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ABSTRACT

Histories of events can be told from multiple perspectives, and there is rarely just one linear narrative or a single interpretation of the past. This paper takes an interdisciplinary approach to explain how the concept of shared authority in public history can be applied to transmedia storytelling, in the context of media studies, to address conflicting narratives on historical events. Transmedia narratives allow for more opportunities to target different audiences and offer alternatives, and perhaps conflicting interpretations, to official mainstream interpretations of historical events. This is achieved through three primary methods of public participation in the development of conflicting narratives which can be presented through a variety of different media. The theoretical challenges in sharing authority of transmedia narrative creation with different publics ranges from strong to little control (i.e. radical trust). Thus, we discuss a series of methodologies that can be strategically used in future research projects that wish to share authority with different publics in the development of historical transmedia narratives with conflicting interpretations. This approach can be particularly relevant in contexts of segregation, discrimination, identity, political changes or cultural wars.

Introduction

In the last few decades the production of history has become more interdisciplinary and participatory. Public history, coined in the United States in the 1970s, developed as a way to practice history beyond the classroom, in fields such as museums, archives, parks and other public spaces (Cauvin 2018). At its core, public history aims to make the overall process of history-making more accessible through communication with

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large audiences. Public history therefore invites the use of various forms of communication beyond academic writing (such as new media, audio-visual production, exhibitions). Public history has also become more and more collaborative and participatory. More than ever, the idea is to produce history not only with academic andprofessional partners, but also with various public groups, associations, communities and individuals. Increasingly international and popular, the field of public history presents new opportunities for balancing creative practice outputs and approaches with theoretical discussions (Cauvin 2021). This paper builds upon Michael Frisch's (1990) concept of a shared authority by discussing how a range of experts in history and heritage can engage with different publics using digital media and, by extension, also involving them in the process of co-creating public history and narratives across media.

In considering this shared authority in the development of public history narratives, it is important to clarify – as Joanna Wojdon and Dorota Wiśniewska do in their recent book on the 'Public in Public History' – what the term 'public' means (Wojdon and Wiśniewska 2021). Habermas (1962) defined the 'public sphere' as a virtual or imaginary community made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state. Based on his study of 18th century networks of associations, Habermas stresses the emergence of 'debating public' through different communication media like newspapers and locations, such as coffee houses, salons, or theaters (Chandler 2017). However, the concept of 'public sphere' has also been criticised and Habermas' use of *the* public has been challenged. Scholars like Fraser (1992, 136–137) have used 'a multiplicity of publics' instead of 'the public'. Furthermore, the presence and challenge of dominant official narratives have led some scholars to speak of 'counter-publics', to be aware of the inequalities in the publics in accessing culture and power, as well as discussing contesting interpretations among various publics (Warner 2002). For Fraser (1992, 123), counter-publics are members of 'subordinate social groups' who 'invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs'. Following those debates, practitioners in public history now openly acknowledge and work with a variety of publics (Dean 2021). We similarly apply the concept of multiple publics rather than a single entity.

Due to these cultural shifts, a new challenge has emerged on how to strategically bring multiple publics' perspectives together with historical authority using transmedia narrative approaches? Transmedia narratives

present an opportunity for public history projects because history, heritage and associated public narratives already exist in different media, such as artefacts, historical records, oral history, music, folklore, art and many others. Among these different pieces and when considering public interpretations of historical events, conflicting narratives can emerge. Since 'narrative' is defined in many different ways by scholars across disciplines, and even within narratology, we distinguish how narrative is defined in our application to developing conflicting transmedia narrative(s) for public history topics. In this context, we look at the pragmatics of how transmedia narratives can be used to encourage public participation in co-creating alternative (e.g. conflicting) histories or interpretations of historical events. We prefer narrative instead of the word 'story', (e.g. transmedia storytelling) because 'narrative is the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*, story is an *event* or sequence of events (the *action*), and narrative discourse is those events as represented' (Abbott 2020, 16). Narrative allows for more flexibility in its application to public history topics and so in this paper, we define narrative as

> any semiotic object produced with the intent to evoke a story to the mind of the audience. To be more precise, it is the receiver's recognition of this intent that leads to the judgement: this text is a narrative, though we can never be sure that the sender and receiver have the same story in mind. (Ryan 2005, 5)

This definition importantly considers 'any semiotic object' and in our discussion, this includes digital media, which allows members of the public to share their stories using many modalities such as, text, artworks, photographs, performances, and hypermedia. Public history, as a field, also involves the consideration of many artefacts in different modalities, which can be combined together in different ways within transmedia narratives. The concept of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006) is widely used by scholars who usually research fictional genres, but this paper uses transmedia narratives to specify its application to non-fiction public history projects. Transmedia narratives allow for the incorporation of different interpretations on behalf of historians, contributions provided by different publics, and for the development of non-linear narrative paths within a single digital medium (i.e. 'mothership narrative') and/or the presentation of multiple interpretations across different media.

Thus, this paper addresses the theoretical and practical implications behind the question of how authority in historiography and narrative

authorial control can be shared through transmedia productions for historical events with conflicting points of view. We first present a state of the art in current practices in public history and transmedia narrative design. We then discuss the theoretical implications of sharing authority on history with the publics and how this impacts authorial control within transmedia narrative design. In the end, the level of authority shared depends on the narrative(s) being communicated and it impacts the practical design of a transmedia narrative production. Therefore, we rethink the co-creation process and present three methods of sharing authority and narrative control with examples to highlight how future public history projects can share authority when developing transmedia narrative productions.

