

## **Tate Encounters: Methodological Uncertainties in Research Design**

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This paper attempts to 'fill in' the space between the project of the original AHRC Migration, Diaspora and Identities application, written in May 2006 and the project now before us. In essence these two things are still one and the same thing; we still want to do the project; the institutional parameters of our approach are in place and our questions haven't changed. However things have become more 'clarified' in the space of the last six months working as a team and with the appointment of the Research Assistants. The avowed aim of this paper, after getting through many theoretical preambles, is to define a number of practical starting points.

### **Background to the application and its aftermath.**

The Tate Encounters application was successful more for its collaborative links and public profile than it was for its theoretical rigour and methodological precision, indeed the former elements were singled out in the feedback by the AHRC panel as strengths, although with respect to the later aspects, it was also noted that the project did have some strong research questions. For a number of reasons, at the time, the application was; cautious about theory; asserted the need to build an empirical body of evidence and claimed, (without much hard evidence) to be methodologically innovative. Rereading the application now it gives mixed messages about the intellectual location of the project. The application adopted, again for known reasons, a cross disciplinary approach, which with hindsight could be considered as a kind of 'hedging of bets' in an intellectual landscape and cultural context full of shifts and uncertainties. Since co-writing the application I have been reading widely around methodology in the fields of educational and organisational studies as well as in ethnographic fieldwork. It has been a kind of 'crash course' in what has happened in social science epistemology from the Post-Modern moment. At one level I have been surprised at how little has happened, the perennial problem of social science saying anything with authority about reality is writ even larger, but clearly in the detail of argument a lot has changed. When I reflect upon the shifting landscape of thought in sociology I can recognise that it has changed in parallel to debates in Cultural Studies that have carried both disciplines along on the great tide of Structuralism to Post-structuralism and beyond to the crashing shores of Postmodernism. So it really should not have surprised me at all that this current sense of uncertainty about the intellectual terms and professional conditions of our interest, here defined as museological cultural practices, is paralleled by a corresponding set of worries within social science research culture about the relationship between methods of acquiring empirical evidence and the theoretical paradigms upon which they are constructed and upon which interpretation is founded. In many senses it all boils down to an anxiety about having the confidence, under the banner of academic research in social science, to generalise from specific experience. One very powerful affect of these areas of 'uncertainty' explicit and implicit in the Tate Encounters AHRC application can be recognised in the ambiguity of language/voice in signifying ethnicity and race within the academic discourses of migration and diaspora studies. Uncertainty in research is, of course, no bad thing, in that it accords with current, 'Postmodern' approaches to methodology and simply becomes 'built-in' in to the ongoing methodological process. From, the few commentators I have read on this subject so far, ( Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000,

Escobar, 2004. Stronach 2004.), the fluidity of the current state of play in both theory and methodology brings with it a greater sense of intellectual openness and playfulness. This stands as an ironic contrast to the world of arts organisations and arts organisational worlds, in which cultural policy, as we noted in our application, drives a craving for simplified quantitative based reporting. It would appear that the world of managing creative practices, when it turns to research wants only hard-edged certainties. This does raise the question of whether in building our research programme we should recognise at the outset that some interests may be served by being able to present 'a hard case scenario' based upon some form of data collection and analysis, or to ignore this dimension and recognise that the research models we are likely to build will yield a long set of answers in the form of a textual 'poetics'.

At the time of submission I was convinced that the 'sticky tape' holding together so many pieces of an unresolved research methodology as well as this irresolution of language would be very visible and possibly be the cause of a rejection. In the event my intellectual insecurities proved wrong and Mike Phillip's optimistic view that the project played into rather than against a shifting cultural context proved correct.

Now, with the first flush of our funding success long behind us, we confront again the relative strengths and weaknesses inherent in our project. On the positive side the commitment to collaboration, to practice-based approaches and the resolutely cross-disciplinary nature of our enterprise remain real strengths. As we said in our original formulation this project was not simply to be a piece of highly bounded academic research, nor would it feed the current desire for quantitative output, but rather we wished to locate the project as an active intervention that would engage our participants and their experience of Tate Britain, meeting them half way was the meaning of our earlier stabs at a title for the project, 'Tate Encounters: 50:50'. As a consequence of wanting the research design to be 'inclusive', it followed that we would not want to construct a hard edge between subject and object, nor mimic methodologies that objectified participants as the subject of our scientific gaze. (even if we thought that possible). Our notion of collaboration extended to include the participants in framing evaluations, shaping outcomes and defining purposes and contexts of the research. This led naturally on to the claim that we would use innovative practice-based methods of data building with our participants focused around the uses of new-technologies and online media. All of the above can be characterised as a highly 'reflexive' approach, which now needs to be given much more specificity in method building and in corresponding modes of analysis, but more of that later.

