and 2014 at *Tate*, generated a large body of recorded data, which remains available in various video, photographic, audio and textual formats on the research pages of *Tate Online* (2009).[4] Much of the analysis of the major three-year research project, *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture* has already been presented in online reports and papers, together with chapters co-authored with Victoria Walsh (2012; 2013; 2014). The most condensed and analytical formulation of the research resides in the co-authored book, Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2013), *Post Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum*, which was written following the end of the *Tate Encounters research project*. The second project report was published as *Cultural Value and the Digital: Policy, Practice and Theory,* Walsh, Dewdney and Pringle (2015). It is from this combined body of data, together with four international conference papers, written and presented over the past two years (2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c) that this paper attempts to chart a new path orientated to the question of the representation of art museum education, which, it is hoped will be pertinent to this volume.

It will be helpful in what follows to identify a number of key linguistic terms; creativity, modernism, audience and representation, which play out like actors in the drama of the art museum. Although each term has its own discourse, together they form a semiotic ecology within which the separated knowledge domains of government policy, art museum practices, and academic theory perform as well as contest their own agency.

Creativity and modernity

The first two of these terms – creativity and modernism – have a shared history and coupled agency, which connects programming and exhibition in the art museum with the extended networks of purpose and value in the production, acquisition and reception of art. In this discussion we can take creativity as a speculative field of knowledge encompassing both practice-specific and general explanations. On the one hand creativity is taken to be a universal, necessary self-actualising ability in which

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[4] Tate (2009): *Tate Encounters Online*, online: www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/tate-encounters (last access: 22.05.2017).

subjectivity and identity is realized and reproduced in everyday life,[5] whilst on the other hand, practice-specific creativity in European historical culture is located in the heightened and exceptional figure of the artist. There is no necessary contradiction between these two strands of thinking about creativity, but British representative culture has been taken up almost exclusively with the custodial conditions of the latter in its educational provision and national museums. From the formation of the South Kensington Movement[6] to today's arguments for the creative industries, hubs and networks, creativity has been allied with the economic and industrial force of modernity. This is a modernity fashioned in the image of Enlightenment rationalism in which the modernist aesthetic is inscribed in economic and social progress. Art Education and Gallery Learning have been centrally caught up with aesthetic modernism and its genesis in individual creativity, rather than with the collective expression of creative reception, which in the art museum is its audience and in society its public.

Audience

In the discourse of the public museum, the specific notion of audience contains the wider conception of *the people*, whether as the personified citizens of the French republic or as subjects within Britain's constitutional monarchy. Over the last decade there has been a marked shift in the conception of the museum audience from that of the public to that of consumers. In public cultural policy the individual visitor has both a specific subjectivity and a representative identity, which are combined in the formation of civic culture. On the surface, the notion of the post-modern consumer seamlessly replaces that of a representative public and consequently dissolves the educational problem of the address and reception of art. In highly heterogeneous and increasingly globalised societies art in

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[5] Raymond Williams's account of the historical formation of the idea of creativity is given in a chapter entitled *The Creative Mind*, in *The Long Revolution* (1961).

[6] The South Kensington Movement was led by Henry Cole (1808–1882), who was responsible for the management of The Great Exhibition of 1851, the establishment of The Victoria & Albert Museum and instrumental in founding The Royal College of Art.

the museum has become experience itself. The hypermodern art museum can forget representation and need only embrace cultural hybridity, be more ambient, install more coffee stations and shops and relax. But such a view raises problems for the agency of creativity and modernity, which holds the museum to its representative public purposes in policy, practice and theory as well as providing the aesthetic of viewing. As long as creativity is framed by modernity then the art museum still has to think of itself as a progressive rather than consumer force, offering through art a significant if not transformative art educational experience. *Gallery Learning* is now the final and attenuated link between the hybrid postmodern consumer, cut adrift from cultural norms and values, and modernism's socially affirming creativity. It was as a response to the problematic and politics of audience in 2007 that the *Tate Encounters research project* emerged.

