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## **MEDIATISATION AND INSTITUTIONS OF PUBLIC MEMORY: DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND THE APOLOGY**

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### **Abstract**

Institutions of public memory are increasingly undertaking co-creative media initiatives in which community members create content with the support of institutional expertise and resources. This paper discusses one such initiative: the State Library of Queensland's 'Responses to the Apology', which used a collaborative digital storytelling methodology to co-produce seven short videos capturing individual responses to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples'. In examining this program, we are interested not only in the juxtaposition of 'ordinary' responses to an 'official' event, but also in how the production *and display* of these stories might also demonstrate a larger mediatisation of public memory.

## **Background**

‘Mediatisation’ is beginning to emerge as an important concept in studies of media.<sup>1</sup> The concept refers, in its simplest form, to the integration of media into institutions whose core business is something other than media, like political, religious, and historical institutions, to the extent that ‘institutional activities are performed through both interactive and mass media’.<sup>2</sup> In other words, mediatisation—in contrast to ‘mediation’, which is often tacitly defined as a neutral or transparent process—assumes that such institutions not only conduct their activities through media, but that in doing so they become dependent upon and guided by the ‘institutional and technological modus operandi of the media’.<sup>3</sup> Institutions of public memory are an example of such institutions: they are publicly-funded and physically-located organisations that mediatise the ‘intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions’ through their collection, preservation, and display of cultural artefacts.<sup>4</sup> They range from cultural institutions with broad charters—like the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, which is both a museum of and a production space for Australian ‘moving images’ in film, television, and digital media—to more conventional repositories, such as libraries, galleries, museums, and other public archives.

This institutional mediatisation of public memory has occurred, in part, through the increasing emphasis on online presence, with institutions typically developing digital collections for or offering digital access to their collections on a website. This digital mediatisation is connected to profound shifts in the ways in which institutions of public memory view their social value and obligations to citizens in a digital age. National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), for instance, states in its ‘Reimagining Libraries’ vision statement: ‘In collaboration, the National, State and Territory Libraries of Australia and New Zealand will become leaders in empowering people to create, discover, use and transform our

collections, content and global information resources'.<sup>5</sup> Over the last decade institutions of public memory, but especially larger institutions like state or national museums and libraries, have also increasingly employed co-creative media programs, or programs that facilitate community members to collaboratively create content with institution staff and/or resources.<sup>6</sup> Such programs are used to 'draw new audiences to their collections' as well as increase community engagement in demonstrable ways.<sup>7</sup>

The 'interactive' nature of such programs is not in itself new: Peter Vergo describes how institutions of public memory (he writes specifically of museums) have incorporated community interaction with content since at least the 1860s, most notably through public lectures about and demonstrations of displays.<sup>8</sup> This version of interaction with content, in recent years, is more likely to take the form of audio guides or online tours,<sup>9</sup> demonstrating how 'deeply embedded' media have been and continue to be with the 'what, who, how, and why of public memory'.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, while communities have come to expect some form of 'interaction' with the content available at institutions of public memory, 'any artefacts which [community members] create are not normally collected, catalogued and made part of the institutions' collections'.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, where community co-creative programs differ from the (by now) standard interactivity of content is that these programs are specifically designed to enable community members to co-create some of the materials that, by virtue of being collected and archived, will come to constitute public memory. They are, in other words, explicitly organised around—as in the case of the digital storytelling program that we will focus on in this paper—recording *and displaying* 'ordinary' peoples' stories, or vernacular expressions, alongside the 'official' histories with which institutions of public memory have long been associated.

This is a trend that is occurring alongside, but quite distinctly from, the broader shift toward a more participatory online culture, featuring the increased visibility and significance of user-created content and online social networks.<sup>12</sup> The development of increased user participation as part of increased digitisation and mediatisation of institutions of public memory has also brought into question the traditional institutional authority that ‘official’ archives of public memory were assumed to wield. As well as questions about how institutions of public memory may need to alter their own practices as part of a participatory turn, and in response to the burgeoning of popular archives such as YouTube,<sup>13</sup> there has also been a recent interest in a turn to participatory public history, where vernacular memory (e.g. raw oral history material) is presented alongside official accounts.<sup>14</sup> Against this backdrop of institutional and media change, the specific area of digital storytelling is a useful focal point for exploring the ways in which institutions of public memory are reconfiguring their own practices as part of the broader mediatisation of public memory.

## **Aims**

This paper is broadly interested in the mediatisation of public memory in Australia, with specific reference to those contexts where institutions of public memory engage in the commissioning, collection and display of rich media content created with members of their constituent communities. To consider this, we discuss the State Library of Queensland’s ongoing digital storytelling program, ‘Queensland Stories’. We focus specifically on the 2008 ‘Responses to the Apology’ project,<sup>15</sup> in which SLQ collaborated with Indigenous community leaders to document and collect responses to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s ‘Apology to Indigenous Australians’ proffered in the House of Representatives in early 2008. The Apology was in itself an intensely mediatised event and one that, like other official apologies, drew on personal memory and functioned as a public rewriting of Australia’s

national history.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, we consider a series of questions, including: to what extent does the juxtaposition of ‘ordinary’ or ‘vernacular’ responses to Rudd’s official political apology represent an example of participatory public history? Does the State Library of Queensland’s formal co-creation, collection and display of these digital stories function to complicate the dominant mediation of Rudd’s Apology or, conversely, does the institutionalisation of these stories ‘condense’ their diverse responses in a way that enables a ‘consensus view of the past to emerge’?<sup>17</sup> Finally, we briefly consider the project in the context of participatory online media more generally, and their implications for institutions of public memory.

