The Visual in Culture and Social Visibility in National Art Museums: Notes towards an emergent research approach in the knowledge domain of the art museum

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We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach – though not necessarily within arm's reach. … Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world. (Berger.1972 p. 8-9)

However, in relation to visual culture as a meaning system, what matters is not simply the external sociological places which 'seeing subjects' occupy, but their subjective capacity to take meaning, to interpret and make sense of what is seen, and how social positions help to shape those subjective capacities. In that sense 'seeing' is regarded as a cultural practice. By 'subjective capacity' and 'cultural practice' we understand how so-called objective social and psychic positionings are formed and become productive of interpretations, are used and 'lived' subjectively, influencing from the inside – not always in manifest or conscious ways – both what and how meaning is taken. (Hall, 1999 p. 310)

Thus from both sides the image is felt to be weak in respect of meaning: there are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness. Now even – and above all if – the image is in a certain manner the limit of meaning, it permits consideration of a veritable ontology of the process of signification. How does meaning get into the image? (Barthes,1999, p.33)

The spectacle inherits all the weaknesses of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of seeing; furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a speculative universe. (Debord, 1999, p.97)

Thus at the dawn of the modern age, in the sixteenth century, the ordinary man appears with the insignia of a general misfortune of which he makes sport. As he appears in an ironical literature proper to the northern countries and already democratic in inspiration, he has embarked in the crowded human ship of fools and mortals, a sort of inverse Noah's Ark, since it leads to madness and loss. In this vessel he is trapped in the common fate called Everyman *(a name that betrays the absence of a name), this anti-hero is thus also* Nobody. (De Certeau. M.1988, p.1-2)

Introduction

This paper brings two separate objects of attention to bear upon a related set of questions posed by the *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture* research project, concerning the nature of art spectatorship. To give the reader an initial guide to the discussion that follows the underlying practical question is asking what is involved when people are given permission to take pictures whilst visiting an art museum? This has practical utility since the making of digital images, whether still or moving is one of the research practices of Tate Encounters. More widely within our culture people routinely record culturally specified events within their lives in what has become settled as domestic or personal media. And, in parallel with personal recording, a global media network of commercial industries and public broadcasting, based upon the same image technologies, projects out into the world an endless torrent of media products. Thus at the outset the paper encompasses both the field of cultural and media studies, with its distinct objects of attention in media artefacts, and those of museology and art history, whose objects of attention are those of the museum and its collected artefacts.

The argument engaged in this paper is that the production and reception of global media, domestic imaging, and works of art displayed in art museums are somehow connected through an expanded and polysemic field of visuality, structured through a number of predominant gazes, looks, ways of seeing, which position viewing and value and, in doing so, exclude some - and limit other - subjectivities and agencies. This is not a new argument as the paper goes on to identify, but its renewed application to the research fieldwork of Tate Encounters, focused upon art museum spectatorship, may be helpful. In particular, it helps to illuminate some of the vexed questions surrounding, on the one hand, how art museums cannot but help position viewing, i.e. there is always a point of view; and, on the other hand, how culturally differentiated subject positions are met, or not, within the museum encounter.

The general aim of this paper is to begin to describe how the viewing positions offered by the museum and the viewing positions within wider cultural reproduction are connected and structured by and through prevailing organisational practices, through which, it is argued, limits are set upon the social possibilities of viewing. In laying this argument out the paper also begins to describe what the conditions and possibilities for other excluded viewing strategies, which have as yet no place within reproduction, might look like.

The paper is addressed to the ethnographic fieldwork currently being carried out within Tate Encounters. One strand of the fieldwork is comprised of a close engagement with the viewing experiences of voluntary student participants in their initial encounter with the museum and its artefacts.[1] Here, the effort is to build 'thick description' of all that is engaged in the subject position of viewing. The other strand is an organisational study, which is tracking the development and production of exhibitions and displays. Here, the aim is to build an understanding of how curatorial narratives are constructed within the organisation of professional labour. The overall aim of this work is clearly to look at the art museum from both the 'inside' and 'outside', in order to identify points of (dis)connection between audiences and museum professionals.

