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Creators	Quinn, Malcolm

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**‘Tate Encounters: Research in Process’**

**Programme A: Education Practice at Tate 1970 – Present**

**Monday 23 February – Friday 27 February 2009**

*In considering how museums have significantly reconfigured their relationships with audiences over the last decade and given how Learning as a department carries a notable responsibility in developing audiences, this series of interviews with present and past members of Tate staff aims to create an understanding and account of how Education practice within Tate has historically evolved from information and explanation to interpretation, engagement to participation, informal knowledge to professional research.*

*Questions to be considered in this programme in relation to Education practice are:*

- *Since its inception what are the historical legacies of the original Education Department within the operation of Tate and more recently Tate Britain?*
- *Where has Education been historically positioned and now?*
- *What kind of agency does Education hold within the production and reproduction of knowledge within Tate?*
- *What is its relationship to a research practice?*
- *How does it configure its publics?*

Programme A of ‘Tate Encounters: Research in Process’ was conducted as a set of nine two-hour interviews between Victoria Walsh, Head of Adult Programmes at Tate Britain, and key figures involved in the development of curatorial and educational programmes at Tate from 1970 to the present. In the first four days of programme A, two interviews per day were completed with Michael Compton and Simon Wilson, Tim Marlow and Sylvia Lahav, Anna Cutler and Andrew Brighton, Toby Jackson and Helen Charman, with a final interview with Richard Morphet on day five. These interviews did not follow a strict chronology, but were instead intended to address facets of the research questions (set out above) that framed this Programme.

Programme A began with Michael Compton’s discussion of the curtailed Robert Morris exhibition at Tate in 1971, and finished with Richard Morphet’s account of Carl Andre and the ‘Tate Bricks’ affair of 1976. As it progressed, Programme A also

gathered narratives of more recent educational and curatorial practice, allowing for a synoptic view of the conditions within which Tate has developed its educational programmes. Programme A was seeking a specifically historical engagement with the development of educational practice, as is clear from the tenor of its research questions. This research was undertaken using interviews, partly because of the absence of full archive data on educational policy and practice from 1970 to the present. This meant that Programme A had the odd and exhilarating sense of an *in situ* assembly of data and an emergent methodology for an historical critique of museum education. What follows in this report is a sketch of that methodological framework, as it emerged from key motifs and themes developed across the nine interviews.

The absence of a historical critique of educational practice, a deficiency that Programme A sought to address, was thrown into sharp relief in the final interview with Richard Morphet, who retired as Keeper at Tate in 1988. Morphet spoke eloquently about his difficulty in introducing a critical historical perspective in curatorial work with the Tate collection. He made specific reference to his failed attempts to introduce a realist portrait by Meredith Frampton held in the Tate collection, into an exhibition dedicated to the art of 1935. Morphet's historical critique of curatorial practice, challenged the Modernist curatorial redoubt built by Norman Reid, Director of Tate from 1964 to 1979. Morphet made a plea for a curatorial methodology called 'Adequately Representative Historical Tracing' which he was pleased to note was now being reflected in the display of Frampton's painting at Tate Modern.

As the novelty of Programme A's research indicates, Morphet's 'Adequately Representative Historical Tracing' methodology for curators, is only just beginning to develop equivalents in educational practice, for reasons that he made clear. When Victoria Walsh asked whether the notion of 'the public' was ever factored into the curatorial equation during Morphet's time at Tate, he simply replied that it had not. It is at this point that the crucial distinction between 'developing audiences' and 'configuring publics' comes to the fore within Programme A's framework of research questions. The inclusion of Frampton's painting in the Tate Modern's displays, certainly suggests a new alliance between an historically and culturally informed curatorship, and a more subtle, professional and academically rigorous understanding of specific audiences for art. This kind of alliance was promoted in the model of a unified curatorial and educational practice developed by Toby Jackson at

Tate Liverpool. However, a similarly sophisticated grasp of the notion of publics or the public did not emerge over the nine interviews. It may have been assumed that an archaic and utopian idea of a public, has simply been superseded by a nuanced, fully-rounded understanding of audiences.

The nine interviews certainly seemed to chart a progression from 'cold' natural science analyses of the pupil dilation, sweat gland activity and body sway of gallery audiences by the behavioural psychologist Hans Eysenck, that were disparagingly cited by Michael Compton, to the 'warm' social science view of a lifeworld including artist, curator, educator and audience, referred to by Helen Charman, Toby Jackson and Anna Cutler. However, this same richness of audience engagement and public programmes, described by Toby Jackson in his interview using the culturally inclusive notion of 'lived experience and the work of artists', was already re-encountering the spectre of the public.