### **Digital Storytelling and the State Library of Queensland (SLQ)**

‘Digital storytelling’ has been used to describe a variety of diverse media forms and practices, which, according to Kelly McWilliam, can be broadly categorised into two main conceptions, namely the ‘generic’ and ‘specific’ conceptions:

the *generic* conception of digital storytelling is epitomised by writers like Carolyn Handler Miller who, in her *Digital Storytelling* (2004), uses the term broadly to refer to any media form that digitally facilitates interactive storytelling (from online games to interactive DVDs). The *specific* conception refers to the co-creative filmmaking practice developed by Dana Atchley, Joe Lambert and Nina Mullen in California in the early 1990s, now homed in the Center for Digital Storytelling.<sup>18</sup>

It is the latter form that we focus on in this paper. ‘Specific’ digital storytelling, or what Knut Lundby describes in his introduction to *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories* as the ‘by now classic model of Digital Storytelling’,<sup>19</sup> is a workshop-based format in which ‘ordinary’

people are taught how to create a short (usually 2-5 minute) film. In its simplest form, the film (or ‘digital story’) is comprised of a voice-over and scanned self-sourced photographs, and is typically focused on a particular moment in the participant’s life.<sup>20</sup>

Developed as a specific response to the exclusion of ‘ordinary’ people’s voices in traditional (broadcast) media, digital storytelling was enabled by the increasing accessibility of digital media—particularly personal computers, digital cameras, and scanners—to the domestic market in the late 1980s and 1990s, which until then had been the (prohibitively expensive) domain of experts and industry.<sup>21</sup> The proliferation of cheap access to digital technologies alongside the rapid popularisation of social and participative technologies have increasingly enabled both the mediation *and* mediatisation of individual memories, such as through broader practices of vernacular creativity like the upload of personal videos to video-sharing sites or the emergence of digital scrapbooking sites.<sup>22</sup> These practices demonstrate an ‘unprecedented global accessibility and participation in the creation of memories’.<sup>23</sup>

While digital storytelling is increasingly taken up around the world—for instance, it is already used widely across North America, Europe, and Australasia and, to a lesser extent, across Africa, Asia, and South America, a predictably uneven diffusion given the West’s historical dominance over key mass-market technologies—there are nevertheless trends in its application.<sup>24</sup> A recent international survey of the practice, for example, found that ‘historical’ digital storytelling was one of the most popular applications of the practice, particularly in North America and Australia. ‘Historical’ digital storytelling is typically conducted by community or community-focused public organisations, which use digital storytelling as a tool to collect ‘public history – usually of a particular community, place, or group of community members’.<sup>25</sup> Helen Klæbe notes that such applications offer a

‘powerfully emotive by-product of oral history’, demonstrating digital storytelling as an effective mediatisation of individual oral histories.<sup>26</sup> Digital storytelling, then, is increasingly emerging not only as a tool in mediatising individual memories; it is equally a facilitator of public histories. However, while digital storytelling is increasingly used by some museums, most notably the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (see particularly its Truedesign and ThinkSpace initiatives), it is less popular in libraries, at least in Australia, despite its obvious potential for the collection of documentary heritage.

Thus far, the State Library of Queensland (SLQ), which was established in 1902, remains the ‘only State Library’ but also likely the ‘only library in Australia, to have undertaken a major role in the collection of digital storytelling’.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, SLQ has actively facilitated the production, collection, and display of digital stories as part of its collection of Queensland documentary heritage since 2005, the year it launched the ‘Queensland Stories’ program. Developed through the public library strategic development grant scheme, Queensland Stories began collecting its first ‘digital stories’ through its acquisition of a mobile multimedia laboratory that effectively enabled digital storytelling workshops to be brought to participants, particularly in regional and remote locations.<sup>28</sup> After four years in operation, Queensland Stories has by now collected a large number of digital stories as part of at least twenty-four different digital storytelling projects, from ‘River Stories - Bunya to the Bay’, which was a partnership project between SLQ and the Riverfestival, to the ‘Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame’ collection.<sup>29</sup> The ‘Responses to the Apology’ is one of the more recent, and certainly one of the most politically poignant additions to the Queensland Stories initiative.

## **The Apology and its ‘Responses’**

In his first motion addressed to the House of Representatives on 13 February 2008, newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologised to Australia’s Indigenous peoples and to the Stolen Generations in particular.<sup>30</sup> Rudd apologised for the inequitable and divisive ‘laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments’, for the ‘stony and stubborn and deafening silence’ which had greeted previous requests for a formal apology, and for their collectively traumatic trans-generational impacts on Indigenous Australians.<sup>31</sup> For many observers, however, the Apology was at least a decade overdue, given the unmet call for one in the *Bringing Them Home* report, which had been presented eleven years earlier to then Prime Minister John Howard.<sup>32</sup>

When the Apology was finally offered in 2008, it was a major national event: it was broadcast live on national television and news web sites, in the process becoming one of the most widely shared experiences in the Australian cultural public sphere as well as a moment of official history, as a formal political event documented in government archives.<sup>33</sup> In the media more broadly, it was widely articulated as ‘a defining moment in the nation’s history’, eliciting both intense discussion and a broad range of emotional responses.<sup>34</sup> In this paper, however, we are specifically interested in seven personal responses to the Apology.

