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### Exhibitions of Impact: Introducing the Special Issue

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## **Exhibitions of Impact: Introducing the Special Issue**

By David Haldane Lee

**ABSTRACT:** The Exhibitions of Impact (EOI) special issue of ABS consists of six articles from authors in communication studies and rhetoric, public health, medicine and bioethics, memory studies and art therapy. Each article profiles some exhibition or memorial related to a pressing social issue, including gun violence, racist terrorism, domestic violence, religious fundamentalism, corporations selling harmful products, and how society treats those regarded as cognitively and behaviorally different. First, examples from today's headlines show a global outcry over racist monuments and artifacts, and a global pandemic which casts doubt on the future of exhibitions. Historical examples and explanatory concepts are introduced, with a focus on public exhibitions which issue suggestions or commands, first blatantly and later in more indirect ways. A look at medical and health exhibits makes explicit how exhibitions try to get us to do something while being informative. While summaries of each article show the topics are diverse, racism and health inequities emerge as underlying themes. After considering performative exhibits there is a call for a bioethically informed exhibition studies, capable of navigating the wide variety of exhibits out there, and able to express allyship while troubleshooting urgent problems.

**KEYWORDS:** exhibitions, museums, memorials, health, rhetoric

The Exhibitions of Impact (EOI) special issue of ABS brings together researchers in medicine, bioethics, rhetoric, health and nutrition communication, memory studies, archival

studies, art therapy and other areas of inquiry to consider the meanings and politics of exhibits. The authors assembled are not necessarily museum studies researchers, and many of the exhibitions are not in museums. Settings include activist street installations (Goodnow, this issue), walking trails, monuments and courthouses (Bloomfield), galleries (Hartman and Owings), virtual exhibits (Riter, et al; Lee), and would-be memorials never built (Lynch; Hartelius and Haynal), in addition to traditional museum exhibitions (Petre and Lee). Most exhibitions relate to some social problem, tragedy, or health risk, such as racism, mass shootings, intimate partner violence, creationism, smoking, big sugar, and the treatment of oppressed populations such as the developmentally disabled. To introduce the idea behind the special issue, these exhibitions take on some impactful event or issue, and they contain instructions, sometimes tacit. In recounting some current events and history, a focus emerges on exhibitions as material and symbolic systems, which, on the pretense of becoming more invitational, are obligated to quiet their imperious urges.

Now, what EOI is not about. The word “exhibition,” usually associated with museums (art, history, natural history, science and technology, etc.), has other meanings too. For instance, a trade show lobbying group is called Exhibitions and Conferences Alliance (“Trade Show Industry...” 2021), and the word can denote boxing matches, preseason sporting events, scholarships, and ostentatious emotional expressions. The word “impact” in visitor studies and evaluation research refers to some measurable effect which can be used as evidence when applying for funding. The data indicating it comes from box office, press coverage, likes, hashtags, surveys, focus groups, or observed dwell time. Pre/post testing shows how much visitors knew about some subject before and after visiting. Most authors in this special issue don’t measure impact those ways. The CFP was deliberately ambiguous about whether the focus was on

impactful exhibitions or exhibitions of something impactful. It stated the measure of impact could be concrete or “likely, possible, inferred or abstract.” The unit of analysis, a particular exhibit, exhibition, collection or initiative, or the museum/institution itself (past or present). To expand the definition beyond museums, I invited submissions about showings in libraries, lobbies, fairs, conventions, airports, etc. It wasn’t until receiving inquiries about possible submissions that we reasoned that the definition of exhibitions also encompassed monuments and memorial sites.

### **A Requiem for Exhibitions**

As we go to press, momentous events affect the public consumption of exhibitions. Some anecdotal examples provide historical context. Some male artists and museum administrators are called out for sexual harassment. Global outrage erupted over the commemoration of racist and genocidal historical figures (Araujo, 2012). Statues of arch-colonialist Cecil Rhodes were beheaded at the Universities of Cape Town and Oxford (Chantiluke, Kwoba & Nkopo, 2018). A statue of gynecologist J. Marion Sims, who performed experimental surgeries on slaves without anesthesia, was excised from Central Park (Wailoo, 2018, p. 1529). Monuments to human traffickers were toppled, such as Edward Colston and Robert Milligan, and slave owning “founding fathers” Jefferson and Washington (Araujo, 2020). A bust of racist Avery Brundage was removed from the entrance of San Francisco’s Asian Art Museum and placed into cold storage (Pogash, 2020). The American Museum of Natural History called for evicting the statue of Teddy Roosevelt (on horseback, flanked by an African and Native American), from city property in front of the museum (“June 2020 Update” 2020). At UC Berkeley, anger over ethnographic artifacts and human remains in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology led to the removal of anthropologist A.L. Kroeber’s name from a lecture hall (Scheper-Hughes,