Part One: Theoretical Orientations

I have argued elsewhere that the historical formation of the public art museum privileged the production rather than the reception of artistic value, that is to say the art museum's function lay in acquisition.[2] Today, although there is greater curatorial awareness and recognition of the active social processes involved in giving meaning to artefacts and collections, the institutional organisation and reproduction of major art museums continues to centre on collection and preservation. It may already be in some readers' minds that such a statement is contradicted by a great deal of contemporary art museum curation which is focused upon the museum experience as event. The riposte to this as the paper goes on to argue, is that post-modern consumer-focused visitor attractions hide, rather than reveal social meaning. In framing the persistence of preservation I pointed to the larger social and economic relations of artistic production throughout the twentieth-century in which the social use value of the work of art, (i.e. its absolute exhibition value, which Benjamin (1999 p.76) surmised would replace the ritual function of art with that of politics), was instead replaced by the exchange value of art.

Under these conditions the public art museum had, over the same period of time, to perform a slight of hand, a trick of 'hiding in the light', in being able to invest the art object with meaning for a public, when that public's expressed social meaning had already been replaced by exchange value. In the place of the museum functioning to demonstrate the social reception of art it functioned to conceal the contradiction of exchange value by fetishising the work of art. It did this through institutionalising abstract formal aesthetics and through repeating narrative myths of the artist as creator. Notwithstanding the need to elaborate this argument in more detail, and possibly re-caste it in terms of language, it can nevertheless be argued that the organisation of the art museum remains wedded to the reproduction of this twin mythology in a number of ways; through art historical scholarship 'filling the gap' of social reception; through the singular privileging of the artist as ultimate source of meaning; through the positioning of the individual as the ultimate source of reception; and through exhibition operating as spectacle. In these ways we can understand the art museum as being extremely one-sided, at or least culturally incomplete, because the other half of the process of meaning, i.e. the social reception of art is continually substituted and hence profoundly unknown.

The art museum is only legitimately concerned, its consecrated purpose as opposed to the profane engagement with actual people, with the guarantee of exchange. For those interested in the idea that the art museum can be a place of collective criticality (Rogoff 2008) the above may read as an over-worked and outmoded deterministic analysis, but it is not intended as such. It is said to remind us of a serious obstacle in our path, a status quo, which reproduces a set of highly developed conservative institutional practices, kept in place because they are underpinned by larger economic purposes. It does not follow from this that all art museum practices are monolithic, nor that they can be reduced in analysis to a singular overarching purpose. The opening decade of the twenty-first century in Britain has demonstrated that the production and consumption of art is very much a dynamic part of a new cultural economy.

The new economy of the cultural industries, in which art museums play an important role in stimulating consumer demand, can be characterised in a number of ways as Post-Fordist. (Harvey 1990). There is some ground for arguing that commissioning, programming and marketing now follow a more deregulated and distributed mode of

(re)production in which art museums co-opt smaller cultural producers, exploit niche marketing, outsource curation, import strategy and above all increase output, all of which are characteristic of Post-Fordism with its predominant mode of just-in-time delivery. The new dynamic is consumer demand and in terms of the art museum that means high visitor rates. A further counter to my own anxiety of reviving a reductivist analysis of the cultural sphere comes precisely with the recognition that national art museums under the conditions of post-modernity depend upon a large turnover of ever greater numbers of visitors, whose participation in the myths that conceal exchange value is less schooled, regulated and potentially contained.