‘Responses to the Apology’ was a pilot project facilitated by SLQ in collaboration with Queensland University of Technology and Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>35</sup> Its purpose was to ‘capture’ the ‘thoughts and feelings’ of seven participants’ responses to the ‘historic event’ of the Apology, concentrating directly on the participants’ memories of the events of that day, as well as their reflections on its broader significance and limitations.<sup>36</sup> However the project did not simply ‘capture’ and archive



materials that had emerged in response to the Apology elsewhere: it deliberately sought to facilitate the production of such materials and to embed the co-creative processes of digital storytelling into new areas of the organisation so that the Responses to the Apology program might continue beyond the life of the pilot project. The project was initially designed by SLQ in alignment with their own institutional priorities and public service obligations; it was undertaken, and the stories produced, in collaboration with community and media organisations, but it focused on the personal perspectives of individual Queensland residents. In other words, the project was intended to be a collaborative construction of public memory from the outset—which, as Bodnar writes, ‘emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions’—with its mediatised facilitation of vernacular responses (individual participants) to an official cultural expression (the Apology).<sup>37</sup> Bodnar defines these terms further:

official culture promotes a nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole that mediates an assortment of vernacular interests. [...] Vernacular culture, on the other hand, represents an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole. They are diverse and changing and [...] can even clash with one another. Defenders of such cultures are numerous and intent on protecting values and restating views of reality derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities rather than the ‘imagined’ communities of a large nation. [...] But normally vernacular expressions convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like.<sup>38</sup>

This articulation of ‘official’ and ‘vernacular’ expressions is played out in different ways in the seven digital stories, all of which were collaboratively produced. Of the seven participants, five are Indigenous Australians: Tiga Bayles, manager of Brisbane’s Indigenous

radio station 98.9 FM; Jeremy Robertson, a drama student at the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts; Natalie Alberts, the Assistant Director of the Musgrave Park Culture Centre; well-known Aboriginal poet, Sam Wagan Watson Jr.; and Nadine McDonald-Dowd, Program Coordinator for *kuril dhagun*, SLQ's Indigenous Knowledge Centre. The final two participants are non-Indigenous: Anna Bligh, Queensland's Premier, and Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, the (then) Governor of Queensland.

Several of the stories are conversational in style, because of the oral history interview approach employed in creating the voiceovers;<sup>39</sup> they are largely unscripted, relying on recorded dialogue and video material from interviews. The stories, which were subsequently published by SLQ on its own website and YouTube channel, focus on the individual storyteller's experience of the Apology as an event on the day, as well as on their subsequent reactions. The stories are mediated and mediatised in multiple ways: through the digital storytelling form itself, through the collaborative circumstances of production (in workshops and with facilitators), through the websites they are now distributed on, and through the embedding of the project within discourses of both the State (via the partnership with SLQ) and nation (via the national context and focus of the catalyst event). We return to some of these issues later, but begin by looking briefly at the stories themselves.

Tiga Bayles is a leading figure in Indigenous broadcasting and politics; he was a key figure in establishing Canberra's Aboriginal tent city in 1972, and worked at Radio Redfern in the 1980s. Bayles is currently General Manager of Brisbane-based Indigenous radio station 98.9 FM. His story, which includes images of the past several decades of Indigenous activism with which he has been involved, concludes:

That step taken by the Prime Minister with his apology on that day has made a lot of mainstream Australians feel it is now OK to recognise the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country. As opposed to the previous Prime Minister, where we had racists coming out of the woodwork, it has created a change. It's a new era in our time. And mind you, saying sorry is only the very first step, but it's a major acknowledgement - it was a major event for us. But we've got a long way to go.<sup>40</sup>

The affective power and historical resonances of Bayles' personal narrative are extended through the use of existing visual material drawn from SLQ John Oxley Library collection, in particular, archived images of Indigenous children corralled into lines, and a digital copy of original *Old Legislation Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* document of 1897 that includes the text:

The native is susceptible to all the physical and moral ills of our civilisation, and it is only by complete separation of these two races that we can save him from hopeless contamination eventual extinction, as well as safeguard the purity of our own blood.

This stark reminder that policies of forced separation and removal were embedded into official Government policy is potentially emotionally disturbing and confronting to the viewer—poignantly underlining the significance of the Apology, and the reasons for the purposeful anger so evident in Bayles' voice.

