Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture

Strategic Partnerships: Locating knowledge production in the museum

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LSBU background

- Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences
- Social Policy and Urban Regeneration Institute (SPUR)
- Located in social science, changes in family, work, sexuality and race (ESRC)
- Expansion of Arts & Media at LSBU and opportunity to engage larger
- Questions of Culture and Society.
- Increased Status of Cultural and Creative Industries
Don’t get me wrong, I like this society/city/museum, but... Where is the bacteria? Where is the life?
Research Context

Tate Encounters is an enquiry into questions of the relationship of Art, culture and society

TWO QUESTIONS

1. Why the audience profile of museum attendance has not changed, despite cultural diversity programmes aimed at targeting people from lower socio-economic groups and people with migrant family backgrounds?

2. What narratives of Britishness are contained in the National Collection of British Art and in Tate’s exhibition and display practices?
2. Problematic - the reproduction of distinction

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<tr>
<th>Art Museum</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Audience</th>
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<td><strong>Theory.</strong></td>
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<td>1. Post Colonial Critique located the formation of the museum and collection as a consequence of colonial domination and rule and pointed to museum practice as perpetuating an uncritical Eurocentric world historical view.</td>
<td>Culture is seen as delivering social cohesion and renewal. <strong>Practice</strong></td>
<td>Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology identified the social class basis of museum attendance and value as the social practice of distinction. I.e. a knowledge of art and appreciation functioned as ‘cultural capital’</td>
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**What to do in practice?**

*Limited attempt at academic forms of curation/reactive interpretation, otherwise it is business as usual*

**With the Result?**

Curatorial practice continues unaffected, audiences remain unknown

**What to do in practice?**

Educate the working classes to appreciate art or accept cultural division
Research Context

Tate Encounters enlisted the voluntary help of students with migrant family backgrounds in enquiring into how Tate Britain is experienced.

In this enquiry students used digital capture devices, mobile phones, cameras, camcorders and audio-recorders, to record their experience and explore the relationship between the visual culture of Tate and their own visual culture.
3. Discipline: Theory and practice - transdisciplinarity

Creating a field to understand the relationship between art objects and audiences
Results
Can be seen on Tate Encounters.org

Experienced the museum as
Irrelevant to everyday life

Did not recognise themselves
or their histories in the collection.

Experienced the museum as a place of control.

Experienced art as something separate from their knowledge

Were angry about the situation
Tate Encounters: Britishness & Visual Cultures

A three year collaborative research project between

London South Bank University, Wimbledon College of Art, University of the Arts & Tate Britain
Research Projects

Tate supports a number of important research projects. Please follow the links below to find out more about current major projects.

1. The Camden Town Group: Paintings & Drawings in the Tate Collection
2. Contemporary Art Research: Modern Paints
3. Interviews with artists
4. J.M.W. Turner: Drawings, Watercolours and Sketchbooks in the Tate Collection
5. Matters in Media Art: Collaborating Towards the Care of Time-based Media Works of Art
6. MultEncode
7. Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art
8. Recording Changes in Naum Gabo's Plastic Sculptures
9. Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture
11. Tudor and Stuart Paintings and Drawings: Works in the Tate Collection
12. Culture-mining and the Search for Meaning: online audio/video search tool
Modernisation of the Museum since the 1980s

- Social trends - consumerist models of engagement
- Capital projects
- Urban regeneration
- Museum as social agent
1 **Relationship to AHRC:**
Diasporas, Migration, Identities Programme

Diasporas, Migration and Identities is a trans-disciplinary research programme funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It includes arts and humanities scholars from all over the UK working on individual research, large collaborative and interdisciplinary projects, and in international networks. The aim is to research, discuss and present issues related to diasporas and migration, and their past and present impact on subjectivity and identity, culture and the imagination, place and space, emotion, politics and sociality.
The Limits of Cultural Diversity Initiatives: Recognition of the need for a new model of interdisciplinary research

“The proposal is based upon an interdisciplinary collaboration between a major national cultural institution, a research institute with a strong research reputation in the area of diasporas and migration, situated in an inner urban and culturally diverse university which is actively committed to widening participation and an Art School with a tradition of excellence in art education. The proposal is founded upon the sharing of knowledge and the central outputs of the project are directed at wide non-academic audiences, through workshops, projects and networks.”

