

**Cultural Diversity:
When Politics and Policy meet Practice in the Art Museum**

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Conference 'The Creative Case for Diversity in Britain' organised by
City University London, Arts Council England and *Third Text*

23 March 2011

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in the Art Museum



Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture 2007-10



Cultural Policy and the Public Value of Museums

- “ ... museums are spaces where people can explore personal beliefs in amongst universal truths. In short, they can show how events and beliefs from the past shape people’s experiences of the present, and help create a sense of identity. Because cultural identity in the 21st century is not necessarily defined by national borders.”
- “Museums ... are at the heart of what we call ‘the public realm’. The public realm is the shared space – and the network of public institutions and practices – over which all citizenships have ownership, and which is held in trust by Government in all forms at all levels.”

Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life, DCMS 2005



The Parekh Report of 2000

In prefacing its recommendations the report stated that:

‘The concepts of equality and diversity must be driven through the government machinery at national and regional levels. Responsibility for making them real must be devolved to the local levels at which theory becomes practice, where real change does or does not take place. Verbal and financial commitment from the government is essential, but the test of real change is what happens on the ground.’ (3.21)

Tate Britain and Tate Encounters: Three mutual understandings

1. Despite over a decade of substantial dedicated funding and activity framed by policies of 'cultural diversity' no significant increase in visits to the art museum by 'minority' audiences had been realised
2. Academic debates centred around Post-colonialism had not notably entered into curatorial discourse or practice
3. Museological debates had not opened up a space in the art museum where policy and practice might meaningfully engage with each other to form a new model of curatorship – or audience engagement.



Tate Encounters Key Research Findings

1. Impact of Cultural Diversity Policy (CDP)

1. Organisational Response to CDP
2. Audience response to the art museum
3. Impact of changing contexts beyond the museum
4. Consequences for the practices of audience engagement in relation to the politics and policies of cultural diversity and multiculturalism



Racialisation of Cultural Diversity Policy

- DCMS / ACE interpretation and monitoring of CDP produces conceptually reductive account of difference based on race leading to racialised models of British culture
- Conflation of CDP with social inclusion agendas creates 'deficit' model of culture
- Conflation of CDP and social inclusion with discourses of Britishness and Identity reinforces notions of fixed identity based on outdated modes of representation of difference that take no account of new transnational flows

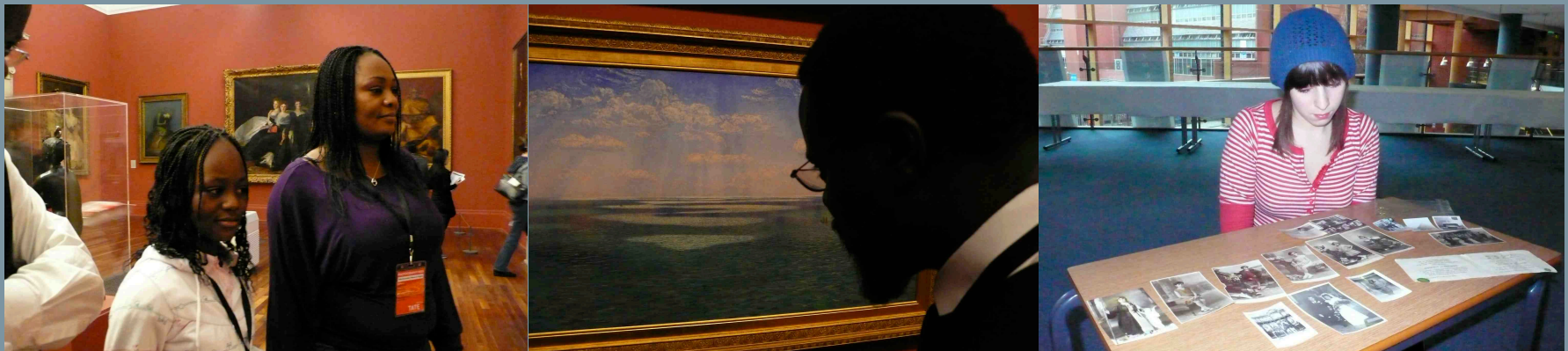


Museum Response to Cultural Diversity Policy

- Organisational strategic response focused on creating and auditing *targeted* programmes and activities at audiences defined by policy category of BME
- Curatorial programmes look to practices of learning and interpretation as services to offset or promote discourse of ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ at point of reception (not conception)
- Learning programmes and activities underpinned by funding and assumptions of ‘cultural deficit model’ (produced by CDP and social inclusion agenda) produces ‘needs-based’ forms of cultural provision
- Conflation of cultural diversity targeting with social demographic measurement encourages data gathering that demonstrates accessibility and inclusivity through its emphasis on the markers and status of difference between core and marginal audiences

