

## Herança-History, Heritage and Culture Journal special issue

Deadline: Dec 13, 2021

Isabel Lousada

HERANÇA-HISTORY, HERITAGE AND CULTURE JOURNAL  
SPECIAL ISSUE Call for Articles

Guest edited by Dr Gabriele Salciute Civilienė and Dr Kristen Schuster, Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London, this special issue of Herança-History, Heritage and Culture Journal invites proposals for work that engages with interdisciplinary and critical perspectives and explorations of the emerging notions, theories, and practices of designing and implementing experiment in and for museums. It encourages proposals that focus on the role, worth, and extent of experiment as a product and process in the ongoing transformation of museums as virtual only, hybrid, distributed, networked, or post-digital spaces of social and cultural engagement understood in the broadest sense. We welcome in particular the proposals that, rather than tell success stories, problematize the areas of conceptualizing, designing, and conducting experiments in the digital transformation of museums. We encourage proposals that address the following themes:

### EXPERIMENT WITH THE METAPHORS OF MUSEUM.

Descriptions and critiques of museums range from cultural to organic images such as a mirror and a lung (Bataille 1930/1986), a cemetery (Hainard & Kaehr 1986, p. 33, as cited in Beek 1990, p. 27), a meeting-place (Fors 2012), a website (Staniszewski 2000) and the like, reflect how we frame museums over time. The early 18th and 19th-century model of the modern museum is often likened to a container where "visitors became an explicit curatorial problem because they could cause damage" (Harris 2015). Ever since, contemporary museums have grown to be "more experimental, less architecturally determined, and offering a more politicized engagement with our historical moment" (Bishop 2013, p. 6).

### EXPERIMENT WITH AND FOR CURATORIAL PRACTICES.

Museology has problematized the regimented design of the exhibition space with a view on whose role it is to define the content of museums (Bataille 1930/1986; Harris 2015). The emphasis on public engagement has prompted museums to create educational environments where viewers would learn not only by observing museum objects in the exhibition space but also by interacting and engaging with museum collections through research, volunteering jobs, internship, artist-led workshops, citizen curation, and the like.

More recently, the metaphor of laboratory has become prominent in museology and museum design. Central to laboratory work is experimentation, which, though not new to the operation of

museums, is traditionally hidden from the public eyes. To make scientific research more visible as a process, both interdisciplinary and collaborative, museums have brought laboratories, along with open workspaces and storage rooms, into the exhibition space (Rössig and Jahn 2019). The exhibition space serves to disseminate the established knowledge, but the design and act of exhibition may also be used as a site of 'knowledge-in-the making' (Bjerregaard 2020). The recent attempts to frame and redefine museums as public laboratories has opened up new possibilities for museums to redress the balance in the conventional object/subject relationship.

#### EXPERIMENT IN AND WITH NARRATIVES AND CRITIQUES OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.

Museums have evolved from displaying history, predominantly from a colonial and nationalist perspective in the past, to interrogating and rewriting it. Curating in the public domain and with the help of public participants plays a significant role in how history is produced by museums. Paradoxically, while bringing history closer to their viewers, museums create their own social and cultural distances. In search for the new models and means of producing inclusive, collaborative, and socially engaged spaces, museology has always drawn inspiration from other cultural institutions. Back in 1889, Smithsonian Institute curator George B. Goode anticipated that museums will "stand side by side with the library and the laboratory" (cited in Kenderdine 2021, p. 15).

These broad themes will structure our special issue that problematizes how experimental thought and practices inspire, disturb, frame, and facilitate the conception and evolution of museums as diverse spaces of inquiry and memory. This reflects our interest in developing more nuanced and critical language for describing museums as sites of knowledge and power through the lens of experiment. In particular, we will promote discussions focused on experimental museology.

The emerging concept of experimental museology is linked to the so-called fourth wave focused on the design and practices of exhibition (Haldrup et al., 2021). In light of this shift towards the laboratory model, the question arises as to what constitutes a museological experiment. As a major workforce in sciences, experiment has a long-standing history. Scientific experiment tests and produces theories. It has to be repeated and replicated before a hypothesis can be turned into a theory and provide the basis for empirical knowledge. Scientific experiment thus thrives on the scrupulous interrogation of indeterminacies. Does an experiment, designed for a museum, shares the same objectives and characteristics with its scientific equivalent? Are the museums on the receiving end in that they only borrow experiments from sciences? Are they capable of producing or improving experiments for sciences? In what ways does experimenting in and for museums change the traditional notions of experiment?

While experimental museology is automatically associated with the use of digital technologies and media, it is important to understand the worth, role, and extent of experiment in the context of museology and museum design. What is the role of the digital in a museum experiment, both on the practical and theoretical levels? In what ways do digital technologies such as cloud computing, AI, XR, digital twins, IoT, and the like shape and inform a museum experiment? How does the application of digital technologies in museum experimentation transform and advance their own development? In what ways does digital experimentation change the traditional tasks of museums, such as collecting, preserving, restoring, and curating? What are the social implications of experiment-led transformation, locally and globally?

The ambitious transformation of museums as networked and distributed spaces (Bautista and

Balsamo 2011), that span physical and virtual domains, requires new skills and significant resources. What challenges does experimental museology face? One of such challenges is the preservation and dissemination of performance-based cultural heritage (Kenderdine 2021). Apart from technical difficulties as in capturing movement or sound for cultural heritage, experimenting may be encumbered by socio-cultural and ideological factors. Does everyone have access to and through experimentation and its benefits? Since digital innovation such as the application of digital twins can be afforded by well-funded institutions, the further question is whether museum experimentation is bound to deepen or overcome the digital divide? How does low-tech exploration fit in the laboratory model of museums?

The construction of experiment is historically contingent. It comes with its own rhetoric and beliefs. A historical overview of these aspects is long-overdue. Yet we also need to ask about the potential consequences of experimental museology. While designed to solve some problems, digital experimentation produces new challenges for which we may not have solutions yet. What is there to anticipate? What views and experience do museum scientists, curators, and managers inscribe on experiment as reflected in its design and implementation? What tensions arise in this multitude of perspectives?

As a manmade construct (Radder 2003, p. 4), even scientific experimentation is not limited to empirical rigor. The adjective 'experimental' implies a degree of tentativeness, incompleteness, and speculation. The notion of "public hallucination" (van Fraassen 2008) frames scientific experiment as a creative act of research in the production of new phenomena. What are those productive imaginaries of experimental museology? The issue of balance between education and entertainment remains relevant in the context of museum experimentation. While experimentation allows many museums to produce new themes and thus expand the scope of their exhibitions, it has given rise to the concern over the historicizing functions of museums. Bishop asks (2003, p. 24) "if the past and the present are collapsed into transhistorical and transgeographical clusters, how can the differences between places and periods be understood?". What are technical, ideological, political, and cultural implications of this experimental relativism on the future museum?

#### IMPORTANT DATES

Proposal Submission (700 words): Monday 13th December 2021

Notification of Acceptance: Friday 14th January 2022

Full Paper Submissions (7,000 words, excluding titles, abstracts, keywords, bibliography, figures, and tables): Monday 14th March 2022

Blind peer reviews: Friday 15th April 2022

Full Paper Re-submission (where applicable): Monday 2nd May 2022

#### Reference:

CFP: Herança-History, Heritage and Culture Journal special issue. In: ArtHist.net, Oct 20, 2021 (accessed Dec 18, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35132>>.