Online and Plugged In?:
Public History and Historians in the Digital Age

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In 2006, *TIME* magazine chose to open its feature article by 'exposing' common misconceptions about history and the people who make it. It informed its readers that the past was not simply 'the biography of great men' as historians like Thomas Carlyle had famously written. Instead, it was 'a story about community and collaboration'; history was about ordinary people who were shaping the world.[1] This perspective was not new. Since at least the 1970s there has been a movement to write 'history from below' and insert everyday people back into the pages of history.[2] While there is still a long way to go, by 2006 it was no longer novel to imagine history in this way. What made *TIME's* article so ground breaking was its description of *how* people were making history. Using the internet and digital platforms – 'Web 2.0' – they were producing their own content and reaching unprecedented numbers of people. 'In 2006', *TIME* wrote, 'the World Wide Web became a tool for

bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter.' For this productive effort, 'You', the average person, became *TIME's* person of the year.[3] While *TIME* was referring to people 'making history' as those who were shaping the world, its article also carried a second meaning.[4] People were also using these technologies to access and create stories about the past.

Web 2.0 affects how people interact with one another, including how public historians and ordinary people connect with history. Online forums, blogs, portable devices, apps, mobile phones, tablets, social media and the other, countless array of digital platforms have facilitated a greater degree of 'user engagement', where anyone with access to the web is able to contribute to understandings about the past. Through these new avenues, ideas about history have also been able to span countries, cultures and languages and reach more people than ever before.

This article examines the complex and powerful relationship between the internet and public history. It explores how public history is being experienced and practiced in a digital world where 'you' – both public historians and laypeople – are made powerful through using the world wide web. Web 2.0 is a dynamic terrain that provides both opportunities and challenges to the creation of history. While it may facilitate more open, democratic history making, the internet simultaneously raises questions about gatekeeping, authority and who has the right to speak for the past. Though the web provides new avenues for distributing historical information, how these are used and by whom remain pressing questions.

Although there are many articles by public historians and the public alike that touch on Web 2.0 and history-making, this is the first, comprehensive, reflective piece to examine these trends.[5] It analyses how public historians and ordinary people are navigating the field, as well as their issues, concerns and successes in harnessing these new technologies to engage with the past in the present.

PUBLIC HISTORY AND THE USER GENERATED WORLD

> Once a bastion of 'professionalism' credentialed knowledge producers share the state with 'amateur' creators [because of the web]... these changes, among others, are ushering us towards a world where knowledge, power, and productive capability will be more dispersed than at any other time in our history...[6]

This quotation introduces one of the most significant ways that Web 2.0 is changing public history.[7] It reveals that the status of public historians as the producers and 'laypeople' as the audience of history is shifting. Ordinary people are using online technologies to shape the past, while historians are reporting, commenting and contributing to these changes. Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams' assertion, that this means 'knowledge, power, and productive capability will be more dispersed than at anytime in our history', is supported by the wave of historical works that make their way through cyberspace.[8] The authors of these works range from intellectuals to management consultants and ambulance drivers and they are produced in almost every corner of the globe.[9] It would be a mistake to assume, however, that the impact of Web 2.0 is only to disperse this productive power. There is also convergence, where people are coming together and working to shape a new kind of history. This new online world of public history lacks none of the nuance and dynamism that has characterised the field since its inception. Issues of participation, audience and exposure are as complex as they ever were.

A recent case in point is 'Museum Selfie Day'. In January 2014, over 10,000 people participated in this event. The brainchild of blogger and cultural enthusiast Mar Dixon, the idea for the project was quite simple – to take a picture of yourself in a museum and share it on social media with the twitter hash tag #MuseumSelfie. Dixon's aim was to draw people into museums, boost museums' profile, especially after very public controversy over funding cuts, and to get people to engage with the past in new and exciting ways. From Russia to Australia, the United Kingdom to Qatar, thousands of people posted their photos, raising museums' entrance figures in the process.[10] Museum Selfie day promoted the fetishization of museum objects; the artefacts (as well as the person/people in the photo) were the centre of attention, taken out of their normal environment, and their historical context was largely lost to the photo's viewer. Although this type of practice can be criticised for privileging the 'trapping of the past' at the expense of any 'meaningful' engagement with history, many historians have viewed the day positively.[11]