Jeremy Robertson is a student at the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA) in Brisbane. He begins by talking in general terms about his experiences at ACPA and the issue of contending with racial stereotypes, moving on to explaining what Rudd's apology meant to

him. Robertson's story includes images of ACPA and of his friends and family, again interspersed with archived material from the John Oxley Collection. In this instance the candid self-portrait images so commonly 'snapped and displayed' on social networking sites by young people contrast with the Library material, hinting at the generation gap he goes on to describe very frankly. He says that he had little or no knowledge of the Stolen Generations until the Apology occurred, but that the Apology had raised his awareness: 'I didn't even know what the Stolen Generation was until basically last year. I heard that it was something bad that happened in Aboriginal history, that something was going on and that people were taken; that's all I heard - I didn't realise it was stretched so far'. He concludes by expressing his outrage that the Apology had taken so long: 'Why did we need to wait so long? If the sorry was said back then and that next step was taken, where would we be now?'<sup>41</sup>

Sam Wagan Watson Jr is a leading Aboriginal poet, facilitator, and mentor for the creative arts, whose work has won both the 1999 David Unaipon Award and the 2004 Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry at the New South Wales Premiers Literary Awards. With only a couple of spare hours available to complete his digital story, Wagon Watson Jr preferred to use images taken on the day of the workshop, and to concentrate on his script. He is a gifted storyteller and his story begins with a refusal to 'whitewash' the history of Indigenous people's treatment by the state of Queensland. He recalls working as a security supervisor on an industrial site the night before the Apology, and his doubts at the time about the meaning of the Prime Minister's speech:

I actually slept through the apology. Seven hours deep sleep and then back to

work. But when I got to work, and I worked on a site that was predominately staffed by Polynesian and Maori workers, the boys literally formed an honour guard when I walked in. Most of these guys had lived through significant political events involving indigenous rights in New Zealand. These men were ecstatic about the apology, where I was still trying to process it.

He concludes with a sense of aspiration, by saying that the Apology delivered a sense of ‘clarity’ about Australia’s national identity, and that the word ‘Sorry’ by rights ‘belongs to a future of healing, compassion and hope’.<sup>42</sup>

Nadine McDonald-Dowd is the Program Coordinator for *kuril dhagun*, the Indigenous Knowledge Centre at SLQ. McDonald-Dowd’s mother, Veronica Anne McDonald, is a member of the Stolen Generations and was invited to sit in the Gallery of Parliament House for the Apology. McDonald-Dowd accompanied her mother and father to Canberra. As video footage of the Apology shot on her digital camera is shown, she describes her mother’s anticipation of the event and the emotional atmosphere at Parliament House on the day. The amateur film footage, while raw, is highly personalising and, through the familiarity of the home video genre, invites empathy. This footage is intermittently mixed with Creative Commons-licensed Flickr images that offered a similar perspective—so the viewer is delivered behind the scenes to witness an unofficial version of the day’s events. McDonald-Dowd’s narrative emphasises the deeply personal impact of the Apology on individual members of the Stolen Generations, by using a small detail of her mother’s experience of being removed and living in church-run institutions to convey the politics of invisibility and recognition that the Apology is bound up with:

At the orphanage they'd celebrate the birthdays on one day; there were just too many kids, too many cakes. They'd celebrate on the same day, get the same present and there was always a little matchstick doll and a little matchbox. She was just a number. Even when you get your freedom of information, you're just a number.

By contrast, McDonald-Dowd says, 'The apology for her on that day was a final kind of recognition that I actually... I exist. And my name is Veronica Anne McDonald'.<sup>43</sup> This line in the script is double-edged, however. Ironically, while Veronica Anne McDonald was indeed proud of the day and the importance of the moment, her daughter has used a digital image of the certificate presented to her by the Prime Minister on the day as the last image of the story. In the certificate, Veronica's surname was spelled incorrectly — a detail that perhaps only other family members would notice, but nonetheless unravelling what might otherwise have been a moment of neat resolution.

Natalie Alberts is the Assistant Director of the Musgrave Park Cultural Centre in West End, which provides for the preservation and promotion of Aboriginal culture and heritage, and a platform for Indigenous artists to develop and display their skills. The Cultural Centre also provides cultural awareness and education for groups in the wider community. Alberts is a descendent of the Iman/Yiman/Jiman people of the Dawson River region, with traditional affiliations to Gambuwal people and Wakka-Wakka and Burrungum speaking people of the Darling Downs, in regional South-east Queensland.

Alberts' family has endured the enforced practices of removal and displacement from traditional homelands onto missions, reserves, and industrial schools, although the family groups have maintained their connections to country and to one another. In her story Alberts describes how Government policies affected her family, growing up at Cherbourg, Woorabinda, and northern Queensland. The story is illustrated with a combination of images from Albert's family album, the centre in which she works, and, as with many of the stories, with images from the SLQ John Oxley collection. She recalls organising an event at the Musgrave Park Cultural Centre on the day of the Apology, and the overwhelming response from the local community to the event. She recollects looking around at the young people who attended on the day, some of whom spontaneously joined others onstage for the corroboree that was part of the event. She says: 'And looking at that group you can see that some of those kids have been affected, because their parents have been taken away. These kids grew up on missions—their families, their parents—but you see their spirit still in them there. They were keen to get up, and they're hungry for that'. This spirit of hope is translated into an explicit call for action: 'This is the start of it, saying sorry is the start, acknowledging what wrongs have been done. So we want to see some genuine commitment from this government [...] to help and support in making better changes for the future for the children'. The significance of family and generational struggle for survival are visually emphasised by the final image of Natalie with her daughter, holding her mother's photograph between them.<sup>44</sup>