The convergence of public participation in history and transmedia narrative designs

The relations between sources, historical interpretations and narratives have raised many debates. Historians have traditionally struggled with the concept of narratives. Many scholars do agree that narratives are needed in the recording, describing and explaining of historical developments (Meuter 2011). A simple chronicle of events linked together by dates 'cannot generate understanding because such understanding can be achieved only if a specifically narrative connection is established between the recorded dates' (Meuter 2011, para 10). However, White (1973) went further and argued that notable historians in the 19th century modelled real events into an artificial narrative form that patterned existing narrative genres, such as romance and tragedy, which transposes value judgements onto the events of the past and attributes further meaning. Although narrativization of historical events can come at the expense of objectivity as there is no ontological or epistemological objectivity outside a frame of reference, narrative makes something visible that may otherwise be unperceivable (Meuter 2011 para 11). Therefore, narrativised history is an imperfect representation of past events, but it is through these narratives that we can form meaning and understandings of what came before.

The production of historical narratives has changed in the last few decades in relation to new definitions of authorship. The participatory dimension of public history has particularly developed with the rise of the Internet and digital participatory tools (Adair, Filene, and Koloski 2011). Once limited to local and punctual participation, the Internet offers

opportunities for international, transnational and synchronous participation. Historians have started to develop and discuss new digital public history practices where users are at the centre of the process (Noiret, Tebeau, and Zaagsma 2022). Some projects, based on user-generated content, have demonstrated how public participation can contribute to reframing decision-making in public history (Schrum et al. 2011). For instance, the *September 11 Digital Archive* relied on public contribution of materials, photographs, testimonies to build one of the first digital born participatory archives (Roy Rosenzweig Center 2002–2022). The public's participation impacted the overall decision-making process in public history creation. Frisch's (1990) concept of a shared authority helps describe the relationship between historians and narrators in oral history. It has been used – sometimes loosely – to support public participation in public history. Through public participation and shared authority, projects have included multiple, and sometimes conflicting, narratives of the past. It is therefore crucial to explore how participatory projects handle, deal with and frame knowledge production through different media (i.e. transmedia).

Transmedia storytelling, a concept coined by Jenkins (2006, 21), emerged in response to 'media convergence-one that places new demands on consumers and depends on the active participation of knowledge communities. Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making'. This paper applies this world making to historical events and places. Transmedia stories must consist of three (or more) narrative storylines within the same fictional universe on multiple platforms in order to clarify that 'narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms' (Producers Guild of America in Ryan 2016, 3). While the most popular transmedia stories are fictional, the definition and application of this type of story design has been adopted in non-fiction contexts, such as journalism and history/heritage too. True transmedia stories, whether they be fictional, non-fiction or a hybrid, use different media to communicate different narrative content, which form one story when combined, rather than being a single story that appears in adaptations across different media. Thus, reiterating our use of the term narrative over story.

To date, the method of transmedia narrative design has been developed using two common methods. The first method is the 'snowball effect' where a story becomes so popular that it results in prequels, sequels, and fan fiction. The second is a 'system' where a story was

conceived from the beginning to develop over many different media platforms (Ryan 2013, 363). The snowball effect and system-style transmedia narrative designs are most often seen in fictional genres in franchises like *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*. The system design is used more rarely in a commercial context than the snowball effect (e.g. *The Matrix* and *The Blair Witch Project)*, which is likely because it takes much longer to create and thus requires a higher production budget. A third method, developed by Basaraba (2020), is a bottom-up method of remixing a nonfiction 'mothership' narrative – a term used by industry creators to describe the main or origin story. As historians aim at piecing together what has happened in the past, transmedia narratives created for public audiences can be put together based on these fragments of history, which appear in multiple media such as artefacts, textual documents, photographs and oral histories. The result of this process can be the development of a remixed 'mothership' transmedia narrative that is constructed from the different media pieces.

The multiple different components of a transmedia narrative can be strategically pieced together and reflexively reference the other pieces so that people can experience a narrative from both sides of a conflicting story (or choose to view single interpretations). Another advantage of transmedia is that it can be used to target different audiences using different media. For example, if a public history transmedia project is covering a conflict in a border region (i.e. between two countries), the narrative could be covered through a collection of digitised newspaper articles in one language for people who lived through the conflict, and also in the form of video interview clips from citizens on the other side of the border in their language. Applying a transmedia design, these two pieces of the narrative can represent two different sides of a historical event and target two opposing audiences, but these pieces can also be purposefully brought together into a new medium, such as an interactive web exhibition, to showcase both sides of a conflict and target a new audience (e.g. international students studying history). Transmedia storytelling allows a conflicting narrative to be communicated to different audiences through different media while also representing a larger storyworld that can be combined and reviewed from a more global perspective. This creates different layers of understanding of history. For example, transmedia narratives could be developed for conflicting narratives or perspectives of colonialism. What is or was the perspective of the colonists? What is or was the perspective of the colonised? How is this history viewed today? These perspectives can be presented in either

a single medium or purposefully connected in a transmedia narrative so the different interpretations or viewpoints can be experienced in a medium that best suits the nature of the history being communicated (e.g. textual, visual, archeological). Transmedia design allows for historical narratives to continue to evolve and expand into new media (i.e. additional pieces) as interpretations of the past change or as new historical evidence is discovered.