The high yield visitor attraction rates of Post-Fordist international art museums have been achieved through adopting global branding techniques, maximising corporate client potential, putting in place greater and more prominent consumer opportunities for shopping and eating together, with thematic programming approaches, and an extended range of related media activities. This evident shift from production-led to consumer-led approaches to museum programming is reflected in a corresponding shift from object-led to visitor-led art museum professional practices, noted for the museum sector generally by Hooper-Greenhill (2000). Conceiving of the art museum visitor as consumer is antithetical to the tradition which regards museums as continuing, albeit problematically, the Enlightenment values of critique, freedom and progress (Lord. B. 2006. p11). The argument that post-modern consumer ambience in the affluent world, brings with it, on the one hand, a world of interesting and pleasurable lifestyles, choices and cultural aesthetic distractions, whilst on the other, abolishing tradition and detaching the individual from a representation of reality, has continuing purchase in theorising forms of conscious agency in art museum visitor experience.

Audience targeting policies, introduced primarily as an auditing mechanism within the public subsidy of museums, can also be understood as a Post-Fordist mode of audience production that responds to smaller markets and changing consumer needs. Gallery education aspires to be on the side of social reception, but so far operates only in a highly instrumentalised form, which finally categorises and quantifies audiences. In these newer (globalised) forms of the art museum's production of audience, interpretation, education and online media function to redress the older object-led mode of museum reproduction through instigating consumer-led, social processes of meaning. Visitors to museums may be 'disciplined' by residual, or still dominant museum discourses, but they do not and can not repress their contingent practices of everyday life in which creative strategies and tactics of resistance are present, (De Certeau 1988), in other words meaning cannot be contained.

The work on the side of the social reception of art, and hence upon the completion of the social process of the production of meaning, resides in what people, audiences, make of their experience in a museum and how that is shaped on the one hand by the organisation of the museum – the literal organisation of the building and its spaces, the patrolling of space, the security of objects, the literature and other interpretative material and devices, curation, and on the other by all that is brought to bear from people's previous experience when encountering the museum and its objects, that is to say everyday life, or more abstractly, social embodiment. The practices of the museum operate to restrict and exclude the unruliness of everyday life in order to produce a 'normative' spectator, someone who knows how to behave and respond in the museum and who gains reward and personal meaning by understanding of the embedded customs, codes and conventions of occupying the spaces and appreciating and contemplating the artefacts. This normative figure is reflected in the silent, quiet and reverential repose of the educated adult. The

construction of the normative spectator reveals much about the dominant aesthetic discourse, one that is still centred upon private contemplation of aesthetic beauty, or the divination of inner psychological states of artists. In these aesthetic tropes meaning takes place between the work as the point of transmission and the individual mind, the point of reception. This is a model which excludes social dialogue, even though we know that in practice conversation and language are very much part of the process of forming and sharing meaning, whether this is done as social conversation or in thought. Discovering ways of making such conversation and language audible and shared, both in and beyond the museum, would be towards the process of constructing the missing, submerged, substituted half of the [social] meaning of art.

In modernist exhibition 'social conversation' is performed not by the spectator but by the curator, who is the intermediary in dialogue with objects and is the one who metaphorically 'answers back' to the object. Actual audiences engage at one remove with this dialogue through the degree to which they are, or become informed of and familiar with, particularised curatorial narratives. This is what led Bourdieu (1999) to conclude that the preferred position of the spectator is that of knowledgeable and informed viewer, one who knows how to adopt or inhabit aesthetic modes, against those for whom such knowledge conferred no meaningful distinction. We might now ask if the realignment of the visitor as consumer has created an art museum spectatorship which embraces the everyday?

> *Despite the prevailing mythologies that continue to link the experience of art to individual reflection, we do look at art, inhabit the spaces of art in various forms of collectivity and in the process we produce new forms of mutuality, of relations between viewers and spaces rather than relations between viewers and objects. Beyond the shared categories of class, or taste or political or sexual orientations another form of 'WE' is produced in these processes of viewing and it in turn shifts the very nature of meaning and its relation to the notion of displayed visual culture. (Rogoff 2004)*

Part Two: Practical precedents

> *Photographs are perhaps the most mysterious of all the objects that make up, and thicken, the environment we recognize as modern. Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood.* (Sontag 2001)

When John Berger stood in front of a BBC Camera in 1972 and famously said "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak", he ushered in a wider popular debate about the status of art in modern capitalist culture, which until then had been confined to a small academic circle interested in the work of Walter Benjamin. *Ways of Seeing* also gave a new status to the visual in thinking about culture and the importance of vision within everyday life. Berger insisted upon both the phenomenological as well as social and cultural nature of seeing.

