

Let us avoid making the reduction from the start: the Tate is not some monolithic entity operating under a single law. It is neither a commercial machine of populist blockbusters transforming whatever it touches into gold, nor an unstoppable super-engine of institutionalization, nor again a monster-museum of privatization masquerading as a democratic, public institution. While there may be some truth to all these claims, in fact, the Tate Gallery represents a complex institution comprising museums in Liverpool, St Ives, and London, each subdivided into various departments, operated by a variety of agents. There is no one, simple Tate Effect, since the Tate embodies contradiction, multiplicity, paradox.

There are only Tate effects, plural operations, disparate and often at odds, shifting and irreducible to any overriding principle. If Tate Modern is exemplary of the museum in the age of globalization—and indeed it is the most visited museum of modern art in the world, welcoming nearly five million visitors per year¹—then it is because today’s global museum is a space of conflict, diverse functions, and mixed political effects.

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The Tate Effect*

No doubt the first of such complexities is the Tate’s funding structure. The Tate’s expansion into a series of museums across England occurred during Thatcher’s conservative administration in the 1980s, which brought about a noticeable shift in the Tate’s administration toward the dependence on private funding. This process formed part of the general circumstances that bore witness to the waning of European social democracies and the turn toward economic deregulation during those post-industrial years. Tony Blair’s New Labour government pursued those policies, celebrating the cultural accomplishments of public-private partnerships, and advancing the transition from the public funding of national institutions such as the Tate to part corporate sponsorship. Certainly, many of the effects of this transition upon the museum are problematic, particularly the conflicts of interest and the anti-democratic aspects of the museum’s organization that result from these developments (e.g. art-collecting or corporate executives directly appointed by the prime minister as trustees).² In addition, Tate Modern has been made to surrender valuable gallery space to display corporate collections

Fig. 1 Exterior view of Tate Modern. Photo: © Tate, London 2008



by those funding bodies—particularly the holdings of UBS, a major Tate Modern sponsor—which rightfully angers critics, who charged that the Blair government had effectively sold its national museum to the highest bidder, thereby shortchanging the public. “Isn’t this prostitution?” writes Laura Cumming. “What else would you call it when a public museum is so desperate for money that it has to give itself, in the form of its own body of space, for someone else to use as they please?”³ Yet it is clear that such sponsorship has also facilitated the development of the institution in terms of the increase of exhibition space (the Tate Modern, for instance, has plans for enlarging its present building) [fig. 1], the expansion of exhibition projects made available by means of these new financial opportunities, and the stimulation of educational programming activities surrounding these new initiatives. Faced with the reality of public-private funding, however, curators can only work ambivalently with it, ever conscious of the mixed effects of emerging forms of corporate control in the museum’s uncertain future.

In tandem with its geographical and corporate-supported expansion, the Tate has diversified internally under Sir Nicholas Serota’s directorship. Composed of a multiplicity of departments, including, of course, the traditional ones for exhibitions and collections, Tate Modern has also established a publishing house, several bookshops, and specialized educational and outreach programs. The Tate, in other words, has not fol-



Fig. 2 Tate Modern Website. © Tate, London 2008

lowed the common path of other leading Western museums toward international franchising—as exemplified by the model used by the Guggenheim dynasty, or presently, the Louvre, with its sights set on Abu Dhabi—but has led the way for the museum’s globalization via cyberspace. The museum maintains a highly innovative website, which offers wide-ranging publicity services for its exhibitions and events and also archives extensive webcasts of lectures and conferences [fig. 2]. Internal diversification also describes the institution’s own departmentalization toward the stratification of its audience, categorized as increasingly differentiated and commercially targeted demographic fields, comprising virtually all age groups and various types of visitors, members, and donors, from programs for children to assistance with bequeathed contributions.⁴ One could argue that these developments represent the museum’s growing efficiency in managing diversity and producing new audiences, and then proceed to critique its educational initiatives as solely enticing destination marketing—getting conference goers into fee-charging exhibitions, cafes and bookstores.⁵ But it would be mistaken to conclude that the museum functions merely as a capitalist machine, or as part of what Gilles Deleuze termed a generalized “society of control,” designating the dispersed field of functions that operate between late capitalism’s institutions, corporations, and government. Classifying the Tate Modern’s many departments as “metastable states

coexisting in one and the same modulation,” as Deleuze writes, would again radically reduce the Tate’s internal complexity, just as it would render—unfairly—curators and visitors mere passive effects of that totalized system.⁶

