Redistributing Knowledge and Practice in the Art Museum

Victoria Walsh

Looking back to the rise of institutional critique in the 1980s and New Institutionalism in the 1990s, the Foucauldian project to critically analyze the structural organization of power and knowledge in institutions seems historic when one considers the current relation between the art museum and the academy. Today, the ability to move across these two institutions—and particularly the art school and the art museum—has never been so open and fluid, nor the practices at one level so close, at least in the United Kingdom. For the development of formal research practices in the art museums now effectively parallels those of the university: initiating and leading research projects funded by the public and private sectors, running doctoral programs, supporting fellowships, developing research centers, hosting seminars, and organizing conferences for specialist audiences.

At a time when universities such as Goldsmiths in London are building new gallery spaces to support curatorial and display practices, Chris Dercon (ex-director of Tate Modern), in anticipation of the opening of the Tate Modern extension in June this year, has noted:

> *The museum of the future is going to be completely different from a place where people come to admire… the museum of the future is going to be like a university, like a campus, where the art is one thing, but the fact that you have so many different encounters and that you can test your ideas out, that you can throw your questions out about gender, identity, about the world, about salaries…. This is the museum of the future.*[1]

To focus on this increasing morphing of the academy with the art museum and the hybrid practices that are emerging, this paper discusses four collaborative research projects between the art museum and the academy in the UK and Europe, which the author led from within both types of institution. And it is perhaps worth noting that collectively these projects totaled just over £800k—approximately €1

million—offering some indication of the scale and ambition of such research in the current funding landscape.

While the opportunities research presents for both the art museum and academy are significant, the need to reconceptualize research in both, and the need to develop new collaborative, inter- (if not trans-) disciplinary research methods is fundamental if the relation between the museum and the academy is to lead to new or useful forms of knowledge production, and particularly if both are to retain their relevance in the public sphere. For to simply reproduce the museum in the academy, or the academy in the museum, will only, inevitably, lead to the demise and stultification of both.

As this paper will argue, despite the art museum's tenacious and strategic commitment to the modernist art object, the increasing convergence of art, media, technology, and the digital network, as well as the correlative production of comparatively "immaterial" art, is not only bringing into question the relevance and value of traditional curatorial and museological practice, but also transforming how audiences experience and value the art object as both material fact and digital image. It is at this juncture, as the paper will explore, that expanding concepts and practices of the "curatorial," through practice-led research, assume a particular currency in the terms identified by Irit Rogoff, who has written:

> One of the reasons that I want to distinguish between curating and the curatorial is that the curatorial is an ongoing process; it doesn't think it's over when the event of knowledge has taken on some sort of tangible form and is materially sitting there. It recognizes that its existence is a way station in a process; a milestone in a process….[2]

Research practice in the art museum

To briefly provide some context to the emergence of formal research practice in the art museum in the United Kingdom, we need to return to the late 1990s and early 2000s, when public and government scrutiny of national research funding in the Arts and Humanities came into focus. The key problem identified by critics and policymakers was that the major disparity between professional practice and academic knowledge was rooted in the lack of connection between university-based education and academic study and its public application and value. In addition, the increasing evidence of the economic, social, and cultural contribution that national museums were making through research-led and partnership-based innovation alerted policymakers to the potential untapped knowledge resources held within the academy. Untapped resources that needed to be fully exploited if the UK was to maintain a leading position in the increasingly competitive and new global markets of the knowledge economy. To encourage and support new forms of knowledge production and innovation of public value, a

new research body, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), was created in 2005, just ten years ago.

In 2006, in recognition of the sustained quality and impact of the research carried out by certain national museums, including Tate, ten national institutions were designated as an "Independent Research Organization" (IRO), granting them equivalent status as universities to directly apply for national research funding, run doctoral programs, and initiate major research projects. At the core of the AHRC's strategies to support and develop Arts and Humanities research was also an understanding and response to the changing condition of knowledge, the changing locations of knowledge production, and an awareness of the increasingly diverse and complex social and cultural environment in which the Humanities was situated, and with which it needed to actively engage.