In hindsight two things about *Ways of Seeing* seem remarkable: firstly, in the world of post-reality television we can recognise a public broadcast ethos that thought it important to commission a television series based upon an obscure and difficult

essay argued within a Materialist perspective; and, secondly, that Berger and his team used the visual practices of television - the panning and probing of a camera, together with montage and voice over - to interrogate images. On the first count *Ways of Seeing* remains widely used in education as an accessible account which stresses the social and cultural basis of seeing, that seeing is not natural, but something, which, from culturally specific positions, humans have to learn. On the second count, less has been made of the actual use of television formats and film codes to investigate images and paintings. The extension of media technologies made possible by digital technology deserves our attention here. When Berger and his team made *Ways of Seeing*, they did so using analogue technologies, which for Broadcast standards of the day required expensive equipment and trained operators that would only have been available to professional broadcasters and film makers. Now the entire process of shooting, editing and broadcasting can be done with a digital capture device and a laptop computer. This is a significant change in the ways in which media can be made and distributed. A fact which is currently having a dramatic impact upon the way commercial media and public broadcasters think about the future of television.

It would be impossible not to recognise that since the television screening of *Ways of Seeing* the world has changed and in the intervening years some of the basic theory together with the themes of the programme have been the subject of extended critical review as well as further elaboration. Over the past three decades, the stridency of modernity's grasp upon the future has been checked and the confidence of modernism's intellectual discourse has been undermined. A catastrophic series of failures in the twentieth century, from the Holocaust to Hiroshima and from the collapse of Communism to the triumph of Global Capitalism became linked, by writers such as Baudrillard, Lyotard, Debord and others, with a corresponding critique of a central failure in the logic of technical and historical progress.

The greater predominance of the visual in late capitalist 'techno-culture' has led some to argue for a new discipline of visual culture which would regard the considered work of art and the half glimpsed rushing images of screens and urban spaces as deeply connected and as an 'expanded field' of viewing. This is not to say that the centring of visuality has only arisen with the advent of digital technology and a globalised economy. Indeed, following Benjamin we might go on to say that digital technology has at present simply networked a field of visual reproduction first begun with mechanical reproduction – photograph and film – and secondarily expanded from the 1950s with electronic reproduction – television. In response to this compounding of the visual in culture, Visual culture has emerged as an intellectual trope and field of enquiry into the ways human life is increasingly organised by and through technologies based in visual communication. (Evans, Du Gay, Hall, Mirzoeff, Rogoff). There is a critical urgency attached to this new delineation of visual culture, or the centrality of the visual in organising everyday life, because for some it is seen as a manifestation of a larger and deeper crisis of social fragmentation and excessive information. Visual cultural study is then premised upon the need to understand what is entailed by the saturation of everyday life by images and to discover how this situation is realigning established and settled ways of seeing the world. In beginning to do this Visual Cultures has begun to recognise how the increased global traffic of mediatised messages not only operates one way – from the dominant broadcast centres of the developed world to the subordinate receivers of the underdeveloped world – but both ways.

To study visual culture is thus thought to bring the new topography of a globalised world under some form of intellectual and educational control and to reframe epistemologies that have previously only privileged a Eurocentric account of seeing

and being seen. The notion of the expanded field of visual culture is directly relevant to the museum practices of viewing, since it reframes the traditional isolated mode of museum spectatorship, which, it is argued, can no longer be separated from other visual narratives.

