

# 1

## Introduction

In June 2010 the British cultural institution Tate held its annual Summer Party. It was a prestigious affair. Guests were greeted and tickets were inspected at the main entrance. Notables on the guest list included the art historian Wendy Baron, the Duran Duran keyboardist Nick Rhodes, the artist, author and Marquess of Bath Alexander Thynn, and the Conservative party faithfuls Virginia and Peter Bottomley. Smiles and nods from smartly dressed staff directed them up the stairs into Tate Britain's impressive and expansive Duveen Galleries, where silver service staff standing in a perfect 'V' were holding shiny trays and offering each new arrival a flute of champagne.

The party hosted a cast of characters crucial to the story of *Artwash*. Nicholas Serota, Tate Director, and John Browne, ex-CEO of BP and Tate Chair of Trustees, were both holding court. Penelope Curtis was centre stage; as director of Tate Britain she curated the exhibition of Fiona Banner's artwork that formed the party's centrepiece. Nearby: Iwona Blazwick, once Head of Exhibitions and Displays at Tate and now Director of the Whitechapel Gallery in London – the position Serota held before stepping up the cultural professional's ladder – and Anna Cutler, the newly appointed Head of Learning. Around them party goers surveyed Banner's *Harrier and Jaguar*, decommissioned fighter jets suspended through the 100 metre-long gallery, and accepted offers of sausages on sticks.

It was an opportunity to rub shoulders or take 'selfies' with some prominent individuals. Christopher Frayling, a previous director of Arts Council England, and Colin Tweedy, a lobbyist for corporate sponsorship of the arts, each would have made an appearance, as would the artistic directors from other BP- and Shell-sponsored galleries,

such as Jude Kelly of the Southbank Centre and Sandy Nairne of the National Portrait Gallery. There was a light accompaniment of live music heard underneath the buzz of chattering guests.

Tate holds the party annually but on that particular occasion Tate directors elected to use the event to mark 20 years of BP sponsorship of Tate's group of four art galleries spread around the UK. And meanwhile, across the Atlantic Ocean, BP's Gulf of Mexico oil spill that had begun on 20 April 2010 was still splurging from the seabed as party guests gathered at Tate Britain on the River Thames in London. Outside of the party, the world's eyes were fixed on BP's gigantic spill as it spun out of control. It would take 87 days to cork the blowout but on 28 June, the night of Tate's party, no one knew how long the ruinous spill might last.

Unbeknown to the party planners beforehand, a number of unlisted guests were making their way to Tate Britain that evening, and not merely to gatecrash in pursuit of Pimm's and nibbles. Entering the building stage right at 7.15pm: Anna Feigenbaum and me, both part of the freshly formed Liberate Tate. We arrived ready to make a spill performance we created with climate activists Danni Paffard and Beth Whelan – Beth, Anna and I shared intertwined histories experimenting in art and activism, which for Anna was in parallel with a media studies lectureship and authoring the book *Protest Camps*, and for Beth and me this was our chosen path concurrent to our contemporaries' entry on to the Glasgow and London theatre scenes. Anna and I, naming ourselves Toni (Hayward) and Bobbi (Dudley) after the outgoing and incoming BP CEOs – we are also one English and one American performer – entered the party just like the other guests, with heads turning at our large floral vintage bouffant dresses. Invisible to the casual passer-by, we were carrying ten litres of oil-like molasses into the gallery under our skirts, held in easily rippable rubble sacks attached to our hips with remarkably transferable strap-on harnesses. When we reached the entrance to the 'V' of the champagne reception, we spilled our precious cargo across the polished stone floor of the gallery. Across the Atlantic BP was attempting to plug the dire spill, and here at Tate we replicated their messy clean-up mission. We donned the BP ponchos hidden in our handbags and attempted to contain our spill

## INTRODUCTION



Figure 1.1: *Toni & Bobbi, Liberate Tate*, June 2010, Tate Britain. Film stills. Video credit: Gavin Grindon, 2010.

with our nail-polished hands and classy party shoes, as we described the mess to our gathered audience as ‘tiny in comparison to the size of the whole gallery’, echoing Tony Hayward’s widely criticised initial defence of the BP disaster. Gavin Grindon, who lectures in art history at the University of Essex and curated *Disobedient Objects* at the V&A, joined us inside as videographer of our spill performance.

