

Temporal Conflicts and the Purification of Hybrids in the 21st- Century Art Museum:

Tate, a Case in Point

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To the deregulations of neo-capitalism there corresponds an immense deregulation and individualization of time.¹

Tate, and by implication the modern art museum in general, is struggling with a double paradox. How, on the one hand, can modernity's notion of linear progressive time be maintained in a world where, through the proliferation of technology and networked mobile devices, our time horizon has shrunk to that of the present; and, on the other, can aesthetic modernism's atemporal space of exhibition and display be maintained in the face of the multiplicity of times experienced within *presentness*?

Responding to increasingly contested and declining national funding for culture and the arts in the neoliberal culture of the 1990s, the then Tate Gallery openly embraced corporate business strategies and tactics to reduce its institutional vulnerability and develop a more sustainable, independent future. The key to this was to expand and build sustainable audiences: repeat audiences to the free collection displays and repeat audiences to the paid exhibitions. The idea of a permanent collection on display for extended periods (often years at a time) clearly directly mitigated against fostering and producing repeat audiences.

Understanding this fundamental problem, and with the added rationale of the need to show more of the Tate's collection to the public, the director, Nicholas Serota (appointed 1989), introduced a new rotational hang, of which the first installation was titled *Past, Present and Future*. In one move the temporal condition of traditional museum time, defined by the permanent collection hang (what we might call "heritage time"), was dismantled and replaced by the temporal condition of programming—and the inherent demands of production cycles that programming generates.

While the paid temporary exhibition has been a long-standing feature of the modern art museum, the "present" now assumed a greater currency, or rather a new enhanced currency through the introduction of a high-profile and highly ambitious program of artist commissions. Known as the "Duveens commissions" for their site-specific nature in the Tate Gallery's Duveens Galleries at Millbank, the commissions were not just site-specific, but as temporary interventions and installations they were also time-specific. The "present" was not just the present,

nor the present connected to the future, but rather was to be understood as the “contemporary.” In the 1990s producing, promoting, and programming the so-called contemporary offered a much-needed way out of the ossified public heritage culture of the visual arts, and opened up a new international gateway to artists from Europe and North America.

As Peter Osborne identified in 2013, however, twenty years later the contemporary is now an exhausted narrative, a market fiction, and a fictive screen to smooth over spatiotemporal and geopolitical difference in a global world:

Today the fiction of the contemporary is increasingly primarily a global or a planetary fiction... There is no actual shared subject-position, of or within, from the standpoint of which its relational totality could be lived as a whole... Nonetheless the idea of the contemporary functions as if there is... That is, it functions as if the speculative horizon of the unity of human history had been reached. In this respect the contemporary is a utopian idea. In rendering present the absent time of a unity of times, all constructions of the contemporary are fictional.²

While Osborne’s observations derive from an essay reflecting on the differences between Tate Britain’s relation to contemporaneity and Tate Modern’s primary alliance with modernity through its name, this essay argues that, with the acceleration of time and the conflation of time within the modern art museum—produced by technology, the Internet, and now networked culture—it is more apparent than ever that Latour’s 1991 claim, “We have never been Modern,” reflects better the reality and challenges of many of today’s modern art museums, including Tate Modern. To maintain market position and brand awareness in order to produce repeat audiences and income generation, accelerated programming has seen the event of architecture be replaced by the event of spectacle, with the event of spectacle replaced by the event of performance, as in the inaugural program of the Tate Tanks in 2012. In 2016, however, we are now witnessing the event of performance being replaced by the event of the circulation of people in space—and this in the networked time of online communication, as visitors instantly and consistently mediate their encounter with friends and family through instant image-sharing platforms and social networks. As this paper will discuss, as the art museum tries to navigate these temporal conflicts and paradoxes, we are left with a key question: is the modern art museum, including Tate Modern, the new heritage, and if so, how are we to understand cultural value in and of the present?