Part Three: Technologies of Visual Culture

The most compelling photographs used in the national press and on television in the days immediately following the London Bombings of 7th July 2005 were taken by survivors who had used their mobile phones to capture still and moving images when being led out of the London Underground to safety. These grainy and indistinct recordings had the emotional power of participation in a catastrophic event, whereas the professional photographers who had rushed to the scenes only moment later were only able to record in more clinical detail the aftermath. The use of 'personal media' in witnessing events of social and political significance has been the focus of subsequent journalistic and academic debate. Media producers have seen the widespread use of digital capture, linked to Blogging on the World Wide Web as a sign of the rise of the citizen-journalist. In a twenty-four hour global media environment the network of online users can be seen as heralding the end of an era of centralised editorial control. Other more critical commentators have seen the same use of personal media as creating an ethical crisis in which privacy has all but disappeared because of the incursion of networked surveillance and social boundaries overstepped through new forms of cyber-bullying. What is of interest in these arguments is the recognition of a potential new historical moment in which the power to respond to and even create events which are registered within the public realm has been radically extended through technological advance.

There have been other historical moments when similar recognitions have been noted. The use of photography by both the police and the Communards during the Paris Commune of 1870 is one example in which the social consequences of the use of photography were new, but were not fully grasped at the time. Photographic images taken by Communards of their own achievements at the barricades were subsequently used by police spies to arrest people identified in the images. This has a similar echo in the 'trophy pictures' taken by United States soldiers at Abu Ghraib recorded between 18 October and 30 December 2003, which subsequently came to light through their circulation on websites and led to the prosecution of nine individual soldiers for the torture and mistreatment of captured Iraqis.

Between the innocence of the Paris Communards and the ignorance of the US soldiers we can trace the continued social power of photo-media to create 'evidence' of events when inserted into a public context of exhibition or circulation. What we can immediately take from this is that the mobile phone - more technically the miniaturised computer transmitter and recording device that locates its users in space and time - is potentially a powerful tool of communication in the hands of millions worldwide. Having said this, we need also to observe that in the decades of the phenomenal growth of mobile personal media its primary social uses and destinations have remained largely private and domestic, as were the pre-digital analogue equivalents in the forms of the instamatic camera, video recorder and telephone.

Whilst personal media has followed without exception the route of private and domestic use from analogue to digital, over the same period of time and with the same technological knowledge of the recording and transmission of vision and

sound, large scale national institutions of broadcast were developed with an explicitly centralised form of public address directed at the private domestic receiver. Williams (1974) outlines many of the reasons why television developed as a centralised system in an emergent post-war social formation-based around what he called mobile privatisation, with the domestic television set becoming one of the first consumer durables. Slater (1999 p. 289) traces the development of a parallel consumer market for domestic and amateur photography and advances the argument that the instamatic camera separated the knowledge of image making from the consumption of photographs through the interests of Kodak in maintaining high film sales. In both examples the user was encouraged by the technological shaping of communication media and its marketing to regard themselves as passive consumers.

Current digital media technology once again presents a potentially new moment of democratic extension of the media franchise, which brings with it a renewed and different emphasis upon public broadcasting and address, no longer the centralised and essentially non-productive mode of the one-to-many, but that of the dispersed mode of the many-to-many. Digital technology now brings not only the production and distribution of media within the reach of anyone who has access to the computer network and portable digital capture devices, but also the ability to search at will within a global media database.

How might this recognition of the evident potential power of mobile networked relate to the specific position we are considering of audience practices in art museums, i.e. the possibility of digital media to position users as authors and hence the power to 'act back' upon media and 'intervene' in events?

Part Four: Imaging the Museum

There is now a long and established use of practical photography and video in formal and informal education. Photography and video have been used for constructing personal and community histories. They have been the practical basis for projects exploring identities, whilst others explore contemporary relationships to local environments and still others taking on issues of representation within broadcast media. Much of this work can be characterised historically as a form of redress for the invisibility and bias of much of the dominant media's representation of gay and lesbian people, women, black and ethnic minorities and working class communities. Such social media projects, as indicated here, are now generally accepted as a norm of community arts and informal community educational projects, so much so that they illicit little or no critical attention. At worst, social media projects are regarded as a form of palliative social work and at best as forms of community expression and local history.

