Introduction: Experiments in Exhibition, Ethnography, Art and Science

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"*Nullius in verba*," "On the word of no man." In the 1660s, with these words taken from Horace, the scientific age was inaugurated. Adopted by the newly established Royal Society, this motto declared a break from Aristotelian epistemologies based on doctrine, rhetoric, and the authority of accepted truths which had dominated the scholastic world of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. What the new academicians proposed was a commitment to empirical evidence as the basis for knowledge, a commitment to establishing truths about the world through the staging of experiments. The experiment, meaning "from trying," thus became synonymous with the scientific method. Indeed, the popular image of the scientist remains that of a white-coated figure, surrounded by laboratory apparatus, peering into a test tube.

Historians of science have discussed the concept of the experiment at length. Like other disciplines, the natural sciences have had their reflexive turn and authors including Hacking (1983), Latour (1999), and Shapin and Schaffer (1985) have turned their critical attention to the experimental processes through which scientific knowledge is produced. While they have pointed out the heterogeneity of types of experimentation historically (especially Hacking 1975; see Schaffer 2005), central to many character-

izations is that experiment is regarded as a knowledge-generating procedure – "experiment is the *creation* of phenomena" as Ian Hacking puts it (1983, p. 229, emphasis added). Via the assembly of particular apparatus and methods performed in a context that was at least theoretically open to the public, experimentalism was, according to Thomas Hobbes's critical account of 1660, an empirical intervention that aimed to "procure new phenomena" (see Shapin and Schaffer 1985, p. 115). Experiment thus entails the "systematic production of novelty" (Pickstone 2000, p. 13). Or, as Bruno Latour (1999) has explored, experiment can be seen as a transformative process – for the people as well as the materials involved. (For example, the experimenter is transformed by the experiment into an expert.) As we hope to demonstrate, such conceptualizations resonate in the chapters of this book, which are concerned not with scientific experiments so much as with experiments in exhibitionary practices.

Indeed, the realms of experiments and exhibitions are perhaps not so distinct. Shapin and Schaffer argue that the purpose of scientific apparatus is "to make visible the invisible" – in other words, to exhibit, to "hold out," to display. In the seventeenth century Robert Hooke, we might note, was the Royal Society's first *curator* of experiments. (The word "curator" was first used to refer to an officer in charge of a museum collection around the same time as the founding of the Royal Society.) Furthermore, the world's first university museum – the Ashmolean, which opened its doors in 1683 – was also a venue for the public demonstration of scientific experiments. The exhibitionary quality of public experiments – their drama, spectacle, and shock value – has been revived more recently in the gory showmanship of Gunther von Hagens, his hugely successful *Body Worlds* exhibition and televised autopsies.

If the contributors to this volume are agreed on one thing, however, it is that contemporary exhibitionary practices cannot be conceived merely as means for the display and dissemination of already existing, preformulated knowledges (the Aristotelian model rejected by the scientific experimentalists). Arguing that contemporary exhibitionary practice is – or should be – also an experimental practice, the contributors to this volume insist that exhibition, too, is a site for the generation rather than reproduction of knowledge and experience. In the following chapters, exhibition is thus conceived as a kind of laboratory, in which, to use the language of actor network theory (Law and Hassard 1999), various "actants" (visitors, curators, objects, technologies, institutional and architectural spaces, and so forth) are brought into relation with

each other with no sure sense of what the result will be. The exhibitions discussed are, it might be said, experiments in meaning-making.

Initiating our Experiment

As editors, our experiment has been to bring together a diverse group of contributors – curators, artists, anthropologists, and other academics – to reflect on their own or others' exhibitionary experimentalism. Our experiment began with an open call for papers for a panel entitled "Exhibition Experiments: Technologies and Cultures of Display" at the *Anthropology and Science* decennial conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists held in Manchester in 2003.[1] The abstract for the panel invited contributions on experimentation with exhibitionary form, media, and technologies of display and suggested that presentations might reflect upon the motivations, effects, potential, and limitations of exhibitionary experimentation and also possible parallels with, or differences from, ethnographic experimentalism (discussed below). Papers were selected which best met with this remit and that collectively offered a broad range of examples, so that ideas could be investigated across diverse contexts. The panel drew a large audience and produced lively discussion. This discussion then fed into the second phase of our project in which we reviewed the knowledge generated so far, further refined our remit to focus more specifically on cases which involved a substantial element of experimenting with the idea and practice of exhibition itself, and then – following leads from the conference debate, from our panellists and others with whom we discussed the ideas – invited further contributions, from a wider array of disciplines, in order to open up the experiment for a second time.

As with the exhibitions discussed in this book, our experiment involved gathering contributions without sure knowledge of what the outcome would be. Certainly, we were aware that there seemed to be a good deal of exhibition experimentation going on and had noted some apparently shared themes, but the extent to which such diverse experiments would be motivated by like concerns, would share similar ideas, or would be subject to related reflections by those involved was open to question. What we were interested to find was that, despite the diversity of the contributors' professional backgrounds and the contexts of the exhibitions they write about, there was a remarkable consistency in many aspects of their

arguments and observations. Below, we pick out some of the areas that the chapters in *Exhibition Experiments* collectively bring to the fore.

