Beyond the Book

Reshaping Australian public history in the Web 2.0 environment

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Abstract

With digital media and the web becoming increasingly pervasive in our everyday lives, few historians have considered in depth the impact that this is having on the ways that history is represented and communicated in the public sphere. This thesis is an examination of how the practice of public history in Australia is being reshaped in the Web 2.0 environment. In the context of new media theory, public history practice is considered in relation to identifiable changes in the ways the web is used and understood.

The public historian’s concern with interpreting the past to a public audience means that changing social practices and information patterns are pertinent to their work. This thesis highlights the ways in which different forms of history are being produced, distributed and consumed on the web. It focuses on the potential role of the web user as an active producer of personal and creative interpretations of the past and on how experimental public history practices in the Web 2.0 environment have emerged in response to changing audiences.

This study argues that the rise of Web 2.0 is reflected by personalised, ubiquitous, democratic and innovative public history practices on the web. Through an in depth analysis of the Powerhouse Museum collection search and YouTube as case studies, this thesis shows how increased participation, the proliferation of user-generated content, social networking and existing practices by users in the Web 2.0 environment reshapes public history.

This thesis goes beyond conceiving of the web as a site of historical source material, both digitised and born-digital, to an understanding of the value of participatory media and informal communication in enabling the sharing of historical knowledge and materials between and among networks of people on the web.
This is to certify that

i) the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface

ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

iii) the thesis is 30,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography.

_Megan Sheehy_
Researching and preparing this thesis has been a dizzying experience filled with thousands of people, ideas and places that could never be done justice between two covers. As anyone who has been through it will know, writing a thesis is as much about omission, self-control and time management as it is about producing written work.

The understanding and encouragement offered to me by my primary supervisor, Dr Keir Reeves, made the experience of writing this thesis nothing less than a pleasure. I am happy to report that, although the work was hard at times, my experience was definitely improved by knowing that my supervisor not only supported my left of centre research interests, but also shared my eclectic taste in music.

Sue Hodges, my boss at SHP through whom this thesis was industry sponsored, provided invaluable support both personally and professionally throughout the course of my candidature. Meeting Sue first inspired my interest in the public history industry in 2005 and my ongoing work with SHP motivates me to consider fresh perspectives and to work innovatively. This thesis is very much a response to the many opportunities for development in the field, one of which I believe resides in digital technology. Thanks also to Belinda Ensor, Jason Sheehy, Ben Mountford, Nicola McColl, Andrew Junor, Lisa Sulinski and Shane Cargill, my colleagues at SHP who are consistently inspirational.

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE: PUBLIC HISTORY AND NEW MEDIA IN AUSTRALIA</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian public history</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public history and the web</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From hypertext to social media</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO: THE WEB 2.0 ENVIRONMENT</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly evolving services rather than packaged software</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built on an architecture of participation</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on unique and hard to recreate data sources</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow a many-to-many communication model</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wisdom of the crowd and the long tail</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple to use and utilise the web as platform</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: CHANGING HISTORIES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Powerhouse Museum collection search: OPAC 2.0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YouTube</strong></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary sources</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary sources</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Illustration Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Screen capture of institutions on the CAN (Collections Australia Network) website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Screen capture of South Seas website showing map of James Cook’s first Pacific voyage, 1768–71.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Screen capture of Milton Ulladulla Local and Family History Site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Screen capture of a Picture Australia group on Flickr through which users are able to contribute their images to the collection of the National Library of Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td><em>Time</em> magazine cover on 25 December 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Merged screen capture of the user-contributed story ‘A Pioneering Family’ on <em>Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Merged screen capture of the Somerset Hills History Tourguide and Mashup that combines Google Maps with local historical information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Visualisation of a one-to-many communication model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Visualisation of a many-to-many communication model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Screen capture of the latest version of the September 11 Digital Archive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Screen capture of a list of featured exhibitions linked together by the theme ‘Toronto Through Time’ on <em>Collection X</em>. The exhibitions combine provided content and user-generated content to explore historic and contemporary Toronto.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.9  An interpretation of Chris Anderson’s economic concept of the ‘long tail’. The right hand side of the graph, and its continuation, represent the long tail where a small quantity of a large number of items is thought to outweigh the sale of a large quantity of a small number. 49

Figure 3.1  Merged screen capture of an object as displayed on the Powerhouse Museum collection search, with user-generated tags, related subjects and similar objects, the location within the museum that the object is on display and the object’s catalogue record. 54

Figure 3.2  Screen capture of a user-contributed image on Flickr with associated tags. 55

Figure 3.3  Screen capture of a tag cloud of bookmarked websites saved on Delicious. 56

Figure 3.4  Screen capture of objects tagged with the keyword ‘orange’ on the Powerhouse Museum collection search. 58

Figure 3.5  Screen capture of Google search results for ‘stackhat’, producing the Powerhouse Museum collection search record as the first result after a sponsored link. 62

Figure 3.6  Screen capture of channel ‘geriatric1927’ on YouTube. 66

Figure 3.7  Table of results from YouTube searches of five historical subjects. Search undertaken on 30 July 2008. 70

Figure 3.8  Screen capture of the video ‘A 1940s World War Two Photo Album, Massena, New York’, uploaded on the channel ‘Johnswackyworld’ on YouTube, 23 February 2007. 71

Figure 3.9  Screen capture of the video ‘An Occasionally Accurate History of Australia: Part I’, uploaded on the channel ‘TheCinephile’ on YouTube, 23 October 2006. 75
Figure 3.10  Screen capture of the video 'Halo 3 History Special (Jesse James—Westward Movement)', uploaded on the channel 'MadMike1122' on YouTube.
This thesis examines the changing nature of public history in the emerging Web 2.0 environment. Concentrating on Australian public history, the purpose of the investigation that follows is to present Web 2.0 and its associated sites and technologies as viable media for the interpretation of the past to a public audience and to examine the shape of public history in this new web environment. Importantly, this is also a study of how the Web 2.0 environment is reshaping the ways in which Australians gain a sense of the past, in a period where digital technology and the web are increasingly pervasive in our everyday lives.

In the time of my candidature from March 2007 to October 2008 this thesis underwent many transformations and has ended up as a very different project from how it started. My previous academic research interests were predominantly in British history, focusing on the analysis of historical images. This focus on imagery led me toward multimedia and other mediums used for the representation of history. I found an interest in non-textual forms of history such as oral history, film history and material culture and was immediately drawn toward the notion that history is increasingly being recorded in multiple media that can be used to represent the past: through sound, voices, objects, places, moving image and combinations of these.

As a public historian my decision to focus on Web 2.0 stems from two things. Firstly, the web has placed a variety of formats of history in the public sphere that contribute to Australians’ sense of the past. Yet, within Australian historiography there are few academic studies that consider the web as a serious medium for representing the past. Secondly, I am one of an emerging
generation of historians and other postgraduate researchers whose first point of engagement with the past is often the web. Yet, the web does not fit comfortably within the conventions of the historical discipline.

Having grown up using the web, email and a mobile phone for everyday communication needs I already had a basic technical understanding of the internet and hypertext. It is from looking at hypertext history that I was first introduced to the term Web 2.0. Initially the concept was frustrating—it was not a second version of the web, but the sites under the Web 2.0 umbrella were somehow different from those that came before them. After only a few weeks of curious investigation I had started a blog, uploaded videos, photos and audio recordings, signed up for four different social networking services, contributed to Wikipedia entries and finally decided upon a thesis topic. I wanted to know how Web 2.0 was being used for the practice of public history and what opportunities, if any, could be leveraged from the huge amount of user-generated content being produced on and for the web.

There were many challenges involved with producing a thesis about public history and Web 2.0. Apart from the normal limits of a word count and time period within which to conduct my research, other practical issues had to be overcome. Throughout my candidature I was very aware of the pace of the field which I was attempting to study. When I commenced research, I had not heard of the term Web 2.0, I did not know what Facebook, Wikipedia or RSS were and twitter—a social networking service for the updating and posting of text up to one hundred and forty characters in length—had only just been invented. As an historian my desires to contextualise my subject, to review the relevant historiography and to engage with firm case studies were severely challenged. The web is not a normal historical source; it is constantly expanding, changing, being updated and being outdated.

This thesis relies upon the web and its content as primary source material. It is essentially an analysis of the implications of a recent period of web development described throughout the thesis as the ‘Web 2.0 environment’. While the formal requirements of this thesis bind it to the written form, I would like to extend an invitation to readers to engage actively with the dynamic sources and examples discussed throughout the following chapters. Web 2.0 is about experimentation, active participation and utilising the unique nature of the web.
Introduction

Tell me and I’ll forget;
Show me and I may remember;
Involve me and I’ll understand.¹

Since its introduction in the early 1990s most public historians have understood the web as a medium for the public presentation of history, a source of information and an educational tool.² Early experiments with hypertext history emerged later in the decade, promising historians new ways to write history and communicate the past to a public audience.³ However, over the last couple of years, the popularity and widespread use of new web services and applications reveal how the medium has rapidly matured. Specifically since 2004, an enormous range of websites, web-based services, technological innovations, design principles, tools, ideas and companies have been developed. Collectively, this stage of web history has come to be identified by the

¹ This Chinese proverb is attributed to Confucius; another version of it reads ‘I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.’
contentious term Web 2.0 and characterised by the participation of web users on a global scale. Many new web services no longer focus only on providing content to users, but also enable them to participate and be involved in the production of content.

As the Chinese proverb suggests, involving audiences in the production of content can assist them to understand history. Yet, this new web environment has received little attention from public historians. In Australian society a significant shift has occurred in the ways that information is produced, distributed and consumed. This has created a serious gap between the knowledge and practices of professionally trained historians working in the public sphere and the new ways in which many Australians are engaging with the past.

The aim of this thesis is to determine how Australian public history practice is reshaped in the Web 2.0 environment. Using web-based content as primary source material and engaging with an interdisciplinary range of scholarship, the thesis scopes this newly emerging field of practice and identifies trends in public history in the Web 2.0 environment. Web-based content such as YouTube videos, user comments, Wikipedia entries and blog posts are examined to provide insight into the way the Web 2.0 environment is used and understood. While the use of such content as primary sources is relatively experimental within the historical discipline, the web is increasingly being understood as the socio-anthropological phenomenon of our time. It is only by understanding the unique and changing nature of the web that public historians might develop effective ways of using it for their work.

This study is limited purposely to public history practice in Australia. Although academic and other forms of history are affected by the development of the Web 2.0 environment, this investigation focuses on the impact of the web user’s changing role from a consumer to a producer of content. This change is particularly pertinent to the public historian, who is concerned with the interpretation of the past to a public audience. The web user’s changing role is a further reminder that, as the recent history wars debates made clear, Australians do not consider history as a form of inaccessible knowledge or the preserve of experts.

While the following chapters draw upon international case studies and the global nature of the web, the conclusions and trends identified in this thesis focus specifically on the way that public history is practiced in Australia. In this country, public history refers to the histories produced

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4 Dr Keir Reeves, personal communication, 12 September 2008.
by professional historians for a public audience, meaning those that are not private or intended for a purely academic audience. This definition is intentionally broad, as in Australia public history incorporates a wide range of practices. The work of public historians crosses over into a range of other fields, namely the heritage industry, museums, local history, academic history and most other parts of the professionalised discipline of history.

Importantly, public history has also frequently overlapped with the work of amateur historians and enthusiasts. Although it can be a sore point for professional public historians, it is often amateurs and enthusiasts who are the custodians and interpreters of our cultural heritage in the public sphere. Particularly in areas such as local history, biography, genealogy and memorabilia, amateurs hold a wealth of information in books, papers, stories, photographs, object collections and research notes. The Web 2.0 environment has provided many tools and sites by which these amateur historians and enthusiasts can share their interest and knowledge. Recently developed websites such as the user-contributed encyclopedia Wikipedia, the photo-sharing site Flickr, the short video sharing service YouTube and the social networking site Facebook have enabled web users to share history in new ways. But they have also raised important issues about accuracy, authority, authenticity and historical understanding in our increasingly networked, digital world. Public historians are now faced with both the challenge and opportunity of creating meaningful and effective public history projects in a constantly evolving participatory web environment.

The ephemeral nature of the Web 2.0 environment is resolved in the following chapters by drawing upon new media theory to explain the development of Web 2.0 as part of a phase of identity crisis through which all new media pass when they first emerge in a society. Lisa Gitelman has explored, through an analysis of historical precedents, how this crisis is caused by the uncertain status of the new media in relation to old or existing media and their functions. Although the web has been around for a decade and a half, it is still going through an identity crisis. The dot-com boom and bust of the late 1990s, the emergence of Web 2.0 and recent

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6 I have used the word ‘practice’ because public historians are considered to practice, rather than study history. I have used ‘practice’, the noun, over ‘practise’, the verb, consistently to describe public history throughout this thesis. See Rebecca Conard, “Facepaint History in the Season of Introspection,” The Public Historian, vol. 25, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 22.


inclinations toward the idea of Web 3.0 indicate that, at least partially, this is a persistent element of the web. Gitelman suggests that it is during this stage of identity crisis that perceptions of the web and its practical uses are adapted to existing understandings of what different media do for whom and why.

Given the pivotal nature of this phase it may seem alarming that within Australian historiography there are few studies of the use of new web technologies for history. The reason for this is perhaps quite simple. As Charlie Gere wisely observed, it is ‘hard, if not impossible, to grasp the effects of a technology at the time they are taking place’. The web appears to be continually developing and changing, leaving historians on the periphery of conversations and decisions that will impact upon their profession. By identifying trends in public history practice in the Web 2.0 environment, this thesis contributes significantly to understanding how and why the historical discipline must respond to new media.

Historians have responded in various ways to the rapid pace that the web has entered our everyday lives. For some historians, the last fourteen years of web development has been immensely exciting as the ‘foreign realm of the virtual’ has become increasingly used for the representation and communication of history. Personally, this thesis is partly a product of a fascination with the way this technology has, in just over a decade, transformed many everyday practices such as reading the news, listening to music, communicating with friends and searching for information. Yet this same development, and its consequences, has been criticised by historians and cultural commentators alike. In 1996 Gertrude Himmelfarb stated that she was ‘disturbed by some aspects of’ ... ‘the new technology’s impact on learning and scholarship’. ‘Every source appearing on the screen,’ she suggested, ‘has the same weight and credibility as every other; no authority is “privileged” over any other’. For this reason, and for many others, public historians have tended to avoid experimenting with this new media. In 2006, Paul Arthur suggested why this is the case:

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10 Gitelman and Pingree, New Media, xii.
12 Turnbull, Australian History, Hypermedia and the World-Wide Web, 55.
For history to adopt today’s very latest technologies of representation for its own use (at this very early stage in their development) is to effectively take historical scholarship out of its comfort zone and to bring it face to face with the very processes of change it seeks to document.\textsuperscript{14}

However, the implications of the Web 2.0 environment lie beyond its role as a technology of representation. The web is quickly becoming the key communications tool of the early twenty-first century.

In Chapter One, public history and the web are examined in the context of new media theory. The relationships between new media and old media and between technology and society help frame Web 2.0 in an appropriate historical context. Following an investigation of public history practice in Australia, pre-Web 2.0 examples are analysed to determine the ways in which public history practices on the web have shaped the relationship between public history and Web 2.0. These examples reveal certain understandings about how and why the web is used for public history. A range of literature is also drawn upon to explore why the practices and possibilities of Web 2.0 are intimately connected to older media and why they cannot be understood outside broader debates about convergence, technology and society, digital media, hypertext and authorship.

Chapter Two provides an analysis of the term Web 2.0 and the six principles that have underpinned the development of services, applications and technologies under this banner since the term was coined in 2004. It considers in depth what these principles mean for the practice of public history on the web and uses key examples of history-related initiatives to explain the more technical aspects of Web 2.0. This chapter also outlines some of the ways that public historians and cultural institutions, such as museums or libraries, have begun to engage with their audiences in new ways. From enabling users to contribute photographs to the collection of the National Library of Australia through Flickr, to discussions about popular history topics on blogs and wikis, the scope of web-enabled participation in public history has expanded dramatically in the new web environment.

Chapter Three draws together background literature and the principles of Web 2.0 through a detailed analysis of two case studies. The first case study, the Powerhouse Museum collection

Beyond the Book

search, reflects an institutional response to the emerging Web 2.0 environment. In this case study I assert that the collection search has been developed through experimentation with new web principles and through a reconceptualisation of the relationship between the museum, the museum's collection and its public audience. The outcome has been that the collection search itself functions as a site of public history enabled by the new web environment. The second case study, YouTube, has become almost synonymous with the term Web 2.0. Through an analysis of historical content and patterns in the way that history is produced, distributed and consumed on YouTube, I argue that it presents public historians with opportunities both as a site of historical source material and as a new site of public historical discourse. This examination of YouTube also looks at how Australian cultural institutions have approached the service and at the potential for users to share new creative forms of history that are valuable to the practice of public history.