As the AHRC report of 2007, *Arts and Humanities Research and Innovation*, particularly noted, new types of research were emerging in progressive areas of the Arts and Humanities in response to complex "real-world problems" that demanded new forms of interdisciplinary collaborative research to resolve.[3] This was understood in direct opposition to the traditional model and work of the academic "lone scholar," which, as the AHRC report unequivocally stated, "is a severely outdated model of the arts and humanities researcher."[4] Much of the AHRC's analysis was well anticipated by Lyotard in 1979 in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* and by Beck, Giddens, and Lash's understanding of the crisis of knowledge and expertise in the post-traditional society in their seminal 1994 publication, *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*.[5]

Tate Encounters

In 2007, Tate took advantage of this new research landscape and saw the opportunity to address a key area of policy and programming which was failing, and which it recognized it could not resolve on its own, through its traditional knowledge base: Art History. The problem, put succinctly, was that despite considerable investments of government funding, significantly increased levels of targeted public programming, and extensive market research, Tate's lack of ability to diversify its audiences to meet the national demographic of Black, Minority, and Ethnic (BME) population, as part of the government's cultural diversity policies, was a problem. The initial analysis of this problem recognized two particular facts of interest to us here:

– That despite high levels of targeted discursive and exhibition programming rooted in academic discourses of postcolonialism, critical museology, and institutional critique, academic debate had had little or no impact on

audience engagement with the museum, its exhibitions, or displays.

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— That although policy formation around cultural diversity and social inclusion was informed by considerable academic research in the Social Sciences, its framing of the individual "subject" (i.e., spectator, visitor) was based on categories of race and identity that held no meaning with contemporary BME designated audiences.

In order to address this problem of the "missing audience," the Tate Encounters project identified the need to overcome the clear separation of the three areas of policy, practice, and theory which framed this problem. In response, a collaborative and interdisciplinary research team, led by Andrew Dewdney at London South Bank University in London, with myself at Tate, and David Dibosa at Chelsea College of Art, was constructed which brought together curators, academics, and researchers whose collective disciplines and expertise included art history, visual cultures, social sciences, science and technology studies, social and cultural anthropology, policy studies, and digital media.[6]

To connect these three areas of cultural policy, museum practice, and diasporic audience experience, the project developed a highly embedded, practice-led research project in which the full research team was situated within the museum for three years. In addition to carrying out an ethnographic organizational study of Tate Britain through the study of a specific exhibition and a review of the formation and implementation of government cultural policy, the project developed two further research strands of particular note here. Firstly, converting one of the museum's display galleries into a public research space, a four-week "discursive" program of panel discussions, interviews, and presentations titled "Research in Process" was held, bringing together artists, curators, critics, funders, and policymakers to discuss four of the key research strands: education practice at Tate since 1970, digital practices in the art museum, cultural policy, and contemporary visual cultures.[7]

Secondly, a two-year fieldwork project was conceived with undergraduate arts and media students from diasporic backgrounds to document their experience of Tate and its relation to their everyday visual culture. Twelve of these students were constituted as "co-researchers" through their sustained and formal input to the design and development of the research strand. The combination of expertise within the professional research team also ensured that a knowledge base could be drawn upon that could trace relations between the life-worlds of the student co-researchers and the museum as part of a field of study that would recognize the specificity of the visual—not as defined by the category of art or art history, but as a practice of viewing that connected the visual of the everyday with the practice of viewing and spectatorship inside the art museum. Working with the co-researchers was not, it should be stressed, an

educational initiative, nor to be confused with ideas of the "curatorialization of education," as no journey of creative transformation or educational enlightenment was sought. Indeed, it remained a testament in part to the legitimacy of the research that the students remained as disinterested, disinvested, and felt as disenfranchised in Tate at the end of the two-year project as they had at the start.

As the Tate Encounters project found, while Tate's display and exhibition practices were and are still rooted in the narratives and logic of aesthetic modernism (think white walls, minimalist hanging, narrative of artistic autonomy), underpinned by ideas of expert knowledge rooted in Art History, such models of curatorship no longer held authority over how contemporary audiences viewed or interpreted works of art. In 2010, this situation had been produced by the impact of the digital on visual culture through the saturation and circulation of imagery both via mobile digital capturing devices and online culture. Five years on, this situation is more clearly characterized by how the selfie is increasingly usurping the wall text as a form of cultural engagement with the work of art, and it would be unwise to dismiss or limit this phenomenon to a trivial preoccupation of "non-educated" / "non-specialist" audiences. It is endemic in how we see and interact with the world—for all of us.

