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Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron
Tate Gallery of Modern Art at Bankside
London, since 1994

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Something remarkable happened to Britain as the Conservative government of John Major crawled to its ignominious end in 1997. The Conservatives had been persuaded to introduce a national lottery, an innovation which the Anglo-Saxons had previously always seen as a somewhat demeaning practice, one that was the exclusive preserve of less-favored southern Europeans. Britain had previously believed in a more dignified approach to funding its essential infrastructure. But John Major promised that the lottery would allow the building of a whole range of cultural projects that would otherwise never have had any chance of being realized.

And in some ways, he was right. The lottery has had the unexpected effect of overturning all the preconceptions of British cultural life. A society that once believed in an almost puritanical way in financial probity turned the weekly draw into a national ritual. And perhaps even more extraordinary was what the state chose to spend its share of the proceeds on. A number of charitable causes were established to channel money into construction projects ranging from sports stadia to cycle tracks. And one fifth was earmarked for the most un-English idea of all, to celebrate the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity by spending several billion pounds on 20 landmarks. Having set in train this astonishing, and astonishingly out of character, idea, Britain started immediately to carry out the program in the most English way - in disorganized, pragmatic confusion.

Much of the money is being poured into schemes of utter futility, such as the creation of giant water fountains in Portsmouth harbor and a number of sports arenas of unpardonable banality. Out of all this, the reinvention of the Tate Gallery of Art stands as a towering exception. The original Tate was a private bequest. It stands on the north bank of the Thames, just upstream of the Houses of Parliament in a Palladian Victorian structure that guards Britain's finest collection of Turners and Gainsboroughs. Under the direction of its present director, Nicholas Serota, it is evolving into a new kind of institution with outposts in Liverpool (designed by James Stirling) and Cornwall (Evans and Shalev). But its biggest transformation will be unveiled next year when it opens an entirely new conception, the Tate Gallery of Modern Art, carved out of a disused power station just across the river from St. Paul's Cathedral by Herzog and de Meuron. And most of the money has come from the lottery. Unlike some attempts to expand museums around the world, the reinvention of the Tate at Bankside is rooted in an intelligent appraisal of the nature of the new museum rather than in any search for size or novelty for its own sake. The museum first asked itself why it wanted a new building instead of pondering other questions such as where to put it or how it should look. The answer was partly that it needed, as so many institutions do, more space: space to show its reserve collections, as well as the space it needed to keep up its intellectual claims to leadership.

The Tate in the early years of the twentieth century developed its own identity as distinct from the National Gallery by concentrating simultaneously on the modern and on British art. Serota's vision

was to separate the two: to maintain the original site as a gallery of British art and to establish a new building that would concentrate on modern art in all its forms. From the point of view of art it meant dealing with a wide range of difficult questions. Would the old site atrophy into a historical collection, or would it continue to acquire new works? If the latter, how would the two venues apportion work by living British artists? Would the new building acquire prestige that Millbank would lose?

And what form should the new building take? An extension, a new building, or the conversion of an existing structure? It was a series of decisions that explored most of the concerns which have been echoed around the world in the epidemic of museum building that has characterized the last two decades. It touches on the shifting balance of power between architect and curator. On the one hand is the kind of landmark museum that probably began with Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim, and which is echoed most recently by Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao. Such structures have proved their power in helping to shape the identity of entire cities, as well as to build an audience, almost as if they were giant architectural sculptures. Such projects, however, have created unease among the artists. They may establish a high profile, but are they the best place in which to show art? Many artists and curators have felt the answer is no, ever since the bitter opposition that Wright's egotistical design for the Guggenheim attracted. Forty years later it's one of New York's most famous landmarks, but most of the collection is shown in a new wing, with discrete rectangular walls.

In the art world, architecture is too often seen as intrusive and overbearing. Yet art can be just as egotistical in its demands on a gallery. Imagine the reaction from an artist asked to rework a piece to make it small enough to fit a specific space, and to rethink the color to accommodate a new carpet. But this is the essential nature of the architectural process. It is this ambiguous burden of utility that has tended to give architects a certain sense of cultural inferiority and mistrust of art. They can't participate in it as equals, so they shut it out. On the other hand the work of certain artists, such as Donald Judd, with their measured sense of order and proportion, has specifically architectural qualities.