Transmedia narratives also allow for public participation through contributing via social media, which is particularly opportunistic for public history projects (Steinhauer 2021). Since transmedia stories are told across different media, it allows the creators to use existing media platforms to their advantage. For example, the members of the public already engage with various social media platforms and they willingly create living histories of their lives, cultural customs and social practices. Social media provides a feasible tool for reaching larger publics and requesting their participation in contributing to transmedia stories through, for example, crowdsourcing historical documents, oral histories, as well as opinions and debates on conflicting narratives. This allows for missing perspectives from history to be gathered and shared. In summary, we argue that strategically designed transmedia narratives can allow for multiple different interpretations on 'one larger narrative' of history to be represented in different media, or the same media if desired, by the story creators to allow for a debate or purposefully provide a comparative contrast of two sides of a pivotal event for instance. Drawing upon these alternative sources (e.g. crowdsourced contributions) can result in 'polyvocal'[1] transmedia narratives, which have been demonstrated to work well in examples within critical historical geography (Llewellyn 2003), digital technologies in museums (Arrigoni and Galani 2019), and interactive documentaries (Green et al. 2017).

Opportunities for presenting conflicting narratives across different media

Museums are common and well-known places for communicating history and heritage, and they can offer new options for engaging with the publics using new media. In the past three decades many 'museums have embraced the narrative turn', where they have transformed from a knowledge (and collections) based institution to an 'experience' and 'audience-oriented' institution using narration (Noy 2020, 1). As Noy (2020, 2) explains, objects and their accompanying labels within

museums represent a narrative grammar and 'building blocks of historical narration' that unfolds during a visit. Many museums are also incorporating public or visitor participation through eliciting their contributions (Noy 2020, 5). Museums are continuing to move towards incorporating a more narrative-like experience for visitors, and they are using multiple different media to do so. As Kidd (2018, 23) summarises, museums are telling stories through transmedia content such as through interactive installations in exhibits, online games, performances, workshops, online web portals, social networks, digital archives and crowdsourcing stories and memories from the publics. Since publics are increasingly sharing their cultural customs and life experiences using various media and in crowdsourced public history projects, it creates more space and opportunities for creating dialogues that go beyond indoor museum spaces. Transmedia narratives by design allow creators to include voices or contributions from the publics (i.e. polyvocality) and museums have been working towards polyvocal exhibitions for a number of years (Arrigoni and Galani 2019). A transmedial approach allows for a cohesive experience that strategically exists within different media and that can include conflicting narratives.

Another medium that has immense potential to serve as a transmedia 'mothership' (i.e. one piece of a transmedia story) for conflicting narratives are interactive documentaries (iDocs). IDocs can propose different interpretations of a same topic or event and provide interactors with the ability to choose which pieces of the narrative to explore. A prime example of this is *Gaza Szerdot* (2008), where the authors Lotz, Ronez, and Szalat visually presented a two-sided web interface with a video interview from Gaza (a city in Palestine) and Sderot (a city in Israel) to artfully show the contrasting perspective of the residents living in these two cities at war, considering they are only separated by a distance of three kilometres. This iDoc visually and narratively presents multiple sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in one medium so that the interactor can access the information without needing to navigate to different interfaces or different media. The interactor can virtually explore the stories on either side of the border and navigate through a map of the region by the themes covered in the video interviews with residents. IDocs are not the only method of portraying different sides of a single narrative or historical event, but the medium offers many affordances that allow the storytelling to work on multiple levels from a semantic and visual level while giving the interactor some agency to make choices of which pieces of the narrative they want to view. While *Gaza Szerdot*

(2008) was published by one producer, a similar approach could be used to create an iDoc interface composed by two different authors/producers with opposing viewpoints or interpretations of a historical event, for example. On the other hand, using different media can also be a different strategic choice for creators who wish to cover controversial or multiple perspectives of a historical event and target different audiences through these separate media. Considering the demographics and viewpoints of the target audience(s) is important for selecting which medium to use. For example, younger audiences may prefer to consume content on the social media platform(s) that are currently popular or trending at the time, while older generations of local residents may prefer printed newspapers they have consulted for decades. If a targeted audience is not already using a specific medium in their daily life, it can be more difficult to reach them by encouraging them to participate in a new medium which they are not familiar with. However, strategically choosing how a transmedia narrative is presented can enhance public consumption and understandings of the histories or differing sides of the story.

Another example of a transmedia narrative that artfully presents an alternative, or conflicting, viewpoint is the Sochi Project (by Hornstra and van Bruggen). Rampazzo Gambarato (2016) categorises the narrative as 'slow journalism within the transmedia space' where she explains how the project creators, Hornstra and Bruggen slowly developed the narrative over five years, from 2009 to 2013. It was financed by 650 people who donated to the project through crowdsourced funding. Sochi is a subtropical tourist resort that is also a zone of conflict while over 12 billion euros were invested in the Olympic Games but on the other side of the mountains lies the poorest region of Russia, thus creating a series of political, economic and social conflicts. This slow journalism transmedia story was communicated using an iDoc and was available in Dutch, English and Russian; digital publications, and social media including Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest; printed media including newspapers, cards, sketchbooks; and an exhibition inside a building (Gamarato 2015). This transmedia journalism project provided a contrast to the Sochi Olympics propaganda that aimed to distract the world from serious social issues within Russia, such as in the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community and the transformation of the city from an inexpensive retreat for the working-class to a luxurious location for wealthy visitors. The multiple sides to the Olympic events in Sochi were investigated and presented in different media that reached different

audiences ranging from the local exhibition visitors to the global stage as facilitated by social media.