This thesis supports an experimentalist approach to the practice of public history and to the discipline of history more generally. By focusing on the potential for the genesis of new genres of public history, it promotes experimental use of new media to enhance historical understanding. This is, of course, influenced by postmodern approaches to history, but should be seen as corresponding to a range of experiments with history that have arisen over the last few years. Experimentalist historians cast aside both the modernist notion that history can mirror the past and also the postmodernist idea that history cannot be a mirror of what once was. Alan Munslow and Robert A. Rosenstone explain that their intention, in producing experimentalist histories, is to ‘defamiliarize the reader, to disrupt the routine perception of the past as history with only one road and one destination—to travel hopefully rather than to arrive at the story?” Likewise, the Web 2.0 environment offers public historians new ways of practising their craft. Even though the web is continually evolving and expanding, the principles and practices of Web 2.0 enable experimentation with personalised, ubiquitous, innovative and democratic public histories.

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Public history and new media in Australia

The internet has rapidly become a pervasive communications network in Australia. By November 2000 thirty-seven per cent of Australian households were connected to the internet.¹ At the end of 2006 this figure had risen to sixty-three per cent, though patterns of internet use indicate significant regional and socio-economic differences throughout Australia.² Internet use continues to rise in 2008 as it is increasingly accessed through portable digital devices including mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs) and other devices such as gaming consoles. The introduction of the World Wide Web, or the web as it has become commonly known, prompted this explosion of internet use. Over the last decade and a half the internet and the web have reshaped many aspects of daily life, including the ways in which many Australians gain a sense of the past.

As a developing media that is a communications tool as well as a technology of representation, Web 2.0 is a difficult subject for which to provide an historical context. There is, however, a large range of critical literature that can be drawn upon to inform how the Web 2.0 environment can be understood in relation to the practice of public history in Australia. This chapter provides a context for Web 2.0 and public history by examining it from three particular angles of enquiry: what is the relationship between public history and new media? What is public history and

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Beyond the Book

what shape did it take on the web prior to Web 2.0? How do these precedents and the debates surrounding them inform the relationship between public history and Web 2.0? The enquiry is necessarily framed by new media theory as the web is understood as a central part of new media today. New media theory enables the web to be understood as coming after all media that have previously been considered new, but before all those media that will inevitably take the place of today’s new media. This approach makes explicit not only the complex relationship between new media and society, but also emphasises that many of the challenges of engaging with the Web 2.0 environment will be associated with understanding it in relation to existing ‘old’ media.

Web 2.0 is intrinsically linked to other media forms in society and to broader economic, political, social and cultural trends. In particular, Web 2.0 forms part of the process of convergence. In this process, the web is a convergent media that brings together computing and information technology, communications networks and digitised media and information content. According to web theorists Robert Burnett and P. David Marshall, the process of convergence is ‘the coming together of all forms of mediated communication in digital form.’ This process has considerable implications for the recording, preservation and presentation of history. It highlights the changing ways that our society is producing, distributing and consuming information about the past. Shifting uses and understandings of ‘old’ media such as books, radio, television and film are just one way that convergence can be identified in society. The process is also identifiable through physical changes in most Australians’ everyday lives. Digital media are physically converging as new devices appear on the market that can perform a range of different functions previously attributed to distinct devices. Mobile phones are a key example, as they now often include a web browser, mp3 player, data storage, navigation system and audio and video recording utilities, as well as playback and editing.

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4 As Terry Flew observes, the media technologies that we now consider ‘old’ were once ‘new’, and the media technologies that were once ‘new’ become ‘old’. See Terry Flew, New Media: An Introduction, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.


8 See Gitelman, Always Already New, 1–22.
Public history and new media in Australia

While new media and the process of convergence might reshape or alter the way that old media function and are understood, the emergence of new media does not necessarily render old media obsolete. As Terry Flew observed, ‘the Internet has not significantly reduced television consumption, just as the birth of television did not mean the death of radio fifty years earlier’. It may come as a relief to many historians that predictions of the downfall of printed publication have, in the short term, proved to be wrong. Books and journals still have important roles to play in communicating the past to a public audience, particularly given that the historical discipline is understood as a product of print culture in the western world because of the primacy that is often placed upon the written text. But with the rapid uptake of new media, particularly among a younger generation, it is important to consider how social practices relating to old media are changing. Hugh Mackay and Tim O'Sullivan suggest that it is a case of an ‘old’ medium ‘in new times’. As new media becomes embedded in our everyday lives, public historians must begin to reassess the appropriateness of both old and new media for interpreting the past to a public audience.

The relationship between new media and social practices is a well established field of enquiry, with a large range of critical work examining the ongoing tension between old and new media, and the impact of this tension on society and the practices of everyday life. While this thesis focuses on the implications of Web 2.0 specifically for the practice of public history, it is important to recognise that this topic is framed by broader debates about whether media technologies have the capacity to transform society and culture. These debates extend from the approaches pursued by two early media theorists—Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams—in the 1960s and

9 Flew, New Media: An Introduction, xv.
1970s. McLuhan’s influential catchphrases such as ‘the medium is the message’ have come to be associated with the idea of technological determinism, which in its simplest form is the notion that media technologies reshape society and culture.\(^\text{14}\) Williams’ critique of McLuhan, however, has come to dominate media studies today, with the alternate view that media technologies are shaped by social, cultural, political and economic forces.\(^\text{15}\) Williams uses the notion of human agency to explain that ‘all technologies have been developed and improved to help with known human practices or with foreseen and desired practices.’\(^\text{16}\)

This thesis draws on a particular idea that both McLuhan and Williams held in common about new media: the idea of remediation.\(^\text{17}\) The work of media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin examines the idea of remediation in depth.\(^\text{18}\) They define a medium simply as ‘that which remediates.’\(^\text{19}\) That is, a medium is something that ‘appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real.’\(^\text{20}\) In this thesis, I consider Web 2.0 technologies as remediating. Old media, including Web 1.0, are both rivalled and supported by the Web 2.0 environment. Web 2.0 incorporates, as the following chapters reveal, almost all old media—including text, photography, television, film and radio—but has refashioned them in a way that makes it appear to be somehow ‘better’. As Bolter and Grusin state, the user is ‘left to wonder why she ever needs to return to the original medium.’\(^\text{21}\) But, as new media theory explains, old media are refashioned or refashion themselves in response to new media, while the practices and possibilities of the new media are still being

\(^\text{14}\) McLuhan’s main theses stem from what Martin Lister et al. refer to as a ‘narrative of redemption’, in which McLuhan presents electronic media as a recovery from print culture. McLuhan argues that there are four media cultures, including the primitive culture of oral communication, a literate culture which co-existed with the oral, the age of printing and the culture of electronic media, including radio, television and computers. See Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant and Kieran Kelly, New Media: A Critical Introduction (London: Routledge, 2003), 75–80. McLuhan’s phrase ‘the medium is the message’ was first introduced in Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1964). An interpretation of McLuhan’s phrase ‘the medium is the message’ in relation to the web can be found in Paul Levison, Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 35–43.

\(^\text{15}\) For an analysis of the differences between the McLuhan and Williams’ approaches see Lister, et al., New Media: A Critical Introduction, 72–92.

\(^\text{16}\) Raymond Williams, Television, Technology and Cultural Form (London: Fontana, 1974), 129.

\(^\text{17}\) The notion of remediation originally comes from the seminal work of McLuhan, Understanding Media, 23–24.


\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{21}\) Ibid., 209.
determined. The relationship between new and old media, between technology and society and between public history and new media is dialectic.

On the edge of this dynamic tension and complex process of shaping, modelling, fashioning, developing and reshaping, remodelling and refashioning, sits the field of digital history. Digital history is concerned with all aspects of the historical enterprise that involve digital media in its presentation, storage and access. As Paul Arthur explains, it refers to the digital means of delivery rather than to a specific genre, allowing individual works to be described as ‘a digital history’.22 The most comprehensive work on digital history to date is *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (2006), by American scholars Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig.23

Although now a couple of years old, Cohen and Rosenzweig’s book engages with many of the fundamental concerns of historians wanting to ‘do’ history with digital media. The authors describe seven advantages of digital media—capacity, accessibility, flexibility, diversity, manipulability, interactivity, and hypertextuality (or nonlinearity)—and five dangers or hazards—quality, durability, readability, passivity, and inaccessibility.24 In their conclusion, the authors press the need for historians to experiment with the web and new media, with their larger message being ‘that all historians can use the web to make the past more richly documented, more accessible, more diverse, more responsive to future researchers, and above all more democratic’.25 However, according to new media theory, the work of almost all historians is affected by new media, whether or not they decide to experiment with it. The practices and possibilities of digital history are inextricably linked with existing non-digital forms of historical practice. Therefore, as well as encouraging historians to experiment with the web, I propose that understanding what the web does for whom and why will assist historians to interpret the past to a public audience. As new media continues to affect social practices and information patterns, it is essential for public historians to remember that ‘society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools’.26

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24 Ibid., 3.

25 Ibid., 248.

Having only emerged in 1993 from its origins in research communities, the public web in Australia has impacted upon the practice of public history in two main ways.\textsuperscript{27} Firstly, it has disrupted the place of traditional media within society. Through the dialectical relationship between technology and society, patterns of the production, distribution and consumption of information have changed. This has affected, for example, the publishing models of small journals.\textsuperscript{28} Secondly, the web has brought a range of new challenges and opportunities for the practice of public history. Although the impact of the web on the functions and social significance of traditional public history mediums deserves further research, the concern of this thesis is to look at how Web 2.0 technologies are being used and understood for the representation and communication of history in the public sphere and to outline trends as to how public history is reshaped in the Web 2.0 environment.

So far this chapter has argued a great number of things that require a brief summary before moving onto a discussion of some recent literature. I have suggested that internet and web use is continually growing in Australia and increasingly accessed through portable digital devices. The process of convergence supports this growth and is identifiable through changing social practices and information patterns. This means that the relationship between public history and new media is complex, as the identity crisis of new media and the process of remediation reveal the myriad factors involved in determining the role and social significance of Web 2.0. I wish to stress three particular points emerging from the arguments put forward so far. Firstly, positing Web 2.0 and its associated sites and technologies as viable media for public history does not necessarily diminish the importance or relevance of other media. Web 2.0 both rivals and supports old media. Secondly, it is important that we do not immediately consider Web 2.0 to be ‘better’ than old or existing media because of its inclination to combine different media forms. Cohen and Rosenzweig’s seven dangers of digital media must be kept in mind, along with the knowledge that new media tend to build their own markets as ‘enhancements not replacements,’ as Walt Crawford and Michael Gorman noted in 1995.\textsuperscript{29} Lastly, with rising web access and use in Australia, particularly among the younger generation, responding to the challenges and opportunities of new media is likely to be an increasingly important priority for public history.

\textsuperscript{27} In 1993 the web browser ‘Mosaic’ was released, making the web accessible outside research communities. See “About NCSA Mosaic,” NCSA. Available [online]: <http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/Projects/mosaic.html> [24 June 2008].

\textsuperscript{28} Many small journals have found that online publishing proves more cost effective and gives them a wider readership than the traditional print journal model.

\textsuperscript{29} See Cohen and Rosenzweig, Digital History, 3; Walt Crawford and Michael Gorman as cited in Lim, “The Last Book”.

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In Australia, there is a growing body of literature about the use of the Web 2.0 environment for the communication and representation of cultural information. To date, this literature has largely focused on institutional responses to Web 2.0, particularly those of traditional collecting institutions such as museums. A number of recent articles, conferences, projects and online forums reveal changing understandings about the relationship between cultural institutions and their audiences. Dr Angelina Russo leads the Australian *New Literacy, New Audiences* project and has published, along with Jerry Watkins, a range of articles focusing on digital cultural communication and new media. The *Social Media and Cultural Communication* conference held in late February 2008, chaired by Russo, brought together many of Australia’s leading cultural institutions to discuss the challenges and opportunities of ‘social media’ for museums, galleries, libraries and archives. This recent explosion of interest and research is recognition of and a response to a shift in information patterns and social practices in Australia. Responses to this shift can be observed not only from cultural institutions, but also from the broader sector known as the ‘creative industries’ in Australia. Investigations and experiments with new media in a range of cultural and creative fields have begun to reflect an acknowledgement of the new ways that Australians are learning, creating and engaging with global communities.

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32 In this context social media are considered to be a group of web services driven by users (i.e. blogs, wikis, social networking sites, video and image sharing sites) that fall under the Web 2.0 umbrella.

33 Cultural Ministers Council Creative Economy Roundtable, *Building a Creative Innovation Economy: Opportunities for the Australian and New Zealand Creative Sectors in the Digital Environment* (Cultural Ministers Council, February
The web, described by Burnett and Marshall as the ‘friendly multimedia portion of the internet,’ is a complex medium for public history. In the museum sector, Russo and other researchers argue that new media has resulted in a shift in the ways that museums act as trusted cultural online networks, distribute community knowledge and view their role as custodians of cultural content. However, beyond the realm of the museum, very little has been written about the impact of new Web 2.0 technologies on the ways that history is interpreted to a public audience.

Two key history-based articles discussing Web 2.0 technologies are Roy Rosenzweig’s 2006 article ‘Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past’ and Stephanie Ho’s 2007 article ‘Blogging as Popular History Making, Blogs as Public History: A Singapore Case Study’. Rosenzweig contemplates the accuracy and value of collaborative, amateur history on Wikipedia, examining whether it is a valuable historical resource and how it compares with encyclopedias written by experts. One of the major research questions addressed in this thesis extends from Rosenzweig’s examination of the Wikipedia model. That is: in what ways do participatory media reshape the interpretation of the past to a public audience? Ho’s article addresses only part of this question, by focusing on how blogging enables personal engagement with public history-making processes in Singapore. This thesis is written specifically from an Australian public history perspective and focuses less on a particular web tool or practice than on the environment in which these tools and practices have developed. Consequently,

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35 These three shifts were identified in Russo, et. al., “How Will Social Media Affect Museum Communication?”


this investigation fills an important gap in scholarship between the knowledge and practices of Australian public historians and public history institutions and the new ways in which many Australians are engaging with the past.

Australian public history

The practice of public history in Australia remains distinct from many of its international counterparts. Although difficult to characterise, Australian public history is identifiably different from the British people’s history movement, as it is just as concerned with great men and great events as it is with telling the histories of those people who have been left out of the major narratives. It is sometimes, though not always, employed to inform public policy, but is rarely called upon to directly inform present-day decision-making, making it distinct from the American applied history movement.39 Australia does not have a government history group such as the Ministry for Culture and Heritage in New Zealand, making Australian public history also distinct from that of our neighbours. Instead, history is continually in the public sphere in Australia and historical research has almost become a national pastime.40 But not all manifestations of history in the public sphere form part of the field of public history. Australian public historians are academically trained, part of a spectrum of professional historians working in a variety of contexts.41 Indeed, public historians engage with public audiences through heritage sites, newspapers, books, television, film, museums, the web and other mediums.

The key features of public history practice in Australia can be gleaned from a number of different understandings and explanations. In the inaugural issue of Public History Review Ann Curthoys and Paula Hamilton wrote that ‘for us a commitment to the idea of public history is a commitment to a concern with audience and an awareness of the complex relationship between audience, historical practice and institutional context.’42 Graeme Davison emphasised

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that public historians are overtly concerned with a public audience, with the practical skills of interpretation and communication, the making of public policy and the relationship between the professional historian and the public. Grace Karskens pointed toward the development of business skills by public historians, which are essential when negotiating contracts, engaging with clients or even maintaining a professional status beyond the walls of the academy. In New Zealand, Alexander Trapeznik and Gavin McLean stressed that public history has two main elements: audience and purpose. The spectrum of Australian public history involves all of these elements: audience and purpose, interpretation, communication, public policy and business skills.

However, the element most often emphasised in definitions of public history in Australia is the public historian’s relationship with a public audience. This is, after all, the element that distinguishes it from history produced for academic audiences or from history-making processes in the private sphere, such as compiling a family history scrapbook. As discussed in Chapter Two, this concern with a public audience makes Web 2.0 particularly provocative for the practice of public history. Although the web has long been understood as enabling two-way communication, Web 2.0 gives a renewed emphasis to the role of the audience.