2020). Shrunken heads were taken from glass cases and stowed away at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum because they "reinforced racist and stereotypical thinking" (Director Laura Van Broekhoven quoted in Batty, 2020). In addition to demands for decolonization, repatriation and greater diversity among artists and administrators (Mathur, 2020), there are denunciations of "toxic philanthropy" (c.f. Joselit, 2019) from benefactors such as the Kochs (coal), Sacklers (opioids) and Kanders (tear-gas).

Museum stakeholders join the chorus. In 2016, an International Council of Museums (ICOM) committee proposed a new definition of museums as "democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and futures...aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing" (quoted in Marshall, 2020). This made headlines and was the subject of controversy within ICOM. Smithsonian Director and founder of Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), Lonnie Bunch, states "it's crucially important to have a diversity, not just of race or ethnicity, but of ideas" to ensure that public institutions are "grappling with interesting questions that help the public" (quoted in Gelles, 2020). Director of D.C.'s Anacostia Museum Melanie Adams (2017) calls for diverse exhibits which "Move away from narratives as told through the eyes of the oppressor" (p. 294). Robert Janes and Richard Sandell (2019) write "Inadvertently or not, many of the world's museums are agents or partners in the hoarding of wealth, while also indulging in excessive consumption..." (p. 5).

While fielding activist outrage, museums also face right wing threats. For example, in Latin America, museums such as Lima's Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social, Santiago's Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, and Porto Alegre's Farol Santander were targets of bigoted bullying (Blair, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). After a far-right

activist called for the destruction of Berlin's Pergamon Museum on social media, vandals desecrated over 70 antiquities (including Egyptian sarcophagi, paintings and sculptures) at the Pergamon and three nearby sites (Brown, 2020). Museum leaders decried the January 2021 storming of the U.S. Capitol, which involved "the spraying of a blood-like substance on statues and the general destruction of art and objects throughout the building" (Weiss and Hollein, quoted in Kenney, 2021).

A stunning blow was delivered via pathogen. Thousands of museums and memorials have closed or are in danger of doing so, due to COVID-19. One third of 760 museum Directors surveyed in the summer of 2020 said the future looked doubtful for their institutions (Ulaby, 2020). Tens of thousands of museum professionals (often volunteers, low wage workers, or contractors precariously employed to begin with) are on indefinite hiatus. The title of this subheading is ironic, but since their future is uncertain, a special issue about exhibitions seems befitting.

### **Disciplinary Exhibits (the Entrance Narrative)**

Entrance narratives are those storylines we bring to exhibitions (Doering & Pekakirk, 1996), and the scholarship has some of its own. It is acknowledged that objects are tendentious (Blair, et al, 2010, p. 4), with politics inscribed in their classification and juxtaposition (Macdonald, 1998; Luke, 1992). What marching orders do they issue? While 19<sup>th</sup> century "Great Exhibitions" celebrating empire and industrialization were "often repulsively arrogant, aggressive, greedridden and racist" (Greenhalgh, 1989, p. 94), earlier public exhibitions are described as "virtuous and edifying" (Déotte, 2004, p. 61) instruments of revolution. To Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) the museum was a "crucial instrument" (p. 190) used to discredit the *ancien régime* and promote revolution. Royal palaces and their contents were expropriated,

offering the public access to what were formally private possessions (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 174). “War indemnities” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 173) from imperial conquest were grouped into “schools” by country (p. 186) and new subject positions (experts and administrators) were forged (p. 183). To create “docile bodies” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 168) museums employed “disciplinary technologies” to prescribe and regulate behaviors (p. 171). Exhibitions were “by the couth, for the uncouth” (Weil, 2002, p. 195); a means of refining humanity’s “rough and drossy ore” (Wright, 1824, quoted in Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 189).