The reflexive note struck in the approach to collaboration resonates equally with what was said about the necessary cross-disciplinary currents that lay behind the research questions. The initial literature review recognised the paucity of the evidential basis used in support of cultural diversity policies, one the one hand, and the absence of any empirically based studies of the museum spectator on the other. In addition we had noted that the informed critical, cultural analysis of museum artefacts was firmly rooted in theoretist models, (most recently post-colonial studies), which addressed a minority academy audience. The strength of our cross disciplinary approach, so we said, would be that we could combine a 'bottom-up' concept building from an evidential base, with a 'pick and mix' conceptual framework that identified the framing discourses of; space and place and the contested nature of visual culture. We said that there would be no single point of theoretical attention to the research objectives, but rather a constellation of approaches. Amongst those perspectives we cited were;

*For example: the importance of networks and performative acts,  
(Latour 1999); the uncoupling of fixed boundaries of the experience of*

*time and space (Massey 1993); the structuring of the gaze (Mirzoeff, Rogoff) and how cultural identity is signified, (Hall 1995, Gilroy 1997). The application of such theoretical writing to studies of museums has opened up new avenues for thinking about the structural marginalization or exclusion of migrant and diasporic experience. (AHRC Supporting Statement 2006)*

All of the above represent continuing strengths of the approach, but it should also be considered, if only as another test, how these very strengths might also be weaknesses when it comes to the specificity of the research design and programme. The stress on the collaborative and participatory nature of the research creates the potential problem of not being able to maintain a clear separation between the research and the close engagement we want with Tate educational practice and internal policy debate. As we go around building up an 'empirical' picture of some kind, through participants own diaries, narratives, image and texts, together with interviews, field notes, photography and film, we could be in danger of a kind of empiricist naturalism, a kind of micro-positivism. Alvesson and Skoldberg (p48-49) summarise the dangers of data-orientated methods of grounded theory, ethnomethodology and inductive ethnology as, "missing the main part of the interpretative problematic, so that the data appear as more or less unmediated, pure, and the research process is endowed with a naïve character of gathering and threshing empirical material." Equally they champion the historic gains of these movements in emphasising the importance of qualitative methods in the face of the overwhelming positivist tradition of quantitative research. The problem it would seem, can not be wished away by a new embrace of abstract theory building, nor, by the side-step into discourse analysis which treats the process of gathering 'evidence' and 'noting events', i.e. data collection, as an exclusively textual process. Interestingly, Alvesson and Skoldberg and others suggest that reflexivity, whilst acknowledged as a convoluted process may well be the best guard against positivism or postmodern poetics, providing as it does methodological processes which connect data to wider (cultural) analysis. But more of that later.

If our first problem is that of constructing a sustainable qualitative research method, then the cross-disciplinary currents of cultural policy debate, visual culture, art history, museology and art education is our second. Here we are presented with the problem of intellectual coherence and methodological context. How in detail are we going to subject our empirical evidence to analysis, what mobilising concepts are we intending to employ to make sense of ourselves and our participants as any or all of the following; 'constructed subjects' or 'social actors', undertaking 'performative acts' within a network and how are we going to understand the 'differences' in our 'life worlds' or our 'lived experience'? What practical utility do these concepts offer us in designing our data methods and what theoretical paradigms do they implicitly suggest? We can recognise, dimly at present, that the theoretical concepts we noted in our application as well as those just noted above, belong, in differing ways, to larger theoretical enterprises, paradigms, tropes and discourses. What is clear to me is that as investigators we do not start our research from a shared and coherent position within theory, but rather are differentially positioned by theory. There is, then a job to be done in articulating, if not a coherent theoretical position, at least a theoretical map, guide, or less ambitiously, some of the theoretical coordinates along which this project lies.