Underlying the arguments made here, the paper draws substantially upon the research findings of Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture, (2007–2010)³ and Cultural Value and the Digital (2014).⁴ These projects constituted a sustained study of a set of issues surrounding Tate’s understanding of who its audience was, precisely in relationship to collection, exhibition, and display. Within the studies carried out over seven years, the period under consideration in this paper starts with the opening of Tate Modern in 2000, along with the renaming of Tate Britain, continuing to the opening of the Tate Modern extension, the Switch House, in 2016.



Fig. 1 The Switch House, Tate Modern extension, 2016. Credit: Victoria Walsh.

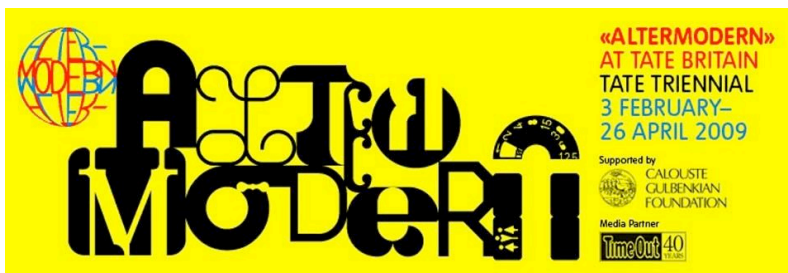


Fig. 2. Altermodern poster, Tate, London, 2009.

The crisis of representation

In 2009 Nicholas Bourriaud curated the fourth Tate Triennial (at Tate Britain), through which he proposed a new periodization of the contemporary, “Altermodern,” and made a series of observations from which he identified the emergence of “a new modernity... reconfigured to an age of globalization,” and one in which “our globalized perception calls for new types of representation.”⁵ As Bourriaud went on to note, “The artist becomes *homo viator*, the prototype of the contemporary traveler whose passage through signs and formats refers to a contemporary experience of mobility, travel and transpassing,” and from which “the form of the work expresses a course, a wandering, rather than a fixed space- time”:

*Altermodern art is thus read as a hypertext; artists translate and transcode information from one format to another, and wander in geography as well as in history. This gives rise to practices which might be referred to as “time- specific,” in response to the “site-specific” work of the 1960s.*⁶

The provocative nature of the triennial’s proposition within the context of Tate as an institution with a responsibility to modern art is perhaps more clear now than ever, although many challenges were evident at the time of its conceptualization and commission. Three particular points are worth highlighting. Firstly, as an exhibition calling for the recognition of the problematic status of representation, the architectural specificity and political context of Tate Britain as a national museum carrying the

burden of national representation based on tradition, heritage, and identity was more than evident. Secondly, the identification of newtemporal interests in art practice, focused on process rather than form and objecthood, confronted Tate's fundamental logic of collection and its inherent narratives and value systems generated from concepts of material permanence and historical continuity. Thirdly, in insisting on an installation that sprawled from Tate Britain's Duveens into the permanent collection gallery spaces, it highlighted the contrasting and contradictory spatiotemporal relations between the museum as collection and the museum as defined by exhibition and artist commissions.

It was, in fact, a collision course of the modernist art museum with contemporary exhibition-making. Ultimately, this collision could only be effectively mediated through a rapid proliferation of discursive programming and publishing; a move that further undermined the cultural authority of curatorial expertise based on modernist certainties of the aesthetic and the claims of art history. "Altermodern" was, it seemed, too contemporary, too present. The questions it raised were not just directed at Tate Britain, but rather Tate Britain in relation to Tate Modern, and vice versa. Tate Britain remained, as with the Duveens commissions in relation to the Turbine Hall commissions, a test bed for curating and programming.