Then, at 7.25pm a group of twelve performers in black clothing, with black veils reminiscent of Catholic widows in mourning covering their faces, poured more oil-like molasses from BP canisters at the main entrance to Tate Britain, as the guests continued to arrive. The spill seeped down the steps and across the entranceway, silent itself but eliciting gasps from the gathered crowd. In the group were Isa Fremeaux and John Jordan from the ever-inspiring art and activism collective the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, who were key to the catalysing of Liberate Tate; artists Hannah Davey, Tim Ratcliffe and Darren Sutton who with several more artists and activists went on to form the core of the Liberate Tate art collective and create many more interventions in the space and the discourse; and other performers who founded new groups such as Shell Out Sounds and the Reclaim Shakespeare Company to call out oil sponsorship in different museums and galleries. The twelve figures upon emptying their barrels turned and calmly walked away, a steady procession of graceful objection. These acts, among others by the group, brought the distant spill into greater physical and discursive proximity to the BP logos at Tate.

Remaining at the scene were over fifty people, who were part of a wider movement opposing oil sponsorship of the arts – Art Not Oil. A group of artists and activists held hand-crafted placards declaring ‘Artists are angry’ and interpreted the spill performances for guests: in the bunch was Matthew Todd, the editor of *Attitude* magazine, the performance artist Hayley Newman who later joined the hub of Liberate Tate, and the artist and educator Jane Trowell from Platform, an organisation that is a long-standing critic and creative provocateur of oil and its cultures. Platform’s press officer Kevin Smith ferried himself between soundbites and interviews, and videographer Tom Costello captured every splash. Many of the artists who had gathered had signed



Figure 1.2: *Licence to Spill*, Liberate Tate, June 2010, Tate Britain. Photo credit: Immo Klink, 2010.

a letter in *The Guardian* that day, calling for an end to BP sponsorship of Tate. Signatories to the letter included the playwright Caryl Churchill and the artists Sonia Boyce, Hans Haacke and Suzanne Lacy.

A chorus of voices critical of alliances between art and oil in the city has since risen up, and oil sponsorship of the arts is becoming increasingly controversial in the UK and around the world. Soon after novelist Margaret Atwood expressed concerns about Shell sponsorship of the Southbank Centre in a presentation of her work revolving around art and climate change, the Southbank Centre's five-year-long sponsorship deal with Shell came to a close. *Artwash* will visit art museums around the world where Big Oil – the multinational power glut of petroleum conglomerates – has made an appearance. Of the galleries in London that accept oil sponsorship, it is Tate with which I am most intimately engaged. The changing exhibitions always bring something new to my attention with clarity and depth. Tate's vast collection of surrealist work is a real treasure and the Beuys exhibits remain a favourite. The buildings themselves are part of the delight: Tate Britain on Millbank, London; Tate Modern at Bankside, London; Tate Liverpool on the docks, Liverpool; and Tate St. Ives, on the sea

shore in Cornwall. Each one is distinct, but the four share a certain spacious, sacred – yet somehow not overly pretentious – core. The first time I visited Tate Britain the BP logos remained at the margins of my perception, but once the corporate message registered, my visiting experience changed. I'm glad of this – I want to be clear about how often visits to Tate incur regular, delicate imprints in my mind of a green and yellow 'helios'. This is the reason I set out to examine here the impact of oil branding in the art museum, with reflection on the various galleries around the world that accept oil sponsorship. I do this from a position connected to Liberate Tate, Platform and Art Not Oil, without wishing to speak for all involved in this movement but rather aiming to reflect some questions back at the picture we are collaboratively painting.