Two additional digital stories were made with The Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh (interviewed by Getano Bann)<sup>45</sup> and the (then) Governor of Queensland, now Governor-General of Australia, Quentin Bryce (interviewed by Faith Baisden).<sup>46</sup> Speaking from a couch

in her offices, Bligh shares her opinions on how past legislation has impacted upon Aboriginal people. She talks particularly about the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, and how a bipartisan Apology is important for improving conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Bryce talks about her emotional response to the Prime Minister's Apology, her role in Indigenous issues and how she first learnt about the Stolen Generation in 1978, as a consequence of a personal friendship.

In both cases, although the subjects of these stories are elite representatives of government institutions speaking from their positions in public office, the mode of discourse in their stories is far from officious: their voiceovers were edited together from material gathered as part of a one-on-one, conversational interview—consistent with the oral history approach employed with other participants—with Indigenous facilitators.<sup>47</sup> The requirement that they tell the story of their response to the Apology, as a specific event and from a personal perspective, ameliorates much of the danger of their stories ending up as political exercises in public relations and effectively allows them to offer 'vernacular' expressions from their otherwise 'official' speaking positions. In both instances, a limited timeframe required the production team to use images taken during the oral history interview, combined with personal images of visits as provided by the interviewees, to create a more personal digital story, contrasting with their very public images. While their stories take different perspectives, both describe an emotional response on the day of the Apology and articulate a sense of hope for the future.

In different ways, each of these seven stories responds to what Melissa Nobles has referred to as the 'three tasks' that official apologies 'perform', which each have 'national histories and



their reinterpretations necessarily at their center'.<sup>48</sup> Nobles describes these 'three tasks' as follows:

First, apologies validate reinterpretations of history by formally acknowledging past actions and judging them unjust. Second, with history acknowledged and judged as unjust, apologies may strengthen history-centered explanations of minority disadvantage. Third, apologies advance reconsideration of the obligations and boundaries of membership in the national community.<sup>49</sup>

The first and third 'tasks' of official apologies, as Nobles describes above, are the most common receptions of the Apology in these seven stories. For example, six of the seven stories experienced the Apology as 'validating' a 'reinterpretation' of national history—Nobles' first 'task'—through Rudd's official re-casting of the past as unjust; teenager Jeremy Robertson was the only exception, who instead described how he 'didn't even know what the Stolen Generation was' before the Apology. The other participants, however, articulated a very clear sense of how the Apology worked to re-cast official history, from Alberts' description of the Apology as 'acknowledging what wrongs have been done' to Bligh's observation that the Apology removed any doubt that there 'was serious injustice done'. These articulations were not all at an abstract level, however; two participants appreciated the re-casting of official history both at national and individual levels. Bayles, for instance, says that the Apology 'made a lot of mainstream Australians feel it is now OK to recognise the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country', while McDonald-Dowd described her mother's relief that the Apology gave her a 'final kind of recognition'

that she ‘actually exists’, after years of institutional invisibility as a member of the Stolen Generations.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the extraordinary range of emotions elicited on the day, most of the stories—five of the seven, comprised of Bayles, Wagan Watson Jr, Alberts, Bligh, and Bryce—also received the Apology as a moment to optimistically reconsider the ‘obligations and boundaries of membership in the national community’ (Nobles’ third ‘task’ of official apologies). In other words, most of the stories articulated a sense of hope for how Australia, as a reconciled nation, might move forward in collective and equitable ways. Wagan Watson Jr noted an Apology ‘belongs to a future of healing, compassion of hope’, for example, while others translated this sense of hope into explicit calls for action. Alberts, for instance, said that what needs to follow the Apology is ‘help and support in making’ a better future ‘for the children’, while Bryce experienced the apology as offering a ‘way forward’ to where ‘every single one of us as individuals’ has a responsibility in producing a reconciled nation. The only one of Nobles’ three ‘tasks’ of official apologies that was not responded to by the majority of these stories was the second task, although this is also the only task that typically occurs after the event so this is perhaps unsurprising given that these ‘Responses’ were recorded so soon after the actual event (i.e. in June-July 2008 or less than six months after the event). Even so, three stories (by Bayles, Wagan Watson Jr., and Bligh) do articulate a sense that the event had already produced (and would continue to produce) a stronger sense of ‘history-centered explanations of minority disadvantage’.<sup>50</sup> Bligh, for example, is certain that Rudd’s re-casting of national history explicitly acknowledges the link between current inequities and historical injustices: ‘as a result of that serious injustice many people in our community today are still struggling’; importantly, however, this re-framed national history

‘will now go into our history books’ and be taught by ‘our schools’ to our ‘children’. In each of these stories, then, is a sense that the Apology represents a particular national ‘moment’ that has and will continue to have national, local, and individual ramifications, which are all, albeit to varying extents, about both an acknowledgment of historical responsibility as well as some form of redefinition of ‘the nation’.