While Bourriaud was drawing attention inside the museum to the changing world outside and the impact on artists' practice, Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture was carrying out problem-solving research to determine why certain audiences, defined by the government policy category of "Black and Minority Ethnic Communities," were missing from Tate's visitors. As Bourriaud had understood and indicated, and the Tate Encounters research confirmed, three specific cultural conditions now defined the art museum encounter. Firstly, the impact of technology and digital media was significantly changing how artists and audiences were engaging with making and viewing the work of art—moving from the spatial to the temporally specific—and creating, as we put it in Tate Encounters, a form of "transvisuality." Secondly, that the cultural politics and historic practices of representation on which the museum depended no longer held value or meaning in the new conditions of digitally distributed visual culture, particularly not in relation to the new transnational and transcultural subject/viewer of historic migration and contemporary globalization, who was no longer interested, or could relate to, fixed forms of representational identity (Bourriaud's "creolization"). And, finally, that the traditional historical epistemologies that informed the museum's practices, (namely taste, connoisseurship, art history, aesthetic modernism) and the cultural certainties of tradition and expertise were also being challenged and dismantled by the proliferation of new distributed forms of knowledge production generated online. Combined, these changing conditions of the relation of the artist/viewer to the museum posed major new questions and challenges for the future of the museum.

Reflexive modernization and chrono-reflexivity

These challenges were made most explicit in London in 2000, when the new gallery at Bankside emerged as Tate Modern with its branded claims to the temporal narrative of modernity, leaving Tate Britain to assume the

burden of representation through its renaming. Inherently linked by the arterial flow of the River Thames, the two London Tates remain excellent examples of the process of “reflexive modernization” that the cultural theorists Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash, and Anthony Giddens had observed in their 1994 publication, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*.

Taking the logic and practices of tradition as the organizing principle of institutional culture (and particularly at the level of the nation state), the authors made explicit the relation between tradition, space, and time. As they noted, “Tradition is somehow involved with the control of time... Tradition is also about the future, since established practices are used as a way of organizing future time.”⁷ Since tradition and identity are interdependent, “Tradition is a medium of identity... identity is the creation of constancy over time, that very bridging of the past into conjunction with an anticipated future.” Tradition and knowledge and expertise are also interdependent: “... so long as traditions and customs were widely sustained, experts were people who could be turned to at certain necessary junctures.” As they argued, however, now that modernity has been surpassed by globalization, the impact of globalization is profound, for “whereas tradition controls space through its control of time, with globalization it is the other way round... leading to the conclusion that post-traditional society is the first global society.”

While Tate Britain tried to bravely mediate its relations to the present and future through an increase in exhibitions and commissions of contemporary art, as well as a much accelerated level of programming to sustain and produce new audiences through event culture, the concurrent demise of cultural authority, rooted in tradition, taste, and art historical knowledge, highlighted the paradoxes that post-traditional society brings for the museum. The dependency on reverting to the atemporality of aesthetic modernism (think minimalist hang, white walls, monochrome colors) and the apparently fluid narrative of the contemporary further complicated rather than mollified the temporal paradoxes at Tate Britain, invariably bringing the cultural politics of the everyday into the museum. At Tate Modern the paradoxical negotiation between time and space created by globalization has, however, been made even more apparent with the opening of the new Tate Modern Switch House, highlighting how the museum must reflect not only upon its organization and understanding of space, but also of time.

The purification of hybrids

The reasons why this paradoxical situation prevails within the art museum can be found within a nexus of conditions that theorist Gilles Lipovetsky has called “hypermodernity,” in which time has been deregulated as a consequence of capitalism’s hyper-accelerated global mode of production, with its unregulated movements of capital and people, coupled with the development of complex computer networks and advances in real-time communication.⁸ The problems of the deregulation of time for exhibition and display are clearly part of the larger and ongoing crisis of representation. However, the problem of the unravelling of modernist linear time has a parallel historical explanation in Latour’s writings

and work, in which epistemological paradoxes are written into the very constitution of modernity as a result of the ontological separation of the nonhuman world of objects from the world of human actions and politics.