Tate Modern’s mission of representing “international modern art”—as claimed on its website⁷—similarly reveals a museum beholden to a complex and contradictory set of functions. On the one hand, the Tate Modern institutionalizes a national definition of artistic practice, despite the purportedly universal associations of the category of international modern art. In its permanent collection, British contemporary art is strategically integrated into a narrative of modern art history, building lineages that lead—as if teleologically—from American and European modernism toward contemporary British practices. In the exhibition area titled *Idea and Object*, for example, the work of British artist Martin Creed hangs near a Carl André minimalist sculpture, while in *Ready-made Revisited*, pieces by British artists Sarah Lucas, Rachel Whiteread, and Ceal Floyer extend a trajectory beginning with Duchamp’s *Fountain*, 1917, traced through Manzoni’s *Can of Artist’s Shit*, 1961 [fig. 3]. Yet here, the results are multiple and even paradoxical: while such genealogies propose a new order of national identity—



Fig. 3 Installation view of *Ready-made Revisited* at Tate Modern, showing pieces by Sarah Lucas, and Rachel Whiteread next to Duchamp’s *Fountain* and Manzoni’s *Can of Artist’s Shit*. Photo: © Tate, London 2008

elevating British art to the level of world-class, global contemporary art—the museum’s formation of this global category simultaneously suggests a denationalization of British practices shed of regional specificity. And, in fact, relatively few solo exhibitions of British artists have occurred at Tate Modern since its opening in 2000 (the exhibitions of Rachel Whiteread in the Turbine Hall, in 2006, and the recent show of Gilbert & George in Spring, 2007, being the exceptions). Tate Modern thus joins two contradictory impulses—on the one hand, to establish a privileged place for British art according to the canon of international modern and contemporary art history, while, on the other, to define a global collection of contemporary art that necessitates a balanced approach to national representation in order to guarantee the museum’s ostensibly neutral and objective authority—which means that in the end neither ambition quite succeeds.

That said, Tate Modern’s account of international contemporary art is quite idiosyncratic (some would say limited), and the exhibition of non-European/non-American art largely falls through the cracks: the only major solo exhibition by a non-European/non-North American artist at the Tate Modern in the first five years of its operation following its founding in 2000, for instance, was a Frida Kahlo retrospective shown in 2005. While it is true that with major retrospectives of Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles scheduled for summer 2007 and autumn 2008 respectively, it would appear that the Tate Modern may be making a concerted effort to expand its geographical areas of representation beyond the traditional categories of Western Europe and North America. It is also true that the majority of the Tate Modern’s non-Western shows are mostly minor affairs, such as those of Meschac Gaba (2005), Simryn Gill (2006) and Dan Perjovschi (2006), each being exhibited in small project rooms. Furthermore, the Tate covers the global South via large-scale group exhibitions—such as *Century City: Art in the Modern Metropolis*, 2000 (with the sections *Lagos*, curated by Okwui Enwezor and Olu Oguibe, and *Bombay/Mumbai*, curated by Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha), as well as the recent 2007 *Global Cities* exhibition, which showcased Cairo, Mexico City, São Paulo, and Johannesburg, in addition to London, Los Angeles and Tokyo. As promising as these exhibitions are in terms of their worldwide coverage, they demonstrate that—at least until recently—the Tate

has tended to collectivize the non-Western, reserving the star status of solo exhibitions for Europeans and Americans.

