

Redrawing the boundaries: questioning the geographies of Britishness at Tate-Britain

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In the mid to late 1990s the matter of Britishness was, it seemed, everywhere; from the re-appropriation of the Bonzo Dog Doo Daa Band's term *Cool Britannia* to Britpop, Britart, New Labour, New Britain and the process of political devolution. It seemed that discussion of what exactly this term meant was ubiquitous. Much of this emerged from the rhetoric of Blairite politics, as is implied by the above examples. The institutionalization of this 'Rebranded Britain' manifested itself explicitly in spaces such as the much-maligned Millennium Dome in North Greenwich. Here we were invited to consume a Britishness that rejects the dusty conservation of heritage and projects itself as innovation for the future. It is this allusion to the temporal concerns of Britishness which is of interest, for the very name Millennium Dome facilitates, albeit in rather crude terms, an understanding of Britain as simultaneously pertaining to time and space, or time-space. By drawing together both the temporal and the spatial in this way, it is possible not only to re-think Britishness, but also to take things further by reflecting on how time and space inform the ways in which we 'think' of Britishness. Just as we might consider whether the Millennium was something which was more completely realized at a reclaimed industrial site on the Greenwich peninsula than in, for example, the West Country or the North West, so too we might also think about what Britishness means under New Labour as compared to the time of Charles II during the Restoration. Through thinking of time and space as not only co-related but as co-present, we might also want to consider 'where' Britishness is. So, what I want to consider here is a notion of British identity which links and 'cuts across' different spaces, moving beyond the confines of the bounded nation state. As Brandon Taylor has argued, 'art institutions termed 'national' are highly complex objects, whose histories can be told in many ways' (Taylor 1999: xiii); it is the multiple spatial and temporal dimensions contained within the notion of Britishness that constitute these complexities. This paper uses the case of Tate Britain to explore the social construction of national identity in its relationship to the museum's culture of time-space. My argument is that the identity which is projected by a museum is not a fixed attribute which is generated from within the nation and unproblematically realized as a national collection. Rather, as I show in the case of Tate Britain, the times and spaces which have emerged within the British nation state can be seen as arrivals and departures which are themselves informed by 'other' times and 'other' spaces.

The problem of confronting the complexities of Britishness is not a new one for the Tate which was founded as the National Gallery of British Art in 1897. In its early days the questions, 'when and where were British artists?' (Fyfe 1996: 221) became a major concern in respect of the management of the gallery's purchasing fund *viz.* the Chantrey Bequest. Whilst the Bequest was to be used for the acquisition and display of 'British Fine Art', as Fyfe asserts, this led to a problem for the Tate in that it became 'a contested site at which the significance of nation and the meaning of British art were determined' (*ibid*). A century later, in the late 1990s, it is arguable that the problem of determining the meaning of a national collection at the Tate Gallery re-emerged. However, late-twentieth-century changes in curatorial style meant that the contested character of British art was no longer something that was to be settled by the curator as didact. Rather, uncertainty was to be exhibited as a guiding principle of display. As the Tate's director stated: 'our aim must be to generate a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery [...] rather than find themselves on the conveyor belt of history' (Serota 2000: 55). The principle behind this curatorial practice is that priority is given to the visitor's 'experience' of a more direct relationship to art works as opposed to the 'interpretation' of the curator (Serota 2000). Questioning Britishness can, therefore, be seen as a favoured aspect of the visitor's experience rather than as a mere curatorial inconvenience. But questioning Britishness in the latter part of the twentieth century reflected wider social and

political issues; Scottish and Welsh devolution, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, Britain's place in Europe and the presence of far-right racism have peppered contemporary debates on national identity. Confronting the difficulties of defining Britishness and, as I will argue here, considering the diversity of its constitutive times and spaces, has become a significant contemporary issue for the Tate Gallery within a broader reconsideration of Britain's geographies.

On 27th March 2000 the Tate Gallery at Millbank opened its doors as Tate Britain for the first time. The idea of redefining the Gallery's role had first been mooted over seven years earlier and was coupled with plans to open a new site at Giles Gilbert-Scott's Bankside Power station, to be known as Tate Modern. Design company Wolf Olins, specialists in re-branding and identity, had been consulted and the matter of establishing a remit for this new exposition of British art was undertaken. A principle concern was that the opening of Tate Britain should not be overshadowed by the opening of its counterpart. Bankside was a project that involved an expenditure of around £130 million in order to create the largest gallery of modern art in the world. Fundamental to this concern was the fact that whilst Tate Modern would open in May 2000, the completion of work on the North West Quadrant at Millbank, and thus the full realization of a Tate Britain, would not be until March 2001. Mindful of the fact that this sequence of events might detract from Tate Britain, Wolf Olins proposed a re-think. As a result, in the autumn of 1999 the Tate announced that it would 'begin to install a completely new presentation of the British collection.... leading up to the launch of the Tate Gallery of British Art' in March 2000 (Tate Gallery 1999). The new strategy was to facilitate a more graduated transformation at Millbank whereby rooms would be systematically re-hung in the manner of Tate Britain before its new official opening date. Thus, by March 2000 the Tate at Millbank became Tate Britain with the completion of the re-hang but without the extended gallery space and with building contractors still at work.