These examples of nonfiction transmedia narratives highlight different methods of construction from an artistic and practical level to show how conflicting narratives on topics of regional politics can be presented to public individuals. This can be extended to topics and issues in public history. Transmedia can present a side-by-side contrasting narrative that stands as a completed piece and/or it can slowly disseminate one narrative in different media targeting different audiences serving as pieces of a larger narrative as it unfolds. The latter is often the case with history because our perspectives change over time due to new information being uncovered or new societal perspectives that were less prominent at the time of the narrative's creation (e.g. deprioritising narratives of women or colonised populations). Thus, conflicting narratives can arise.

The idea of 'conflicting narratives' is used in this paper in reference to opposing or alternative interpretations on the same topic (or issue) rather than exclusively narratives about conflicts, such as war, refugee movements or other 'post-conflict' narratives as it has been in European studies literature (Obradovic 2013; O'dowd and Komarova 2013). McRoberts (2016, 2) explains that there is a complex

> relationship between truth, memory and narrative or storytelling in post-conflict societies that raises a host of questions about whose voice gets heard?; whose story getsrecognition?; in which context?; through what types of medium? And, how, if at all, does any transformation occur through the process of storytelling?

While this is true in post-conflict narratives, these questions also arise in the context of public history where there are often 'official' and 'alternative' interpretations. Official or formal interpretations may include state and public bodies' publications, which can be problematic because they often present a single and dominant narrative that may exclude, misrepresent, or marginalise certain groups (Hackett and Rolston 2009 as cited in McRoberts 2016, 3). Sources of 'authority', whether they be cultural heritage and memory institutions, scholars, historians, or journalists, can be referred to collectively as 'gatekeepers' of knowledge or publications. While 'unofficial' or alternative interpretations often take the form of fiction, documentary film, oral histories, performance, and community-based initiatives (McRoberts 2016, 3). These alternative stories are also widely communicated by the publics using various social media platforms. A key challenge with community-based oral history

archives is, for instance, that these stories are often 'unable to transcend to the community from which they are produced' (McRoberts 2016, 3). Thus, transmedia narratives, which deploy one story across multiple media, present opportunities for public history projects to engage with polyvocal narratives due to the affordances (i.e. advantages) provided through the possibilities of the overarching narrative design. We argue that transmedia narratives could provide a step towards including conflicting interpretations as well as different historical content producers, namely 'official' and 'unofficial'. It is noted that previous academic studies in non-fiction transmedia storytelling topics have looked at how it can be applied to education (Rodrigues and Bidarra 2016; Dickinson-Delaporte, Gunness, and McNair 2020; Kalogeras 2019) and the museum experience (Tosca and Klastrup 2016; Kidd 2016; Wyman et al. 2011; Falk et al. 2008). However, there is a lack of focus in the existing literature about how transmedia technologies as well as analog media can be used for creating a transmedia 'mothership' where multiple media are remixed and recombined into a new larger narrative that can be debated or even offer conflicting sides to a shared historical event.

Challenges in decision-making for narrative control in public history projects

The presence of multiple narratives in public history or cultural heritage projects questions not only their relations to each other but also the overall decision-making. The following section presents several approaches on how to deal with multiple narratives and their relation with authority and expertise.

Strong control versus radical trust

Cultural institutions have traditionally developed strong control over the historical narratives they produce and communicate to their publics. This partly derived from the institutions' assigned function. In the 19th century, public museums aimed to educate and inform visitors and citizens (Bennett 2006). Curators and collection managers looked at groups and communities as, at best, sources and donors, but rarely as actors of the production of history and cultural heritage. This top-down approach resulted in many museums and other cultural institutions acting as producers of official historical narratives that silenced minority groups and communities (Trouillot 1995). Communication was often conceived

as a unilateral one-way process in which users and visitors were recipients of historical narratives produced by cultural institutions. Embodied in the museum field through the fact of letting the objects speak for themselves – although objects are actually always part of an interpretation and design planning – the argument for minimum control over narratives relates to an absence of mediation. Despite the rise of participatory projects, some cultural institutions still conceive their collections, exhibitions, and websites as top-down communication processes over which they keep a strong control.

