

Space and Value in the Contemporary Art Museum: The journey of a performance document at Tate

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Abstract:

The space of the museum, rather than being monolithic and heterogeneous, is complex, fluid, and fractured. As an institution, its multiple spaces relate to a variety of activities, motivations, and attitudes towards the objects it collects, conserves, and displays. By using Michel Foucault's 1967 notion of the 'heterotopia' to read the museum as a space of spaces, and focusing on the complex object of the performance document, this article traces the link between the placement of objects in a specific space, and how this can be read as a perspective on their value. In tracing the journey of the Joseph Beuys performance document *Four Blackboards* 1972 through various spaces at Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) and Tate Modern, this article will demonstrate those acts of valuation being undertaken over a fifty-year period in the institution, and explore how changing value perspectives result in a changing space, both physically and conceptually, for the performance document.

Article

Museum Space

The space of the museum is a complex one, which has been in a constant process of change from its foundation in royal collections to the critical approaches to the white cube, and into notions of postmodernism and the contemporary art museum. The relationship between that space and the objects within it has also been a point of persistent critical analysis, from thinking about the museum as an object itself, situated within a specific geographical location and with certain architectural features, down to the positioning of artefacts and artworks within display cases and cabinets. This article, rather than viewing the museum as a monumental, fixed space, and the object as being subsumed within it, will view the space of the museum as fractious and fluid, both physically and conceptually, and will consider the object not as fixed within a singular space, but on a subtle journey between these through its own redefinition. In doing so, it becomes possible to uncover the implicit reasoning behind the movement of objects within the museum space, and therefore to understand how the museum values the objects it contains.

Approaches to the space of the museum have varied, particularly over the past thirty years, as new focuses for analysis have driven theories and case studies. Considerations have been made of the architecture of the museum and its impacts on the narratives and experiences within it (Duncan and Wallach, [1980] 2012; Casey, 2005; Ingraham, [1998] 2012, MacLeod, 2005), as well as how the organisation of spaces and objects influences the visitors to the museum (Gielen, 2004, Bennett, 2006, Psarra, 2005). Perceptions of the neutrality of space have been questioned, (O'Doherty, 1986, Corrin, [1994] 2012), and the changing organisation of objects and narratives through the space of the museum has often been brought to light (Hooper-Greenhill, 1990; Preziosi, 1994, Kennedy, [1996] 2012). There have also been examples of critical approaches to the museum space in terms of its connection to time (Bazin, [1967] 2012) and the relationship between the museum's internal space and its external geography (Prior, 2011).

This article will attempt to bring together several of these spatial concerns, from the physical space of the museum to the conceptualisation of spaces around objects, through Michel Foucault's idea of the 'heterotopia' (1967) and an exploration of a particularly complex museum object: the

performance document. This spatial-object relationship will then be used to discuss a connection to value within the museum, using the case study of Joseph Beuys's *Four Blackboards* 1972 at Tate to explore the valuation of the performance document through its movement across the museum space(s). Tracing its entrance into the museum as a prop-object for Beuys's performance *Information Action* in 1972, to its eventual display in the ARTIST ROOMS display of Beuys's work in 2015, this journey will be used to consider the attribution of value within the museum, and how the existence of the performance document in multiple spaces alters our valuative readings.

The performance document

Before beginning to consider the issue of museum space as outlined above, it is worth briefly considering our focal object: the performance document. The term is used here primarily within the scope of visual arts practices, although it also has an important relationship with wider practices of performance, theatre, dance, and other performing arts. From the late 1960s to today, performance documentation has been approached in two ways: firstly through critical, theoretical debates about its ontological existence, and secondly through changing practices undertaken by artists. In the case of the former, debates around the ontologies of performance and documentation have been well rehearsed since Phelan (1993) and Auslander (1999/2008). Primarily, concerns have been raised over the transformative, enduring nature of the document in relation to the ephemeral performance, acknowledging that documentation is fundamentally different to performance and often framing this as problematic (Oliver, 2014). Even writers, such as Matthew Reason (2006) who pay greater attention to the specifics of documents and documentation seems to stop just short of suggesting that the difference between performance and documentation may be a positive thing.