Despite the public historian’s concern with a public audience, little debate has emerged about the changing ways that audiences are engaging with and sharing history. Indeed, until the late 1990s most Australian public historians knew very little about how their audiences engage with the past. The ‘Australians and the Past’ survey conducted by the University of Technology, Sydney, helped to bridge this gap in understanding. The researchers’ reasons for undertaking the study were very clear. They asked, ‘how are historians to communicate the past to the public if we do not understand the historical sensibilities of our own culture?’ By investigating the ways in which Australians gain a sense of the past, the survey confirmed the researchers’ suspicions that most people’s understanding of the past comes from representations of the past in popular culture. It also showed that many Australians learn about the past through actively engaging

43 Davison, “Paradigms of Public History”, 14.
in history-making activities, revealing the value of personal communication outside the realm of the professional historian.

In the survey, the researchers found that sixty-nine to seventy-five per cent of respondents were involved in making history. But trends show that, with the falling cost of digital recording devices and the increase in web access and use, these intimate history-making processes are becoming increasingly digital and networked. And, as personal history-making practices change, the historical consciousness of the public historian’s audience may also change. Historical consciousness, the ‘individual and collective understandings of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors that shape those understandings, as well as the relations of historical understandings to those of the present and the future’ is of central concern to public historians. In order to effectively interpret the past to a public audience it is necessary to understand the ways in which Australians gain a sense of the past and how interpretations of the past in the public sphere are related to the historical consciousness of the audiences.

This was also a concern for the British popular memory group in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which suggested that public representations and private remembrance are the two main ways in which a sense of the past is produced. Popular memory, they argued, is concerned with two sets of relations—the relation between dominant memory and oppositional forms in the public sphere and the relation between those public discourses and a more privatised sense of the past. These two relations are being played out in the new web environment as public history is positioned side by side with both personal and popular histories. While this appears to present public historians with major challenges such as building and maintaining authoritative and effective public history projects on the web, it also presents them with the opportunity

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48 Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton revealed that these activities included saving heirlooms, taking photos, and researching family trees. See Ibid.


51 Dominant memory is a term used to describe the historical representations that are the most powerful or pervasive, produced in the course of struggles between competing constructions of the past. See Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” 76. Foucault’s use of the term ‘popular memory’ is particularly evocative in the context of the web, as he considered popular memory to be the forms of collective knowledge about the past held by those people who were low down in the social hierarchy, those who were not involved in producing the dominant accounts of history. See R. Pearson, “Custer Loses Again: The Contestation Over Commodified Public Memory,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed. D. Ben-Amos and D. Weissberg, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 179; see also Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003).
to somehow utilise other forms of history that are now in the public sphere. As the popular memory group suggested, historical production must include *all* the ways in which a sense of the past is constructed in our society, including those that 'do not necessarily take a written or literary form'.

For some public historians Web 2.0 represents a further challenge to their professional identity, because the quality of historical research is not recognised and conventional benchmarks are no longer applicable. To some extent, this explains why there is a general reluctance in the industry to engage with new media while its role within the historical discipline is still being determined. Over the last few decades, Australian public historians have had their professional identity continually challenged by influences such as the history wars, the Australian political climate and the ongoing democratisation of history. Each of these influences has caused new inquiries into the nature of public history, new debates about how Australia's past is and should be interpreted and has thrown many historians into heated debates in the public sphere.

Nonetheless, the continual challenges faced by public historians have enabled reflection upon the profession during critical stages of its development and the establishment of professional standards and networks. By 1992 public historians in Australia could look to the *Public History Review* for critical reflection from the field. The Australian Council of Professional Historians Associations was formed in 1996 and the Australian Centre for Public History was established in 1998. Although each of these associations and professional networks might have different goals, they were each formed in an attempt to recognise public history as a professional practice in this country. These networks provide forums for public historians to stay in touch with current practice and debates relevant to the field. Hopefully, the challenges and opportunities of new media will motivate public historians to reflect upon their profession once again and perhaps even encourage the development of professional networks and standards for the use of new media within the industry.

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52 Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method", 76.
53 Arthur, "Exhibiting History".
Public history and the web

There is no denying that many historians still like their ‘text linear and coherent, and in crisp black fonts on a white page’. Yet it is increasingly recognised that now and in the future a vast amount of our cultural heritage will be either encoded in digital forms or ‘born digital’, having never existed on paper. This shift is encouraging increasing numbers of historians to engage with new media, though as Sebastian Chan commented about the cultural sector, they are ‘careful, cautious and meticulous’. Even in 2000, when thirty-seven per cent of Australian households had the internet, most historians preferred presenting multimedia-based history in fixed media forms, such as CD-ROMs, because the web was not regarded as technically stable. Nevertheless, in the space of a decade and a half rapid technological developments have resulted in an explosion of history on the web. Cohen and Rosenzweig call this aggregate of history-related websites ‘the history web’. Yet mapping such a history web in 2008 proves next to impossible; a simple Google search for a popular Australian historical subject such as Ned Kelly brings up over one million hits. This is not only indicative of a widespread interest in historical subjects online, but also suggests that the web is of a significantly different nature from other public history mediums.

The spectrum of public history practice in Australia has allowed for different levels of experimentation with the web. A few examples can briefly be drawn upon to illuminate

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56 The field of digital preservation deals with the management and preservation of digital content. The term ‘born digital’ refers to material that was created in digital form, such as emails, online journal entries and blog entries, as opposed to ‘turned-digital’ materials, which are items existing in analog media formats that have been digitised. These phrases are in common usage by collecting institutions, see for example State Library of Victoria, “Digital Preservation Policy.” Available [online]: <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/about/information/policies/digitalpreservation.html> [8 April 2008].


58 These products were usually produced with the assistance of multimedia experts. See Cohen and Rosenzweig, Digital History, 20. Paul Turnbull discusses examples of multimedia history CD-ROMs in Turnbull, “Australian History, Hypermedia and the World-Wide Web”, 46.

59 Cohen and Rosenzweig, Digital History, 18.

60 It is likely that there are a large number of websites not identified in this search because they are not found by Google. Content on the web is often described as ‘deep web’ when it cannot be identified by search engines. See Michael K. Bergman, “The Deep Web: Surfacing Hidden Value,” Journal of Electronic Publishing, vol. 7, issue 1 (August 2007). Available [online]: <http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/07-01/bergman.html> [26 March 2008].
some of the ways that public historians have used the web prior to Web 2.0. One of the best-known examples is CAN, the *Collections Australia Network* website and email lists, which is a government funded initiative that acts as a ‘public gateway to collecting institutions’ in Australia (see Figure 1.1). CAN was developed in 2004 from the Australian Museums and Galleries On Line website. It focuses on small, often regional, collecting institutions—many of which are run by volunteers—and aims not only to aggregate their collections but also to provide tools and services. For professional public historians and their amateur counterparts working with institutions and collections in regional areas it serves as a useful central hub through which to stay in touch with the latest developments in the field. It provides partners with a hosted web page, makes collection records accessible online, offers resources and professional development activities and contains event and exhibition listings and a range of discussion lists. A large number of collecting institutions and the historians working for them have seized these opportunities, including historical societies, historic houses, councils and museums. CAN does not present end products of public history (such as books or exhibitions); rather, it is a communications hub for the discussion of local and community history related to Australian collections. It is an important example of the web being used for its communicative ability before Web 2.0 emerged.

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62 The Australian Museums and Galleries On Line website no longer exists and content has been integrated into the *Collections Australia Network* website.

63 Examples of historical societies include the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society, Ballarat Historical Society, King Island Historical Society Museum and the Toowoomba Historical Society among around 145 others. Among the historic houses are the nineteenth-century portable iron houses at Coventry Street, Melbourne, the Charleville Historic House Museum and Rio Vista historic house at Mildura. Council collections include the Adelaide City Council Archives and the Wollongong City Council. Museums range from the Powerhouse Museum and Melbourne Museum to the Aboriginal Artefacts Museum in Beachport, SA and the Doll and Bear Museum in Manunda, QLD. See *Collections Australia Network*. 
The *South Seas* project developed by Paul Turnbull and Chris Blackall with the support of the National Library of Australia and the Australian National University was designed as an ‘online companion to James Cook’s momentous first voyage of discovery’ (see Figure 1.2). It was officially launched on 20 July 2004 and remains hosted by the National Library of Australia. Although the creators suggested that the project would eventually include hypermedia forms and offer readers ways to ‘compare and contrast how occurrences on the voyage struck different participants’, the site remains predominantly text-based and only four years later appears clunky and difficult to navigate. Nevertheless the experiment successfully used the web to take digitised primary source material from the National Library and the interpretations of professional historians working from within the academy to create a useful public history resource.

*South Seas* puts three advantages of the web to good use. Firstly, the web provides access to the vast amounts of storage space available for all forms of digital media. *South Seas* uses this storage capacity and the interface of the website to present a range of primary source material along with the historians’ interpretations and narratives. Secondly, the web enables

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64 *Collections Australia Network*.


67 The project received funding over three years from 2000 to 2002.
Beyond the Book

the presentation of multimedia. Although only basic use of multimedia has been integrated into the *South Seas* example through maps, there is clearly the potential for photographs, short film, oral history recordings and other media to enhance the site. As Cohen and Rosenzweig expressed in 2006, this allows us to ‘ preserve, study and present the past in the multiple media that expressed and recorded it’.

The website also makes effective use of hypertext, which allows the presentation of history in a non-linear way, as users can navigate between different parts of the site through hyperlinks.

A different kind of website, not funded by a government body, institution or university, is the *Milton Ulladulla Local and Family History Site*. The site has been created and maintained by public historian Cathy Dunn since 1999 and is hosted on a local community promotional website under the history section (see Figure 1.3). According to her profile on the site, Cathy Dunn is a public historian with a Graduate Diploma in local and applied history, a member of the Professional Historians Association of NSW and has published a number of Australian and local

68 Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, 5.
69 South Seas Project.
history books. The website is an example of the direct translation of traditional history-writing skills to the web. While it does use a limited number of links to divide sections of the site, it also contains large blocks of text, links to purchase print-based publications, very few images, broken links and a lack of navigational elements. It does, nevertheless, contain a considerable amount of local history information, including detailed indexes related to war history, births, deaths and marriages, pioneer history, Aboriginal history and a couple of significant local buildings.

These examples demonstrate three different kinds of public history websites found on the web during the early 2000s. They reflect how public historians were using new media during this period and they show that the web was understood as having the capacity to converge text and images, for communication between geographically dispersed people, to provide access to sources and to create new genres of history that incorporate multimedia and hypertext. Although each project is funded and maintained in a different way, the goals of each of these projects are essentially the same: to make previously under-utilised historical resources more accessible to the public through the medium of the web, while similarly increasing the use of

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71 Milton Ulladulla Local and Family History Site.
those resources and the institutions, people and places that support them. Prior to Web 2.0, these were two of the fundamental goals of the web for public history.

A number of unique features of the web shaped the development of these goals for online public history. As well as providing for the storage and transmission of large amounts of data and having the capacity to incorporate multimedia, the web is also an easily searchable source of information. The development of easy-to-use search functions made databases and online resources a focus of online public history initiatives. The historian’s ability to publish online at virtually no cost also shaped understandings of how the web could be used. Many written histories have been placed directly on the web, sometimes in hypertext linked blocks of text to make them easier to read, but always maintaining the conventions and practices of print-based genres of history. This, of course, raised legal and financial issues, as publishers soon feared that online publishing would detract from physical sales of history books. Supporting this line of thought was the low cost of revising and updating web content, in comparison to the cost of reprinting an entire book. However, the scholarship that accompanied many of the more adventurous experiments with history on the web before and during this period suggests that the one thing that is fundamentally unique about the internet, and worthy of serious attention, is hypertext.

**From hypertext to social media**

Hypertext is a system of writing and displaying content that contains cross-references or ‘links’ to other content. The words ‘hypertext’ and ‘hypermedia’ were coined in a 1965 conference.

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72 The first is a government-funded project in conjunction with the Australian cultural sector; the second is a public history project managed by university-based historians and funded by an Australian Research Council grant, and the third is an unfunded, locally produced and hosted website that continues to be updated by the enthusiastic historian who created it almost ten years ago.


74 Although it may seem more appropriate to use the term ‘hypermedia’, given the existence of electronic links between images, audio, video, text and combinations of these media on the web, I have used ‘hypertext’ for the sake of consistency with existing literature.
Hypertext is widely known through the ‘http’ at the start of web addresses as the electronic links that join things together on the web. The ‘http’ refers to the hypertext transfer protocol, a standard set of rules that makes it possible to send and receive information on the web. For historians, hypertext and the early web presented new ways for audiences to ‘read’ history that did not necessarily follow the narrative of an historian or curator. Web users could navigate their own way through information by deciding whether or not to follow links to other documents and content. Hypertext showed how the web could be utilised for more than accessing large databases of digitised historical resources. In particular, hypertext presented an opportunity for historians to consider new ways of writing and presenting history.

In 1999 American Quarterly in collaboration with two universities presented some experiments with hypertext history. These experiments revealed that primary and secondary source material could be presented along with the historian’s essay and also that hypertext enabled the reader to experience the text as non-linear. History is presented in a way that is fundamentally different from its presentation in a history book, encouraging the democratisation of information. But, for historians, the translation of traditional history-writing skills to hypertextual modes did not seem to present a major conceptual shift.

The process that historians undertake to produce a print-based history essay translates to hypertext simply by understanding footnotes as links to other documents and sources. As Michel Foucault suggested in The Archaeology of Knowledge, the ‘frontiers of a book are never clear-cut’, because ‘it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network’. This helps explain why early experiments with hypertext did not fundamentally change the way that historians practised their craft. The hypertext history essay followed the conventions of the historical discipline. These early experiments did, however, challenge historians to consider how their work would be read. The web user was
now able to follow a link to the historian’s source, to double-check and perhaps disagree with the conclusions drawn. The challenge of hypertext to the historical discipline was, and in many ways still is, based around how to use this system of writing and displaying content to enhance historical understanding.

In *S/Z* Roland Barthes describes the ‘ideal text,’ which closely resembles our understanding of hypertext. Barthes makes a distinction between text based on print technology and text based on electronic hypertext through the notions of ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ texts. The writerly text, Barthes suggests, makes ‘the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.’ The notion that a reader might weave their own narrative through a history also echoes the poststructuralist debates of the late 1960s surrounding the death of the author, as the viewer or user of hypertext history is given greater control over the way they read the text. As Paul Arthur has discussed, if hypertext emphasises navigation over narration, the role of the historian as narrator becomes problematic. Presenting history in this form also received significant criticism from literary theorists. In 2005 David Bell argued that ‘information is not knowledge, searching is not reading, and surrendering to the organising logic of a book is, after all, the way one learns.’ But, with changing information patterns and social practices, this will not always be the case.

In the twenty-first century, with the influence of postmodernism and what Lyotard called a general ‘incredulity towards metanarratives,’ students of history are taught to question the ideal of objectivity in history. Being an historian means finding a balance between the power of narrative based on sources and ‘facts’ and the ‘radical opportunities and exciting gaps’ opened up by postmodern critique. For some historians, postmodernism has reoriented the way they write history. Although narrative is still the predominant way that historians communicate the

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81 Ibid., 4.
84 Bell, “The Bookless Future.”
Beyond the Book

Past to a public audience, Robert Berkhofer suggests that the work of Greg Dening, Richard Price and Robert Rosenstone contains elements to this effect. Berkhofer also presents a useful analysis of the impact of postmodernism on the factual authority of history, by suggesting that ‘normal history orders the past for the sake of authority and therefore power’. Indeed, if the traditional authority of the historian’s ‘facts’ is destroyed, then the primacy of history as an intellectual tradition becomes arbitrary.

Moving from hypertext history to Web 2.0 brings many of the debates surrounding hypertext and postmodernism to the fore. Authorship can become collaborative, users can become producers, histories can be subjective without the identity of the ‘subject’ or person writing them being known and users are learning in ways that do not involve the organising logic of a book. In the Web 2.0 environment public historians face the challenge of engaging with new audiences that are undeniably active in producing interpretations of the past that may challenge or contradict the historian’s interpretations. But public historians are well equipped to make sense of this situation. Public historians have established techniques to allow for the existence of ‘anything goes’ interpretations and to position stories that make no claim to factual accuracy alongside the interpretations of professional historians, who are trained to interpret the past and, increasingly, to make their interpretation explicit. This is the ongoing role of the public historian, who navigates between academic historical scholarship and the work of amateurs and enthusiasts, institutional contexts and public audiences.

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87 Robert Berkhofer, Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 200, 276, 279.