It is the re-hanging of the collection that is central to the Tate's intentions and to the new vision of British art. The Gallery, in *'Representing Britain 1500-2000'* (Myrone 2000) set about disrupting a formal, chronological profile of the past, something which director Nicholas Serota had long espoused (Garlake 1991). This rehang was to incorporate a broad curatorial distinction between 'themed' areas and rooms dedicated to 'major names'. Whilst the names would include artists such as William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough and William Blake, the former would be broad themes such as 'Private and Public', 'Literature and Fantasy' and 'Home and Abroad'. These were to be subdivided into more specifically themed rooms; in the case of 'Home and Abroad' the rooms being 'British Landscape', 'Images of War' and 'Artists Abroad'.

It is the curatorial intentions of this last room which I consider in this article. The reason for selecting this room is that it had been ascribed a particular function within the broader scheme of *'Representing Britain'*. It is, moreover, a function which I believe to have been central to Tate Britain's broader intention of re-evaluating Britishness within the context of contemporary Blairite political discourses. The intention was that 'Artists Abroad' would show British artists' 'responses to landscapes and cultures around the world revealing the international context of British art' (Tate 6/11/99). I will consider the room itself later on in the discussion. My initial task is to explore the idea of an 'international context' and to consider aspects of what might be termed time-space dynamics and how they might help to inform the ways in which we might think about Britishness and its *'Representation'* at Tate Britain.

Time-Space and the International Context

In placing British art in an international context Tate Britain was creating a homology from a distinction. The distinction made in the 'Artists Abroad' room was between the work of British born artists who have lived and/ or worked abroad, and those who were born abroad and have lived and/ or worked in Britain. The homology resided in the premise that 'British art has recurrently been shaped through interaction with foreign cultures' (Myrone 2000:18). This takes us some way towards a definition of what was being conveyed by the term 'international context'; we are dealing with a notion that was attempting to overcome a sense of fixity about how British art is constructed. That is to say that British art becomes something which is

unbounded; it can lay claims to be beyond the shores of the nation state and to circulate back and forth. Thus, this new room afforded the visitor a sense of spatial dynamism. It also follows that, if we are talking in terms of dynamics, we are talking of processes, and by incorporating this awareness we are able to talk of time-spaces.

My argument is that if the Tate's notion of an international context alludes to what might be termed 'time-space dynamism', then the Gallery's conceptualization of Britishness might relate to what Doreen Massey refers to as 'a progressive sense of place' (1993a). This sense of place can be defined in terms of the notion that 'what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus' (Massey 1993a:66). The implication of this perspective on culture and identity is that there is no fixed and permanent boundary between a national art and its international context. British art cannot be unproblematically located in its international context as though the division between the two was not a process worthy of examination in its own right. Thus, to follow Massey, the locus that is this *place* Britain consists of a convergence of the larger constellation of spatial relations. These converge on the point of Britishness and in so doing provide a 'sense of place'. As Massey explains:

The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself (Massey 1993a:66)

There are two fundamental points to be made in connection with this notion of a progressive sense of place and which have implications for the ways in which Britishness might be articulated at Tate Britain. First, there is the matter of the relationship between place and identity as it has been approached within the burgeoning discipline of cultural geography. Because there are multiple ways in which people identify themselves in relation to any given place it is impossible to talk of anything other than identity in the plural. Despite the fact that this point of view has become widespread within contemporary cultural debate, its importance cannot be over emphasized. The implication is that we need to think in terms of various forms of Britishness. Furthermore, these various forms of Britishness relate to various time-spaces; they may be co-present but they are also the product of different 'strands' of place-based belonging. Central to this issue is the notion of 'meanings' which become woven into these various time-spaces, for as Hall observes:

it is us - in society, within human culture - who make things mean, who signify. Meanings, consequently, will always change, from one culture or period to another (Hall 1997: 61).

Or as one might add, of course, from one space to another. In due course I will return to these issues of multiple identities and the associated multiple meanings which attend debates about Britishness. At this point, however, I want to raise another issue that is associated with the idea of a progressive sense of place.

The second point concerns how we think about the notion of place itself within this 'dynamic' context. This relates back to our thinking about the processes which take place 'in place'. Following Massey's premise that 'space is not static, nor time spaceless' (Massey 1993b:155) I have said that these processes should not be understood as being merely formative of place. By this I mean to say that, having established that time-spaces are constituted by dynamic processes, we can see that they do not arrive at a particular locus and then reside in stasis. Therefore, these processes are not formative of place in the sense that we do not arrive at a place which then exists with unquestionable meanings and a fixed sense of 'form'. To this end therefore, we must retain the notion 'that places are processes too' (Massey 1993a: 67); that they are *no more* than a convergence of time-spaces, continually dynamic and deracinated. Indeed, whilst not wanting to get bogged down (sic) in organic metaphors, they convey this notion effectively, whether we think of place in terms of the

rhizomatic 'body without organs' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) or the notion of a network whereby places 'can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations' (Massey, 1993a: 66).