Crisis of representation and reflexive modernisation

Notwithstanding the art museum's recent forays into new media and the digitisation of collections it remains a deeply analogue institution, cast by the preservation and collection of objects themselves originating from an analogue world of material production. The communication and media function of the art museum also reflects the cultural form of analogue representation. This is the highly centralised broadcast mode of address in which the elite few talk to the many. However, the hypermodern world is now in a post-digital phase and the Internet is the de facto default of communication in which the many talk to the many. Both analogue and civic modes of representation built positions of cultural authority based upon a selective tradition of disciplinary knowledge and cultural value, which is now challenged by the decentred, distributed and networked character of post-digital culture. This is the most recent expression of the crisis of representation, which has been systemic in post-industrial societies for the last two decades and which has had far-reaching consequences for the reproduction of knowledge, governance and aesthetics. The articulation of a crisis of representation was entailed in the outline and analysis of the condition of postmodernity from the late 1970s (Lyotard 1984). At this time, the crisis focused upon the evident disparity between the grand narratives of scientific and technological progress associated with Enlightenment

rationality and the catastrophic events opened up over two world wars in Europe, the American war in Vietnam and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The articulation of the condition of post-modernity developed new understandings of late capitalism's shift from production to consumer-led production and the consequences for both capital and labour, in what is now characterised as global neo-liberalism. The crisis of representation identified within the condition of post modernity pointed to the inadequacy of the developed systems of European thought and their representative political and aesthetic conventions in capturing and defining new conditions and realities at the end of the twentieth century. Currently, the same historic forms and institutions of representation are still in place, but operating within a radically different system of information capture, storage and circulation and consumer modes of consumption. Such a situation has given rise to processes of convergence and remediation of representational modes and forms. Convergence and remediation are readily expressed and present within media and technological debates, but what is less clear is the impact of technological change upon the field of art and its institutions. What, we might ask, is the current manifestation of the crisis of representation within the art museum?

The condition of knowledge

In hypermodern times modernism's progressive linear historical continuity and with it the continuity of cultural memory have run out of time, whilst modernity's future horizon has shrunk to that of a perpetual present. Lipovetsky's essay (2005) reframed the post-modern break signalled in the 1980s, which called into question modernity's certainties as well as articulating the far-reaching changes in the conditions of modernity which have subsequently unfolded. Hypermodernity is an attempt to move beyond the cultural and intellectual interregnum represented by the post-modern moment, through a recognition of an accelerated modernity, characterised by time multiplying and fragmenting. This is the world of the paradoxical present, in which time is experienced as a choice and in which values are recycled with ever-greater speed. It is the now familiar world of instant memorialisation of everything and anything alongside of a perpetual anxiety about meaning and purpose.

Under the conditions of hypermodernity, modernist critical reasoning and its developed

notion of creativity become uncoupled from the historical logic of linear progressive time, which has a number of emerging consequences. There is a case for arguing that the modernist notion of criticality has been commodified and fetishized in the academy, thus reducing its productivity in the public realm and diminishing its ability to define programmatic futures. There is a further case to be made that aesthetic modernism (that is to say, the focus on the work of art as an autonomous, self-referential object to be appreciated through formal qualities) is no longer able to define the contemporary, because time is no longer experienced linearly. Aesthetic modernism, as a mode of interpretation, curatorial display and aesthetic appreciation, is thus consigned to a growing list of heritage products and culture. The rejoinder to these tentative arguments of the exhaustion of the critical project of modernism would be that the argument itself is born out of modernist critique, proving that critical practice continues to evolve. It could also be argued that in hypermodernity both positions hold true, after all the recognition of appropriation in cultural reproduction has been a cornerstone of critical theory since Marx and Engel's publication of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848.

What is new, or at least new as a perspective on the art museum, is the exponential acceleration of appropriation in the processes of cultural reproduction. This is the experience of cultural workers of the ever faster race of programming, the cultural churn, rather than turn, and the ever more voracious appetite for cultural consumption. This is also the condition of most scholars and academics whose critical writing is short-circuited in the closed networks of universities, academic publishing and research assessments. It is the world in which cultural value is a hyperlink replacement on the surface of a computer screen. This is hyper-production whose impact upon culture rests in the hollowing out and monetisation of the use value of knowledge. Hypermodernity's transformation of disciplinary knowledge into heritage and its replacement by extreme and myopic specialisation, suggests that the representation of educational knowledge of the art museum is redundant the moment it recognises itself as a disciplinary field. But this is not to say the knowledge practices of art education have no agency, but rather to say that there is a need to trace the new lines of flight and identify networks in which the agency of pedagogic knowledge travels. How then can the genuine interests, aims and practices of art pedagogy be taken forward, what spaces might such knowledge usefully occupy under the conditions of hypermodernity?