Reporting on her own involvement with this project, public historian Emily Oswald suggests that this unconventional strategy actually breaks down many of the barriers that deter 'laypeople' from

getting involved in museums. She argues that 'taking a good selfie requires that both the creator/subject and the viewer to look carefully at the artwork or artefact', granting a new perspective and a personal connection to a potentially lifeless object.[12] Oswald also reflects on how authority is challenged by this simple technique of 'the selfie'. On 22 January, ordinary people were invited to situate historical objects and frame exhibitions, taking on a role that normally resides with museum curators. Individuals with no historical training disseminated their understanding of the past and received more publicity than any 'professional' historian could dream of.[13]

The notion that the public can, and should, be involved in creating the past is not new. In 1990, the term 'shared authority' was coined by oral historian Michael Frisch and used to describe an ideal form of making history. Historians would not simply distribute knowledge to the public, but would work together with ordinary people. The past would be recognised as the ever changing, social terrain that it was, and historians and the public would cooperate and exchange ideas so that the expertise of one would meet the needs, desires and cultural knowledge of the other.[14] Frisch's idea was relatively influential throughout the 1990s. It spurred on the 'People's Museums' movement in Britain, where residents gave their personal collections to local museums for display.[15] It informed the constantly expanding field of oral history, adding to calls for minority histories to be heard and for greater community involvement in public history.

What has changed, and what makes future possibilities for public history all the more important, is how new technologies have accelerated this trend. From the more moral arguments that people should be 'allowed' to play a role in creating their own history, millions of non-professionals are now actively pursuing history on their own. As Jorma Kalela asserts, 'the hopelessness of academic gatekeeping efforts regarding the study of the past is starkly illustrated by web 2.0.'[16] Historians are forced to confront issues of shared authority and public engagement because the past can, and is, being created, accessed and restored without them through digital mediums. Ordinary people have access to primary sources through internet databases and with the digitisation of historical material. They have virtual platforms such as twitter and blogs and are able to create webpages to share their ideas.

The sheer scope of these new, 'democratic' productions of history where every person is their own historian, is clearly illustrated by looking at the twitter account *@historyinpics*.[17] This site shares pictures from the past, posting a new image every couple of hours. Its creators mainly post pictures that show celebrities and famous events. What their

site lacks, however, is any indication of where these images came from, when the pictures have been doctored or the historical context of the posts. Despite these apparent failings, the site has twice as many viewers as the Library of Congress. Its producers, two teenage boys, earn up to $50,000 a month in revenue from *@historyinpics* and their other internet projects.[18]

The success and popularity of this type of site has not been lost on historians. Jason Steinhauer, for one, has admitted that 'we [the trained professionals] may feel a tinge of jealousy… We want people to interact with our collections and ideas… Public history organisations have invested resources and commissioned studies in order to attain the level of engagement these teenagers reached in two months.'[19] What makes this 'history's' influence all the more disturbing from a professional historian's point of view is what it lacks in historical depth and academic rigour. Steinhauer's piece resounds with the fear that this 'whimsical', public past is as manipulative as it is deceptive: *@historyinpics* claims to be 'history', yet it lacks any critical engagement with the past, any deep analysis of sources, or any evidence of the images' significance – except for perhaps the subjective, emotional responses of present-day viewers.

Steinhauer is not alone in his thinking. In a recent edition of *Public History Review* that examined 'New Directions in Public History', American historian James Gardner took this argument further to suggest that historians are under threat from the 'radical trust' they allow the public. 'Radical trust' is not the 'shared authority' that Frisch imagined. It involves historians completely giving up their power and influence and letting the public 'determine the future of public history.'[20] As Gardner sees it, 'There is no half way in radical trust. If we [the historians] mediate or if we filter out unedited, uncensored opinion, then we are breaching that trust.'[21] In the future that Gardner imagines, historians and 'real' history will be lost; for if the public are to have all authority, then there is no room for historians to participate in shaping the past. Left to their own devices, Gardner predicts that the public will use the past to reinforce their own expectations and prejudices. 'History' will apparently signify the rearrangement of facts for present purposes, and become devoid of true, historical meaning.[22]