I have discussed some ways in which Britishness and the place that is Britain might be seen as dynamic and processual rather than as being fixed within an international context. I will now explore the notion of time-space further through the notion of networks. I show how more general considerations of museums in social networks may provide us with a useful way of thinking about the specific matter of the 'Artists Abroad' room and the broader curatorial logic at Tate Britain.

A Few Thoughts on Networks or Getting to the Route of the Problem

The concept of network as it has been elaborated in Actor-Network Theory, provides us with a way of illuminating the dynamic relationship between British art and its international context. As a theory, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) has evolved from a number of sociological writings that emerged during the 1980s (see for example Callon 1986, Latour 1987). In its essentials ANT is a theory concerned with power; it is concerned with the way in which power is generated and ordered. This is confronted through the notion that 'society, organizations, agents, and machines are all *effects* generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) materials' (Law 1992: 380). In this sense, what things 'come to be' can be seen as a result of the connections being made within a network of heterogeneous elements. Size and power are seen merely as the result of different kinds of networks; 'Napoleons are no different in kind to small-time hustlers, and IBMs to whelk-stalls' (*ibid*). And, one might add, neither are directors of national galleries different in kind from small town curators. For ANT it is axiomatic that 'actor' and 'network' are two facets of the same social reality. They are inextricably linked; one is constitutive of the other so that actors can be seen as networks and networks as actors. If we are inclined 'to talk of "the British Government" rather than all the bits and pieces that make it up' (Law 1992: 380) then the question is this: how do networks come to appear as 'single point actors'? In the case of a national gallery of British art we might ask: to what extent and how was a coherent national art generated, enlarged and mobilized as a force within its international setting? Whilst it is impossible to do justice to what is an extensive and complex theory here, the broad usefulness of ANT in this account is through the ways in which it seeks to explain how small things become large things, how they generate power and how they become stable through the connection of heterogeneous elements within networks.

Bruno Latour has recently remarked that the word network may have come to carry connotations of static things that are at odds with ANT. ANT thought of network as specifying the relationality of things and identified processes across the perceived boundaries of nature and society, the human and non-human. However, semantic shifts that have been associated with the push-button understanding of the World Wide Web may require us to clarify the meaning of the word network. That is to say that 'with the new popularisation of the word network, it now means transport *without* deformation' so that the double-click of the mouse faithfully transports far flung things such as images and texts into our presence (Latour 1999: 15). Latour's point is that the language of the WWW obscures ANT's concept of network as process by reducing it to a new set of static, immutable, bounded, 'stages'. Latour claims that originally 'the word network, like Deleuze and Guattari's term rhizome, meant a series of *transformations* - translations, transductions - which could not be captured by any of the traditional terms of social theory' such as *social structure* (*ibid*). It is ANT's emphasis on transformation which I want to consider here. In studying the social production of Britishness we must acknowledge the movements and processes which enable Tate Britain's engagement with the notion of an international context. It is also important that we acknowledge time-spaces as being *transforming*; that is to say, they are processes in themselves. The international time-spaces of British art cannot be resolutely fixed as the wider context of a national tradition. That is to say, British art is not something that can be cut, dried and conserved by the museum within its international context as though one of these is merely the context for the other.

As well as incorporating the works of artists who are seen as 'connected' with Britain

and thus allowing a degree of fluidity in relation to place, the 'Artists Abroad' room also covered a diverse time scale. The works included in what was the initial hanging of this room (there have been succeeding hangs) covered a period of over two hundred years: from the late eighteenth century to the mid 1990s. The appearance of diversity was accentuated by a variety of artistic genres, or, what might be loosely referred to as styles. These, predictably, represented artistic 'moments' within the story of art history which might be described as 'romantic', 'modernist' or 'Pre- Raphaelite'. The room was, therefore, hung with a strong emphasis on diversity, and this was further accentuated by the imposition of what was referred to as 'challenging juxtaposition(s)' (Tate Gallery 6/11/99). By means of these juxtapositions the viewer was invited to consider the complementary as well as the contrasting qualities of works from different periods and genres. Through this hanging it was intended that a prioritization of 'theme' over chronology would have the effect of 'drawing out new meanings' (*ibid*).