Such work as is produced through what we might nostalgically call 'emancipatory media' is of varying technical and cultural quality, with almost none of the output reaching any kind of national audience. Many of its creative practitioners will now emphasise the process value of such work for participants, rather than focus upon the quality of its produced outcomes. There is therefore little that can be pointed to by way of an accumulative historical account of what has been achieved and what critical perspectives might be registered. Such a situation reflects the commonly held view that the products of such work are of no lasting public value, unlike that of the production of art or broadcast media, which is collected and archived. What accounts of embedded social media projects have repeatedly demonstrated is that access to

technology in and of itself is not a sufficient condition for the development of its critical and engaged social use. It has also been amply shown that the educational and community contexts in which such work takes place rarely builds upon project experience in developing institutional infrastructure of broadcast or exhibition for wider audiences.

In considering the use of digital media as a means for audiences to engage with and respond to the art museum we are thus presented with an initial position in which culturally, digital media is understood by its users to be for personal and private use, even when that is extended to the uploading of digital material on social networking sites. This is, ironically, one of the strongest reasons for museums in general to encourage visitors to take photographs, since it is clear that little or no commercial interest would develop. This situation is recognised by some museums, The British Museum for example, which notifies visitors that they may take photographs for personal use in some galleries.

Tate has a strictly enforced policy of not allowing visitors to take photographs for personal use in any of the four museums, with the exception of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. Tate does grant permission for the use of photography in the galleries for the purpose of private study and research, if no reproduction is available and copyright law permits. The primary reason for Tate not allowing the use of photography for personal use is based upon their policy of respecting intellectual property rights and their copyright agreement with the Design and Artists' Copyright Society (DACS), which covers the work of artists' reproduction rights, permissions and fees.

In the Tate Encounters project participants have been given limited permission to use digital capture devices, cameras, phones and video recorders in the galleries. Participants are issued with badges showing that they have permission to make recordings during agreed times and Tate Encounters research staff notify a Visitor Services duty manager of the date and time of such visits. Most of the occasions on which participants have used digital media in the galleries have so far been during organized workshops, which have taken place during public opening times.

The limitations imposed upon the research participants taking photographs are the same as those granted for private study and research, which are that the photographs can only be used for private study and must not be used in any published context, including the Internet, without the expressed permission of Tate or the copyright holder. The technical restrictions are that making images in the galleries must not involve the use of flash or any other additional lighting. Photographs of the public in the galleries can only be taken by the participants with their expressed permission. Photographs taken at Tate Britain and in other locations related to themes of the project are the intellectual property of the participants. Being allowed to make recordings in the galleries has been one of the most remarked upon interests and benefits of joining the project. It is seen as an exclusive privilege in an otherwise restricted space. It is an uneasy privilege and participants are routinely challenged by attendants who are not aware of their credentials, which creates a general unease and occasional moments of confrontation.

To date, digital photography has been one of the main ways in which participants have engaged with the project, more so than video or sound recording. We have observed that participants feel better 'armed' with a camera in the gallery and recording creates meaningful purposes and a structure to the activity of being in the galleries. The project has a dedicated Intranet Site on which participants can upload images, videos and text. This is a closed site which only project members can

access and exists for participants to see and comment upon each other's contributions. Over the project it has been observed that participants do not use the site extensively for comment and exchange of text and images, preferring instead to meet face to face in workshops and to work on images and text offline and upload material when a deadline is imposed. This would seem to bear out what has been noted above that neither the institutional project context, nor access to the medium is a sufficient condition for ongoing production.

Material from the Intranet site is also edited for *Tate Encounters: [E]ditions* a microsite on the main Tate website and this has provided punctuated deadlines and a motivated outcome, but there is a sense that these are very much of the researchers making and that left to themselves the default position of private use reasserts itself. The cultural form of the private use of the digital or video camera remains that of the snapshot. The 'camera' in the mobile phone has had the effect of extending the range of occasions and situations in which snapshots are taken as well as adding the possibility of short video sequences in which voice-over 'panning' or 'tracking' shots are added. Caution needs to be taken, however, in describing digital capture of personal media within the cultural/technical language of film and photography. Initial inspection of the collection of images on the project Intranet indicates a range of awareness of conventions and conscious use of rhetorical devices, depending upon the previous experience and interests of participants.