Research and learning in the art museum

In 2005 *Tate* had no Research Department. The *Tate Encounters project*, funded by the UK's national funding council to the sum of £500k, was motivated and initiated by the Education Department at *Tate Britain*. As with *Tate Encounters*, the second research project *Cultural Value and the Digital* involved the participation of *Tate Learning*, but was not framed by the aims and practices of gallery education. Indeed, both projects stood at a strategic distance from *Tate Learning* in order to underline the importance of the research's potential impact upon the whole organization, as well as to national cultural policy. That said, *Tate Learning* curators made invaluable contributions to the progress of the research. But the research strategy of distancing itself from Learning at the outset is a recognition that museum education can all too readily be a limited repository for good ideas not taken up, becoming, in the worst-case scenario, an organisational zone for public experimentation, but containing the potential of radical change within the museum.

One idea reflected upon here, which emerged from the 2007–2010 *Tate Encounters research*, is that in the art museum, the networks of education and learning departments are open and receptive to external partnerships and genuine collaborations, whilst comparatively closed within the organisation at the level of agency. In 2010 the research found an organisation in which all activity was subject to the management of risk to core purposes of collection, corporate development and building expansion. Five years later, such an analysis of the institutional limits upon education in the art museum may seem counter-intuitive in the face of *Tate's current public profile*, in which learning is put at the centre of its rhetoric and culture. This represents something of a puzzle, if not paradox, in that antithetical aims, that of transformative pedagogy and corporate risk management, co-exist in dialogue with each other. Of course, the same might be said of the academy at this point in time – a situation in which corporate management treats learning as a market commodity, whilst academics continue to pursue knowledge and education as a value in and for itself.

Have we come to a position where organisational revolutions are effortless and no longer based upon the conflicting social and economic interests of capital and labour? If

revolutions can be staged corporately then it throws serious doubt upon the historical, political and aesthetic goal of transformation itself, which has been fundamentally founded in the emancipation of the people as well as the self-actualisation of the individual. This is where Giroux's stricture concerning the Western appropriation of Paulo Freire's liberationist pedagogy has real traction.

> What has been increasingly lost in the North American and Western appropriations of Freire's work is the profound and radical nature of its theory and practice as an anticolonial and postcolonial discourse. More specifically, Freire's work is often appropriated and taught 'without any consideration of imperialism and its cultural representation'. (Giroux 2006)

Between 2011 and 2012, *Tate Learning* underwent an internal review process, to understand the impact of Learning and to bring it *more to the heart of what Tate does*. In a summary document of the outcome of the project, Caroline Collier, the Director of *Tate National* could report,

> The principles have been to integrate evaluation and reflection into the everyday practice (action research) and to be open to critique, seeking out feedback and interrogation. This confident approach has led to programmes and projects of quality and impact. It has also freed Learning from the confines of marginal departments and made it a core concern of the organisation. Learning with art is now widely recognised to be the primary role of *Tate*. (Pringle n.d.)

Image 1: Andrew Dewdney (2014): *Tate Modern Phase Two under construction*, London, © Andrew Dewdney.

The review undertaken by *Tate Learning* of its practices and values can be seen as a prelude to the opening of the *Tate Modern extension* in June 2016. *Tate's website* explains,

The expansion will create a less congested, more welcoming environment. The exhibition and display space will be almost doubled, enabling us to show more of our Collection. There will be more cafes, terraces and concourses in which to meet and unwind. Learning will be at the heart of the new *Tate Modern*, reflecting *Tate's commitment* to increasing public knowledge and understanding of art. There will be a range of new facilities throughout the building for deeper engagement with art: interpretation, discussion, private study, participation, workshops and practice based learning.[7]

As Mark Brown, the *Guardian's* arts correspondent reported in September 2015,[8] such a policy steer within *Tate* forestalls potential reductions in public funding for the arts or the reintroduction of charges for admission. This is possibly a cynical reading, but the realities of *Tate* managing risk to its core purposes are very real and education in the museum has, not for the first time, been called upon to represent public engagement and participation at the policy level – and to secure significant levels of government, corporate and trust funding.

Reflexive modernity

It is *Tate's* very success as an early adopter of corporate reflexive modernization, in the 1990s (Beck et al. 1994), that allowed it to pioneer the marketization of the older civic museum and to embrace hypermodernity's new mode of accelerated programming based upon fashion and consumption. Beck's analysis of reflexive modernity focused upon the shift from established industrial society and its public institutions, to the need to manage the uncertainties brought about by risky technological and political developments of

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[7] *The Tate Modern Project*, online: http://www.itsliquid.com/the-tate-modern-project.html (last access: 22.05.2017).