In our application we touched upon the possibility of using Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a model to explain the relationship between people and objects which 'perform within a system' Latour. (1992). We also mentioned the distinction between

place and space/time as a way of exploring social behaviours and the cultural valuation of architectures and objects with reference to the work of Massey (1999). We made mention of the structuring of the gaze and Rogoff's (2000) notion of viewing as involving 'permission' and we also made mention in passing of Hall's (1997) model of the cultural signification of identity. These, I think, all have relevance but they don't stack up very clearly. They are elements within larger discourses which have other objects in mind and their practical utility to our starting point is questionable. So where do we go from here?

### **Revising perspectives and practices**

In my own, rushed, attempt here to survey the theoretical landscape, I have been trying to find a tall enough metaphorical tree from which I can survey the forest on the metaphorical 'plane or immanence'. I mostly jest in reference to Deleuze & Guattari, (1987), however, this reference points towards a recognition of the problem of the project not being able to live with theory, but equally not being able to live without it. And so I try here, briefly, to reread our application from the position of its theoretical co-ordinates. One of our starting points was, rightfully, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1991), which forms a position along one of our hypothetical co-ordinates (let's call it provisionally, the overarching theory co-ordinate). Bourdieu insists upon the social science project needing to forge an epistemological break with notions and frames of reference of the everyday world in order to escape empiricist reductivism. His project was to fathom the 'deep structures' [of regulation and reproduction], which, he believed could only be done by creating theoretically based models and social concepts. We started with one of Bourdieu's powerful and enduring concepts, that of cultural capital, as many others in the museological field have done, as a possible centre for understanding how participants could be theorised in relationship to Tate. However, in the process of writing the application, Bourdieu was relegated to an outer edge of our project, because, I think, we considered that the concept of cultural capital was itself now part of the problem we were trying to look at. Cultural capital had become an incorporated explanation for forms of class based cultural exclusion, or, put another way a naturalisation of barriers to access. In questioning the efficacy of one of Bourdieu's central concepts, we might ask if the project is putting to one side the issue of the theoretical elaboration of how culture, the art world, or indeed Tate Britain form part of a structural reproduction of power along the lines of domination and subordination. In what reads like a the somewhat moribund sociology of art (Inglis and Hughson. 2005), we can see the work that flowed from Bourdieu, which attempted to make the production of art serve socially reproductive purposes, diminished in the face of a postmodern engagement with the autonomous zone of freedom represented by creativity. But there are other large theoretical strands in the overarching-theory co-ordinate whose explanatory agency along the axis of power and reproduction can still make a claim on our project. Foucault's (1980) micro-physics of power- knowledge, Derrida's (1978) critique of binary opposites and his discussion of difference. Lyotard's (1984) emphasis upon the value of bricolage and narrative, even Baudrillard's (1985) collapse of the sign and signifier could all meaningfully frame the character of the contemporary image world. And somewhere out on the horizon, possibly at a tangent I can still dimly see de Certeau's (1988) 'practices of everyday life', with the mobilisation of the concepts of tactic and strategy as modes through which individuals make meaning.

### **The Collection and Visual Culture**

In our questioning of Bourdieu and the initial 'pick and mix' approach to theory building, it has struck me that we are in danger of losing sight of a larger framework of our interest, which does have a theoretical firmament. In conceptualising a Tate Encounter, we essentially imagined a meeting of; the consecrated and the profane;

high and low, elite and popular. Of course we did not wish to shore up or reproduce a binary epistemology, but we nevertheless acknowledged and conceptualised the separate spheres of visual culture as it is met and lived in the everyday lives of students and their families on the one hand and the selective tradition of visualising life which is represented by the museum and its collection on the other. I think we should bear in mind that the encounter is not limited to a set of individuals and a building containing a certain range of artefacts, this is merely the research context. The encounter is also between competing and conflicting ideas and notions of culture itself and the relationship culture has to nation and identity. We could therefore be as interested in what is absent from the collection as we are in what is present in the everyday significant material cultural practices of our participants. In some ways we enter Derrida's playful binary arena of presence and absence. i.e. we enter the terrain of deconstruction. Another binary is present in the way in which we set the material artefacts and the physical space of the museum against the responses of the students in a virtual space and in a digital form. This also reproduces another kind of presence and absence both of different spaces and different registers of information. In the largest sense the collection itself is an absence, rather than a simple empirical fact. If we revisit the research questions we will see that they very clearly locate the problematic of the project in culture and in politics as well as being located with a particularised political culture.