This apocalyptic vision of the future has been compounded by public misconceptions about historians and their work. A recent study in Australia suggests that most ordinary people have little idea what academically trained historians actually do, apart from work with 'old things.'[23] They may consequently believe that historians are themselves part of the past, relics of an older time that are static, brittle and

unchanging. As most practitioners would agree, however, this could not be further from the truth. Historians know better than most the influence of social forces that have both changed history, and continue to shape the present. Indeed, as Iain McCalman suggests, 'measuring and explaining such changes is centrally the stuff of history.'[24] Public historians in particular are preoccupied with the interaction between the past and the present. They have always had to respond to the changing needs of the public – although, since the 1970s, the idea of what and who constitutes 'the public' has changed markedly – and so these professionals are better equipped than most to meet the demands of user generated histories and Web 2.0.[25]

Another significant idea that is rarely explicitly confronted, is that historians are not immune to the influence of the present.[26] Although such a blunt statement may appear obvious, this notion has only recently been accepted by a majority in the field, and is still disputed by many who operate outside of the discipline. Since the beginning of history as an 'academic' pursuit in the nineteenth century, the understanding that historians are objective purveyors of the past has held a great degree of influence. To be completely impartial, however, implies that historians are somehow immune to pesky, external influences such as the needs and desires of the present. Today, historians recognise that this standard of complete objectivity is impossible. Scholars may balance opinions, weigh the value of sources and try to get as close as they can to the past. But they are not omniscient. Historians write their histories in accordance with their training, their audience, their interests and in response to a myriad of external pressures.[27] When practicing history, as Sheila Fitzpatrick has recognised, 'there is no view from nowhere.'[28] If we place historians back into history then, and recognise that they are active agents who create and respond to their own context, a more optimistic interpretation of public history can be gained.[29] Historians are already rising to challenges and making the most of the opportunities presented to them by the digital age.

HISTORIANS: ONLINE AND PLUGGED IN

The 'public' are not alone in exploring the possibilities offered by new media platforms. Indeed, there has been a proliferation of histories carried out and disseminated in the virtual arena. And this trend shows no sign of slowing down. Although the internet as we know it today has only existed since the 1990s,[30] Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig remind us that now 'almost every historian regards a computer as basic equipment.'[31] Academic and public historians alike are using digital

technologies to access sources and articles, connect with researchers and publics around the world, and are adding their own histories to the plethora of information available online. This desire to engage with digital mediums created a market for Cohen and Rosenzweig to produce a manual on the subject. Harnessing their experience as both public historians and their extensive use of new media, they wrote *Digital Histories: a guide to gathering, preserving and presenting the past on the web*. This book is evidence of the digital phenomenon sweeping the profession, and it also perpetuates this trend. A structured, step-by-step layout allows historians to navigate how to make the most of these new technologies, and the book tackles issues as complex and diverse as attractive web design and copyright laws. It is available online, with most of its references hyperlinked to the original texts. In this way, all readers are able to access the book and assess its sources for themselves.[32]

Digital techniques like those employed by Rosenzweig and Cohen give the public the opportunity to engage critically with the piece before them. Digital referencing is but one example that demonstrates this clearly. Instant access to an historian's sources changes the way that their histories are read. As the work of Australian researchers Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton suggests, the public are more likely to give authority to histories that they can see using material traces of the past – that is, primary sources. Original sources are regarded as largely authentic, truthful relics of the past, and the history they support is legitimised by this tangible connection to times gone by.[33] Digital referencing moves beyond mere annotations to virtually connect readers to these sources with the click of a button. Consequently, digital referencing lends this material dimension to histories and can legitimise historians' findings in the eyes of the public.

These easily accessible sources also allow the reader / audience to have a personal role in interpreting the past. Ashton and Hamilton's study revealed that people are inclined to trust information if they feel that they have an element of input or control over the narrative.[34] Digital histories, and hyperlinks in particular, provide such an opportunity for people to evaluate sources, and, consequently, the historian's interpretation of them. 'The public' are allowed a space to construct and shape their own understanding of the past alongside historians.

