

The Tate Encounters Research Process: A Research Participant's View

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Introduction

The notion of submitting a few retrospective thoughts to the Tate Encounters project, subsequent to my two-ish year involvement as a studied participant, first popped into my consciousness on the back of reading *Situated Method* (2008) written by Isabel Shaw, one of the project team researchers. Though fascinated by all variety of matters raised, my attention lingered over one simple statement that expressed the paper's intention to handle 'the process by which research findings are found and represented' (Shaw, 2008: 1). Isabel's text focuses exclusively on how Tate Encounters went about studying Tate Britain as an organisation; its day-to-day functioning and the way in which the nature of relationships within the institution and its practices may weave specific meanings and values into the exhibitions assembled by the museum. Interested as I was to learn how Tate Britain was approached by the research team in exact terms, more than anything the paper left me wanting to read a comparable article which would systematically treat and reveal the method by which 'findings are found and represented' in relation to the Tate Encounters' other 'leg' of investigation; that concerned with how visitors (as in the research participants) experience the Tate Britain – unsurprisingly, the part of the research that I was involved with.

Much to my regret, what is presented here is nothing close to the essay I wanted (and want) to read, although, in fairness, wasn't so much designed to be. Yet, with the questions that underlie that notional essay firmly in mind, what is offered is a description as a participant co-researcher of going through the Tate Encounters process: touching on my immediate reaction to the project as it was presented to me, my motivations for becoming involved, my activity within the project, the work produced as a result and the thought processes behind it and the factors that influenced it. A little space will then be spent considering the value of unravelling the process of how participants' work may be read by the research team.

While I am primarily concerned with the method of meaning fabrication and what was/is happening towards and at the end of the research period, first and foremost this writing strives to answer a brief set by Tate Encounters which for its own reasons wanted me to consider the research's initial stages. It posed the questions: 'how did [I] understand/perceive the opportunity to participate? How did/do [I] understand diversity in the student population of LSBU? Why did [I] apply to LSBU and was the question of diversity of the student population an active factor in [my] choice? Why did [I] take up

the offer of participation in the project? How did [I] perceive those around [me] taking up/not taking up the offer of participation in the project?’

Given the reflexive nature of the project and the ideal of equality between researcher and participant driving it, I was quite able to steer the essay in my own direction and, indeed, the brief specifically asked me to reformulate the questions from my own position. All the same, it invited me to ‘reformulate’ not ‘completely overlook’ the posed questions as I might otherwise have done (in favour of solely trying to address the way in which ‘formal’ meaning is being created). In an effort to find a happy middle ground, I have taken some of the brief’s questions as a starting point for roughly outlining what I think it was that I was trying to communicate to Tate Encounters during my involvement. These statements can then potentially be used as some kind of record that allows comparison between what I have said and what the researchers may come to say I have said (that is, facilitates the assessment of how any meaning has been filtered).

As an aside, I should point out that I have a definite squeamishness regarding the seeming egocentricity of this plan. I do fully recognise that mine is merely one miniscule contribution to the participant side of the research and further that the researcher’s job is to somehow aggregate *all* the information given to it by the entire group of participants. There is no expectation, or for that matter wish, to be able to distinctly locate my ‘voice’ in any research findings. My actual concern is with the general link between participant statements and research findings; with the *process* of meaning production not any individual it is applied to. It so happens that I am the only specimen I have access to and therefore am attempting to use myself as something of a case study.

Joining the Research Project

Taking a hop, skip and a jump back to Autumn 2006, when the Tate Encounters project was first presented to me, isn’t the easiest of tasks as my exact thoughts at the time are now somewhat on the hazy side. What I can state is that my attraction to the research was great and immediate - and, evidently, sustained. When I initially tried to retrospectively sketch why this was I lingered over the calculations I had made relating to its potential advantageousness along the lines of skills development and CV enhancement: being part of a project linked to a major, national cultural institution certainly didn’t appear to be the worst thing to add to it. However, listening back to a recording of the ‘recruitment session’ in which the research team outlined what the project was about to the class of first year undergraduates I was part of, I realised that actually, before anything, I was drawn to the research for the ‘purer’ reason of mental stimulation – all the other benefits, while definitely considered, came later and more as bonuses rather than primary motivations.