In many respects, the ‘Responses to the Apology’ digital storytelling project represents an exemplary constitution of public memory. At the very least, the stories themselves represent the mediated intersection of ‘official’ expressions (the Apology, a formal political motion offered by the Prime Minister) with ‘vernacular’ expressions, a dialogue that is at the core of Bodnar’s definition of ‘public memory’.<sup>51</sup> The combination of the personal story and images with publicly available official documents, images and material drawn from the archives is indeed for major cultural institutions a potent way of ‘drawing new audiences to their collections’ as well as increasing community engagement in demonstrable ways. Moreover, ‘vernacular’ expressions, which typically represent a diverse range of ‘specialized interests’ that are based on ‘reality derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities’, speaks most obviously to the Indigenous participants as the members of the ‘small-scale communities’ most directly affected by Rudd’s ‘Apology to Indigenous Australians’. Yet, as individuals who equally articulate a position as ‘defenders of such cultures’, the two non-Indigenous participants also offer ‘vernacular’ expressions, in Bodnar’s definition of such.<sup>52</sup> Bodnar notes that even within such ‘specialized’ responses, there will be diverse views that may even ‘clash’ with each other; while there was no explicit ‘clashing’ of views in the ‘Responses to the Apology’, there were nevertheless strongly voiced responses that varied in their reception of the Apology. Wagan Watson Jr initially expressed some resistance to the

Apology, because he has ‘trouble trusting any politician’, while Robertson—the youngest participant in the project—was simply bemused that the Apology had taken so long.

Importantly, the differences within and between the participants’ responses to the Apology, particularly the expressions of distrust and dissatisfaction offered by Wagan Watson Jr and Robertson, demonstrate that these stories have not simply been ‘condensed’ in a way that enables a ‘consensus view of the past to emerge’, as Robert Burgoyne has spoken of in relation to the contestation of memory at the Rock and Rock Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, USA.<sup>53</sup> Rather, these seven different perspectives, while offering relatively consistent receptions of the Apology in terms of the three ‘tasks’ of official apologies that Nobles identifies, nevertheless engage in a public and mediated dialogue with Rudd’s Apology, enabled by their facilitation of and collection and display by one institution of public memory. Here, as in Burgoyne’s Hall of Fame and Museum, vernacular memories implicitly challenge any ‘triumphal narrative’ of nation in Rudd’s Apology,<sup>54</sup> the kind that is associated with official cultural expressions in public memory and that ‘promot[e] a nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole that mediates an assortment of vernacular interests’.<sup>55</sup> This nationalism is certainly present in Rudd’s Apology: for instance, he describes the Apology as ‘right[ing] a great wrong’, as having the ‘sufficient audacity of faith to advance a pathway to the future’, ‘shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia’, and as offering ‘reconciliation which opens up whole new possibilities for the future’.<sup>56</sup> Alongside this excerpt of jubilant prose (from his much longer Apology), Rudd also draws on national stereotypes:

There is a further reason for an apology as well: it is that reconciliation is in fact an expression of a core value of our nation—and that value is a fair go for all. There is a deep and abiding belief in the Australian community that, for the stolen generations, there was no fair go at all. There is a pretty basic Aussie belief that says it is time to put right this most outrageous of wrongs.<sup>57</sup>

Yet, these seven digital stories are never ‘condensed’ in or subsumed by this nationalist political rhetoric. In contrast, the individuality of the seven vernacular expressions remains foregrounded as ‘responses to’, rather than ‘part of’ a political leader’s Apology: the project itself is titled ‘Responses to the Apology’, just as the stories themselves are now part of the display of an institution of public memory. Here, these seven digital stories challenge any sense of a homogenous reception of the Apology, other than the shared sense that an Apology was necessary: precisely how it was experienced and what each participant thought should emerge from the event are articulated in different ways in each story, offering slightly different understandings of the place of the Apology in their different ‘narrative[s] of nation’.<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, then, the ‘Responses to the Apology’ and the dialogue they offer with Rudd’s Apology demonstrate Shawn Rowe et al’s conception of public memory as a ‘site of contestation between competing voices’ that is ‘created in a variety of public forums where various parties representing various parts of a society exchange views’.<sup>59</sup> But to what extent, if at all, does this contestation over the specific event of the Apology demonstrate any broader mediatisation of public memory?

## Conclusions

There were (and continue to be) numerous responses to Rudd's 13 February 2008 'Apology to Indigenous Australians'. One of those was the State Library of Queensland's 'Responses to the Apology', which also represents a significant recent example of an institution of public memory employing co-creative media programs—in this instance, a digital storytelling project—which partners with communities in the creation of content. This example is particularly interesting, because those digital stories subsequently became part of the Library's collection, offering seven permanent responses to—and a permanent mediated dialogue with—the Apology. In this article, we have considered the Apology as a shared national event and a catalyst for multiply mediated public dialogue, reflecting specifically on the 'Responses to the Apology' workshop as one attempt to amplify and archive aspects of the event. The record of the workshop, namely the digital stories that are available both from SLQ web site and the Library's YouTube channel, has created a form of public remembrance that is distinct from the 'official' record. These stories are a permanent reminder that the Apology itself is an ongoing site for the negotiation of public memory, particularly around the Stolen Generations and issues of reconciliation,<sup>60</sup> moreover, their existence has been a catalyst for SLQ to further engage with Indigenous communities in co-creative media programs around Queensland.<sup>61</sup>