89 Dr Keir Reeves, personal communication, 12 September 2008.

90 This is an expansion on Curthoys’ and Hamilton’s explanation of public history. Curthoys and Hamilton, “What Makes History Public?”, 13.
As the web continues to develop and the online resources and tools available to historians grow in number, the goals of the web for public history have begun to change. Chapter One discussed how public history websites from around 1999 to 2004 utilised the web’s storage capacity, accessibility, communicative ability, potential for multimedia and hypertext to make under-utilised historical resources more accessible and to increase their use. While these public history projects successfully achieved their aims, they are now, with the exception of CAN, static websites that reflect a certain understanding of how this medium should be used for public history.

CAN, however, reflects a different understanding of the web. The site was developed from a previous web resource that assembled information about Australian museums and galleries. It was developed as a network for communication between participating collecting institutions, historians and interested members of the public, rather than as a public history project. In 2004, the same year that CAN was launched, web developers began to celebrate a revolution in the way the web was being used and understood. This revolution, known by the controversial moniker Web 2.0, is reshaping understandings of how the web can be used for public history.

The term Web 2.0 refers to a series of development principles that were adopted as a driving force for web developers and investors. These principles were determined after the few websites that survived the 1990s dot-com collapse were seen to have common characteristics and the
Beyond the Book

The web began to show new potential through a second generation of web services and applications. Web 2.0 principles stem directly from Web 1.0-era websites, causing critics of the term to refer to Web 2.0 as an ‘attitude not a technology’; or simply ‘vacuous marketing hype’. Yet, despite criticisms and varying definitions, the term Web 2.0 was quickly adopted. Terry Flew accurately suggests that this is because the term highlights the communicative elements of the web that have long been seen as central to it, such as the potential for participation, interactivity, collaborative learning and social networking, and also because some of the fastest growing websites of the 2000s have been based on Web 2.0 principles.

Web 2.0 encapsulates a large number of new web services and applications, as well as implying a series of principles upon which those services have been developed. As Paul Arthur argues, ‘Web 2.0 represents not so much another form of digital history as an environment that allows for new combinations of existing resources and for user input into those resources.’ Effectively, Web 2.0 has begun to bring together the participation and communication of web users with online public history produced by professional historians. This shift is challenging the validity and relevance of earlier (Web 1.0-era) sites, which contained mostly textual information that was disseminated in a top-down fashion from producer to consumer.

This chapter examines six key principles of Web 2.0, developed from those articulated in September 2005 by Tim O’Reilly in his online article entitled ‘What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software’: The principles are: constantly evolving services rather than packaged software, built on an architecture of participation, based on unique and hard to recreate data sources, follow a many-to-many communication model, utilise the wisdom of the crowd and the economic concept of the long tail and are simple to use.

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4 Flew, New Media: An Introduction, 17.
5 Arthur, “Exhibiting History”.
6 Web 1.0 is the moniker assigned to websites that do not incorporate the new web development principles of Web 2.0. The term was only used after the moniker Web 2.0 gained popularity.
7 O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0”.
and utilise the web as platform. Tim O’Reilly’s company, O’Reilly Media, is a major American media company concerned with computer and internet innovation. Consequently, his article focused on the core competencies of Web 2.0 companies and how businesses can benefit from understanding the new rules for success on the web. Nonetheless, the principles encapsulate the ideals of the Web 2.0 environment and many websites, tools and concepts have been developed according to these principles. This chapter analyses how these principles relate to the practice of public history and how public historians, public history institutions and history enthusiasts have begun to engage with Web 2.0 through blogs, wikis, tagging, social networking services, multimedia sharing services and data/aggregation services.

Constantly evolving services rather than packaged software

One of the well-known benefits of the web over the history book or even multimedia CD-ROM is that it can be easily and quickly updated without the need to release revised editions or versions. Tim O’Reilly extended this notion in his explanation of Web 2.0, describing the ‘end of the software release cycle’ as a move away from the Microsoft business model of producing packaged software products toward using the web to provide constantly evolving services. Websites such as Google and the image-sharing site Flickr are examples of constantly evolving services, which would cease to function properly if updates did not occur continually. Just as Google is persistently finding new sites and re-ranking old ones, Flickr is forever processing uploaded images, improving its tag search functions and introducing new elements. The key to success of these sites is that their design allows the updating to be automated, making sure the service is constantly improving. As more and more history finds its way onto the web the notion that the web is useful for the provision of evolving services rather than end products suggests a rethinking of how best it can be used and designed to enable the interpretation of the past to a public audience.

Firstly, if websites are considered to be ongoing services, the historical material available on or through those sites must be continually updated in order to remain relevant. New publishing

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
and information management models will need to be developed for this to occur, as traditional publishing models do not translate to this new environment. By reducing the emphasis normally placed on the finished product of public history—whether it be a book, exhibition or CD-ROM—history can achieve a ‘self-healing quality’, as errors and omissions can be fixed quickly and easily.\(^\text{11}\) This form of history is likely to be more up-to-date than any printed book or journal article. But establishing processes for the updating of content online will increasingly involve asking whether this is the role of the historian. In the Web 2.0 environment trends toward collaboration and participation in content production, a focus on the development of online social networks and a dependence on the website (or service) improving the more people use it mean that content production, at least to a certain extent, must be in the hands of users.

Secondly, this service-based model represents a move away from more traditional narrative-based forms of history and demands a rethinking of the value of historical writing. If public history is continually updated rather than presented as a finished product, what value are historians’ skills in crafting narratives and revealing meaning to audiences through the use of appropriate contextual frameworks? The challenge of mapping public history to this kind of service-based model is that it emphasises the value of content and data, rather than form. This makes it essential for public historians to begin to use their skills in new ways. Public historians must guide the development of new web services that enable users to access appropriate contextual information and gain understanding through participating in the process of comparing, contrasting and contributing to source material and conflicting views of the past. Adequate consideration must be given to the construction of meaning and the architecture of web services, so that users have the ability to ‘weave a new narrative that is personally meaningful—and enjoyable’, a challenge proposed by Jennifer Trant as early as 1997.\(^\text{12}\)

This service-based model is most easily applied to resource aggregating sites such as Picture Australia, which enables the digitised image and map collections of many of Australia’s largest cultural institutions to be searchable through the one portal.\(^\text{13}\) This initiative provides an up-to-date and constantly improving service through software that automatically builds the database, so that contributing institutions need only maintain their own databases for it

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\(^\text{11}\) Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source?”


\(^\text{13}\) See *Picture Australia*. Available [online]: <http://www.pictureaustralia.org>.
to function effectively. This initiative also encourages public contributions to the Pictures Collection of the National Library of Australia through the popular photo-sharing service Flickr (see Figure 2.1). Although not all photographs are incorporated into the collection, the initiative makes an important connection between the role of collecting institutions, the popular history-making activity of taking photographs and the capacity of the Web 2.0 environment to support history-related services rather than fixed products.

The advantages of a service-based model in this case are obvious. The digitised collections of cultural institutions are made accessible to the public and valuable additions to the national collection can occur. However, the advantages of applying this same kind of service-based model to the interpretation of history, not just the collection of historical artefacts, are less obvious.

As more and more digitised material finds its way online and with the ever-increasing production of born-digital material, historians face the challenge of maintaining their skills in finding, sorting and contextualising historical material in this new environment. Information management and the provision of access to resources on the web are of increasing concern to

Beyond the Book

historians, as ‘all the undeniable advantages of the Internet make it as powerful an instrument for deception and misinformation as for knowledge and learning’.\textsuperscript{16} The development of public history websites using service-based models that incorporate the participation of web users enables both historians and their audiences to communicate up-to-date and relevant information. By emphasising collaboration and the development of communities of shared historical interest, the web has advantages unobtainable on the same scale through traditional mediums.

**Built on an architecture of participation**

The Web 2.0-era has seen the rise of a generation of web services and applications built on what Paul Anderson describes as an ‘architecture of participation’.\textsuperscript{17} According to this principle, website design and architecture affects the extent to which mass user participation is allowed and/or encouraged. If well designed, a site/service will not only encourage participation, but the service itself will also improve through user participation. This concept extends from the broader notion of the network effect, which Anderson uses to describe the increase in value to the existing users of a service in which there is some form of interaction with others, as more and more people start to use it.\textsuperscript{18} Participation, therefore, becomes critical to the success of Web 2.0 sites and the ability of these sites to improve their service to users becomes dependent upon the users themselves.

The principle of the network effect predates the notion of Web 2.0 but is used by services such as Facebook to encourage its adoption as social software.\textsuperscript{19} In explaining his opinion of the concept of Web 2.0, Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the web, explained that the web has always been about connecting people; about being an interactive and collaborative space that is ‘people to people’.\textsuperscript{20} Blogs, email groups and instant messaging services utilise this feature of the internet and all predate the use of the term Web 2.0. These services also all improve

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{16} Gordon Graham, *The Internet: A Philosophical Enquiry* (London: Routledge, 1990), 90.  
\textsuperscript{17} Paul Anderson, “What is Web 2.0? Ideas, Technologies and Implications for Education,” *JISC*. Available [online]: <www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/techwatch/tsw0701b.pdf> [29 August 2007], 18.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 20.  
\textsuperscript{19} Middleton and Lee, “Cultural Institutions and Web 2.0”, 8. See also Facebook.  
Beyond the Book

The Web 2.0 environment

the more people use them and should be seen as precursors to the kind of participation encouraged by social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. With the architecture of participation, the success of websites and the services they offer depends almost wholly on participation, as the role of the user has changed to what Axel Bruns calls ‘prod-users’—a hybrid of producers and users of the web. This new emphasis on user participation is why Time magazine declared their person of the year to be ‘you’, for participating and producing content and services which challenges the online content produced by more traditional web publishing methods (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Time magazine cover on 25 December 2006.

The utilisation of user participation was outlined in 2000 by Dan Bricklin as one of three distinct ways to build large databases on the web. The first way is to pay people to do it and the second is to get volunteers to do it, both of which have seen the creation of useable databases such as the original Yahoo Directory or the open source Open Directory Project. The third way to build a database is to add value to a database as a natural by-product of using the tool or service for your own benefit, such as the original version of Napster. The principle of the architecture of participation implies that web users will add value to web-based databases simply by using them for their own benefit.

By enabling user participation Web 2.0 is related to the rise of a participatory culture that has begun to infiltrate the cultural industries in Australia—including the public history industry. Catherine Styles from the National Archives of Australia warned in 2006 that, 'Institutions that publish without participation, that continue to rely on the strength of their traditional authority, and which fail even to embrace a notion of shared authority, may find that their relevance and influence wanes.' Public historians and public history institutions that have previously relied on basic text or online exhibitions to engage with broad audiences on the web will face the challenge of maintaining authority and relevance. Many users of the new web environment have begun to expect a certain experience on the web; one that is quick, easy, participatory, personally meaningful and often socially networked. By not catering to this audience or making online public history visible in Web 2.0 spaces, public historians face the risk of producing projects that do not engage their intended audience. Jim Spadaccini has suggested that museums, in particular, face the danger of being invisible to millions of potential visitors, audience members and even contributors if they do not develop new policies and web services that enable participation and the sharing of authority.

27 Napster was a popular music file sharing service that operated between 1999 and 2001. Because users could easily distribute and share music files among each other, Napster became the subject of major law suits and was eventually shut down by court order. See “Napster's High and Low Notes,” Business Week. Available [online]: <http://www.businessweek.com/2000/00_33/b3694003.htm> [10 June 2008].
30 Spadaccini, “Museums and the Web 2.0”. 
Finding the right balance between traditional authority and shared authority is one of the emerging difficulties of Web 2.0 for public history. As suggested in Chapter One, the public historian's concern with a public audience means that changing patterns of audience/user participation will impact upon the way that history is represented and communicated in this environment. While a broader audience may be enticing, using Web 2.0 services and applications is thought to require a radical trust of web users. Rochelle Mazar, an instructional technology liaison librarian at the University of Toronto, posted an entry on her blog on 11 May 2006 commenting on this notion of radical trust, ‘We can’t control everything. The whole point of interactive technologies is that you can’t control them. The only way we can use web 2.0 applications is by trusting our users.’ Catherine Styles suggests that this participatory culture represents a new force in the history wars as the practices of writing and reading history change.

In an attempt to respond to the challenges of this new web environment, some public history projects have begun to embrace the notion of web-based participation. In New Zealand Te Ara (the Encyclopedia of New Zealand online) encourages users to contribute their own stories (see Figure 2.3). But, as with the Picture Australia example mentioned above, there is an editing process between user-generated contributions and the public history presented on the site. Users are not trusted (radically) to contribute to these databases and Te Ara does not automatically improve through user participation.

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The collaborative authorship of public history presents issues of accuracy, authority and authenticity. Opening up historical resources and publishing routes to mass user participation simultaneously opens them up to inaccuracies and potentially misinformation. If inaccurate information is made available, as sometimes happens on Wikipedia, there may be very few ways for someone reading that information to validate it. If this kind of model is to be adopted by public historians and public history institutions such as museums, who are traditionally perceived as providers of accurate and authentic knowledge, it is likely that they would require some way to check the accuracy of content, or to differentiate user-generated content from that provided by the historian or institution.


35 This was a recommendation made by Michael Middleton in his suggestions of ways for institutions to engage with social networking. See Middleton and Lee, "Cultural Institutions and Web 2.0," 20.
The process of differentiation has been proven to work effectively for the sharing of cultural information. A 2006 paper prepared by Australian researchers and museum professionals found that using social media on a cultural institution website can actually extend the traditional authenticity of a museum by enabling it to maintain a cultural dialogue with its audiences in real-time.\(^{36}\) The researchers use the example of the Sydney Observatory blog site, maintained by the Powerhouse Museum, to describe how a curator’s comment about a hoax email received 135 responses from web users, many of which ‘credited the Sydney Observatory with providing the “truth” in this matter.’\(^{37}\) By maintaining an ongoing dialogue with web users, the Sydney Observatory was not only able to extend the traditional authenticity of the institution, but was also able to achieve a level of relevance in the Web 2.0 environment. This example reveals that some of the traditional values associated with history, including accuracy, authority and authenticity, can translate to the new web environment.

Based on unique and hard to recreate data sources

Almost every successful Web 2.0 service is based on a collection of data. YouTube is based on short videos, Flickr is based on images, Facebook and MySpace are based on user profiles and Wikipedia is based on information.\(^{38}\) Each of these sites or services has successfully employed Web 2.0 principles, particularly the architecture of participation, to build a database of information through user participation. As historians are in the business of building, maintaining and using repositories of information, whether personal research files, family photograph albums or local historical society collections, they should be aware of the value of this wealth of unique historical data. By virtue of their role, collecting institutions in particular have vast amounts of unique data, though much of it remains in physical form.\(^{39}\) As the interpreters of this data in the public sphere, however, public historians are in an optimal position to benefit from the participation of the web community, as historical insight can be gained from the wealth of history not only in family photograph albums and the stories of contributors, but also in the online spaces occupied by users—such as blogs, photo albums on Flickr or short videos on

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37 Ibid.
38 YouTube, Wikipedia.
39 Middleton and Lee, “Cultural Institutions and Web 2.0”, 32.
However, one of the many challenges of allowing user contributions is to define who owns the content and copyright.

The established ways that historians capture and preserve personal stories from the community include processes for copyright clearance and appropriate use. Oral history and digital storytelling, for example, are two methods commonly used to enable community input into public history projects. Established processes ensure that contributors are informed about how their story will be used and usually the contributor will be required to approve of the finished product before it is released to a public audience. Similarly appropriate processes will need to be developed for the Web 2.0 environment. If users are participating and contributing to public history projects it is essential that both they and the historian understand where content ownership and control resides. These processes are essential to ensuring that historical data and information is accessible to researchers and contributors, and that contributors, particularly those with little understanding of the web, fully understand their actions.

The notion of data ownership and control is becoming increasingly complicated on the web. Tim O’Reilly made clear in 2005 that ‘the race is on to own certain classes of core data’, but ‘we expect the rise of proprietary databases to result in a Free Data movement within the next decade’. Creative Commons Australia is one initiative that attempts to manage ownership and copyright of user-generated content. Extending from the open-source and free software movements, Creative Commons works toward defining the spectrum between full copyright (all rights reserved) and the public domain (no rights reserved). There is a growing trend toward this kind of ‘some rights reserved’ copyright on the web, which often is adopted in order to allow data to be re-used by third parties. Making historical material online open to be re-used and added to in other mediums, or ‘mashed-up’ with other information/data sources, could reshape not only the ways that historians research, but also our understandings of the past.