In total opposition to producing narratives under strong control, other institutions have opted for radical trust. This concept initially came from for-profit marketing and advertising and called for unmonitored production by users (Douma 2006). The absence of mediation is actually a very old archival practice. Archiving oral history, for instance, is based on this approach of letting narrators talk with little or no interference from the interviewer. The difference being that oral historians choose and ask the questions. Some recent projects of archiving COVID-19 memories are based on a similar approach of giving entire freedom to individuals to stress what is relevant to remember and archive. Many museums, archives, libraries and other research centres have launched user-generated collections of items and testimonies dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the *Coronarchiv* in Germany does not moderate the contents sent and uploaded by users (International Federation for Public History 2020). Radical trust in users goes further and relates to a broader trend based on user-centered architecture and user-generated data that arose with the Web 2.0. Users are no longer passive consumers as they can interact with each other and with digital content (Ridge 2014), which gives them power to choose and interpret contents from unmediated narratives that materialized through different ways. In another example, StoryCorps (2003) has archived more than 50,000 recordings at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, which were gathered from organised story-booths, door-to-door appointments, and participants recording themselves. Thus, in this case, the narrators had a tremendous amount of control over their own image and how they were represented.

The act of controlling and mediating narratives depends very much on the process. In most projects, participants are able to upload contents, but they do not take part in selecting or interpreting the data – those roles remain in the hands of whoever is leading the research project (e.g. historians, other principal investigators, creative practitioners). If

collecting unmediated documents is part of the archiving process, interpreting, narrating and communicating history in cultural institutions raises specific issues. We touch here upon the core of history and heritage production that aim at adding interpretation to unprocessed documents and narratives. This is a crucial argument for Gardner (2010) in his criticism of the use of radical trust in museums. Gardner (2010, 53) posits that 'looking to the public for content and direction' has become the next step in public history and that it forces historians to 'giv[e] up control'. He refers to the discussion over radical trust that 'means letting the public (via communities) determine the future of public history'. He opposes knowledge to opinion, explaining that the former is a process based on steps, tools, and methodology. He argues, knowledge and opinion are not similar, and 'we need to resist the current impulse to welcome (and thereby validate) any and all opinions' (Gardner 2010, 54). Shared authority is not synonymous with relativism, which is the idea that one interpretation or vision of the past is just as acceptable as another. If raw materials (e.g. unprocessed interviews) are important for the creation of sources and archives, a process of interpretation is needed to understand, expose, contextualise the complexity of the past. The question of the relations between knowledge and narratives is at the core of participatory practices in public history. Ultimately, Gardner (2020, 60) invites historians to share authority rather than giving it up. Bryans (2019, para 9) concurs and asserts, 'while sharing authority requires openness to multiple perspectives, it does not mean ignoring the historical method, historiography, or well-established facts that historians use to craft a coherent and defensible interpretation of the past'. Thus, Lubar (1995, 46) warns about the delicate balancing act of co-creation:

> Sharing too little authority means that the audience will lose interest in or be unable to follow the narrative; it over privileges the curator's point of view. Sharing too much authority, on the other hand, means simply telling the audience what they already know, or what they want to know, reinforcing memory, not adding new dimensions of knowledge, new ways of approaching problems, new understanding.

In the context of transmedia, as more participatory narratives are being co-developed by scholars, creatives, and different publics – which are increasingly using digital media – it raises the practical challenge of maintaining some authorial control over the narratives being developed.

This challenge to authorial control has been termed the 'narrative paradox' by Aylett (1999) who explained that the difficulty of 'retaining

the original narrative' is because the audience is actively involved. This is especially the case of virtual environments where the audience becomes a 'user', 'interactor' or even a 'co-producer' of the narrative. In other words, they are active participants in the digital narrative's unfolding, rather than passively consuming one sequential narrative. The first question for the narrative creator is how much of the narrative control can be relaxed to allow for change, and secondly how much the user is permitted to participate in the narrative (Aylett 1999, 83). The level of control on either side is key to how successful the resulting narrative is in terms of whether a narrative is communicated to the audience or users, or whether it is simply a curation of anecdotes as in a case of radical trust, for example. On the other hand, when multiple narratives are co-produced by 'experts' and the different members of the public, in the case of shared authority, there needs to be a larger underlying theme, communication goal, or rationale for constructing the project so that one or more narratives are communicated. As Aylett (1999) explains, in digital media, there is more opportunity to create 'emergent narratives' which are a result of both authorship and the user's interaction with the authored content. Therefore, adopting a user-centered approach to transmedia design impacts the nature of the narratives conveyed and requires a consideration for the amount of authority that is shared with the public. For example, with the increase in the use of mobile phones, it has become easier to use locations for connecting audiences to historical information around them (Leon 2017, 56). The level of strong control versus radical trust will impact the transmedia narrative pieces that may appear across different media, such as museums, on websites, social media platforms or location-based mobile applications.

Sedimented and agonistic theoretical frameworks for interpreting history

As many cultural institutions are increasingly including more public contributions in their display and collections, questions have been raised about how to deal with polyvocality and conflicting narratives. Collaborative processes involve not simply selecting contents that fit an official narrative, but confronting multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the past. The challenge for cultural institutions is to conceive and design inclusive transmedia narratives. Thus sedimented and agnostic frameworks are here discussed within the fields of public history, museums studies, cultural heritage and the science and

technology of communication to highlight the decision-making processes required when sharing authority.

