

**The Design of History:
An Exploration of how Philosophies of Truth
shape Digital Public History Innovations**

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Department of Integrated Design

University of Moratuwa

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Honours Degree in Bachelor of Design

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Declaration

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Abstract

Digital Public History (DPH) has redefined how historical narratives are created and accessed by the masses, fostering inclusivity and participation through neverbefore-used technologies in the digital age. However, these innovations are shaped by the epistemological and ontological assumptions of their creators, reflecting their philosophies of truth under the umbrellas of Realism, Pragmatism, and Anti-realism. This study explores how these assumptions influence the design of DPH tools and user interactions.

Using qualitative methods, including case studies, de-scription analysis by Madeleine Arkrich, and user observations, the research explores how creators' biases significantly shape affordances and micro-interactions, often affecting user engagement. Findings indicate that low engagement rates are frequently linked to mismatches between creators' embedded assumptions and users' expectations. The study underscores the importance of transparent and inclusive design processes that resonate with diverse user perspectives. It offers recommendations to enhance engagement and deepen the connection between history, technology, and public participation in an increasingly digital world.

Key words: Public History, Digital Public History, Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions, Design Micro-Interactions, Historical Narrative Construction

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Glossary	v
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
1 Chapter 01 THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN PUBLIC HISTORY INNOVATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE	8
1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 Fundamentals	9
1.2.1 The Evolution of History: From Tradition to Narrative	9
1.2.2 “Doing” History: Foundations of Public History	12
1.2.3 Public History in the Digital Realm.....	19
1.3 The Role of Innovators in Digital Public History	25
1.3.1 Innovators’ Utopia	25
1.3.2 Innovators’ Utopias in the Digital Public History Landscape.....	27
1.4 Philosophies of Truth and Reality	28
1.4.1 Historical Realism as a Lens.....	29
1.4.2 Pragmatism as a Lens	32
1.4.3 Anti-Realism as a Lens	36
1.5 Implications for Research	39
2 Chapter 02 A GUIDE TO ASSESSING ASSUMPTIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN DIGITAL PUBLIC HISTORY DESIGN	40
2.1 Introduction	40
2.2 Research Design and Approach.....	40

2.2.1 Phase One: Preliminary Data Collection and Case Categorisation.....	40
2.2.2 Surface level content analysis	41
2.2.3 Designing the Case Study Methodology.....	42
2.2.4 Phase 2: De-scription of Technical Objects	43
2.2.5 Phase 3: Observational Studies and Interviews	45
2.3 Assessing Opportunities and Limitations.....	46
3 Chapter 03 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ASSUMPTIONS AND USER INTERACTIONS IN DIGITAL PUBLIC HISTORY DESIGN INNOVATIONS	49
3.1 Introduction	49
3.2 Overview of Case Study A: The Holocaust.....	49
3.2.1 De-scripting Affordances and Micro-interactions	52
3.3 Case Study Group B: History Educational Initiatives.....	71
3.4 User Interaction Patterns	74
3.5 Discussion	77
Conclusion.....	81
References	84
Appendix A	88
Appendix B	91

Glossary

Scenes: The specific contexts or settings in which interactions between user and innovation occur as per script.

Script: The predetermined roles, expectations, or actions assigned to actors in a particular situation or interaction, shaping user engagement with the innovation.

Prescription: The implicit or explicit roles and expectations embedded within a script, shaped by the design of affordances and micro-interactions that guide user interactions: The intended use.

Pre-inscription: Prior knowledge, skills, or conditions that an actor acquires or is subject to before engaging as a user.

De-description: The analytical breakdown of the composition of affordances and microinteractions of the DPH innovation, ultimately detailing its intended use, (prescription) and actual use.

Delegates and Lieutenants: Refer to both human (user) and nonhuman actors (affordances and micro-interactions of the DPH innovation) that hold specific roles within interactions.

Translation/Delegation: Transferring effort from one actor to another, intended for simplifying user interactions.

Chreods: The guided/predetermined necessary paths that actors the user or DPH innovation follow within a given context.

Transcription/Inscription/Encoding: A conversion of scripts and roles from one context into another durable context, medium or format.

Adjustment: How users alter or modify the prescribed uses of micro-interactions based on their own experiences and contexts.

Subscription: Conformation to the prescribed role or script.

Repairing: Appreciating the script but modifying it to overcome shortcomings.

Resisting: Ignoring the script and modifying it to overcome shortcomings

Re-inscripting: Making fundamental alterations to the script to better suit user needs.