Are we attracted to galleries by art or architecture, by scholarship or urban spectacle? Clearly, for any cultural building that takes its civic responsibilities seriously, both aspects are important. But it is not an easy balance to get right. And the conflict between art and architecture is a phenomenon that goes right back to many of the most famous buildings of the twentieth century, or even to the moment that sculpture came off the pediment and onto the floor.

It's a two-edged process: the curators and the artists themselves, of course, want to attract the audiences that museums use to measure themselves against one another, but they don't want to be upstaged by architects. Dull buildings, on the other hand, don't pull in the crowds. That tension helps to explain why so many new cultural institutions are housing themselves in recycled industrial buildings. They offer the possibility of great big spectacular spaces, like the Tate now taking shape. But they don't carry the insistent signature of a contemporary architect. In many ways the most important decision taken by the Tate was to move into the old power station, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, an architect whose career spanned the transition from the closing stages of the Gothic revival to the wide acceptance of the modern movement. The power station is a heroically scaled exercise in monumental art deco brickwork that clearly owes a debt to Dudok but that was only completed in the fifties. It became redundant in the late eighties, an echo of a past era, once seen as a utilitarian intrusion in the center of some of London's most historic views but now regarded as an essential piece of heritage. The Tate embarked on a long-drawn-out competitive process to select an architect for the project. The first stage was an open request for credentials, and on this basis a short list was drawn up of architects who were invited to present more detailed proposals. The short list

included Tadao Ando, Rem Koolhaas, and David Chipperfield, as well as Herzog and de Meuron. All of them had to struggle with the sheer physical presence of the original building and the desire to signal a new function and to accommodate a major collection of art. Chipperfield proposed demolishing the single most recognizable feature of the power station, the giant central chimney, but to respect the rest of the structure. Koolhaas's design was for a more visible transformation. But Herzog and de Meuron won with a solution that was to do what appeared to be almost nothing but that will in fact create one of the most dramatic public interiors in London, simply by giving it an internal logic and capitalizing on its inherent qualities.

The building as Herzog and de Meuron found it was an immense, symmetrical, windowless brick box, with a single giant chimney almost 100 meters high aligned directly with Sir Christopher Wren's great seventeenth-century masterpiece just across the Thames. It was a remarkable confrontation, the greatest civic landmark that London has ever built directly opposite a giant industrial object, the kind of installation normally kept out of sight in city centers. In deference to its position, Scott gave the box a certain austere architectural character. But its façade was just a single brick thick, concealing a vast, steel-framed interior made up of two giant halls. One had housed the old boiler house, the other the turbine hall (152 X 24 X 30 meters) that will make this one of the largest conversions of an industrial building to gallery use ever attempted, with almost 11,000 square meters. The budget is, £130 million, an investment that it has been calculated will create 2,000 jobs in the new museum itself and in the surrounding, rundown district of Southwark.

The architect's strategy has been to retain the essence of the giant turbine hall as the major orienting experience for visitors. They will enter on a piazza level and find themselves in a soaring space in which the ancient steel gantries are still in place high above. It will be a semipublic space, with the character of the piazza in front of the Beaubourg. One level above is the access bridge into the galleries themselves, which will be pristine, top-lighted rooms inserted into the old structure. Externally, the transformation of the building from its original use is marked by the creation of a double-height glass box running the entire length of the building, offering spectacular views over the river for the museum staff and looking at night like a giant beam of light. The other big urban innovation is the creation of a new footbridge designed by Norman Foster, working with the artist Anthony Caro, linking the Tate to the North Bank. For all the restraint of Herzog and de Meuron's architecture, this will clearly be a spectacular place to visit, one that will leave visitors with the most memorable of experiences of spatial gymnastics. Indeed, the Tate is already nervously revising its estimates of visitors upward. Predictions have more than doubled to four million in the first year. What the Tate hopes is that the quietness of the gallery spaces themselves will not be disrupted by the impact of such enormous numbers, allowing the Tate's collection to speak for itself.