The expanded field of cultural practice emblematised in Helen Charman's notion of the 'artist-educator', was insufficient to account for the new forms of cultural management and governance that have been undertaken at Tate in the twenty-first century. As Sylvia Lahav expressed it in her interview, Tate Modern had to offer 'something for everybody', whereas previously the museum had sought to develop new audiences from a relatively small core of regular visitors. This shift in scale and emphasis, is exemplified by the difference between the pragmatic difficulties with injuries to the audience that resulted in the closing down of the Robert Morris exhibition in 1971, and Karsten Höller's metal chutes in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in 2006-7.

While in some ways Morris's climbing frames and Höller's chutes seem to invite similar forms of audience interaction and participation, their institutional orientation is entirely different. Morris's art was developed in a situation in which the relation of spectator and artwork is radicalised within the 'de-differentiated' perceptual fields of minimalism, in a transgression of the usual conditions for an encounter with the artwork. Höller's work, the logical successor to successive waves of mobilisation of new audiences through contemporary art, is a piece of middle-class mass choreography that rivals a North Korean public rally. It exists in a situation in which the artwork expresses the aims of the modern museum with regard to the management and enculturation of populations. As you slide down one of Höller's chutes, you can be assured of your place in a cultural order of 'something for

everybody', in which everyone has an experience, yet no-one's experience counts for more than anyone else's. Höller's post-curatorial artwork, expresses the difference between the institutional configuration of a public, and Richard Morphet's celebration of the development of a new audiences around a museum collection. It is within this space between the expanded role of the institution, and the limitations of curatorial agency, that a new methodology for the historical critique of museum education could emerge from the motifs and themes of speech disclosed by Programme A. For this to happen, the investigation of museum education would have to begin as a dialogue about the tangible and intangible limits placed on curatorial agency by the public mission of the museum, and then proceed to a point within the public domain from which the museum can be seen differently. Both of these methodological directions could be developed out of the material in Programme A.

The limits that the public domain places on curatorial agency, were ably described by Richard Morphet and Simon Wilson in the context of Tate's purchase and display of Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII*, and the subsequent media generated furore over the 'Tate Bricks' in 1976. The Tate Bricks imbroglio sits at a mid-point between the experiments with new audiences in the Robert Morris exhibition, and the mass cultural management modelled in Carsten Höller's chutes. As Morphet and Wilson made clear, there was a complete discursive schism, in which tabloid-generated anger over an (unspecified) price paid by Tate for Carl Andre's work, was matched with a curatorial debate conducted in the pages of *The Burlington Magazine*. Here, the public dimension of the museum was encountered by Tate as an irrational limitation on curatorial agency, not amenable to reason or education and demanding the 'wrong' kind of information (i.e financial information) about the work of art.

What became evident over the nine interviews of Programme A, was that these limitations could also emerge through the indirect curatorial action of the Government, which imposed proxy controls on the movement of the collection, through the emphasis placed by the National Curriculum on the direct encounter of children with key artworks. As Sylvia Lahav suggested, at the time of the Tate's 'New Displays' in 1990, school groups were often disappointed to find signature pieces missing, guides battled with lecturers and children in a diminished set of galleries, while curators were insistent that the re-hang constituted pedagogy in its own right, and that they were not going to let schools dictate the agenda. What the interviews in Programme A made clear, is that a school art curriculum still does not have the status of a thought about the Tate collection. This may be one reason why

curation and education have managed to form an alliance on the question of audience, but not on the question of the public. Education remains an annex of curatorial practice, and does not provide a leading edge of thinking for curators to follow.

When asked in his interview why head of education posts in museums were hard to fill, Simon Wilson drew attention to the manner in which education programmes are prized as part of the public face of museums in bids for government funding, but that 'when the politicians go away, the education department is ignored'. This hierarchy of thought was mentioned in the first interview of Programme A, where Michael Compton mentioned what he called the 'contemplative' role of curators in relation to the pragmatic activity of managers, administrators and educators. Despite the revolution in brand management and cultural outreach necessitated by the development of Tate Modern, and discussed in Tim Marlow's interview, it is significant that since the deadlock and antagonism of the Tate Bricks in 1976, the marriage of curatorship and education has been built on notions of audience development within a harmonious 'life-nexus' that can contain artist, institution and audience. This position, informed by ideas drawn from social science and cultural theory, was advanced in interviews with Anna Cutler, Toby Jackson and Helen Charman, and contrasted with a more art-historical emphasis of Tim Marlow, who spoke of the educational importance of the encounter with the object *in situ*, accompanied by discussion of its status as a document relaying social, cultural and political information.