Sites claim to inspire, instruct, admonish and exemplify (Blair, et al, 2010, p. 26). What is exhibited is what is considered worthy of imitation (Adams, 2006, p. 295). Artifacts arranged temporally showed progress towards greatness, which “was held up as an example to be imitated through intellectual endeavor, through heroic acts, or (failing both of these) merely by behaving well” (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 189). To Tony Bennett (1995), exhibited objects take on “exemplary status” and through them, “the subordinate classes might learn, by imitation, the appropriate forms of dress and comportment exhibited by their social superiors” (p. 28). Like settlement houses, museums “aimed to combat poverty, alcoholism and social unrest” (Silverman, 2010, p. 8). The theme of subjects becoming party to their own subjection (Foucault, cited in Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 171) is comparable to another narrative about museums becoming less overtly disciplinary and more deferential.

### **From Inculcation to (Greater) Inclusion?**

If people internalized the museum’s disciplining message, then exhibitions that followed need not be so prescriptively overt. Yet European male claims to universalism, which Bennett (1995) calls “representative generality” rendered the museum “inherently volatile, opening it up to a constant discourse of reform as hitherto excluded constituencies seek inclusion” (p. 97). A

pivot from edification to education brought “hordes” of visitors (Alexander, 1979, p. 215). Yielding to reform efforts, museums held public events (Alexander, 1979, p. 218), and sent outreach programs into “slum ridden inner cities” (p. 215). Curators were expected to collaborate and consult with community members (Message, 2014, p. 179).

Stephen Weil (2002) notes a “...toning down of that omniscient and impersonal voice in which the museum of yester year was accustomed to address its public” (p. 42). Museum work focused more on “public service and communication” (Weil, 2002, p. 43) than collections management. Hooper-Greenhill’s (2000) concept of the “post-museum” is “based on notions of cultural diversity, accessibility, engagement and the use of objects” (Barrett, 2011, p. 109) rather than the unbridled acquisition of them. Visitors became the focus. When visitors are conceived of as “clients” the museum “no longer seeks to impose the visit experience that it deems most appropriate. Rather, the institution acknowledges that visitors, like clients, have needs and expectations that the museum is obligated to understand and meet” (Doering, 1999, p. 75).

Relatedly, funding deficits in the latter twentieth century prompted museums and allied institutions to go into “marketing mode” (Weil, 2002, p. 237). Davi Johnson (2008) uses the post-museum concept to note that “contemporary museums are increasingly modeled on businesses, assimilating marketing, consumer focus, and corporate sponsorship into their agendas” (p. 348). This is elsewhere called a neoliberal turn because the “so-called public space of the museum is being replaced by market logics, cloaked in ideals of humanism, inclusion, participation, public good, value, and citizenship.” (Kundu & Kalin, 2015, p. 48. See also Ekström, 2020). For neoliberal exhibitions, consumer freedom is foremost, yet Sharon Macdonald (1998) notes that consumerism is tacitly prescriptive, since not choosing isn’t a choice (p. 134). With the customer service approach, visitors experience the satisfaction of



having their already existing views confirmed. Doering and Pekarik (1996) say about visitors “They may not want to learn much more specific detail than they already know, and they certainly do not intend to have their narratives radically revised” (p. 21). To lessen cognitive expenditure in science museums, Sue Allen (2003) proposes “immediate apprehendibility” (p. 20) which suggests user-friendly features.

It would be at least presumptuous and likely overgeneralizing to attribute to “neoliberalization” contemporaneous developments within museum scholarship such as calls for inclusivity (Galla, 2016; Kinsley, 2016) and participation (Simon, 2010). In broad leaps I’ve tried to suggest a drift from “inculcative” to “inclusive.” From didactic, to, finally, exhibitions where the goal is not (explicitly, at least), to discipline. For speakers, there are all kinds of face-saving ways to tone down a command, such as joking, offering, promising, etc. (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p. 124-125). Is this observable in the multimedia grammar of exhibits?

There is a turn, in visitor studies, away from “thinly veiled Behaviorist, stimulus-response models” (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 150). The title “exhibitions of impact” may imply an agentic exhibition which produces effects like other media. Sandell (2007) compares developments in media studies to views about museum audiences. Some criticisms of the “behavioral paradigm” in audience studies are that it is overly focused on the propagandistic function of “texts,” and determinate, measurable outcomes (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 9). To remediate such “behaviorist characteristics” (Sandell, 2007, p. 76), an encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1990) emerged where audiences don’t receive messages intravenously but instead, negotiate their meanings. Yet the metaphor of hypodermic transmission may be evocative, such as with health exhibitions.