As we also noted in the project's findings, the acute acceleration in programming in order to generate and perpetually reproduce audiences both as a function of cultural and institutional legitimation, as much as income generation, was impacting upon the temporal condition of the museum and its relation to audiences. To be specific, between the "heritage" time of collection, the "historic" time of displays, the "contemporary" time of exhibitions, and the "present" time of event culture and performance, the cultural and curatorial authority of the atemporality of aesthetic modernism was fragmenting in the audience's experience of the museum. This fragmentation of time produced by such multiple and conflicted temporalities was further exacerbated by the technologization of culture. As Lipovetsky alerts us in his analysis of hypermodernity, the paradoxical need to reassert the presentness of the present (think live programming, event culture, real-time performance) is in itself a response to the absence of the certainty of knowledge, and by implication its more traditional and static form of educational transference.[8] In this respect, "programming" can be seen as the most succinct acknowledgement within the art museum of the postmodern collapse of knowledge and expertise, and the catalyst for its redistribution.

In recognizing that the findings of the project could not have been arrived at independently by either the museum, the academy, or policymakers, the project conceptualized its method as "post-critical." In proposing this term, the project was building on the analysis that the art museum could no longer be usefully understood as a monolithic, institutionally coherent hierarchy, but rather as part of a much greater

network of partnerships, interests, and activities that extended well outside the physical walls of the museum—including the life-world of the visitor. For this reason, the project argued that, in the context of the neoliberal flows of capital, labor, and technology which framed the art museum, critical museology or institutional critique was now an exhausted, if not historic project, fundamentally limited in its ambitions that were exclusively focused on "revealing" the power structures of the institution.

Cultural Value and the Digital, Tate

In 2014, a second, smaller research project was subsequently developed as a collaboration between Tate, the Royal College of Art, and London South Bank University, called "Cultural Value and the Digital."[9] Adopting the discursive method of research through a three-week public research forum, this project discovered very quickly that, despite high levels of independent practice across the cultural sphere in the United Kingdom and Europe in relation to the creative use and development of digital media and online culture, the ability of artists, curators, academics, policymakers, and funders to share knowledge towards an integrated understanding of how the digital is transforming their work was missing. This was all the more apparent in relation to the art museum, including Tate, whose understanding of the digital remained, as Tate Encounters had termed it, "resolutely analog."

The museum's problematic relation to the digital and to networked audiences was articulated most candidly by the contribution of one curator reflecting on Tate's first online initiative to embrace new audiences through the BMW Tate Live online webcast performances. As the curator discussed, there was a significant light-bulb moment in the early stage of the program when it became apparent through the very low online visitor figures that not only did online visitors not enter the space "through the front door" like the physical museum, but when they did show up their audience profile was in stark contrast to the average Tate museum visitor. As the curator put it, being online was more like being in the "Wild Wild West" than in the Westminster area of Tate Britain or the Bankside, Tate Modern's global city location.

As the research identified, technology was primarily being understood as a tool, not as a medium with its own behavioral characteristics, with the primary emphasis being placed on its use in terms of the digitization of collections, the documentation of events, and the live online broadcast of events. In short, as an extension of the museum's archival nature rooted in the modernist logic of collection and display. Such content-generation, mimicking the practice of exhibition production, however, is fraught with the paradoxical compulsion to rematerialize the ephemeral, to document and archive the experience in order to invest the

digital with the status of an asset, of museological objecthood.

The fundamental flaw in this move to materialize, to render static, to fix a representational value to the digital asset, is the inability to recognize or acknowledge not only the expanded circulation of the digital "object," but the primary and prevalent conditions in which online culture operates—which is to say, a distributed culture defined by networked communication that is perpetually and simultaneously playing with numerous temporalities that render museological time either nostalgic (traditional) or obsolete (heritage). Writing about the changing role of the modern art museum in the twenty-first century in relation to the new iconic performance and installation "tank" spaces of the Tate Modern extension, Chris Dercon observed that "we can think of the museum in the twenty-first century as a new kind of mass medium."