Rather than seeing the performance and the document as two separated, fundamentally different objects and practices, this article takes the viewpoints of Rebecca Schneider (2011) and Christopher Bedford (2014) that the practices of performance and documentation are intimately connected within the larger scope of an artist's practice, and the artwork's existence within the world. Amelia Jones has also advocated for the ability to access a performance moment through a document as a legitimate experience of the artwork (Jones, 2012: 203) and both Auslander (2006) and Tracey Warr (2003) suggest that performance documents are made with a focus on a future experience, extending the life of the performance and the scope of its potential audience. These approaches all acknowledge the fundamental difference between performance and documentation, but also frame this as potential.

The complexity of the relation of documentation to performance as an art object is also reflected in its complex relationship to the museum as a space of collection and display of art objects. The document of an artwork has been a way for artists to mediate the audience's access ever since the form of the artwork became 'difficult' to present within the museum: from the rise of conceptual art in the 1960s (see Danto, 1997) which saw a collapse in the art object to integrate both thought process and material object, and the live elements introduced into artmaking by Futurism and dada (see Goldberg, 2011), through to the collaborative and instructional performance works of Kaprow's 'Happenings' of the late 1950s and the works of the Fluxus movement in the 1960s. In other cases, the size or site of the object made it difficult for the work to enter the museum; Dennis Oppenheim, who worked in land, body, and conceptual art practices, explicitly acknowledged that documentation became the way to ensure access to his artwork (Bassas, [1994] 2001). Art historian Henry Sayre explicitly acknowledged that '[w]hat saved the museum, what in effect gave it access to objectless art, was the document, the record of the art event that survived the event' (Sayre, 1989: 2). This is a sentiment which is reflected in Boris Groys's more contemporary approach to the document/museum relationship, where he notes that '[o]ne could say that today's art audience

increasingly encounters art *documentation*, which provides information about the artwork itself, be it art project or art action, but which in doing so only confirms the absence of the artwork' (Groys, 2008: 49, original emphasis). Neither Sayre nor Groys designate the document itself as being an art object, rather it is a means by which the museum visitor comes to experience or understand a work which is not itself present. In more recent years, closer attention has been paid to the specific relationship between contemporary art museums and performance documentation, both as an institutional or artistic practice and as an art object (Giannachi and Westerman, forthcoming).

It is this uniquely complex existence of performance documentation, and the ever-shifting perceptions of it, which makes it such an apt object through which to trace the intricately connected, and sometimes subtly delineated spaces, of the museum. It is at once an object which refers to an artistic work which is absent from the museum, and therefore from the collection and from the exhibition, and at the same time is an object which may itself have been created through an artistic practice. Where it should be positioned within the museum has not always been immediately clear, because its own value is not fixed. When we consider the space of the museum to be similarly 'unfixed', an intersection with a constantly shifting art object takes on a new resonance in terms of positioning and status.

Foucault's heterotopia

Michel Foucault first outlined the notion of the heterotopia in the 1967 work 'Of Other Spaces'. In this, he suggests that in the twentieth century we moved into the 'epoch of space' (Foucault, [1967] 1986: 22), moving out of the nineteenth century's preoccupation with history and the progress of time. He suggests that in this epoch, we will be concerned not only with the organisation of spaces, but that '[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed' (22); in short, that we are concerned with the relationships between spaces within the structures of society. Foucault also offers up an alternative to the space of the utopia: the heterotopia. Foucault's interest in both the utopia and the heterotopia stems, he claims, from a curiosity around spaces which exist by 'being in relation with all the other sites' (24). He cites the utopia as being one such space that does not have any basis in reality, and the heterotopia which does, and which has a tangible, physical presence. Foucault lays out, throughout the course of his argument, a series of six 'principles' which he views to be those which define any space as a heterotopia. These range from the assertion that all civilisations have some form of heterotopia within them (24), to the fact that all heterotopias go through a process of opening and closing which 'isolates them and makes them penetrable' (26).

