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ON TEA AND CULTURE

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In his critique of notions of the 'creative city', Matteo Pasquinelli (2008:126) polemically reverses Guy Debord's statement on the triumph of the spectacle - 'the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes images' – with the claim that 'capital is spectacle to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes a skyline of cement' (p.126). His inversion of Debord draws attention to the ways in which the European city, as a 'factory of culture', involves substantial investments of both capital and cultural symbolism. The concrete manifestation of surplus capital and spectacle is to be seen in proliferating sites of cultural regeneration. My focus in this piece is on Tate Modern as a catalyst to urban regeneration at Bankside, although there is a plethora of national and international examples; the most quoted being the Guggenheim, Bilbao, and its mythical status in placing the post-industrial city on the global cultural tourist map. I explore two parallel narratives in and of Bankside, as the forms of both public and private space that are emerging around Tate Modern reference and help to reproduce visually seductive sites of cultural and touristic exchange.

My research on the subject of cultural regeneration around Tate Modern has led me to interview residents and employers of Bankside through various organisations and in various sites. I became a regular at Terry's café on Great Suffolk Street, a local café serving the local community as well as the transient community of construction workers. Austin, who took over his father's establishment, upholds their policy of maintaining the cost of a cup of tea; 'my father was adamant that the price would remain at 20 pence'. This contrasts starkly with the price charged by the recently opened establishments that dot the perimeter of Bankside Mix, the collection of retail units incorporated into the ground floor of the Bankside 123 development directly south of Tate Modern. Both Starbucks and Terry's are well-placed to profit from the generative potential of symbolic capital; but Starbucks sits directly in the shadow of Tate Modern, with its five million annual visitors to Tate Modern, and charges £1.90 for a cup of tea.



Terry's café

This paper will set out to analyse how two very different urban narratives are evolving in Bankside, as large-volume signature buildings are set in stark contrast to the existing urban context. The reopening of the Globe Theatre (1997), and the openings of Tate Modern (2000) and the Millennium Bridge (2000/2) refocused cultural activities from the South Bank firmly onto this area of London. The area had been viewed as a backwater where London taxi drivers would be reluctant to venture for a lack of return rides, providing repositories for the City's backup data chests housed in large

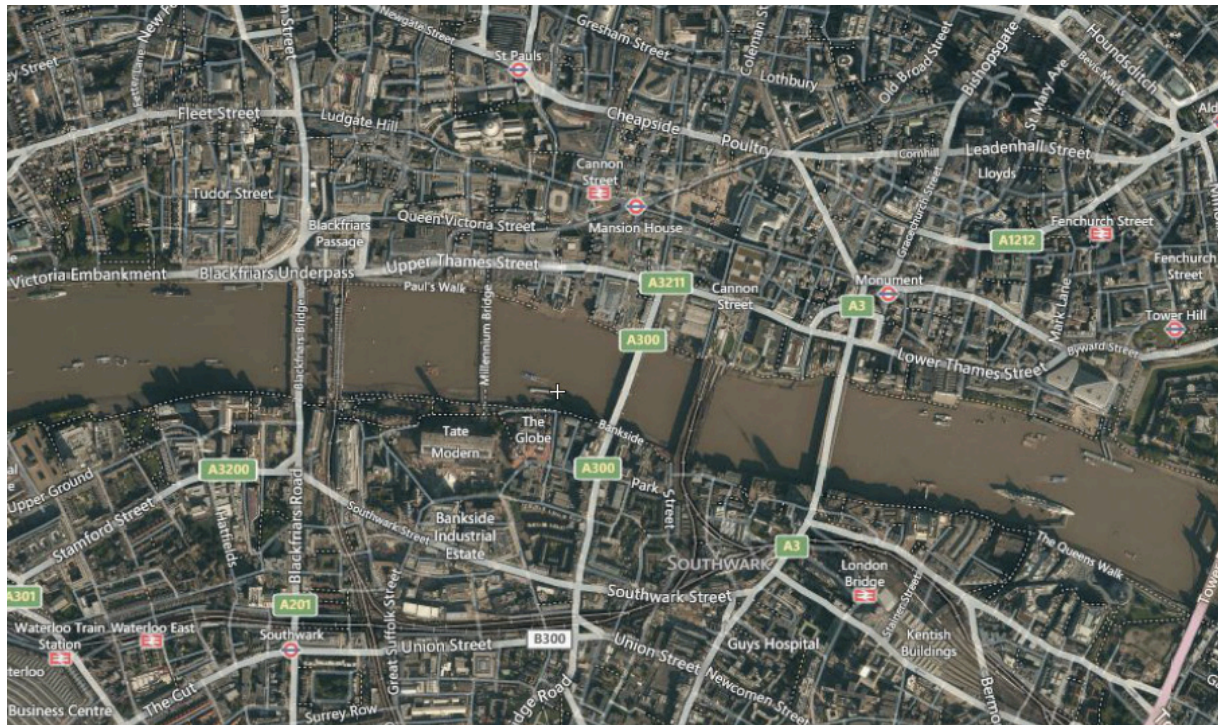
anonymous concrete buildings. In the eighties the area saw a number of large-scale office buildings, finally clearing away its history of wharves on the Thames riverfront, and in the 2004 London Plan this formerly marginal space was incorporated into London's 'Central Activity Zone' for investment and development.