[8] "Tate Modern's Olympic-sized expansion to open in June 2016. Extended London art gallery in former power station that was set to open for 2012 Olympics boasts 20.700 sq m more space", online: http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/sep/22/tate-moderns-olympic-sized-expansion-to-open-in-june-2016 (last access: 22.05.2017).

industrialisation itself. Reflexive modernisation arises as a response to the weakening of the welfare state, family and social solidarity, by cultural globalisation and neo-liberal market economics in which individualisation and functionalisation are the new norms. Risk management is a central organising feature of reflexive modernisation, expressed in differentiated networks of association through which the agency of people, objects and ideas are reconstituted and have currency. Risk management operates to assess and adjust the balance of probabilities in maintaining stability. Reflexive modernisation was a response to the new uncertain and fluid social and economic conditions to emerge in the late twentieth century to which the new normative idea of the post-traditional society gave a name and focus.

The central and interesting problem for museum practitioners, and of relevance to the discussion of the representation of pedagogy, is that the success of *Tate Modern*, measured by market terms of income growth, increased audience numbers and brand awareness, has been achieved by what is now more clearly an intellectual fiction of the contemporary. The modern and contemporary in art has been commodified by the logic of market-driven consumption and outpaced by the Internet, which paradoxically turns the critical project of modernity into heritage and in turn mythologizes the past. One of the unexpected outcomes of this situation, as the diagram below shows, is that the authority of the educator in the museum increases against that of the art curators, the more the art museum recognises the demands of the new consuming audiences.

Tate Modern embraced the new heterogeneous temporalities allowing visitors a space of separation from the contained space of curated exhibition. This spatial reorganisation increased the visitor's sense of time being compartmentalised, in free time, social time, time for consumption, along with the potential for educational time spent in the galleries. Art could now be experienced within this multiple framing of temporality in the art museum. One of the consequences of this highly successful strategy of reflexive modernisation was that the new temporal multiplicity reframed and put pressure upon the previous singular logic of aesthetic modern curation. The new terms of accelerated and multiple time of the spaces of *Tate Modern* came into contention with the authority of historical continuity and its guarantee of the cultural value of the work of art. *Tate* alone does not carry the burden of the paradox between the multiplicity of times in the contemporary spaces of circulation and the linear historical time of aesthetic modernism

in which art continues to be exhibited and displayed. In fact, in the context of international modernist art museums, *Tate* can be seen to be successfully grappling with the problems associated with the broader crisis of representation. *Corporate Tate*, embodied in *Tate Modern* as the constitutional head of a new cultural body remains a spectacular success, whose practices are emulated across the globe.

In the *Post Critical Museology* account of 2013 the discussion of the future of the art museum was articulated by the research's observations of the different curatorial practices between *Tate Britain* and *Tate Modern* in relationship to the collection and display of the historic, modern and contemporary. Under the directorship of Chris Dercon, *Tate Modern* had initiated its own discussion of the future of the art museum, leading up to the launch of the *Tate Tanks* in July 2012 in which he recognised that;

> The museum no longer sees its ever-growing audiences as a hindrance. It embraces the public as never before. It will become a new type of public space, one for social play and innovation, facilitating new forms of art, creativity and thinking, where people will look at and interact with art as well as with each other. Learning will become an artistic activity in itself. (Dercon 2015)

The distributed museum

The *Tate Encounters research discussion* developed its own modelling of the future of the art museum, which was expressed as the notion of the distributed museum, which was the museum seen from the perspective of its visitors. Dercon's global vision for the art museum was based upon art production for new types of institutional space, whereas the distributed museum attempted to grapple with the difficult question of cultural value expressed by audiences. The distributed museum is a conceptual way of seeing the contemporary museum from the perspective of the public reception of art, which as noted entails the problem of modernity's project of social and cultural emancipation. The cultural, communication and knowledge practices of such publics are now transmedial and transcultural, rather than experiential and engaged. Socio-cultural communication is defined by a transmedial mode in which attention is both locally focused and ambiently

distracted. Media culture takes place on multiple platforms and local networks in which the user curates and edits content-on-demand and co-creates fictional narratives or factual collage. Value in the transmedial is registered transculturally, by subjects differentially located within everyday life negotiating relative and mobile positions of subjectivity. Such a model of contemporary communication challenges the highly centred, continuous historical forms of cultural value of which the museum has been one of its public guardians. The transmedial and transcultural might also be the basis for staking out the agency of art pedagogy, the opening out of the space it might occupy beyond its functionalisation within the museum.