The problem here, however, lies firstly in misrecognizing the extent to which the museum has always acted as a medium, "mediating" the art object, but secondly, and more importantly, that the art object is now being mediated elsewhere, outside of the museum space, rendering it and the exhibition mode as only one of many other forms of distributed remediation. As Dercon further wrote about the programming of the tank spaces as new performance and media spaces:

> *A further question that the Tanks bring to the forefront of discussion for museums is the changing role of the audience at a moment dominated by social media and new modes of broadcast. Many of the works presented in the Tanks address their audiences directly, emphasizing the visitor's own physical presence, whether that be by being part of a crowd surrounding a performer, becoming part of a conversation, or walking through and around an immersive installation. With these complexities and the advent of new recording technologies, the live event takes on new meanings and possibilities…. They [the Tanks] challenge many aspects of what historically has been important to museums—their collections and modes of display and archive—and ask vital new questions of what it is to be a museum in the twenty-first century.[10]*

As the project rapidly discovered, the museum's struggle to move beyond the historic broadcast, enlightenment model of the transmission of knowledge (of the "one to many") and its default position to think of the digital as a tool rather than a culture—and specifically a networked and distributed culture—highlighted its bigger struggle to recognize the legitimacy and new cultural authority of an audience which held little or no interest in the modernist system of classification and value.

Fig. 1 *Lawrence Abu Hamdan, installation view of Contra-Diction: speech against itself, part of Transfigurations, 20-16 June 2014, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona ©Oriol Molas.*

Transfigurations, MACBA

As cultural production and consumption is increasingly characterized as being both "on the Web" and "*of* the Web," that is to say decentered, distributed, and networked through collectivized interests and communities of practice, the tenability of museological narratives of the modernist, autonomous art object, defined by notions of individual authorship, becomes increasingly fragile. This is as true of historic objects in museum collections, as of contemporary forms of cultural production, through the expanded cultural life (and ontological fact) of the object as online image.

The challenges for museums produced by these conditions are increasingly apparent through the near-exhausted logic of museum databases and content management systems, which were designed in the first digital era to represent the functions, practices, and knowledge systems of the analog institution, rooted in and structured by representational systems of value. To be specific, the allocation of a collection object number or reference was based on the designation of key classificatory information, such as artist, date, medium, size, collection accession date, and so forth. The ontological status and value of the work was indicated by the allocated number or reference, which also helped to distinguish—and preserve—the curatorial expertise and epistemological knowledge associated, attached, and invested with the object, along with its asset value, as either collection object or archive material.

Anticipating this moment, the potential redundancy of the museum's classification system in the twenty-first century, driven equally by the shifts in artistic practice, was well-identified by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in 2012, when the then director introduced a cataloguing system that no longer made distinctions between the artwork, the document, and online content, and subsequently enabled the design of new content management systems or databases. As MACBA's then head of archive, Mela Davila, noted in 2012:

The structure taken by the archive and library collections is complex as it derives from a theoretical concept according to which the categories of "artwork" and "document," understood in their classical sense, do not apply. In practice the relations of continuity between these collections and the MACBA art collection, and the fact that the archive and the collection are described with entries of one single database, are two factors that help to resolve certain important problems…. In terms of classification and description, one of the main consequences of this process is the fact that the work is stripped of its status as object and consequently the "product of creation" having disappeared, the "relations" between the different elements involved in the creative process take on crucial importance.[11]

MACBA'S ability to adopt such a radical method of collection management was and is clearly informed and enabled by the short history of its own collection, which began in 1987, and which leaves it unburdened of the management of historical legacies and collection donations. But its institutional approach to open and fluid systems of classification made it a methodologically sympathetic partner to develop collaborative curatorial and artistic research focused on how artists' contemporary engagement with technology and representation can be designed without the predetermined strictures of museological display and management.

This research, which culminated in the project "Transfigurations" in 2013, was funded by the European Union as part of the "Museums in an Age of Migrations" multi-partnered, four-year project (MeLa) and expanded upon the findings of Tate Encounters, particularly in terms of the crisis of representational systems, the shifts in artists' practices towards new technologies, and the need to identify new collaborative models of both curatorial and artistic practice in "problem-solving" research.[12] One of the key concerns of the research was to identify new forms of exhibition/display practice that overcame the representational pull of the exhibition form; a key concern in relation to how the work of migrant or diasporic artists were being presented in museum exhibitions and displays.