## **Health Exhibitions**

In case the reader is wondering why a detour into health exhibitions is warranted, it's because many, if not most papers included in this issue of ABS relate to health. Exhibitions are said to be beneficial to health even if they are not about health topics. The idea behind social prescription is that "arts-based and other cultural programmes can reduce adverse psychological and physiological symptoms and are positive determinants for survival, well-being and quality of life" (Camic & Chatterjee, 2013, p. 66). Health promotion is predictably more peremptory than, say, art exhibits, because some behavior is prescribed, like getting vaccinated. A glance at health exhibit history shows the intent to influence behaviors in addition to educating.

An age of "museum medicine" (Reinarz, 2005) predated hospital and laboratory medical training. In the days when lay audiences observed medical oddities exhibited on midways and seaside boardwalks, the director of the Wellcome Museum of Medical Science in London noted increasing interest in health outside the medical profession and the need for disease prevention "propaganda" (Daukes, 1920, p. 62). In the thirties, inspired by Dresden's Deutsches Hygiene Museum (DHM), a committee formed within the American Public Health Association (APHA) to create exhibitions (McCleary & Toon, 2012, p. e28). The first was notably racist. The 1934 annual meeting of the APHA in Pasadena, CA, hosted *Eugenics in the New Germany*, the first DHM exhibition shown this side of the Atlantic. Exhibits included "Central Registry of Diseased or Suspect People" and photos of African clergy and ranking officials, presumably shown as anti-French propaganda ("Photo Record," 2016).

DHM curator Bruno Gebhard helped create the American Museum of Health (AMH) and the *Hall of Man* exhibition, seen by 12 million at the 1939 New York World's Fair (McCleary & Toon, 2012, p. e27). AMH couldn't find a permanent home after the fair was over, so an ambitious plan for a nationwide network of health museums and travelling exhibitions went

unrealized (McCleary & Toon, 2012, p. e28). Gebhard (who became director of the Cleveland Health Museum, later known as Healthspace Cleveland) stated “the aim of health education includes not only dissemination of information on personal and public health; its final aim is to impel action for better and healthier living through personal habits and in community life” (1940, p. 657). This is a truism about health communication: To be effective, give the audience something to *do* at the end. However, AMH’s failure may be attributed to it being, not overly prescriptive in tone, but rather, not prescriptive enough. Erin McCleary and Elizabeth Toon (2012) note that, while the exhibits aimed towards clarity, they were “curiously passive” pedagogically, offering “few specific suggestions about what exactly visitors were to do” (p. e29). This suggest that indirectness (typical of politeness) can have the unintended consequence of not getting the message across. Visitor surveys conducted at AMH showed that “even expertly designed exhibits may impart misinformation” (Derryberry, 1941, p. 261). For example, a photo lead to the mistaken assumption that rickets was “primarily a disease of negro children” (Derryberry, 1941, p. 261).

The word “communication” once described “roads, canals and railways” (Williams, 1976, p. 62). In the mid twentieth century, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization fitted buses, trucks and trains with exhibits promoting health, sanitation and social welfare, and showed them all over Asia and Africa (Silverman, 2010, p. 11). When institutions spotlight issues affecting “urban communities” (racially coded terms: See Kinsley, Middleton, and Moore, 2016) health issues come into focus, because racism increases morbidity and mortality. In the seventies, museums responded to activist demands to create exhibitions relevant to surrounding neighborhoods. The Museum of the City of New York had exhibitions on drugs, alcoholism and “venereal disease” (Alexander, 1979, p. 223). The Anacostia

Neighborhood Museum in D.C. became a wing of the Smithsonian and showed *The Rat: Man's Invited Affliction*, focusing on the rodent as disease carrier and “attacker of small children” while recommending vector control through food storage and construction (Alexander, 1979, p. 224-225).

The eugenics exhibit mentioned above wasn't the last ethnocentric one. Fast forward to the early twenty first century for a more contemporary example. The plastinated cadavers of *Bodies...the Exhibition* (BTE) were (controversially) of non-specific Chinese provenance, yet they were fitted with blue and green glass eyes and posed swinging a baseball bat (Hsu & Lincoln, 2007, p. 17, p. 21). This erasure of Chinese identity is described as “rhetorical inoculations against cultural rejection” for North American audiences (Gorsevski, Schuck & Lin, 2012, p. 315). BTE and similar exhibitions contain behavior change imperatives, including telling visitors to dispose of cigarettes and do sit ups (Hsu & Lincoln, 2007, pp. 19-20).