Facilitating re-use enables data and content to be recombined in new ways, a phenomenon referred to as the creation of ‘mash-ups’. Mash-ups take their name from the practice of

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41 O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0”.

42 Creative Commons Australia. Available [online]: <http://creativecommons.org.au>.
remixing elements of different music tracks to create new compositions and are described as ‘an unusual or innovative composition of content (often from unrelated data sources), made for human (rather than computerised) consumption.’ The American-based *Somerset Hills History Tourguide and Mashup*, for example, takes local history information and mashes it with the *Google Maps* application, so that users can find historical information about places by choosing a location and being guided to historic images, blogs and other sources (see Figure 2.4). While this site is experimental, the potential to be able to organise and visualise historical information in this way represents just one of the plethora of publishing and communication opportunities presented by Web 2.0.

Yet the re-use of data can also have negative effects, particularly in relation to the dissemination of accurate historical information. In his article on *Wikipedia* and history Roy Rosenzweig commented that it ‘can act as a megaphone, amplifying the (sometimes incorrect) conventional wisdom.’ Because mash-ups rely on open access data sources, sites such as *Wikipedia* can become authoritative because other sites, such as *Answers.com*, appropriate the information contained in its pages. An inaccurate piece of historical information could therefore conceivably be posted on *Wikipedia* by an anonymous web user, then appear as an answer to a school student’s question on *Answers.com*. This could undoubtedly inhibit the school student’s historical understanding. But, as any school history teacher will know, *Google* is often the first place that students turn to find information. And, given that *Google’s PageRank* software generally puts *Wikipedia* entries in the first page of results, school teachers and historians alike are faced with the challenges presented by user-generated history.

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45 Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source?”

Enabling content to be open and accessible is an acknowledgement of the changing ways that public history audiences find and use information and content. For example, if journal aggregators make articles available to be searched through Google, or a historical society uploads their photograph collection to Flickr, they are making valuable and authentic historical information visible in the Web 2.0 environment. In this environment, users seem more concerned with finding the information they seek than with which institution is providing it. As Middleton

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47 Somerset Hills History Tourguide and Mashup.
and Lee have argued, the digitisation of artefacts allied with increasing amounts of born-digital material has diminished the distinction between different institutions. Additionally, the distinction between authoritative and non-authoritative sources has also become problematic as users no longer need to search for information through specific gateways. The management of data sources to ensure integrity and visibility in this new web environment is a growing concern for cultural institutions in Australia. Initiatives such as the National Library of Australia’s *Federated Search Project* are working towards developing unprecedented access to the collections of Australia’s archives, galleries, libraries and museums. Importantly, they are also working towards maintaining the authenticity of the collections of Australia’s cultural institutions in this new web environment.

**Follow a many-to-many communication model**

The increase in participation on the web and the emphasis on new development principles has resulted in the emergence of websites and services based on a many-to-many communication model. Whereas most existing genres of public history are based on a one-to-many communication model (see Figure 2.5) using media such as books, television, radio, movies, exhibitions and conference presentations, the many-to-many communication model encourages simultaneous communication between and among many people over any distance and recognises the audience as active participants in an ongoing historical conversation (see Figure 2.6). This model values the participation of the web user, but is a complex environment in which not all users participate or engage on the same level. The many-to-many model has led to new ways of thinking about the gathering and communication of cultural information, such as history.

The internet has long been recognised as a medium that facilitates many-to-many communication. File sharing networks such as *Napster* used this feature of the web to allow users to

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communicate and transfer data between and among themselves. The many-to-many model decentralises information production and distribution, fostering collaborative production through new tools such as wikis.\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{one-to-many.png}
\caption{Visualisation of a one-to-many communication model.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{many-to-many.png}
\caption{Visualisation of a many-to-many communication model.}
\end{figure}

Rather than leading the historical conversation, as they once might have through older media, public historians and public history institutions are part of a broader network of people who are producing and consuming historical content. Axel Bruns’ concept of the prod-user is based on the role of the web user within a many-to-many communication model and recognises the nature of the internet as a medium that allows this to take place. The many-to-many model is an essential part of the architecture of participation described above. But, as with the architecture

\footnote{Wiki is a collaborative web space that enables users to access, contribute and modify the content of the website. Wikis are usually open to anyone to contribute, but access can also be restricted.}
of participation, the notion that successful Web 2.0 services must follow a many-to-many communication model presents public historians with the same challenges of maintaining authority, authenticity and accuracy.

The wisdom of the crowd and the long tail

The idea of sharing authority with audiences and enabling mass user-participation invites less formal ways of producing and sharing information. Just as Bricklin suggested three ways to build large databases, legal scholar Yochai Benkler proposed that a third model of production, what he calls ‘commons-based peer production,’ has emerged as well as the existing firm and market models, which are based on managerial hierarchy and market price respectively. Commons-based peer production describes the way that ‘ubiquitous computer communication networks’ have resulted in individuals being able to collaborate on a much larger scale and perform more complex tasks than were possible in the past. James Surowiecki in The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few, argues that when this kind of collaboration or group intelligence is pitted against individual intelligence, group intelligence will always win. But this raises the questions of whether the commons-based production model is suited to history and whether the notion of collective intelligence works to undermine the authority of experts, resulting in what Andrew Keen has called ‘the cult of the amateur’?

Benkler argues that the academic world is already based on a non-proprietary peer-production system. Scientific researchers in particular, he writes, ‘contribute their product to a knowledge “commons” that no one is understood as “owning,” and that anyone can, indeed is required by professional norms to, take and extend.’ While some academic historians may work in this way, public historians generally work in a more commercial, market-driven environment—though given the broad scope of public historians in Australia it is likely that all three production models come into play. This means that original historical research undertaken by public historians is sometimes owned by the commissioning body or the public historians themselves, not to be

52 Benkler, “Coase’s Penguin”.
53 Ibid.
56 Benkler, “Coase’s Penguin”.
taken and extended as Benkler suggests. Of course, the end products of public history are also owned, but are generally in the public sphere in various forms. These characteristics of public history practice in Australia suggest that the peer production system may not be appropriate.

Nonetheless, the characteristics do not rule out the possibility of using commons-based peer production to enhance public history practice. *Wikipedia* is perhaps the most relevant example of a commons-based peer production model working efficiently to produce an encyclopaedic-style work of history on the web. It is probably the largest work of history on the web and therefore represents the willingness and interest of people in participating in the writing and interpretation of history. Increasingly, many historical interests are being catered for by large web-based resources such as *Wikipedia*, because it is easy to use, has a broad range of topics and is constantly updated. As a history-related web resource, it should be considered because of the way it can be used for a positive introduction to accurate and authoritative public history resources and institutions. If historians are contributing to, inserting references and linking professional history resources to *Wikipedia*, students and families can begin with *Wikipedia* and be guided to further resources.

The challenge for public historians is to understand how the rules for success on the web have changed and to find ways of working with their audiences to both collaboratively produce public history and also to maintain an ongoing historical conversation with web users. It is likely that new or reshaped genres of public history will emerge in response to *Wikipedia* and the other new ways that Australians are sharing historical knowledge. Internationally, there are a few examples to which Australian public historians can look. The *September 11 Digital Archive* collects, preserves and presents digital materials surrounding the events of 11 September 2001 and is now managed by the Library of Congress (see Figure 2.7). While the archive is not necessarily utilising the wisdom of the crowd it is built largely on user contributions including stories, email correspondence, digital photographs and artworks. It recognises new ways that Americans are communicating and recording information and works toward serving the needs of a very broad, public audience.

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Another international project that is promoting peer collaboration around cultural content is Collection X (see Figure 2.8).\(^59\) This experimental project provides users with images, audio and video and the capacity to upload their own materials. It provides tools for users to create exhibitions, mash-up content, discuss, tag or simply view other users’ contributions. The project is described as ‘an open-source museum created by the public for the public.’\(^60\) It demonstrates the interest and ability of web users to engage creatively with historical artefacts, to make connections between objects, stories, photographs and artworks, to connect the past with the present and to share these ideas in sophisticated ways.
Both of these examples demonstrate a new way of practicing public history, which is to provide users with a collaborative space where both historians and enthusiasts can contribute, manage and create historical content. The notion of each web user contributing and using content in their own way is closely associated with the Web 2.0 concept of 'leveraging the long tail'. As an economic concept, this idea proposes that through cheaper distribution methods, such as the web, companies can sell small quantities of a large number of items, rather than a large quantity of a small number of items (see Figure 2.9). This concept has been proven successful by websites such as Amazon, which benefits from a focus on niche markets. For public history the long tail encourages the contribution and use of an almost limitless amount of user-generated content covering an infinite number of historical topics. The concept suggests that the number of web users engaging with a large range of content of interest to a few will outweigh the number of


users engaging with a small range of content of interest to many. But, of course, this concept is problematic for history as it raises issues of quantity versus quality and breadth versus depth.

![Graph of Chris Anderson's long tail concept](image)

**Figure 2.9:** An interpretation of Chris Anderson’s economic concept of the ‘long tail’. The right hand side of the graph, and its continuation, represent the long tail where a small quantity of a large number of items is thought to outweigh the sale of a large quantity of a small number.  

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### Simple to use and utilise the web as platform

One of the key concepts supporting the development of Web 2.0 websites and services is ease of use. As Sebastian Chan explains in relation to the Powerhouse Museum’s website, users can sometimes feel a kind of threshold fear because they do not know how to find what they are looking for, or perhaps even where to begin. Making websites and services user-friendly is essential to encouraging use of the website and participation. Public history websites must, therefore, be developed from the user’s perspective, by understanding how web users find historical information and the kind of experiences they expect.

Thinking broadly about the application of new media to public history also means thinking beyond the web as a computer-based medium. As discussed in Chapter One, the web is part of the process of convergence. This means that using the web for public history should not depend

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64 See Anderson, *The Long Tail*.

65 Chan, *Social Media and Government 2.0.*
on users logging on at home on desktop-based computers or laptops. Engagement with the site or service should be considered in as many contexts as possible for both the production and consumption of information. It is also possible to produce public history projects that target distributed media, such as a recent Australian project by Sarah Barns that enables people walking around to Sydney to access location-specific archival film and sound recordings.\(^6\) Once again, projects such as this place an emphasis on the appropriate management of data and content, which has become central to most Web 2.0 services.

The principles discussed in this chapter present many new ways of thinking about public history both on and off the web. The provision of continually updated content has become essential to maintaining a relevant web presence, as has enabling and utilising user participation. The trend away from linear narratives has become even more explicit as authority is shared with audiences and the emphasis shifts to maintaining an historical conversation with the audiences. The ideas of a many-to-many communication model and utilising the wisdom of the crowd tend toward the decentralisation of information production and distribution, as well as diminishing long-held distinctions between institutions and sources. The landscape of information distribution has changed as a result of new web services that consider audiences to be not just consumers, but also producers, of information. For public history, our audiences are increasingly recognised as active participants in the interpretation of the past. Recently developed web tools such as blogs and social networking sites have enabled our audiences to engage with each other through a many-to-many communication model that, in many ways, does not involve the participation of professional historians or cultural institutions. In order to maintain relevance among this increasingly participatory web community, the principles of the Web 2.0 environment can provide a guide to how mutual benefit can be gained by both public historians and their audiences.

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Changing histories, new opportunities

Our sense of the past is shaped and limited by the possibilities and practices of the medium in which that past is conveyed, be it the printed page, the spoken word, the painting, the photograph, or the moving image.¹

The guiding principles of the Web 2.0 environment indicate the ways that the practice of public history might be reshaped by the use of this new and pervasive media. Though stable genres of public history have not yet been established, the histories emerging through Web 2.0 are shaped in four ways: they are personalised, ubiquitous, democratic and innovative. The case studies presented in this chapter examine how the Web 2.0 environment has shaped public history practice in two very different settings. The first case study, the Powerhouse Museum’s collection search, demonstrates how the Web 2.0 environment has challenged and inspired a cultural institution to reconsider the role of its collection, the possibilities of the mediums through which the collection is interpreted to a public audience and levels of audience participation in that interpretation. From a different perspective, YouTube is analysed because it is a flagship site of the Web 2.0 environment, through which an increasingly significant amount of historical content is shared in the public sphere. The Web 2.0 environment is being used both intentionally and serendipitously to engage with history and to portray the past. Through the following case studies, I analyse the nature of public history practice in the Web 2.0 environment and consider how it is shaping and influencing Australians’ sense of the past.

The Powerhouse Museum collection search: OPAC2.0

This case study considers how the Powerhouse Museum has engaged with the Web 2.0 environment to contribute to the Australian public history landscape through the collection search on their website. The web services division of the Powerhouse Museum has produced a number of pioneering projects over the last few years, which collectively represent a major attempt to make the institution's information and data more accessible and useable by the public. The 'Powerhouse Museum collection search 2.2', otherwise known as OPAC2.0, is the specific focus of this case study, because of its innovative use of Web 2.0 principles to enable and enhance access to more than sixty-five thousand objects in the Powerhouse's collection. The trends toward public history that is personalised, ubiquitous, democratic and innovative are evident from the Powerhouse's use of Web 2.0 to enhance public engagement with historical material and information.

In the opening chapter I explained how public history in Australia, as a professional practice, is conducted in a range of different settings. One of those settings is the Web 2.0 environment, in which the relationship between the public historian and a public audience can be considerably different than through the use of other media. This case study provides an example of how the Powerhouse, as an institution that engages in public history practice, has negotiated its presence in this new environment. Examining the Powerhouse requires consideration of a range of scholarship often considered within the field of museology, rather than specifically public history. However, in this case study important insights are drawn from a broad range of literature to explain how a collection search can act as a way of interpreting the past, through the museum's collection, to a public audience. Just as digital history crosses sub-disciplinary boundaries to analyse all aspects of the historical enterprise that involve digital media in its presentation, storage and access, this case study considers one of the many different shapes of public history located in the public sphere.

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2 The Powerhouse Museum is a science and technology museum located in Darling Harbour, Sydney. It has a collection of around 385,000 objects spanning history, science, technology, design, industry, decorative arts, music, transport and space exploration. See Powerhouse Museum. Available [online]: <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com> [10 June 2008].

3 The two names for the collection search, either the 'Powerhouse Museum collection search 2.2' or 'OPAC2.0' are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

4 This case study is based on the 2.2 version of the collection search, which is being continually updated. Already by June 2008 the collection search had moved to version 2.4 with over sixty-seven thousand objects digitised.
Museum collection databases have, until recently, been predominantly internal to the institution and used by or with the assistance of experts. OPAC2.0 makes these resources accessible to the public in the form of digitised collection records online. This is the fundamental basis of the innovative nature of the public history represented by OPAC2.0. Gaining a sense of the past through digitised objects with their associated collection records and user-generated tags (see Figure 3.1) simultaneously challenges the superiority of the ‘real’ object over the virtual and invites new ways for object collections to be used by public audiences. By conceptualising OPAC2.0 as public history, this case study is drawn from an emerging discourse that considers digital historical objects as material objects in their own right, not just as surrogates to the ‘original’ or the ‘real’. From the outset of this case study it is important to understand that OPAC2.0 has been developed from within the museum, as an extension of the museum into the Web 2.0 environment, rather than by web users external to the institution. Consequently, I consider OPAC2.0 to be part of the landscape of public history, through which web users and museum visitors can gain a sense of the past through meaningful engagement with digital historical objects.

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6 Among other arguments, Fiona Cameron moves away from the established discourse of Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard and draws on internet theorist Gordon Graham and media theorist Sean Cubitt to argue for the reality of digital historical objects. See Fiona Cameron, “Beyond the Cult of the Replicant: Museums and Historical Digital Objects—Traditional Concerns, New Discourses,” in *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage*, ed. F. Cameron and S. Kenderdine, 49–75.
The rise of the Web 2.0 environment gave the Powerhouse new ways to think about its online presence and new tools to enhance the user experience. This challenging environment initially allowed the web services team to identify a number of problems with the previous collections database. Sebastian Chan, the manager of the web services division, suggested that OPAC2.0

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7 Powerhouse Museum. Note that in this screen capture the collection search is already up to version 2.4, yet this case study examines version 2.2. This was caused by a need for a higher resolution screen capture.

8 Chan, Social Media and Government 2.0.
was shaped by three particular problems: firstly, people did not know what the Powerhouse had in their collection. Outside the Powerhouse’s website, collection items did not turn up in the search results of popular search engines such as Google or Yahoo. Secondly, the collection was not useable in database form because it could not be browsed, was difficult to navigate between items and did not include recommendations for users to look at other collection items. Lastly, Chan and his team decided that, aside from a small group of experts, not many people know how to effectively use advanced search functions. The influence of Web 2.0 and the popularity of new social media services on the web provided an opportunity to rethink the Powerhouse’s online collection search as more of a browsing and social experience, like looking through bookshelves in the library or along aisles in the supermarket.