From the Thames, via the Atlantic, to the Gulf, the tides connected the two sites of Tate's party and BP's catastrophic spill. The link was both fluid, via the oceans, and solid, in BP share value, because BP's relationship with Tate was fundamental to the company's survival of the disaster. There is a cynical PR strategy central to every oil sponsorship deal, and the companies themselves do not deny this: sponsorship consultant Wendy Stephenson, who delivered many of BP and Shell's arts sponsorship contracts in London, says that 'they milk the sponsorship for what its worth.'<sup>1</sup> Oil companies' desire to associate themselves with prestigious arts institutions is a survival strategy of an industry that itself feels increasingly precarious, both upstream and downstream. In the theatre of the global public relations and brand management industry, arts sponsorship becomes a way for the global, transnational corporation to present and benefit from a nationally specific brand identity; it offers a pretence of corporate responsibility for the callous profiteer; and becomes an illusionary act of cultural relevance for outmoded industries. Many risks accompany the presence of Big Oil in major cultural institutions across the world: the political influence allowed to the oil lobby, stymying efforts to tackle climate change; the uncomfortable disjuncture between the oil sponsor branded on the entrance of the gallery and the artworks, learning programmes and curatorial intentions of specific exhibitions;

## INTRODUCTION

and the restraints put on our imaginations through Big Oil's co-optation of these spaces meant for creativity and reflection.

A visit to a gallery opens doors to moments in history when the present is made. It can bring the ideas of artists – who, walking the earth centuries apart, never would have crossed paths – into conversation with each other. The dialogue between visitor and artwork is varied and open-ended. I want to ask, where does Big Oil fit into that conversation? While a visitor to the Turner Prize final selection in 2012 stood seemingly engrossed in Paul Noble's *Homeland*, their mind might also have been filled with Spartacus Chetwynd, and those other things they saw: the map of the gallery, the names, the phrase 'sponsored by BP'. If the sign had no impact whatsoever, it simply wouldn't be worth putting it up: the fact of its very existence warrants critical discussion over the impact of those few words, 'sponsored by BP', 'supported by Shell', 'in association with Chevron'. However discreet, however small, these words have purpose and they have effects. What does the presence of an oil company *do* to the galleries they sponsor? What are the material and aesthetic impacts? How does the curatorial control of the gallery differently extend to staff, artists, visitors, members and corporate sponsors?

In the context of cuts in state funding for the arts, corporate sponsorship looms as an inevitable route – but these debates are riddled with ideological strategies and misleading narratives. This situation should not restrict anyone concerned with ethics and the arts from taking a critical stance on the arguments made by Tate staff and British civil servants under the all-consuming dictum of 'Austerity Britain'. Oil sponsorship is one small, replaceable thread in the multi-coloured cloth of the organisational incomes of large galleries in the UK, North America and Europe. Anyone working in the arts will have had first-hand experience of shifting funding terrains that require constant renegotiation. Power over these decisions is tangled: members and gallery-goers hold a stake in these spaces, but stand at a remove as audiences, while artists and staff share potential influence and precariousness since they are both essential and vulnerable to the institution. Crucially however, galleries can and do change. Shifts take

place when voices within and around coalesce in harmony to shape the institution as they see fit.

The question of oil sponsorship is sometimes submerged into the many considerations that arise with all corporate arts sponsorships. Although associations with certain companies, such as banks or car manufacturers, bring up related ethical questions, the singular impacts of oil make a narrow focus on oil sponsorship both necessary and urgent. The oil industry is responsible for some of the most devastating social and environmental disasters in history. At every stage of the industrial process from extraction to transport and refinery, the sector has created countless catastrophes. Eleven people died in the explosion on the BP Macondo rig in the Deepwater Horizon field, Gulf of Mexico, and sixteen were injured: these terrible risks are more often associated with joining the armed forces, not extracting oil. Drilling rigs like the Macondo have exploded numerous times, killing the workers on board. In 2012, 154 people died on the Chevron KS Endeavour exploration rig in the Funiwa field, Nigeria. Oil tankers at sea are another source of nightmares for the industry and feature in a heavy catalogue of oil's most apocalyptic moments. The counter climbs to over 9,500 tanker spills to date, depositing thousands upon thousands of oil into the oceans to be washed up along the shores. Oil pipelines, the arteries of the industry, are notorious for causing immediate community disruption and frequent accidental disaster. In Nigeria, up to 2,500 people have been killed in oil pipeline explosions between 1998 and 2008. In 2013 an ExxonMobil pipeline bearing tar sands oil from Canada burst in Arkansas and spewed out 1,000 tonnes worth of its contents. The spill basin included twenty-two homes, and forced residents to evacuate. And potential for accident awaits crude oil upon reaching its destination: refinery explosions around the world have wrought devastating losses of life. However shocking they may be in cause and consequence, these incidents are far too frequent to seem surprising.