Less abstractly the idea of the distributed museum *as fact* is a way to characterise the museum's relationship to the Internet and the current forms of the Online museum. In this the second research project recognised how the art museum currently organises itself as an online content producer, a deregulated arts broadcaster, which reproduces an analogue representational mode as a means of retaining cultural authority. This can also be seen as the art museum resisting a situation in which its traditional cultural authority has been reordered by the transmedial and transcultural, such that the expert now stands in exactly the same position as the visitor with respect to distributed information.

The conception of an audience's relationship to works conjured by the new performance spaces of the *Tanks*, was in many ways at odds with the positioning of audience in the displays in the galleries at *Tate Britain*, which under the direction of Penelope Curtis[9] had been reorganised chronologically in a heightened narrative of nation.[10] Clearly different and, it is argued, paradoxical cultural, contemporary and art historical narratives have been played out at *Tate*.

Table 1: First published in Andrew Dewdney et al. (2013: 206): *Post Critical Museology*,

[9] Penelope Curtis was Director of Tate Britain between 2010 and 2015.

[10] On 9 October 2014, the *Tate Research Centre: Learning* was launched. It joins five other well-established *Tate Research Centres,* and builds on *Tate's* internationally recognised learning programme and close connections to external partners in Higher Education, visual arts and arts education, online: http://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/learning-research (last access: 07.06.2017).

The modernist art museum has had three decades in which to assess and adjust to the condition of postmodernity and now hypermodernity. What can be seen unevenly over this time is a twin movement of modernity itself. On the one hand *Tate* adjusting to neo-liberalism through the strategy of corporate reflexive modernisation, on the other the curatorial pursuit of modernism's critical project in staging the contemporary and deconstructing the colonial past. The latter is evident in the Foucauldian and post-colonial critiques of the museum (Foucault 1998; Bennet 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 1992), which as is now clear, left the power structure of the museum intact and at best introduced a marginal counter narrative of historical interpretation. What such critiques and their curatorial innovations left untouched was the museum's organisational structures and what fell out of the separation between organisational change and curatorial critique was *Tate's understanding*, knowledge and relationship with audience. Put more politically what had changed was the museum's relationship with the historically constituted civic culture and the public realm.

Encounters

One of the abiding recognitions to come out of the many different contexts of fieldwork in the long-term research work at *Tate*, was just how fragile the epistemological wall between objects and humans really is and yet how much effort and energy is constantly needed by the museum and its extended knowledge collaborators in academia in order to maintain such a division. On the one hand, the ethnographic studies with culturally diverse audiences and their families revealed a disinvestment in the value category of *art* per se and its replacement by transmedial practices; and on the other hand, an organisational study demonstrated that the agency of the professional practice networks at *Tate* were directed at managing absolute risk to collection presented by the audience, a fact which went largely unrecognised by curators and for those educators invested in the agency of audience ran counter to their goals. So, whilst our selective audience was busy creating lines of flight from the museum and new networks of association beyond the art object, the curators and educators were ceaselessly attempting to unite and bond

audiences with objects in the spacio-temporal place of the museum.

Much of what was generated from the research study, supports a central argument that individual identities are no longer anchored in spacio-temporal certainty, founded in tradition and continuities of the discourses of nation and its unsustainable categories of race and class. This relativism of identity is a direct outcome of the breakdown of older representational categories and the rise of networks for which as yet there is no collectively recognised and reflexive mode. Human subjects in the multiple worlds and zones of the present experience greater uncertainty and insecurity, which is at odds with settled and fixed identities. In cultural politics and practices the effort to maintain the representational and historic forms of identity, place and belonging, needs recalibrating in relationship to the conditions and relationships of the present based upon migration, mobility and network culture.

The involvement of student participants in the *Tate Encounters research* was not undertaken to engage students in the art museum experience, there were no educational aims as such, but rather to find ways to elicit their responses to the museum in what for many was a first encounter. The mapping of responses was undertaken variously, through questionnaires, essays, interviews and participants' videos and photo-essays over a two-year period. One common, if not overwhelming view of *Tate Britain* at the time was that it was not an easy or natural extension of their cultural environment. The museum was felt to be a controlling environment and its representational objects were felt to yield little that reflected or was sympathetic to their own sense of cultural history and everyday life. For those students who elected to participate over a longer period of time, getting beyond this first blank response led them to an interest in the ways in which the museum's representational order was maintained. They became animated and interested in the value processes of the museum and this led them to want to undertake their own investigations in how value was assigned or created. Importantly the location and practices from which interest in further investigations was generated were that of the contemporary media and visual culture.