In the case of Lipovetsky's conception of hypermodernity, we are led to consider how the new conditions of social time and what he calls "chrono-reflexivity" impact current museological practices and thinking about the museum of the twenty-first century. In Latour's analysis of the imbroglio of humans and objects we are led to consider (as in Bourriaud's *Altermodernism* and the research findings of *Tate Encounters*) what the consequences for the art museum are in maintaining an old historical order of object collections and displays, as well as contemporary exhibition, through a modernist curatorial logic; a logic that can be understood to be based in the critical practices of the "purification of hybrids" that Latour identifies. That is to say, as Latour identifies the separation out of spheres of knowledge and practices such as nature and society, science, and humanities, we can equally contextualize the historical and ongoing separation out of art and technology within the art museum, the mixing of atemporal aesthetics with the temporal specifics of media as part of the purification of hybrids—an increasingly difficult task, as the forces of globalization more and more define the temporal experience of the art museum.

In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) Latour notes that modernity rests upon the passage of time:

Modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists, yet all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The adjective "modern" designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word "modern," "modernization," or "modernity" appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, a quarrel, where there are winners and losers. Ancients and Moderns. "Modern" is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished.⁹

For Latour, the word "modern" contains "two entirely different sets of practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective." He defines the first set of practices by what he calls "translation"—mixtures between new types of beings, "hybrids of nature and culture." Latour illustrates this daily mixing and churning of science, politics, economy, law, religion, technology, and fiction in the way newspapers represent the entirely new problems of the environment, computing, and AIDS. These, Latour says, are hybrids of nature and culture that are proliferating, and to which the second set of practices of the modern are dedicated to their "purification, to maintaining two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of humans beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other."¹⁰ Latour's reading of the newspaper finds the literary supplement and purely political articles "restful," in part, because the object of his study was primarily to disentangle the imbroglios of science and technology, rather than the arts and technology. But the modern dichotomy between

the work of purification and the work of translation can arguably be applied to the hybrids that create today's networks of art, science, and technology.

This is exemplified in the modern art museum's relationship to technology, and in particular, to digital technology and the Internet. Such an analysis became apparent during the collaborative research project with Tate, *Cultural Value and the Digital*, in which the overarching finding was how divided Tate departments were between those who thought of the digital as a cultural condition, a default medium of being and knowing the world, and those who viewed it instrumentally as simply another tool of communication/publication with audiences; the dividing line being implicitly drawn between the privileged space and relations of modernist aesthetic experience and the more mundane sociocultural space and relations of the public domain. Two diametrically opposed positions emerged: those defined by a concern as to how technology was disrupting traditional modes of attention, education, and communication, and those who wanted public engagement to emerge and be made visible within the practices and value systems of the museum's programming.

One way of explaining the art museum's current fear of the Internet, or more broadly, why it continues to purify technology of its culture, seeing it only as a medium (think digitization of collections) and a channel of representation (video interviews with artists), is the separation between organizational management, curatorial knowledge and audience interaction; an institutional and organizational standoff which consistently tries to maintain aesthetic modernism's coherence— both spatially and temporally. In our research the biggest hybrid stalking the spatiotemporal form of exhibition- and museum-building is the audience; the contemporary audience, culturally and socially connected through social media and networked visual culture. Museum visitors have long since mixed themselves with objects, sensations, language and meanings, and media of other kinds. Today's visitor is now the unquantifiable mobile translator (Bourriaud's *homo viator*) in an otherwise static equation. The art spectator and art visitor is a traveler who moves in and out of the space of the museum, and who moves across narratives of time, or as it could be said: the visitor to the art museum is a node in a hybrid network. By contrast, the curator is institutionally tied to the narrative of the object, which within the critical project of the "modern" relies on the separation of nature and culture, and continues with the work of purification. As Latour sums it up, the more we forbid ourselves to conceive of hybrids the more possible their interbreeding becomes—such is the paradox of the moderns.