The 'Missing' Audience of Policy

- The imagined 'excluded subject' of CDP clearly understands the 'offer' of the art museum and knowingly rejects it
- Clear recognition of how they are being identified and targeted by the museum and actively reject it
- Politics of representation and identity no longer of significant interest to 3rd generation diaspora c.f to how systems of value operate in the museum



Changing Contexts

- **Transnationalism** - Impact of global migration, especially to cities, is changing social and cultural demographic of audiences organisationally (mis)identified through racialised notions of 'difference' and social exclusion models
- **Transculturalism** - Culture is progressively moving along new and non-institutional lines of distribution, extending beyond the historical and expanding boundary of Europe and US characterised by conditions of mobility and transition, involving the spatial, material and virtual.



Changing Contexts

- **Transmediation** – is the product of the the convergence of media in digital forms. All of us are involved in acts of transcoding when we move between and across differently produced media.
- **Transvisuality** – is the product of digital transmediation and the affects of transculturalism which is impacting upon established visual culture and literacy and which has realigned and constituted the art object in the public realm as ‘image’, accumulating new distributed meanings and associations, not confined by notions of expert knowledge or national contexts of production



Limits to existing forms of Policy and Practice in the Art Museum

- When CDP meets the practices of the art museum racialised concepts of audience are reproduced and separation of knowledge between curatorial and learning is reinforced, further supporting the division between ideas of the 'core' and 'margin' and stalling any shifts in audience development
- Key narratives and logic of Modernism are rooted in ideas of expert knowledge (Art History) which increasingly emerges as ill-equipped to account for contemporary art discourse or production
- Modernism and discourse of Britishness (constituted by name, national status and Collection of Tate Britain) increasingly in conflict
- Impact of the digital on the visual realm - fracturing of curatorial authority and expertise based on Modernism (limits of art history)

Analysis of Research Findings: ***From the Global to the Local, the Aesthetic to the Public***

- **Redistribution of Cultural Authority** within the expanding Public Realm of the global and local needs to be recognised and engaged with at the level of the core (not only through social media)
- **Demise of expertise rooted in Art History** in relation to cultural authority creates necessary condition to engage with other forms of visual and cultural knowledge that connect the historical and contemporary without recourse to discourse of racialised heritage and Modern European aesthetic
- **Global capital and labour flows** have produced new conditions in which the transcultural experience of migration together with the transvisual experience of digital culture, now places every individual museum professional in exactly the same cultural space as that of every other individual subject in respect of the meaning of museum objects.

Consequences for audience engagement in relation to the politics and policies of cultural diversity and multiculturalism

- Cultural policy lags behind these new conditions and is reluctant to abandon the politics of identity and representation as the historic basis for progressive cultural engagement
- This is a sign of a larger intellectual and political problem which is understood as a historic limit of Modernism and State Multiculturalism
- The critique of the representational politics of multiculturalism is rightly propelled by the aim to reject the politics of Cultural Welfarism because it has reproduced a racialised view of culture in the place of a contemporary creative heterogeneity.



Rethinking the Public Realm of Culture

- The move to replace national representational multiculturalism with a plea for the universality of creative culture and aesthetic excellence is a traditional and conservative move that will not change the dynamics of inclusion or investment in the public realm
- Neither the Essentialism of race nor art is the answer. The claim for the universality of creative culture is the other side of the same coin to the essentialism that claims the authenticity of localised ethnic or racialised cultures.
- The challenge is no longer to achieve fair and proportional systems of representation, nor primarily a historical revision of the Modernist canon, but of mapping a new sense of a public realm and acknowledging new kinds of connectedness between the cultural, social and visual



The Reshaping of Practices

- **Recognising and Responding to the Redistribution of Cultural Authority**

Cultural authority which is maintained by an insistence on the inherent, fixed and ultimately universal meaning of the objects of collections, explained by experts and validated by custodial practices, is of diminishing interest to an increasing cultural minority and demands greater attention

- **Innovation and Change**

The cultural authority of major national cultural institutions is greatly enhanced at those moments when they successfully reshape their practices through a grasp of new movements and patterns in cultural production and consumption and equally when they are able to jettison residual definitions.





From Left to Right. Back row: Patrick Trubidy, Laura-Eleua(?), Kunz Tracey Jordon, Robbie Sweeny, Adekinle Detokunbo-Bello, Mary Aoyipomah, Deep Rajput, Nicola Johnson Oyejobi, Aminah Borg-Luck and Andrew Dewdney. Front row: Victoria Walsh, Sarah Thomas, Maria Cinta Esmel Perlies, Jacqueline Ryan, Dana Mendonca and David Dibosa.