The framing of Britishness both within the research and in the displays of the collection reveals problematic notions of nation and identity and one of the central understandings to come out of the *Tate Encounters* report to the *Tate Trustees*, was that contemporary identity as experienced by a student-aged generation is more fluid and multiple and that

cultural meaning is organised around subjectivities rather than fixed identities. A related finding was that cultural affiliation and subjectivity, based upon migrational experience is more likely to be dynamically transcultural, than intercultural. Such *lived* cultural relativism from a potential museum audience presents problems for art historical categories of object display as well as challenging categories of art collection, but opens up new possibilities for education, as many of *Tate Learning's curators* have embraced in their practices. As a testament to the success of the research, it was clear at the end of the three years that the student participants felt no more or less invested in *Tate* than they did at the outset. They had undergone no pedagogical transformation in relation to the value or appreciation of the art museum, nor the art object. *The Tate Encounters student participants* led the way out of and beyond the museum.

How the lived cultural knowledge of the audience is represented in their encounter with the art museum comes to the fore in what has yet to be named as the social art museum, the distributed museum or the art museum of the future. How is this knowledge registered within the art museum and how far and in what ways does it travel within the knowledge networks?

Cultural value and organisational networks

What if anything are the organisational barriers to cultural value in the art museum flowing not from the art object to audiences, but from the audience to the object? In 2007, at the start of the *Tate Encounters research* this question was framed in much narrower terms, but not without a deeper resonance to the question of cultural value. With a New Labour government keen to address social cohesion through the politics of multiculturalism, diversity was a key issue. Social cohesion became integrated into cultural policy, with museums being charged with widening participation and diversifying the traditional white, middle-class, educated audience. This was the implicit political context within which *Tate Encounters* operated and it quickly became cast as a project to get more diverse ethnic groups, particularly those defined as *Black* and *Asian*, into the museum, a role also assigned to *Tate Learning*. This was a highly charged situation within which to operate, since on the one hand it appeared as if the research itself was critical of the narrow demographic of the museum, which largely mirrored the

professional staff group, and on the other hand was actively seeking ways of engaging culturally diverse audiences in the art museum experience. In reality the research stood apart from these instrumentalised goals and racialised demographic definitions, seeking instead to understand the experience of the museum from the perspective of a disinvested audience and from the perspective of how museum professionals perceived and operationalised its own terms for audience.

As part of the field work of *Tate Encounters* a trained post-doctoral research anthropologist carried out a series of open-ended, semi-structured interviews over an eighteen-month period with a selection of *Tate* staff, as well as sitting in on staff meetings and making contemporaneous notes.[11] The approach adopted to this study was ethnographic in character, creating space in the interviews for the subject to range freely in giving an account of their working practices and priorities as well as a view of the organisation they were working in. The researcher's participation in staff meetings were again ethnographic in kind, with the researcher being *embedded* in the organisation as a familiar figure in the workplace. The interviews and staff meetings were not audio recorded, but instead the researcher kept extensive notes, which she wrote up immediately following any session. The decision not to record was based upon an early recognition of a heightened sensitivity on the part of *Tate* staff to making critical comment about their employer, and as a consequence the research went a long way to guarantee anonymity. The research aim of the study was to map what knowledge practices of audience were held and operated by different departments and within employment roles. The study aimed to track the agency of audience as it travelled across the production and reproduction *Tate's exhibition and public programmes*. The analysis of the study was both discursive and dialogic in character, discursive since it scrutinised textual sources in order to identify the lexical indicators of the presence of a discourse of audience and dialogic, in that it took place in a dynamic research group situation which unfolded over the period, using a *snowballing* approach based upon an *embedded* ethnography.

The analysis of the study was also informed by perspectives derived from Actor Network Theory (Latour 2007), which attempts to trace the agency of things as well as people in

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[11] Isabel Shaw, researcher for *Tate Encounters,* conducted seventeen interviews which were anonymised and drawn upon in the organisational analysis.

establishing networks of purpose and association. The following organisational diagram was developed from the exercise of plotting the relationship, or distance, between the organisation's held and classified notions of audience, termed "abstract public" and real visitors, variously grouped according to their mode of participation or encounter with the museum, defined as "embodied audiences".

