

## **Besides Looking: Patrimony, Performativity and Visual Cultures in National Art Museums**

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### **Prelude**

Art museums in particular have played a central role in fabricating and maintaining national and folk heritage and identity, working to promote such identities as characterized by coherences over space and time in aesthetic sensibility.

- Donald Preziosi<sup>1</sup>

*My father never took me to a museum. When I was a child, the visits to see paintings in Shakespeare's sister's house or embroidered slippers in the Shoe Museum were the provenance of school trips, during which Mr Williams (bless his cotton socks) and Mrs White (bless hers, too) would lead us, an unruly bunch of children, into town or across Abington Park to stare at furniture that once belonged to the fattest man in England. Or, so I remember. Looking back, I guess that every grubby fingerprint on a vitrine and every whoop at a specimen case must have meant another box ticked in the honourable attempts by the affable teachers of St Mary's Middle School to satisfy the greater wisdom of yet another policy from the Local Education Authority. Of course, I didn't know anything about local government or education policy or greater wisdom back then. The main thing I grasped, amid all that curiosity and wonder, was the importance of walking in single file and keeping my voice down. Indeed, it wasn't until my father told me about his own childhood, many years later, that I finally grasped the significance of all those visits to Northampton's shoe museum.*

*In a letter dated 9th November 1991, my father wrote to me about his childhood spent living between Asaba and Onitsha in southern Nigeria. I knew that my father had grown up in a modest background amid a worthy, hard-working, God-fearing family. I didn't know until I read that letter, though, what effect misfortune had had on his life. The death of his mother in childbirth alongside his father's long illness meant that he grew up together with his eldest brother's family as a kind of other son. He wrote to me of the difficulties that such a situation posed for him. As I read the letter, all the sorrow and hardship seemed expressed in the following words: "Throughout my Primary School till I was 13, I had no slippers or shoes."*

*I walk back, often, in my daydreams and my imagined memories, to Northampton's Shoe Museum. In my imagination, I am accompanied by my father rather than the well-meaning teachers from my respectable Roman Catholic school. We speak non-stop, my father and I, in this daydream, about the importance of shoes to British history: their role in urbanization and the industrial revolution; the way they shod the armies of Britain, France and elsewhere, as Europe marched to build its empires across the world; the allure that footwear had – 'English shoes from Northampton' – in Nigeria and other colonies; shoes as fashion items, status symbols and fetishistic markers of cosmopolitan chic. "No wonder", my father and I say sagaciously, with all the serenity bestowed by a daydream, "No wonder shoes lie at the centre of so many myths: the elves and the shoemaker; the glass slipper – where would Cinderella have been without her shoes?"*

*When my daydream slips away, as softly as a ball gown at the last stroke of midnight, my father vanishes and I am left with the trace of his voice reminding me of the importance of shoes. "The reason why," he says, "so few of us in the West could ever understand the Russian Revolution, is because we never understood how, before the Bolsheviks, the majority of the Russian population wore birch-bark shoes." Have you ever seen a birch tree? Have you ever felt its bark? Next time you climb the steps to a national art museum, look down at your feet and remember my father's words about birch-bark shoes.*

### **Seeing on the move: introducing transvisuality**

In the lifetime of one man the amount of changes that occur within his culture some times can be very little as to go unnoticed, or, they can be so great that men would learn to fly.

- Patrick Tubridy<sup>2</sup>

In his work, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums and Phantasms of Modernity* (2003), art historian and museologist Donald Preziosi wrote about a surprise discovery of an image of his recently deceased father during a visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup> Preziosi explained how disturbed he had been by the unexpected sight of his father in a photograph in a museum that he had been visiting for the purposes of furthering his museological research. Preziosi confessed that his subsequent inclusion of the event in his writing was a way of working through the turbulence he had felt on first being confronted with the image.

I want to step back, in the present text, from the intellectual journey that took Preziosi from an unexpected encounter with an image of his father towards the final writing of a book. I want to hold onto the moment of surprise in the museum and, thereby, commit a critical misdemeanour in suggesting that one might gain more by setting aside the nuanced or tangential meanings of the event and by taking the event literally, instead: a man's father becomes part of his patrimony – his national heritage. In such terms, I feel compelled to ask: how does it become possible to recognize one's patrimony in a national museum and, as importantly, what happens when such possibilities are impeded?

Moving away from the American setting of Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum, one can ask a series of related questions concerning the recognition of patrimony in a context closer to home. What kinds of issues emerge when one discusses the notion of patrimony or heritage within the context of national museums in London with all the particularities of post-Imperial ambivalence and fluctuating nationalisms that characterize post-devolution, post-9/11, post-7/7 Britain? How do transmigrational peoples respond to the discourses of heritage that they encounter in the countries through which they move?

The term 'transmigration' has been circulating in the field of Migration Studies since the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> It is used in this paper as a means of emphasizing the shift in migration practices in Europe, particularly following the Freedom of Movement rights bestowed upon European Union citizens since the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (1992). The enactment of such rights can be seen to have facilitated 'transitory migrations', whereby peoples move between national territories without the sole purpose of permanent settlement. Rather, settlement in any other EU member state is seen as the enactment of one among many possibilities and might, indeed, entail subsequent

settlement in another member state. In such terms, transitory migrations can be seen to have characterized a form of movement contrasted with the post-war, post-colonial patterns of migration, in and around Europe, which were marked by more extended, sometimes permanent, periods of settlement.