At the presentation Victoria Walsh (both a member of the Encounters team and Head of Adult Programmes at Tate Britain) explained that Tate Encounters was endeavouring to study:

The nature of identities and visual cultures and what that means in terms of experiencing art and experiencing Tate Britain as a space ... how we engage with that notion of Britishness that obviously is inextricably tied up with that name [Tate Britain] that is perhaps not reflected on the walls of the gallery. We need to understand: are we representing Britain and how are we doing that, if we're doing it and, if we're not doing it how might we want to do it; how could we do it? What are the questions we should be asking of ourselves and what is the knowledge we need in order to start creating a Tate Britain that really does represent the nation? With that, of course comes the need to understand and to have knowledge of the different values and traditions that not only we operate in historically as Tate and what became a museum in 1897, but also what values and traditions our audience bring into the building to experience it (Walsh, 2006).

This summary of research objectives triggered the memory of excitement I had over two very separate things. Firstly, I recall being moved to tip my hat to serendipity for bringing me an opportunity to further explore something that had been a major preoccupation of my life for the previous seven or so years: the relationship between national and personal identity. As would later become a key feature of my contributions to the research, for a long time I had been wrestling to make sense of and bring meaningfulness to my dual British/Finnish nationality. Having devoted a phenomenal amount of energy, time, resource and mind-space trying to locate, or even, 'inflate' a genuine Finnishness in me (being born and raised in England I had more or less overlooked the fact that I had anything to do with the Finland up until I was eighteen), questions relating to the interconnection of national and personal identities and how they are constructed – including the role that culture has to play – had become something of a permanent fixture in my thoughts. I thus smiled on the chance to develop the elongated, ever-fluctuating conversation I had had with myself from a totally new perspective.

Nevertheless, I think what I found infinitely more exhilarating that day was hearing an establishment of Tate Britain's stature seriously and openly question itself and more than that, essentially admit that it might not be getting everything 'right'. It very much undercut my subconscious assumption (I had never given the matter any direct thought) that organisations such as Tate Britain were only capable of asserting some kind of 'fixed', overbearing authority. I simply found it astounding to witness the institution challenging itself. While my loyalty to critical scepticism forbade me from taking the presentation of Tate Encounters completely at face value, I was willing to suspend any disbelief until I had cause to do otherwise and accepted that there was a real earnestness behind the project. Consequently, I wanted to be in and amongst it to watch exactly how it would unfold.

Beyond this, in terms of how I immediately responded to the project, it seems relevant to observe that the only note I made during the 'pitching session' was: 'It is all dependant on what a person brings to a work'. Though I've no precise memory of why I was moved to jot down this single comment, in accordance with my general sensibilities, I happily speculate that I was hugely attracted to the detection of some kind of attempt to reverse the emphasis in the understanding of why art is

valuable and how it becomes valuable (focusing on individual interpretation rather than institutional prescription). I believe it struck me as being both rather radical and appealing.

I took a few months getting to know some of the principle researchers a little more and 'sussing out' the spirit in which the project was to be conducted. It was actually a while after this 'first encounter' at the end of October 2006 that the research properly got going. Isabel Shaw and Sarah Thomas were appointed as research assistants at the beginning of the new year and, roughly speaking, we began actively fumbling through the initial stages of the project in the late spring of 2007. As my mental sketch of the Tate Encounters project and the team of people orchestrating it (their interests, motivations and values) developed and started to stabilise over perhaps the course of four or five months, I felt quite enamoured with this fantastically chaotic, wild-looking piece of research – even if my thinking wasn't completely in sync with all aspects of the work. The 'diversity' interest, for example, and its 'black and other ethnic minority' slant (especially noticeable at the early stages) was a real turn off for me. To briefly touch on the issue of how I understood 'diversity' in relation to Tate Encounters and the student population of London South Bank University (LSBU) from which it recruited its participants; in the politest terms I feel able to muster, I personally understood it as a matter of terrific irrelevance. To be a touch over-simplistic, within the project context I essentially read 'diversity' to mean 'having a particular interest in targeting socially or culturally marginalised/disengaged, non-white individuals'. In fairness, by recollection, the research was only ever 'sold' to participants as being concerned with 'migrant experiences' rather than 'racially-based exclusion experiences' and if I had ever felt the latter to be a serious drive in the project I would have withdrawn from it post-haste.