Exhibiting Exhibition

The shift from Aristotelian to experiment-based empirical science entailed, as noted above, a making visible of the processes by which scientific knowledge was established. Mechanism was, at least ostensibly, laid bare, and theoretically was made open to "any man" or "the public." Whatever the opacities involved in practice – such as continuing flows of patronage, barriers to public inspection, mystifications of expertise, and so forth – the notion of transparency of method was central to the burgeoning idea of experiment.

The idea of exhibition experiment as involving a making visible of processes of exhibition itself is present in many of the chapters that follow, and several contributors note the increasing prevalence of "reflexive" or "meta-exhibitions." In Nuno Porto's discussion of ethnographic museums, for example, he notes cases such as the one at Neuchâtel, Switzerland, which produced reflexive exhibitions that paid attention to questions of collecting and colonial power regimes, such as *Collectors/Passions* (1982), from the early 1980s. Other accounts of the trend toward "institutional critique" (e.g. Putnam 2001; Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh 2004; Marstine 2005; Schneider and Wright 2006) generally emphasize the work of artists such as Christian Boltanski, Neil Cummings, Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, and Fred Wilson. While much reflexive art work has been contained within artworks themselves – for example, Boltanski's "Inventory of Objects belonging to an inhabitant of Oxford" (1973; discussed by Schneider 2006) – an increasing trend has been toward installation (see Porto, chapter 8) in which art escapes its frame and infiltrates other parts of the museum, or even moves beyond it. *Browse* (1997) by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, for example, consisted of a leaflet showing objects from both the British Museum and Selfridges department store – so highlighting the similarities between the two and raising questions about the nature of collecting. The leaflet was made available in both the museum and the store (see Putnam 2001, p. 112; Cummings and Lewandowska 2001). Chapter 6 provides further examples of their challenging work.

The range of aspects of exhibiting that have been subject to reflexive strategies is extensive. For those concerned that exhibiting exhibition risks

becoming a repetitive and overly familiar move, the range of examples contained in this book suggests that the scope for experimenting with exhibition is as broad as the range of topics that exhibitions cover. The cases that Porto describes from the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Coimbra (MAUC), Portugal, for example, include an exhibition of materials from the Dundo Museum, Angola, considering photography in relation to colonial regimes of surveillance; and *Nomads,* an exhibition of, and about, objects that had traveled and been exhibited elsewhere.

These examples are very different from the reflexivity involved in the storyboard produced by Xperiment! – a group involved in the public communication of science – in which they seek to lay bare the ongoing processes by which they attempted to learn about the science and interests involved in genetic modification (chapter 5). Or take the example of *Capital,* an artistic intervention by Cummings and Lewandowska at the opening of Tate Modern in London in 2001. This involved exploring analogies between Tate Modern and the Bank of England, and the role that both play in assurances in circuits of capital. Drawing on ideas about gift exchange, *Capital* also sought to draw attention to questions of the visibility of some kinds of art patronage versus the invisibility of the financial contribution of ordinary taxpayers.

In a chapter that is centrally concerned with exhibiting exhibition, Mieke Bal provides a further example of an exhibition that seeks to expose what she here calls "the work of exhibition" – the narrative strategies and frames through which exhibitions position viewers and offer up particular, positioned, readings. It is worth noting that in a considerable corpus of previous writing and, more recently, her own curatorial work, Bal has herself made a major contribution to analyzing the "work of exhibition" (e.g. 1996, 2006). Her praise here, then, for an exhibition that she describes as "the most effective, gripping and powerful" that she has ever seen – and that derives this power from the way in which it illuminates its subject while simultaneously being a "meta-exhibition" or "exhibition exploring the nature of exhibiting" – deserves particular note. The exhibition, called *Partners* and curated by Ydessa Hendeles, is concerned with the uneasy relationship between German and Jewish populations. It deploys mixed media – photography and sculpture – in juxtapositions that prompt the visitor to be attentive to the politics of particular kinds of optics and commemorative practices; and in her analysis Bal seeks to understand its mechanisms via a set of illuminating analytical concepts inspired by the exhibition's own use of filmic and cinematic aesthetics.

What these chapters also show is that the work of experimentally exposing exhibitionary mechanisms can be undertaken through the full range of exhibitionary media – including both "conventional" media, such as art works and objects, and "new media" such as video or digital technologies (see especially chapter 1 by Henning and chapter 7 by Carolin and Haynes). Moreover, as Paul Basu shows in his chapter, even museum architecture can be used reflexively by architects such as Daniel Libeskind to disrupt conventional museological architectural tropes and thus to "critique the concept of the museum through the medium of the museum itself." He borrows from literary theory to refer to the strategy of "reflexive structuration, by means of which a text shows what it is telling" (Ulmer 1992, p. 140; see chapter 2), as "the *mise en abyme*." This terminology, which indicates the dangerous nature of the process involved, is revealing. Exposing your own practices is not necessarily easy. It can indeed feel like, if not quite a falling into the abyss, at least a kind of crisis.