The following discussion is put forward as a means of further elaborating the questions outlined above, particularly as regards the development of visual practices in relation to transmigrational cultures. I wrote a little about visual cultures of migration in an article 'Migrations', published in the first [E]dition<sup>5</sup> I would like to take the opportunity afforded by the current text to dilate those issues. In particular, I want to open out the discussion in the light of the understandings delivered by the move from migration to transmigration. One such understanding can be seen in the appreciation of transmigration as a model emphasizing the possibility of dynamic and, even, accelerated movement – the transmigration to one country precipitates the subsequent transmigration to another. Under the auspices of such an argument, I want to position the person going through transmigration as producing and reproducing subjectivity by means of a dynamic specular modality – a way of seeing or a means of negotiating a particular visual terrain that can only be afforded through the experience of transmigration – a kind of *seeing on the move*.

I offer the term, 'transvisuality' as a means of theorizing the experience of 'seeing on the move'. The use of 'transvisuality' stresses the shifts in visual language or, more precisely, the conditions of visibility that take place as the subject moves from one national territory to another. Shifts in conditions of visibility reflect changes in discursive conditions that accompany moves between national territories, particularly those in Europe, which often entail variations in language environments. 'Transvisuality' implies that such changes entail the production of differentialized modalities of viewing – means of looking at things that differ from one national territory to another. 'Transvisuality' encompasses not only changes in the way in which things are seen, but also in what can and cannot be seen. It signifies variations in what constitutes the field of the visible itself. The ability to apprehend such changes and to generate the means of negotiating them is seen here as the development of transvisuality.

The aim of the present text is to address issues relevant to the development of transvisuality in the context of engagements with visual spectacle offered by national art museums. Such issues will be addressed by the following means: first, by outlining an understanding of transvisuality, alongside generalized exemplifications of the term; secondly, by locating the relevant debates within wider contemporary scholarly discourses on museums, spectatorship and extended participation in cultural 'heritage'; thirdly, by addressing the issues that arise from such debates against the background of arguments generated within the inter-disciplinary field of Visual Cultures; finally, by following recent arguments within Visual Cultures in proposing performativity as a means of framing the visual media interventions of the Tate Encounters' project participants and co-researchers. Such a task must, by necessity, be handled tentatively, principally to avoid embedding particular research perspectives within the research programme while still in the process of generating and gathering data. One remains mindful, however, that certain approaches might be favoured, at this point, rather than others. The discussion aims to set out what those approaches look like and what their implications might be.

## The Scope of Transvisuality

On the face of it, the post-ideological period of museums enables individuals and marginal communities to express their desire to represent themselves autonomously. The reality, however, is that official state culture determines for the marginal community the governing paradigms and neutralizes the potential for any radical change at the level of representation.

- Ariella Azoulay<sup>6</sup>

In my previous text, 'Migrations', I traced Gillian Rose's outline of the intellectual terrain surrounding the notion of 'visuality', which emphasized the discursive aspects of what we are able, unable, provoked and compelled to see.<sup>7</sup> Our subject positions, how and where we are located in culture, according to such arguments, does not so much impinge on our outlook so much as it constitutes our field of vision. In such terms, the unvisualized is not merely that which remains unseen, it is that which is unseen because it is that which it is not yet imagined as possible to be seen. The conditions of possibility retain, therefore, an important place in visuality. What shapes those conditions and what allows them to be reformulated remains the key question at the heart of the present argument.

The premise of the current discussion is that visualization – the production of visuality or the making and remaking of what it is possible to see – remains a practice embedded in a matrix of discursive formations relating language to gesture to thought to image. Where the discursive formation shifts, so does visualization. Transmigration is rendered here as a set of conditions in which discursive formations shift. Even if language does not seem to change as national borders are crossed – between Britain and Ireland, for instance – the inter-relationship between language, gesture, thought and image does alter significantly. In respect of transmigration, then, one begins to speak of a series of successive visualities being modified according to the movement through language groups and national borders. It is the successive modification of visualities that is emphasized in the term '*transvisuality*'.

In some ways, what I am suggesting in respect of transvisuality seems to go against the current of contemporary debate. For, it relies on the notion that the crossing of a national border affects visuality and, therefore, that visuality is somehow affected by the workings of the nation-state. Within the context of continental and, indeed, global population flows that situate the conditions of contemporary transmigration, it seems odd to recite the nation-state as being, if not deterministic, then, at least, somehow effective, in ways that much contemporary thinking would dismiss. Allow me, however, to cite a number of examples drawn from the internet – that transnational entity *par excellence* – to demonstrate the ways in which national culture impinges on the visualizable. Such examples remain, at this stage, highly generalized. Their applicability might not even withstand close scrutiny. However, they do serve to dislodge any assumption that national borders can be discounted when it comes to considerations of visuality. My exemplification ranges from matters of what is *permitted* to be seen, raising issues of political positions, to what *should* be seen, calling into question moral and ethical standpoints.