Table 2: First published in Andrew Dewdney et al. (2013: 178): *Post Critical Museology*, London: Routledge, © Andrew Dewdney.

In undertaking the analysis two key boundaries were perceived, one permeable and the other not, across which the agency of audience held different currencies. A network of directorate, trustees, artists, collectors and dealers defined an organisational core, not open to public inspection and whose role is to secure the long-term cultural value and purpose of the museum. A hard boundary was perceived between this organisational layer, with fewer points of connections to the network of the curators, programmers and academics whose work is to maintain and shape cultural value in the public sphere. The analysis also perceived a soft or permeable boundary, with more points of connection to the networks of educators, marketing and related service delivery, who work to publicise and represent cultural value and who have direct contact with visitors. In summary, at the permeable margins of the organisation the agency of audience is aligned with visitors, whereas at the organisational core, audience holds only strategic value. It is possible to see this as a situation in which knowledge in the art museum flows as part of the management of risk to established cultural value, and as suggested at the outset, Learning networks mediated the risk presented by *unknown* or culturally diverse audiences to the networks of collection.

In successfully managing risk at *Tate*, aesthetic modernism became the main network of ideas and objects in which *Tate* negotiated the relations between artist, art markets, collectors, donors, curators, educators and viewer. In a semiotic analysis it might be said that aesthetic modernism operated as the meta-narrative of organisational change. Aesthetic modernism established the authority of the curator in defining the contemporary as the regulatory iteration of the canon of the modern. It also positioned the viewer as the aesthetic individual, rather than a member of a given cultured group,

which in turn gave rise to the constructivist pedagogies of museum learning. The project of aesthetic modernism remains, albeit uneasily, the default of contemporary art museum and gallery practice, but, it is argued here, now operating under conditions in which the museum is *displaced* in public space by the Internet (Bishop 2012; 2013).

In this realignment, or more accurately redistribution of cultural authority, the traditional-modern axis no longer holds, given the multiplicities of the spacio-temporal experiences of viewers in the accelerated cultural economies of continual replacement. The outcome of this situation, underlined here again, is that under the conditions of hypermodernity, the critical/educative dimension, or *edge* of aesthetic modernism is converted into commodity form, and thus loses its power to transform either individuals or society.

What then does this situation mean for the future of curation and Learning? For the art museum hypermodernity's logic and analysis returns to the idea of the distributed museum, which is the museum viewed from the position of its audiences and conceived as a network. The art museum visitor as well as non-visitor is both a consumer and producer of cultural value in the network of associations. The polarities of cultural transmission and reception defined by the previous analogue representational model have been reversed, and this calls for a new set of terms and understanding of value formation. Transculturality is a given (social) condition of hypermodern experience which operates through the transmediation of historically and culturally given representational codes. The paradigm of transculturality defines the hypermodern museum visitor in the context of the distributed museum through the presence in viewing of differing information codes and the re-imagination of the space of the museum as a specific configuration and instance within a continuous information flow. Transvisuality, or more broadly transmediality is the new mode of viewing/experiencing in the art museum, which replaces the historically given vertical alignment of seeing within specific aesthetic tropes, cultural locations, objects and places ordered by aesthetic modernism.

Post-critical museology

Can the distributed museum be manifested as a new organising set of practices and visible reality, against the weight of established practices, which continue to confine the

agency of the visitor to an effect of the production of objects by professionals? Is a renegotiation between the networks and critical modernity possible in the art museum? The obstacles to the development of the distributed museum are less those of principled objection, i.e. the letting go of cultural authority, than they are economic, organisational and logistical. The art museum already operates as a continuous but differential set of internal and external networks, and the issue therefore is one of the scale of connections and disconnections between people, ideas and objects which can be produced such that agency and meaning can be registered and productively used. Both the *Tate Encounters* and *Cultural Value and the Digital* research projects involved a small-scale modelling of distributed and transmedial value chains, based upon a co-research, co-creation and collaborative model of knowledge production. Could such a model be scaled-up in such a way that the museum professionals, now seen more fully as co-researchers and co-creators in networks, would collaborate in the reversed polarities of cultural value in the distributed museum? One of the most important outcomes of the development of an embedded, collaborative methodology in *Tate Encounters* was the attempt to practically engage the critical in seeking to identify and go beyond the limits of reproduction of an outmoded system of representation. In seeking to open up new positions and lines of cultural value the method of co-research was crucial in providing the ground of the transcultural and the conduit of the transmedial. Co-research was a potential way out of the reproduction of the closed loops of theory, practice and policy operating in organisational networks of the museum, academy and government.