Crises of Representation and Ethnography

Exposing practice has been a key feature not only of the first age of experimentalism – that associated with the project of the Enlightenment – in which the scientific method provided a reliable means of knowing the "Truth" – but also with what might be called a second age of experimentalism, associated with that post-Enlightenment "crisis of representation" in which notions of "objectivity," "certainty," and "Truth," as well as earlier claims of transparency, have themselves come to be questioned. While the crisis of representation has been reported across a wide range of disciplines, it has been particularly keenly felt within anthropology (Marcus and Fischer 1986). In response, anthropology has struggled with its methodological and textual practices to, among other things, respond to the conundrum of how to represent "otherness" when the very concept of otherness is perceived as a construction of the discipline's own practices. Ethnography and ethnographic experimentalism have, in turn, inspired or provided a critical prompt to other disciplines, and especially to artists, in dealing with questions of engagement and representation. This is evident in many of the chapters that follow.

Several of the contributors here, for example, use ethnographic methods. This includes anthropologists Alexa Färber and Anne Lorimer who carry out participant-observation fieldwork on the making of

exhibitions. By doing so, they not only practice the "repatriation of anthropology" (Marcus and Fischer 1986) – that is, anthropology of their own societies – advocated as one means of contending with anthropology's perceived focus on otherness, but they also turn a method that was developed in a context of capturing the exotic back onto a practice (exhibiting) that was itself implicated in that process. Other contributors, who do not identify themselves as anthropologists, also employ ethnographic approaches. Members of Xperiment!, for example, effectively use the experimental ethnographic methods of "following the object" or "following the story" (advocated by George Marcus 1998; see also Latour 1987) in their attempt to grasp the complexity of the scientific and political processes that they seek to describe. Moreover, their unusual "text" – a large storyboard that can be walked upon – also exemplifies tenets of "second age" experimental ethnographic writing in its presentation of multiple voices and positions, and as unfinished and contingent. The work of Cummings and Lewandowska with Polish film enthusiasts also entails a kind of collaborative ethnography; and in its search for new forms for exhibiting and archiving develops the kinds of concerns that have been voiced by anthropologists. Ann-Sofi Sidén's work on prostitution likewise relies on ethnographic engagement, in this case with the sex workers who become the subject of her exhibition – *Warte Mal!* ("Hey, wait!" – a phrase with which they attempt to attract their clients). While this work can undoubtedly be seen as an example of what Hal Foster has called "the ethnographic turn in contemporary art and criticism" (1996, p. 181), it goes beyond many such works both in avoiding assuming ethnographic authority (a problem that Foster has identified in some "artist as ethnographer" pieces) and in the way in which her work artistically generates complex questions of voyeurism, alterity, realism, and genre, as discussed by a range of commentators in chapter 8.

Works such as these not only draw on ethnographic practices, they also offer experimental models that may in turn inspire transformation in practices in anthropology and other disciplines. As Schneider and Wright (2006a) observe in their discussion of the relationship between art and anthropology, there is considerable unplumbed potential in artistic practice that might be experimentally developed in anthropology. In particular, art offers techniques for moving beyond the overwhelming textual focus of anthropology's 1980s representational concerns, as exemplified in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). To escape logocentrism is not, however, necessarily to

escape the criticisms to which it has been subject. Non-textual media – such as video, photography, painting, or interactive computer screens – can equally, though in interestingly different ways, raise problems of the kind put forward by the *Writing Culture* critiques (e.g. of authority and authorship, realism and transparency) – as we see in many of the chapters that follow.

Nevertheless, what exhibitions offer is the opportunity to mix media and to draw from different disciplinary traditions, and in the process to explore their differential potentials. Exhibitions also typically reach a wider public than do academic texts and offer different possibilities for engaging them – including physically and within the exhibition space itself (see below). It is notable that in recent years a number of the academics who have written most extensively on questions of representation have themselves turned to exhibition-making. George Marcus, for example, has been involved in exhibiting the work of Cuban artists, including Fernando Calzadilla and Abdel Hernández. Their artistic practices – partly influenced by *Writing Culture* debates – offer, he suggests, inspiring collaborative possibilities for ethnographic practice (Calzadilla and Marcus 2006). Mieke Bal, who writes here and who is one of the most well-known and original cultural theorists writing on art, has herself taken up the challenge to create an exhibition (Bal 2006). In doing so, she drew upon her understandings of the "affective syntax" and "work of exhibition" discussed here to create an experimental work that also aimed to avoid the dilemmas of the auteurist exhibitionary strategy that has become one of the most common responses to critiques of the absence of authorship in exhibitions. As she explains, openly acknowledging the authorial role of the curator does not necessarily challenge the curator's authority. More challenging strategies – involving exposing the work of exhibition through exhibition itself – are required. Likewise, Bruno Latour, whose writings have inspired experiments in ethnography, text, and exhibition (for example, the ideas of multiple "actants" and of "following" noted above; and see chapter 5), has worked with Peter Weibel at the ZKM to produce the exhibitions *Iconoclash* and *Making Things Public* discussed here; both exhibitions include exploration of themes of representation that he has previously tackled in his writing.

Exhibition experiments, then, expand the scope for engaging inventively and provocatively in questions raised by the so-called "crisis of representation" in anthropology and elsewhere. They do so on account of some characteristic qualities – to which we now turn.

Assemblages

All exhibitions entail the bringing together of unlikely assemblages of people, things, ideas, texts, spaces, and different media. Curators, designers, artists, anthropologists, sponsors, visitors, artworks, artifacts, antiquities, machines, installations, display cases, spotlights, photographs, moving images, catalogues, promotional materials, object labels, audio tours, gallery guides – we might say that these constitute the apparatus of the exhibition experiment. As Weibel and Latour note, they are highly artificial assemblages, brought together for no other reason than the experiment itself, and yet their purpose remains to make visible that which is otherwise invisible, to make tangible something intangible (Shapin and Schaffer 1985). The alchemy through which this transformation is brought about is another of the themes that run through many of the chapters of the book.