In respect of notions of what is permitted to be seen, I refer to the recent examples of the actions of the Chinese state authorities in exercising national controls over what is generally viewed as a trans- or even supra-national information network embodied in the work of the internet. There is no room to survey even a minor range of sources in the present discussion but permit me to point to comments published online within British new media outlets over the past five years.

Most recently, in March of this year, *The Guardian's* online source, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), published an article titled, 'China blocks media due to Tibet unrest' which detailed an "internet clampdown" in China involving the blocking of sites, including *YouTube* and *Yahoo* alongside the *Guardian's* own website.<sup>8</sup> The aim, according to the report, was to prevent dissemination within China of news reports covering the unrest in Tibet. Prior reports, in the years preceding the Tibetan unrest, in sources such as *BBC News Online* and *NewScientist.com*, point towards Chinese State intervention, blocking access within China to online blogs and to the popular online search engine, *google*.<sup>9</sup> Although it is not made explicit whether the blocked news reports and blogs included images, one can still argue that visuality remained affected by policies enacted in the name of the nation-state. The discrepancy between what is visualizable in a nation-state that restricts the circulation of reports of a given event and that which is visualizable in a nation-state that encourages such circulation supports such a position.

In terms of what should be seen, a debate emerged in 2004 around the controversy surrounding the circulation of images of dead U.S. soldiers in the wake of the war in Iraq. According to sources, such as *MediaGuardian*, a Pentagon ban, in force from the beginning of the Iraq invasion until its overturning in April 2004 under the auspices of the U.S. courts, had prevented the circulation of images of dead soldiers returned in their coffins to the United States.<sup>10</sup> *MediaGuardian* suggested that: "the secrecy surrounding the return of soldiers killed in Iraq over the past twelve months has been such that media organisations did not even know the photographs, taken by defence department photographers, even existed."<sup>11</sup>

The present argument does not, of course, seek any parity between the actions of the Chinese authorities actions cited above and those of the U.S. authorities. In particular, the successful legal challenge to U.S. government action, alongside the ensuing public debate, offers a clear distinction between the two. However, what becomes of importance in the case of the U.S. images is the suggestion that, because of the ban, the existence of the images was not even known to the U.S. media organisations.<sup>12</sup> To suggest that the existence of an image is not known cannot be equated with the suggestion that the existence of such an image is not imaginable. Again, however, I would maintain that, despite the characterization of the contemporary era as one of unimpeded transnational information flows, there remain knots and blockages put in place, albeit temporarily, by the nation-state.

*Transvisuality* is put forward, then, as an analytical tool working against the generalization of a particularized mode of seeing – the 'information super highway' - that can mistakenly be used to characterize a 'global outlook' as a normalized position of viewing in the world. None of us have access to an uninterrupted circulation of images across the world. The transnational flow of images is always susceptible to impediment by the activities of the nation-state. The inhabitation of particular national territories lends itself to an immersion in specific formations of visuality – different things are rendered visible in different national contexts. Those persons that move through such different contexts – transmigrational persons – become placed in the position of operating within those differentially inflected formations of visuality. Such operations can be rendered the objects of an analytical gaze. Such is the purpose of framing the notion, 'transvisuality'.

## In the Names of the Fathers: Patrimony, Heritage and Cultural Difference

Perhaps, though, the performance of exclusion has nothing to do with entrance or access and far more to do with perceptions of the possible.

– Irit Rogoff<sup>13</sup>

In his essay 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling "The Heritage", Re-imagining the Post-Nation' (2002), Stuart Hall framed a series of questions in respect of the relationship between migration and heritage, "from the perspective of the multicultural Britain which has been emerging since the end of World War II."<sup>14</sup> According to Hall, notions of heritage can be addressed in terms peculiar to Britain:

... This gives the British idea of 'Heritage' a peculiar inflection. The works and artefacts so conserved appear to be 'of value' primarily in relation to the past. To be validated, they must take their place alongside what has been authorized as 'valuable' on already established grounds in relation to the unfolding of a 'national story' whose terms we already know.<sup>15</sup>

If Hall's insights are to be taken seriously, one would have to follow by asking in what ways such a characterization of British heritage impacts on the means by which one might be able to recognize one's patrimony in a national art museum. Within the context of migration, such a question becomes ever more pressing: finding a place in the well-established grounds of British national identity raises particular issues for transmigrational peoples in Britain; seeing oneself as part of an unfolding national story, the terms of which are already known, raises further concerns. Indeed, in the light of such matters, one might ask whether it is even possible for transmigrational peoples to take up British heritage, particularly as one begins to scrutinise what is legitimized as 'heritage'.

I have used the terms 'heritage' and 'patrimony' interchangeably so far in the present text, notwithstanding the slightly dated and gendered inflection of the term, 'patrimony'. Hall's definition of heritage points away from such gendering:

Heritage ... I take it to refer to the whole complex of organizations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts- art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds ... and sites of specialist interest ...<sup>16</sup>

The efficacy of the discursive emphasis within Hall's definition is recognized in the present discussion. Indeed, I would like to import the breadth of Hall's definition as crucial for the development of the present arguments. However, within that discursive arrangement, I want to highlight the figure of the *forefather* as well as *his* legacy into the flow of the discussion, hence the privileging of patrimony.

