

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

# DIGITAL ACCESS AND MUSEUMS AS PLATFORMS

Caroline Wilson-Barnao

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Focus

# Digital Access and Museums as Platforms

*Digital Access and Museums as Platforms* draws on interviews with museum practitioners, along with a range of case studies from public and private institutions, in order to investigate the tensions and benefits involved in making cultural collections available using digital technologies.

Taking a media and critical studies approach to the museum and raising questions about the role of privately owned search engines in facilitating museum experiences, the book questions who collects what, for whom objects are collected and what purpose these objects and collections serve. Connecting fieldwork undertaken in Australia and New Zealand with the global practices of technology companies, Wilson-Barnao brings attention to an emerging new model of digital ownership and moderation. Considering the synergising of these institutions with media systems, which are now playing a more prominent role in facilitating access to culture, the book also explores the motivations of different cultural workers for constructing the museum as a mediatised location.

*Digital Access and Museums as Platforms* will be of interest to academics and students working in the fields of museum studies, art, culture, media studies and digital humanities. Weighing in on conversations about how technologies are being incorporated into museums, the book should also be useful to practitioners working in museums and galleries around the world.

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# Digital Access and Museums as Platforms

Caroline Wilson-Barnao

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# 1 Introduction

## From the analogue to the digital museum

### **Introduction: platformisation of the museum**

This book considers how museums have been radically reimagined by digital devices, social media platforms and ubiquitous networked communication enfolded into everyday life. The museum is increasingly operating in the context of the ‘sharing economy’ and ‘participatory culture’, where platforms and devices facilitate new forms of sociality (Bruns 2008; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). By acknowledging the inherent differences between the core missions of the art gallery, library, archive and museum, this book is concerned with their evolving role and their transition from essentially government or private institutions towards infrastructures of ‘civil society’ with new accountabilities (Blakenberg and Lord 2015: 22). The book argues for the adoption of a critical lens through which to regard this shift to the new media economy and puts forward a framework for examining these changes in the following chapters. However, the focus is not only on new technologies but also on the place of the museum in the public sphere. These once-authoritative formulators of predominantly heritage culture have been enlarging their practices beyond the exhibitory, educative and participatory to embrace making their space more social and inclusive.

At first glance, museums and their allied iterations as galleries, libraries and archives continue to curate exhibitions to educate and entertain their on-site visitors. Physical museums still perform that important civic function, and viewing an exhibition in the twenty-first century remains an experience involving artefacts housed in ‘cabinets of curiosity’ as they were in the 1600s, but now more publicly visible (Bennett 1998: 346). Pressure to democratise from the middle of the past century led cultural institutions to realise the need to engage with their audiences if they were to retain currency and remain financially viable (Witcomb 2003). These transformations have accelerated as the museum has increasingly embraced digital media technologies to permit visitors with smartphone in hand to experience its

## 2 *Introduction*

cultural offerings, bringing about an interactive and participatory turn (Henning 2017). The trajectory of change is ongoing as global audiences can now readily access and freely interact with high-resolution images of collections that are made available in the online domain.

In this sense, museum collections are no longer housed exclusively within institutional walls nor are they only sites where visitors engage with each other and objects. Contemporary users, accustomed to social and streamed media sites where they connect, comment and rate, have prompted cultural institutions to rethink how they go about harnessing the digital to engage visitors and project relevance. High-speed internet, virtual reality (VR), three-dimensional (3D) scans and artificial intelligence (AI) make personalised visits possible, enabling audiences to access some of the world's greatest collections remotely, while on-site visitors use apps and interactive guides, post photographs to a range of media platforms and employ search engines for additional content about exhibits (Wilson-Barnao 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020). User data are then aggregated to feed into algorithms, which create the potential for museums to measure the impacts of culture and afford new means by which to make sense of collections.