Returning, then, to the broader picture I had of Tate Encounters in the early days. Perhaps the easiest way to cover it, is to relay how I tended to explain the project to my friends. I remember repeating a number of times: 'well, basically, I think Tate Britain is having some kind of identity crisis'. I further speculated that there was probably a will to create evidence to justify Labour's 2001 free museum policy and that the project was more than likely sponsored by some tick-box oriented, governmental sub-body (an assumption at least partly based on the 'Black and Asian' interest of the project). In retrospect, it strikes me as being profoundly odd (and comical) that up until 2010, even though I was always very mindful of the fact that Encounters was being funded by one organisation or another, I never actually took a moment to learn more about whichever one it was. For some reason, I was content with my incredibly vague conception of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) - not that I knew it by name - as some nigh mystical (and almost certainly sinister) body distributing government money (an opinion I have since revised).

Maybe one way to account for this horrendous oversight, would be to admit that I was in fact mischievously excited by what I perceived as something of a tug of war within the research. I understood it to be the case that all variety of interests (of quite different sets of players) had been poured into the project. It could thus have possibly seemed wholly entertaining to me to preserve the

image of some sort of 2-D 'baddy' in the shape of the AHRC. Especially as I had identified the 'good-guys' of the piece: the crusading academics, striving to make the world a better place by means of challenging the authority of museum spaces (while far from having a strong 'sense' of the researchers – not that the team itself is not divisible by specific interests - I quite quickly came to the belief that there was a definite reform agenda motivating them). Of course, the analysis is very tongue-in-cheek, but at the same time, in a certain respect does fairly represent my view at the time.

Other than this, I recognised that the research was positioned amid the extended 'ideal research methods' and 'quantitative/qualitative' debates frequently rehearsed by all variety of social scientists (sociologists, cultural theorists, ethnographers, anthropologists and the like). I rather suspected that it was endeavouring to take one or two tiny steps forward in the history of developing new, viable – truth revealing (and thus, in accordance with life, inevitably a little messy) – strategies of social research. In and amongst this, I further perceived a will to accord the objects of study (participants) a little agency within the work, to treat them with an amount of respect. It is perhaps proper to observe that as the research progressed, I became much more intrigued by its methodology than I was with the actual research questions. Bewildering as it often seemed, I nevertheless began to feel one of the most significant, exciting contributions Encounters could potentially make to the world (of academia, at least) was through its research model. It is, in fact, for this reason that I am so preoccupied with the process of meaning creation: I want to confirm that it is a robust, credible system, capable of producing valuable findings, yet believe more insight and evidence are needed before this is possible.

Participation In The Research

While in many respects my ride aboard Tate Encounters saw a multitude of shifts and tweaks in my attitude and approach, I think it is possible to recognise a general consistency in the positions I assumed and areas/issues I paid particular interest to. In an effort to loosely sum up at least what I would take as the key responses I made along the Encounters journey I would identify the following rough points: an ambivalence towards Tate Britain that encompassed both a flat rejection of or indifference towards aspects of the museum *and* an amount of queer affection for the place. I challenged the very idea that Tate Britain has a duty to reflect Britishness, maintaining that, for my tastes, the significance of it being a national museum goes only as far as having an obligation to preserve, develop and display a collection belonging to the nation. I further lingered over my feeling that as identities (national, personal, other) tend to be in a constant state of flux, attempting to locate any fixed or stable Britishness in Tate Britain's galleries was hugely problematic. Finally, and perhaps above all, throughout I was keen to question the research process itself and emphasise the role the researchers played in shaping responses to the project.