Science and technology centers which exhibit health topics also experience market pressures and have a history of corporate sponsorship. For example, Lockheed and Bell were permitted to donate exhibits to the San Francisco Exploratorium if they didn't market any specific product (Heim, 1990, p. 30). Davi (née) Johnson (now Johnson-Thornton), applies Macdonald's (1998) concept of “supermarket logic” to a Pfizer-sponsored mental health exhibition (2008, p. 348). To Johnson (2008), the “duty to be well” necessitates self-governance, as though our bodies were capitalist enterprises (p. 345). Johnson (2008) locates exhibits within a repertoire of health and citizenship technologies “distributed as explicit exhortations to a particular practice of living” (p. 351). Framing mental health as a “chemical imbalance” suggests psychotropic drugs, although none are overtly marketed in the exhibition (Johnson, 2008, p. 355). The market for medical products includes pre-symptomatic “patients in waiting” (Rajan,

2006, p. 176, cited in Johnson, 2008, p. 356) so wider swaths of beholders are targeted besides those presently ill (Lee, 2019, p. 710). In Johnson's (2008) account, exhibits "interpellate visitors as consumer agents" (p. 351) and provide them with discursive resources for characterizing their own mental states and emotions as neurochemical phenomena. Although the pretense is free choice, note what Johnson (2008) terms the "explicit 'morals'" of exhibits (p. 351) and the mandate to pursue health and "boost your brain" (p. 352).

This glimpse into health exhibition scholarship shows researchers concerned with their prescriptive character. If other exhibitions went from being more to less didactic, do health exhibits go in the other direction? Why stop just shy of explicit commands? Besides a prohibition on product placement, such indirectness may be attributable to "negative face" (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 62) or "reactance" (Brehm & Brehm, 1981) which are terms used to characterize a tendency among humans to bristle at attempts to control them.

### **Introducing the Articles**

Each paper is different, but they have things in common, such as attention to the surrounding contexts; the exhibition or memorial being studied as an intervention, and each author's willingness to face troubling issues. For example, the exhibition of living humans designated as behaviorally or intellectually different (Bogdan, 1986). Visitors once paid to gawk at inmates of London's Bethlem Royal Hospital, AKA "Bedlam" (Coleborne, 2001, p. 104). A *Time* magazine article which preceded the deinstitutionalization movement entitled "Bedlam, 1946" showed images of patients crowded into state mental hospitals which resembled (then-recently revealed) concentration camp photos.

While the first essay isn't about exhibiting the institutionalized, John Lynch looks at how (de)institutionalization is commemorated in his study of a would-be memorial at the site of

Staten Island's Willowbrook State School. This institution for the developmentally disabled closed in 1987 after years of scandal and public outcry. Lynch shows how a proposed memorial at the site was unrealized due to contested meanings, official, and vernacular (see Bodnar, 1994). Here Lynch follows up on previous work about minimal remembrance (2019), a term used to describe institutions implicated in bioethical scandals who wish to limit the public impression of their culpability (p. 154).

The paper that follows is also about a memorial that was never built. In July 2011, Anders Breivik killed 77 people in Oslo, apparently to publicize his anti-Islamic and anti-feminist manifesto. Johanna Hartelius and Kaitlyn Haynal (this issue) describe how Norwegian officials and the press deliberately tried to minimize coverage of the 2012 trial, on the grounds that it would withhold the publicity Breivik sought. A proposed memorial to the victims would have physically severed a small peninsula of the mainland near the island of Utøya where the shooting happened. The authors use Landsberg's (2004) "prosthetic memory" concept to account for mediated collective memories held, even by those not physically present for the event. The broader social issues here are racist terrorism and gun violence. In 2019 it was reported that far-right terrorism, which the World Economic Forum calls a major global security threat, increased 320% over the previous five years (Spence, 2020).