### ***Identities, museums education and visual Languages***

- a) *How does identity inform the position of the viewer and the conventions employed in the act of looking?*
- b) *How do traditions of visual culture of migrant groups enmesh with the dominant position of the individual spectator?*
- c) *How does the subjective apprehension of space and the emotional relation to place and time inform the shaping of the museum experience?*

### ***Concepts of Britishness, representation and identities***

- d) *In what ways does the Tate collection constitute a discourse of Britishness and how does the exhibition and display programme articulate a visual imperialism in which cultural difference(s) have to be read 'against the grain'?*
- e) *How does British visual culture and visual language currently frame, shape and represent diasporic/migrant experience and identity?*
- f) *How are notions of cultural hybridity constructed in and by visual culture as experienced within domestic family settings?*

### ***Values, traditions and museums***

- g) *In what ways will the cultural encounter between the institutional and work practices of Tate and the diasporic/migrant families be experienced in relationship to their everyday life and culture?*
- h) *How is Tate configured, or ranked within particularised sets of 'cultural capital' by diasporic family members?*
- i) *Are there generational and gendered lines of difference in the modes and tactics of interaction with the Tate and its activities and if so what are they?*

### ***Museums, Cultural diversity policies and practices***

- j) *What factors inhibit migrant and diasporic audiences from forming meaningful and ongoing relationships with the Tate.*
- k) *What factors enable meaningful and ongoing relationships and can conclusions for national museums be drawn from this?*

In a matter of a few months since the application it is possible to feel that our questions are relatively 'closed' and reveal much about the ways we positioned the project within the institutional politics of the AHRC project and Tate. We can, however, differentiate our questions along the axis of the phenomenological realm of 'direct experience', or that of the discursive and rhetorical. On this basis most of the

questions are deeply meta-theoretical and therefore will take a high degree of iterative interpretation from the phenomenological to reach. This again is where a reflexive methodology may well come to our aid.

***Reflexivity – a leap of faith***

One strategy for bridging the schism between the desire for an unmediated reality and the recognition of the constructedness of the subject-object relationship manifests itself in an interest in reflexivity, which more than anything asserts that both researcher and object are involved in a common context and are thus context-dependent. The development of reflexive methodologies has led Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) to argue that research should include;

*Less concentration on the collection and processing of data and more on interpretation and reflection in relation not only to the object of study but also to the researchers themselves and their political, ideological metatheoretical and linguistic contexts appears to be a reasonable and fruitful path for qualitative research to follow. p241*

They go on to elaborate four stages in a reflexive methodology which is useful because of the relatively fluid relation between and across levels. It is a structure for understanding interpretation as a process of connecting theory, creativity and intuition. I think it has something to offer us and reflects the fact that we have a number of projects within a project and a range of voices within the research group.

**Table7.2 Levels of interpretation (Alvesson Page250)**

<i>Aspect/level</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Interaction with empirical material	Accounts in interviews, observations of situations and other empirical materials
Interpretation	Underlying meanings
Critical interpretation	Ideology, power, social reproduction
Reflection on text production and language use	Own text, claims to authority, selectivity of the voices represented in the text.

***Revisiting the programme - constructing the empirical –a first level of interpretation.***

In the application we proposed two parallel methods of establishing an evidence base. The first involving the participant groups, the families and a group of Tate employees, in documenting their responses to the ‘Tate Encounter’ through digital video, photography, audio and text, using a methodology that focuses on observing and uncovering meaning. We anticipated that emergent, intensive qualitative and ethnographic methods will generate in-depth process information about the understandings and experiences that are central to the research concern in order to generate emergent perspectives and meanings.

We went on to be quite detailed about an ethnographic method in saying;

*The ethnographic approach will entail ‘thick description’ that makes explicit detailed patterns and discourses of cultural relationships in context through analysis and interpretation. The starting point for in-depth interviews is participant observation as the families engage with the Tate collection and programme, and Tate employees engage with them, and of families’ own everyday cultural practices. The exact nature of the interviews, and the techniques used, will emerge through the ethnographic*

*study. Researchers' detailed field notes will thus be one source of information. Analysis of the ethnographic material will employ an inductive approach, coding and interpreting data to formulate ideas about meanings, and returning to the data to test and develop the ideas in an ongoing process. This will produce the localised theoretical matrix referred to earlier, which will then be related to wider theoretical perspectives of concern. Each family will form a case study for data collection. The material will be organised as family case studies, but cross referenced by membership of particularised diasporic group, generation and gender.*