The relations between individual and collective narratives have also evolved according to broader definitions of history and memory. Since Halbwachs' works in the 1920s, collective memories became a social object that could be studied by scholars (Halbwachs 1952). Historians started to engage more with individual and group memories in the 1980s (Lowenthal 1985; Connerton 1989; Nora and Kritzman 1996). They were, at first, very careful to distinguish between memory – the topic of their research – and history (Nora and Kritzman 1996). For instance, Lowenthal (1997, 32) opposed historians who 'while realizing that the past can never be retrieved unaltered . . . still strive for impartial, checkable accuracy, minimizing bias as inescapable but deplorable' and those – he does not call them historians – who 'see bias and error as normal and necessary'. In other words, history would tend to objectivity, while memory would be subjective. Memory is present-oriented, composed of emotions, non-universal since it is supported by social groups, and therefore constantly changing. However, other historians argue that public history offers opportunities to reconsider the relations between history and memory. For instance, Glassberg (1996) argued for public history projects that would include individual and collective memories. Those projects are based on the 'intersection of the intimate and the historical' (Glassberg 2001, 6).

Lloyd and Moore (2015) have further explored this intersection between the individual and the collective, between the intimate and the historical. They discuss how multiple interpretations can co-exist in coherent historical projects through examples from working with local groups in Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. Deriving from co-production and community-based practices in history-making, the concept of sedimented histories can 'hold different accounts of the past alongside one another, accommodating both the histories that people choose to live by and the histories that everyone lives with' (Lloyd and Moore 2015). Their concept was inspired by Samuel's (1999) view of the built environment as 'a sediment of geological strata, a multi-layered reality'. Lloyd and Moore pursue 'where voices and memories are contested or perspectives fragmented, where elements of the past are differently weighted or valued, we are aiming to create a "sediment" of connected, but not necessarily uniform histories'. These 'connected but not necessarily uniform histories' open the door for critically constructed

narratives that include multiple interpretations of the past. For example, the *Everyday Lives in War* exhibition during the First World War centenary in the United Kingdom takes into account the radically different interpretations held by individuals and groups across the region (Lloyd and Moore 2015). The historical interpretations differed between foci on the military perspectives, the social dimensions, the sacrifice on the Front or at the Home Front, on the young men named on memorials or lesser heard stories for instance from the population from asylums (Lloyd and Moore 2015). The project showed specific interpretations of the War while connecting them to broader historical contexts and narratives. Nevertheless, questions remain about how those connections materialise in displays and transmedia productions, especially when interpreting conflict.

Some political scientists have proposed other concepts to conceive the production and dissemination of cultural and historical narratives. Mouffe (2005, 2013) has called for a move from cosmopolitan and multicultural towards agnostic frameworks. She argues that, since 1945, the needs for consensus and agreement have led to the marginalization of communities who did not fit the dominant model (Mouffe 2005, 2013). A dominant public sphere – for instance supporting European integration – would have excluded disagreeing communities and narratives for the sake of consensus (Mouffe 2005, 2013). This marginalization of communities and narratives – on both parts of the political spectrum – would have contributed, due to the lack of representation, to the rise of populist politics in the last few decades. Mouffe calls instead for a model based on agonism that includes competing and conflicting voices which are not necessarily leading to consensus but often to a clash of perspectives (Reynolds 2021, 82). In that sense, conflicts and conflicting views are entirely necessary and part of a democratic process. Bull and Hansen (2016) have applied Mouffe's theory to memory studies and have encouraged the presence of conflicting interpretations of the past in the public space. They explain that the absence of space for divergent views in the dominant model has strengthened political instability and tensions in Europe (Bull and Hansen 2016). For example, the European UNREST (2022) project has studied and questioned the concept of agonistic memory in several museums and history projects. Bull and Hansen (2020) conclude that many oral history projects do offer a plurality of narratives but always within a 'consensual over-arching perspective'. Applied to public history and transmedia narratives, agonism would invite practitioners to not only include multiple narratives, but also to disregard a quest for consensus and instead to accept conflicts of

interpretation as a necessary and fruitful mark of democratic understanding of the past 'even if their particular perspective is not in keeping with the traditionally dominant narrative' (Reynolds 2021, 83). In this regard, transmedia narratives could be applied to conflicting interpretations of the past.

Reynolds similarly suggests that oral history can contribute to more representative public history, not only by showing multiple perspectives but also by accepting conflicting interpretations (Reynolds 2021). He mentions examples from oral history in Rwanda, Bosnia, Argentina, Sierra-Leone and South Africa in which oral history helped go beyond gatekeepers and dominant narratives (Reynolds 2021, 79). Oral history can be coupled with material culture in agonistic frameworks too. For example, in Northern Ireland, the 2008 Healing Through Remembering (HTR) exhibition explored the different interpretations of the Northern Irish conflict. In *Everyday Items Transformed by Conflict*, HTR asked people to provide and comment on everyday objects that they thought would symbolise the conflict in Northern Ireland. The multiple voices and interpretations represented the complexity of the conflict. Using the work of the UNREST project on agonism in museums, Reynolds recently connected oral history and agonism for an exhibition – *Voices of 68* – at the Ulster Museum in Northern Ireland in 2019 about the history of the conflict (Black and Reynolds 2020). Combining video testimonies with images and documentary footage, the exhibition presented a wide range of interpretations from former activists, participants, bystanders, interested observers and others well placed to comment (Reynolds 2021, 85). The exhibition moved away from a narrating voice and included previously marginalised understandings of the past. The project did not shy away from radical multiple and conflicting interpretations of the past. In line with agonism, instead of a common ground and consensus in sedimented narratives, the exhibition displayed the complexities of the memories in Northern Ireland (Reynolds 2021, 85). Many visitors were 'uncomfortable' with this non-traditional and multi/conflicting narratives. One visitor wrote, 'the exhibition at the Ulster Museum is unsettling – being confronted by some narratives about '68 that you believe are wrong. But that is the point, and it is quite discomforting (. . .) One has to be prepared to listen to other viewpoints' (Reynolds 2021, 87). Although more studies should be undertaken, agonistic frameworks offer innovative opportunities for transmedia design and inspire us to rethink the framework of co-production with different publics.

