

Editorial

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Spoiler Alert?

Reviews of narrative works, including films and books, often carry a 'spoiler alert', a warning that in coming to an assessment of the work in question, it is necessary to reveal certain key plot points. The reader must make a decision whether to risk diminished pleasure from knowing the *denouement* as they set out to read or watch the artwork in question. I was reflecting on this convention as it applies to museums: I have yet to see any critic give a 'spoiler alert' in an exhibition review, even though most displays these days are narrative in conception. Would it affect the experience of any visitor to our *Cosmonauts* exhibition, for example, to know in advance that its final room, containing an atmospheric installation featuring a tissue equivalent mannequin modelled on Yuri Gagarin, echoes the exhibition's opening section on the early twentieth century Russian philosophy of Cosmism? Probably not; in fact, many museum professionals, when visiting another venue, will deliberately *reconnoitre* an exhibition to grasp its structure before attending to specific objects and displays. For them, even a narrative exhibition is better understood if one knows what is coming. I even know a thriller-writer who always reads the ends of books to decide whether it is worth reading them in detail.

No such uncertainties about the virtues of prior exposure dog the consumption of periodicals; academic writing presupposes analytical and selective reading. Indeed, this issue of the *Science Museum Group Journal* anticipates 'Science Museums and Research', the inaugural conference we are holding in our new Dana Research Centre and Library the weekend after Easter. Half of this issue's substantial contributions amount to pre-circulated versions of material to be presented at the conference. It is now not unusual for workshop organisers to insist on pre-circulated papers, so as to ensure lively and informed discussion, and this is our aim here too. Ken Arnold's reflections on exhibition-visiting as a kind of research, or Jean-François Gauvin's critique of conventions in scientific instrument display, for example, are discussion pieces. As regular readers will have noted, this is one of our standard genres of article. Only this time, we have a forum where that discussion can take place. 'Science Museums and Research', over three days, gives an opportunity for the Science Museum Group's research community to convene: Our staff, students and our close associates in the universities will be presenting and discussing the actuality and potential of research of all kinds in the work of the museums. More than fifty speakers, covering the material and public cultures of science and technology, as well as their interrelations with the arts, will demonstrate the myriad ways in which research can fertilise all aspects of our museums' work. For those of you unable to attend, we expect a fair number of the presentations to appear in written form in future issues of *SMGJ*. And, if you are interested in the kinds of things you see in *SMGJ*, please don't hesitate to contact us about the possibility of submitting a piece yourself.

Tim Boon, Guest Editor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy M. B." with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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