Regardless of their funding sources, museums rightly possess a public ethos that is potentially altered by the entanglement of cultural offerings with the digital economy, and this ethos is a primary focus of this book. The museum has long been depicted as in service to society that 'acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment' (ICOM 2019: Statutes, Article 3, Section 1). Having drawn upon this characterisation for almost 50 years, the peak body the International Council of Museums (ICOM) sparked international debate when it recently put forward an alternate definition that eschewed a colonial context. The revised designation incorporates a remit to uphold 'social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing' in addition to working 'in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world' (ICOM 2019). The museum, as it is envisaged by ICOM, is not defined solely by the artefacts held within its virtual or physical spaces; rather, it is obliged to 'hold artifacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people' (ICOM 2019). The re-envisioned institution is acknowledged as embodying 'democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures' (ICOM 2019). It is precisely this aspiration of the museum to facilitate broad access and critical conversations that make it a particularly worthy focus of study in a digital era.



Museum studies scholars have referenced digitisation as defining the creation of a ‘post-digital’ museum and the ways in which mediatisation is intrinsic to its evolution (Parry 2013: 24). This is evidenced through what Parry (2013: 24) refers to as ‘structures of legitimation’ within the museum that align its goals to digital formats by embedding the digital into its exhibits and overall operations. The contemporary museum interacts with devices, platforms, screens and networks in a range of ways, transforming the space of the museum and the social encounters that take place in relation to it; however, it is distinguished from the media by its physical and material aspects (Henning 2006). This is especially important if we are to regard the museum as a ‘third place’ (Oldenburg 1999), an environment that sits between home and work, or public and private, where people come together both physically and digitally, and that fosters community debate. It is naïve to suggest that the institutional structures that are now scaffolded by digital media platforms remain unchanged by these alliances. Digital platforms are a means through which audiences engage with and enjoy the museum. As museums intensify their move from analogue to digital, new exhibition contexts and practices blur the boundaries between the experience of the museum and the construction of public identity by audiences on social media platforms (Wilson-Barnao 2016). What complicates matters further is the fact that museums are becoming more integrated with media platforms, which impacts how they engage with the public and operate as institutions. Platformisation and access are key notions used here for thinking through the refashioning of cultural institutions under the terms of an expanding digital economy. Media platforms are designed to maintain user interest through the production of content that renders visitor activities into data for third parties. Nieborg and Poell (2018: 1) use the term ‘platformisation’ to describe ‘the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and governmental frameworks of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life, as well as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around’ them. The concept of museums as platforms (and its converse), thus, draws attention to the ways in which digital ecosystems contribute to the museum as a public sphere. On the one hand, museums are taking on the attributes of interactive and participatory global media platforms, which offer significant connective functions to users worldwide. On the other hand, by providing museum access, media platforms are recalibrating how the museum operates.

From this standpoint, there is a disparity between museums with transparency and accountability requirements producing cultural content versus geographies of distribution that are reliant upon commercially owned platforms and subject to different dynamics. Given the adoption of core logics that reshape these institutional structures (Dijck and Poell 2013: 2), there is a shift occurring in traditional understandings about the organisation of the

museum and its visitors. This affects its characterisation as a civic environment capable of facing the challenge of acting as an inclusive space for all in a digital era and how this might align with the broader set of obligations outlined by ICOM (2019). The overall aim of this book is to present a critical appraisal of the ways in which the museum is being platformised and to explore the move towards a datafication of cultural visitors within the wider ecology of social media.

### Participation, publicity and the public sphere

One example of aspects of these emerging relationships is *The Obliteration Room* by Japanese contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama, featured at the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (QGoMA) in 2014. An installation comprising a domestic scene was constructed within the gallery, where visitors to the room were handed sheets of coloured stickers and invited to ‘obliterate’ by placing dots on top of everyday objects, walls and floors. Social media feeds filled in a posting frenzy throughout the summer with images of people adding colourful stickers to a white space. Visitors repeatedly recorded their on-site experiences on social media, alerting others to the exhibition in a more compelling way than any advertising campaign by making the participation of ordinary people visible. The experience of this art installation and the documentation of it via smartphone on social media acted as a highly engaging form of peer-to-peer promotion, where the engagement with the artwork by the viewer constituted the affective labour of generating sociality around the work in the gallery and then creating and circulating images of that sociality (Clough 2008). As audiences applied the adhesive dots to *The Obliteration Room* and circulated pictures on social media, they performed a type of publicity work for the institution.