AHRC Tate Encounters Application. July 2006
Identifying the Right Partner
LSBU: Expertise, Reputation, Student Population, Locality
Building a Team: Knowledge Transfer through Practice
Contribution to Tate:

- Building trust and confidence in new modes of thought and models of practice through embedded research
- Creating the space for critical engagement with issues through practice
Contribution to Tate:

• Diversifying knowledge-base of museum practice IN RELATION to Collaborative Practice

• Extending the public research domain within the museum: Research In Process
Contribution to Cultural Policy

- Identifying the current limits of cultural diversity initiatives within the museum
- Relocating the questions of cultural diversity policy into the core of museum practice
- Engaging with the specificity of Tate's collection in terms of subjectivity and spectatorship of 'diverse' audiences
- Re-connecting the social with the cultural through co-researchers' engagement
- Building knowledge and skills to inform the development of cultural policy around audiences
Model of Good Practice in Collaborative Research: Tate's Perspective

- 2006 Tate Awarded Independent Research Organisation Status
- Recognition of the benefits of trans-disciplinary research (and the challenges)
- Tate Encounters: Phase Two - Beyond Tate Britain
Problem Solving
Using empirical qualitative methods and analysis to reframe questions

THE RESEARCH STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT:

• The problem of creating an inclusive audience for Tate can not be resolved by a cultural deficit concept and its practices of targeting

• Categorising potential audiences by ethnicity or racial grouping fails to recognise the polysemic nature of human difference and the practices which produce it

• Tate is responsible for the reproduction of exclusion through its knowledge orders and practices

• Who in Tate needs to know this and what might it lead to in terms of new museum practices?
Possible ways forward through engaged and situated research

THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS:

• That Tate as a ‘learning institution’, could use the collaborative methodologies developed in the research as a model of practice for new relationships between museum professionals

Departments who would be most receptive to this approach
• Tate Learning
• Tate Media
• Tate Research

Departments who would be least receptive to the approach
• Marketing
• Curatorial

Key strategic partner
• Tate National

Modeling how the museum might change and what it might look like using embedded research methodologies
Modeling good practice: through embedded research methodologies

- **Practice of theory** - changing the canon of museological knowledge
- **Reflexive practices** - privileging knowledge of museum practitioner
- **Archival practices** - gathering a critical knowledge of audiences
- **Collaborative practices** - working with both internal and external partners
The Research

Background Context
In an increasingly globalised world, what is the future for a national museum of British art? Tate holds the National Collection of British Art from 1500 until the present day. Tate Britain gives over much of its space to its display. Tate Britain was re-launched in 1997, with a re-hanging of the collection and the opening of the new Manton Entrance. The following year, to mark the new millennium, Tate Modern opened to great acclaim. While Tate Modern has been widely acclaimed for attracting large audiences and for pursuing a successful curatorial policy of internationalism in art, Tate Britain’s position is less clear.

Diversity Policy
Public museums and galleries in Britain have, over the last decade, worked in line with government policies that stress the need to make public culture more socially inclusive. The argument has been that publicly funded culture should attract as well as reflect the diversity of the British population. This policy perspective has been widely translated by the Museum and Gallery sector into the practice of targeting social, educational and community groups who are under-represented in audience and visitor figures.

Art and Distinction
According to the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1979), art appreciation and the social activity of attending art galleries is primarily the province of the educated indigenous middle classes. In Bourdieu’s terms, art bestows social distinction. While more recent demographic evidence on art gallery attendance has modified Bourdieu’s findings, his overall thesis retains its force. The change in the British government’s approach to cultural policy that accompanied the rise of the New Labour project can be seen against the background of Bourdieu’s work on culture and social distinction. For the last decade, Government policy has been trying to widen participation in the arts through the creation of more diverse audiences. Cultural diversity policy has been largely translated into the practice of targeting groups who are considered to be under-represented in visitor and...