Before coming to look more closely at how and why these and related interests were addressed in the work I submitted to the project (work that also attempted to provide the researchers with insight into my personal background, as per the project's request), it seems in some way pertinent to mention that during my involvement with the project I was constantly harassed by a concern regarding my selectivity over what I was and was not willing to include in my responses. My inner-researcher frequently insisted that I must not omit such crucial details as I was inclined to, to which the rest of my innards replied: "Screw you, that's my private business!". An obvious example of this was in my refusal to handle any aspect of my Caribbean heritage. To this day, I remain resistant to publicly exploring the reasons for this, much as I am deeply perturbed by how this may be misinterpreted.

I wasn't ever especially worried that with all the things I didn't/wouldn't mention I would single-handedly warp all research outcomes, but was simply sensitive to the fact that whatever meaning was being created was rather fuzzy round the edges. Nevertheless, the more I consider the question of meaning production, the more I am satisfied by Tate Encounters' means of data collection. I find there is a deal of worth in (substantive, accurate information to be taken from) building a picture out of countless impressions and recurring ideas over a long period of time, that are shaped by a sustained thought process. Reviewing the work, I find that certainly, what I submitted does not cover everything and was subject to all kinds of distortion before it was even turned over to Tate Encounters for interpretation, but I would say that what is covered in the work is by and large highly representative of my corresponding positions.

Turning to examine that work in a little more detail two of my three digital-video submissions to the project were *Lie Back & Think of England* (October, 2008) and *A Bit Hämäläinen* (March, 2009). *Lie Back & Think of England* is a twenty-three minute film built out of an eclectic collection of audio-visual material, framed around an interview I took with Andrew Dewdney (the Tate Encounters Principal Investigator) at the end of 2007. It roughly tracks a journey I made in 2008 from England to Finland (where I stayed for eight months) on to Russia (an area of which was formerly Finland) and back to Finland before returning to England. It endeavours to clearly lay out and respond to two key research areas of Tate Encounters (as defined by Andrew) relating to the dominant narratives Tate Britain may promote and how ways of seeing are shaped by personal backgrounds. I would say its chief point is concerned with the fluidity of nationality, both in respects of personal identity and in physical, geographic terms. It struggles to convey the simultaneous significance and immateriality of nationality in 'my world' and tries to suggest that nationality is best understood in highly flexible terms that allow for (or admit) a process of continuous remanifestation or reconfiguration. Like so many of my undertakings, *Lie Back* was developed in a characteristically haphazard fashion to the point that I couldn't possibly account for the myriad of thoughts that were poured into it or even say when the work began. The foundational interview with Andrew presents itself as an obvious starting point although once completed was left untouched for over half a year and was in fact conducted with an entirely different film in mind (now mostly eroded in my memory, yet worth mentioning to underscore

how very different my answers to Tate Encounters could easily have been). Nevertheless, one point of continuity throughout the undertaking, was the will to make a feature of the role of the researcher.

There were a few of objectives behind my targeting Andrew as the Encounters' Principal Investigator. Firstly, there was a straightforward aim to reaffirm exactly what Tate Encounters was asking, as by the end of 2007 I didn't think I was the only one among the participants who'd begun to feel a tad bamboozled by the sprawling nature of the project and its ever-multiplying and subdividing questions. As a closet conformist, I really did want to give as direct and as full answers to the project as I could which invariably proved a challenge when my conception of what was being asked kept on dissolving or shifting. I further specifically wanted to overtly present the question element as part of my answer not merely as a handy reference point, but because I wanted to show the two as being inseparable – the framing very much informed my comments and was not my own (much as it was adaptable).