*Union Street and artist's construction
of Neo Bankside*



Zukin (2010) examines the aesthetic vocabulary of gentrification that has re-made downtown New York; I would like to highlight here the uneasy relationship of financial and cultural capital as this is manifested through such residential and commercial projects such as Neo Bankside and Bankside 123. Part of the visual vocabulary in the London context uses the codified language of advertising to capture the shift in the area's profile. This alignment of finance and consumption with culture skews the potential of cultural forms to pose critical social questions, rather than merely mirroring or aligning with forms of social and economic power.



Ariel View of of Bankside (Source: Flash Earth, 2009)

Bankside can be described as being made up of two contrasting areas, one on the Thames riverfront and the second the 'hinterland' one or more layers back, a term coined in the urban blueprint document for Bankside Urban Forest¹. The area of land immediately adjacent to the former power station that became Tate Modern was made vacant by the demolition of St Christopher's House, previously occupied by the Ministry of Defence and leased from Land Securities, the largest commercial property company in the UK. Adjacent to where the Tate Modern's western ramp now stands stood a paper manufacturer demolished in the late 1990s. Bankside 123, a large office complex leased to RBS and IPC media and designed by the architects Allies and Morrison, was built on the site of St Christopher's House. Although the area masterplan allowed for the reinstatement of Canvey Street (previously subsumed into the 1950s building), the buildings at ground level create a barrier to flow to the south from Bankside, rather than encouraging the porosity though the site that had been a key aim of the urban agenda of Tate Modern's trustees and the urban plans commissioned from Richard Rogers Partnership. A large atrium accessible only to employees fills the entire ground floor of the IPC

¹ Witherford Watson Mann Architects were selected by the BID association, Better Bankside, to develop a vision and framework for the Bankside Urban Forest. This project is led by Better Bankside with the support of Tate and other landowners. The plan is to create a dynamic new quarter of London extending from Tate Modern southwards towards the Elephant and Castle between Blackfriars Road and Borough High Street. The Urban Forest will connect newly landscaped areas around Tate Modern to open spaces across Southwark, involving the improvement of the urban realm through the creation of pocket parks and other small-scale developments.

buildings; retail outlets are let at the ground-floor level of the rest of the site, all with a uniform frontage and strict design guidelines for the display of signage. The advertising for the retail units comes under the remit of the promotional organisation Bankside Mix, with large posters setting out the choice between high art and leisure in a visual vocabulary that intermingles culture and consumption.