Further to catastrophic events, oil extraction produces daily social and ecological harm. Despite its illegality since 1984, some oil companies in Nigeria continue to flare, or burn off, unwanted natural gas as a routine practice of oil extraction by crafting ways to



## INTRODUCTION

circumvent the law. Toxic chemicals released during gas flaring have been linked with chronic illnesses including respiratory problems and skin conditions. Shell pledged to phase out the activity by 2008, but has since postponed its commitment year on year, unfazed by condemnation from local and international civil society groups. In 2010 Shell burnt 22 billion cubic metres of gas, which was equivalent to 30 per cent of North Sea gas production in the same period. In Canada, numerous First Nations groups have joined together to oppose tar sands expansion because it denies communities access to indigenous lands and livelihoods; the extractive method has also been linked to increasing cancer rates and decreasing deer populations. Resistance to oil pipelines is global: communities in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Egypt, Ireland, Ghana, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Canada and the USA are all engaged in ongoing campaigns against the pipelines built and proposed to be built in their respective regions because of the disruption to land use and risks associated with living in the proximity of a monstrous and foreboding oil pipeline.

From UN report findings to scrawled peace protest placards, the capacity of oil to exacerbate war and conflict has been noted on every continent. The influence of oil companies in the decision of the US and UK governments to attack Iraq in 2003 is summed up in the minutes from a meeting between BP and the British Foreign Office, which state: 'BP is desperate to get in there and anxious that political deals should not deny them the opportunity.'<sup>2</sup> Smaller oil companies Tullow and Heritage raised capital to drill exploration wells on the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the same month that 30,000 people fled North Kivu during two weeks of fighting in the region. With reference to British Foreign Office emails and US diplomatic cables Platform and Corporate Watch accused Heritage Oil, founded by former private mercenary Tony Buckingham, of bearing responsibility for the death of six Congolese civilians near an oil exploration site in 2007,<sup>3</sup> and a Platform source found Heritage had equipped the DRC military with boats and jeeps in 2010.<sup>4</sup> In Nigeria, Shell is alleged 'to have transferred over \$159,000 to a group credibly linked to militia violence.'<sup>5</sup>

These examples of the relationship between oil and conflict also demonstrate an uncomfortable pattern of the industry to re-inscribe colonial geographies. BP, Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil and Total's operations in Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Uganda, Madagascar, D.R.C. and Angola trace the shape of nineteenth-century British, French and Portuguese colonialism. BP originated as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) to drill for oil in Iran in 1909 with the objective of fuelling Royal Navy warships, and in the following decades it formed subsidiaries to drill in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and Kuwait. When Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh announced the nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry and said that AIOC should 'return its property to the rightful owners',<sup>6</sup> the British government co-ordinated an international boycott of Iranian oil. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill recruited the US president Dwight Eisenhower to deliver a *coup d'état* and remove Mosaddegh from power. Mosaddegh was overthrown in August 1953; he was held in prison for three years and then kept under house arrest until his death in 1967; the state ordered his burial to be held in his home for fear of a public outcry. BP began life intertwined with British military activity; it survived thanks only to British imperialism, and at the start of the twenty-first century it again sought British government intervention to secure access to oil in the Middle East.