A greater degree of inclusion would undoubtedly reach out to London's diverse population, and could potentially reframe the museum's representation of global contemporary art as a process of democratic inclusion and equality, rather than one that repeats familiar political and economic hierarchies within the Tate. Global contemporary art, of course, does not simply exist in the world, but results from institutional decisions, influenced, not surprisingly, by money and power. And major museums such as Tate Modern play a key role in defining the narrative of contemporary art that potentially reaches the greatest number of people. This narrative, however, could encompass a good deal more: consider the diversity of artists at documenta 11 (2002), or at the many other recent biennials in developing countries struggling for global recognition (exhibitions in Istanbul, Gwangju, São Paulo, Sharjah come to mind), which demonstrate the current strength and richness of contemporary art outside of traditionally defined artistic centers. By failing to incorporate this expanded field of practice, Tate Modern appears determined to merely reproduce its own narrowly defined tastes—at least in terms of its major exhibitions and permanent collection—which are then elevated to artistic hegemony simply by virtue of the museum's popularity, which is, of course, engineered by the institution thanks to its enormous economic resources and corporate sponsors. For London audiences, this situation of accessing a limited outlook toward global contemporary art, moreover, is exacerbated by the fact that London has no international biennial, as Tate Triennial at Tate Britain is dedicated to British art alone (even if recent Triennial directors, namely Beatrix Ruff and Nicolas Bourriaud, have attempted to challenge this basis).

Tate Modern is frequently taken to task for the casual display of its permanent collection. Its supermarket-like pick-and-choose combinations seem to eliminate the possibility of drawing meaningful historical connections between objects, which, owing to the display's non-chronological arrangement, offers visitors a mirage of the utopian liberation from history and the suggestion that any style or medium is available at any moment. For some, this is synonymous with the culture industry's manufacturing of a fantasy of freedom; for others, it suggests a surrender of criticality and rigor.⁸ Yet, one might reply, neither is historical pro-

gression totally determined—as MoMA’s rigid teleology of modernism would otherwise have us believe—and perhaps Tate’s unconventional hanging prompts alternative, creative thinking, which might provoke imaginative interpretative possibilities. Similar critiques might be waged against the Tate Modern’s canon-producing permanent collection and its stream of blockbuster exhibitions. Yet, alongside its imperial art history manifested in its frequent stream of blockbuster shows—recently including one of the American abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko—are other levels of minor special exhibitions, film screenings, and conferences that offer unexpected, diverse, and creative programming: consider, for instance, the recent conference on *Rethinking Spectacle* organized by Claire Bishop and Mark Godfrey, or the groundbreaking cycle of Middle Eastern films and videos organized by independent curators, Predrag Pajdic and Samar Martha in cooperation with the Tate Modern’s Curator of Film Stuart Comer, both in 2007. These and other such events force one to acknowledge that Tate Modern exists as a site of diverse interests and constituencies, and that curators of education and minor programming have a fair degree of autonomy and freedom to introduce challenging, diverse and critical content into the museum’s cycle of shows and activities. Nina Möntmann provocatively wrote that “while the populist model [of the museum] follows the policy of the lowest common denominator, progressive art institutions intend to use specific events running in parallel to create a democratic, polyphonic place, hence accepting conflict.”⁹ In the case of Tate Modern, the challenge is to see both logics at work, even locked in an ongoing struggle.

Another site of conflict is the Tate Modern’s vaunted policy of free entrance to its permanent collection and Turbine Hall [fig. 4]. Celebrated as popular areas of public gathering, these galleries construct an image of an open society, democratic and inclusive—particularly in the Turbine Hall, which is visible from the building’s higher floors and thereby offers an image of the public body.¹⁰ Such open spaces are certainly laudable, particularly when other museums worldwide charge dearly for mere admission, such as New York’s Museum of Modern Art and Paris’ Centre Georges Pompidou. And yet, the Tate’s free spaces are also surrounded by money-making operations, including bookstores, restaurants, and cafes on multiple floors, and its galleries advertise the