This reflects a global trend towards non-traditional museums with pop-up exhibits, such as New York’s Museum of Ice Cream, which encourage audiences to take photographs of their experiences and share the images on social media platforms such as Instagram. In these spaces visitors are unambiguously invited to interact with the artworks and objects by taking pictures. Similarly, Artvo, with sites in Melbourne and on the Gold Coast, describes itself on its website as a 3D ‘trick art gallery’ that offers visitors ‘priceless photos’ and ‘unbelievable scenarios’ (Artvo 2020). It is promoted as a ‘refreshing’ space where ‘museum staff’ . . . encourage you to take as many photos and selfies as possible’ (Artvo 2020). When visiting Artvo, the audience moves through different rooms expertly painted with varying scenarios. Audiences then take photos of themselves participating in the exhibit as they surf a giant wave, climb bamboo with a panda bear or enter the departure point for what resembles the train station where students enter Hogwarts in Harry Potter (see Figure 1.2).





*Figure 1.1* Selfie stations are a common way for museums to encourage visitors to share their experiences with social media networks, where families playfully engage with exhibits by having their picture taken.

Source: This image was taken at Adderton House & Heart of Mercy in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

This approach of a digitally enhanced experience that appears playful, innovative and collaborative would seem to be anathema to the traditional physical museum, embedded in serious curatorial scholarship displaying artefacts that are not meant to be touched. The contrast is illusory, as both styles of museum employ artists to paint works with which visitors interact, and that they share on social media as Instagrammable moments in an extension of their on-site meaning-making with cultural collections. Recognising the benefits of publicity, the museum has removed photography bans to encourage the online posting of audience experiences. Unsurprisingly, the traditional practices and community-building operations of the museum have adapted in parallel with the ways people build and maintain relationships online. Of course, contemporary predilections to take selfies, to post everyday minutiae and in the process publicise oneself or an organisation, are not confined to cultural institutions. Endless posting to social media, influencer culture, likes and commenting are products of the digital realm – even British Broadcasting Commission podcasts urge listeners to post on social media to ‘tell others about us’. However, they serve as illustrations of how social media platforms can play a vital role in attracting audiences, sponsors and attention to the contemporary museum.

In related ways, databases of artefacts in online museum collections can create a valuable network of open data that was not previously available for audiences to engage with. In this scenario, visitors – unwittingly or not – have become adept at creating public relations value for the museum by sharing content on digital media platforms, and museums in turn increasingly understand themselves as building infrastructure that facilitates new forms of interactivity. Once they are highly ranked on internet search engines, collections can garner increased visitation both on-site and online. On the one hand, new spaces are created for user participation and interaction; on the other hand, there has been a renegotiation of the museum’s role to what media scholar Jose van Dijck refers to as the ‘ecosystem of connective media . . . a system that nourishes and, in turn, is nourished by social and cultural norms that simultaneously evolve in our everyday world’ (van Dijck and Poell 2013: 21) (see Figure 1.2). The museum moves from being a permanent storehouse of objects to a constantly changing infrastructure where multiple publics interact, creating content, curating collections and engaging in publicity practices. In the process, audiences are imbued with enhanced visibility to the institutions and to each other, as well as contributing audience measurement services on social media sites, where the ‘internet of behaviour’ is able to track users in real time.

Much of the scholarship on museums is accompanied by an underlying assumption that museums will continue to provide the same level of access to their visitors. There is limited acknowledgement that recent use



*Figure 1.2* This illustration depicts an art exhibition that has been configured specifically for visitors to engage with using cameras and smartphones.