Tate Modern: Belated modernism and the global city

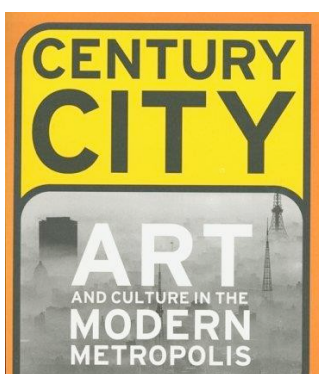


Fig. 3. Front cover of *Century City* exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, 2001

To remind ourselves, Tate Modern emerged out of the old Tate Gallery at Millbank, a neoclassical building where narratives of history and nation were negotiated alongside narratives of the modern and international. While the old Tate Gallery assumed the geospatial definition and representational role of nation when it was named Tate Britain in 2000, awarding the name Tate Modern to a project opening at the start of the twenty-first century inevitably highlighted how belatedly modernism and the idea of the modern art gallery had come to Britain. In contrast to Tate Britain's location within the Westminster World Heritage Site, defined by the historic buildings and nation-state work of Parliament, Church, and Monarchy in London, Tate Modern's location in direct proximity to the City of London, the world's leading global financial center, has a direct bearing on the multiple temporalities in which it is bound up. In the twenty-first century the relationship between the modernist project of the art museum—of patronage, collection, and display—and the flow of capital is of course fundamental to the museum's financial stability and sustainability, and narratives connecting the museum and the city were actively sought by Tate Modern from its inception and highlighted in the opening years.

In 2001 Tate Modern opened *Century City*, the largest group exhibition ever staged by Tate, which aimed to explore the relationship between cultural creativity and the metropolis by focusing on nine cities from around the world at specific moments over the previous hundred years, including London, New York, Paris, Moscow, and Vienna, but also Tokyo, Bombay (Mumbai), Lagos, and Rio de Janeiro. Strategically conceived to connect the ethos of Tate Modern with the ethos of international biennial culture, and to signal Tate's international importance, the exhibition sought to mix the temporality of the "street" in the Turbine Hall with the temporality of permanent gallery space, mixing free and paid space, time and money.



Fig. 4. *Global Cities* page, Tate website, 2007.

In 2007 Tate Modern then brought biennial culture directly into the Turbine Hall with the exhibition *Global Cities*, which drew on data and exhibits

originally assembled for the 10th Venice Biennale of Architecture. Featuring both visual art and architectural responses exploring ten global cities through five thematic lenses—speed, size, density, diversity, and form—the cities included were Cairo, Istanbul, Johannesburg, London, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Mumbai, São Paulo, Shanghai, and Tokyo. Such exhibitions, while playing out Tate’s strategic aims and objectives related to the development of patronage, building, and political advocacy, invariably also highlighted the implicit relation between the global acceleration of capital and migration, tourism and culture, of which Tate Modern has now become the apogee, attracting just under six million visitors in 2015 and listed as the most visited museum of modern and contemporary art in the world.



Fig. 5. BMW Tate Live, Tate Website, 2012.

In 2012, in addition to highlighting the global currency of Tate Modern, significant new programs came to the fore to indicate Tate Modern’s recognition of the impact of technology on both artists and audiences. In the first instance, Tate Modern launched BMW Tate Live, which was comprised of three strands, all related to performance art, and notably included the new Performance Room, a “series of performances commissioned and conceived exclusively for the online space and which are broadcast live across the web.”¹¹ As an experiment to link the analog museum with online culture, the series produced a range of unexpected and new insights, and clearly highlighted how different the temporal behavior of online culture is to the temporal behavior of analog museum visitors.¹²

Alongside this, and as a teaser to the recently opened extension of the Switch House, Tate Modern staged *The Tanks: Art in Action*, a fifteen-week programming marathon in the redesigned tank spaces “celebrating performance and installation.” As Chris Dercon, then director of Tate Modern, noted, “... the Tanks bring to the forefront of discussion for museums... the changing role of the audience at a moment dominated by social media and new modes of broadcast. We can think of the museum in the twenty-first century as a new kind of mass medium.”¹³ As Dercon acknowledges, audiences were no longer usefully understood or interacted with through categories of identity, but rather through time-based media, digital technology, and online culture. As the foundation spaces of Tate Modern’s new building, the Switch House (designed again by the architects of Tate Modern, Herzog & de Meuron), the decision to prioritize performance and time-based installations in these spaces

establishes a spatial dynamic for the visitor at the fore of their encounter with the new building, which now extends the heterogeneous spaces introduced by the conversion of the power station, with its original surprise of the Turbine Hall, into a new spatial composite.



