

Book Review

Jenny Kidd, *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, hardcover £ 65.00, pp. ix+166.

Kidd's *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics* is the book that the sector needs, seeking to discuss the role, purpose and value of media in museums within the context of a post-digital world. As such, this is a useful guide for researchers and museum practitioners, providing concrete examples of how to tackle the complicated field that has become the 'transmedia' museum. In the museum, transmedia storytelling is 'the extension of narrative across multiple platforms', something that museums are already well versed in, but something less commonly discussed (23). The book separates its topics into clear and concise headings - including Communications, User-created content, Interactivity, Gaming, Mash-ups and Narratives - all of which are highly relevant subjects that museums are having to deal with on a daily basis. If the reader is struggling to make sense of so many new terms and issues then surely we can empathise with museums, struggling daily to wend their way through a new type of museum, a new type of curating, and meet the needs of a new type of visiting audience. Not only does this book cover the issues in an accessible way, but Kidd seeks to provide a comprehensive overview as to what has already been done in the relevant fields of research and outline what we still need to understand and the possibilities of where we might go in the future.

Too often, academic books can be weighed down by a discussion of the theory, but Kidd manages to make use of a wealth of very recent case studies and exhibitions from Europe, North American and several examples from Australia and New Zealand. On its own, these would be useful snapshots for professionals seeking to understand how other museums are responding to contemporary issues, and when combined with the theory, it presents a good, holistic view of current issues. Kidd confidently states that museums can be seen as 'a complex of definitional, representational, philosophical, ethical, aspirational and economical dilemmas' (1) and technology is certainly at the heart of this. Whilst much of this book deals with dichotomies, and Kidd often questions mainstream assumptions, the author does so in a way that is not overly critical but instead offers a useful reflection on past practice and research. This book can therefore sit as a stepping stone between how we have understood the digital museum in the past and how, now, we can move towards a more useful set of arguments in the post-digital future in which we are now living.

Whilst the chapter headings elucidate the relevant areas in which Kidd focuses her research, the themes running through this book (and reflected in the subtitle) - Transmedia, Participation, Ethics - bring to the foreground the issues with which museums are grappling. These include ethical issues in digital technology and user-generated content, the acts of participation that digital can encourage and prevent, and the fact that it is no longer just media in the museum but 'medias' that weave in and out of various platforms, within and without the institution, before and after the visit. It has long been the view that this would constitute the 'museum of the future', but as Kidd reminds us, it is no longer of the future but is now a reality.

Although academic publications on social media, user-generated content and interactivity are becoming more rife within the sector, Kidd's examination of narratives and the impact that digital technologies are having on these in the museum, as well as her focus on online gaming, will be of particular interest. The breadth of Kidd's research is admirable, and to make her case, Kidd draws on a vast range of authors in the field of digital heritage, audience engagement,

digital technologies, museum practice, social media, and learning. Combined, she presents their research as a series of developments within the North American and UK museum sectors, using concrete data and reports based on the literature and theories reviewed to support each segment. As such, this book uses a tried and tested format that is relatively straightforward to follow through the narrative, but the individual chapters can also be studied without necessitating a review of the entire work. This aspect will be particularly useful for students of museum and digital technology doing research on, or studying, a particular subject and who are looking for the key authors to uncover. Here, the author references both established digital heritage experts, such as Ross Parry from the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, and those who are working on the cutting edge of media studies research, such as Drotner and Schrøder in Denmark. Ben Gammon is another well-recognised name which is essential for when discussing interactivity in museums, and Kidd manages to draw in some of Taylor's very pointed comments about the reality of digital interactivity. Kidd's chapter on *Democratising Narratives* is especially well-referenced, and this is no surprise, given the wealth of research on narrative that has been done within and without the museum institution. It is also gratifying to find an author who is confident enough to effectively draw on, and further, their own research against the work of these respected authors, and is able to showcase how far her own work has taken her in the topics discussed here.

This book is an exercise in restraint as it often feels like the chapters could be further extended, as if each chapter could be a book itself. It eschews an overly in-depth examination of each of these topics, however, for a broader, richer approach that acts as a jumping off point to further research that is needed, to represent – in a contained way – the current state of the 'field' and think about where it might go next. Interestingly, the author does not lament the mistakes that have been made in the past or seek to criticise the learning that has taken place in the field of media and museums in previous decades. Rather, it offers a timely and generous discussion of the arguments and counter-arguments, of the pros and cons to the plethora of media available in museums, and inspires us to think about where museums, and media, might take us next.

Dr Amy Hetherington

University of Leicester