Source: This image was taken at Artvo on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia.



of digital media has impacted the museum's public orientation. Museums no longer understand themselves as exclusively providing physical access to audiences on-site. In the digital era, the provision of access to the institution involves removing photography bans so audiences can capture images of artworks, in addition to making collections available in online repositories where global audiences can play with digital objects. For example, internationally recognised expert on participation Nina Simon (2010: 2) calls for the museum to work as a 'platform that connects different users who act as content creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators'. In her view, museums can demonstrate their 'value' and 'relevance' by replicating the 'tools and design patterns' of the 'social web' that 'make participation more accessible than ever' (Simon 2010: 2). Yet, as different publics engage with the museum using smartphones or via online access, they are subject to new practices of monitoring and datafication.

Approaching the discourse of participation in the museum from this angle brings us to the distinction between publicity and the public sphere. It also provides a useful framework for understanding the contemporary museum as a domain of social life where public opinion and culture are formed. Museums have historically been institutions of the public sphere. Beyond the physical and embodied experience of the institution, a fundamental claim is that museums ought to catch up through greater mediatisation (Anderson 1999; Drotner et al. 2019). There is an inherent recognition of the need for museums to draw on digital technologies to enable broader public access to preserve and share artefacts and information. This discourse can give the impression of a radically enhanced institution, one that is more connected, participatory and democratic.

The heightened recognition of the need for digital access to collections was dramatically accelerated in 2020, following the emergence of COVID-19. For museums around the globe, the pandemic necessitated long closures as protocols around non-essential gatherings and social distancing came into play (AMGA 2020). Publicly funded institutions were forced to seek emergency funding in order to maintain jobs and operations. Private institutions without government funding, which traditionally have relied upon admission fees and donations from individuals and the private sector, were significantly impacted. In the American context, the president and CEO of the Met Museum, Daniel Weiss, explained in a media interview that institutions were operating on 'the edge, with very limited reserves. All facing unprecedented financial damage as a result of the immediate and long-term effects of the coronavirus on the economy' (Museums Association and Stephens 2020). The significant impacts of COVID-19 have forced institutions to explore new means of delivering access to collections, from livestreaming

exhibition content to providing behind-the-scenes visits, through to social media engagement.

The global pandemic has revealed in a gravely acute manner the enmeshing of museums, audiences, devices and platforms. Cultural institutions educate and engage the community and are fundamentally designed to generate forms of togetherness, connection and identity. When social media and the internet are the only means through which audiences access cultural institutions, platforms play an enlarged role in generating participation and the experience of sociality. For example, on 28 January 2020, China's National Administration of Cultural Heritage asked museums to focus on online delivery of content in order to 'encourage the determination and morale of the local people to fight the epidemic and accompany all to spend a special and unforgettable Spring Festival' (Tong 2020). Institutions such as the Getty Museum in America have challenged online audiences in quarantine to recreate a work of art from their collection by using household objects and family members and then post their recreations. This has resulted in a proliferation of images of everyday people dressing up and repurposing domestic items such as toilet paper rolls, bedspreads and fruit in humorous ways to imitate famous paintings. These images are publicity outputs that promote the institution and create a sense of connection during isolation while also substituting for traditional forms of physical proximity between people and artefacts. Under COVID-19 conditions, the transformations of museums have been acute, significant and transparent, but these manifestations of change are part of a protracted and somewhat opaque radical reimagining.

## **Rationale, research and underlying concepts**

From a societal perspective, the mediatisation of the museum raises two important questions that this book seeks to interrogate. Firstly, how have the publicity practices of visitors transformed museum access? Publicity in this sense refers to the opening up of public space as a result of increasing visibility of users who use smartphones to take photographs and curate collections online. Secondly, if cultural access is entwined with data-collection practices, what does this mean for the museum as a public sphere? To address these questions about forms of digital publicness in the museum, the critiques of public life and digital media by Mark Andrejevic (2002, 2007, 2010) and Jodi Dean (2005) are influential, and each of them aligns or responds to Jürgen Habermas's (1989) eighteenth-century conception of publicity. For Habermas, the public sphere is a space where ideal speech is realised because it is accessible to all members of the public – albeit defined as a strictly limited group of white bourgeois men. Habermas