At this stage in the fieldwork the focus is not upon single images, or even sequences of images as bearers of a completed semiotic, but rather as events, as a form of interruption in the process of seeing and being seen and as an intervention in a space. Rarely is an image taken as a deliberate reproduction of a work of art and more often than not images locate an artifact in space, through a fragment of the frame, wall, floor and distance from the object which might also include partial framing of other visitors. Many images are not focused upon artifacts but upon details of the architecture of the building including furniture, fittings and signage. Such images operate as markers of a first encounter and generate further reflection and conversation. For participants who have been involved in the project for over a year it is noticeable that on reflection it is possible to see that the images of first contact are in some way resilient, even brutal. These first images can generate meaning, questions, arguments, agendas, perspectives, which given time and interest we have seen develop into ongoing enquiries about the museum and its objects. At this point we would modestly say that use of personal media provides a necessary means from which a productive response to the fact of being in the art museum can be developed under the conditions framed by research.

One example of the development of the use of photography within the project will serve to conclude this paper and illustrate how being 'armed with a camera' operated to produce the effect of 'breaking into' the mythologised space of the gallery, or in less military prose, brought everyday contingent life into the 'Return of the Gods' in the Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain in April 2008. In Robbie Sweeny's first Tate encounter he produced images of Henry Moore's bronze figures in one of the galleries. Subsequently, Robbie put a series of these gallery installation images on the project Intranet alongside images he had made in Brixton, South London, near where he lives, of urban streetscapes. He was deliberately and crudely contrasting the refinement of space in Tate Britain with the shabby and chaotic space of the urban street.

This echoed the response Cinta Esmel Pâmies, who, six months earlier, in her first encounter commented, "Where is the dirt, where is the life" and made a similar contrast between the rarified and ordered space of Tate Britain and the teeming

disorganisation at urban ground level. Both Robbie and Cinta were responding to an unfamiliar and uncomfortable space: a space which induced both reverence and rejection at the same time. Later, Robbie asked if he could make a more constructed image for a college assignment that required the use of a television set, a stool, and an armchair as props. His aim was to create a domestic living space with a young woman aimlessly watching television in the foreground of the Duveen Galleries, with Neo-Classical sculptures in the background. The project supported the photo-shoot after internal discussion and gaining the necessary internal permissions to facilitate an early morning supervised session. I attended the shoot along with two research assistants and my own response had something of the thief in the night about it. We were clearly trespassing, waiting to be challenged. Even though we had permission, some small voice inside my head was saying, "let's get this picture over with and get out before we are caught". We had crossed a line somewhere, no longer the licensed public, but equally not familiar insiders. This felt like a transgressive act, but why? The discussion within the research group and with Tate staff leading up to the shoot had raised some interesting questions about the status of the student photographer and the status of the intended photograph. The out-of-hours photo-shoot, although essentially still a student project, had raised the stakes somewhere along the line.

The research project was making a bigger demand, which had, in exactly the same way as we experienced the actual shoot, moved us into some unknown territory. Tate staff very reasonably and helpfully facilitated the request once the reasons for it as part of a research project had been explained and accepted. But in wanting to make this particular photograph distinctions between amateur and professional, documentary or artistic production were being called up. Was this image intended as a work of art? Was this image intended to represent Tate? Who was this image for? The Duveen Gallery photographed down its central axis is a Tate Britain icon and potentially a commercial asset. This returns us to the status of photography. Robbie could have written an essay about his experience and perspective which would have gone unnoticed. He could have taken a lower grade image during one of the regular workshop sessions and posted it on the Intranet, which would have also been unremarkable. He could also have achieved almost the same final image through digital montage. But in adopting the language and technical approach of professional media production, rather as John Berger had dramatically done in the opening scenes of the first in the series of *Ways of Seeing*, Robbie had, innocently challenged the art museum's primary role of collection and preservation.