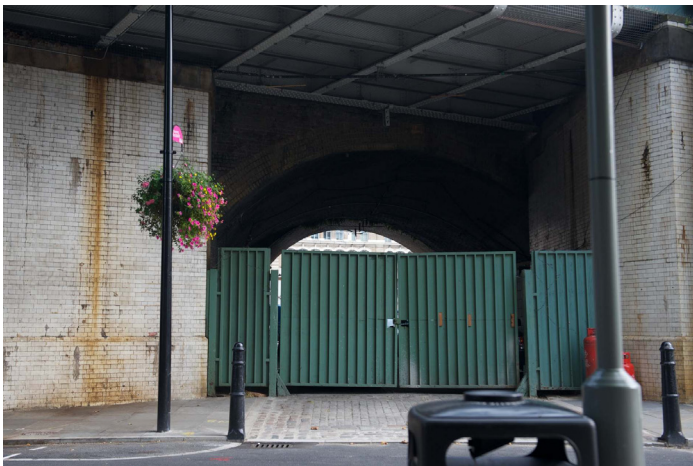
Hopton Street, Bankside Mix advertising

Massey (2005) calls for forms of public space that allow for 'an inevitable contingency' of everyday life in the city - the unexpected, a degree of conflict, instability. Space that is too codified as to behavioural norms limits diversity and can create and reinforce exclusions. A recurring issue that arose when Tate Modern's community liaison officer was tasked with engaging with local residents in order to build a relationship in the run up to the opening in 2000, was dissatisfaction with the lack of accessible green space. One of the few green spaces in the area, Mint Street Park, was built on the site of a former children's hospital (Evelina Hospital, 1869 – 1976), and was instigated by the charitable organisation Bankside Open Space Trust (BOST). A division of the Bankside Residents' Forum (BRF), it was tasked with addressing green spaces in Bankside. The BRF is funded by the London Borough of Southwark, the local authority acknowledging that the area lacked community representation in a context of rapid urban development which would impact heavily on residents. As part of a research and memory project which I carried out as a volunteer for BOST titled the Memory Garden, I interviewed long-term resident and former Borough Market trustee Ted Bowman, who recounted his tales of being a patient at the children's hospital. I ask Bowman about the popularity of the park and the development of green spaces around Bankside. Bowman believes that little is being given back to the community, with limited amounts of space allocated for public green space, and cites the Tate Modern Community garden as a poor exchange for Section 106 money. Particularly in summer, the relatively small proportion of green spaces are heavily used by office workers, suggesting the heavy pressure and growing strain on local amenities in the area in view of the accelerated development taking place.

Zukin (2010) argues that 'culture' is seen as a field of exhilarating and educative experience, but is 'also a powerful means of controlling cities'. As a source of images and memories, cultural forms symbolise

'who belongs' in specific places. The growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, fashion, music, and tourism) and the industries that cater to it fuel the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space. Here I return to Terry's café: the café, which opened in 1986, has a red and white awning that shelters pavement tables and chairs from the sun, and more often from the wind. The interior is decorated with black and white photographs depicting the area's history. Terry tracked down images of hop pickers; residents from the area would take the hops trains out to Kent for four-week hop-picking holidays between the 1920s and 1950s. The interior has been carefully considered, drawing on perceptions of authenticity - red-and-white checked tablecloths and a chalk and blackboard menu hint at the pie and eel cafés that were once characteristic of the local area. Terry recounts his impression of the changes he has observed in the area's image: 'there seems to be a lot of new building going on and change, what do they call it, regeneration, I think,' Terry merges the words 'regeneration' and 'gentrification', suggesting a sense of detachment from the external pressures affecting the area's appearance and confusion about attempts to classify what to him is a form of status quo.

Terry and his son Austin, who was being trained to take over when Terry retires, both travel from Kent, one-and-a-half hour's drive from London every day. The cafe opens at 6 am and closes at 3 pm. Previously they lived in Bermondsey, and recalled feuds between local Protestants and Catholics, as well as the diversity of customer: 'Tales of the frocks [the cafe is close to the law courts] I wouldn't believe who came in.' Terry hints at the more edgy customers. Austin speaks of the regular customers but embraces the rapidly changing socio-economic situation. To cater more for white-collar workers and less for the manual trades, Austin plans to change the opening hours of the café, opening later on weekdays and over the weekends. Southwark Council recently overhauled the street, implementing Austin's suggestion during a consultation exercise that the street should be re-named as a 'parade'. Now a street sign greets residents and visitors to the shopping strip: Great Suffolk Street Parade. The council recognises the importance of the street and its amenities for local residents living in nearby council estates; one of who repeated complaints concerns the lack of retail outlets. The greengrocer comments on the lack of traffic from new residents moving into the area, who are perceived to be largely young professionals, working during the day and therefore not frequenting the local parade of shops.



Flat Iron Square

Skirting around Bankside, the railway arches represent Southwark's recent economic history, housing light industries such as car and motorcycle mechanics, and a petrol station supplying the taxi drivers who congregate around the Island café on Flat Iron Square. On Great Suffolk Street, at the intersection of two railway viaducts creating a brick spaghetti junction above, motorcycles spill out into the street. The plots of many of these spaces are a combination of oblique lines where the structures are squeezed into the site and tenants adapt their business to fit the unusual plots. Blackfriar's Scenery make up a cluster of scenery and set designers, occupying three large arches, containing a welding and blacksmith unit and large scale wood-working equipment and a yard full of stage sets spilling out of skips, stage sets for the cultural performances on the South Bank. The Roman Catholic Church squeezes its shrine in between the Church of the Precious Blood entrance and the footings of the viaduct. A level of reciprocity is built up through interchange of small businesses in the area. Arches are rented and decorated to suit individual business needs. Now, with the regeneration leases no longer being renewed, Railtrack are gutting the structures to equip them for B1 office use, painted in magnolia with fully glazed fronts and lined with corrugated folded steel around the arch. This is an efficient material for preventing damp penetration, but conceals the grandeur of the structure in London red brick. This is part of Network Rail's £6 million investment scheme to provide innovative business space throughout the South Bank area.