Reflecting on the social, creative, and bureaucratic negotiations involved in staging a major exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, Lorimer suggests that there is indeed "magic" involved in the design process. Charged with the task of translating concepts into material forms (giving "body" to the concept of "mind," for example), Lorimer argues that for exhibition developers the process of assembling the components of a display may be better understood as a process of discovery, in which the exhibition takes on a "ghostly" life of its own, disrupting its creators' intentions and leading to serendipitous encounters. As the apparatus of the exhibition is assembled, in the museum workshop as much as on the gallery floor, so the different components interact with each other, generating new and unanticipated outcomes.

It was this idea of putting together different elements and observing the outcome of their interaction that was central to the early appropriation of the concept of the experiment within literature and the arts. Whereas the label "experimental" is today perhaps too loosely employed to refer to art practice which is regarded as innovative or avant-garde, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries artistic experimentation was considered more closely analogous to scientific experimentation. The German poet and philosopher Novalis (1772–1801), for example, was particularly interested in chemistry and how chemists experiment with different substances, combining them and observing how they react together under different conditions. For Novalis, experimenting with words, the text, too,

was like a chemistry laboratory in which compositions in different areas of knowledge and experience could be examined by observing how they react to one another (Fabian 2002).

Working at ZKM, the Center for Art and Media, in Karlsruhe, Germany – an institution which is itself dedicated to bringing together different areas of knowledge and experience across the sciences, the arts, and politics – Weibel and Latour describe *Iconoclash* and *Making Things Public* as assemblies of assemblies. In the context of *Iconoclash*, for example, these assemblages include not only the "totally improbable elements" that would go on display, including documents, scientific objects, religious icons, and artworks (both genuine articles and facsimiles), but also the input of no fewer than seven curators assembled for the project. Challenging the "sacrosanct autonomy" of a singular curatorial vision, which typifies the hierarchical structure of much exhibitionary practice, Weibel and Latour's exhibitions are thus also experiments in heteronomy. Rather than seeking agreement and a neat convergence of purpose, Weibel and Latour describe the desired outcome of these assemblages as the production of "interference patterns," which, as physicists experimenting with wave forms will explain, can be both constructive and destructive.

New media "remediate" old media, old media remediate new media (see Henning, chapter 1). Of all media, that most closely associated with the process of assemblage is film. In cinema it is classically the relationship *between* the assembled shots that constructs their meaning: "The essence of cinema", writes Eisenstein, "does not lie in the images, but in the relation between images!" (Aumont 1987, p. 146). It is interesting, therefore, that Mieke Bal uses cinema as her master trope in her analysis of *Partners*. By exploring the medium of the exhibition through the medium of cinema, one might say she remediates both. Bal is concerned with understanding the affective relationships both between the exhibition visitor and the artworks exhibited, and among the assembled artworks themselves. The emotional punch of *Partners*, Bal argues, results from the way in which the visitor encounters the discrete elements of the exhibition as she moves through it. In particular Bal is interested in exploring the "affective syntax" that results from the sequencing of and transitions between these elements as they are framed and animated by the dynamics of the visit. This may be understood as an essentially cinematic experience, consequent upon more than the mere juxtaposition of images or installations, and dependent upon more complex techniques such as dissolves, superimposition, zoom-ins, flashbacks, long shots, close-ups, and so forth.

Crucially, it is the visitor that provides the kinetic impetus to make the images of *Partners* "move," and the affective discourse of the exhibition thus remains "virtual, not actual, so long as visitors do not 'perform' the film" (Bal, chapter 3). It is to this issue of performance, another dominant theme in the world of exhibition experimentalism, that we now proceed.

From Mediation to Enactment

The "crisis of representation" discussed above and alluded to in many of the chapters forms the critical context for much contemporary experimentation in exhibitionary form. It is no longer tenable to claim that one can represent neutrally, objectively, or impartially – whether in an exhibition or in an ethnographic monograph. All representations are socially, politically, ideologically, institutionally, and technologically mediated. Exhibitions, as various authors here argue, must be understood as sites of cultural mediation; and mediation, furthermore, must be understood as a process that partly constructs that which it mediates. In exhibition experimentation, this shift from representation to mediation has provoked two responses. On the one hand there is what Henning (below) describes as "hypermediacy," in which the processes of mediation are accentuated and where media are used to reference other media. On the other hand there is what Henning describes as "immediacy," in which processes of mediation are suppressed or concealed; this is evident, for instance, in the so-called "return of the object," where contextualizing information or narrative interpretation is, to a greater or lesser extent, suspended (Bann 2003). In many of the exhibitions discussed by our contributors, hypermediacy and immediacy co-exist, drawing attention to both the politics and poetics of display.