The resulting collection search utilises a number of Web 2.0 principles and tools. The main tool that has been used is a tagging and recommendation system for collection items. Tagging is a well-established web practice that allows users to assign keywords to data, such as images on Flickr (see Figure 3.2) or hyperlinks on Delicious (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.2: Screen capture of a user-contributed image on Flickr with associated tags.

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9 Ibid.


11 “Deep Sea Hard Hat Diver #8 ‘No Einstein On the Beach’”. Flickr. Available [online]: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/83287853@N00/94300411/> [16 September 2008]
When keywords or ‘tags’ are collected they form new classification systems, which have become known as folksonomies. The folksonomy created through OPAC2.0 has two particular kinds of value for the museum. Firstly, because each collection record refers to a physical object within the collection, it is possible for the museum to learn more about its collection through user-generated tags. This depends, of course, on the context in which the digital object is shown and whether the user accepts the authenticity of the physical object represented. If the collection record is considered as a digital historical object in its own right, however, the folksonomies can be valuable to the museum as a way to map audience engagement and to learn about how different people understand museums, objects and their interpretation. It should be kept in mind, however, that there are no limits or restrictions on the keywords that users can assign to items, leaving room for spelling errors and inaccuracies alongside valuable content.

The reasons why users tag collection items and their motivations for choosing one keyword over another are not yet fully understood. A 2006 research paper suggested that motivations to tag could be understood as either organisational or social, where users either attempt to develop a personal standard and use common tags created by others, or attempt to express

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13 Cameron, “Beyond the Cult of the Replicant”, 56.
14 Of course, spelling errors could be considered of interest in their own right, as reflecting the impact of digital technology on society. However, other users can remove contributed tags as well as adding their own, allowing the process to be somewhat self-regulating.
themselves and their opinions through the tags they use.\textsuperscript{15} User keywords on OPAC2.0 are likely to be influenced by a number of factors. As well as organisational and social motivations, tags could be influenced by the catalogue records presented with the digital object, by personal motivations, by the hype of the technology or by the novelty of being able to participate in what is normally an extremely formal classification process. The explanation given on OPAC2.0 for the implementation of the tagging system hints toward the benefit of enabling users to contribute to the classification process:

\begin{quote}
we are experimenting with tagging because sometimes museums describe objects in language that is highly specialist and user added keywords are useful in bridging the ‘semantic gap’ between the language of the museum and that of the user.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

By allowing users to add value and meaning to the collection items of a formal institution, OPAC2.0 is fostering direct engagement with, and understanding of, objects from their collection as well as the process of object classification. In this way, OPAC2.0 can be seen to democratise the process of object classification.

The collection search takes this user-generated tagging system another step by making it into a recommendation system that provides users with personalised search results based on the searches and tags of others. It is designed to gather, process and produce information in two ways, described by Chan as ‘augmented’ and ‘frictionless’ serendipity.\textsuperscript{17} The discovery of information is augmented when users actively contribute, through tagging, to the developing classification system. When users contribute tags, it is then possible to search the collection through those keywords or tags. For example, by searching for the keyword ‘orange’ the user is shown all objects that have been tagged with that word, from a “Stackhat” protective sports helmet & box, plastic/metal/cardboard box, designed by PA Technology made by Rosebank Products Pty Ltd, Victoria, Australia, 1987” to an orange gogomobile (see Figure 3.4). It also brings up a list of related user keywords that direct the user toward ‘fruit,’ ‘Orange NSW,’ ‘gogo’ or even ‘purple.’


The process is considered frictionless when recommendations to users are automated and the collection needs only to be used to produce valuable information. It tracks the searches and viewed objects of site users and recommends ‘similar searches’ automatically. Because this function is constantly updated as the site is navigated, the results and recommendations are dynamic and respond to user interests. This personalised search culture is closely associated with the Web 2.0 notion of an architecture of participation, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Based on the wisdom of the crowd, the tagging and recommendation system shows patterns over time, including user interests and popular objects. These patterns can be used as a dynamic new method of audience research, but can also influence the representation of the past by the museum. By understanding user interests the curation and interpretation presented in online content and even physical exhibitions within the museum can be shaped to audience demand. The difference, of course, is that the museum is dealing with a new audience: one that is not necessarily going to visit the physical museum or even access information through the museum website. This complicates notions of the museum as a physical space, which is considered even in very recent literature as one of the three basic elements of the museum—building, objects, and public. Recent research initiatives are focused on understanding this demand

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18 Search undertaken on 10 June 2008.

19 For dynamic new methods of audience research, see Lynda Kelly, Audience Research. Available [online]: <http://amarcll.blogspot.com/> [17 June 2008].

20 A web user may, for instance, locate collection items and information through a Google search.

in the context of social media and museum audiences. It is an important, however, that this attempt to engage new audiences in new ways is also helping the museum to understand its audience.

The Powerhouse Museum recorded a positive outcome from the implementation of the tagging and recommendation system on its collection search, as an average of 1.62 successful searches were conducted per visit with 5.02 object views per visit, compared with a single view per visit achieved by the old collection search. But, while this system may have had a positive outcome for viewing statistics, the value of user-contributed keywords to the museum collection and the ways that it might contribute to shaping a user’s sense of the past are still debated internationally. The US-based *Steve.Museum* project is currently researching how social tagging can enhance access to museum collections by adding useful terms to existing museum documentation. Tagging was also a feature of the *Museums and the Web 2008* conference in Canada in April 2008.

Drawing on Bruno Latour’s notion of an object-oriented democracy, Fiona Cameron has argued for the need for museums to enable objects to ‘perform at a higher level of complexity’ in order for the museum to cater for the multitude of ways that objects are being understood and consumed. One of the new ways that objects are being understood and consumed is through

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24 The *Steve.Museum* project researches social tagging and art museum collections around the principal hypothesis that social tagging can enhance access to museum collections by adding useful terms to existing museum documentation. See *Steve.Museum*. Available [online]: <http://www.steve.museum/> [10 June 2008].


their presence on the web, particularly in the Web 2.0 environment. This environment places objects in new networks of meaning, while simultaneously enabling conflicting meanings to be ascribed to the object through initiatives such as the Powerhouse collection search. Drawing from the work of Manuel Castells and Felix Stalder, Cameron suggests that because objects are situated in this complex, networked system it is difficult to produce universal or even consensual interpretations of history and heritage. OPAC2.0, as a new kind of public history containing digital historical objects in their own right (as collection records), provides a consensual interpretation of the ‘real’ object through a written record and formal classification. Although the nature of the online collection record as an object is not explicitly revealed to the user, the existence of a tagging system acknowledges that in the Web 2.0 environment objects—both the ‘real’ ones stored at the museum and the digital ones—may be understood differently in different contexts.

The capacity of Web 2.0 to allow objects (and history, for that matter) to be understood differently in different contexts enables the personal to exist in the public realm. Far from causing a general decline in the quality and reliability of information, as suggested by Andrew Keen, Web 2.0 can bring the challenge of complexity to our sense of the past. Public historians receptive to recent interpretation theory will be aware of an emphasis on the construction of meaning, rather than the communication of so-called ‘factual information’. The Interpretation Australia Association, for example, defines interpretation as ‘a means of communicating ideas and feelings which help people understand more about themselves and their environment’. While many historians still cherish notions of objectivity, the flourishing of oral history methods, memory studies and digital storytelling has revealed value in personal interpretations of the past. The trend toward personalised public history is a two-way process involving both the collection and dissemination of personal interpretations. Web 2.0, in principle, allows these sometimes conflicting perspectives to flow simultaneously around large groups of people over any distance,

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27 Ibid.

28 Keen, The Cult of the Amateur.

29 Freeman Tilden’s suggestion that interpretation is ‘an educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience and illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information’ is still cited by modern interpretation policies, including Sarah Murphy, Interpretation Planning Guidelines (WA: National Trust of Australia (WA), March 2000), 3.


31 For the use of oral history in museum exhibitions see Thomas, “Private Memory in a Public Space”, 87–100.
As represented by the many-to-many communication model discussed in Chapter Two. The Powerhouse collection search demonstrates this capacity of Web 2.0 to a limited extent.

The tagging and recommendation system of OPAC2.0 encourages new ways of searching through the Powerhouse’s collection alongside the use of a traditional classification system. While new meanings and relations can be identified between collection items through the attribution of keywords, they remain subsidiary to the main collection record when viewing an object. Cameron suggests the folksonomies produced operate as ‘kind of in-between spaces between disciplines and formal museum nomenclatures—to engage the more nuanced social understandings of objects’. In this way, OPAC2.0 successfully demonstrates an intersection between the authority of experts on which the institution traditionally depends and the participation encouraged in the Web 2.0 environment. Both factual information and contested meaning are present and the process of searching for and locating relevant objects and information is democratised.

As with most Web 2.0 initiatives, this kind of tagging and recommendation system is subject to a significant amount of criticism. In 2005, prior to the launch of OPAC2.0, Jill Walker argued that Web 2.0 recommendation techniques, like the one later employed on OPAC2.0, are problematic because the recommendations are ‘like sheep paths in the mountains, paths that have formed over time as many animals and people just happened to use them’. The combination of the new recommendation system and a traditional classification system addresses this issue. Multiple processes are used simultaneously to produce relevant results, some based on user-generated keywords and some on the existing collection records. An example is perhaps the most effective way of explaining how this process works. Searching through Google for ‘stackhat’ brings up the Powerhouse collection record as the first result after a sponsored Ebay link (see Figure 3.5).

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32 Cameron, "Object-Orientated Democracies".

After a user navigates to the Powerhouse’s object record, they are provided with recommendations of other tags, subjects, themes and objects that may be of interest to the user. The user tags in this case are simple descriptive terms—helmet, orange and stackhat—but they are not the only paths that a user can take around the collection. If anything, their simplicity represents a consensus with the collection record presented by the museum. The ‘sheep paths’, which may have led the user to continue navigating around the collection through these simple tags, are intersected by the traditional classification system that gives the user subjects to navigate through—Australian Design Award, cycling, road safety and Australian product design. The user keywords, though simple in this example, enable objects from the collection to extend into the complex, public space of the Web 2.0 environment.

The combination of user-generated tags and the museum’s classification system also works to engage new audiences with objects in the museum’s collection. Indeed, the most viewed object in the collection is, interestingly, a Lisa Ho dress worn by Deltra Goodrem at the 2003 Aria awards that has never been on display within the museum. According to Chan, Deltra Goodrem fan sites and Google searches have driven traffic to this particular collection item, but, once these users are within the museum’s website, they ‘view almost double the average number of

34 Search undertaken on 10 June 2008.
pages viewed by others on our site; and they spend more time on the site too.  
Far from creating ‘sheep paths’ that lead web users along a certain path, the user-generated tags and the museum classification system enable web users to locate this object through external search engines, then allows them to quickly and easily explore other items of relevance or interest.

Engaging with Web 2.0 principles on OPAC2.0 has shaped the way that it acts as a site of public history in four particular ways, contributing to the trends outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Firstly, collection items can now be found through popular search engines. This allows the museum’s interpretation of collection items (the physical objects that are represented by the online records), as well as the collection as a whole, to become increasingly ubiquitous. Particularly as Google’s search function is mashed-up with other applications, the presence of the Powerhouse in various Web 2.0 spaces is continually enhanced. What this does not take into account, however, is the nature of the online collection record as an object in its own right. It will be interesting to observe whether, over time, the digital object with its wealth of user-generated keywords will be preserved and managed by the museum for its own value, as distinct from the object it now represents.

Secondly, the tagging and recommendation system enables more democratic engagement with objects in the museum’s collection than was previously possible. Without having to know how object classification systems and taxonomy work, users are able to browse the collection through vernacular language and with the assistance of visual browsing through tag clouds. Having the capacity to tag collection items with their own language also democratises the way that the object is interpreted by the museum. Users are encouraged to be producers as well as consumers of historical information. Even if the user-generated keywords are, as Andrew Keen would call them, ‘superficial observations of the world around us rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgement,’ their combination with a more conventional classification process enables value to be added to the collection from different perspectives.


36 A tag cloud is a visualisation of the most frequently occurring keywords or tags on a particular website or blog. On the Powerhouse Museum collection search, a tag cloud is used under the ‘browse user tags’ section, to depict a selection of the most popular user-generated tags for the collection.

37 Keen, The Cult of the Amateur, 16.
The user’s personalised engagement with the collection search is two-fold. On one hand, the user is normally outside the physical context of the museum building, perhaps using a home-based computer, mobile phone or PDA to access the web. The different places and contexts possible for engagement with OPAC2.0 are likely to influence how the public history might contribute to an individual’s sense of the past. On the other hand, the recommendation system works to provide relevant results and suggest appropriate keywords, while allowing the user to remain in control of the path they take through the collection and their level of engagement. Navigating the collection, users are encouraged to construct and contribute (through keywords) their own personally meaningful narratives influenced, perhaps, but not restricted to the museum’s interpretation or curator’s narrative.

Lastly, but importantly, the collection search provides an innovative approach to public history. Not only does the museum enable users to participate in the process of object classification, but it also provides historical information and materials as an ongoing and continually updated service catering to both popular and niche historical interests. This corresponds directly to the notion of the ‘post-museum’, with its interest in using object collections rather than further acquisitions. The collection search also enables a limited amount of meaningful engagement with the conventions of history and heritage interpretation. By encouraging users to tag items and to participate, the museum is educating its audience about the advantages and disadvantages of object classification and about the processes of historical interpretation of objects as primary sources. Of course, this only occurs in a very limited capacity, but it does provide users with an opportunity to challenge interpretations of cultural heritage objects and the past, which may be portrayed as objective ‘facts’ in other public history settings.

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38 In this way, OPAC2.0 is using the idea of the ‘long tail’. For further information see Chan, “Initial Impacts of OPAC2.0 on Powerhouse Museum Online Visitation”.

YouTube

*YouTube*, a popular website and short video sharing service officially launched in December 2005, rose to prominence so quickly that by July 2007 it comprised nearly ten per cent of all traffic on the internet, had over forty million videos and more than twenty million site visits each month. During its rapid rise *YouTube* has reshaped or involved itself in many aspects of everyday life, including the ways in which Australians gain a sense of the past. In this case study I argue that, while there have been a number of attempts to use *YouTube* for the distribution of professionally produced audiovisual public history, most of these initiatives have been focused on defining the institution in this participatory space, rather than experimenting with the potential benefits of the new media.

This case study examines the practices and possibilities of *YouTube* and indicates that a number of new forms of public history practice are emerging that are personalised, ubiquitous, democratic and innovative. The first section of this case study is a discussion of the kinds of historical content found on *YouTube* and the ways that it is being used for the practice of public history. In the second section I examine how the social networking aspects of the site promote informal historical discourse and use a number of examples to illustrate how *YouTube* is being used to share personal histories, recollections and local history as well as creative works about the past. By understanding the ways that history-related user-generated content is shared through this new media, public historians will gain a greater understanding of the possibilities of *YouTube* for the interpretation of the past to a public audience.

On 5 August 2006 an elderly English man posted his first video to his online video channel ‘geriatric1927’ on *YouTube* (see Figure 3.6). By December 2007 he had posted over ninety videos, the channel had been viewed over two million times and over forty-five thousand other *YouTube* users had subscribed to it. In comparison, the Computer History Museum’s channel has had just over forty thousand views with about fifteen hundred subscribers. The Computer History Museum’s channel was launched on 2 November 2007 and these figures were recorded in mid-June 2008. See “ComputerHistory,” *YouTube*. Available [online]: <www.youtube.com/user/ComputerHistory> [22 June 2008].

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41 “Geriatric1927,” *YouTube*. Available [online]: <www.youtube.com/user/geriatric1927> [19 December 2007].

42 In comparison, the Computer History Museum’s channel has had just over forty thousand views with about fifteen hundred subscribers. The Computer History Museum’s channel was launched on 2 November 2007 and these figures were recorded in mid-June 2008. See “ComputerHistory,” *YouTube*. Available [online]: <www.youtube.com/user/ComputerHistory> [22 June 2008].
music plays briefly (and distortedly) in the background. In his first foray into the production of a YouTube video, which has since been viewed over two and a half million times, he says:

I got addicted to YouTube, and what a fascinating place to go to see all the wonderful videos that young people have produced. So I thought I’d have a go at doing one myself... Oh, yes, and incidentally the picture, I really am as old as I look, and therefore I think I'm in a unique position. What I hope I'll be able to do is just bitch and grumble about life in general from the perspective of an old person who’s been there and done that, and hopefully you will respond in some way by your comments. And then I might be able to do other videos to follow up your comments.