Within the broader context of the mediatisation of public memory, the project also invites further consideration around the role of public service institutions in the face of contemporary developments in media culture, such as burgeoning social archives like YouTube. The viewpoints expressed in the 'Responses to the Apology' stories, for example, are already in a memorial dialogue with the more spontaneous and 'vernacular' video responses from a far

less controlled institution of public memory, the YouTube archive, where extremist views contend for space with (and sometimes in response to) the digital stories produced as part of the SLQ project.<sup>62</sup> The ever-increasing proliferation and circulation of media content produced by mainstream media, governments, and ordinary citizens in response to issues and events of shared national concern represents a range of perspectives that no single institution of public memory could hope to capture. We suggest that the 'Responses to the Apology' project models one way in which institutions of public memory might respond. In other words, the seven digital stories that are now part of the SLQ's collection are neither simply the product of the Library's mediatisation of public memory, nor the result of the inclusion of pre-existing vernacular material. Rather, as a direct result of the co-creative production process, the stories themselves also occupy an intermediary position between the 'official' practices and values of major institutions of public memory, like SLQ, and the vernacular practices of everyday media creation and use. This demonstrates not only a further mediatisation of public memory around this one national event, but also the institutional coordination of vernacular storytelling and community-based media-making. In doing so, the co-creative approach results in new historical materials that emerge out of the negotiation of multiple perspectives, and indeed include the 'competing voices' that Rowe et al call for.<sup>63</sup> However, the resilience of the idea of the author and the highly personalised nature of the stories means that new challenges arise for institutions of public memory. When archiving and displaying co-created content like digital stories, for example, there are not yet any accepted protocols for how they might adequately represent and account for the multiple voices and stakeholders who have contributed to the co-creation of such material. And the materials themselves are not always presented to the public in ways that invite further active engagement with the topics addressed (e.g. through the ability to leave comments). However, as institutions of public memory like SLQ increasingly employ user participation as part of

the increased digitisation and mediatisation of the sector, just how these challenges are addressed remains to be seen.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Stig Hjarvard 'The Mediatization of Society. A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change', *Nordicom Review*, 29, 2 (2008), 105-134; Sonia Livingstone 'On the Mediation of Everything' *Journal of Communication*, 59, 1 (2009), 1-18; and Knut Lundby (ed) *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Hjarvard, 105.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> John Bodnar *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993), 13. Inevitably, what constitutes a collectable 'cultural artefact' is subject to the 'prevailing epistemological context' of each time and location. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 191.

<sup>5</sup> National and State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA), 'Reimagining Libraries', Vision Statement. Available at: <http://www.nsla.org.au/projects/rls/>

<sup>6</sup> See Helen Klaebe and Jean Burgess 'Co-creating Heritage: Innovative Uses of Oral History and Life Narrative in Australian Libraries.' In: XV International Oral History Conference, 23-26 September 2008, Guadalajara, Mexico. Available at: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/17169/> See also Christina Spurgeon, Jean Burgess, Helen Klaebe, Kelly McWilliam, Jo Tacchi, and Mimi Tsai (2009). 'Co-creative Media: Theorising Digital Storytelling as a Platform for Researching and Developing Participatory Culture.' In T. Flew (Ed.) *Communication, Creativity and Global Citizenship: Refereed Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Communications Association Annual Conference*, Brisbane, July 8-10. ISBN 987-1-74107-275-4. Available at: <http://www.proceedings.anzca09.org>

<sup>7</sup> Jerry Watkins and Angelina Russo 'New Media Design for Cultural Institutions' In *Proceedings of the 2005 conference on Designing for User eXperience (dux 05)*, Vol. 135, November 2005, San Francisco. Available at: <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/new-media-design-for-cultural-institutions,2>; see also Angelina Russo and Jerry Watkins 'Digital Cultural Communication: Tools and Methods for Communication Co-Creation' In *Proceedings Engaging Communities 2005*, Brisbane. Available at: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/3983/>

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Vergo 'The Reticent Object' In Peter Vergo (ed) *New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1993), 41-59, 76.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Anne Fahy 'New Technologies for Museum Communication' In Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (ed) *Museum, Media, Message* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), 82-96.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Gitelman *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (London and Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 29.

<sup>11</sup> Watkins and Russo, 4-5

<sup>12</sup> OECD 'Participative Web: User-Created Content' (OECD Working Party on the Information Economy, 2007). <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/14/38393115.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Karen F. Gracy, 'Moving Image Preservation and Cultural Capital' *Library Trends* 56.1 (2007): 183-98.

<sup>14</sup> Bodnar. See also Jean Burgess and Helen Klaebe 'Digital Storytelling as Participatory Public History in Australia' In John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (eds) *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 155-66.

<sup>15</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge all the participants, facilitators, fellow researchers, partner organisations and library staff whose generous contributions of time and enthusiasm made the *Responses to the Apology* pilot project possible. The use of data and content from the project for research purposes complies with and has been cleared by the Ethical Clearance requirements of Queensland University of Technology.