After over a century of quests for oil and disputes over access, Big Oil companies have begun to escalate environmental risk-taking, since the remaining or available sources of oil are more remote and increasingly difficult to seize. Oil rigs that once populated shorelines creep further out to sea into deeper waters that bring an unknowable host of new safety challenges. Drilling methods compete with millennia-old geologies to crack oil and gas shale rock in vast swathes of land and below the seabed, as part of a highly controversial drilling process known as hydraulic fracturing or fracking. Canadian tar sands are potentially unprofitable when the global oil price dips due to the high cost and increased carbon emissions involved in the production of synthetic crude. The continuation of the practice illustrates another facet of the scramble to procure oil: the devastation of precious landscapes. In Canada tar sands strip mining decimates the ancient

## INTRODUCTION

boreal forest to below ground level and leaves the land contaminated with a toxic sludge industrial waste product which is laid to rest in tailing ponds the size of large lakes. Further towards the polar north, companies try their hand at grasping oil reserves deep beneath the icy Arctic waters, nonchalant in the face of the extreme risks of a spill in isolated locations and sub-zero temperatures.

At a time when extreme weather events are increasing and scientists agree that climate change is one of the biggest threats we face, oil companies are not only directly responsible for a significant amount of global carbon emissions – since 1854 almost two-thirds of industrial carbon pollution emitted into the earth's atmosphere can be traced to fossil fuel companies and extractive industries – but certain companies have been exposed as silent funders of climate science denialists. In 2009 *The Guardian* newspaper revealed ExxonMobil had continued support for groups that promote climate science denial despite a public pledge to withdraw funding. In 2010 the Brussels-based NGO Corporate Europe Observatory disclosed BP's admittance that it provided funds to the Institute for Economic Affairs even though the company was fully aware of the organisation's denial of climate science.

The unethical singularity of oil company arts sponsorship reeks of the industry's spills, tailing ponds and contaminated rivers. Yet oil sponsorship is commonly regarded as unchangeable, just as petrol is considered to be a fixed facet of modern life. The perceived immutability of oil is used as evidence that no change can take place. And yet the question of oil is answered daily by British government civil servants writing foreign policy documents for North Africa and the Middle East, by fumbling diplomats in powerful cliques at unwieldy global climate policy summits, by power company executives as they bask in multiplying profits: these are not predestined outcomes, but decisions taken and enacted. Critics of the oil industry regularly meet the objection that anyone who has used oil or its products is in no position to challenge the industrial practices of Big Oil. This support for oil is short-sighted; if there is a power profiting from the infrastructure that makes up – and concurrently risks – our entire lives, we must interrogate it. When the widespread harm of the oil industry is pushed

aside in this way as merely a collateral damage of a necessary act, a war mentality demanding collective amnesia in pursuit of a greater goal dangerously pervades our daily existence.

The tides are hesitating however – aching to ebb. Investment bankers raise eyebrows as many join the chorus warning that oil stocks are approaching their sell-by dates. A societal shift from oil is a broader question, but it is crucially linked to that of sponsorship.

The petrol station scene is a familiar one, in film and in art. The car pulls in and the viewer knows the ritual instantly and intimately, whether the setting is a dusty North American desert or a beating European metropolis. But growing oil consumption in post-industrialised countries is not inevitable. Alternative sources of heat, transport and power both exist and evolve. Despite its mundane regularity, oil is historically peculiar and not essential to human life on earth. Oil dependence is a social standard constructed daily by those who benefit from the vast profits made possible by extreme risk and exploitation of land, homes and habitats. In the global casino that is the international oil industry, arts sponsorships play a vital role in securing access to power and acceptability in the eyes of consuming publics. Through the arts the oil industry embeds itself in cultures, as the creator of our lives, a disguise to mask its shadowy presence as a threat and force of destruction. The ending to the story is as yet untold however, and the script remains open to edit. The use of oil can be questioned, and so too can oil sponsorship of the arts.

Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo* and *This Changes Everything*, succinctly points out in response to the climate challenge, that: ‘Humans have changed before and can change again.’<sup>7</sup> Art galleries house a visual history of cultural shifts, turns and re-awakenings. In every difference from one generation and school of thought to the next, the museums suggest change is a core part of what societies are, and that culture itself is a process of change. As cultural shifts take place, the arts play a role in shaping, articulating, understanding and embedding those changes. Galleries and museums are important cultural sites in which we understand our lives and society – and in which we imagine the future.