This positive appraisal of digital history and its possibilities does not detract from the fact that there are still significant issues to be overcome in the virtual arena. Critics argue that academic gatekeeping still characterises the digital world. Historians' work remains largely

available only through restricted access sites such as Proquest or JSTOR, where people need money or institutional backing to gain access.[35] Moreover, most histories are still published in conventional, book-format. As James William Brodmen writes, 'many authors consent to an electronic version only after they have exhausted any possibility of a reprint edition. Those scholars who are daring enough to publish solely in an electronic form will bear the weight of this prejudice for some time to come.'[36]

These are serious problems that affect how public historians are able to harness the potential of Web 2.0. However, it should not be forgotten that significant advances have, and continue, to be made. From a very recent past when all sources and histories were physical, now 'virtually every scholarly journal duplicates its content online… Virtually every historical archive, historical museum, historical society, historic house, and historic site – even the very smallest – have its own website.'[37] Even if physical monographs remain the preferred form of publishing for many historians, there is always some information about these texts online, be it in the form of book reviews, synopses or excerpts from the piece. Google books houses countless titles online, and many thousands of history texts are available to read for free.[38] Amazon.com allows free access to select pages from its titles, while libraries are also moving into the digital age.[39] Public libraries provide online resources, including subscriptions to many restricted journals, for their patrons.[40] On social and career networking sites such as Academia.edu, historians are placing their papers and openly sharing them with the public. This proliferation of histories on the web, combined with the rapid growth of computer literacy, means that history is reaching and interacting with the public like never before.[41] Public historians have well and truly entered the virtual age, and there is no going back.

PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL COLLIDE: *THE DICTIONARY OF SYDNEY* AND *HISTORYPIN*
While the previous section has touched on some of the possibilities that await public history in the digital realm, there is one crucial element that should be explored in further detail. It needs to be recognised that Web 2.0 provides new opportunities for history to become a site of dialogue, where professionally trained and amateur historians can work together to construct the past. When contemporary public history began in the 1970s this development would have appeared almost unfathomable. Public history was seen as a one-way process, where trained historians bestowed their expert knowledge of history to the public.[42] Indeed, as late as 1998, Graeme Davison defined public history as 'the practice of

history by academically trained historians working for public agencies or as freelancers outside the universities.'[43] This and other similar definitions did not account for public history as a social 'process by which the past is constructed into history.'[44] They did not recognise public history's capacity 'for involving people as well as nations in the creation of their own histories.'[45] Web 2.0 does.

The online sites, the *Dictionary of Sydney* and *historypin*, provide significant case studies for this public and professional history making. According to its creators, the *Dictionary of Sydney* is a free, 'multimedia city encyclopaedia that presents the history of metropolitan Sydney in a digital format.'[46] It features articles, primary and secondary sources, including oral histories, sounds, images, videos, maps, documents and many other mediums. Among its most 'multidimensional' additions, the *Dictionary* also features a present day, virtual-map of Sydney where relics and information about the city's past are tagged to their geographical position in the landscape. This unprecedented convergence of different sources provides a rich and complex repository of information. Like the hyperlinked referencing explored previously, the site's format encourages user interaction and the public interpretation of sources. The content of articles and procedures that determine how the site is run also ensure that the *Dictionary* takes this collaborative aspect even further.[47]

Although originally articles were commissioned largely from professional historians, the site's metaphorical doors were soon thrown open to the general public who were 'clamouring to participate.'[48] Contributors from all walks of life are now able to choose their own topics and discuss aspects of Sydney's history that they find important, and this provides a unique insight into the past. It not only allows the *Dictionary* to provide information on a diverse range of areas; it also reflects the interests of its public and professional writers, becoming a collection of social meanings in the process. Academically trained and 'amateur' historians have their histories presented side by side. They can be directly referenced or connected via links so that one piece informs how the other is understood and received. Anyone can also write to the editors and suggest amendments to articles, further connections between material and other avenues that the site might explore. The *Dictionary of Sydney* approaches history as an ongoing project that has no definitive end. It transcends the physical constraints of a printed medium as information is easily added, re-written and disputed to keep up to date with advances in scholarship and its viewers needs. This continuous

dialogue, between different authors, audiences, editors and new and old scholarship supports a communal form of history making.[49]

The *Dictionary* differs from other participatory sites such as *Wikipedia* in that its content is not immediately posted online, but goes through an editorial process before it is published. Articles may range from formal essays to more conversational entries. However, all information is referenced, and in some cases virtually linked to its digital source. For even further transparency, the authors are named and their credentials readily available to viewers online.