The term 'patrimony' is underlined for three reasons: first, because the figure of Sir Henry Tate still hangs over the institution that he founded through the donation of his collection – an institution that still bears his name – an institution that still holds an important role in the Tate Encounters research project; secondly, because one of the co-researchers participating in Tate Encounters, digital photographer Patrick Tubridy, has made the exploration of fatherhood one of the central foci of his visual media practices, conducted as part of the research; thirdly, as an aspect of my own self-reflexive positioning within the Tate Encounters project.

The characterisation of Tate as a national institution bearing the hallmark of patriarchal practices can be seen in the association of the museum with its first 'great white male' patrons – Sir Henry Tate and the Duveens, father and son. Sir Henry himself has been positioned as a forefather figure whose image still hangs over the institution. Indeed, a portrait of Sir Henry, up until recently, took up a prominent position within the building, at the top of the Manton staircase. Sir Henry's gaze remains extant within the museum also by the way in which his taste in art – embodied in his bequest – is still reflected in works that are on display in the museum. Indeed, art historian Brandon Taylor discussed the ways in which Tate's views were encapsulated in works that he bought:

... [Tate liked] high polish illusionistic naturalism that sought to dissemble the qualities of the medium and its surface in preference for pictorial illusions of moral situations and scenes.<sup>17</sup>

Such taste for 'moral situations and scenes' was reflected in works such as Luke Fildes' *The Doctor* (1891), donated along with the initial bequest, currently on display in Room 15 in the Tate Britain galleries. Sir Henry Tate's legacy was supplemented by another celebrated male patron of British art, the collector and art dealer, Sir Joseph Duveen, who, in the early twentieth century funded the first expansion of the institution founded by Tate<sup>18</sup>. Sir Joseph's name, together with that of his son – also Joseph – is literally inscribed in Tate Britain's centre-piece Duveen galleries, which host the Tate Triennial as well as the Duveen Galleries Commissions, which have given rise to displays of such works as Mark Wallinger's Turner Prize-winning show, *State Britain 2006*<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the institution, the building and its contents remain explicitly inscribed with the names of its founding forefathers.

The issues that arise from an encounter with Tate have been framed, by Tate Encounters co-researcher Patrick Tubridy, in terms of the transmission of traditions from father to son. Tubridy has discussed his own work within the research project in terms of a negotiation of 'fatherhood' and 'heritage'. As will be addressed later in the present text, Tubridy has made the following question explicit within his work: "I wonder if the cultural memory that has been passed on from my father through me to my son will survive"<sup>20</sup>. The poignancy of such a question becomes all the more evident against the background of notions of British national heritage emblematised by the exhibitions and displays at Tate. How can such consciousness of Irish heritage, as reflected in Tubridy's words, be negotiated alongside renditions of British heritage embodied in Tate? How can someone like Patrick Tubridy use such a negotiation to elaborate his own cultural legacies? Such questions become central to Tate Encounters.

It was Tubridy's foregrounding of the question of heritage in terms of the relation between father and son that led me to reflect on my own positioning within the Tate Encounters research project. My training in history, art history and visual cultures, alongside my role as a university lecturer, produces me as a transmitter of cultural knowledge. The coherence of such cultural knowledge, exemplified by staples of university curricula, like 'nineteenth-century French painting' or 'twentieth-century European avant-gardes', is, of course, placed in question as a body of knowledge 'handed down' through the legacy of late twentieth-century scholarship. Such a legacy is placed in dialogue with the knowledge transmitted to me by my own father and, thereby, complicates my own position as a subject of knowledge who might aim to transmit my own cultural legacy to my children whether imaginary, symbolic or real. What status I can attribute to my own cultural authority both within the project and within my own pedagogical practices becomes a pressing question.

## Moving through museums: Visual cultures and differentialized views of art

The first contemporary scholarly discourse on museums and spectatorship to which this argument draws attention is that which has emerged around the critical interventions that have taken place in the name of Visual Cultures.<sup>21</sup> The usefulness of Visual Cultures can be demonstrated through the elaboration of two of its key terms: 'expanded field' and 'expanded participation'<sup>22</sup>. Through the notion of the 'expanded field', one is able to recognize a broad range of materials as constituting objects of specialized visual knowledge and critical attention. Thus film posters, advertising hoardings magazine advertising and so forth, can be brought into an inter-related field with the more narrowly defined objects of critical attention within historically established disciplines such as art history. Through 'expanded participation', one is able to recognize a broader range of experiences as constituting subjects of specialized visual knowledge and critical attention. Thus the collector of soccer posters is recognized as holding specialized knowledge. Class, race, sexuality, gender, nationality etcetera, are all addressed as contingencies that condition visual engagements, which, in themselves premise different articulations of knowledge as well as different ways of knowing.