A way forward: supporting shared authority in transmedia narrative co-production

Finding a balance between strict control and radical trust means staying away from a zero-sum understanding of expertise where one group of participants would gain authority at the detriment of others. Most public history and cultural heritage projects rely, by definition, on collaboration among many different participants. An exhibition is often based on teamwork that can involve curators, collection managers, education specialists, scholars, and designers. Koloski therefore proposes the consideration of a 'combined expertise', namely an 'approach to collaboration in which practitioners from different fields not only share their skills but open themselves up to the varied perspectives and values of different disciplines' (Adair, Filene, and Koloski 2011, 13). In addition to professional practitioners, 'combined expertise' can also come from 'community experts who have gained knowledge through their own lived experiences' and 'who ha[ve] gained authentic knowledge from a particular point of view' (Lyon, Nix, and Shrum 2017, 35). For instance with museums, what the institution '"lets go" of is not expertise but the assumption that the museum has the last word on historical interpretation' (Adair, Filene, and Koloski 2011, 13). As such, public history's collaborative practices do not deny producers' authority and expertise, but replaces them in a broader process of production.

In 2013 in the United States, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Legacy Project (SNCC) formed a partnership with the Center for Documentary Studies and the University Libraries at Duke University, to chronicle historic struggles for voting rights. The project's content creation drew upon three different realms of combined expertise. The 'new content was led by the activists and informed by the scholars, and its presentation was structured by the librarians. Together, the participants saw themselves as true partners in the production of knowledge, with SNCC veterans leading the way' (Forner 2020). Combined expertise does not work as a simple sum, but rather as an agreed upon participatory model. Combined expertise also relates to the user-generated approach and open authority. Defined as 'the coming together of expert authority with user-generated content on free and open platforms', some historians have embraced the concept of open authority within publication (Phillips and McDevitt-Parks 2012). Manuscripts are published open access where the expert peer reviewers publish and publicly share their reviews on the platform, and members of the public

can comment directly. Both the peer reviews and the public comments are part of the digital production and may even be incorporated in analog published formats. These approaches to shared authority and expertise can be translated into specific transmedia narrative design methods for public history projects. To date, three main methods of involving public participation (as a project collaborator) have been identified in transmedia narrative production.

The most-frequently used forms of public participation within these types of transmedia narrative projects are digital civic labour, crowdsourcing, and co-authorship. Digital civic labour is often limited and task-based such as, reading, translating or creating metadata for historical documents or archives. Crowdsourcing involves collecting individual histories or public opinions for the development of archives and community heritage information. Finally, co-authored transmedia narratives can have multiple ways of sourcing public contributions. Each of these approaches comes with different levels of authorial control and participation of non-experts. The selected method of sharing authority in transmedia narrative design depends on a number of factors in terms of the overall project goals, the team members involved, and the desired narrative output.

Firstly, digital civic labour provides experts with the most control because they seek assistance with a very specific task and they limit the user's participation. One example that used this method was the Letters of 1916–1923, a participatory digital humanities project in Ireland (Letters of 1916–1923, 2016). The project involved creating a digital record of letters written by Irish residents who wrote about politics, romance, public administration and medicine to reveal what life was like in the early 20th century. The project garnered over 2,000 volunteers who transcribed digitally scanned, handwritten letters into typed machine-readable digital archives. The letters were categorised based on a variety of topics including the Irish Civil War, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and World War I (Letters of 1916–1923, 2016). The call for participation was open to anyone who had access to a computer, Wi-Fi and could read and write in English. This method allowed for a high level of control on behalf of the project leaders because the volunteers typed up transcriptions of handwritten letters so their task was clear, limited, and vetted for accuracy after the letters were transcribed. It allowed people to participate in a way that contributed to a better understanding of public history in Ireland during the stated time period since the transcribed letters were curated into categories and

readable online, which provided further insight into the everyday lives of literate Irish citizens.

Secondly, crowdsourcing can provide a moderate level of control because the experts, who carry the narrative authority in terms of decision-making, can choose which items to incorporate into the transmedia narratives. Transmedia narrative creators in this case maintain a high level of authorial control because they often create a menu of options to help curate historical facts and images that are presented in a website. For example, in the United States, one of the most popular among digital public history practitioners is the templated platform called Curatescape. Curatescape allows crowdsourced materials about urban heritage to be geo-located using Omeka content management software (Curatescape 2023). It has been used in professional contexts and by public history programs as a student training tool – especially for urban spaces. Similarly, Historypin.org is a platform that hosts over 365,000 stories across 2,600 cities around the world with the aim of bringing communities and organisations together (Historypin 2020). Historypin allows users to upload images, a title, location, description and they permit 'likes', comments, 'repins' and sharing among other users. The level of authority shared with the members of the public is moderate for Curatescape and Historypin because they provide the ability for users to upload and contribute content, but users are limited by the technological infrastructure provided. For example with Historypin, the text contributions appear under Creative Commons licensing, but the copyright of uploaded media files (such as images and soundbites) remain with the individual contributors who are free to choose which copyrights they want to attribute at the time of upload. Historypin does not moderate uploaded content, but users must comply with the terms and conditions, and content can be removed if other users file a complaint. Therefore, Historypin operates based on radical trust with contributors, but also provides them with some authorial constraints within the software.