This user’s channel was immediately popular on YouTube, but also received a large amount of attention from traditional media outlets. Peter Oakley, the real name of user ‘geriatric1927’, has since gained celebrity status on the internet, with an article about him on Wikipedia attesting to his fame and influence.

While this user’s channel is an extraordinary case, even for YouTube, it is perhaps more than a little disconcerting to public historians to consider that more than forty-five thousand web

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45 “Geriatric1927.”
users might regularly gain a sense of the past from this strange combination of vlogging (video blogging) and autobiography. A number of cultural institutions in Australia have attempted to colonise *YouTube* for the practice of public history, to define the role of their institution in this space and to place accurate and authoritative audiovisual history on the site.\(^6\) The Australian War Memorial has a *YouTube* channel on which it displays video footage from the archives. Its first video, posted on 11 November 2007, was rare footage of ANZAC troops at Gallipoli. This video has also been its most popular. On 5 August 2008 the footage had been viewed 5,908 times, the channel as a whole having been viewed only 1,408 times.\(^7\) The most popular video on the State Library of Victoria’s channel had only 230 views, having been added on 15 May 2008.\(^8\) This video was not archival video footage, but a filmed interview with Dr Christopher de Hamel, Fellow Librarian at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Unfortunately, however, none of the examples produced in a professional public history capacity that I could find on *YouTube* had statistics anywhere near those achieved by ‘geriatric1927’. It seems that public historians and public history institutions are using this new media in an old way.

*YouTube* functions as an intersection of a broad range of historians, enthusiasts, historical methodologies and historical content, containing academic, personal, amateur and public history alongside primary source historical material and historical debate. As with the Powerhouse Museum collection search, *YouTube* places histories and historical materials in a new context with a different audience and different rules of engagement from more traditional mediums.\(^9\) Many historians may consider *YouTube* an unthinkable medium for seriously representing the past. But we should consider that precedents for the kinds of histories found on *YouTube* can be found in multimedia history, digital storytelling, oral history, short film and amateur, homemade video production. All of these mediums or methods are familiar to public historians and were around well before *YouTube*. In particular, short, homemade videos have been around since the 1930s, when Australians first began to document their lives on film.\(^{10}\) As is well known to historians who work with audiovisual content, film reveals a great deal about the past that

\(^{46}\) Jim Spadaccini argues that museums are being defined in Web 2.0 spaces by the users, and that this should prompt museums to respond. Spadaccini, “Museums and the Web 2.0”.


\(^{49}\) See Cameron, “Object-Orientated Democracies”.

written texts and even oral history may not. Particularly relevant to user-generated videos and personal histories is Albert Lichtblau’s assessment of the difference between audio and filmed oral histories:

Film reminds us how intensely someone constructs his or her life story. One can see at once that interviews deal with memory. Maybe this is the most fascinating aspect of audiovisual history since it reminds us that we don’t deal with history but with historicity, memory and therefore textual images about the past.51

Practices of public history on YouTube draw directly from understandings of these precedents. But translating these public history practices to YouTube necessarily reshapes them, because the site is a Web 2.0 service and a real-time communications tool.52

YouTube has all seven of the characteristics or principles of Web 2.0 outlined in Chapter Two. The website is not a static product with fixed parameters and a limited amount of content; it is designed as a service. The service constantly improves through the continual uploading of content by users, automated searching and the addition of new features. It is built on an architecture of participation, not only encouraging participation, but also improving through user participation.53 The user base of the site and the user-generated short videos represent both a unique and also hard to recreate data source. The site is very easy to use, including searching for videos, navigating, contributing and communicating with other users. Ease of use contributes strongly to the popularity and increasingly ubiquitous nature of the service.

Understanding the web as a platform enables YouTube content to be used elsewhere on the web, such as embedded on blogs or as MySpace comments, and makes it accessible via a range of

51 Ibid., 11.
52 Lev Manovich argues that prior to the internet, the intersection of representational and communicative technologies led to the subordination of real-time communication. See Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), 162–63. Only recently have communication models on the web begun to move beyond traditional transmission models—one-to-one (i.e. user to user) or one-to-many (i.e. producer to consumer)—to more collaborative, participatory models that embrace real-time communication: many-to-many. See Russo, et. al., “How Will Social Media Affect Museum Communication?”, 1.
53 As discussed in Chapter Two, the concept of an ‘architecture of participation’ extends from the broader notion of the network effect, which Paul Anderson uses to describe the increase in value to the existing users of a service in which there is some form of interaction with others, as more and more people start to use it. See Anderson, “What is Web 2.0?”, 18.
portable devices including mobile phones. The site also reflects a many-to-many communication model, which utilises the communicative aspects of the web to enhance the user experience. On *YouTube*, however, the wisdom of the crowd is not so overt. On any given day the most popular videos on the site are almost guaranteed to be music, entertainment or comedy. Although the proliferation of user-generated videos may not appear to lead to any kind of wisdom, *YouTube* cannot simply be passed off as part of the 'cult of the amateur'. There is value to be found in the personal and local knowledge of user videos on *YouTube*. The concept of the long tail is also identifiable, as the site encourages an almost limitless amount of user-generated content covering an infinite number of topics, of interest to a few people, rather than the production of a few videos of interest to many.

Historical content on *YouTube* ranges from news footage, old cartoons and television commercials, oral history and digital storytelling, to photographic slideshows, historical re-enactments, recordins of history lectures, vlogs and creative combinations of a number of these forms. Some of this content is already being used by historians as source material. But even a brief glance at *YouTube* shows that entertainment and comedy are far more common than any professional histories or authentic historical sources. A study published in July 2007 found that out of the twelve categories under which users can upload videos to the site, the most popular category is music at 22.9 per cent, the second is entertainment at 17.8 per cent and the third is comedy at 12.1 per cent.

Scouring *YouTube* for historical content can be a lengthy and unproductive process. Searching for five common Australian historical subjects, two people and three events, the top results provided an interesting mix of videos (see Figure 3.7). Two of the results could be considered audiovisual historical source material, three were marketing for products related to the historical

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54 Some new mobile phones in Australia can record digital video, edit it and upload it directly to *YouTube*, making the site even easier to use, and even more ubiquitous. The LG KU990 is advertised for this ability.

55 This is the name of Andrew Keen's seminal work in response to the influence of Web 2.0 on American society. See Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur*.

56 Jonathon Rees published an article in the American Historical Association Journal describing his use of *YouTube* and other online video sites to teach history through access to primary source audiovisual material. See Jonathon Rees, “Teaching History With *YouTube* (and Other Primary Source Video Sites On the Internet),” *Perspectives On History* (May 2008). Available [online]: <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2008/0805/0805tec2.cfm> [18 March 2008].

57 There is no history category on *YouTube*. Most of the personal histories identified were found under the 'people and blogs' category which accounted for 7.4 per cent of videos. Xu Cheng, et. al. *Understanding the Characteristics of Internet Short Video Sharing*. 69
subject and nine were not directly related to the historical subject. An interesting range of amateur history productions was found, including two short films, one based on a statue and the other on an oral history, a school assignment, a tribute and the performance of a song about an historical subject (with an explanation preceding it). Of these results, it is interesting to note that none of the content was uploaded by cultural institutions.58

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>First result</th>
<th>Second result</th>
<th>Third result</th>
<th>Fourth result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ned Kelly</td>
<td>Movie trailer</td>
<td>Movie clip</td>
<td>Clip of 1978 TV show of someone singing a song called ‘Ned Kelly’</td>
<td>Comedy TV clip of The Micallef Show doing a skit about Ned Kelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Cook</td>
<td>Historical short film based around Captain Cook statue in London</td>
<td>Music clip</td>
<td>Clip of video explaining the construction of the Captain Cook Bridge, Brisbane</td>
<td>Swimming with dolphins at Captain Cook (place) in Hawaii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 Referendum</td>
<td>Special promo for an ‘old mago’ related to anniversary of 1967 referendum</td>
<td>Historical short film based on an oral history</td>
<td>Another special promo related to anniversary of 1967 referendum</td>
<td>Musical group from Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eureka Stockade</td>
<td>School assignment, re-enactment of the Eureka Stockade</td>
<td>Amateur history tribute to the heroes of the Eureka Stockade</td>
<td>Song by Buddy Williams</td>
<td>Local history in the form of a song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collapse of West Gate Bridge</td>
<td>ABC 7pm news report</td>
<td>Driving across Golden Gate Bridge</td>
<td>Queen Mary 2 passing under the Golden Gate Bridge</td>
<td>Free Tibet Banners, Golden Gate Bridge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.7: Table of results from YouTube searches of five historical subjects.**59

In this brief survey, two forms of commonly found historical content on YouTube are not represented. Firstly, no vlogs appeared in the search results. This may be explained by the search terms used, as vlogs are not usually focused around a single historical subject. Those with an historical angle, like ‘geriatric1927’s; are based around personal recollections that may span a number of years and an array of themes. Another kind of historical content not represented in these search results is amateur local history videos with strong connections to place, rather than

58 The historical short film based on an oral history relating to the 1967 referendum was produced by “AlJazeeraEnglish”, who describe themselves as a news channel based in the Middle East. See “AlJazeeraEnglish.” Available [online]: <http://www.youtube.com/user/AlJazeeraEnglish> [6 August 2008].

people or events. The channel ‘Johnswackyworld’ (see Figure 3.8) is a particularly good example of this kind of historical content. It contains many examples of the use of historic photographs to create basic audiovisual histories about Massena, New York. Produced by a thirty-year-old man from Massena, who describes himself as ‘a writer, author, local historian, collector, lawn mowing landscaper, pack rat’, the channel has twenty-four videos, which are mainly short loops of historic photographs with captions and music. One of them, titled ‘A 1940s World War Two Photo Album, Massena, New York’, has had over twenty-four thousand views since it was uploaded on 23 February 2007. In the description of this video, the user reveals that it contains forty pictures from his collection.

![Figure 3.8: Screen capture of the video ‘A 1940s World War Two Photo Album, Massena, New York’, uploaded on the channel ‘Johnswackyworld’ on YouTube, 23 February 2007.](image)

By making his personal photographs and interpretation of Massena into short videos publicly available on YouTube this gentleman has produced a valuable local historical source. Notably, he maintains ownership of his photograph collection (though not the distribution of the digitised versions on YouTube) and control over how the history of Massena is represented to a global

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60 “Johnswackyworld.” Available [online]: <http://au.youtube.com/user/johnswackyworld> [20 November 2007].
61 Ibid.
62 “A 1940s World War Two Photo Album Massena New York.” Available [online]: <http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=VJlLf_k0g4g> [20 November 2007].
63 Ibid.
community. Just as importantly, however, this video is also a reflection of how the practical uses of YouTube are being determined in relation to old media. The video content of ‘A 1940s World War Two Photo Album’ is a short clip of a local history video produced by the user. Adapting the old media of film to the new media of a YouTube video has caused alterations to the length, content, title and audience of the production. From a ninety minute movie covering the history of Massena from 1897–2007, this clip is only four minutes and forty-six seconds, covering only the 1940s. In this case, the communicative potential of YouTube as a social networking site has been utilised to try to find a niche market for this user’s local history productions among a global audience.

The intriguing mix of history, marketing and unrelated content produced through this history-related search on YouTube raises two important points about the nature of the website. Firstly, the success of the site is dependent upon mass user participation, rather than on any measure of the accuracy or quality of historical content. The site is not promoted for its educational value; instead, it is a way to ‘broadcast yourself’ to the world, as the site’s tagline suggests. YouTube’s dependence on mass user participation has shaped it as a unique media space, catering for audiovisual user-generated content that is distinct from the content produced, distributed and consumed through other outlets for audiovisual content, such as television or cinema. Secondly, videos are to be used as live streaming content on the web or through web-enabled devices such as mobile phones. YouTube does not enable videos to be saved or preserved in any kind of audiovisual archive, making it a difficult medium to understand in relation to conventions of the historical discipline. It ensures, however, that the priorities of the site are based around access, speed and the quantity of content. The site was intended to add ‘a little bit of video’ to the web users text, image and sound based experience.

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64 YouTube’s terms of use specify that while users retain ownership rights to the content they upload, by submitting it they are granting YouTube a: ‘worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, sublicensable and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform the User Submissions … in any media formats and through any media channels.’ See “Terms of Use,” YouTube. Available [online]: <http://au.youtube.com/t/terms> [3 December 2007].

65 This is based on the concept of ‘leveraging the long tail’, as discussed in Chapter Two. See Anderson, “The Long Tail”.

66 The dependence on mass user participation comes from the site’s architecture of participation. See Anderson, “What is Web 2.0?”, 18.

67 See YouTube.

YouTube provides the capacity to store and share unprecedented amounts of user-generated videos, yet it remains problematic for historians because of the difficulty of finding historical material of relevance. Although building relevancy through Web 2.0 is a key component of the new personalised search culture evident on sites such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and YouTube, it remains difficult to search for historical content on YouTube if a user is not already subscribed to channels of interest. Relevancy is a long-standing field of interdisciplinary research defined by Rees in 1966 as:

the criterion used to quantify the phenomenon involved when individuals judge the relationship, utility, importance, degree of match, fit proximity, appropriateness, closeness, pertinence, value or bearing of documents or document representations to an information requirement, need, question, statement, description of research, treatment, etc.69

On YouTube, building access to materials of relevance, whether it is videos of animals, music, the news or history, is dependent upon Web 2.0 tagging and search tracking techniques or the social networking capabilities of the site. Unlike in the Powerhouse Museum case study, the tagging process is not assisted by a formal classification system through which content can be found. Given that YouTube is used mainly for entertainment, it is easy to understand why accurate or authoritative historical material is not prominent in search results. For this reason I suggest that the value of YouTube does not lie in the public visibility of authoritative histories, but in the mass of user-generated content and the social networking capabilities of the site. It is possible to find relevant and valuable content on YouTube if we understand that value as being based on mass participation on a global scale and on a many-to-many communication model.

In the quote from ‘geriatric1927’ at the beginning of this case study, he describes his interest in people responding to his videos through comments, so that he may make more videos to follow up those comments. Essentially, this user wants to start an open conversation, through short videos and typed comments, with a younger generation of web users around the world. On YouTube, conversation through videos is commonplace, as users respond to videos with their own, or debates ensue in the comments section below popular or controversial videos. In this way, YouTube can function as a site of informal historical discourse, with users commenting and

producing video responses based around historical subjects. *YouTube* provides an opportunity for individuals to share their historical knowledge, or opinions, with other web users. This enables the creation of new social networks and new forms of personal audiovisual history-making by a generation of Australians who have the capacity to record, edit and share their lives in digital formats.

The social networks created on *YouTube* have the potential to reach across the globe, and across the amateur/professional divide to bring people together to discuss, debate and interpret historical subjects. As a social networking site, interaction between users on *YouTube* is not restricted by age, geographical location or expertise. There are communities and groups in *YouTube* and statistics and awards for videos, personal channels and messaging between users. As Cheng, Dale and Liu neatly put it, ‘videos are no longer independent from each other, and neither are the users.’ It is this aspect of the site that links the personal user-generated videos to a public audience and that enables the simultaneous existence of multiple interpretations and conflicting perspectives on the past. These conflicting perspectives, often imbued with personal meaning, memory and even the creative use of historical sources, can influence the ways that Australians gain a sense of the past. The most common way that this occurs on *YouTube* is through comedy and the production of short ‘spoof’ histories that are an individual’s take on a dominant historical narrative. For example, there is a series of three videos titled ‘An Occasionally Accurate History of Australia’ that are amateur videos put together as a comedic version of the history of Australia (see Figure 3.9). Although stable genres of historical content have not yet emerged on *YouTube*, these videos reflect a new kind of semi-accurate, amateur, entertaining history that is a form of self-expression, social commentary and historical interpretation.

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From this screen capture, the view of the user is clear. He has placed a picture of a group of Aboriginal Australians, with the text ‘Indigenous uninhabitants of Australia,’ over the top. In a Monty Python-esque comedic manner the video plays with matters of Australian history, producing a deliberately tongue-in-cheek, idiosyncratic version of events. Placing this video in a global network of viewers produced some interesting comments from other users, such as ‘that was great :D but i think i’m not australian enough to understand everything *lol* still working on my comprehension skills,’ and ‘how is the british going to discover new worlds that already have people in it, don’t you people mean, new discoveries for european people?’