Visual Cultures, as an intellectual field, envisages a series of inter-related visual planes within which subjects and objects are located differentially with differences being re-inscribed rather than elided from the scene of visual engagement. In that sense, it can be positioned as a critical discourse through which an analysis of transmigrational experience within Britain's national art institutions, like Tate Britain, can be conducted. Through such understanding, the scene of analysis remains always-already conditioned by a form of rupture: the national art institution that structures its collection – its patrimony, if you like – along the lines of a conventional museology will find itself constantly interrupted by the differentialized modes of visual attention that cannot be expected to follow the *museologic* of its conventional approach. Such an analysis positions Visual Cultures in terms of its use as a mode of critical engagement. In doing so, I do not wish to overlook the view that visual cultures can be understood as the product of critical engagement – a newly apprehended visual terrain. I merely wish to draw attention to the critical modalities that Visual Cultures offers, as well as to the factors that have informed its development.

Differentialized modalities of viewing, which account for, rather than elide experiences of transmigration in national art museums, mean that one cannot anticipate the transmigrational viewer's engagement with "the unfolding of a 'national story' whose terms we already know."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, transmigrational viewers might introduce another story, indeed, an entirely new narrative structure, the terms of which could not yet be known. Furthermore, the 'we' who are to know such another story would remain, in that setting, unknown to one another, as yet unconstituted as a collective. In those terms, any prior attempt to address the transmigrational viewer, as such, must always fail.

Neither marketing device, nor political directive, nor call for papers, nor invitation to participate in a research project can be cast at, directed towards or targeted at any notional audience of transmigrational viewers. For, such an audience can only be constituted at the moment of viewing. The modalities of such viewings can only be assessed at the time they take place. This is what distinguishes the model of the transmigrational from other ethnicized, raced or nationalistic categorizations. Such categorizations rely on a prior set of aggregated commonalities that are recognized as constituting an identifiable collective. The only commonality that can be applied to

the transmigrational is that they are migrating or rather *transmigrating*. Discourses of Britishness, notwithstanding their contemporary political expediency, cannot, therefore, frame the transmigrational in any conclusive way. The transmigrational will act to move towards the extra-categorical – passing through a moment in which it falls into a category but inevitably passing beyond it.

The artwork of Francis Bacon, caught in the well-travelled transmigrational route between Britain and Ireland, offers a useful point of debate. His works, on display in Tate Britain's Room 26 up until May 2008, lie on a fault-line between the museological imperatives of a British national art institution, placing Bacon in the traditions of British painting, and the critical attention of transmigrational viewers, such as Tate Encounters co-researcher Patrick Tubridy, who claims Francis Bacon as a fellow Irishman and, as such, not belonging properly to a British national art institution.

The question of what belongs where is central to the twin disciplines of art history and museology, as Preziosi puts it, "Art historical and museological practices have been devoted, overwhelmingly, to this fixing-in-place of individual objects within the (ideal) horizons of a (potentially) universal history of artistic form."<sup>24</sup> Art historical and museological drives towards such a universalized history play their part in the need to locate Bacon in relation to British traditions of painting, allowing his work to be contrasted with the Kitchen Sink painters, such as Bomberg, Auerbach and Kossof, working in post-War England<sup>25</sup>. One could argue that the nationalistic claim for Bacon as an Irish painter also serves such purposes. However, discussions of Bacon as an Irish figure do not emerge from art historical discourse aiming to locate him in Irish traditions of painting – he is not discussed, for instance, in relation to the tradition set by William Orpen or Jack Yeats<sup>26</sup>. Rather, Bacon is claimed in relation to broader Irish national figures such as Beckett and Joyce<sup>27</sup>.

The question framed within the discourse of Visual Cultures is not, of course, whether Bacon rightfully belongs to Ireland or to Britain. Nor does such a line of questioning pose the possibility, as some would have it, that Visual Cultures implies that it no longer matters whether we're dealing with Irish or British Bacon. Regardless of the argument as to where Bacon belongs, we need to address the issues that viewers raise in his name, we need to attend to the judgements they reach, we need to take account of the views they express, not as a means of side-stepping scholarly accuracy but precisely as a means of deepening our engagement, scholarly and otherwise, with the discourse that surrounds Bacon – the thoughts, actions and speech that deliver him to us as an intelligible figure.

Visual Cultures invites viewers' differentialized views of Bacon – Irish or British or gay – as a means of premising the viewer as a speaking subject participating in the production of meaning of the work. Again, this is not to occasion a kind of 'flattening out' of meaning, a caricatured liberal notion of democratisation, an ineffectual 'anything goes'. Rather, the call for viewers' thoughts on Bacon is to facilitate the premising of a supplementary question, asking: what further claims do such thoughts enable viewers to make? How far are viewers thereby able to articulate their unfolding subject positions in an imprecise discursive terrain? Such a line of questioning must reject the necessity for a universalized history within which the location of art objects is fixed. Artworks become unfixed and are brought into relation to other objects through their proximity to any given subjectivity that is *in the process of being articulated*.