The strong social science emphasis in education practice advocated by Cutler, Jackson and Charman, produces a dialogue on the terms of cultural inclusion within a curatorial agenda. This dialogue is based on a proposition concerning the inclusion of the full subjectivity of the audience within the conceptual scheme of the institution, 'the cultural endeavour with cultural practitioners' mentioned by Anna Cutler in her interview. Unfortunately, this emphasis on cultural complexity and the 'artist-educator', neglects the unanswered question of whether a school curriculum can have the status of a thought about the Tate collection. For any historical critique of museum education, this would constitute a problem of the public that has been lodged with the Tate since its foundation, rather than a problem of particular audiences addressed by means of a culturally inclusive education programme.

In the final part of this essay, I will address the second methodological issue I have identified within Programme A, namely the location of a point within the public domain from which the museum can be seen differently. A different possibility for research arising from the Tate Bricks affair of 1976 could be imagined, one in which an historical critique of museum education was developed from the point of view of political economy, rather than locating historical knowledge within curatorial practice, as Richard Morphet sought to do. A specific and crucial point of historical reference here, is the political economy of art and culture offered by the Benthamites and reformists at the Board of Trade who packed the Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures of 1835/6, and who demanded 'the education of the eyes of the people by their own government'<sup>i</sup> following the Reform Bill of 1832.

While this project for a political economy of art and culture, dedicated to Free Trade, general *embourgeoisment* and the diminution of the sinister interests of the Royal Academy of Art, ran out of steam quite rapidly, it provided the framework for a unique alliance of government, museums and the first publicly-funded art school, where the collective aim was 'to infuse, even remotely, into an industrious and enterprising people, a love of art, and to teach them to respect and venerate the name of 'Artist''<sup>ii</sup>. The key difference here was that this new love of art was to be developed from a political economic, rather than an art historical, perspective. However, as the testimony of the painter John Martin to the Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures showed, this experimental conjunction of forces dedicated to a cultural revolution in the cause of Free Trade, produced an intolerable, worms-eye view of capitalism that was not conducive to the stability of artistic identity and practice. The painter told the Select Committee about 'a sort of diorama of *Belshazzar's Feast* [John Martin's painting of 1820], in Oxford Street', which had resulted in Martin applying for an injunction: 'This diorama was a most infamous piece of painting, and the public were given to understand that I was the painter . . . [the plagiarist] comes to the field with a cheaper production, supported by all the effect of the advertisements, and other expensive means of publicity that my own performances had led me to adopt. He not only robs me of my ideas, but establishes a lucrative trade on the effects of my pecuniary outlay'<sup>iii</sup>. Here, a self-actualising and sensation-seeking public holds sway over the established audiences for artworks. Nor could any kind of curatorial practice intervene within this situation, unless it was prepared to accept the impossible conditions of a curatorship of capital.

While the development of Tate Modern has made public reason and public management important again, those interviewed in Programme A of the Tate Encounters review, used models that were all based one way or another on the development of audiences, in other words the view from the museum towards culture, rather than the view adopted in 1835, that included museums, the government, and the then soon to be established national art school system, within a political economic conception of British culture. If Programme A is to advance the research agenda it has given itself, it may be obliged to broaden its research to include elements of the original alliance of government, museums and art schools in the cause of public education. As Programme A showed, all those elements exist within speech on museum education, but in incommensurable and alienated fragments.

Andrew Brighton's interview, which was partly concerned with his development of an art school intellectual agenda within a museum education programme, showed that the art school and the museum can be brought together in the cause of an enhanced university level art education. However, it is this very alliance of the art school and the museum in the cause of higher knowledge, thereby excluding the agency of public governance and public pedagogy, that still prevents a school curriculum from having the status of a thought about the Tate collection. Arguably, there is still no common viewpoint or intellectual framework available to museum directors, curators, administrators and educators from which to assume responsibility for the problem of the public that is at the foundation of their work. Programme A of the Tate Encounters review of research in progress, has shown some of ways that this common language can be described and understood.

Dr Malcolm Quinn  
Reader in Critical Practice  
Research Co-ordinator,  
Wimbledon College of Art



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<sup>i</sup> *Report from Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures together with the minutes of evidence and appendix*, London: House of Commons 1835, p.16.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xi.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66-7.