Foucault explicitly uses the museum as an example of the heterotopia to illustrate his fourth principle: 'Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time' (26). He talks about the heterotopia being somewhere that breaks from 'normal' time; the museum and the library are 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time' which 'have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit' (26). In Foucault's assertion that the museum demonstrates at least one of his principles of the heterotopia, he opens the possibility of it demonstrating the other principles he outlines. This includes, most importantly in terms of Tate and the Beuys document, the notion of the heterotopia being a space of space, in that it has 'a function in relation to all the space that remains' (27). Foucault suggests that any heterotopia might do this in one of two ways: being an example of all 'real' spaces organised meticulously, or replicating all the spaces of society within themselves. It is these descriptions of the heterotopia as potentially organising and demonstrating overlapping and intersecting 'real' spaces, which begins to open the museum to being a deliberately delineated space. This allows us to move beyond seeing the museum as a single, institutional space, and instead consider the different types of spaces which might exist, overlap, and intersect within the frame of the museum.

Foucault's notion of the heterotopia has been used widely as an analytic tool since 1967, despite the relative brevity of the article from which it comes. Primarily, it has been used to consider public, or partially public spaces, the way they have been constructed, and the way they are moved through. Beth Lord has also applied it to the museum specifically, questioning initial impressions drawn of the museum from Foucault's description of it as heterotopic (Lord, 2009). These uses of the heterotopia have tended to focus on the spaces themselves, analysing them in terms of power and control, or in Lord's case, how interpretation occurs, and what it can show us about difference. This article differs in considering the museum as a heterotopia and exploring why we could designate it this way, but then also exploring the consequences of this for the valuation of objects situated within the space(s) of the museum; it looks not just at the space of the museum, but what is happening within it, especially in terms of actions relating to objects.

Tate as a Heterotopia

To consider this demarcation of types of space and its implication more closely, it is beneficial here to use a concrete example of the museum read as a heterotopic space. Tate is particularly interesting to consider in light of being a 'space of spaces' because it consists of four distinct geographical sites, situated across England, and yet 'Tate' is often spoken about in the singular. Its origins are in the private collection of Henry Tate, who prompted the creation of a new national gallery of British Art, distinct from the work of the National Gallery, leading to the formation of the Tate Gallery in 1897 on Millbank, London. In the one hundred and twenty years following this, the collection expanded significantly, leading to the opening of a site in Liverpool (1988), in St Ives (1993), and on the Southbank in London (Tate Modern, 2000), the latter of which prompted the adoption of the simplified organisational title of 'Tate'. Without delving too far into Tate's complex past, it is clear to see that despite the use of the catch-all term 'Tate', this is a complex institution, with each site alone having different display remits, potential audiences, and architectural spaces.

For this article, I will consider Tate in its entirety as heterotopic, but will look specifically at the physical and conceptual embodiments of this through the two London museums, Tate Britain and Tate Modern, where Beuys's *Four Blackboards* have previously been situated. Looking at these spaces allows us to do something often overlooked in considerations of the museum space: to account for those spaces of the museum which are not dedicated to exhibition and display. Both sites, but perhaps especially Tate Modern, include spaces which contain no artworks, while at the same time having designated gallery spaces. Helen Rees-Leahy even notes that the galleries in Tate Modern are hidden and that 'visiting them is optional' (Rees-Leahy, 2005: 113). What exists alongside the spaces of art-on-display, are other types of space: spaces of learning, education, archiving, public records, leisure, conservation, publication, and marketing. While some of these are public spaces, others occur within the 'private' areas of the museum, thus reinforcing Foucault's fourth principle of the heterotopia: that it is not entirely accessible like a public place (Foucault, [1967] 1986: 26). While areas within Tate Modern and Tate Britain are freely accessible to the public, there are others – offices, workshops, storage spaces – which are not. When we take a step back from thinking about the museum as solely linked to those spaces exhibiting art to the public, and consider all spaces in which the activity of the museum occurs as being 'the museum', then we can see the museum as demonstrating that '[t]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces' (25).