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Recreated Schneider's Lager Beer Salon from 97 Orchard Street (1864-1886) at the Tenement Museum	15
Figure 1.2 Public His'tree by Thomas Cauvin, 2020	17
Figure 1.3 . Peretha Kaakka and anonymous installations at GotaGoGama.....	18
Figure 1.4. Wall Projection Mapping at the Presidential Secretariat	18
Figure 1.5 Collaborative pieces from Art from the Aragalaya	19
Figure 1.6. A Cartoon critique of the Marketplace of Ideas published on the May 8, 2021 edition of The Economist	34
Figure 2.1 Methodology Breakdown	47

List of Tables

<i>Table 0-1 Research Design Plan</i>	6
<i>Table 2-1 Initial Case Study Categorisation based on Surface-level Analysis</i>	41
<i>Table 2-2 De-description Approach</i>	44
<i>Table 2-3 Observational Study Framework</i>	45
<i>Table 3-1 Case Study Group A Overview</i>	49
<i>Table 3-2 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Speak with Pinchas at IWitness</i>	52
<i>Table 3-3 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Speak with Pinchas at IWitness</i>	52
<i>Table 3-4 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - View all interviewees</i>	54
<i>Table 3-5 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Page Navigational Sections</i>	55
<i>Table 3-6 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Pinchas Gutter Holographic Avatar</i>	56
<i>Table 3-7 De-scripting Dimensions of Testimony – Microphone</i>	57
<i>Table 3-8 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Pinchas Gutter Holographic Avatar</i>	59
<i>Table 3-9 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Fullscreen/Windowed Mode Toggle Buttons</i>	60
<i>Table 3-10 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Fullscreen/Windowed Mode Toggle Buttons</i>	61
<i>Table 3-11 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Fullscreen/Windowed Mode Toggle Buttons</i>	61
<i>Table 3-12 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Download Transcript button ..</i>	62
<i>Table 3-13 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Biography button</i>	63
<i>Table 3-14 10 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Education page, About, and Gallery</i>	64
<i>Table 3-15 Attentat 1942, Prologue Clip</i>	66
<i>Table 3-16 Attentat 1942, Landing page</i>	67

<i>Table 3-17 Attentat 1942, About us page</i>	68
<i>Table 3-18 Attentat 1942, Game Play</i>	69
<i>Table 3-19 Case Study Group C Overview</i>	70

Introduction

Background and context

For generations, the “writing of” or “making of” history was considered the sole responsibility of historians, confining the discipline to a strictly academic space. Many understood history as a scholarly pursuit, focused on the study of past events by experts, with knowledge primarily disseminated through books, archives, and artefacts. This perspective framed history as a collection of static, objective facts preserved in primary sources. However, as historical discourse evolved, history began to be seen not merely as a static record but as a dynamic narrative—a story that connects multiple events, perspectives, and interpretations. This also led to the diversification of how history is practised.

This shift gave rise to Public History (PH), a practice of “doing” history collaboratively, involving not only academic experts but individuals from various sectors, organisations, to communities bearing lived experiences. PH prioritises inclusivity and democratisation, encouraging diverse stakeholders to actively shape and contribute to historical narratives.

With the advent of digital technologies, PH has evolved into Digital Public History (DPH), where history is disseminated through innovative tools such as digital archives, interactive timelines, and virtual exhibits to never-before-seen technologies in the historic space, such as gamification, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence etc. These tools democratise access to historical resources, breaking down traditional barriers such as geographical limitations, institutional gatekeeping, and the exclusivity of academic discourse, enabling individuals from all backgrounds to actively engage in historical storytelling and interpretation, exploring and even reshaping narratives in novel ways.

However, the design of these innovations, like any other innovation, reflects the underlying philosophies of truth, values, and biases of their creators. These

assumptions shape how history is presented to and experienced by the masses. For instance, schools of thought like Historical Realism or Anti-realism, influence whether history is portrayed as an objective truth or as a narrative open to interpretation.

Thus, the motives and ideologies of the creators become crucial factors in understanding how DPH innovations are presented, function and how audiences interact with them. In this context, examining the interplay between creators' assumptions and user engagement offers valuable insights into how history is constructed, mediated, and reinterpreted in the digital age.

Research Problem

While Digital Public History (DPH) innovations have revolutionised the way history is accessed, interpreted, and shared, there remains a critical gap in understanding the underlying assumptions that shape their design. DPH projects, despite the novelty their participatory and accessible qualities may bring, are not without the influence of their own creators' biases. These underlying ideologies, often unexamined, significantly impact how historical narratives are constructed and presented. Moreover, the extent to which users actively engage with and reinterpret these embedded assumptions remains under-evaluated.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring how the ideologies of creators shape the make-up of Digital Public History innovations from a design perspective, and how users engage with or challenge these ideologies through their interactions with the technology.

Research Questions

1. What are the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions of creators about Public History?

2. How are the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded into the design and functionality of Digital Public History innovations?
3. Do users re-interpret or modify the micro-interactions of the design of Digital Public History innovations?

Significance and contribution

This study contributes to the emerging field of Digital Public History (DPH) by critically examining the epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded in DPH innovations and their influence on visual and multimedia design experiences. It emphasises the importance of well-crafted User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) design in effectively communicating historical narratives.

By analysing how these assumptions shape both design and user engagement, it highlights, most significantly, that PH and DPH innovations are not immune to creators' inherent biases. It advocates for greater transparency in the creation of digital history and memory tools, promoting inclusivity and participation in historymaking. This becomes an opportunity for consumers of historical narratives to make informed choices and reflections.