YouTube is a distinct media space because anyone can participate; anyone can make a video and upload it to share it with other users. As with the videos described above, this has led to new creative forms of personal history-making in the public sphere and conversation about historical subjects. For public historians wanting to engage with YouTube, it is important to understand that the site is successful because it operates on a many-to-many communication model. As discussed in Chapter Two, public historians and public history institutions are part of a broader

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72 Ibid.

73 Comments by a German user, ‘kuschelfranktion’ and an American user, ‘jamillahlh7’ in response to the video “An Occasionally Accurate History of Australia: Part I.”
network of people who are producing and consuming historical content. Responding to this new communication model and the challenges and opportunities of the new web environment must become a priority for public historians and public history institutions. The new ways that many Australians are sharing history through *YouTube* have the potential to influence our historical consciousness. In particular, the new genres of history-making that are a mix of self-expression, social commentary and historical interpretation have the potential to challenge dominant historical narratives and to encourage web users to think critically about how they understand the past. Unfortunately, however, these same forms of history-making can inhibit historical understanding by presenting inaccurate or insufficient information. Public historians are now faced with the new challenge of producing accurate and appropriate public history projects while trying to promote critical thinking about the past and about the various interpretations of the past in the public sphere. While enabling the participation of web users, new genres of public history must both make use of the historical content already on the web, but also encourage the use and discussion of content in a way that enhances historical understanding.

For cultural institutions, posting historic content such as the ANZAC footage posted by the Australian War Memorial, can be a valuable public history initiative. At the *Museums and the Web 2008* conference, a number of such institutional initiatives using *YouTube* were seen to have positive results, 'In the end it appears that posting video content on YouTube benefits the institution, and that the potential risk of lost direct Web traffic has not necessarily dissuaded the participants.'

I propose, however, that from looking at the way that personal, local and new forms of history are shared on *YouTube*, the site presents an opportunity to engage users’ creativity to enhance informal historical discourse through the sharing of short videos in the public realm. Some of the most effective uses of *YouTube* have been new ways of encouraging web users to produce content in response to specific themes. Creating a *YouTube* contest is just one way that users are encouraged to produce short videos in response to a certain subject. At the moment it is mostly corporations using the site in this way, asking *YouTube* users to create short videos about cars, donuts, banking and mobile phones. But it is not inconceivable to

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75 A range of contests can be found at “Community Contests,” *YouTube*. Available [online]: <http://www.youtube.com/contests_main> [14 August 2008].
think that museums, heritage sites or even local history initiatives might create a contest based around an object, place, theme or the sharing of personal stories.

This is a particularly effective technique for helping young people to understand history. Recent research has shown that ‘digital natives’, those who have grown up using digital technology, learn in different ways from ‘digital immigrants’, those who have learnt to use it later in life. In line with constructivist learning theory that values informal learning for the construction of knowledge, YouTube can be used as a tool by teachers and public historians to assist young people to learn about and share history in media that they are familiar with. Examples can be found on YouTube where students are leading the way, using their creative and technological skills to create innovative school history projects. A fourteen year old schoolboy in America uploaded a video to YouTube that he made for a school project about Jesse James and the Westward Movement (see Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10: Screen capture of the video ‘Halo 3 History Special (Jesse James—Westward Movement),’ uploaded on the channel ‘MadMike1122’ on YouTube.77

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77 “Halo 3 History Special (Jesse James—Westward Movement),” YouTube. Available [online]: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjFaN0pEzb0> [22 June 2008]. This video has since been deleted by the user and is no longer available.
This video uses the editable platform of the video game *Halo 3*, combined with the voice over narration of the school student, to tell an informative story about Jesse James and the Westward Movement. The preparation and writing of a script and the consideration of physical and visual elements in this history project are valuable because the student would have had to consider more than dates and facts to produce the video. Creating a project of this sort would have required the student to think about the physical, spatial and environmental elements of the history. Asking students to engage with *YouTube*, perhaps even setting assignments to make and upload videos, can be an effective way to teach students about the past and to help make young peoples’ experiences of history meaningful and enjoyable. By acknowledging new media like *YouTube*, teachers and public historians are also helping students to learn about the differences between old and new media, about historical sources and about the issues surrounding the representation and communication of the past through networked digital media.

This case study has sought to examine *YouTube* as a new site through which web users are not only gaining a sense of the past, but also actively sharing historical knowledge, material and opinions. Although its function for public history practice remains uncertain in relation to old or existing media, *YouTube* undoubtedly has greater implications than simply adding a bit of video to the web user’s experience. It appears that *YouTube* is related to increased levels of participation in the interpretation of the past, to an increased use of non-written sources and interpretive media and to an emphasis on the value of creative production.

Although specific genres of historical *YouTube* content have not yet been fully defined, this case study has outlined a number of new forms of personal history-making that can be found on *YouTube* and that appear to be exclusive to short video sharing sites of the Web 2.0 environment. These include autobiographical vlogs, amateur short films with strong connections to people, places and events, photographic slideshows utilising personal archives and idiosyncratic entertaining responses to historical narratives, myths and generalisations. All of these forms of content are user-generated and show new ways that audiences are producing, distributing and sharing historical information beyond the traditional realm of the historian, curator or filmmaker. While these ways of interpreting and sharing the past are not yet well understood, they are likely to have an impact on how the past is understood both by the public, and professional historians.

*YouTube* is a complex medium through which to interpret the past to a public audience. As a site of informal historical discourse, it appears to offer large audiences a platform for audiovisual
content and a new way for audiences to engage creatively with public history. But the uploading of authentic historical material and professionally produced videos as public history initiatives is not making full use of the opportunities presented by the site. YouTube is a unique media space that caters for content not normally found through other media. Users are experimenting and creatively mashing up historical content to produce new forms of personal and local history. These histories are uploaded and viewed by users from all over the world, helping place personal histories in global networks of meaning. It is the sharing of emerging new forms of history and self-expression that make YouTube and the Web 2.0 environment exciting platforms for the practice of public history. By understanding the new methods of history-making emerging on YouTube, fresh perspectives, both local and global, can be brought to Australians’ sense of the past and to the ways it is interpreted in the public sphere.
Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the Web 2.0 environment and its associated sites and services present new opportunities for the practice of public history in Australia in the early twenty-first century. It has gone beyond conceiving of the web as a site of historical source material, both digitised and born-digital, to an understanding of the value of participatory media and informal communication in enabling the sharing of historical knowledge and materials between and among networks of people that are not governed by physical location. The main objective of this thesis has been to encourage a reconceptualisation of the potential of the web as a creative space for the practice of public history. Involved in this reconceptualisation is the development of a link between personal history-making processes and public history in the Web 2.0 environment.

The dialectic relationship between old and new media and between technology and society was discussed in Chapter One. This revealed how existing understandings and practices in both digital and non-digital media influence and are influenced by the role of the audience in public history. By introducing this theme, I proposed that a renewed emphasis on the role of the audience necessarily shapes public history practice through that medium. In Chapter Two this theme was developed through an analysis of how public history audiences must be considered as active producers of content, information and knowledge on the web. The principles of the Web 2.0 environment reveal how the traditional role of the public historian as interpreter of the past to a public audience is increasingly challenged by emerging patterns of information production, distribution and consumption. The Powerhouse Museum case study demonstrated
how incorporating the role of the public as active producers can add value to a museum collection and also assist public historians in the museum context to engage with them in new, meaningful ways. The *YouTube* case study showed that in an environment dominated by anonymity and entertainment the value of user-generated contributions can be leveraged through creative new forms of personal and public history-making.

Increased access to digital recording devices and the web has resulted in the sharing of an unprecedented number of digital personal histories on a global scale and has enabled new ways of recording and remembering the past. The notion of historical consciousness was drawn upon in Chapter One to discuss how the web and digital media are playing an increasingly important role in shaping Australians’ sense of the past. The two relations discussed with regard to popular memory—the relation between dominant memory and oppositional forms in the public sphere and the relation between those public discourses and a more privatised sense of the past— are particularly relevant to understanding the Web 2.0 environment for public history. The Powerhouse Museum case study showed how Web 2.0 has been used to encourage the contribution of oppositional forms that might challenge the dominant, narrative style interpretation provided by the museum, even though it is limited to a somewhat subsidiary tagging system. The relation between public discourses and a more privatised sense of the past, however, is more difficult to determine. By recognising that an individual’s sense of the past is shaped by both public representations of the past and private remembrance, I propose that a service like *YouTube* reveals ways that Web 2.0 enables spaces for people to respond to public representations of the past in a personalised manner.

This thesis has revealed that public history in the Web 2.0 environment is shaped in four particular ways—it is personalised, ubiquitous, innovative and democratic. The personalisation of public history can be identified in three main areas. Firstly, Web 2.0-era search engines are geared toward a personalised search culture. As shown by the Powerhouse Museum collection search case study, new search algorithms and techniques enable search engines to make recommendations to users. This is also reflected by new methods of delivering information to users, through RSS feeds and embedded and customised advertising. Secondly, by enabling user input into public history projects (as seen with *Te Ara*) and resources (as seen with the *Picture Australia*—*Flickr* initiatives), the Web 2.0 environment enables personal, local and

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1 Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method”, 76.
family histories to be incorporated into public history projects. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Web 2.0 enables historical data and content to be ‘mashed-up’ by users. This is increasingly giving audiences not only the capacity to view information in personally meaningful ways, but also the capacity to manipulate data sources. The personalisation of public history in this environment has been identified as a key priority by some institutions, including the Brooklyn Museum.\(^2\)

Public history in the Web 2.0 environment is also becoming increasingly ubiquitous. In 2002 Yochai Benkler referred to the internet and associated technology as ‘ubiquitous computer communication networks’.\(^3\) In 2008, the web is perhaps the most pervasive medium in Australian society. In America, web consumption had already overtaken television consumption by 2007.\(^4\) Public history is increasingly ubiquitous in the Web 2.0 environment as historians and cultural institutions begin to understand the ways that web users search for and locate information through sites such as Google and Wikipedia rather than through institutional database searches. In Chapter Two I asserted that the curation and management of data sources to ensure integrity and visibility in this new web environment must become a priority for collecting institutions and public historians alike. As the Powerhouse Museum collection search case study revealed, making authoritative historical content searchable through Google increases access to it. Public history projects that are visible in the Web 2.0 environment have the capacity to interpret the past to a public audience anytime, anywhere and through a range of media.

Innovation is usually a term associated with technology and the commercial world, but in this context it refers simply to the introduction of new public history practices. The Web 2.0 environment necessitates innovative public history practices that extend well beyond the conventions of print culture. The case studies considered in Chapter Three revealed how early initiatives have attempted to respond in new and creative ways to the challenges and opportunities of Web 2.0 and it will be interesting to see what future experiments will bring.

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\(^2\) Through experiments with Web 2.0, the Brooklyn Museum concluded that they should personalise their content as much as possible. Shelley Bernstein, “Where Do We Go From Here?”

\(^3\) Benkler, “Coase’s Penguin”.

\(^4\) In the US the Forrester Group surveyed over 60,000 households and found a number of interesting trends, including that internet time has surpassed TV time. Ted Schadler, Consumers' Behavior Online: A Deep Dive (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Forrester Research, 2007).
Innovation is required in response to the needs, demands and expectations of web users, who are paving their own way in the Web 2.0 environment. As Marc Prensky wrote in 2005:

“They’re already busy adopting new systems for communicating (instant messaging), sharing (blogs), buying and selling (eBay), exchanging (peer-to-peer technology), creating (Flash), meeting (3D worlds), collecting (downloads), coordinating (wikis), evaluating (reputation systems), searching (Google), analyzing (SETI), reporting (camera phones), programming (modding), socializing (chat rooms), and even learning (Web surfing).”

But these systems are no longer new for the younger generation of ‘digital natives’ or for many other web users. A recent study by Hannah Green and Celia Hannon in the UK found that ‘the use of digital technology has been completely normalised by this generation, and it is now fully integrated into their daily lives.’ The need to understand how young people are interacting with the web and gaining a sense of the past is a particularly pressing issue.

New sites of public history now exist where members of the public are able to construct their own histories alongside those of professionals, making Web 2.0 a more democratic environment for the interpretation of the past to a public audience. The democratisation of history is often thought to be a great potential of the web, but it is limited in two particular ways. Firstly, the digital divide causes this medium to be heavily influenced by socioeconomic, racial, generational and geographical differences. Some scholars have pointed out that different levels of access and IT literacy by different social groups actually go against the notion of democratic access. In Chapter One I explained that new media such as Web 2.0 need to be understood in relation to existing old media. This is particularly true in relation to public history, as our audiences come from a variety of social groups: they are rich and poor, young and old, of all nationalities and live all over Australia and throughout the world. At this stage in its development, Web 2.0 is not a suitable medium for engaging all social groups, but should be understood as one medium among many to be used for the practice of public history. Secondly, as with Wikipedia, the democratisation of the production and sharing of history can put history in the realm of common consensus.

6 Terry Flew noted that digital media have become so pervasive in our everyday lives that they are almost ceasing to be ‘new’ in any real sense of the word. Flew, *New Media: An Introduction*, 2.
But, as Paul Arthur has argued, 'historical interpretation...has never been verified by common consensus; the interpretation of history has always been in the hands of experts'.

Public historians, with their concern for public audiences, need to be aware of the most appropriate mediums for engaging their audiences in the process of meaning-making and of the ways that Web 2.0 can be used to do this. Public history practice in the Web 2.0 environment has been identifiably shaped by Web 1.0, including hypertext theory and debates surrounding the representation of the past in digital formats. Chapter Two revealed that most of these debates are still relevant in the Web 2.0 environment as the web retains many of its fundamental qualities. For example, it remains suited to the accumulation and distribution of historical resources and the enhancement of communication between historical institutions and the public, as CAN demonstrated prior to Web 2.0. The Web 2.0 environment makes use of the communicative potential of the web and has developed it into a suitable medium for historical discourse as well as historical source material. This discourse challenges the validity of distinctions between the personal and the public and the amateur and professional.

The conclusions presented here reflect a break with many of the traditions of Australian public history practice and are aligned with the experimentalist notion of history as a journey rather than an end destination. The goals, shape and boundaries of public history are challenged by the Web 2.0 environment, to the extent that engaging with the web now demands consideration of a plethora of new issues. As a practical outcome to this research project, I propose three ways that public historians should respond to the new web environment. Firstly, it will be necessary to accept shared authority in the interpretation of the past to a public audience. The Chinese proverb that opened this thesis suggested that historical understanding can be enhanced by involving the audience. Historical interpretation in the Web 2.0 environment should, therefore, include multiple perspectives and give the audience genuine opportunities to respond critically and meaningfully to the interpretation presented. This will include thinking about ways that user-generated content could enrich the history and the appropriateness of including it.

In order to utilise any of the opportunities presented by the Web 2.0 environment it will be necessary for public historians to develop their professional skills in this area. In 2005 Jerome McGann pointed out that 'digital illiteracy puts us on the margin of conversations and actions

9 Arthur, "Hypermedia History", 12.
10 Munslow and Rosenstone, *Experiments in Rethinking History*, 11.
that affect the center of our cultural interests (as citizens) and our professional interests (as scholars and educators). By understanding and using new research tools and data management practices, by learning about new ways of engaging audiences and communities and by joining and contributing to professional social networks, public historians will be actively involved in shaping the relationship between technology and society and between public history and new media. The third way that I propose public historians should respond to the new web environment is by ensuring that public history practices using digital media involve the creation of re-useable content. The nature of new media is that it is continually changing and remediating. Investigating sustainable digital media formats, particularly for images, audio and video, should form an integral part of the initial stages of any web-based history project.

Whether public historians put it there or not, public history already exists in the Web 2.0 environment. People take photos and videos of historic houses, museum exhibitions, heritage trails and other physical sites of historic interpretation and comment on them. They communicate in public forums about their experiences at institutions, about reading books, about visiting historic sites or undertaking self-guided heritage trails. Other web users take their own photo collections, home videos, audio and stories and construct their own interpretations of the past. Some gain fame from doing so, as we saw in the case of ‘geriatric1927’ on YouTube. Responding to this content is, as this thesis shows, a complex issue for public historians. It is, nonetheless, an issue that needs to be raised within the professional community. This thesis has identified a few particularly pressing areas of research that will need to be addressed over the next few years. These include how the role and social significance of existing or old public history media are reshaped by new media, how young people are interacting with the web and gaining a sense of the past and how the Australian public history industry can best respond to new media, new audiences, shifting social practices and information patterns. The future of public history will be shaped by how historians respond to these challenges.

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