The image Robbie made is illustrated here and is available to be seen, together with the other images referred to above in 'Image/Sound/Text' of *Tate Encounters Edition Three.*

From the perspective of what has been argued in this paper Robbie's final image seems to me to say; "I have made a journey to this place, look I am here. I stand in awe and disbelief. I am interested what knowledge this place contains. I am bringing my world to this space. I can and will be here."

Appendix: Email response from Robbie on his experience of making the image

Q.   What did you think would be involved in taking the picture?

A.   Initially I had imagined that the shoot would be relatively straight forward as the only real prop I was bringing into the Tate environment was a small television, I imagined that I would come along some morning or evening whilst the Tate was closed to the public, set up the shoot in about ten minutes, photograph the scenario in about an hour and then pack up and leave.

Q.   What response to your idea were you met by and how did you feel about that?

A.   The initial response was quite positive and encouraging, but then it became clearer that there was going to be a lot of red tape involved. As this project needed to be completed within a certain period of time, it was touch and go as to whether or not the shoot would go ahead. It was frustrating at times, as for a short period I was not able to receive a yes or a no as to whether or not I should continue with my efforts. I found it confusing as to why there were so many issues, as I had photographed at the Tate prior to this and the issues such as insurance and copyright had not been a problem then, but at the same time I did understand that a place such as the Tate does need to take certain precautions.

Q.   During the shoot what was your experience of the event?

A.   The shoot itself went very smoothly. There was an initial hold up due to a trolley being ordered, but it had never been taken care of, but this was not a problem as there was not a lot to transport through to the location of the shoot. Once we were there it was quite surreal to have the Tate to ourselves. It was as I had hoped. I set up the props and my tripod and experimented with various angles. It was all very straight forward and completed within the hour.

Q.   How have you subsequently reflected upon that experience?

A.   Looking back on the project, on the whole it was a very positive, unique experience. There were things I would have done differently, namely the timing, I would have tried to give myself and the Tate more time in which to organise the shoot. I also would have tried to have given myself the option of having two shoots, one being the dummy shoot in which I might have identified any issues such as lighting or angles, and then I would have addressed these in the follow up shoot. I was lucky enough to have had the help of Dr Isabel Shaw and Sarah Thomas, without their help in liaising with the various departments of the Tate, I don't think the shoot would have gone ahead.

Q.   What is your view now of the pictures taken on that shoot?

A.   On the whole I am very proud of these pictures. I was aiming to capture a dark,

atmospheric, yet mildly mundane feeling, with which to contrast the regal feeling of the gallery's hallway, and I think I managed to capture this. There are however a few technical issues I would have addressed had I the option to do the shoot again. I think some areas of the photo could be lit better, namely the subject's legs and some of the background areas. Also I was hoping to get a specific lighting effect from the television, which I was unable to do, so given more time I would have researched how I could have gone about obtaining this effect.

Q.   What did you learn about Tate from the overall experience?

A.   I have learned that Tate is not unlike any other large institution, there is a lot of bureaucracy involved in the planning of an event, no matter how small. It has given me a better understanding of the intricacies that a gallery has to deal with on its many levels.

I had never imagined prior to this experience that in order for a piece of art to be moved, that an art handler would have to be employed in order for the piece to be moved. Nor would I have contemplated that permission needed to be given in order to be able to use the electrical sockets. Like any place where public events occur, we do not really think about what goes on behind the scenes or what happens in the space when we are not there, but in working on the Tate Encounters project specifically this shoot, I have been given a glimpse into how this world operates. It can be a frustrating and difficult environment when things do not go your way, but when things work out, the rewards make these obstacles worth the perseverance.

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[1] Participants elect to join the project on the basis of meeting the minimum criteria that they or their parents or grandparents migrated and settled in the UK.
[2] Dewdney, A. (2008), *Tate Encounters [E]dition 3*

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