An exhibition is, above all, a multimedia environment in which different media come to remediate each other. As Henning reminds us, as new media technologies are introduced into exhibitionary practice, so the space of exhibition and the way it is used by both exhibitors and visitors are transformed. The gallery or museum is thus constantly reimagined as it embraces new technologies and reanimates old ones. In this way, the museum becomes a fascinating context for pursuing a kind of archaeological excavation of media technologies, in which the impact of new information and communication technologies, for example, can be shown to be prefigured in earlier, long-taken-for-granted technologies

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such as the card index system and interactive mechanical devices adapted from fairground attractions. Through such technologies we are witnessing a convergence of the institutions of the museum, the library, and the archive. But is this an experimental moment of reimagination or actually a return to an earlier concept of the museum? With the renaissance of the museum as archive, the concept of the "open storage display" has become increasingly popular. As the store effectively becomes the exhibit, Henning poses an important question: what becomes of the medium of the exhibition itself?

With Henning's caveat in mind, that very little innovation is without precedent in contemporary exhibitionary practice, a significant shift in the function of the exhibition space is nevertheless apparent in many of the experiments discussed in this volume. This might be most succinctly described in Weibel and Latour's words as a "performative turn" in exhibition practice. The exhibition is thus no longer conceived as a medium for representation, but becomes, instead, a medium for "enactment." Cummings and Lewandowska thus write of breaking from that long tradition which separates the site of the production of an artwork (the artist's studio) from the sites in which an artwork is all too often passively consumed (the gallery or exhibition). They argue, rather, for the "exhibitionary context" in which the *work* of the work of art is activated. Hence, as we have already noted, it is in the act of visiting *Partners* that its cinematic syntax is animated.

An interactive relationship between installation and visitor is central to the *Knowledge Themenpark* at Expo 2000, discussed by Färber. The main attraction of *Knowledge* was a "swarm" of 72 slowly moving robots, among which visitors could roam in a dimly lit exhibition hall. The designers employed the poorly understood swarming behavior of certain animals as a metaphor for the "complexity and interconnection of knowledge," but it is evident from Färber's ethnographic account that it was the visitors' own "knowledge-seeking strategies" that were most forcefully articulated by the exhibition. As the visitors interacted with the slowly swarming robots and discovered that the movements of the robots could be influenced by their behavior, they sought to comprehend what was happening and in so doing became part of the performance of the installation. *Knowledge* became an arena for the visitors' own experimentation, and in a manner that made it necessary for them to gather evidence through "acting" – what happens if I do this? Whereas the artists' group involved in developing the swarm wanted the exhibit to be experienced without further interpretation, the

Expo organizers were more concerned to explain what the installation was meant to represent and what visitors were supposed to learn from it. Here there were clearly two different conceptualizations of exhibition converging on the same site: the one concerned with knowledge transmission and understanding, the other with enactment and experience.

Weibel and Latour's exhibition *Making Things Public* is concerned with democracy and that elusive concept, "the public" (see also chapters 5 and 9). "Democracy", Weibel and Latour argue, "cannot be represented, it can only be 'enacted'," and thus *Making Things Public* was, above all, conceived as a "field of enactment" – an "interactive artwork" in which the visitor becomes another among the many assembled "actants" which comprise the exhibition. This is perhaps most clearly evident in an installation within the exhibition, designed by digital artists Michel Jaffrennou and Thierry Coduys, entitled *The Phantom*, after Walter Lippmann's 1925 book *The Phantom Public. The Phantom* is described as a "quasi-invisible" work of art, which comprised a series of audio-visual effects distributed throughout the entire *Making Things Public* exhibition. The "behavior" of this installation is shaped by numerous factors, including local climatic changes, the time of day, push-buttons that visitors are invited to press at various points in the exhibition, as well as the visitors' own movements through the exhibition, which are tracked through unique radio frequency identifiers in their tickets. The idea, explain the curators, "was to give visitors a vague and uneasy feeling that 'something happens' for which they are at least sometimes responsible – sometimes in a direct way, but mostly in ways not directly traceable" – "just as politics", they go on, "passes through people as a rather mysterious flow" (Weibel and Latour, chapter 4). *The Phantom* – and, indeed, *Making Things Public* as a whole – do not represent political process in a series of discursive displays, they enacts it. As Weibel and Latour conclude, "it is an exhibition experiment that *is* what it shows" (emphasis added).

But the performative turn in exhibition experimentation is not reliant on such "hi-tech" computer-mediated technologies. In contrast to *Knowledge Themenpark* or *The Phantom,* note, for example, Cummings and Lewandowska's *Capital.* Every day for the duration of the exhibition, at unspecified times, this experiment involved the enactment of a gift exchange, whereby a visitor would be approached by a gallery or museum official and, with the words "This is for you," would be presented with a finely wrapped, limited-edition photographic print of a silver spoon bearing the Bank of England's crest. This simple, though astonishing,

gesture would disrupt the normal behavior of the gallery (provoking intrigue among bystanders as well as affecting those directly involved) and would typically result in an animated conversation between gift-giver and receiver. Discussions would follow as to the nature of the exchange enacted and thereby exhibited: were debts being repaid through the gift (for instance, the public institution's debt to the taxpayer, whose invisible gift sustains the institution), or were new debts being incurred? It is the enactment of such disruptions in the placid order of things that constitutes the *work* of the exhibition experiment.