This moves beyond the notion that the museum juxtaposes spaces solely through its geographically-diverse collection objects. Instead, we can take a view which acknowledges this as only one of a series of ways in which the museum intersects and juxtaposes (types of) space. It also juxtaposes spaces of activity, which are often physical: Tate Britain hosts the Tate Archive and Gallery Records,

and Tate Modern hosts the Tate Exchange space, where learning and community driven projects occur. There are conservation studios across the sites where preservation work is done, and different departments occupy adjacent offices where curatorial projects are developed, research is undertaken, books are published. However, these spaces can also be viewed as being conceptual, and therefore able to intersect. When archival objects are used within a museum exhibition, for example, a juxtaposition of the archival space and the display space occurs, and practices by both curators and archivists overlap. These sites of education, curation, conservation, archiving, and so on, are defined in their activities and practices, but at the same time are fluid and can be brought into direct contact with one another. The importance of this reconsideration of the spaces of the museum as multiple, distinct, and fluid becomes more acutely significant when we also understand space as an indicator of value.

Valuation and Space

‘Value’ is, and has long been, a loaded term. It is linked to the notion of money and worth, but also to more ethical and philosophical notions. In much current debate around the arts and humanities, concerns with ‘value’ are often over whether it can be measured, whether it *should* be measured, and therefore if value could be used to indicate why certain activities should be publicly funded (see Bakhshi, 2012; O’Brien, 2015; Belfiore, 2015). In considering the museum, it is often ‘values’ which are the focus, with claims that the museum communicates its ‘values and beliefs’ (Duncan and Wallach, [1980] 2012: 46) through the experience it offers of spaces and objects. This article, however, does not seek to consider an empirical approach to value, but rather considers the *ways* in which individuals or small groups value an object; in the museum, I argue, the monetary value of an object is less significant than the activities that are undertaken around it and with it, and therefore a qualitative approach allows a more nuanced understanding specific to this institutional context.

This position draws heavily from the ‘Theory of Valuation’ by John Dewey (1939) and is supplemented by the work of Elizabeth Anderson (1993). Dewey writes at length on how the patterns of behaviour which people exhibit can be observed and – crucially - analysed, and therefore indicate what value they place on an object (Dewey, 1939: 15, 51); this lays the foundations for acknowledging that value is about perception, rather than being something universally quantifiable. Anderson adds a layer of complexity to this possible analysis by suggesting that goods (objects) ‘differ not only in *how much* we should value them, but in *how* we should value them’ (Anderson, 1993: xiii, original emphasis). There is a suggestion here, building on Dewey’s observational approach over time, that there may be room for a multiplicity of types of value which an object is perceived to have. A pluralistic approach to value then provides the opportunity for a more complex analysis which accounts for the multiple perspectives coming from the variety of spaces in the museum. It allows for the value of an object to fluctuate not in amount, but in *why* it is valued, and what that valuation translates into in terms of the document’s purpose. A pluralistic approach allows us to understand both the multiple roles an object is taken at any given moment, or the ways in which that role, and therefore that value, has shifted within the museum over time.

What Dewey and Anderson offer, in their respective theories, is a way of understanding how an object is valued, what the motivations behind this are, and what the consequences of this valuation will be; the value of the object is not the end of the inquiry in this case, but is a stage within its ongoing journey in the museum. When applied to valuation within the museum, this becomes an important tool through which to consider the value of the performance document across the different spaces of the museum. If each department has its own practice and concerns, as seen above, it therefore has its own perceptions of value in the objects which enter the museum. Those outside of the museum can also interpret value judgements through the space the object occupies;