Lisa Murray and Emma Grahame from the *Dictionary* argue that these procedures ensure that the website 'is embracing a shared authority process, rather than surging forward with the radical trust of web 2.0 engagement.'[50] In this virtual context, public ideas are not given sole authority or represented as poorer interpretations of the past than professional histories. Academic and 'amateur' histories alike must meet certain criteria before they are given a place on the web page. While this means that it is not an entirely democratic source, as restrictions are imposed on articles from above, it also has its benefits. These standards give the *Dictionary* authority because it controls the content and quality of material that makes it onto the web. Even though all entries are not automatically given the stamp of approved 'knowledge', all submissions are considered equally. This ensures that people do not need qualifications to interpret the past; they simply have to write 'good' history. It also means that when 'the public's' work is included, it carries more weight for having undergone this review.[51]

By way of contrast, *historypin* has far fewer restrictions on what is uploaded online. This program harnesses Google maps to allow anyone to pin old photos, memories, voice recordings and other digital sources to the location that these sources refer to. While the *Dictionary of Sydney* has a similar 'temporal mapping' project, as mentioned above, *historypin* is worldwide in scope and has no academic standards that entries have to meet. All that a pinner needs to do is connect to the site via their Facebook, Twitter or Google account, and they can instantly upload their content. From this description alone, it may appear that *historypin* leaves little room for historians to engage with this public creation of history. Members from any community around the world can post whatever histories they wish without seeking an historian's advice, input or meeting their professional standards.[52]

In response to this challenge, public historians are not simply standing aside, content to watch history being shaped and changed without them. Historians are constantly looking for new ways to participate, find their place in a 'user generated world' and prove that

they are still needed.[53] In relation to *historypin*, many history professionals are taking an active role on the site and adding their own posts to those of the public. Historians who act on behalf of institutions such as museums and archives are especially prolific contributors, with countless sources from their collections added to the site. Although *historypin* does not provide a specific, authoritative role for public historians, these people are choosing to enter the digital arena. Their pins literally help to map out the past and their information can also become part of a dialogue with the public. Public historians' sources provide points of access for many of the site's users as ordinary people comment on these posts and are prompted to share their own pictures, memorabilia and stories after encountering historians' pins. Historians' contributions can provide easy entry for users who might otherwise be overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the *historypin* project.

Historypin has also begun to move beyond being an exclusively online platform and is creating projects to promote community engagement with their site. In 2012, one such initiative was carried out in Reading in the United Kingdom. Local volunteers worked closely with *historypin* representatives to learn about the site and then volunteers used these skills to raise awareness about Reading's history. 'Intergenerational volunteers and champions' worked closely with the community to share Reading's past and show people how they could use *historypin* to add their stories.[54]

The Reading Museum was the main community partner involved with pinning Reading's history, and public historians contributed a great deal to this initiative. To take part in the project, however, these historians had to move beyond conventional understandings about their relationship with history. Museum curators usually play the leading role in determining how the past is portrayed in their exhibits. As N. Elizabeth Schlatter notes, their authority typically relies on the belief that 'objects, experiences or people are being chosen and presented by an expert best equipped with the necessary knowledge and experience.'[55] In the Reading project, public historians' voices were only some of many. Their interpretation of the past was not the definitive narrative, and their job was to work alongside ordinary people. They were to guide and inform participants, but ultimately their task was to give people the tools to discover history for themselves.

The collaborative role of historians in Reading's *historypin* project points to a shift in public historians' relationship with the public and the past. Jorma Kalela is among practitioners who argue that the historian's

place is no longer at the heart of public history projects. Their 'prime role is to act as one who provides expert advice':[56]

> Rather than just transmitting knowledge, our [historians']
> main contribution is to encourage and support non-
> professional people engage with history – and to be available
> when needed.[57]

This is a contentious point that is under debate in historical circles. Such a suggestion does not signify that 'public history', as a practice carried out by professional historians, no longer exists. Many practitioners are still leading public history projects and are employed for their expertise.[58] As recently as March 2014, the American National Trust asked historians to engage in a forum on climate change and conservation. Researchers were called upon to manage contemporary issues and enter 'a conversation about… balancing preservation and public history with addressing sustainability and climate change.'[59] These competing examples of the role of public historians illustrates that the 'field' of public history is expanding and diversifying. As historians respond to the pressures created by 'user-generated histories' and the digital world, their position is more fluid and hard to define. They may simultaneously serve as authorities, consultants, advisors, educators and fellow participants in the public process of making history. Web 2.0 has forced public historians to confront conflicting ideas about their purpose, as these divisions are more visible and pressing than ever before.