Following on from this, I felt it important to try and document or make a 'formal' impression of the personality of one of the figures behind the project. I have for a long while been vehemently opposed to the idea of the researcher being a neutral, objective observer (coming from the position that objectivity is both something that must be recognised as a fallacy and something that must be striven towards). In the name of addressing the posed questions, I felt it worthwhile to at least have a glance at the poser of the questions (and the motivation for posing the questions), working on the suspicion that thereby an overall amount of the answers could be found. The more familiar I became with the project the more its reformative agenda suggested itself to me and the more I felt the Encounters lot already had an idea of how and why Tate Britain might be 'problematic'. To be clear, this is not to say I felt the research was merely ceremonial or the professional integrity of the researchers was at all questionable. Quite the contrary, my estimates of the validity of the work was boosted for Andrew being open enough to allow me record personal sentiments. Though it perhaps wasn't what Encounters was looking for, I somehow feel one of my greatest contributions to the project was having Andrew describe his own mixed feelings towards Tate Britain.

To pick out a handful of additional aspects of *Lie Back* that pertain more to what I was trying to communicate in relation to my personal background and view, a good place to start is with the 'voice' I adopted. I was quite keen to incorporate the very strong 'I simply don't have a clue' feeling that followed me throughout the project as a legitimate (meaningful) element of my response. I used 'stuttering', self-deleting titles to narrate *Lie Back* in an effort to allude to the huge struggle I had with the Encounters' questions which typically saw me oscillating between polar positions. I, for instance, had the feeling that Britishness was both irrelevant and integral to me, that I absolutely was and was not Finnish and that the awe that the Tate Britain building encouraged was both off-putting and dazzling. I believed the very contradiction of all the contradictory impulses I had was worth pausing on as it offered its own insight.

Another point I tried to articulate, primarily through the use of Finnish landscape (and actually, the absence of any large amount of footage from Tate Britain itself), was the fact that while I had an ability to (and did) appreciate Tate Britain, there was almost some kind of fundamental limit to the extent to which I was inclined to engage with it. This had very little to do with *anything* the museum did or didn't do (such as impose ideals I was uncomfortable with), but rather that I was often slightly frustrated by the art museum experience per se. Its 'containedness' just didn't especially work for me (not to mention the continual shuffling of other visitors in and out of my way precluding the possibility of any deep absorption into a given display). When I thought about what I might want from visiting a gallery or what I found visually stimulating and fulfilling, I noticed that the things most important to me were located in the outside world; in the unframed everyday and in subsuming landscapes.

Lie Back closes with an African drummer performing in the middle of Tate Britain's Duveen Galleries before opening hours. It should be confessed that in many ways this was down to pure, self-indulgent opportunism – I simply wanted to see what kind of sound one could get from that big, beautiful hall. However, there were also a couple of points relevant to the Encounters enquiry that I hoped to make through the inclusion of this material. By placing something (or someone) thoroughly incongruous with the museum at its centre (at least my view), I tried to stress the sense of restriction the museum can in some ways seem to impose. At the very same time, I wanted to play on and challenge my expectations of what is and isn't to be found in Tate Britain. In the act of permitting my tomfoolery, the museum showed it was capable of treating its spaces with an amount of flexibility; that it is wrong to think of the institution as only rigidly asserting its authority or attempting to preserve a fixed idea of propriety.

A Bit Hämäläinen (ABH) very much continues where *Lie back* leaves off and tries to update and develop the themes presented in the earlier submission, although it has the one distinct difference of dealing much more directly with the Tate Britain and visually situating itself in the museum. It is a twenty-one minute work arranged into five non-linear parts: dominant narratives, the answers, regulated spaces, the questions and histories and texts. It takes on a similar structure to *Lie Back* in that it is hooked on to a follow-up interview with Andrew Dewdney (conducted in December 2008), and persists with the obsession of emphasising the dualities involved in and sheer fragmentation of my feelings in relation to both Tate Britain and Encounters' questions. Again it has the straightforward objective of trying to offer a supplementary personally edited summary of where the project has got to. Amongst this, *ABH* strives to show that Tate Britain is far from a monolithic institution uniformly functioning to produce one unalterable message, but it is much more of a chaotic place (built up of many people, of a range of strata). It nevertheless confirms that the museum does, in places, transmit visions of Britishness that don't particularly appeal to or resonate with me, yet also indicates that I am not intimidated by the institution and am perfectly happy to playfully (and slightly subversively) interact with its collections and spaces.