when stating that '[d]amaged goods are an institutional shame hidden in the recesses of vaults' (Corrin, [1994] 2012: 339), Lisa Corrin makes a judgement about the lack of artistic value a damaged object is perceived by the museum to have, and defines the placing of the object in 'vaults' as the way in which that valuation is expressed. By positioning an object in a specific space within which it is determined that it can best serve its 'purpose', those acting are undertaking a process of valuation. No object simply comes to be within the museum, because the museum is not a neutral, or monolithic space; rather the object is positioned through a process of comparison to the other objects around it, whether that be a spatial, temporal, or practice-based comparison. I will further explore this notion, and its implications for understanding performance documentation's value within the museum, by tracing the fifty-year journey of a performance document within the spaces of Tate.

The Journey of the Beuys Blackboards

In February 1972, German artist Joseph Beuys performed the work *Information Action* as part of the Tate Gallery's 'Seven Exhibitions' show. The work consisted of Beuys discussing, for around six hours, the notions of democracy and art, during which time the audience were invited to participate in a debate. Alongside this discussion, Beuys used three portrait-oriented blackboards on which he drew various diagrams to illustrate his points. He repeated the event the following day at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, using a single blackboard in the landscape position. Following the performance, which was one of the earliest examples of a live work within Tate's space, the four blackboards were '[p]urchased from the Artist' (Fox-Pitt, 1983). Their very early life at Tate is unclear, and the blackboards were either kept in an early version of Tate's archives, or were stored in the Education (now Learning) department at Tate, which in the 1970s and 80s was the site of collection for many 'documentary' films, including some by Beuys., The implication here being that the Education department was responsible for the collection and maintenance of any performance documentation existing within Tate (Measham, 1972). It is reasonable to assert then, that the blackboards constituted a 'document' of the Beuys performance and were treated as such.

Between 1972 and 1983 the chalk on the blackboards was fixed, an act of conservation which implied an awareness of their potential value in the future. Then, in letters between Fox-Pitt and Richard Morphet, one of the Keepers at Tate, an awareness of the monetary value of similar blackboards became clear, and, with the movement of the archive to a new site, the collection was felt to be a more appropriate space for their continued existence within the museum because of this revaluing (Fox-Pitt, 1982). Shortly after this movement of the archive, the blackboards were transferred from the archive into Tate's collections, where they were acquired as *Four Blackboards* (originally *Ohne Titel*). Following this quick succession of movements through different spaces in the museum, the documents remained unaltered in the collection for over three decades. In 2015, following research undertaken during the AHRC-funded project 'Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art', the three Tate blackboards were rearranged to mirror their original order from the performance, and the Whitechapel blackboard was separated and rotated back into the landscape orientation, and all four were put on display at Tate Modern.

What we see here is the continual reassessment of the performance document's value, and the reflection of this within the deliberations of the most appropriate space for the document. Notably, this is not simply the space in which the object 'exists', but the space in which those agents acting within the scope of the museum *place* the object. It is an act of valuation which results in a direct action upon the object. Apart from the fixing of the chalk, and the later re-arrangement of the work, the content of the performance documents has remained (relatively) stable, and the material has

not altered in any significant way. Rather, it is the context and institutional perspectives which have shifted, leading to a changing view on the value of the performance document for the museum.

What this tells us about valuation

What this indicates to us, then, is that the value of an object within the museum can be as fluid and pluralistic as the spaces of the museum. In the first instance, the blackboards were perceived to primarily have information value about a performance having happened, and so found themselves in a space of 'evidence' based documents. Once there was an increased awareness that other, similar performance documents had a monetary value, there was a notable change in the perception of the type of value the blackboards had. Fox-Pitt, in her memoranda (1982, 1983), questioned whether the archive or the collection would now be a more appropriate space to reflect that change. This was a value judgement being made at a time – the early 1980s – where external shifts in the perceived value of the document as an artistic object – in this case, Beuys blackboards being sold as art objects on the art market - was then reflecting in changing valuations of the document within the museum. This shift towards the permanent archive indicates a strong continued information value being perceived within the document; it also indicates a potential for access value, in understanding the archive as a space of public access by researchers. Although the blackboards maintained their status as informational artefacts, there was a shift towards seeing the museum's responsibility to making these documents publicly available in the early 1980s. This shift fits with the observation by Sayre in the late 1980s (Sayre, 1989) of the increased importance within the museum of the document being a publicly displayable object, and the consequent swing with Phelan (1993) into arguing against the ephemeral performance being replaced by the material object of the document.