In the original application, the project had committed itself to the nominated output of a "discursive exhibition" that would take place at MACBA in summer of 2014. Thinking towards this predetermined "output," the need to develop a reflexive and collaborative form of co-practice between the selected teams of artists and curators seemed a prerequisite in order to avoid prioritizing one practice or form of knowledge over the other. Five pairs of artists and curators were subsequently commissioned to work together, including: Kader Attia (fig. 2) with Sofia Victorino from the Whitechapel Gallery (London); Camille Henrot (fig. 3) with Mélanie Bouteloup from Bétonsalon (Paris); Lawrence Abu Hamdan (fig. 1) with myself and Bartomeu Marí from MACBA (London/Barcelona); Leo Asemota with Paul Goodwin (London); and Quinsy Gario with Jelle Bowhuis from the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam.

This approach was particularly necessary if the project was to realize a more in-depth discussion of how both the curator and artist experience the process of research and exhibition, and to avoid the professional default into the conventional artist/curator dynamic focused on the curatorial illumination of the artist and work through the exhibition concept and form. While some collaborations were more successful than others, the material that emerged evidenced the increasing precariousness of the status and idea of the art object, as each highlighted the extent to which their work draws on and remediates an ever-expanding repository of digitally generated content, be it playlists of music compiled through iTunes (Attia), museum collection image banks (Henrot), or

Fig. 2 *Kader Attia, installation view of From Material to Abstract, part of Transfigurations, 20-26 June 2014, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona ©Oriol Molas.*

broadcast and amateur video footage and sound recordings (Abu Hamdan).

The proximity of the research process to the exhibition form, however, is essentially a paradoxical relation fraught with problems and questions around "research as exhibition" and "exhibition as research," and one that, whatever its objectives and disclaimers might be, poses difficult questions for the artist and curator in relation to the expectations of the public display of material, as well as its inherent relation to the market status and value of the artist's work. Intangible heritage and immaterial culture is still difficult for an analog art museum to engage with in terms of giving form through display, even if its museological systems, such as MACBA's, acknowledge its immateriality by conventional museum standards.
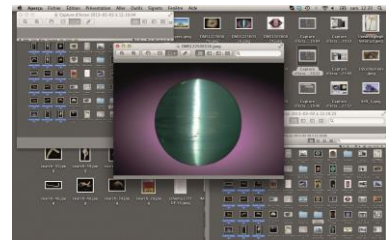

Fig. 3 *Screenshot related to Camille Henrot's research index 'Atlas of the Atlas' from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 2013 ©Camille Henrot.*

Networked culture and the art museum

But, as the museum of modern and contemporary art moves further into the twenty-first century, what we are clearly witnessing is the release of the art object from its mode of fixed representational and aesthetic value, historically determined through the epistemological certainties of academic knowledge and professional expertise, into a flow of new relational value systems. This new mode of existence is reconnecting the artwork not only to the viewer and audience, but also to the wider social entities in which it circulates as object, image, and thing. As Boris Groys has noted, "the Internet is transforming and assuming the historic universalizing archival function of the museum."[13]

The first impact of the digital has now clearly been superseded by the distributive and redistributive modes of online networked culture, of the many to many form of communication, which further displaces old forms of representational authority and value that derived from clearly defined spheres of public and private relations and exchanges of value and meaning—of which museums were a key constituent. Engaging with online networked cultures is not only difficult for the art museum as an analog institution, but more fundamentally it provokes, if not forces, deeply uncomfortable questions about how much and what kind of engagement the museum wants—in other words, where it wants to locate itself in the social and cultural. In many respects, this question is no longer even in the hands of the museum to decide, as audiences and publics move freely between online and analog culture in ways that the museum as an institution cannot so easily. Where once interpretation was a form of managing communication and meaning, networked audiences no longer rely on the institution to guide their encounter.