Speaking of violence, the CDC (2020a) reports that about 25% of women experience intimate partner violence (IPV). Nearly half of all women homicide victims are killed by current or former male intimate partners (Petrosky, et al, 2017). Making the problem public helps "challenge the traditional notion that domestic violence is a private family matter" (McPhail, et al, 2007, p. 818). Trischa Goodnow's study of Silent Witness (this issue) chronicles makeshift exhibits that publicize IPV in potentially intrusive ways. Setting up life sized cutouts of women,

each with details about a specific homicide victim, Silent Witness installations may appear in thoroughfares or squares not regarded as public viewing sites. Goodnow proposes a new theory of collective mourning which, unlike private mourning, publicly demands social change as it provides solace. Goodnow applies the idea of hybridity (Jamieson, 1982) in new ways to multimodal rhetoric where the message isn't entirely (or even primarily) discursive.

The next paper in EOI asks, what makes an exhibition an intervention? Authors Robert Riter, Kevin Bailey and Jeff Hirschy introduce us to the Center for the Study of Tobacco in Society (CSTS), which exhibits artifacts related to the tobacco industry, its allies and opponents. The authors link to an impressive catalogue of online exhibitions and collections, questioning the distinction between the two. Their contribution highlights the potential of online exhibitions during our virtual era. The CSTS story provides a model for bioethically engaged, critical museum practice, and it is a story which deserves a wider audience.

CSTS Director Alan Blum has a long career of public health activism and curation, mostly around smoking but also around other hazardous products such as vaping and tanning beds. In the piece which follows Riter, et al, excerpts from a two hour long interview transcript are included, with Alan reminiscing about Doctors Ought to Care (DOC), a group of white-coated physician activists who creatively spoofed tobacco-industry sponsored events throughout the eighties, nineties, and early two thousands. We talk about CSTS (and other) exhibitions, focusing on the meta-exhibition *Museum Malignancy*, which chronicles tobacco industry sponsorship of major art shows.

Like pharma, tobacco industry exhibition sponsorship never mentions any product. This is also true for the food industry. For example, the Food Focal Exhibit (from the aforementioned 1939 World's Fair) didn't name any specific brand but its "ultimate goal, nonetheless, was to

perform a marketing function, to turn fairgoers into mass consumers of industrialized food products” (Miller, 2021, p. 3). In the next article, Elizabeth Petre and David Lee analyze a 2011-2012 exhibition at the National Archives about the government’s effect on food choices. *What’s Cooking Uncle Sam* was sponsored by a candy corporation and exhibited colorful government posters from WW2 and the New Deal, plus relics of nutritional recommendations over the decades (among other artifacts). Working from the out of print records book the authors choose a poster as a case study on what happens to ideological leftovers. They cook up segments derived from a chain argument, with the subject of each proposition predicating the next one, to suggest specific mechanisms through which subjects are positioned by ideology.

The next article concerns a social and political influence which seems at first less explicitly health related: biblical literalism. However, upon inspection, it is a health threat, after all. For example, evangelical Pat Robertson infamously claimed that AIDS was god’s punishment, and Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry cited Francis Schaeffer’s *Christian Manifesto* as inspiration for the intimidation of women visiting abortion clinics (Clarkson, 1994). In 1979, Schaeffer teamed up with future Surgeon General C. Everett Koop to produce an influential anti-abortion film (Balmer, 2014). Evangelicals in the previous U.S. administration placed provisions on Title X funding, affecting reproductive health services (Abutaleb & Tanfani, 2019).

Emma Bloomfield’s paper is about, not just a particular monument or exhibition, but (practically) a whole town erected in defense of creationism. The Scopes Trial Museum in Dayton, Tennessee commemorates the historic 1925 proceedings when creationism and evolutionism faced off. Bloomfield shows legacies of creationist Williams Jennings Bryan built into the “Trial Trail” which stops at relevant places to dead-end at the conservative, evangelical



Bryan College. This study of a dispersed memory place (Blair, et al, 2010, p. 33) shows that affiliation needs material reinforcement and instantiation.

The last paper in this issue circles back, topically, to the first essay by Lynch, because it concerns those labeled as different: The five million plus Americans with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Previously subjected to institutionalization, those with ASD now receive therapy from making and showing art. Ashley Hartman and Paige Owings spotlight a group of neurologically diverse young adults who exhibit their own multimedia work, and they offer, as evidence of this exhibition's impact, moving testimonies from the artists and their families. Given a higher risk of depression for those diagnosed as ASD (Kölves, Fitzgerald, Nordentoft, Wood & Erlangsen, 2020), this stigma fighting, self-esteem boosting intervention is truly an exhibition with positive impact. The study closes out the issue on a hopeful note, as members of a marginalized group join together and heal through the power of exhibition.