The characterization of art objects as unfixed, positions Visual Cultures as an interdisciplinary field marked by the major tenets of post-modernist and post-structuralist

thinking, such as: discontinuity, dislocation, instability and mutability, which in themselves can be seen as results of the fragmentation of the subject premised in post-modernist and post-structural work<sup>28</sup>. Looking back now, one can see that the legacy of such ideas within Visual Cultures amounts to a heavy theoretical as well as experiential burden. Doubtlessly, the break from the processes driving conventional museological practice have delivered the valuable shifts in thinking, as Crimp put it: “Notions of originality, authenticity and presence, essential to the ordered discourse of the museum are undermined.”<sup>29</sup> Visual Cultures has taken up such undermining as a tool for making room for other kinds of affiliations and constituencies. As such, Visual Cultures sees the fracturing that was used to characterize post-modernity as the means by which new subject positions could find spaces of articulation within modernist institutions such as national art museums represented by the likes of Tate.

The effects of privileging the discontinuous and the dislocated must be accounted for, however, in the context of subjects generating viewing strategies *in response to* unstable and mutable conditions. It would be an error to assume that dislocated subjects and mutable conditions must always lead to fractured or fragmented articulations of subjectivity. Tate Encounters’ co-researchers and participants have shown that subjects can be aware of the mutability occasioned by their transmigration, but still feel able to produce an articulation of their experience that is not marked by fracturing or fragmentation. Thus Patrick Tubridy can articulate his position as an Irishman living in London trying to pass on his heritage to his son by visiting works in Tate Britain. Such responses should not be read as characterized by instability but rather as producing contingencies that can work towards modulating, modifying, refusing and downright denying instability as well as acknowledging or amplifying it.

A claim, then, to articulate the voice of the father sharing his Irish patrimony within Tate Britain – the very institution in which he claims an Irishman’s art does not belong – should not be read as a contradictory claim riddled with the fractures of a dislocated subjectivity. Rather, it should be read as the articulation of a transmigrational viewing strategy, characterized by the contingencies necessary for the working through of knowledge that can neither be fixed nor resolved. Such contingent viewing strategies can be read alongside Vera Frenkel’s recent work on ‘Difficult Knowledge’:

It requires art practices and museum structures that allow space and time for difficult knowledge to remain dilemmatic, unresolvable, evoked rather than stated and made present to the imagination through a mix of absence, indirection, and incompleteness that brings the viewer out of passivity, and makes the world, the world of art, scholarship and social engagement, a place where the difficult is understood to be at home.<sup>30</sup>

### **Performing spectatorship: Performativity and the viewer**

The power or capacity of the visual sign to carry meanings is only ‘virtual’ or potential until those meanings have been realized in use. Their realization requires, at the other end of the meaning chain, the cultural practices of looking and interpretation, the subjective capacities of the viewer to make images signify.

– Stuart Hall<sup>31</sup>

Recent arguments within Visual Cultures have brought to the surface the question of how to account for and mobilize the agency of the viewer within the space of the museum. Of course, the understanding remains that such agency can only be articulated within particular sets of discursive conditions – particular formations of visibility. For some time now, however, the attention has shifted away from examining the workings of discursive formations and much more towards addressing the way in which viewers operate within them. Preziosi, for instance, drew on the shift in Foucault's later work with his deployment of the Foucauldian term 'practices of the self' as a means of understanding the construction of identity: "The construction of identity," he argued, "is linked to the *orchestration* and *composition* of a world in which we endeavour to find our place." [my emphasis].<sup>32</sup> Seeing the viewer as an orchestrator – one who composes – becomes a device for elaborating the workings of identity in respect of the relationship between subjects and visual objects positioned as artworks.

Rogoff takes the arguments premising the agency of the viewer further, setting out a means of decontextualising the subject from its field of engagement with art objects and then recontextualizing the self-same subject *on her own terms* within the visual field. As Rogoff wrote:

... one of the main issues...is that the question posed in the name of expanded participation ... is inevitably articulated at the centres of power, and it is only the response elicited by it that is paid attention. What interests me is the possibility of reading a response as a form of rearticulating the question of what it might be to take part in public sphere culture.<sup>33</sup>

The suggestion that a response can be framed as a re-articulation of a question becomes a direct invocation of a performative approach. For, it was in the elaboration of performativity as a theory of identity formation<sup>34</sup> that one began to see 're-articulation' posed as a strategy of political engagement. How does such a strategy work? Judith Butler's now celebrated elaboration of performativity might hold the key:

Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioural conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it.<sup>35</sup>

Although in museum culture one is dealing with convention rather than law, with invitation rather than command, one can see how performativity breaches the paradigm that divides communities into either those who embrace museums or those who neglect them. Performativity offers a way of anticipating another set of positionalities in relation to the museum. It gives way to another way of thinking.

It is the contention of the present argument that Performativity offers a productive means of engaging with the research practices enacted within Tate Encounters. First, it allows one to account for the agency of spectators without framing them, first and foremost, as objects of museological enquiry whose principal role is to act as respondents to questions; questions formulated within museological discourses elaborated before their encounter with the art museum. Secondly, it forces one to account for the discursive conditions, the visualities, within which the functions of museums are immersed. The presumed national story of a 'heritage', the patrimony that smoothly hands down stories *from father to son*, must be accounted for through a visibility that brings certain images to the fore while leaving others unimaginable.