In thinking further about this challenge to museum conventions and the possibility of new meanings there was, I believe, an intention to re-evaluate the gallery space itself and an attempt to capture the temporal and spatial flows and connections implicit within a progressive sense of place. Whilst we might consider that 'museums have always been heterogeneous classifying machines that aim to perform homogeneity' (Hetherington 1997: 215), in the 'Artists Abroad' room we were being told a self consciously heterogeneous story about Britishness. Indeed, I suggest that the aspiration of the room was to re-assert a heterogeneous sense of place and to perform heterogeneity within a new kind of museum space. The room could be seen as a kind of temporal-spatial analogy for Britishness in so far as it represented a space of convergence, of cross-cutting asymmetries. Just as a gallery space might look after closing time, with its security infra- red lines shooting from wall to wall, so too here do we encounter a temporal-spatial dynamic which cross-cuts and intersects:

Unlike Euclidean geometry, which is associated with the mathematical properties of fixed, or rigid, spaces [we are presented with] what happens when a space [...] is folded, twisted and distorted in a variety of different ways while retaining its overall properties as a space (Hetherington 1997:200).

This last point is of great importance, for we need to retain the notion that when entering the 'Artists Abroad' Room we were still being invited to think *about* and *within* 'a space'. Just as when we considered the broader cultural geographies of the nation state, so too in this room, we were faced with the fact that our thinking about space progressively presupposed the dissolution of boundaries (whether they were the borders of the nation state or the walls of the room). However, there is a danger that the space may have been thought of as merely reconfigured along new lines and without that sense of *transformation* in which we grasp space as being inherently dynamic.

In order to clarify the matter at issue it may be useful to consider the guidance which was provided for visitors at the door of the 'Artists Abroad' room in the form of a text panel. As is usual this provided a kind of résumé of the room's contents. In keeping with the thematic intentions of the room itself, the information did not strive to subject the works within to a process of fixing. As with the hanging of the works in the room, reference was made to the paintings within a non-chronological, discursive narrative. The text panel had a theme and was peppered with references to journeys: the Grand Tour of the eighteenth century, mountainous journeys in search of the Romantic sublime, colonialism and its association with Orientalism, as well as the implications of mass tourism in the twentieth century. The concluding sentence stated that 'what home and abroad mean have become more complex with the growth and recognition of a culturally diverse Britain' (Tate Gallery 2000). This then is the 'international context': Italy, South East Asia, North Africa, to name but a few places, converge both on the room and on Britishness itself; it is a sense of place produced by 'routes not roots' (Gilroy 1997). The question remains, however, to what extent is there a genuine transformative sense of thinking and being? To what extent, if any, has the meaning of home and abroad become more complex? Are we witnessing a reconceptualization of place as a rhizoidal network where time-spaces never rest and never close or are we merely noticing a convergence of things

which come to rest at a centre, untroubled at a journey's end? In attempting to answer these questions it will be necessary to elaborate on Latour's idea of a network and draw upon his notion of a *centre of calculation* (Latour 1987:215-57).

In order to illustrate the temporal- spatial dynamics of what he refers to as 'centres of calculation', Latour draws on a particularly suitable historical example: that of a journey or rather journeys which were taken by sea in the late eighteenth century and, in the course of which, Western sailors drew on the coastal knowledge of Chinese fishermen whose paths they crossed. The journeys made were a series of explorations from Europe to the East Pacific in order to map the land of Sakhalin, and to ascertain whether or not it was an island. This was achieved, according to Latour, through the ability of the explorers such as English, French and Portuguese sailors, to 'act at a distance' and mobilize 'events, places and people' (*ibid*) and bring them back to centres of calculation in Western Europe. Basically, the argument is that each exploration accumulates more information which it takes back in the form of immutable mobiles such as maps and charts. These are bodies of knowledge or otherwise which remain stable through time and space allowing them to become readable and combinable upon return. As Latour puts it, using the example of astronomy:

All these charts, tables and trajectories are conveniently at hand and combinable at will, no matter whether they are twenty centuries old or a day old; each of them brings celestial bodies billions of tons heavy and hundreds of thousands of miles away to the size of a point on a piece of paper (Latour 1987: 227).

In establishing these immutable and combinable mobiles, European scientific discourses created what Latour refers to as 'a Great Divide' between the apparently local and closed worlds of Them (e.g. Chinese fishermen with their local beliefs about a place) and Us (e.g. cartographers with their global knowledge of places) (Latour 1987, 1993). It is important to note, at this point, that in accounting for the differences between Western and non-Western cultures, Latour eschews both cultural relativism and rationalism. The Great Divide between them and us is neither denied, as with the relativists, nor is it reified as western cognitive superiority. Rather, it is a process achieved by way of a cycle of networked accumulation which, in this case, brings local knowledge of other lands back to a centre. By means of maritime charts and navigational tables localized knowledge becomes globalized or, perhaps more accurately, re-localized back in Europe and made readable and knowable at the centre of calculation in Versailles or London: 'everything can become familiar, finite, nearby and handy' (Latour 1987: 230). And as Latour observes the weak become strong for those who stayed at home and saw nothing for themselves become familiar not only with more places than Chinese fishermen but with more than any ship's captain.