### **Racism—a common thread**

The reader may notice in this introduction a subtext of racial injustice, which began with the toppling of monuments erected to slave owners and continued through the dawning of modern health exhibits in the eugenicist Dresden mold. Although race is not explicitly mentioned in the summaries above, each paper points towards racial injustices, because the social problems they face (the treatment of the developmentally disabled; gun violence and intimate partner violence; illnesses resulting from smoking; misogyny, prejudice and biblical literalism) disproportionately impact African Americans and other racialized populations. In what follows, some examples are provided, not to depress, but to leverage the epidemiological research and show connections with exhibitions. The manifestations of racial health inequities are numerous (Williams, et al, 2019), and findings bear repeating if they might bring attention to racism:

- Household surveys report childhood intellectual and learning disabilities at rates ten to twenty percent higher for black children than white (Zablostsky, et al, 2019), but white children are evaluated for ASD up to three years earlier (Broder-Fingert, et al., 2020).
- Reportedly, the disability rights movement grew out of deinstitutionalization activism and calls for the closure of Willowbrook State School. Leading activists in these movements are African American and Puerto Rican (Valdejuli, 2019).
- 80% of homicides are committed with guns, and African American men make up half of the victims (Frazer, et al, 2018, p. 6).
- White women are over a third less likely to be on the receiving end of intimate partner violence than African American women (“Women of Color Network” 2006).
- African Americans are, on average, more likely to be targeted by cigarette ads, exposed to secondhand smoke, and die from smoking related illnesses (CDC, 2020b).
- Taking a page from the tobacco playbook, junk food is marketed more heavily in low-income communities of color. When Phillip Morris acquired Kraft and General Foods in the eighties, they modeled food campaigns targeting racial and ethnic minorities after successful cigarette campaigns (Nguyen, et al, 2020).
- Diabetes rates are considerably higher for African Americans (Muhammad, 2019).

What about creationism and the religious right? Evangelicals were politicized when the tax-exempt status of the segregated Bob Jones University was rescinded in 1976 due to civil rights violations (Balmer, 2014). Biologist Joseph Graves (2010) maintains that, because of their membership in fundamentalist protestant denominations, African Americans are less likely to become scientists, especially in sciences “that may contradict fundamentalist doctrine, e.g. Archaeology, Anthropology, Human Genetics, or Evolutionary Biology.” African Americans

“are ½ as likely as the general population to accept evolution as a valid explanation and 1.4 times more likely to accept the Biblical account” (Graves, 2010). Rates of infant mortality are higher among religious fundamentalists, and sociologists suspect that “Pentecostal suspicion of conventional medicine and its reliance instead on faith healing” may account for the disparity (Bartkowski, et al, 2011, p. 274).

Allyship is when someone from the dominant social group “leverages their privilege in support” of those outside of it (Kinsey, Middleton & Moore, 2016, p. 59). It is hoped that addressing racism more explicitly in exhibition scholarship may be a form of allyship. For Sandell and Janes (2019) “it is time for the global museum community to speak as clearly and forcefully as its privileged position in society demands of it” (p. 18).

### **The Performative Fallacy**

There is another kind of allyship when the privileged express solidarity with a marginalized group, but ostentatiously, with unhelpful consequences. The adjective “performative” is used to characterize such superficial exhibitions of outrage (c.f. Kalina, 2020, p. 348). The term “performative” makes cameos in museum and memory studies (c.f. Katriel, 1993; Hasian, 2005; Arnold, 2016; Bagnall, 2003; Blair, et al, 2010, p. 33). It goes undefined but may mean activities that are akin to performance. For example, publicly displayed comments cards completed by visitors, and other “strategies that demand audience interaction and response” (Sandell, 2006, p. 122). Reference to “performativity-driven efficiency/marketing” (Tili, 2008, p. 144) suggests something like performance metrics.

While the term has come to mean something fake, or performance-like, I originally understood it differently. Namely, as utterances or representations that bring about some new state of affairs (like passing sentence or swearing an oath). This notion of the performative is

something like writ or fiat: discourse that is constitutive rather than “merely referential” (MacKinnon, 1996, p. 21). It is a concept not limited to verbal utterances, and is applied to films, magazines and cartoons (Langton, 1993, pp. 20, 144, 149, 224; Bruzzi, 2000, p. 186). The concept of performativity, in this sense, offers a way of conceiving of an exhibition as “an imperative with the power to realize that which it dictates” (Butler, 1996. P. 65). It is unfortunate that the term became so semantically diffuse.