THE PUBLIC ART OF BLOGGING

Blogging is a new digital medium that provides insights about the position of public historians as well as how ordinary people understand their past. Blogs are free online platforms where individuals post thoughts and ideas. As Michael Conniff asserts, they are structured in reverse chronological order, so that the latest addition is viewed first, and generally feature unfiltered content, posts with an informal tone and hyperlinks to other sites.[60] In 1998, there were less than 50 known blogs worldwide, while in 2006 there were an estimated 57.4 million blogs in cyberspace. This figure is likely to continue to increase.[61]

Historian Stephanie Ho has recognised these sources' significance and pioneered an investigation that uses blogs to uncover how people understand the past. Using Singapore as a case study, Ho demonstrates that blogs can be used to create a communal, participatory historical culture. They allow ordinary people to engage in a dialogue with one another and share their interpretation of the past. Although there are

restrictions on what can be posted online – for example, 'seditious' and overtly political statements are policed by the State in Singapore – blogs still provide new avenues for historical understanding. They can expand the scope of history from the national and political past taught at school to the personal and experiential, as well as connect people by sharing knowledge about 'their' history.

Ho's article draws on some foundational traditions in public history. In the 1990s, American scholars Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen were the first to study how ordinary people thought about the past, and this topic has remained popular ever since. Similar projects to the American case have been carried out in countries around the world and the most recent study, in Canada, was completed in 2013.[62] These previous investigations, however, largely relied on interviews and questionnaires to understand how people use the past in their everyday lives. Ho's study and others that use online forums do not need historians to intervene to gather this evidence. Individuals and communities make digital sources for themselves. This breaks new ground as it shows how people are using the Web to create, understand and interact with their past on their own terms. It also changes the historian's role in these studies. From a participant-collector who physically interacts with 'the public', historians become more akin to observers as they analyse the material before them.

While this illustrates yet another way that Web 2.0 is changing historians' relationships with the public, blogs provide more than just another complex source. Historians are also using this online platform to reflect, discuss and confront issues that affect their field. The National Council of Public History's (NCPH) blog *history@work* is one such site where 'people from a variety of areas of the public history field' are encouraged to 'share ideas and news, and… create a bridge to future digital and other publication efforts.'[63] The format of a blog itself helps to facilitate critical reflection and discussion. The reverse chronological order and instant upload of posts means that historians are able to keep up to date with the latest news, events, ideas and projects in their field. This article begun with references to Museum Selfie day, and *history@work* featured this event less than two months after it had taken place. Although journal articles and conferences have long been used to facilitate discussion between historians, this example shows that blogging has significant advantages. Conferences take months of organisation, travel expenses, research and money to put together. Journal articles require extensive research and a peer review process that takes at least three months, and sometimes years before the article is

published. The fact that a free, accessible article was written about Museum Selfie day so quickly, clearly illustrates the power of the web to connect public historians like never before.

Apart from a professional forum, blogs also provide a site for historians to experiment, be creative and respond directly to issues that affect the public creation of history. Blogs are not meant to replace or compete with journal articles. Indeed, their very design means that they cannot meet academic standards due to their short word limit, informal tone and the impossibility of referencing posts. In a context where many historians feel that they must maintain a public image of authority to justify their position, this new arena provides countless possibilities.[64] Blogs give historians the freedom to ask questions, air concerns, generate discussion and admit that they do not have all of the answers due to the platform's informal, conversational nature. These sites are home to 'works in progress' and so can afford to reference public projects that might otherwise complicate, question or undermine their role as historians. In *history@work*, a lot of attention is paid to the difficulty of defining public history, while the blog also features a great deal of material on popular history making – areas where ordinary people are creating history for themselves.