Fig. 6. View of the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, 2016. Credit: Andrew Dewdney.

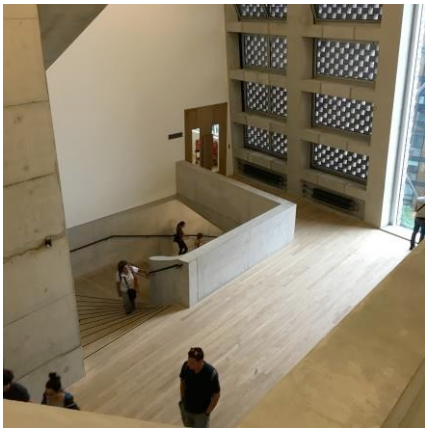


Fig. 7. View of the Switch House staircase, 2016. Credit: Andrew Dewdney.



Fig. 8. The Switch House lift lobby, 2016. Credit: Andrew Dewdney.

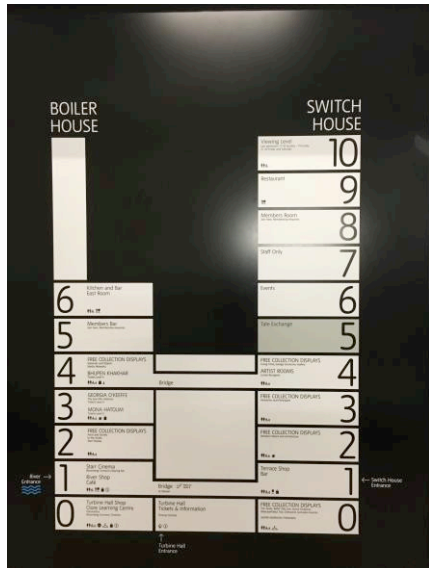


Fig. 9. Tate Modern floor plan, 2016. Credit: Andrew Dewdney.



Fig. 10. Public view of offices from the Switch House staircase.

The combined buildings read like an excessive spatial labyrinth made up of levels, bridges, viewing platforms, expansive lobbies, lifts, escalators, and a proliferation of shops and restaurants. This new confabulation of spaces and circulation, a vertical extension of the river embankment outside, leads tourists to a tenth-floor opening out onto a spectacular, 360-degree view of the global city of London and its financial center, from which many of the 150,000 visitors in the first two months have taken selfies and uploaded them to Instagram, Flickr and so on. In this new composite, there is no European-modernist spatial or Enlightenment-cultural logic. This is the inverse of the modern, in which the post-traditional controls space through its control of time. Here multiple and paradoxical time runs loose in the labyrinth. Tate Modern has finally pushed reflexive modernization to its ultimate logic, in which the collection displays are revealed as a function of collection itself, a cultural reserve, a proxy for cultural value. The galleries are marginalized by the circulation spaces, becoming side rooms, repositories, or storerooms in which competing experiences of time triumph.

The success of Tate Modern can be attributed very clearly to the post-traditional operations of reflexive modernization, which in terms of the spaces of circulation presented by the Turbine Hall was an embrace of

heterogeneous temporalities and allowed the visitor a space of separation from the “closed” space of the curated exhibition. This increased the visitor’s sense of time being compartmentalized in free time, social time, and time for consumption, along with the potential for educational time spent in the galleries. But the latest modernization at Tate Modern has come at a cost to the curation of the modern and contemporary, which under the new terms of accelerated and multiple time can no longer maintain its cultural value, previously underpinned by the cultural authority of historical continuity, nor by the guaranteed exceptionalism of the original, unique work of art.