Spaces of Encounter

Through such experiments, the exhibition becomes transformed from a space of representation into a space of encounter. This causes us to consider experimentation in the architecture of exhibitionary spaces and how it shapes the possibilities of the encounters such spaces generate (cf. Giebelhausen 2003, 2006; MacLeod 2005; Lampugnani 2006). It is interesting to note the spatial metaphors that our contributors draw upon: within you will find reference to maps that are territories to be walked upon and narrated, labyrinths that simultaneously frustrate and enthrall, halls of mirrors that reflect back visitors' own implication in that which is exhibited. Such spatial forms urge us to engage with the concept of exhibition, not as a two-dimensional "text" to be "read," as Cummings and Lewandowska remark, in a "slow pan along gallery walls" (chapter 6), but as an immersive, three-dimensional environment, which calls visitors to explore actively with all their senses and with their "muscular consciousnesses" as well as their intellects (Ingold 2000: 203).

Speaking from their respective professional and disciplinary backgrounds, the discussants of Sidén's *Warte Mal!* exhibition, staged at the Hayward Gallery in 2002, all remark on the architectural space of the installation. Concerned with prostitution in the Czech border town of Dubi, the exhibit takes the form of a central corridor off which lead numerous cubicles, each equipped with benches and with television screens and loudspeakers which play loops of seemingly unedited video interviews with Dubi's sex workers. Elsewhere, onto screens and walls, are projected other video clips, still photographs and excerpts from Sidén's diaries recording her experiences as an artist-ethnographer living among her informants. Unlike the peep-show arcades that the installation's layout

evokes, or the Dubi hotel rooms rented by the hour by the prostitutes, the walls of the exhibition are transparent. Thus, as visitors enter this maze-like exhibition, moving from viewing booth to viewing booth, they watch with the unsettling knowledge that they are also watched: as they gaze, they cannot hide from the gaze of others. As Laura Bear notes, this causes visitors to reflect on their own role as "consumers of images of others' lives," and to question their position in relation to the images and lives they look at, listen to, and read about: are they witnesses, observers, voyeurs? Griselda Pollock suggests that the architectural organization of *Warte Mal!* has the effect of weaving a web around its audience, capturing them in threads of discourse and image and space. Unlike in many exhibitions that one can pass through with ease, the visitor to *Warte Mal!* becomes entangled in these texts, photographs and videos. As one metaphor suggests another, so curator Clare Carolin considers the exhibition as a "hall of mirrors" in which visitors find themselves "reflected and implicated in the issue of prostitution" – there is no escaping here, no recourse to the reassuring and passive consumption of an aesthetic display. The exhibition has agency, it entraps its audience (cf. Gell 1998).

The spatial dynamics of exhibition are foregrounded by Basu in his discussion of the labyrinthine aesthetic in the deconstructivist museum architecture of Daniel Libeskind. Basu approaches the labyrinth not only as an architectural device, but also as a narratological one. He is interested, for example, in extending Ricoeurian ideas of the temporal configuration of emplotment into the space of the museum, considering how visitors tread sense-making paths through an exhibitionary environment, and questioning what happens if such paths are disrupted by what amounts to a labyrinthine design. Whereas many museums are unintentionally (and, many argue, negatively) labyrinthine in their layout (cf. Duncan and Wallach 2004), Basu argues that Libeskind intentionally employs a labyrinthine aesthetic in his museum designs to complicate and critique what he characterizes as "the persuasive "straightforwardness" of the institution's grand narratives and taxonomies. Through the use of intersecting, corridor-like galleries, complicating trajectories, dead-ends and inaccessible voids, this design principle is enacted in the very structure of the museum, making of its galleries an "active path," which insists on its visitors' cognitive and physical labors. Applying de Certeau's (1984) critique of the fictive "totalizing view" of the city to the space of the museum, Basu contends that, rather than fulfilling the promise, implicit in all museums, of rendering their obscure texts readable, the labyrinthine

museum purposely frustrates its visitors' expectations, thrusting visitors back into the troubling – but less illusory – realms of partial truths and uncertainties.

Navigations

It will be clear that the exhibition experiments described in this volume are not experiments in didacticism. The purpose of their experimentation is not to innovate ever more effective ways of disseminating knowledge that has been preformulated and authenticated by experts to those who are inexpert and presumably in need of it. No, the tenor of these experiments has been to reconfigure the way in which exhibitions work. Rather than making complex realities more vividly simple, patronizing audiences and perpetuating illusory securities, the issue has more often been how to engage with complexity, how to create a context that will open up a space for conversation and debate, above all how to enlist audiences as co-experimenters, willing to *try* for themselves. The exhibitions discussed in this book are, it might be said, as much about "not knowing" as they are about knowing. They are about navigations in realms of proliferating knowledges and surfeits of information, about the negotiation of competing truths. Visitors in such environments must play an active role as navigators, way-finders and meaning-makers; drawing their own observations and conclusions without the reassuring presence of an "authority" to defer to.