### **A Call for Exhibition Studies**

Rhetoric is not just discursive, but it includes objects and places (Blair, et al, 2010, pp. 3-4). Exhibitions contain a metamessage that says stop and attend to this; on display here is something deemed figure, not ground; something aesthetic, instructive, or atrocious. Viewing them as inert repositories might distract from how they do the bidding of powerful forces (tobacco companies, for instance). There are more museums (and “related institutions” such as historical sites) in the U.S. than Starbucks and McDonalds (Ingraham, 2014). But while museums, monuments, battlefields and science centers are all grouped together, there is no single exhibition studies capable of navigating them all. They are alike in that they are purposive, and to the extent that they accomplish what they set out to do, they are like communication systems with spring-loaded teloses. This collection concerns how to do things with exhibitions (such as condemn/ legitimate some version of events or encourage/ prohibit some behavior).

The question of intended impact is framed in terms of ideology, discipline, and technologies of behavior management (Bennett, 1995, p. 101). The detour into health exhibits is intended to spotlight exhibitions less inhibited about exhorting or commanding, since what they advertise is ‘good for us.’ “Prescriptive exhibits” (Lee, 2019; 2017) are those that tell us to do something, or to think about something differently, or to assume the position of intended

recipient. Just as traffic lights say stop and go, a taxidermized gorilla, posed, beating on its chest (see Haraway, 1984, p. 25), might reinforce male dominance. To talk about exhibits propositioning us—The question is not ‘can they do that?’ but ‘what happens when we think of them that way?’ Exhibits and memorials perform communicative acts, I assert, through description, prescription, inscription, and conscription. Exhibitions *describe* by representing the world. They *prescribe* when they tell the visitor what to do. They *inscribe* because they are constitutive (carving into public record some tendentious account of what happened, for example). Finally, exhibitions *conscribe* when they enlist us into subject positions. Inscribing and conscribing are reality-making and suggest what was originally meant by the (now polysemically dissipated) term, “performative.” Related are the notions of constitutive rhetoric (Charland, 1987) and interpellation (for example Ott, et al, 2016, p. 349; Chevrette & Hess, 2015, p. 150; Hsu & Lincoln, 2007, p. Lee, 2019, p. 710).

Museums are “authoritative voices in the dissemination of truths in the service of nation-building and reaffirming state authority” often promoting “a Western-centric, colonialist, male, heteronormative, cisgender view of the world” (Kletchka, 2019, p. 299). But graffiti, posters or other non-official exhibits can bid for anyone’s attention, even without institutional authority, to expose what’s minimally remembered. In cities across North America, guerilla exhibits have sprung up on street corners, explaining that the historical figure after whom the street was named owned slaves. While built landscapes are busy inconspicuously rationalizing, the makeshift exhibit calls them out.

## **Conclusion**

The limitations of this introduction can be noted. I didn’t leave enough space to deliberately unpack the intellectual traditions represented in this issue, including critical

museology, multimodality, visual rhetorics, rhetorics of museums, rhetorics of health and medicine, or public memory (not to mention art therapy). For John Shotter (2006), those “theoretical rules and principles” we use to explain exhibits issue “their own commands,” and so we aim to domesticate them rather than “entering into” (p. 274) them. To apply our precepts closes off the possibility of discovering something new, and Shotter (2006) proposes instead a Heideggerian “thereness” (p. 275) –which, ironically, sounds like more presuppositional baggage of the type which he contends would prohibit our entrance.

Exhibitions studied here may enable and empower, or they may justify ignorance, launder profits for unhealthy products, or aim to put the past behind us and legitimate the present (Sodaro, 2019, p. 182). Of the range of emotions invoked when reading these studies, revulsion may ignite outrage and prompt ameliorative efforts. Citing Sara Ahmed (2004), Lynch (2019) relates a sequence in emotional experience, where, after an initial aversive reflex, disgust is proclaimed, and the offense is declared disgusting (pp. 8-9). The sequence may culminate in an action step, galvanizing and inducing solidarity, or it might “foreclose further engagement” (Lynch, 2019, p. 9). We need a bioethically informed exhibition studies which pushes past aversion to bear witness (Zelizer, 1998). As long as it would be regarded as a helpful form of allyship, we can draw connections to racism as a health determinant.

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