Network cultures

In *Post Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (2013), which brought together the research and findings of the Tate Encounters project, we identified new modes of art museum spectatorship that we described as transvisual. Transvisuality, a “seeing on the move,” was created through the convergence of an individual’s cultural migration with the multi-modalities of media experience, particularly in relation to photography enabled by the mobile phone. Arguing that the relationship between viewer and object was no longer based upon a representational system of meaning defined by fixed historical identities and temporalities, but had already embraced chrono-reflexivity and multiple subjectivities, we contended that a new art museum visitor needed to be acknowledged and embraced for the art museum—for Tate—to continue to thrive.

Since 2003 we have witnessed a revolution in technical communication technologies, characterized by the development of Web 2.0, mobile media, and social networks. The development of embedded rich multimedia content, the ability of users to produce, upload, and share content, and importantly the ability to access such content on demand almost anywhere and anytime, constitutes a continuing revolution in social and cultural communication. This was accomplished by a parallel revolution in the Internet’s capacity and speed, supported by giant data and server farms, rapid search engines, the monetization of information, and the corporate takeover of cyberspace. For good and bad, the World Wide Web is now the global default of communication and the new public/private space of human collectivity. We now live in network culture, and we can therefore legitimately ask how contemporary art, the art museum, and beyond that, public museum culture, are adjusting to and engaging with networks.

As the research project *Cultural Value and the Digital: Practice, Policy and Theory* showed, Tate (and most other art museums) has primarily understood network culture so far as a digital extension of analog media. For Tate, network culture is understood as a channel of broadcast and an extension of marketing. The fact that network culture is both cause and effect of the crisis of representation is not registered. If Tate continues to use the network only as a channel of broadcast and marketing, then it can only reproduce its existing form of analog cultural authority, based upon old representational systems, that now excludes the public because there is no new feedback loop, no dialogic process. The lines of communication reproducing the work of purification in Latour’s terms is the closed loop of artist and curator, corporate organization and market, both of which reproduce an older cultural model of the few talking to the many. The

greater challenge now is for network hybrids of the “many talking to the many” to emerge that might just constitute a new, broader, more diverse audience. This would require Tate, and the art museum in general, to risk a much more radical curatorial and organizational rethinking in order to develop methodologies that can operate with multiple temporalities and the associated practices of chrono-reflexivity.

As Boris Groys has equally noted, the Internet is transforming and assuming the historic universalizing archival function of the museum. The transition of spatiotemporal relations within the museum through accelerated programming and performance-based event culture, as discussed above, is taking place, and as Groys notes, “the function of the museum becomes one of staging the flow— staging events that are synchronized with the lifetime of spectators.”¹⁴ This was particularly exemplified in June 2016, during the opening events and projects of the Switch House, the new Tate Modern extension, and in the inaugural year of the building the launch of a new long-term project, “Tate Exchange,” to which one floor of the new building is entirely dedicated. As the project pages on the Tate website describe:



Fig 11. Tate Exchange, Tate Modern, 2016. Credit: Andrew Dewdney.

Tate Exchange will be exploring the theme of “exchange” and will be led by artist Tim Etchells... we have invited more than 50 groups and organizations to be our “associates” and work closely with us throughout the year... These associates range from charities, universities, healthcare trusts, community radio stations, volunteer groups, to many more, both within and beyond the arts... It’s an ongoing program of events developed by artists, practitioners, and associates, both within and beyond the arts sector, aimed at building a dialogue around art, society, and the wider issues facing us today... In short, it’s a space for collaborative and innovative projects, and a forum for anyone and everyone to get involved with art in new and unexpected ways. Inspired by the theme of “exchange” and the art on display in the galleries, our associates will collaborate openly and creatively with one another to develop lectures, performances, drop-in sessions, debates, and even art for the space.¹⁵