Church of the Precious Blood

The railway arches' structure encompass a state of adhocism², embracing a diversity of appropriations. The Green Hut, for instance, was spliced into a left-over space where the railway arches turned sharply,

² In 1972 the architectural theorist Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver wrote *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, describing this as involving an available system or dealing with an existing situation in a new way, a method of creation relying particularly on resources which are already at hand.

providing a sliver of ground space between the rear wall and pavement; this was equipped with a small takeaway kiosk. A wooden shelf allowed customers to stop and eat standing up, observing the street life; when the café was closed a roller-blind came down, masking the structure. The Green Hut was established forty years ago, and had more recently been bought by an Indian leaseholder who added Chicken Tikka to the standard English breakfast menu. By summer 2011, the café had been demolished and a steel frame was being erected for a new residential scheme.



*Surrey Row, The Green Hut, and
New-Build Housing*

Current planning and urban improvements using Section 106 finance have led to schemes to introduce lighting into the arches and a series of art installations has been introduced as part of the 'Light at the end of the Tunnel' (LET)³ campaign. As a result the majestic arches have seen a jumbled array of installations from jellybean lights to LEDs spelling out street numbers. The viaducts provide an infrastructure onto which informal practices and adhoc forms may be added: the long cavernous spaces - sometimes up to sixty metres long and seven metres wide - deterred homogenous office use, in spite of efforts to promote office as well as restaurant developments. Instead these older forms allowed a symbiotic relationship with structures making use of the arched forms and irregular sites.

³ Light at the End of the Tunnel (LET) is both a regeneration and a transport project, promoting growth and development of the area and aiming to create safe transport routes, sponsored by the Cross River Partnership with a budget of £20 million.



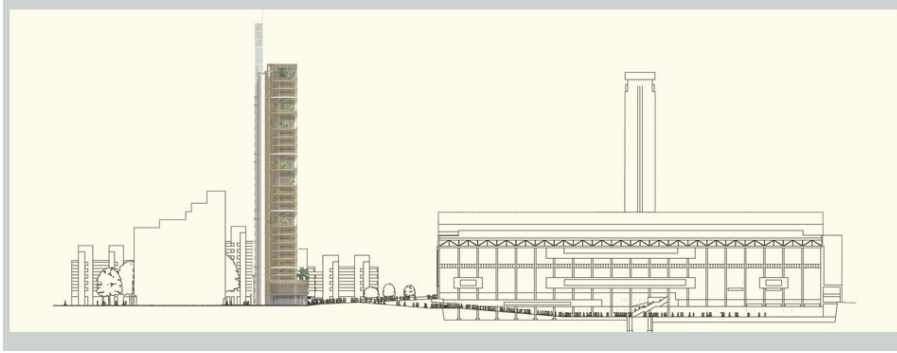
Ian Davenport installation, Poured Lines



Returning from the 'hinterland' to the immediate vicinity of Tate Modern, the residential development Neo Bankside (completed in 2012 by Rogers Stirk Harbour) stands on a former paper manufacturing and warehouse site. Planning permission was granted after a relatively straightforward planning procedure, in contrast to the long drawn-out debacle over a neighboring site; the failed proposal to build Tate Tower (2004), a twenty-nine storey residential tower adjacent to the western ramp of Tate Modern. The developer backed down after repeated attempts by residents to block the tower's construction; the developers of Neo Bankside ultimately bought the land and gave it over to Tate Modern to use as public space in order to ward off local disapproval. The advertising language used to promote the flats at Neo Bankside focuses on the building's proximity to the great artists of the twentieth century on the walls of Tate Modern, listing Picasso, Warhol and Dali as neighbours.