This Great Divide might provide a useful way of thinking about the workings of the 'Artists Abroad' room. If we substitute charts and tables with paintings, we have a parallel between Latour's journeys and the journeys which are repeated in the room. The paintings are, after all, readable, reduced documents of 'other' places from 'beyond Britain'. Furthermore, the construction of the room can be seen as mediated through the notion of the works as combinable and immutable mobiles; they were being combined to give us a readable story of Britain's international context. From Lawrence Alma-Tadema's Roman bathes to De Louthembourg's Alpine avalanche, Richard Dadd's Egyptian desert scene to Philip Wilson Steer's Boulogne beach they were brought together in order to convey what Britishness means in an international context, and to do so they must be combinable. We might also speculate that if we were to make any sense of the room they must be immutable too. If this combination was to *mean* something from one day to the next within this one room, it had to be stable.

It is useful to look at this from another perspective and to consider an example developed by Latour within the context of astronomy. In considering the inconceivably vast extensions of time and space which this body of knowledge draws upon, he states that 'we, the readers, do not live *inside* space, that has billions of galaxies in it; on the contrary, this space is generated inside the observatory... the firm grasp the astronomer has over it comes from a small *ruler* he firmly places to a *map of the sky*' (Latour 1987: 229-30). The point here is that time and space are not independent, autonomous things within which astronomers

work; they are created *within the networks*. We only achieve these immense galaxies at a distance through combining stable, readable information at a centre of calculation such as an observatory. Similarly we might want to make the same claim for Britishness; we do not know this room as a 'Britishness' within which we live and operate, this is not an international context which we can say 'Britishness' unequivocally constitutes. It has been constructed through the mobiles, and all the different time-spaces that bring us here have been, to a great degree, lost. The solution would appear to be that we must 'force these immense extents of space and time... back inside their networks' (*ibid*). Only through doing this can we hope to reveal the time-spaces which they have produced, and through doing this we can think about 'meaning'. We must consider what meanings are being ascribed and what meanings are being lost in this story of the international context of Britishness.

Do They Mean Me?

In order to reveal these networks, I will now go on to discuss two of the paintings which were displayed in the 'Artists Abroad' room. The intention is to consider the temporal and spatial points and flows behind the individual journeys represented by the flat, readable surfaces that constitute the paintings. In doing so, we can reflect on what is being brought to this centre, if that is what it is, and aim to reveal how meanings function within this particular configuration, or to use Massey's term 'constellation' of works. This also raises questions of choices, and how this particular constellation came to be the one which tells the story of Britain's international context. In addition, and more generally, there is the broad concern of what British art and being a British artist means, or, to rephrase Nicolas Pevsner's question: 'what is this Britishness in British art?' (Pevsner 1955).

The two examples I will use are Lubiana Himid's *Between the Two my Heart is Balanced* (1991) and J.M.W. Turner's *Bridge of Sighs, Ducal Palace and Custom House, Venice: Canaletti painting* (first exhibited 1833). The two works represent an explicit contrast. Himid is a contemporary, black, female artist whose work deals directly with issues of black feminism and diasporic identities. Himid was born in Zanzibar and now lives and works in Britain. This example of her work depicts two black women in a boat at sea with a pile of navigational charts between them. An interesting point of reference here is that this work takes its title directly from a painting by the Victorian artist James Tissot. Tissot's painting depicts a wealthy man, again in a boat, with women seated either side of him. This allusion by Himid is explained in the text which accompanies the picture where the curator makes explicit to the viewer her use of irony and her concern with gender politics.

Unlike the Himid, the Turner is place specific. The title refers to the specific features of the localized landscape. It is a landscape scene which alludes to the style of Canaletto, who is featured in the foreground of the painting and as depicting his own localized landscape in his characteristically detailed and geometric style. These are important considerations in moving towards an opening up of the networks which might be 'in place'. We are presented with an evocation of the Grand Tour and the use of neo-classicism in British artistic taste; a story of journeys to Italy in search of antiquities which were, as the room's text panel stated 'seen as part of Britain's cultural heritage' (Tate 2000). If there is an international context here it is one of artistic appropriation, both on Turner's part and on the part of those on the Grand Tour. This is a story of temporal and spatial movement and connections from ancient Rome to eighteenth century Rome, to nineteenth and now twenty-first-century Britain. But that is all the story says. The network, if that is what we can call it, comes to rest on British art. It can be seen as an almost systematic linking of localized points through time-space, one built on the other. So to what extent can we talk of immutability? In considering this it is important to bear in mind that 'immutable does not mean that information is transferred unproblematically but that some features have to be maintained *in spite* of the mobility provided to them' (Latour 1998: 426). So in this sense immutability becomes a kind of battleground where it is in constant tension with mobility. This tension gives way to what we might think of as gradations of immutability through the maintenance of 'some features'. Talking of gradations of immutability may be useful, if a little demanding, but it is unnecessary here. What we can take from this notion is the idea that through these time-spaces created in the networks, some things can