The term "post-critical museology" was reached for as the title of the analysis of the *Tate Encounters research* in an attempt to signal the need for a new position in the production of knowledge in and about the museum. It was considered as a way out of the impasse of the commodification of critical modernism (partially reflected in the arguments of Critical Museology, New Institutionalism and other Foucauldian models of critique), in the belief that is was possible to locate the production of theory within and as part of its own concrete objects. In practice, to turn the performance of theory back upon itself as a means of confronting the limits of the reproduction as theory per se and in order to connect the agency of theory with practice. The post-critical arises from an entanglement of theory in the pragmatics of *problem solving* and change. In relationship to the problem of overcoming the commodification of aesthetic modernism within the art museum, the

post-critical held out the hope for a new set of connections between politics and aesthetics.

Back to the beginning

The paper started by distinguishing the aims of research from those of learning as they appeared at *Tate Britain* and *Tate Modern* in 2007. *The Tate Encounters research* was concerned to understand the transaction between visitor and art museum from the outside looking in and the inside looking out. It wanted to know how the museum constructed its idea of audience as well as to understand how a range of people who were not invested in the art object encountered the museum. In the course of those investigations the research identified the need to understand how cultural value itself was constructed in the art museum and this in turn led to the second project of *Cultural Value and the Digital*.
In both projects the analysis of the connections and disconnections in value chains, or semiotic networks became uppermost. *Tate Learning* launched its own research centre in October 2014 (Furness 2015) with the aim of promoting and sharing knowledge of pedagogies through research in the field of learning in galleries, which could be seen to legitimate a self-reflexive knowledge about the museum's relation to its publics within the museum. As *Tate* formalises pedagogic research and expresses the desire to put Learning at the centre of all its activities it seems legitimate to ask how pedagogy might interface with the distributed museum and its transcultural and transmedial value chains. In the analysis presented here the way out of the impasse of aesthetic modernism requires the art museum to consider a much larger and potentially disruptive set of organisational changes if it is to engage with network culture.
The art and museum worlds, in policy, practice and theory have been and remain subject to a fast-growing cultural economics moving at an accelerated pace, experienced by those involved as a kind of hyper-production and consumption. This is true for the production of art and exhibition as it is for the production of knowledge about art. Paradoxically, this hypermodernity is also characterised by a recycling and reconstitution of historical ideas and situations as one response to current conditions and set agendas for cultural futures. Set against an older hierarchical cultural formation in which cultural authority was centrally organised, there is much to celebrate about the proliferation of

objects, images, events, programmes and voices, much of it propelled by the new demands of online culture. But this new situation brings with it new problems, not least in the conditions of knowledge production and centrally in what and how cultural value is produced, identified and celebrated. The problem for gallery education is no longer the older argument about gaining equality with curatorial knowledge, nor about rebranding Learning as the function of the experience museum, but about the challenge of the art museum identifying and engaging with the new publics of the networks.

To those directly involved in museum education and its representations the hybrid approach suggested here might seem somewhat impure and to be throwing the baby out with the bathwater, ignoring the hard-won knowledge positions of learning pedagogy within the museum and academy. Hopefully there is some resonance in the argument that art museum knowledge and value now needs to be seen from a perspective that articulates both practically and theoretically the hybrid nature of the networks within which museums, collections, exhibition and display operate. This is where the promise of critical pedagogy now lies.

As Andrea Philips has put it,

> Rancière suggests that we must 'repoliticise conflicts so that they can be addressed, restore names to the people and give politics back its former visibility in the handling of problems and resources' and this should be done in the name of the university on all levels, but perhaps especially in the departments and schools that have bent over so readily to embrace the immateriality of practice and thus opened the way for its easy aesthetic economisation. Alternatives in galleries and curatorial projects only serve to mask conflict through their heterotopic performance, and this constitutes a political problem. (Phillips 2010)

To rehearse, let alone shore-up the institutional separations of education, curation, collection, strategy and management, operating as sub-divisions of knowledge in policy, practice and theory is but to see if not reproduce the obstacles in the path of a cultural transformation taking place elsewhere. All of this is now historical in the face of the new conditions of the production and reproduction of knowledge.

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