Much of this approach came from discussions I had with Professor Janet Holland, Co-director of the Families and Social Capital Research Group at LSBU and I think that it stands the test of time and bears out much of what I have been reading since, although I am less sure of 'thick description' as a method than I was. What is clear is that we need to reformulate the research sample of participation of 50 students and their families. The proposal below is that we engage with fifty/sixty students over the active research period, but in differential ways and with fewer families involved. The reason for this reformulation is a recognition that to engage in the depth we first envisaged with this size of sample is beyond the resources of the project and possibly now methodologically unnecessary. What we are now looking for is a variety of ways of engaging our participants in the encounter and a variety of ways of the researchers engaging with them. The fifty families now seems too uniform and something of a media construction (thinking back to Mike Phillips conception of a TV reality game show played out at the Tate). It is more reasonable to think of this variety as constituting a range from; close work with individual students and their families; smaller sub-groups, possibly student friendships of two or three students; a sub-section of a year group of those who have expressed a broad interest in participation; and possibly structured events involving larger year groups, for example staging an event within a teaching programme at the start of next term (see research timeline). Each of these engagements with the LSBU student body can then be organised to capture/construct kinds of data collection, which can be plotted around our research questions. In contrast to the need for a more differentiated view of the LSBU students responses, I think we should treat the Tate Britain employees group in a more formal research mode than we originally considered, thinking carefully about who we want to include and the best ways of doing it with them. The reason for this is to ensure a clear distinction between the cultural-political interests the project has already engendered within the institution and the integrity of the research.

## **PART TWO - Research Design.**

The following draft research design was very much aided by a fruitful day I spent discussing the project with Professor Christopher Miller at the University of the West of England. Chris has considerable experience of ESRC funded research projects and is currently working with others to design a project aimed at understanding the changing experience of ethical values in the public sector. From the outset of our conversation Chris quickly and enthusiastically applied himself to a whole host of practical considerations related to our questions and the research context. For my part I was grateful for his detailed engagement, which in general confirmed many aspects of our 'eclectic' approach and for his part he was excited by what he saw as the innovative approaches to working with participants and our concern for widely disseminating our research outputs.

There were two strands to our discussion, which mirrored the concerns of the first part of this paper, firstly the issue of how to ensure that reflexivity is a central and

structured part of the research process and secondly, how to best answer our questions in working with the participants. By the end of my time with Chris, I had got what I thought was a framework which captured all the dimensions and strands of our project and produced a work plan that was manageable within the resource constraints

**A Provisional Mapping Framework.** This framework identifies both the range of people/groups we want to engage with as well as the depth of focus in each case. It is based upon building a number of pictures of what is going on already in parallel with constructing our main research project with LSBU students. It builds upon the methodologies indicated in the original application and assumes that our spread of research questions have guided our choice of who we need to speak to. However, a further attempt should be made to relate the questions specifically to the mapping in order that we can feel confident that our spread of participation will cover the range of things we are interested in.



**Fig i. Data gathering, the spread of participation**

<b>Providers:</b>	Tate Employees	Official cultural policy	Black cultural opinion shapers
<b>Users</b>	Tate Visitors	Art Students	Non Users: Local GCSE School Group
<i>Building picture of existing views/practices through open-ended interviews from April 07</i>			
<b>LSBU</b>	Afro-Caribbean/African/	Asian/Chinese/white/other	(50 or 60 students in total)
<i>Divided into focus groups who attend dedicated Tate sessions, from Sept 07</i>			
<b>LSBU 12 students and their families</b>			
<i>Drawn from the larger body of students and involving detailed biographical narrative of three</i>			
<i>Generation from Oct 07</i>			

Strand 1. Providers and Users (cultural policy strand)

Cultural policies of diversity and inclusion most obviously relate to ‘the providers’ of the museum experience, ranging from policy definers, public funding bodies to the experts in the museum sector. But as we know, we can not take providers as a uniform social or institutional group and we have already adopted a model of the public cultural sector as a ‘contested space’ or more awkwardly an ‘ideologically imbricated realm’. Because it is a contested space, we could, initially treat providers [of culturally differentiated practices] as consisting of a) a group of Tate Employees and b) a network of black cultural practitioners who engage with cultural policy. This would fit well with the work and positions of Mike Phillips and Victoria Walsh respectively, which we could ‘track’ or ‘build out from’ in our mapping exercise. The strand of our interest in cultural policy would also include self-selecting Tate users as potentially a ‘control’ group which could be constituted as UK nationals of certain age/ethnicity coming through the door, and/or a group of Wimbledon students.