remain stable and immutable, and to that end we might say that some things carry more meanings than others. The important point though is to assert that it is precisely when things are made stable and immutable that they lose meanings; they cease to relate to all the different time-spaces which constitute them; the connections in-between are lost. It is through this loss of meaning that we can move from Canaletto to Turner to British art without really knowing how we got there. There is a stability gained from the mythology that Turner has come in some sense to *be* British art rather than perhaps *becoming* British art; that is to say that the dynamics of time-space are lost and Turner ceases to operate through them. Turner is rendered into the very walls of the Tate; at the Clore Gallery built to house the Turner Bequest and by means of the annual prize for contemporary art which bears his name. Turner is institutionalized. The Tate becomes a 'black box' (Callon and Latour 1981) for Turner; it extracts him from the networks of his constitution and puts him away safely into a bounded space where questions will not be asked of him.

So what of Himid's work which accompanied Turner's within this room? There are the explicit contrasts which the room drew to our attention: female/ male, black/ white, Zanzabarian/ English. There are two notable aspects here though, which can lead us into a fuller understanding of the issues of immutability. First, there is the contrasting association to place between the two works: one place-bound, the other, Himid's anonymous seascape, place-'unbound'. Secondly, there is Himid's critical feminism as reflected in the appropriated title of the work. In contrast to the kind of cumulative movements through time-space which can be identified in relation to the Turner, Himid hints at a more relational sense of connection. It is through Himid's historical reference that we *gain* meaning. If we were to consider the original work which she refers to, we might conclude that Himid 'brings new meaning' to it. Similarly, it is *through* the original painting that Himid's two women come to be in their boat, or at least for the time *being*. The point here is that meaning is being generated through a realization of the networks; through the re-opening of their time-spaces. These are not unquestioned black boxes, but a story of inter-connections and transformation. Indeed quite poignantly, Oguibe has stated that 'Himid has the "magical" ability to *give life to dormant historical events, objects and figures* (and that it achieves) *a penetrating understanding of historical processes*' (Oguibe 1999 - my emphasis). For Himid then, processes are central. It is not important that we don't know the localized point on the atlas where the boat sails; the local is just a point through which they are passing. In this sense, Himid's notion of 'heritage as a guide for our present and future paths' (*ibid*), alludes precisely to the understanding of place-as-process.

There is perhaps an objection to made about this comparison. Of course Turner's work is more stable, it is older and the artist is renowned. We might even suggest that this stability is inevitable; the price of artistic fame is that he should be framed and bounded and that he should take up residence for the admirations of generations to come and as a cornerstone of British art. But, the point must be reiterated that we can only deal in degrees of immutability and that it can only ever be partial. Turner's work may be more stable at the Tate's centre and this may make it readable and knowable; 'ah yes, now this is British art!' However, 'black boxes never remain fully closed or properly fastened (Callon and Latour 1981:285). The time-spaces that constitute the Turner work are processes every bit as much as those of Himid. However, crucially, they are at different points and more durable at some of these points, the constellation is different to Himid's. Immutability, mobility and therefore identities can only be spoken of in degrees, they can only ever be(coming). This insight gets lost, however, in the example of Turner. Because of this stabilization and the concealment of networks he is cut adrift from constitutive elements which give Turner meanings and these meanings are consequently lost. As a result of this, I would suggest that we are faced with an inverse relationship between mobility and Britishness. If Turner is made stable he has an unproblematic relationship with Britishness, Himid's mobility might be seen to make her 'less British'. If stability means the loss of meaning however, this inverse relationship also applies to meaning and Britishness and we are faced with the consequences of a logic which suggests that the more knowably *British* a work becomes, the less it can be meaningful.

This then would appear to be a significant problem facing Tate Britain; what is it that holds these works together? How can we talk of Britishness in a meaningful way? One approach which might be considered is through thinking about

the role of the national culture... not to express the unitary feelings of *belongingness* (my emphasis) which are always there in the culture, but to represent what are, in fact, real differences as a *unity* (Hall 1995: 184).

This necessitates our moving away from a sense of things being in black boxes that have stopped *becoming* and towards an understanding based around process and transformation which is tied up with difference. The differences can be found in the multiple time-spaces which constitute Himid's work, Turner's work and all the other 'Artists Abroad'. The unity, this thing called Britishness, must then encompass all of these time-spaces; but how do we arrive at a progressive sense of Britishness? It must be truly reflective of a network:

composed of similarities and differences, continuities and new elements, marked by ruptures and always crosscut by *difference*. Its *meanings* (my emphasis) are the result of a constant, ongoing *process* of cultural negotiation which is constantly shifting and changing its contours to accommodate continuing tensions (Hall 1995: 185).