## INTRODUCTION

Art and performance are therefore both the subject and object of *Artwash*. The arts are the location and the method to be examined: the performative manoeuvres of oil companies on site at the art museums are under examination. Associations with high art are sought by oil companies in their mission to perform a role of Corporate Citizen. Therefore to 'artwash' is to perform, to pretend, to disguise. As a verb it resembles several other laundering processes: 'whitewash', to cover up, or 'greenwash', to make polluting appear environmentally friendly. BP are familiar with greenwashing: their advertising campaign for a new millennium, 'BP: Beyond Petroleum', presented the oil company as undergoing a transition to producing renewable energy instead of fossil fuels, despite a minimal investment in renewables that was cut from the company portfolio altogether shortly after the brand revamp. Also in cultural parlance is 'pinkwash', a publicity campaign for governments to appear liberal by way of promoting policies around LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) issues, for example the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition's support for gay marriage during social spending cuts. Like all these various washes, to artwash is to do one thing in order to distract from another.

But it is more than this too. The wash is made possible in the act, the performative moment in which companies take on a thoughtful, refined, cultured persona deigned for an audience of special publics – opinion-formers occupying influential positions in the media and politics. Not only does art cover up the negative attributes, but the company re-performs its brand in a new disguise. Tina Mermiri, previously a researcher with the corporate sponsorship lobby group Arts & Business, coined the term artwash as a caution to indiscreet sponsors, when she said: 'Businesses that simply try to art wash themselves in order to restore trust, will not always succeed.'<sup>8</sup>

Performance is a core part of communications. This rule applies from public relations to protest. To artwash is therefore part public relations and part theatre. Well before Erving Goffman, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* described the aspects of performance in everyday life in Jaques' famous soliloquy:

All the world's a stage  
And the men and women merely players.<sup>9</sup>

Stemming from Goffman, Judith Butler and others' analysis of social performance, performance studies looks at human existence in the world as a large-scale piece of theatre. Oil companies' practice of artwashing places its characters on the stages of art museums around the world to play out a persona that can bring material effects. The performance of Corporate Citizen is a necessary act to maintain a guise of social acceptability.

And yet the visual image of oil company logos in gallery spaces jars nonetheless. Imagine any Tate gallery littered with British American Tobacco logos. The picture alerts suspicion. Where oil companies seek to polish brands in the gallery, Big Oil in fact sets up a dialectic between art, environment, ecological destruction and ethics. While sponsorship serves to artwash oil companies, it concurrently evokes negative reactions to the industry. The stage is set with multiple players who shape the drama in opposing directions.

Both inside and outside the international art museum, arts funding is a hot topic. Oil sponsorship arrives in a story already thick with characters and sub-plots that shape how artwash works for the oil industry. Chapter 2, 'Big Oil's artwash epidemic', paints a picture of oil sponsorship around the globe, and considers previous incarnations of debates on ethical funding in the arts by looking at tobacco and arms sponsorship.

Across Europe, corporate sponsorships have been framed as a perfect plug to fill the gap left by government arts spending cuts, despite counting for relatively little of many large organisations' income. Chapter 3, 'Capital and Culture', dissects narratives that present corporate funding as vital in the current economic climate, or acceptable in light of government agreements and galleries' ethical policies.

Oil company spokespeople often claim to be fans of the arts. Their claimed calling to sponsorship is however belied by senior figures in public relations and high-level corporate staff themselves. Despite making appearances at opening nights and private views, comments recorded at annual general meetings and business sector events unsettle the still façade. Chapter 4, 'Discrete logos, big spills', sheds

light on the PR strategy that evolved to manage public perception of the oil company brand, in lieu of actually altering operational standards.

Chapter 5, 'The impact of BP on Tate', uses Tate's mission to increase the public's 'understanding and appreciation of British and contemporary art'<sup>10</sup> as a frame to investigate the impact of oil sponsorships on galleries around the world. Many of the art museums that oil sponsors select are public galleries, which as such hold a special place in the national imagination. The juxtaposition of specific galleries and exhibitions with Big Oil catalyses an uncomfortable tension for audiences, disrupting and inhibiting the real work of the gallery.