Just as with *Lie Back*, if not more so, *ABH* contains a huge muddle of details, layers and textures; a number of which are possible slightly obscure but nevertheless were purposefully included. It is hard to pinpoint a few particular features as carrying any greater meaning than any others, and in many ways that is the very point of the film: the reason why its title refers to 'bits' and why its numbered parts are mis-sequenced: there is no order or end to my comments. As many of the film's nuances amplify issues already covered, the only elements of *ABH* I will elaborate on here are those that speak directly to Encounters chief concern: Britishness in relation to Tate Britain. Thitherto, when taking up the theme of nationality I tended to describe how I was influenced by my Finnish background and was almost irritated by the idea of defining Britishness. For the most part this can be explained by the fact that where as I had spent the best part of a decade constructing my Finnishness, Britishness was such a fundamental aspect of me it required no inspection and tolerated no division. I could happily spend an age exploring citizenship or my sense of duty to, loyalty to, and love for Britain, but when trying to reflect over what actually constituted my Britishness I typically drew a blank: it just was.

Whenever my investigation took me any further, *specifically* thinking of how I might understand Britishness through Tate Britain's collection, I was invariably moved to pause on something I felt important to 'claim' as a Brit, yet found profoundly troubling. I could only dwell on either shameful portions of British history or what I considered the vulgar ostentatiousness of the upper echelons of Britain's social hierarchy. With hindsight I realise that I was quite wrong to think there was any great tension in my relationship with Tate Britain (as I always assumed there was), rather than notice that I am only ill at ease with some of its Historic British Art display. The wealth and power-asserting lavishness of works hung within this collection, which almost seem to demand subordination, were simply an anathema to me. I very much concurred with John Berger's analysis that 'the oil painting showed [the owner's] ... sense of his own value. ... It began with the facts, the facts of his life. Of course, there were other facts which it didn't take into account: where did the owner's wealth come from? The exploitation on which his wealth was based was not shown.'(1972).

My view of Tate Britain's 'Britain' was completely dominated by these preoccupations and yet not quite certain of how to articulate my feelings, I left this fairly critical issue more or less untouched for two years. Finally, towards the end of *ABH* I was able to point to this one real difficulty I had with the museum through commandeering archive newsreel material of King George VI's coronation. I attempted to express my rejection of 'grand Britain' by putting the footage in high-speed. Playing on the austere, reverential tone of the newsreel's commentary and reducing it to a high-pitched squeak, I wanted to show all the pomp and ceremony as being tragically farcical to me. My aim was to treat the matter with an air of comedy, although I hoped that the seriousness, indeed sombreness, of my point would come across. If any doubt remains, I am a republican, inclined to celebrate 'the ordinary', humbleness and tress; never gross opulence, improperly-appropriated wealth or the arbitrary elevation of one individual over another.

The Production of Meaning

To outline (and in places reiterate) why am I so interested in meaning creation, the questions I have relating to it and the overall worth of wanting to unravel the process: there is, in fact, a mess of reasons that have led me to my fixation with the instance of meaning production or the point of converting 'casual' participant statements into official research findings. Among them is an undercurrent of doubt as to the meaningfulness my own contributions to the project, especially in view of the fact that they were in some ways shaped by incidental, circumstantial factors and the potentially 'distorting' effect this had on the statements I made. As already indicated, however, much more significantly, I have been a little uncertain about exactly how the research team have gone about reading and codifying the contributions of the participant group. Understanding it to be an interpretive process, my ultimate worry is that, while I fully trust the integrity, sensitivity, thoughtfulness and thoroughness of all the researchers involved, there is still considerable margin for misrepresentation or error in interpretation.