Strand 2/3. – LSBU Tate Encounters – (visual culture and museum practices)

We have a current Level One group of approximately fifteen students who expressed an interest in participation from the Tate Visit last year. This group could form a pilot group for the Summer term, working with David Dibosa /Isabel Shaw /Sarah Thomas /Morten Norybe Halvorsen in the galleries on a number of timetabled visits

In October 2007 we recruit a new Level One group of approximately fifty students to form the focus groups, again inviting them to the Tate for an initial visit. We will need to put in place an arrangement to ensure students from the Health faculty attend. This new level one group are split into various different focus groups along the lines of gender and ethnicity for different sessions.

We recruit the twelve families group of students from the current pilot group and next year’s new Level One group. The breakdown of the 12 Level One students would be as follows; 6 Afro-Caribbean and 6 Asian sub-continent, 6 female and 6 male, half from Arts and Human Sciences Faculty and half from Health Faculty. They would be broadly of the same age/generation and drawn from students who are the first in three generations to enter higher education. Family members would be interviewed over the project period. As many family members as possible would be invited to the Tate for two dedicated events, one in November 2007, the other in July 2008.

If we accept the framework proposed above we can now ask a more practical question of what kinds of data are we going to construct/capture across this range? What are the events or incidents we are observing, or what is the data we are building.

**Fig.ii. mapping framework**

<p><u>Mapping Level</u> – from April 07</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Literature review (divided into sections along the lines of the project strands, plus comparative methodologies.) including a brief survey of other relevant museum/gallery experience</li> <li>2. Brief for and constitution of Tate employees group</li> <li>3. Interviews/discussions with a network of ethnic minority cultural commentators</li> <li>4. Plan for and action on mapping visitor spatial/self experience</li> <li>5. Pilot participant group visits and website development</li> </ol> <p><u>Mining Level</u> – from Oct 08</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formation of focus groups from new level one students</li> <li>2. Selection of and work with twelve(approx) families</li> </ol>
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Such ‘mapping and mining’ (to be spatial and geographical again), would give us a number of data levels which would form the overall archive of evidence over the active course of the project. Obviously we will need to review the volume of work as and when we consider we need more or less evidence in a particular area.

**Fig iii. – Data production levels**

Data 1.	LSBU participant website diaries	Quantity	60
Data 2.	Producers/users interviews		24
Data 3.	Focus group visits recordings and field notes		12
Data 4.	Family interviews		60
Data 5.	Reflexive texts		n/a
Data 6.	Website research journal		ongoing
Data 7.	Exhibition		
Data 8.	Potential for film		

The first level of data of the student supported website will need a lot of thinking through, in what instructions we do or don’t give them and in how they are supported. But it is otherwise relatively clear that participants will document their responses to a number of organized events through digital video, photography, audio and text and that this will take the form of a project diary, in which they will be able to include digital reproductions of works or parts of works, accompanying notes, interviews, written and spoken comment and reflection on directed and undirected aspects of the Tate programme and collection.

*The family participants will also be directed to collect supporting material consisting of selective documentation of their everyday material cultural practices, which will also be uploaded to the website which will act as a kind of digital ‘gallery’. The website will have technical facilitation for the duration of the project. The Digital Research Gallery at LSBU will be used during the project to create dedicated screen based exhibitions.*

*The methodology for the participants’ documentation will be developed from emergent practice-based research models. In particular, that of a reflexive narrative.*

*Research subjects will be supported in the development of their own 'research' investigations by an enabling programme developed by the Interpretation and Education Department at Tate Britain. The family documentation will be taken as an evidential base for evaluation and analytic commentary in relation to questions of narratives of nation and identity and the congruence/dissonance between the values and meanings drawn from the Tate collection and the preferential personal choices within the broader visual culture. (AHRC Tate Encounters application)*

The second level of data will come from recorded interviews with Producers and Users groups. These interviews should be focused upon work, policy and visitor experience respectively and be semi-structured

The third level of data will be produced from the focus group visits as fieldnotes/recordings. We also need to think of a way of capturing the discussion as well as individual participants responses in the galleries.