For the museum, the desire to hold on to the ontological security of the modernist art object in relation to both the work of art and contemporary audiences is an

understandable, nostalgic reaction to the pace of change and the certainties that previous representational forms of living provided in a pre-digital and pre-globalization national culture. And clearly, as the largest unregulated market in the world, the art market, which the art museum is inextricably tied into, has a necessarily vested interest in maintaining historic systems of representation and traditional modes of production and consumption. But as traditional and generational orders of patronage expire, and funding models based on audited forms of audience engagement increase, understanding networked audiences, the networked visitor and viewer will be crucial.

To achieve this, understanding the art object and artwork within online culture as part of a new image ecology and economy, following its material fact through to its metadata and expanding its ontological legitimacy, is imperative to understanding both its distributed cultural and asset value. Arguably, the asset value of the future artwork will no longer be limited to the concept of the "original," the "authentic," authored material fact, but rather different iterations of value comparable to all intangible asset forms that populate current market practices. As current trends suggest, future practices may well be co-authored, collaborative collectives.

To be clear, though, and to root these observations in the research made possible by the current moment of research funding, such a reading is not an updated version of the 1970s argument of the dematerialized art object in a context of new media, television, and broadcast. Although the museum and art market impetus to rematerialize contemporary immaterial practices, such as performance and sound events for content-generation and collection-based purposes, is notable. Nor is it defined by artistic imperatives to circumvent the conditions of the art market and the demand for representational forms of labor production. But rather, it is increasingly defined by a cultural attitude and aesthetic, not necessarily defined by the technologies of the digital or being "on" the Web, but as noted before, by being—socially, culturally, and politically—"of" the Web.

With the dismantling of the unique art object and its transformation into the distributed object/image/data comes the displacement of the unique encounter with the museum object and with it the historic preserved notions of authenticity and unique value, both analog concepts of a pre-digital era. The challenge now is to think of the museum as one node in a distributed network of cultural practice and engagement, and to think of the art object as a circulating "work of art" whose form and value is comprised of both material and immaterial fact. To understand this work of art and to trace its value is to acknowledge its relationship to the social and cultural, rather than to frame and manage it within the aesthetic preconditions of traditional museological practice; the kind of museological practice that institutional critique and New Institutionalism tried to unravel, but which current "curatorial" approaches hold open within an

expanded field of communication and emergent knowledge formation.

New Brutalist Image 1949–55, Tate Britain

Research-led curating that aims to present processual, contingent, and emergent forms of cultural value and knowledge creation is one move towards the curatorial as denoted by Irit Rogoff at the outset of this paper. This form was further explored in my final research project, which was a Tate-commissioned collaborative research display with co-curator and architectural historian Claire Zimmerman, titled *New Brutalist Image 1949–55*, and on display at Tate Britain in 2014.[14]

Fig. 4 *Installation shot of New Brutalist Image 1949-55, Tate Britain, London, 24 Nov 2014-20 Sep 2015. Curated by Victoria Walsh and Claire Zimmerman. ©Victoria Walsh.*

Both the research process and final installation of this display directly tangled with the issues of the ambiguous status of reproducible material (namely the photographic image) within museological practices through the use of facsimile material, digitized archival material, and animated digital slide projections. The aims of the research display were to bring into play a range of historic cross-media material that would, through its inter-media relationships, visually support a new proposition of contemporary relevance. This proposition was focused on how a group of artists, architects, and designers in postwar Britain (generally identified as part of the Independent Group and the founders of New Brutalism) came to conceptualize and use the photographic image as an effective mode of urban communication, independent of its documentary fact and indexical relation (i.e., beyond its representational function).

One of the key tenets of this argument was rooted in the postwar proliferation of visual culture through the expanded visual field made possible by the development of photographic technology and the rise in print publications of all kinds—not dissimilar in part from the digital expansion of online visual culture today. Moreover, it particularly drew on the sophisticated understanding held by artists, critics, and curators in postwar London of how photography was impacting on cultural production and meaning in the 1950s.