That visibility is the background to the invitation that the museum extends to its visitors. Through performativity we can address the actions of the transmigrational viewer as a renegotiation of the terms of that invitation, a handing back of a story, a re-imagining of the scene of viewing that has so carefully been set out.

By premising visual media engagements within the Tate Collection, primarily through digital photography and online remediation, Tate Encounters has premised practices that can be seen as interventions that re-envisage the visual composition of the art museum. The collection gets re-collected. The legacy gets re-legated through a process of de-legation that positions the transmigrational viewer as one who brings something other to the visual field. Such other modes of spectatorship bring not only new perspectives that enrich the museum on its own terms, they can bring visions of museum activities, articulated in terms beyond those available to the museum.

The articulation of visual engagement beyond that available to the museum gets elaborated through the positioning of Tate Encounters' participants and co-researchers as authorized interventionists within the space of the museum. By being given permission, through their status as participants in research, they are able to go beyond the boundaries of engagement with visual art normally set by the museum. Such move beyond the boundaries, captured through a visual media intervention, allows participants to emphasize the varied conditions of viewing. Moreover, the photographic modalities, through which such emphasis takes place, also allow the participants to circulate their articulations of their varied conditions of viewing. Both the closed intranet site used by all those taking part in the Tate Encounters research project and the online *[E]ditions* become the means by which such circulations take place.

Consider Patrick Tubridy's discussion of John Singer Sargent's portrait, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889), which itself will feature as an image-sound-text piece circulated in this *[E]dition*. The painting that forms the focus of Tubridy's intervention was hung in Room 16, *The Modern Portrait*, at Tate Britain from January to May 2008. Tubridy took his son Rhys to see the work, which he then later photographed as part of his visual media engagement with the Tate Collection. In an interview, Tubridy explained how his view of the work had been affected by his discussion with his son. He had taken his son to see the work not because of the wonders of Sargent's painterly skills, nor because of the legendary British actress, Ellen Terry, whom Sargent had so skilfully depicted. Nor, indeed, had he taken his son Rhys to witness a depiction of a scene from the English bard's darkest portrayal of the decline of the human spirit. Patrick Tubridy confessed that he did not know whether his son even liked Shakespeare. The reason for visiting the work and describing it as part of his heritage was due to the Irish Celtic knots carved on the frame. A look besides – a view taken by literally looking *beside* the image that was offered on display.

The looking beside Singer Sargent's iconic work, enacted by Patrick and Rhys Tubridy, can be understood as a performative intervention rearticulating the terms of viewing as well as shifting the object of spectacle. Indeed, in interview, Tubridy related his son's exasperation at the museum's work – why did they hang that artwork in the frame with Irish Celtic knots. *The work should not be there. The work did not belong to the frame.* The notion that a work by John Singer Sargent depicting an iconic English actress, staged as Lady Macbeth, did not belong, in the context set for it in a national museum of British art, because its frame, could not have come from the museum. The visibility in which the museum's practices are embedded preclude any such enunciation, which, even to be imagined, demands another set of cultural orientations.

## Conclusions: Seeing otherwise

Tubridy's image of Sargent's work can be claimed as the result of a performative intervention by he and his son. By re-ordering the hierarchy of spectacle within the museum – the work articulates Irishness not Britishness – Patrick and Rhys can be seen to have rearticulated the performance of museum space. In asking the question 'what is this doing here?', they also enacted a performativity of Irish identity and, indeed, of Irish patrimony.

In his work, *Men Learn to Fly*, published in *[E]dition 2*, Patrick Tubridy wrote of his concerns about his patrimony:

My father was born 12 March 1912. Until his death on 26 November 2003 he saw his world slowly change, change from a quiet tight knit community of subsistence farmers to a world of automobiles, mechanised farming and daily Transatlantic flights. Now 2008 sees my son living in a world that is changing rapidly due to the speed of technological advances, and I wonder if the cultural memory that has been passed on from my father through me to my son will survive.<sup>36</sup>

The passing on of a cultural memory that spans Ireland in 1912 to Britain in 2008 must be seen as a complex undertaking, particularly as it is elaborated through the auspices of a national museum of British art. Through the theoretical tools of transmigration, tranvisuality and performativity – all drawn from the legacy of Visual Cultures, I suggest that one can abstract the wisdom of the experience of the Tubridy father and son, so as to make use of it in different contexts for the benefit of others endeavouring to tackle issues of identity and legacy in spaces that they encounter. The possibility of re-imagining is offered in this juncture between experience and theory and visual media practice. It is no mean thing such re-imagining. It offers us the possibility for which so many struggle – the chance of seeing things differently, of looking besides and perhaps, if we are lucky, seeing otherwise.