The fourth level of data will be the open ended, biographical and narrative based family members interviews. The design of the families research also needs careful thinking about. It could involve anywhere between two and six individual interviews per family which would produce approximately 50 recorded interviews, which may also need transcribing. This is probably the biggest task of the project. *The process of building the evidential base will involve, observations, questioning and conversations with family members at Tate Britain and in their homes, co-ordinated within the LSBU families research group and will consist of the coding of extended note taking from focus groups, structured and unstructured interviews. Each family will form a case study for data collection. The material will be organised as family case studies, but cross referenced by membership of particularised diasporic group, generation and gender. (AHRC Tate Encounters application)*

The fifth level of data will be a product of the research process in the form of reflexive texts and allied to this the ongoing editing of the research web Journal.

Although the exhibition is defined as a dissemination outcome, it is also a data collection in its own right and may well include material from other data sources.

We should also bear in mind the potential for video-recording across all forms of data gathering and give serious consideration to how we might include a structured ethnographic approach to film making.

At this stage we should be aware that the above mapping and framing exercise needs to be translated into a range of practical strategies for engaging participants and for sustaining their interest. Each frame of the map will need to be developed into a set of practical engagements with the building, selected parts of the programme and sections of the collection and individual works. In addition we should at least model what potential kinds of visual, material cultural practices we might encounter in the wider everyday life of our participants and their families and how we think this might be recorded/represented.

### **Reflexivity as part of the research process and data levels**

One very practical way of thinking about how reflexivity can be engaged in our project is as an ongoing conversation about the project itself and our own positions and experiences within it. Such a conversation will, in any event, take place in many informal ways, but for it to be regarded as part of the research process, for it to become reflexive, it will need to be formalized as a process of; a) reflection on

actions and experiences, b) recognizing and noting how such reflections change understandings of the practical research and c) making changes to the research programme in the light of such reflections and noted these again. Such a process needs to capture three timeframes;

#### **Fig iv. Reflexive levels**

- i) the past, in what we might call with Foucault, the genealogy of the project formation and discourse;
- ii) the present, in which we enact the micro-physics of the project in our various roles and in which we engage with participants and each others;
- and,
- iii) the future in which we recognize the always changing research context and relate understandings of that context to the ongoing project decision making process.

Such a process may be open to the criticism of being too introspective a method, which focuses upon internal processes at the expense of the external world. Those who argue for reflexive methodologies would counter such a criticism by pointing out that such an approach avoids the potentially positivist binary of subject and object and instead ensures that there is an identified process by which findings and analysis can be related and understood by the research community and wider readers. Reflexivity is proposed here as a method for revealing the 'dynamic architecture' of; research aims; the methods adopted to achieve them and the political and ideological context of the research.

#### **Reflexive starting points.**

##### **The past - A Short History of the Project**

At the research investigators meeting of the 26<sup>th</sup> March we discussed our interest in starting to reflect upon the archaeology of the project and how this might be done. There was a shared recognition that the appointment of Mike Phillips as the first Cross Cultural Curator at Tate marked one co-ordinate in the shaping of the project and that some form of reflection upon and analysis of that process needed to be undertaken. Mike undertook to write about his experience of Tate and to interview David, Victoria and myself as part of that process. Some edited version of this material would be incorporated into the project website.

##### **The present - The Induction Week.**

With respect to a reflexive method, we should start as we mean to go and the Induction week presents us with a perfect opportunity to begin our conversation. In fact the induction programme is essentially one continuous conversation designed to take us from the application to the research design. So, we might start with speculating on the research questions, thinking about why were they asked and as an exercise, giving the answers that might guess at or anticipate. In doing this we will acknowledge the differences between us, or put another way articulate what we each bring to the questions, which may give us further insights into our aims. We could define this as a process of 'building pictures' of our starting points, from what we each bring to the table, the differences between us, possibly informed/articulated by age, gender, ethnicity and class, through to a recognition of what is absent. Not only should this conversation be acknowledged as the start of one important dimension of the research process, but also it should help us begin to map the dimensions of our topic and develop the programmatic for the practical fieldwork as well as further work on our epistemologies.

### **The future – dialogues within the research context**

In the dynamic of our project it is likely that we will also need to be 'opportunistic' at points where we can see the advantage of additional connections to the research framework and/ or new networked opportunities. In doing this we need to be able to judge how such changes work in relationship to the research questions and overall aims. This is where some level of metatheoretical reflexivity will need to be employed.

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