Thus Xperiment! conceive their exhibitions as laboratories or research centers of "shared incompetence," the purpose of which is not to decrease the "knowledge differential" between experts and non-experts, but to bring together different people with different knowledges in an arena that is foreign to all (the arena of shared incompetence). Concerned with communicating scientific knowledge in the public realm, Xperiment! are keen to position themselves as non-scientists and non-experts (despite their audiences' preference to construct them as such). Rather, as exhibitors, they argue that they are engaged *with* their audiences in "fuzzy," unclear, and confused navigations of their topic and of each other's knowledges. In these navigations, no mutual understanding is necessarily achieved, and, indeed, understandings are dynamic, shifting with every changing context. In the project they describe, in which their "fuzzy knowledge navigations" are directed toward exploring a genetically

modified rice strain, the group find themselves acting in turn as ethnographers, cartographers, and storytellers. The project culminates with Xperiment! playing shifting roles (are they actors, artists, activists, a PR organization?) as they guide museum visitors around a 250-meter-square "map" of the ethico-scientific processes involved in the production of the rice technology. Exchanging stories with their audiences, they discovered that "a museum can be much more than a territory that represents facts." It can also be a territory of "interaction and experience, an environment that generates various kinds of communications that consistently produce in the participants 'a difference which makes a difference.'" Such is the potential of the exhibition experiment.

The Trouble with Experiment[2]

Exhibition experiments, as we have defined them here, then, are intended to be troubling. Experimentalism is not just a matter of style or novel forms of presentation. Rather, it is a risky process of assembling people and things with the intention of producing differences that make a difference. In their production of something new, experiments seek to unsettle accepted knowledge or the status quo.

But experiments can go wrong. They may turn out to be not troubling in the ways that were intended, or, indeed, not troubling at all. They may make little difference. Equally, trying to create experimental exhibitions may itself generate troubles – practically, institutionally, and politically. Moreover, experimentalism should not be exempt from critique but – if it is to continue to trouble in meaningful ways – needs to be contextualized, analyzed, and troubled itself. Thus, while the chapters here seek to highlight and explore different kinds of exhibition experiments, they also remain alert to some of their limitations and dilemmas.

As many of the chapters below remind us, exhibitions inevitably take place in particular institutional contexts which pose their own constraints of space, funding, personnel, and managerial demands. Exhibitions are generally expensive and this may make some museum directors, managers, and trustees reluctant to allow experimental exhibitions – which are by definition relatively unknown quantities – to go ahead. Furthermore, exhibition experiments may be politically sensitive or challenging – and it is to the credit of all of the institutions that hosted the exhibitions described in this book that they were willing to take the risk to do so. It is

not always thus as, for example, with the banning of the work of Hans Haacke from the Guggenheim (Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh 2004, pp. 545–8) or the decision to withdraw John Latham's *God is Great* – an artwork consisting of the Bible, the Talmud and the Qur'an embedded together in glass – from a retrospective of his work at Tate Britain in the aftermath of the July 7th London bombings in 2005. (For further examples see Dubin 2006 and Conn 2006.) Moreover, as Anthony Shelton has pointed out in a review of developments in ethnographic exhibition, in many museums there has been a shift of control away from curatorial staff and toward managerialism such that "[m]useums … are no longer motivated primarily by either established or experimental academic programming, but by the delivery of external institutional objectives broadly related to social engineering policies and subordinated to supposed market forces" (2006, p. 76). "Blockbusteritis," as Steven Conn (2006) has called the increasing tendency of many major museums to mount large-scale shows of well-known artists, is but one symptom of an institutional preference for tried-and-tested formulae.

While the experiments described in this volume have managed to find suitable niches in the contemporary museum world, they have not necessarily avoided financial and other constraints. An institution such as the ZKM, which has extensive financial and technological resources and also offers exhibition-makers considerable freedom to experiment, is the exception rather than the rule. But, as is shown by the fact that it has produced so many intriguing experimental exhibitions that have become wider talking points, it is an exception that generates significant interventions. Yet, even at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of available finance, imaginative curators and artists may succeed in producing innovative experimental exhibitions. We have noted Cummings and Lewandowska's simple but effective experiment at Tate Modern above. Or take the example of the MAUC, where, as Porto describes, budgets were often severely limited and personnel few, and there were additional constraints and demands, such as that a particular exhibition would attract school groups. Nevertheless, by engaging fully with ideas about ethnographic experimentalism, curators were able to create exhibitions that were challenging even while working within the constraints. Sometimes, indeed, constraints may play into effects judged experimental – as Lorimer describes in relation to some of the factors involved in the Brain exhibition in Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry coming to look so ghostly.

One niche constraint that may pose particular problems for experimentalism is that of genre. Experiments frequently seek to challenge conventional boundaries, but this very challenge may make them hard to place. *Warte Mal!* is an interesting case here because its use of anthropological techniques and video documentary made some visitors and reviewers question its status as art. This was compounded by its subject matter – prostitution – which, as Pollock comments, "is thought somehow to be beyond the realm of what one should see in an art gallery" (chapter 7). Moreover, as the curator of the show comments, multiply troubling exhibitions such as this are more likely to be shown at "international biennials or in more modest – often artist-run – spaces" than in larger galleries (see also Rectanus 2006). On the other hand, once a form of experiment – in this case the politically engaged use of documentary – has been tested in a relatively established institution (in this case the Hayward), it may be taken up by others. However, as Carolin further suggests, as an experimental form becomes appropriated into the mainstream, it may also shed some of its complexity and political edge.

