

Editorial

Journal ISSN number: 2054-5770

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04-19-2017 Cite as 10.15180; 170701 Editorial

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Published in [Spring 2017, Sound and Vision](#)

Article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/170701>

Editorial – Issue 07 ‘Sound and Vision’

The origin of some of the papers and indeed the theme of ‘Sound and Vision’ for this issue of the *Journal* came from the SMG inaugural research conference held at the Science Museum in September 2016.^[1] This wonderfully rich theme has allowed for an extraordinary range of articles, from a consideration of the design implications of an unsung collection of National Health glasses to the exploration of the period when optical instrument makers began to specialise in creating optical toys and novelty devices.

Ideas around sound and vision are not only of interest to the Science Museum Group generally, but very specifically to its site in Bradford, and as the Director of the (newly named) National Science and Media Museum I am delighted to be introducing this issue. Both the photography and the sound themes come from continuing research on collections across SMG and demonstrate the huge opportunities that exist for our Museum in Bradford to provide a platform to explore the science and culture of image and sound technologies. Several of the articles in this issue also explore the theme in the context of museum practice – whether that be the challenges of displaying acoustic collections in a public space, to an examination of a temporary exhibition on Noise Abatement at the Science Museum in 1935. It therefore seemed ideal to publish this special issue to mark the renaming of the Bradford museum, with its refocus on STEM, along with a new brand, a new website and a spectacular new interactive gallery – *Wonderlab* – that will enable visitors to explore the scientific principles of light, sound and perception, the science that is directly relevant to our core collections.

Every cultural institution should continually reflect on its purpose and the changing context and landscape in which it operates. We should always be seeking to maximise areas of opportunity and growth, while remaining relevant and meaningful to visitors. But a change of focus is a significant shift and the changes at the National Science and Media Museum have inevitably raised debate. Three of the papers in this edition reference some of the strong feelings that have been engendered by the decisions taken by the Science Museum Group, specifically around the relocation of a key photography collection (See Edwards, Burbridge, and Terwey). These papers explore this complex and nuanced situation, from within and outside the Museum and provide an opportunity to reflect on what the changes mean to the wider research community and publics. Collections are at the heart of every museum and a museum frames its collections through its curatorial interest and focus. As Elizabeth Edwards discusses in her article, the framing of objects by institutions can influence how they are perceived and understood. But while change might mean we stop exploring one area, it also creates new spaces for different thinking and research. Publication of these papers demonstrates the essential role of scholarly debate in balancing the heated press and individual response. I believe they provide a much needed detailed and considered analysis of recent circumstances and help illuminate the complexities within it that perhaps were not evident in the heat of the press coverage.

Museum activity is a complex combination of collections and expertise, audience and locale – these all develop and change over time. It has previously been noted that one of the purposes of this journal is to foster informed debate, particularly about the impact of science and technology on our social, economic, political and cultural lives. I would add that an equally interesting discussion is the role of the museum and institutional practice in the way that science and technology, indeed all culture, is understood and appreciated.

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Component DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15180/170701/001>

Tags

- [Exhibitions](#)
- [Museology](#)
- [Museum collections](#)
- [Curating](#)
- [Science and images](#)
- [Research in museums](#)
- [Photography](#)

Footnotes

1. The SMG research conference will become an annual event with the second conference taking place at the National Science and Media Museum in Autumn 2017.

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