Fig 4. **Olafur Eliasson:**
The Weather Project, Turbine
 Hall, Tate Modern London
 (The Unilever Series). © Tate,
 London 2008, Olafur Eliasson
 2003, courtesy neugerriem-
 schneider, Berlin & Tanya
 Bonakdar Gallery, New York.
 Photo: Jens Ziehe



commercial sponsorship of wealthy donors and corporations (particularly the investment bank UBS and the multinational manufacturer, Unilever). Publicity may masquerade as generosity and consumerism is forever tempting, as elite tastes are popularized and new social groups are transformed into loyal Tate consumers. Yet, perhaps becoming such an enterprising institution—read: commercialize—is the only way a museum can survive in today’s neoliberal economy. This does not mean, however, that Tate Modern has simply been transformed into the *Society of the Spectacle*¹¹—even though Guy Debord’s analysis in that important text may still offer valid insights into the institution’s functioning today. The point is that the Tate Modern presents us with a complex institution defined by conflicting interests and bearing mixed effects, which should not be simply dismissed, but rather explored and understood so as to facilitate its democratic development.

Tate Modern’s planned architectural expansion entails the construction of a steel-and-glass ziggurat on its Southern end to contain some

eleven stories of new gallery space (a 60% size increase of display area, to the tune of £215 million) [plate. XX]. Its opening will strategically (and no doubt profitably) coincide with London's hosting of the Olympics in 2012. By directing such tremendous resources toward the financing of this spectacular architectural development, once again designed by Herzog & de Meuron, the Tate Modern invites the obvious criticism that it has passed over greater democratic alternatives, such as lowering admission fees—or dropping them altogether—to its special exhibitions and educational events. One might, however, respond to such criticism that the museum's ability to develop its collection and programming, and house its art in less cramped conditions depends precisely on its crowd-pleasing appearance. Time will tell whether its expansion will benefit the creation of challenging exhibitions and ambitious programming, including the dedication of greater resources to video, film and events planning, or if its eccentric architectural development will only necessitate more high-profile shows to recoup the expansion expenditures. Whatever the case may be, to simply oppose Tate Modern would be unrealistic, precisely because the reductiveness of such opposition would neutralize its own political force. A more measured and potentially effective approach would be to view the Tate effect as a matter of complex and ongoing negotiations (including those between ambitious curators and conservative trustees, between the board of directors, artists and art historians and the museum's many publics). The imperative would then be to support the Tate's democratization wherever possible, so that it deepens its potential for critical dialogue and expand its representation of diverse artistic practices in a world where the spaces of independence and autonomy are rapidly vanishing.

Notes

- * An earlier version of this text was published in *Art Press*, (August) 2007, pp. 24–33.
- 1 For statistics, see the pamphlet published by the Tate trustees: Tate trustees, *Tate Modern: The First Five Years*, Tate Gallery Publishing, London, 2005. For further background on Tate's history, cf. Frances Spalding, *The Tate: A History*, Tate Gallery Publishing, London, 1998.
 - 2 Cf. Chin-Tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, Verso, London, 2003.
 - 3 Laura Cumming, "Tate Modern has Sold its Soul—and Us—Down the River," in: *The Observer*, Sunday, May 13, 2007; available online at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2007/may/13/art> (access December 29, 2008).
 - 4 Cf. the demographic analysis in Tate Trustees 2005.
 - 5 Consider Andrea Fraser's argument in: Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique," in: *Artforum*, (September) 2005, pp. 282–3.
 - 6 Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in: *October*, no. 59, (Winter) 1992, p. 5.
 - 7 *Tate Modern Website*, available online at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/> (access November 8, 2008)
 - 8 Cf. Esther Leslie, "Tate Modern: A Year of Sweet Success," in: *Radical Philosophy*, 109, (September/October) 2001; and Dominique Willsdon's response, "Institutional Critique-by-Numbers," in: *Radical Philosophy*, 111, (January/February) 2002; and "Round Table: Tate Modern," in: *October*, 98, (Fall) 2001, pp. 3–25.
 - 9 Nina Möntmann, "Art and its Institutions," in: Nina Möntmann (ed.), *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, Black Dog, Publishing, London, 2006, p. 12.
 - 10 Cf. the discussion in *October*'s "Round Table: Tate Modern," in: *October*, 98 (Fall) 2001, p. 16.
 - 11 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Zone Books, New York, 2006.