<sup>16</sup> Melissa Nobles, *The Politics of Official Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 70-71.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Burgoyne 'From Contested to Consensual Memory: The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum' In Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds) *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 208-220, 215.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly McWilliam, 'Digital Storytelling as a 'Discursively-Ordered Domain' In Knut Lundby (ed) *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 145-160, 146.

<sup>19</sup> Knut Lundby 'Introduction', In Knut Lundby (ed) *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 2.

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<sup>20</sup> For an overview of digital storytelling practice, see John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (eds) *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009). For a guide to digital storytelling, see Lambert.) Joe Lambert *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, (California: Digital Diner Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Lambert, 2.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, <http://www.scrapbookingtop50.com.au/frontpage/html/>.

<sup>23</sup> Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading. 'Introduction' In Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading (eds) *Save As... Digital Memories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 1-26, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Kelly McWilliam 'The Global Diffusion of a Community Media Practice: Charting Digital Storytelling Online' In John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (eds) *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 37-75, 60.

<sup>25</sup> McWilliam, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Klaebe 'The problems and possibilities of using digital storytelling in public history projects' In: *XVIII International Oral History Conference - Dancing with Memory*, 12-16 July, 2006, Sydney. Available at: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/6017/> , 10.

<sup>27</sup> Helen Klaebe and Jean Burgess *Oral History and Digital Storytelling Review* (Brisbane: State Library of Queensland, 2008). Available at: <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/>. 10.

<sup>28</sup> See Watkins and Russo.

<sup>29</sup> For more on which see 'Queensland Stories', Digital Storytelling Program, State Library of Queensland. Accessed 12 Nov. 2009. Available at: <http://www.qldstories.slq.qld.gov.au/>

<sup>30</sup> The term Stolen Generations is used to describe the children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were forcibly removed from their families under the official policies of Australian Federal and State government agencies during the period from the late 1800s until the 1970s.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin Rudd 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples' House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia. 13 Feb. 2008. 25 Nov. 2009. Available at: <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/5952>

<sup>32</sup> While John Howard never offered a formal apology, he did express his 'deep and sincere regret that Indigenous Australians suffered injustices under the practices of past generations' in his 'Motion of Reconciliation', which he introduced to the House of Representatives in August 1999 (Nobles, 97).

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<sup>33</sup> The full text of the Prime Minister's speech is available at the official website:

[http://www.pm.gov.au/media/speech/2008/speech\\_0073.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/speech/2008/speech_0073.cfm)

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., 'Stolen Generation Apology: News and Events.' ABC Canberra. Accessed 20 Nov. 2009. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/canberra/features/apology/>

<sup>35</sup> The methodologies and procedures of this project and its implications for the field of community media are discussed in further detail in Jean Burgess and Klaebe, Helen. 'Using digital storytelling to capture responses to the Apology.' *3CMedia* 5 (2009). Available at:

[http://www.cbonline.org.au/3cmedia/3c\\_issue5/index.shtm](http://www.cbonline.org.au/3cmedia/3c_issue5/index.shtm)

<sup>36</sup> 'Responses to the Apology.' Queensland Stories, State Library of Queensland. Accessed 13 Nov. 2009. Available at: [http://www.qldstories.slq.qld.gov.au/home/digital\\_stories/apology\\_responses](http://www.qldstories.slq.qld.gov.au/home/digital_stories/apology_responses)

<sup>37</sup> Bodnar, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Katherine Borland "'That's Not What I Said": Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 320-332, 320. See also Ronald Grele 'Movement Without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History,' in Ronald Grele (ed.), *Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory, and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony* (Chicago: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991), 126-155.

<sup>40</sup> The story is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpJGyEx33As>

<sup>41</sup> The story is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBVTiayNSRU>

<sup>42</sup> The story is available at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Iu4H2\\_jTfQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Iu4H2_jTfQ)

<sup>43</sup> The story is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3lYJknzXA4>

<sup>44</sup> The story is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bK4Oh6YYeMo>

<sup>45</sup> Anna Bligh's story is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryJkxgU6wtM>

<sup>46</sup> Quentin Bryce's story is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvu5tXYxYis>

<sup>47</sup> Borland, 320; see also Grele.

<sup>48</sup> Nobles, 70-71.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 72.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> See Bodnar, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Burgoyne, 215.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Bodnar, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Rudd

<sup>57</sup> Rudd.

<sup>58</sup> Burgoyne, 215.

<sup>59</sup> Shawn Rowe, James Wertsch, and Tatyana Kosyaeve. 'Linking Little Narratives to Big Ones: Narrative and Public Memory in History Museums.' *Culture and Psychology* 8, 1 (2002), 96-112, 99

<sup>60</sup> Rowe et al., 99.

<sup>61</sup> The 'Responses to the Apology' workshop has, for instance, been expanded to Mt Isa, Hope Vale, Cairns, and Cooktown, as part of a larger 'regional roll-out'. Burgess & Klæbe,, "Using" 14.

<sup>62</sup> Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 86-87.

<sup>63</sup> Shawn Rowe, James Wertsch, and Tatyana Kosyaeve. 'Linking Little Narratives to Big Ones: Narrative and Public Memory in History Museums.' *Culture and Psychology* 8, 1 (2002), 96-112, 99