In a post from 2014, for example, one historian considers 'sound bite history'. 'Sound bite history' refers to compressed, audio-visual narratives where years of history are 'summed up' in a few minutes. Historians do not create these videos but millions of viewers access the clips. Tyler Priest tackles this phenomenon head on in a short post of less than a thousand words. While he writes of the benefits of this history to general education, he also investigates the dangers that this medium poses when it is not tempered with historical analysis. Without academic depth, these posts make sweeping generalisations that can distort history. Some key facts are wrong, while the narratives bombard viewers with information and do not promote any deep understanding of the issues they present.

Priest clearly views this type of public 'history' as a threat to the historian's place as educator, as well as a challenge to historical accuracy. But he recognises its influence, and how it helps to shape public understandings of the past. As this example demonstrates, new media platforms such as blogs offer a wide array of possibilities for historians. Far from eroding the field of public history, they can provide new sources and promote a more reflective historical practice.[65]

CONCLUSION

Web 2.0 is a pervasive force that is shaping public history and will continue to do so into the future. It has altered the way that public historians and the public interact with each other and the past. It has broadcasted thousands of ideas about history to an innumerable number of people from all over the world. It has provided an outlet for debates and discussions about the past and connected people like never before. While these new, virtual platforms are irrevocably changing the field of public history, there is nothing arbitrary about the digital future of the past. Far from being forced to 'collaborate [online] or perish', historians and the public are choosing to enter the virtual arena, and are using the web in diverse and inventive ways.[66] Ordinary people are contributing to history online, and historians are recognising this, responding to these ideas and adding their own histories to the digital collection. The internet is being used in a myriad of different ways to engage with the past, and the opportunities and challenges presented by Web 2.0 promote a more conscious and reflective form of making history.

Speaking of the digital 'revolution', journalist Lev Grossman has written that 'Web 2.0 is a massive social experiment, and like any experiment worth trying, it could fail. There is no road map.' But this is what makes the future of public history exciting.[67] We are treading new ground. 'Historians need to confront... issues of quality, durability, readability, passivity and inaccessibility' because of the pressures of the web.[68] Although there is still a long way to go, historians are already navigating these challenges. They are working with, in between and alongside the public and the web to do so. The internet and public history are powerfully connected in our 'user generated world'. With such progress already made using Web 2.0 to access the past, it is impossible not to see the internet as a significant part of public history's future.

ENDNOTES

1 Lev Grossman, 'You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year', *TIME*, 25 December 2006. Accessed 12 November 2014 via: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>.
2 See, for example, E. P. Thompson's seminal work that spurred this movement: E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963.
3 Grossman, 'You – Yes, You'.

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[4] ibid.

[5] See, for example, William Bryans, Albert Camarillo, Swati Chattopadhyay et al, 'Imagining the Digital Future of *The Public Historian*', *The Public Historian*, vol 35, no 1, 2013, pp8-27; Bill Adair, Bengamin Filene and Laura Koloski (eds), *Letting Go?: Sharing authority in a user-generated world*, The Pew Centre for Arts and Heritage, Philadelphia, 2011; Lam Chun See, *Good Morning Yesterday* Blog, 2005-2014. Accessed 13 May 2014 via: <http://goodmorningyesterday.blogspot.co.uk>; Roy Rosenzweig and Daniel Cohen, *Digital History: a guide to gathering, preserving and presenting the past on the web*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. Accessed online 20 May 2014 via: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/>; Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (eds), *Writing History in the Digital Age*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 2012. Accessed 4 June 2014 via: <http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/>; Society of American Archivists, *The Interactive Archivist: case studies in utilising web 2.0 to enhance the Archival Experience*, 2014. Accessed 3 June 2014 via: <http://interactivearchivist.archivists.org/>; Stephanie Ho, 'Blogging as Popular History Making, Blogs as Public History: a Singapore case study,' *Public History Review*, vol 14, 2007, pp64-79.

[6] Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams as quoted in J. Gordon Daines III and Cory L. Nimer, 'Introduction', *The Interactive Archivist*, 18 May 2009. Accessed 12 June 2014 via: <http://interactivearchivist.archivists.org/#footnote13>.

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