As a little exemplification of how meaning has been extracted from the submissions I made to the project it is worth taking a look at what the research team wrote about my first contribution and *Lie Back* in the editorial of Encounters' [E]dition 4 on-line publication. The comments reveal both how statements can be carried over to a new platform and remain intact, as well as how easily meanings are subject to tiny (yet, all the same, undue it is possible to argue) alterations when they pass into the world of academia:

[Lie Back] essays on the subject of nationality and its meaning as part of identity ... and asks the question, is it possible to 'see' or 'experience' an identity located in nation within the national collection of British art? [Aminah's] first film is structured as a journey to Finland, where [her] mother grew up and where her grandmother still lives. The commentary muses on how the cultural inheritance of Finland is or isn't part of her identity. In the second film, the journey is continued across the shifting border of Finland and Russia in order to question national and physical borders in a globalised movement of people. The second film returns the journey to Tate Britain, and returns the question of the relationship between Britishness and Tate Britain in an edited interview with Andrew Dewdney. The answers given by Aminah and Andrew about art and nationality are interestingly symmetrical, and reject any simple historical notion of nation. Instead, they stress how a sense of place is a stronger formative dimension of identity (Dewdney, 2008).

Evidently, much of this corresponds to what I have already written about *Lie Back* (and I should point out that I specifically refrained from reading the above before I had finished jotting down my own thoughts). I am very encouraged to see that not only did I manage to express myself with an amount of efficacy (something I was never certain of), but much more importantly, that the researchers have been able to hone in so precisely on the key points of my statements and adeptly re-articulate them. There are nevertheless two details that stick out to me as being slightly off the mark.

Firstly, I have never had anything *at all* to say on the ‘globalised movement of people’; in *Lie Back* I relayed the story of how my gran was bombed out of her home by the Russians during the Second World War and how the area to which she was born was subsequently taken by the Russians (and remained in their hands ever since). I can’t possibly stress how emphatically I reject the conversion of this account into the ‘globalised movement of people’. To a much lesser degree, I have a question mark over the role of place in the ‘formative dimension of identity’. I feel the remark probably does contain some truth, yet I’m not sure I would have ever underscored the significance of place. However, it is naturally quite an academicised phrase and to be completely (and a little humiliatingly) frank, I’m not sure I fully understand it – which is no reason for me to dismiss its veracity.

All of this leads to the questions: to what extent do the researchers and participants agree on the meaning of the content of the ‘raw data’ produced during the period of field research? How are the researchers organising and representing that data in the final write up of the research? What extra layers of meaning or value do the researchers add to participants’ statements in order to make them academically or politically significant? It is this last question that is really at the heart of my interest in meaning production which in part resulted from a casual conversation I had with Andrew. I asked whether the participants’ statements were being taken at face-value, to which he replied (and I paraphrase) ‘not-quite’. It is the ‘not quite’ bit that I want to see brought into the open and clearly explained in detail.

My chief ambition here, is only to try and help keep the matter of revealing the project’s process of meaning production a feature of the Tate Encounters on-going discussions, by means of stirring my few thoughts and concerns into the reflexive soup that is Tate Encounters and see how it responds (given that Encounters suggests that to a certain extent its research participants set the project’s agenda). I should emphasise that I am by no means proposing and do not believe that the Encounters team have failed to recognise the issue and its importance. Above all else, the reason why it is of crucial importance is because the worth of whatever conclusions Tate Encounters comes to present rests on the researchers’ ability to make visible/account for every step involved in their production. From the outset, I’ve kept an eye on the fact that this research has been carried out for specific purposes, crudely: to develop academic theory and to make practice/policy (and implicit in that, potentially, funding) recommendations. It is for this purpose that I wish to understand how the Tate Encounters’ participants are being filtered through the researchers and what the researchers themselves are inputting and finally how all of this gets squeezed down into ‘new knowledge’ that may have the ability to influence the lived-in world and/or how it is thought about and approached.

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