Fig. 5 *Installation shot of New Brutalist Image 1949-55, Tate Britain, London, 24 Nov 2014-20 Sep 2015. Curated by Victoria Walsh and Claire Zimmerman. ©Victoria Walsh.*

Among the material in question, the research drew on a newly digitized collection of photographic negatives held at Tate of the work of one of the artists, Nigel Henderson (1917–85), which totaled just under three thousand images. Making a selection of around two hundred negatives, the images were shown as digital projections, which not only enabled such a quantity to be shown with ease, in practical terms of space and cost, but also mitigated the museological concerns with authorial intention, given that few of the images had ever been printed by the artist, thus leaving unknown the final visual intention that might have been produced in exposure, cropping, and framing. The ability to
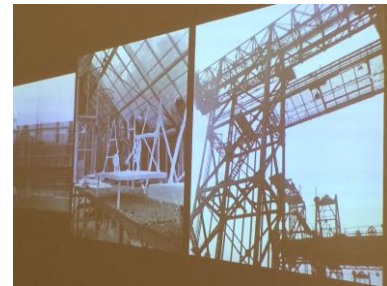
introduce these digital images into the display and to freely choreograph their presence was only made possible by the fact that the images initially held no material object status within the museum's terms of collection or digital content management systems, their status remaining transient and ambiguous until formally determined and processed as holding an archival asset value.

On the walls of the Tate Britain gallery space, their visual status, however, confused if not overrode collection typologies, being neither confined by a vitrine or a frame, but like many other contemporary installations, running off the surface wall of the galleries. Introducing the digitized archival image to the walls of the collection display space not only folded questions of authorship, authenticity, objecthood, and aesthetic into one visually mediated surface, but the simultaneous exposure of these images to public consumption through their publication on the Tate's website released them into new networks of online consumption, yet in substantially lower resolution.

This return of the photographic image, in its remediated, lower-res form, further invested the research display's curatorial proposition about the relationship between the formation of the "New Brutalist Image" in postwar Britain and contemporary visual urban literacy. In addition, it revisited a central concern of the postwar Independent Group about the democratization of visual culture through the processes and systems of mass media, most succinctly articulated through the writings and pithy observations of critic-curator Lawrence Alloway, who coined the still useful term, "Pop art/fine art continuum."[15]

Alloway would certainly have made friends with Hito Steyerl had they met. Anticipating the conditions of Steyerl's analysis of the "poor image," Alloway understood that both the production of images and their circulation fell within an expanded field of communication as a form of information data rather than as a unique mode of individual expression. The ready-made image, the reproducible image, the "as found," cropped, collaged, and re-photographed, prefigured the mediated, remediated, uploaded, downloaded, riffed, and mixed image of online visual culture. Asking where the object is, trying to locate the original, is to misrecognize the contemporary value of the artwork as an actant in a network. As Steyerl summarily observes, the poor image is not a proxy, but a living, vital reality, and one that the museum should strive to follow:

The poor image thus constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history. It builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates. By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the "original," but on the transience of the copy. It is no longer anchored within a classical public sphere mediated
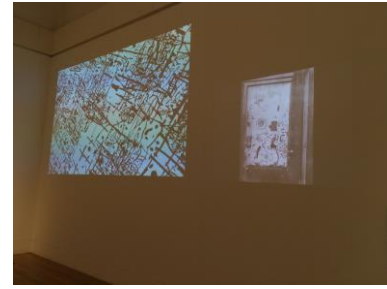

Fig. 6 *Installation shot of New Brutalist Image 1949-55, Tate Britain, London, 24 Nov 2014-20 Sep 2015. Curated by Victoria Walsh and Claire Zimmerman. ©Victoria Walsh.*

and supported by the frame of the nation state or corporation, but floats on the surface of temporary and dubious data pools…. The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation…. In short it is about reality.[16]

Conclusion

Collectively, what these projects sought to examine, and to propose, are new models of practice-based and practice-led collaborative research—situated, if not embedded, in the art museum, and also interdisciplinary, if not transdisciplinary. Apart from being a long list of polysyllabic words, what this modeling of research describes is an approach to problem-solving research that at its core not only recognizes an embodied audience, but actively seeks to animate it as a legitimate participant in the formation and distribution of knowledge within the art museum and the encounter with the artwork.

This approach and ambition actively draws upon the work of Bruno Latour in terms of method, but also in the wider political project of "reassembling the social," as Latour has termed it. Arguing against the project of Critical Sociology (which translates to a comparable position in relation to Critical Museology and Institutional Critique), Latour's *reconstructive* rather than deconstructive approach invariably works with the complexity of the contemporary organization of society which Actor Network Theory enables to be studied.