offers publicity as the practice of forming and managing public opinion. In its ideal form, critical publicity involves citizens exchanging opinions and ideas as part of a discussion that generates a consensus of opinions and attitudes, which in turn guides government. In its rational-critical form, publicity has the potential to enable an ideal symmetrical communication environment by bringing together the diverse views and opinions of multiple publics. Habermas contrasts critical publicity with manipulative publicity that re-feudalises the public sphere by distorting the public interest through covertly shaping public opinion and redirecting attention to private concerns. Within this framework, this book unpacks the way the publicity function of museums sits across a range of tensions and paradoxes with regard to its accessibility. While digital media platforms can be useful as they help the museum achieve its access imperatives, they potentially reorganise these institutions to meet the mechanisms and objectives of datafication.

The museum is a significant but often overlooked site for examining the ever-evolving dynamic among multiple publics, institutions and technology. Digital media platforms now work as conduits among users, institutions and objects in such a way that their influence on culture is not always explicit. That is not to suggest that museum visitors don't enjoy navigating the museum using mobile phones, taking photos and sharing these images on social media platforms; nor does it mean that the transformation of the museum into a more interactive and participatory environment does not come with a host of benefits – visitors can dig deeper into collections that can be accessed remotely, and experience new forms of togetherness. There is already a considerable amount of work that acknowledges these debates (Budge and Burness 2018; Rettberg 2014). In broad strokes, they hinge on questions about the different values and identities of the museum and the media and how the two are interwoven. As the title of this book suggests, the notion of digital access depends on the context surrounding how the museum is made available – that is, who owns the platform and the technologies. Digital media platforms are neither good nor bad; they are just another means by which the museum is able to achieve its mission. It is, however, necessary to recognise the influence exerted by digital media platforms over how members of the public participate. As Tarleton Gillespie (2018: 5) points out:

The fantasy of a truly 'open' platform is powerful, resonating with deep utopian notions of community and democracy – but it is just that – a fantasy while running the risk of simultaneously integrating the museum into the wider market rationality of neoliberalism.

it makes sense that museum workers would seek to embrace the current practices of media platforms and draw upon digital technologies as tools to both promote the museum and make meaning with visitors. Museum workers set out with specific ideas about how they would like to provide unlimited access to collections and information available, and the extent to which audiences should be enabled to produce and consume cultural content. This book develops a behind-the-scenes account of how museum workers use digital technology to deliver access to collections, drawing on a production studies methodology (Caldwell 2008). Examples from Australia and New Zealand are used as the primary lens through which to track the adaptations occurring in the museum sector as a result of the practices of global technology companies. A production studies framework, while primarily used in film and television media context, helps to conceptualise how cultural practitioners understand their work, and in turn the evolution of the museum as a space that is undergoing significant political, economic and technological transformation. Particular kinds of mediated museum experiences are shaped by varying hierarchies of cultural workers and the narratives that play out within different communities of practice. Due to this, the perspectives of professionals working in a range of roles are equally valued for their role in the refashioning of the museum. These museum workers have much to contribute to global discussions about the spread of technology to industry practice. Historically, museums in this region have been pivoting towards digitisation since the 1970s, with a number of digital collections-management systems originating in the two countries that have been influential in the development of large online repositories (Hart and Hallett 2011). Most notably, Australian Museums Online, a searchable museum database of over 1,000 national museums and galleries, arose in the 1990s long before many other international databases of a similar nature (Chan 2020). The exhibitions and digital initiatives of museums such as MONA in Hobart, Te Papa in Wellington and QGoMA in Brisbane have international reach and significance.