## Afterword

*Although childless, I imagine my son's face, as we walk, one Sunday afternoon, through the Duveen galleries at Tate Britain, our national art museum. The click-clack of my ever more comfortable Clark's shoes grows ever louder, and ever more embarrassing to my son as he glides beside me in the coolest canvas footwear that pocket money can buy. I tell him with my imagined authority about father and son, Sir Joseph Joel Duveen and Joseph, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Duveen, the wealthy art-dealers who collected John Singer Sargent and bequeathed his art to the nation then funded the extensions to old Sir Henry Tate's National Gallery of British Art to house the generosity of their bequest.*

*In my imagination, my son is unimpressed by baronets and barons and stories of their wealth or their fabulous gifts. He is even unimpressed by art. His mind is elsewhere. His mind is on flight, on how long it will take us to get the hell out of there. And how long it will take him to get far, far away. My son, I imagine, will be a journeyman, perhaps even a journalist, who alternately despises then craves the familiar armchair comfort of academics who talk endlessly about museums and art.*

*He will tire of my anecdotes and my rifling through my papers to find last century's letters from family and friends. And when he is grown and living in Beijing, he will send me an e-thought directly from his new electro-magnetic implant, "Who needs shoes," he'll think, "when you can have wings."*

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<sup>1</sup> Preziosi, D., *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums and the Phantasms of Modernity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Tubridy, P., *Men Learn to Fly*, [E]dition 2, Tate Encounters, February 2008, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/tate-encounters/edition-2/patrick-tubridy.shtm>

<sup>3</sup> Preziosi, op.cit., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Manalansan IV, Martin, F., 'Diasporic Deviants/Divas: How Filipino Gay Transmigrants 'Play with the World' ' in Patton, C., and Sánchez-Eppler, B. (eds.), *Queer Diasporas*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2000, p.183.

<sup>5</sup> Dibosa, D., 'Migrations', [E]dition 1, Tate Encounters, October 2007, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/tate-encounters/edition-1/papers.shtm>

<sup>6</sup> Azoulay, A., 'With Open Doors: Museums and Historical Narratives in Israel's Public Space.' in Sherman, D.J., and Rogoff, I., (eds.), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Dibosa, op.cit. See also, Rose, G., *Visual Methodologies: an Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Sage Publications, London, 2001, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Sweeney, 'China blocks media due to Tibet unrest', [guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/mar/17/chinathemedia.digitalmedia), 17 March 2008  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/mar/17/chinathemedia.digitalmedia>  
accessed, 17:30hr, 12 May 2008

<sup>9</sup> Will Knight, 'China blocks bloggers' sites', *NewScientist.com* news service, 14 January 2003  
<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn3260-china-blocks-bloggers-sites.html>, accessed, 17:32hr, 12 May 2008; see also 'China blocking Google' BBC News Online, 2 September 2002  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2231101.stm> accessed 17:36hr, 12 May 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Cozens, 'Dead soldier image ban: Ban lifted on photos of dead soldiers' return', *MediaGuardian*, 23 April 2004  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2004/apr/23/iraqandthemedial.pressandpublishing>  
accessed, 17:47hr 12 May 2008

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> 'Dead Soldier images :'Nightline' airs war dead amid controversy. Owner ordered affiliates not to broadcast program'. [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com). 1 May 2004.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/TV/05/01/abc.nightline/>  
accessed 18:00hr 12 May 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Rogoff, I., *Terra Infirma: geography's visual culture*, Routledge, London, 2000, p.121.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, S. 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-Nation' in Araeen, R., et al (eds.), *The Third Text Reader: on Art, Culture and Theory*, Continuum Books, London and New York, NY, 2002, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, B., *Art for the Nation*, Manchester University Press, 1999, p.105.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.142.

<sup>19</sup> Tate Report, 2006-7. <https://www.tate.org.uk/about/tatereport/2007/programmes/tate-britain.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Tubridy, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Evans, J., and Hall, S., (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, Sage Publications, London, 1999; Rogoff, I., *Terra Infirma*, op. cit.; Mirzoeff, N.,(ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, Routledge, London, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Rogoff, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, op.cit., p. 73.

- <sup>24</sup> Preziosi, op.cit., p.23.
- <sup>25</sup> Lucie-Smith, E., *Movements in Art Since 1945*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, pp. 62-3.
- <sup>26</sup> Arnold, B., *Jack Yeats*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998.
- <sup>27</sup> Schmied, W., *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict*, Prestel-Verlag, Munich and New York, 1996, pp.12-14.
- <sup>28</sup> Sarup, M. *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1993, pp. 132-140.
- <sup>29</sup> Crimp, D., 'On the Museum's Ruins' in Foster, H., (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 1985, p. 53.
- <sup>30</sup> Frenkel, V., 'A Place for Uncertainty: Towards a New Kind of Museum' in Pollock, G., and Zemans, J., (eds.), *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2007, p. 129.
- <sup>31</sup> Evans and Hall, op.cit., p. 310.
- <sup>32</sup> Preziosi, op.cit. p. 20. Ibid
- <sup>33</sup> Rogoff, I., 'Looking Away: Participations in Visual Vulture' in Butt, G. (ed.), *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2005, p. 122.
- <sup>34</sup> Butler, J., *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*, Routledge, New York, 1993.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.122.
- <sup>36</sup> Tubridy, op.cit.

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