As Anselm Franke noted at the conference, there is much in Latour's thinking that refers back to Cybernetics; and as Mark Wigley also highlighted, there is nothing new in this concern or practice with the immersive and discursive. Indeed, it is worth noting that many of the exhibitions that have recently been reconstructed due to their current perception as interesting curatorial experiments or moments in the history of curating were themselves directly informed by Cybernetics, Communication Theory, and Information Theory. As the exhibition, or rather series of environments, that comprised the seminal 1956 exhibition, *This is Tomorrow*, at the Whitechapel Gallery in London highlighted, all art and exhibitions only hold meaning for as long as they participate in a shared field of communication.

For as long as curators and museums fail to recognize or engage with how the shifts in communication are impacting not just on artists, but also audiences and the wider production of culture, the faster both the museum of modern art and the museum of contemporary art will become the new heritage. From the perspective of the projects discussed here, the opportunities of the "curatorial," of

practice-led research and process-based curating, suggest the potential to still create the conditions of change within the museum. Embracing the contingent, the distributed, and the messiness of the everyday, situated research and the practice of the curatorial opens up the animating promise of "method as a performative tool of change."[17] Understanding the art object within this context now as a Latourian actant, accumulating connections in a flow of encounters, is a prerequisite for reconnecting the public claims of the museum with the social and cultural in a post-representational era.

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1. "The Museum of the Future," interview with Chris Dercon, Goethe Institute (October 2013), accessed April 4, 2016, http://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/lp/kul/dug/dop/dro/enindex.htm.
2. Irit Rogoff, "A conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck," *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 27.
3. Hasan Bakhshi, Philippe Schneider, and Christopher Walker, *Arts and Humanities Research and Innovation* (Bristol: AHRC/NESTA, 2008), 12.
4. Ibid.
5. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (first published in French in 1979), trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massum (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); see also Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).
6. The research project was led by Professor Andrew Dewdney as Principal Investigator, with two co-investigators, myself as the Tate co-investigator and Dr. David Dibosa. A full account of the Tate Encounters project is published in Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa, and Victoria Walsh, *Post-critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). The majority of the research data is accessible on the Tate website, accessed April 4, 2016, http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters.
7. For the "Research in Process" strand of recorded sessions see http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/education-practice-tate-1970-present-richard-morphet and

http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/new-media-and-museum-practices-and-possibilities, accessed April 4, 2016.

8. See Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

9. For full information about the project and the research findings see the Tate project webpages, accessed April 4, 2016, http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/cultural-value-and-digital-practice-policy-and-theory.

10. Chris Dercon, "Manifesto – Tate Tanks: Art in Action," Tate (2012); reproduced online, accessed April 2016, http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/tate-modern-director-chris-dercon-on-tanks.

11. Mela Dávilla Freire, "Process versus Product: New Paths for Archiving in the Field of Contemporary Artistic Practices," in *Museums in an Age of Migrations: Questions, Challenges, Perspectives*, eds. Luca Basso Peressut and Clelia Pozzi (Milan: Politecnico di Milano, 2012), 199–200.

12. See Victoria Walsh, *Transfigurations: Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations*, (MeLA / Royal College of Art, London, 2014); PDF accessed April 2016, http://www.mela-project.polimi.it/publications/1187.htm.

13. Boris Groys, "Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk," *E-flux* 50 (December 2013): 11.

14. "New Brutalist Image 1949–55," research display at Tate Britain, November 24, 2014-October 2015.

15. Lawrence Alloway first published this idea in his article, "The Arts and the Mass Media," *Architectural Design* 28, no. 2 (February 1958): 84–85. For a fuller discussion of Alloway's ideas on the democratization of visual culture through mass media see Victoria Walsh, "Lawrence Alloway: Pedagogy, Practice, and the Recognition of Audience, 1948–1959," in *Lawrence Alloway: Critic and Curator*, eds. Lucy Bradnock, Courtney J. Martin, and Rebecca Peabody (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015).

16. Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *E-flux* 10 (November 2009): 8.

17. John Law and John Urry, "Enacting the Social," *Economy and Society* 33, no. 3 (2005): 390–410.