This notion of 'Britishness-as-process' cannot be reconciled with conventional sociological notions of social structure. It negates the notion of fixed forms - like the rhizoidal network it is always in flux, its contours shifting and changing, creating discontinuities, ruptures and *deformations*. This might allow consideration of Turner's journeys and Himid's journeys as representing differences in 'return' and 'departure' characterized by 'flows' or 'circulations' back to, or away from Britishness, whilst we retain the understanding that they are still, in some sense, dynamic. But the problem is not only a matter of our confronting new ways in which we might be able to talk of Britishness. The question remains, how can it be exhibited in a gallery? To draw once again on the astronomical metaphor, British art must be seen as a constellation, as relational and, as Hall puts it, 'crosscutting'. The problem though is that of managing to avoid what Latour, after Kant, calls a 'Copernican revolution' (Latour 1987) where, as the term suggests, the works merely become elements revolving around a centre. This, I would suggest, is the problem which Tate Britain is facing and the 'Artists Abroad' room conveyed this in becoming a centre within which all the elements revolve (almost literally) around its four walls. The visitor had to rely on some sense of *a priori* Britishness against which all works were calibrated and this is what made Himid's work the subversive element which didn't seem to fit comfortably. It is because Himid's work cannot be localized and because it comes from somewhere and goes somewhere else that the centre is not dutifully returned to and we might be left asking, 'is this British art?'

As with those who, in the wake of political devolution (and note that this disavowal of centralized power also represents a crisis of the Copernican revolution) had asked the question, so again it is raised: what use does this thing called Britain have left? The very use of the name Britain in Tate Britain creates a centre and a centre, with its black boxes and its magnetic pull, can only serve to pull out of place (and space) the cross-cuttings and therefore the meanings. There is a need to talk of multiple identities and difference within Britishness and this is what brought Himid and Turner together in this particular room. But it is this 'bringing them together' which causes problems. Mediated at this centre the gesture of multiplicity also brings with it a loss of meaning, and it is this loss which can be traced in some of the early responses to the Tate's 'innovative' approach.

Three days before the opening of Tate Britain an article in *The Independent* unequivocally stated that 'new fetish images of transmutation and multiplicity have replaced the constellated, defiant and immutable Britain of yore' (Quinn, 2000: 21). Similarly, if a little more sanguine, an article in *The Observer* followed a few days later with the opinion that 'by jumbling every era and style, it [Tate Britain] counters the determinism of the former Tate with its linear story of art' (Cumming 2000: 8). These two comments on the Tate's approach to rehanging its collection reflect a sense in the press that a perceived challenge to Britishness was being made on the part of Tate Britain. However, this sentiment was also accompanied by a degree of uncertainty as to how this more dynamic approach to the re-presentation of British art related to understandings of Britishness. In relation to a juxtaposition of William Hogarth and Damien Hirst, it was noted that 'these are not different aspects of the same national identity; they are

examples of art about meat that have been made on different planets' (Quinn 2000: 13). Similarly, having reflected on the inclusion of works by several contemporary British artists, an article in *The Guardian* concluded, 'but none of that stops you feeling this museum is dedicated to the art of another country' (Jones 24/3/00: 5).

It would seem, from these sentiments, that to talk of multiple identities and relationality is one thing, but to talk of Britishness is another. The 'challenging juxtapositions' at the Tate have, so the critics suggest, served to lose meanings with regards to Britishness. Whilst on the other hand the Tate suggests, with justification, that 'ideas of what home and abroad mean have become more complex' (Tate Gallery 2000) there remains a difficulty. I suggest that the difficulty derives from 'complexity by addition'. That is to say, that the pursuit of a new understanding of what constitutes British art is not based on anything new, but on addition to the existing paradigm. Thus, new non-linear understandings are laid on top of established chronological ones. Whilst there is an invitation to establish new connections between chronologically non-linear works; there is no fundamental questioning of what Britishness might now mean and whether it is still a useful category. Therefore, I would suggest, whilst the choice of new juxtapositions does provide challenges, there is a struggle to retain meaning so long as the juxtapositions are refracted through an unreconstructed way of thinking about Britishness. We are faced with a problem of square pegs and round holes.

I have problematized the question of how Britishness might be talked about and, more specifically, of how it might be exhibited. In the next section holding the example of the Copernican Revolution in mind, I show how we can move the discussion of Britishness forward.