Church of the Precious Blood & Entrance to Taxi Station



Tate Tower (Image Courtesy of the Architect)

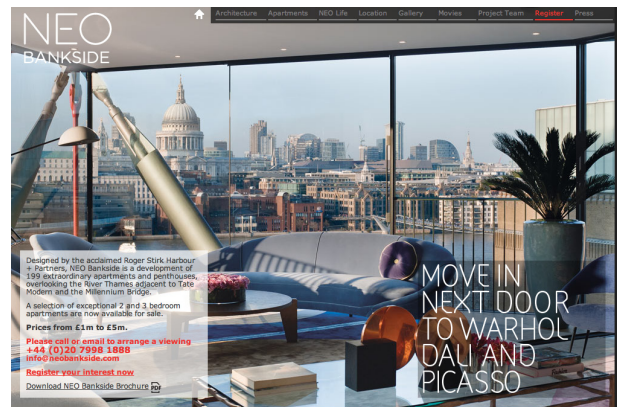


Image from Neo Bankside website.

Image of Crossbones Graveyard, Redcross Street

The sales pitches for the flats were targeted at an Asian audience, advertised prominently in Hong Kong newspapers, and units in the development were bought by investors from China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The chief executive of Native Land, the development company that jointly purchased the site from Land Securities, emphasises the profit margins obtained over and above what was originally predicted for the sales price:

At the urging of Nicholls [chief executive of Native Land], a doubtful Grosvenor agreed they should buy the 1.75-acre site from Land Securities in July 2006 for £24.2 million. The price was arrived at by calculating that the flats could be sold for £725 per square foot. The 67 flats sold so far at NEO Bankside have gone for an average of £1250 per sq. ft., £525 higher than estimated in 2006. For those anxious to know how much this bounty will add to the treasure chest of Britain's richest Duke, it is £55 million. The income from selling 300,000 sq. ft. of flats at £1250 per sq. ft. and 10,000 sq. ft. of shops is roughly £400 million. Land Securities was wise enough to include what is quaintly called an 'overage' clause in the contract. This allows the seller to skim the winnings if the buyer makes a profit over a stated figure.

Evening Standard 25 June 2010, P.Bill

Cultural regeneration has created a landscape for investment of global capital arguably independent from national economies. Meanwhile, local trade-offs in terms of affordable housing happen elsewhere: in the case of Neo-Bankside, the developers GC Bankside were permitted to build affordable accommodation off-site in Borough, Bermondsey and Walworth, arguing that it would not be profitable to build lower-value housing on this highly valorised site.

Alongside the trajectory of Asian investment into a prime property market, and ironically adjacent to Neo-Bankside, the installation of the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) provided a critique of the Made in China phenomenon. The installation consisted of two million porcelain seeds, part of the ongoing Unilever-sponsored series in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Probably more interesting than the installation was the accompanying video documenting the making of the seeds, each one handmade by skilled workers in the Chinese city of Jingdezhan. The piece provided a critique of cheap labour costs that underpin the flows of global capital, the devaluation of labour that promotes foreign export trade and the accumulation and concentration of capital both on- and off-shore. It may be too simplistic to highlight the uneasy proximity of cultural production and financial speculation, but many detractors from the use of culture as a marketing tool argue that aestheticised capital distorts the ability of cultural production to question the economic status quo.



Sunflower installation in Tate Literature

To conclude, one of the major concerns for how urbanism is developing around a cultural regeneration agenda is the unregulated influx of global capital into cities now constituted as 'factories of culture' (Pasquinelli 2008), the danger of deadening and compromising public space as part of an urbanism that is too reliant on large investments of economic capital. Secondary to this debate is the reduction and assimilation of cultural practices to marketing exercises. Tate Modern is pivotal to the development of a new urban narrative at Bankside, and one of the principal drivers of a local cultural quarter linking Bankside to the South Bank. But in order to keep a dynamic cultural base a careful balancing of

development opportunities with a consideration for the evolution of the urban environment to reflect diverse sectors of the residential and business community needs to be maintained. The council's bowing to the pressures of the developers of Neo-Bankside in allowing off-site affordable housing plays its part in an increasingly bland representation of city life. The creative edginess often referred to in reports on the impact of creative practices on the area, and the very 'uniqueness' that capital is seeking to profit from, could lead to both a deadening of city vibrancy and greater inequalities in the right to space. The very conditions that attract developers could be squeezed out by over-imposing, over-scaled developments and visually excluding vocabularies. In the work of BOST and the Bankside Urban Forest project - bodies working across organisations and communities, valuing context and long-term interventions, and focusing on the everyday hinterland rather than the showcase riverfront - there is an alternative narrative involving a commitment to place over a longer period of time, and potentially a more nuanced balance of people and place.

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