The movement of experiments into the mainstream raises the question of whether an experiment remains experimental in all contexts, or when it is repeated. In the natural sciences one feature of experiments is that they should be replicable. Nevertheless, it is the first use of a particular experiment that establishes new knowledge – the replications are intended to confirm it. The repetition of an experiment, therefore, is less "experimental" in the sense that we have defined it above, than is the first, more risky and indeterminate, attempt. This is not to say that repeating exhibition experiments in different contexts is not worthwhile. Doing so may bring them to new audiences; and altered contexts may, perhaps as part of the indeterminacy of process that Lorimer in particular highlights, turn out to have results that are more novel than expected. (The opposite can also be the case as shown in Macdonald's ethnographic study of exhibition-making in the Science Museum, London (2002).) Equally, we are aware of the characteristic Euro-American obsession with novelty (Hirsch and Macdonald 2005); and would not wish to maintain that only the new should be valued. Claims to novelty are, indeed, part of the standard discourse of exhibition-production (Macdonald 2002, p. 115). But this is not to say that such exhibitions are necessarily experimental – that is, that they trouble existing knowledge and practice.

Many aspects of exhibitions that we now accept as standard were, of course, experimental innovations once. Henning points out that when the

Museum of Society and Economy in Vienna introduced spotlighting in the 1920s this was considered a noteworthy innovation. So too, some time later, was the use of film within exhibitions. And as Lorimer notes, an exhibition opening in a science museum in the early 1990s that contained few "authentic" objects and many interactive exhibits was then considered novel.

Even aspects of experimental exhibitions inspired by "second age" experimentalism have, however, entered mainstream practice. Reflexivity, for example, has become widespread – it is a common motif in exhibitions at world's fairs, as Färber describes (see also Harvey 1996); and including sections on collectors and collecting has become an almost ubiquitous addition to ethnographic displays. Reflexivity might, indeed, appear to have become a new orthodoxy. Yet crucial here is the purpose to which it is deployed and how unsettling it is allowed to be. A criticism that has been made of some reflexive ethnographic strategies is that apparently self-exposing moves may be token gestures, serving more to legitimate what is displayed than to unsettle it. Or, as Färber suggests in her analysis of exhibition-makers' creation of a text about an experimental exhibition that was part of an event widely judged a failure, reflexivity may be deployed by the authors in order to try to distance themselves from the event and gain subcultural capital through ironic self-positioning. Turning what might otherwise be seen as failure into a productive lesson is not only fully in line with notions of experiment but also a valuable ability of the entrepreneurial person favoured in late capitalism, argues Färber. The rise of a discourse of experimentalism might thus be seen not so much as a rise in willingness to challenge existing knowledge and generate new, but as "deeply inscribed into the cultural logic of late capitalism" (Färber, chapter 10), legitimizing a particular kind of cultural entrepreneurship. As Cummings and Lewandowska write, "[i]n these "new" economies the artist or enthusiast is an ideal employee; astonishingly self-motivated, endlessly creative, flexible, enthusiastic, resourceful and, financially, poorly rewarded" (chapter 6).

The point being made here is not, however, that experimentalism, and reflexivity, are necessarily only or even primarily part of such a logic. Rather, the call is for remaining alert to such possibilities – and to addressing such questions through experimental work. As Nicholas Mirzoeff, discussing the idea of "the experimental university," points out, there is always a "risk that knowledge production simply becomes knowledge commodification" (Mirzoeff 2004, p. 146); and, equally, there is

always a risk that the experimental is co-opted to support that to which it might direct its challenge. Writing of the early modern period, when scientific experimentalism began to gain ground, Barbara Maria Stafford has shown how the lines between experimental science and trickery were sometimes elusive: "for the early moderns an analogy existed between the legerdemain of experimentalists in all fields and the maneuvers of the con man . . . The potential for fraud lurked in any demonstration in which the performer created the illusion of eyewitnessing without informing the beholder how the action was done" (1994, p. 79). Likewise, in relation to contemporary exhibition experiments, there may be illusions of laying bare mechanism or producing new knowledge without actually doing so.

This raises crucial questions about reception. For, as Thomas Hobbes pointed out in his objections to Robert Boyle's claims about the superiority of experimental knowledge in the late 1660s, "there [are] immense problems for the very notion of witnessing" (Shapin and Schaffer 1985: 114). Part of Hobbes's objections concerned the point that even if people are all brought together to witness a particular event, this does not necessarily mean that they "see" the same thing or make the same inferences. In relation to exhibitions, we typically know rather little about how they are received (cf. McClellan 2003; though see also Hooper-Greenhill 2006); and too much research remains rather crude (ibid.). There is undoubtedly a need for more subtle approaches that observe the kinds of language and metaphors that visitors use in their own comments, as do both Xperiment! and Lorimer in chapters 6 and 10 respectively. While such studies show that there is surely always scope for readings beyond those anticipated, it is also clear that visitor readings are produced in relation to the complexities of the exhibition's affective syntax, assemblages, and spaces. This includes, importantly, the extent to which visitors are sufficiently provoked to experiment with forming and voicing their own views.

Experimental Intervention

As we have noted above, this book too has been an experiment. By bringing together the chapters which follow, we hope not only to generate new knowledge about experimental exhibitions but – like the exhibitions described here – to provoke readers to consider the potential of exhibition experiments not only to meddle in the world of museums but also to intervene and make trouble beyond.

Notes

1 We thank all of those who participated in the panel and its discussion, and the conference organizers for their support.
2 This is borrowed from the title of chapter IV of Shapin and Schaffer 1985.

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