Perhaps the biggest shift in the perceived value of the performance document came with the transfer of the blackboards from the archive to the collection, in the early 1980s. At this point, the intrinsic status of the object changed from being evidence of an artwork, to being part of an artistic practice; it was perceived as having artistic value. This resulted in its movement from the space of the archive, to the space of the collection, and also allowed it the potential for inclusion in the space of display and exhibition as an object demonstrating an artistic work. The blackboards were given an acquisition number and were now subject to considerations of conservation and preservation, as well as use by curators in displays and exhibitions. In 2015, this was put into practice when the blackboards were rearranged, as detailed above, and included in an extensive display of Beuys's works at Tate Modern. Here, the artistic value of the document was reiterated, in the choice of curators to display it – as a definitive collection object – alongside other works from Beuys's extended practice. Its display value was also, in this way, made concrete, in the choice to present it in exhibition to the public. In the choice to move the performance documents into the collection, and then their selection to be displayed alongside objects accepted from inception as 'artworks', the museum blurs the boundary between objects supporting practice and objects which demonstrate practice; not only is this boundary blurred, but the actions observed here suggest that performance documents can move across that boundary, through the deliberate actions of those within the museum to alter their status.

Overall, it is the journey of the performance document of *Information Action* which is of the greatest significance to considering value within the museum. The movement, over fifty years, of the blackboards across the spaces of Tate indicate that not only are there different spaces of activity and motivation within the museum, but that the boundaries between these spaces are porous, and recontextualization and changing practice within the museum can result in the movement of objects. Dewey and Anderson's theories allow us to read this value as shifting, and multiple, tied into the behaviours of the people around the object, rather than into the object itself. The performance

document itself, generally, does not change, but the valuation of it does, translating into movement. By tracing these movements retrospectively, we can understand how perceptions of value have shaped the positioning of performance documents over time. Rather than creating a snapshot of the value of a document, which only considers a single (usually economic) perspective, building on Dewey and Anderson to consider the human facets, impacted by their context within the museum framework, allows us to consider the subtle nuances of value as shaped by human behaviour and activity.

Where next?

This article has focused – very briefly - on only one museum, and one very particular type of object: the performance document. Despite this narrow focus, this exploration has served to indicate the potential in understanding the museum not as a monolithic end-point for objects, but as a complex juxtaposition of spaces, each with its own activities, practices, and motivations. By reconsidering the museum in this way, and understanding valuation as a means to analyse behaviours towards objects, we are able to think more critically about what the positioning of that object within a space means. Being able to read the valuations occurring within a museum can allow us to track changes in museum practice around performance documentation over time, to understand the present situation in which performance documentation is being related to the museum, and to begin to consider how museum practice might respond to performance documentation in the future, particularly in the way that value is attributed.

Keywords: Documentation, Value, Space, Museums, Heterotopias

Contributor Biography: Acatia Finbow received an AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral award studentship in 2014 to undertake a PhD in the Department of English at the University of Exeter, in collaboration with the research department at Tate. From 2014 – 2016 she was part of the AHRC-funded research project 'Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art', to which she contributed various short essays and case studies, as well as supporting the creation of a documentation archive around the dance event 'If Tate Modern was Musée de la danse?' Her thesis considers the value of performance documentation in the contemporary museum, looking at both document-as-artwork and the practices of documentation across the institution. She has been working across departments at Tate to develop new strategies for documenting performance-based artworks in the museum's collections, including developing a method for documenting iterative performance works. Her other interests include the intersection of documenting practices between theatre and the museum, and the shift towards born digital documents and archives.

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