This book draws upon 37 semi-structured interviews conducted with cultural professionals, including directors of cultural institutions and professionals from education, visitor studies, community engagement, social technology, market research, publicity and marketing. A visitor research analyst and academics, whose research examines the cultural sector, were also interviewed. The majority of these professionals were based in Australia and New Zealand, with a small selection of international interviewees included to obtain a broader understanding of different industry perspectives. Extracts from the anonymised accounts of these participants are considered in

relation to a number of museums that are referenced as case studies. Further analysis was conducted of industry documents and communication, in particular collections of papers presented at industry conferences such as 'Museum Next' and 'Museums and the Web'. These findings were then supplemented by scrutiny of relevant industry blogs such as 'Fresh and New', 'Thinking About Museums' and 'Cultural Digital'. In addition to the interviews, fieldwork observations and documentary analysis, recent case examples have been drawn from around the globe to serve as important markers of the pace of digital transformations occurring in the museum landscape, most recently, given the impact of COVID-19. An important outcome is, therefore, the identification of how participation is employed, translated and coded into industry discussion and exhibitions and in explanations of new works.

## **Participation, interaction and publicity**

Three concepts are critical to the way the platformisation of the museum is understood in this book. Interaction, participation and publicity are widely discussed in media studies, but they have particular meaning for and relevance to the discourse on museums and technology. Participation consists of activities that allow audiences to connect, albeit by sharing content and ideas or by creating artworks and experiences on-site and online. In contrast, interaction tends to be related specifically to technology. Participation and interaction are interlinked here because they direct our attention to changes in recent decades that have involved turning passive consumers into active prosumers (Bruns 2008). Interactive participation captures the call for asymmetrical relations with audiences within a participatory culture framework (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013), where the authoritative structure of museums is flattened in order to facilitate enhanced audience voice. Interactive participation is entwined with publicity, which refers to the increasing visibility of ordinary people in participatory media. The concept of publicity not only builds on critiques by Jodi Dean (2002, 2010) and Mark Andrejevic (2007, 2010) of Jürgen Habermas's conceptualisation of the term but also intends to capture what Graeme Turner (2009) refers to as the 'demotic turn'. When individuals use digital devices with these spaces, they enter into an arrangement (see Figure 1.3). In exchange for making their private lives open to the monitoring capacities of digital media, they gain access to networks and the opportunities for publicity. A democratisation appears to occur as multiple publics can seemingly wield major influence, but this can result in a depoliticisation of publicness as visibility becomes commodifiable. Publicity captures the labour of audiences in producing outputs in the form of images, data and



45% **Martha Sarah Butler**  
Thomas G. Wainewright



*Figure 1.3* This picture shows the Google Arts and Culture face-matching app, where users load images of themselves on an app, which are then matched with portraits resembling them housed in international museum collections.

Source: This image was produced using the Google Art and Culture App.

data trails that are interspersed into the experience of public space. Publicity is sited at the centre of museum spaces and experiences rather than forming a set of adjunct practices used to promote a museum.

Open access is a particularised understanding of the museum and its relationship with digital media practices. As most museums display less than 10 per cent of their artwork on-site, it is little wonder that many cultural workers regard technology as a tool to help the museum better engage audiences. As this book demonstrates, cultural workers increasingly theorise the museum in online terms, under the banner of common values and common

good. While open access has largely been used in relation to the publication of collections as online digital repositories, the promise that is explored here in using the term ‘open access’ is that digital media devices and platforms are free from the obstacles inherent in traditional forms of museum access. There appears to be a preparedness to disrupt the traditional model of cultural access along with a willingness to adopt the characteristics of online platforms. There is a projection that digital media platforms work towards the same goals as the museum and that multiple publics will benefit from the increased visibility of the institution, its objects and audiences. In this sense, open access as it is used here can involve individuals sharing content, searching the internet for information, downloading apps, communicating with a chatbot, using AI and so forth. Open access promises to solve the problem of museum access by working towards the goal of providing free and innovative forms of engagement with collections but can alter the boundaries between institutions and the digital media ecosystem.