What Goes Around, Comes Around

Another doubting voice came from the *Art Review*. Its editorial of May 2000 provided a critique of the gallery's non-chronological, thematic approach. Asserting that the Tate was engaged in 'Blairite wishful thinking' (Lee 2000: 1), and laced with sarcasm, the editorial characterized the Tate's position as one in which 'convention is bad. Change especially for its own sake, is good' (*ibid*). The general tone of the critique was based on the perception of an unresolvable tension between the 'proper' way to exhibit the likes of Hogarth and the 'inappropriateness' of such a form of 'progressive' curatorial practice. Although often couched in what might be described as decidedly reactionary terms, as exemplified in the horror expressed towards the false opposition of 'political correctness', one of the more lucid criticisms is of particular interest when considered in terms of Latour's approach to the study of network relations. The criticisms relate to the editor's perception of the gallery as a necessary centre; a place for ordering the flows of time-space through which a history of British art might be constructed:

The 'ism' art of the 20th century was made for different reasons and often with different ambitions to virtually all of the art done before it. These altered perceptions make transhistorical comparisons pointless and help explain the contrasts in quality so disadvantageous to recent works (Lee 2000:1)

For Lee then, the course of British art is very much that of a progressive linear formation. Each 'ism' has its own 'reasons' and 'conditions' and, we might suggest, meanings. This then renders each 'ism' bounded, there are no rhizoidal networks in place within this understanding; there are merely points of entry and exit, and the prefix 'trans' is seen as anathema to the word 'historical'. Too Lee's mind, the Tate is revealing too many networks, or perhaps making networks where there are in fact none. This may well be a justified position to take, and it is certainly one that is echoed in other journalistic accounts of the Tate's approach. Indeed, there does seem to be a strong case for suggesting that the Tate has served to confuse and disorientate an account of British art. However, perhaps this is not so much to do with the idea of opening up the 'idea' of relationality; clarifying connections and establishing networks between paintings. Perhaps, I would suggest, the disorientation comes not from too much unboundedness, but from too little. Whilst inter-relations might have been reconsidered, the centre, as I have suggested, is left intact; it has not enjoyed the same level of reflexive scrutiny. The reason for the importance of such scrutiny (and I must emphasize this crucial point) is

because it is 'not simply the centre that [is] important but its relation to the network' (Ogborn 1998:184). Or to make the point more directly, the centre is *dependent* on the network.

It is not simply a case of reconstructing the centre that is British art in order for it to give the networks meaning. In addition to this reconstruction there needs to be a realization that Britishness must not be reconstructed as a *centre* but as a point within the networks. Through doing this it might be possible to consider that relationality doesn't just stop when it reaches the boundaries of the centre, but that this relationality permeates and indeed constitutes the centre itself. It is through achieving this that we might be able to assert that 'viewed as an artistic phenomenon, New British Art was (or is) neither new nor British' (Mercer 1999: 51); these things are not merely the creation of the centre of Britishness but time-spaces which are near and far, present and past. In recalling Latour's story of astronomers making sense of distant stars and galaxies, it is possible to conceive of Britishness as the charts and rulers that made all these networks readable at the centre. It is these things which *appear* to give meaning to the networks, but crucially they achieve the opposite; we lose the sense in which the centre is dependent; if shifts and changes occur 'out there' in the things which are going on in the networks, the centre, in its state of fixity, becomes meaningless. We might still want to talk of centres, but they can only retain meaning if it is realized that the centre does not hold power; it doesn't dictate the form of the networks. It is the networks which construct the centres and any efforts to stabilize the networks at the centre can, and will, be reciprocated by destabilization of the centre by the networks.

So, for all this paradigmatic re-evaluation, how might this story be told in the gallery space? The thematic approach adopted in the 'Artists Abroad' room did manage to convey a sense in which Britishness is not just something that is played out within the nation state. Furthermore it also established that different time-spaces matter when we are thinking about Britishness. Perhaps, however, the most important omission is the sense of this Britishness as a process; as something which is not stable and collected but as something which is *becoming*. There are, perhaps, considerations to be made of how we might identify routes that go back out from the centre and of how we might capture a true sense of a flow *through* the centre. This might also facilitate a way of viewing Britishness as something which has been constructed through many time-spaces and is continuing to be constructed through others, so that the viewer might have stood in the 'Artists Abroad' room and, in a positive sense, asked 'what is becoming of British art?'

Conclusions

Working through time-space and thinking about place, in this case Britain, in a progressive manner can only serve to open up understandings of how place-bound identities are constructed. It has been my aim to utilize this approach to set up ways of thinking about how networks might provide a tangible way of imagining this temporal spatiality. The Tate Gallery has attempted to challenge the ways in which we think about Britishness. In so doing it has also highlighted tensions and complexities around the relationship between notions such as 'Britishness' and an 'international context'. The problem facing the Tate with its progressive gesture is that once it is embarked upon, if it is to remain a coherent reappraisal, reflexivity demands that the quest for a more nuanced, complex understanding goes to the very centre. The criticisms of the Tate's approach, though not explicit with regards to this particular tension, seem to endorse the notion that, at present, the Tate is caught 'between camps'. I have suggested ways in which the networks which constituted works in the 'Artists Abroad' room might have been traced. I have also offered arguments as to how a notion of relationality might have been considered in the works through thinking about these various stories as 'becoming'. At present, criticisms about incoherence or the calls for a return to established chronologies persist whilst the Tate continues to address the tensions created by the drawing of boundaries.

Note

¹ This was the title that was originally proposed for the Gallery.

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