While the new Tate Modern extension clearly has galleries, what is more apparent than ever is the experience of circulation and event rather than exhibition and display. The experience of the museum is now not just the event of the building, as we saw in the 1990s, but the event of people and time, as well as the event of the self-generated, time-specific photograph uploaded to Instagram, Flickr, and other competitive corporate image

platforms. It is perhaps worth noting the nature of this online networked culture. Within three months of its launch in October 2010, Instagram had generated one million users. On June 21, 2016, Instagram announced it had hit the 500 million user mark, of which 300 million were daily users, creating “a global community of interests sharing more than 80 million photos and videos every day,” highlighting how “every photo and video—from the littlest things to the most epic—opens a window for people to broaden their experiences and connect in new ways.”

In the same time frame, the Google Art Project (part of Google Arts & Culture and the Google Cultural Institute) was launched on February 1, 2011, in cooperation with seventeen international museums, including Tate, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. As of June 2016 it includes over one thousand national museums and galleries, from which over 45,000 digitized works are thematically tagged and presented as “exhibitions” in a seamless narrative of an extended museum and gallery experience. While access to Google’s art project can be via the conventional front door of its website, the thousands of accruing images also proliferate and circulate as networked entities as they enter and expand the stock of networked images through Google Images. Considering predictions that 50 billion devices will be connected globally by 2020, the networked image of the art object will potentially become as ubiquitous as the networked Instagram photo.

Drawing these arguments together we can summarize three logics arising from the above account of Tate’s entanglements with the paradoxical present and its deregulation of time. Firstly, the logic of collection displays, based upon historical narratives of nation, have dissolved into heritage fictions, dislocated from any real sense of present urgency or future continuity in the face of globalizing economic and technological processes of circulation. Secondly, curating practices—located within the narrative of aesthetic modernism and dependent upon the fiction of the contemporary (and its corollary of linear art historical time)—are now overwhelmed by the multiplicity of time within presentness as experienced by audiences. One of the critical outcomes of such practices is that the very idea of the modern is, paradoxically, recycled as both a commodity fashion and heritage. This is all the more evident in consideration of the increasingly acknowledged histories of other modernisms that are coming into view through the spatiotemporal reorganization of geopolitical histories prompted by globalization. Thirdly, cultural value and meaning, under the conditions of hypermodernity and its default expression in network culture, travel along transcultural and transmedial lines, which circumvent traditional centers of cultural authority and the upholding of a linear tradition.

At Tate the authority of the modern is maintained through the narrative of the contemporary as present time, buttressed by the modern as linear historical time, in narratives which smooth over spatiotemporal differences of time, place, and cultural difference. The contemporary/modern is a new expression, or “brand” of global art markets and the logic of public and private art collection. Paradoxically, globalized economies and migrations challenge aesthetic modernism’s singular historic logic through the proliferation of hybrids and the work of translation. As we have said elsewhere, the outcome of these logics is that the curator is now placed in

the exact same position as that of the viewer with respect to value. The “real” present, consisting of multiple temporalities and places, is much less knowable and a challenge to the institutions of art collection, precisely because it is not the stable fiction of the contemporary, nor the representable maintained by the art world.

Perhaps we have reached a point where network culture has rendered the museum to be the archive, and if that is the case, then surely the curatorial belief in the museum as the production site of critical cultural value and public engagement needs to take account of this. The museum as archive is a protean thought suggesting a new and as yet unlimited set of questions regarding interest and value in collection, as well as providing new perspectives on the continued problems of historical representation. The digitization of collections as seen in the Google Art Project is not a replacement of the museum, nor is it a reconfiguration of cultural value in the network, but rather a reproduction of the museum’s traditional cultural authority.

In this paper the point of paying attention to, and playing with, the paradoxes produced by chrono-reflexivity in the art museum has been to identify the larger problem of finding new ways of connecting the multiple individual forms of reflexivity to new forms of collectivity and shared ethical perspectives. The museum seen as archive, from a post digital perspective, opens up so many new possibilities for reflexivity in relationship to historical collection, as well as a future for the collection of digitally born artifacts.

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