Chapter 6, 'Opposition to oil sponsorship', looks at performance protest, critical museology and institutional critique to consider artist strategies to affect change in galleries. Corporate – including oil – cultural sponsorships have previously been subject to artists' scrutiny across the world over several decades. A genealogy of creative disobedience in gallery spaces has cross-fertilised to challenge corporate power and gallery ethics. This global beehive of creative intervention shares some stamps of parallel practices. Where the art has been used in an act of dissembling, performances of public rejection of oil expose the disguise for what it really is. The potential efficacy of these groups gives rise to the unravelling of artwash.

The role of art in society is a hotly contested territory, from debates about censorship to concern around instrumentalism, but the playing out of a corporate agenda within the territory of arts and culture is an important dimension to this debate. The case against oil sponsorship is part of broader resistance to corporate power in public spaces and over public and political life. All the main characters in this story are interested in art, what it is and what it can be. As artists strive to express their ideas, and community arts workers around the world seek to use the arts to enable others to find fulfilment in their lives, the insidious co-optation of the arts by Big Oil looms as an ugly stain on our cultures.

In late 2013 John Keeling's graph of rising carbon dioxide levels in the earth's atmosphere marked the point many had wished it would never reach. Carbon dioxide reached 400 parts per million (ppm). The safe level was back at 350 ppm, and climate scientists warn 400

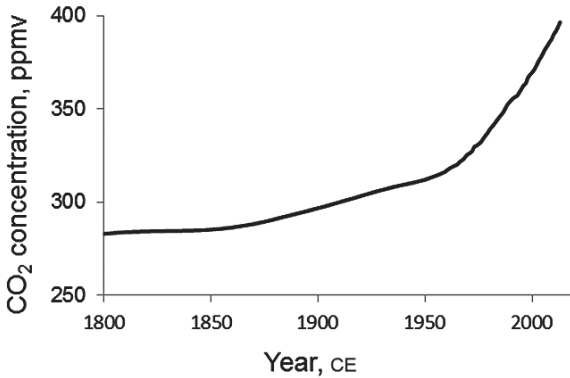


Figure 1.3: *Carbon Dioxide Concentration* ©Simon Lewis, 2014.

Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, measured in parts per million by volume, 1800–2013. Data from 1959 onwards is the Keeling Curve, of direct measurements of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>. Data: annual measurements of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere from 1959, from Mauna Loa, Hawaii, and from 1800 to 1955 from air bubbles trapped in ice, from the Law Dome ice core from East Antarctica (version with seventy-five-year smoothing).

ppm risks irreversible and dangerous changes. The Keeling Curve is an artwork in itself: historical projections followed by painstaking measurements plotted conscientiously over a fifty-year-and-counting duration, each dot signifying a new set of possible challenges. The shape of the curve in its full eight million year mapping is swift and unforgiving, the upward route in recent times looking skyward, questioning the gods. Many galleries profess their concern about global warming and publicly announce their carbon dioxide reduction schema. But do influential actors like Nicholas Serota and Lord John Browne begin to consider the detrimental impact on climate action embodied by oil sponsorship of the arts? If we are to dream, to sketch and to create ways of living that reduce human impact on the planet's ecosystems, we cannot allow our imaginations to be filtered by Big Oil. Galleries' associations with oil companies are not financially inevitable or otherwise beyond challenge. It is a choice that must remain open to question, and therefore to change.

At Tate's Summer Party 2010, at around 7.45pm security staff were ready to conduct Anna and me out of the building. Two burly



## INTRODUCTION

men brought over large black screens to surround us and our messy molasses spill: we thanked them for helping with the clean-up and cover-up operation. Upon being calmly ejected from the building, we could see the artists' protest continuing and Tate cleaning staff beginning to reckon with the twelve oil barrels' spill – some of whom were Colombian emigrants and said they understood fully why people might object to BP. The events continued inside, but the morning's newspapers told the spill story first, and pictures from Liberate Tate's performances appeared in print and on websites around the globe.

It was Tate's party, it was BP's – but it was ours too. We were all there at that moment: the naysayers, the stunt-makers, the corporate lackeys, the undecided and the stuck-in-the-mud, the hard-working staff and the ones who call the shots. We've been crossing paths and debating the issues ever since.