Datafication is an important concept underpinning the exploration of digital access and museums as platforms in this book. It references the technological mediation of users’ daily life on digital media sites such as Netflix and Facebook, where the provision of services is reliant upon the extraction of data. Information that was once considered worthless (and that was invisible to other forms of research) is produced through the process of datafication as a form of knowledge that can be used to shape the decision-making strategies of algorithms. Datafication is a means to ‘access, understand and monitor people’s behaviour’ (van Dijck 2014: 198), which can then be used by third parties to market goods and services. As visitors increasingly access cultural institutions using handheld devices and digital media platforms, museums have become subject to dataveillance practices. Roger Clarke (1988) expresses this as ‘the systematic monitoring of people’s actions or communications through the application of information technology’. Dataveillance has far-reaching implications for the museum, as the provision of free services becomes monetised through access to services (Lyon 2007).

## **Organisation of this book**

The chapters in this book are arranged in sections according to key ideas that revolve around how cultural institutions provide digital access, both in terms of their on-site and online operations. These groupings draw on the various dimensions of the interviews and fieldwork observations that establish a context for thinking about the museum as an inclusive space where participation involves content creation and distribution on digital devices, databases and media platforms.



Chapter 2 focuses on ways in which cultural access is being extended and negotiated by museum workers. It identifies a shift in how participation assists in reorganising notions of the public's involvement and inclusion. The provision of public access is central to how museums go about making collections physically and intellectually available to current audiences. Whether privately or publicly owned, there is an inherent recognition about cultural institutions needing to preserve and share artefacts and information to broader publics. This chapter addresses ongoing attempts by the museum to function as a vehicle for communication, memory and community inclusion as it keeps pace with the emergence of new on-demand gateways for content such as Amazon and Netflix. The chapter identifies how digital media platforms can prove to be effective resources that extend the scope and reach of cultural access, while scrutinising how the terms of access are renegotiated.

Chapter 3 traces a shift from a sensory museum to the sensing museum where the physical experience of interacting with exhibits has been augmented by the use of digital technologies on-site. This involves cultural institutions moving from a mode whereby they have endeavoured to stimulate the physical senses of visitors in order to extend and share learning pedagogies to one where digital devices are used to automatically track and 'sense' how people experience an exhibit. The use of the term also captures the use of technology to stand in for the senses of visitors. The chapter concludes that the sensing museum alters traditional understandings of curation in favour of more individualised cultural experiences.

Chapter 4 deliberates on how recent shifts in the personalised use of digital devices by visitors are playing an important role in making museum content seamlessly available on digital media platforms. The aim is to consider the transformation of museum knowledge and content into a structured set of data that can easily be accessed and managed within the digital media space. Acknowledging that digital infrastructure can provide a cost-effective and convenient way of facilitating access to cultural collections, the chapter critically engages with the fundamental changes that are taking place with regard to the planning, organisation and provision of exhibitions, objects and experiences. On this basis, it reflects upon industry blogs and observations from a range of cultural professionals, who elaborate upon the efforts and activities of these institutions with regard to the digitisation of the museum.

Chapter 5 concludes by recognising the influence exerted by digital media platforms over how members of the public participate in the museum. There are complex dynamics and tensions associated with private platforms facilitating and moderating access to the field of culture and cultural production. As museums integrate digital media devices and platforms into their

programming, architecture and engagement strategies, they adapt to the logics of publicity and monitoring that are central to the new media economy. The data generated through the use of digital devices produce commercial value for both the institution and the media platforms.

For museums, audience data generate nuanced public relations, marketing and personalisation strategies. For media platforms, audience documentation of the museum experience arguably delivers important cultural information about often-valuable taste-making consumers. A different iteration of private/public institution is proposed as having emerged, whereby cultural access is facilitated within the parameters of a digital ecosystem that sees economic influence being exerted indirectly through forms of data capture and analysis. A key thread of the argument in this book is that one of the seminal features of the contemporary museum that differentiates it from earlier modes of curation and display is the extension of platform media into the field of culture and cultural production. This has been brought into sharp relief with the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has provided a lens through which to briefly discuss responses by museums to this crisis, but then situate this conversation in the longer arc of change in the museum as a public sphere.

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