Thirdly, co-authorship of transmedia narratives is the most challenging and complex form of public participation because whoever is leading the project production shares a high level of authorial control with the users. There are many ways of developing creative collaborative methods, but two examples that are discussed here are iDocs and community-based narrative workshops. Firstly, iDocs facilitate user engagement with the historical materials and provide an opportunity for producers and users to think about changes in historical interpretations in different (not

merely chronological) narrative paths. IDocs are particularly interesting for difficult and controversial events because they can offer multiple interpretations on historical events within one medium. For example the iDoc, *Sentenced to Transportation: A Virtual Tour of Australia's Convict Past* (Basaraba 2020), involved remixing texts, images and videos from user-generated content and expert-produced content. Topics were modelled based on TripAdvisor, Instagram, and YouTube public data to identify the interests of visitors to the 11 UNESCO World Heritage Australian Convict Sites. This bottom-up material was then remixed along with content gathered from expert sources (e.g. academic journals, official heritage site and museum websites, onsite oral narratives provided by Australian guides) as well as corporate materials (e.g. tourism guidebooks, tourism marketing brochures). The result was a non-linear collection of curated narratives focused on and multiple narrative themes that can be explored based on a user's topical interests. For instance, a user could engage with the historical event from the perspective of the UK magistrates, the female convicts, or how colonial convictism impacted local Indigenous populations. Thus, iDocs allow for an audio-visual presentation of multiple sources of information to provide different interpretations on historical events. Transmedia narrative creators can share authority with present-day publics who can contribute content or topical interests, choose their own narrative path, and better understand, contextualise and discuss what happened from the perspective of different groups.

Secondly, another popular methodology of sharing authority with different communities is project lead 'co-creation workshops'. For example, the *Sharing Stories* project resulted in a collection of 18 digital stories about Queensland heritage situated around the Kelvin Grove area in Brisbane (Australia), which were produced during two workshops (Klaebe et al. 2007, 4). The oral histories about childhood, work and military service in the area that were collected during this project resulted in a transmedia expansion including a book, website, and artworks. The public contributors authored the stories, which were published on a customised content management framework that made use of Google Maps API so members of the public could digitise their histories and tag associated places (Klaebe et al. 2007, 7). Klaebe et al. (2007, 11) argued that, by empowering citizens and training them on how to use digital technologies to tell stories, and 'if care is taken by the public historian to ensure the process is a positive experience for participants' then it can

help reveal the concept of the 'invisible nation' where collective social history is uncovered and shared.

These established and still developing methodologies for sharing authority in transmedia production offer particularly useful methods for collaboration between historians, other experts, and different publics. Digital media has allowed for more opportunities to include alternative interpretations because members of the public can be taught how to contribute directly to the narratives. These interpretations can appear in a single platform (e.g. a website, idoc, mobile app) or be presented in a different medium separate from the mainstream historical interpretation provided by experts.

Conclusion: creating transmedia projects for conflicting narratives in public history

As we have shown, transmedia provides opportunities to reconsider historians' and other experts' relationship with publics as potential participants in the co-construction of conflicting narratives of the past. Multiple materials from different sources and public contributions can be displayed within indoor spaces such as museums, outdoor spaces such as heritage sites, and recreated in digital environments. When dealing with conflicting narratives in transmedia design, it is important for researchers and transmedia narrative creators to discuss in advance how much authority will be shared with the publics, how this will be implemented, and how it will impact the resulting user's (or audiences') narrative experience. A key challenge going forward remains how to balance shared authority with narrative control for historical topics. Radical trust can indeed lead to a collection of unrelated anecdotes or one-sided views, while strong control misses the opportunity to discover and include untold histories. There is no single approach for applying transmedia narrative design to participatory public history projects, but this paper highlighted three commonly used methods in history and heritage projects with digital productions to date.

In the future, these types of transmedia narratives can be used not only to involve different publics in co-creative practices, but also to foster or inspire dialogues on conflicting interpretations of historical events. In a general context of polarisation of opinions – reinforced by the general network structure of social media – participatory transmedia narratives on historical and cultural heritage topics bring about new opportunities to provide inclusive frameworks of understanding that allow divergent

interpretations of the past. This is particularly relevant in contexts of segregation, discrimination, identity, political changes or cultural wars. Applied to transmedia design, shared authority can help the publics to understand and practice the construction of historical interpretations of the past. The ability to use different media also allows these conflicting narratives to be expressed in ways that suit the subject matter, such as through curated installations, geo-located content, interactive documentaries (White 1973) or a combination of these and others. Sharing authority can result in unexpected dialogues on past events and an ability to reflect upon the past to help make changes or progress decisions about the future.

Note

1. Polyvocality is used to mean multiple voices, interpretations, or narratives.

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