The findings will offer valuable insights into the relationship between innovators, technology, history, design, and the public, informing future DPH projects and contributing to the broader discourse on how technology shapes the construction and dissemination of historical knowledge.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to analyse how philosophies of truth shape the design and reception of Digital Public History innovations, most significantly:

1. To identify the epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying the design of Digital Public History innovations.

2. To analyse how these assumptions are reflected in the affordances and microinteractions of Digital Public History tools.
3. To explore how users engage with and potentially modify the microinteractions in Digital Public History Innovations, according to their perceived needs and ideologies.

Methodology

This research is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how epistemological and ontological assumptions shape the design of Digital Public History innovations and user engagement. This study will employ a qualitative approach to explore the complex interplay between creators' ideologies, design choices, and user interactions, examining how these elements influence the construction and interpretation of historical narratives in the digital realm.

Data will be gathered through a series of methods, within three phases of a non-linear research design process.

- **Literature review:**

The initial phase reviews scholarship on the philosophical foundations of truth, alongside the evolution of PH and DPH, to build a solid understanding of the existing DPH innovation landscape, identifying gaps in current research on digital tools in historical storytelling.

- **Surface level-content analysis:**

Before shortlisting cases for in-depth analysis, websites and digital archives of available DPH innovations will be analysed agnostically, for leads on key themes and values, types and scope of content material as well as userexperience and accessibility for leads on patterns, gaps or biases.

- **Case study analysis:**

After mapping preliminary assumptions of DPH innovations, they are shortlisted for further curation through the multiple case study method. The selection criteria will be based on their relevance to the research questions, accessibility of opportunities for observation and interaction and contextbased parameters of historical significance.

- **De-description:**

In the second phase, the shortlisted cases will be analysed using the “Description” methodology by Madeline Arkrich. The in-depth assessment of design features (affordances and micro-interactions) will be linked to creators’ assumptions and biases.

- **Observations and think-aloud method:**

In the third phase, a series of participant observations, combined with thinkaloud protocols, will explore user engagement with micro-interactions and potential modifications in selected DPH tools.

- **Interviews:**

Follow-up in-depth interviews with participant users will aid in crossreferencing findings from the design analysis.

Research Design

The research will focus on identifying the underlying assumptions of truth held by DPH creators and how these assumptions are translated into affordances and microinteractions in innovations. Given that user interaction with DPH tools is dynamic and subjective, the study will also assess how users, based on their interest and knowledge, engage with historical narratives.

Table 0-1 Research Design Plan

Research Question	Data Source	Data Type
RQ1 - What are the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions of creators about Public History?	Literature review Interviews	Primary and Secondary
RQ2 - How are the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded into the design and functionality of Digital Public History innovations?	Case studies Digital archives	Primary
RQ3 - Do users re-interpret or modify the micro-interactions of the design of Digital Public History innovations?	Case studies Digital archives Observations	Primary

Scope of the Study

Creators' Motives: The epistemological and ontological assumptions that influence the design of digital public history innovations.

1. **Embedded Assumptions:** How these assumptions manifest in the affordances and micro-interactions of DPH tools.
2. **User Engagement and Modification:** How users interact, engage with and/or modify the interactions of the design.

Limitations

- **Access to resources:**

As DPH is a field. Identifying platforms that clearly embody philosophies of truth while offering meaningful examples of user interaction is a challenge.

- **User diversity:**

The study may not comprehensively capture the perspectives of diverse user groups, as user engagement can vary widely based on factors such as cultural background, digital literacy, and interest in historical narratives.

- **Subjectivity in interpretation:**

Analysing the motives and assumptions of creators involves interpretative judgement. While efforts will be made to maintain objectivity through triangulation and crossreferencing, subjective biases in analyses could influence the findings.

- **Theoretical relativism:**

While the study focuses on key philosophical schools of thought with widely accepted interpretations and addresses pressing debates, trends, and critiques, it may not fully encompass less mainstream or anomalous interpretations.

1 Chapter 01 THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN PUBLIC HISTORY INNOVATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

1.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to comprehensively review existing scholarship, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual approaches that intersect Public History (PH) and contemporary digital technologies while establishing the significance of critically assessing the assumptions and ideologies embedded within these innovations.

To achieve this, the chapter first examines the evolution of history from conventional forms to the dynamic understanding of history as a narrative. Then, the foundations of PH are defined, outlining its development with contemporary digital practices. Then, the role of the innovator within Digital Public History (DPH) is investigated, focusing on how their belief systems, biases, and motives influence the design of innovations. It examines how the concept of an “innovator’s utopia” shapes and impacts DPH innovations.

This evaluation assesses key utopias and philosophies of truth that drive these biases and motives, namely, Realism, Pragmatism, and Anti-realism. The first section of this chapter focuses on realism, serving as a dominant philosophical lens throughout time, highlighting the tension between perceiving history as an objective account of past events as opposed to the role of interpretation and context considered by other schools of thought. The second section explores pragmatism, which views historical truth as shaped by assertion, inquiry, and practical dimensions, serving as an alternative to realism. The third section explores Antirealism, the antithesis of Historical Realism, producing fictional models rather than seeking the "real" past. In closing, the chapter emphasises the significance of investigating innovators' utopias within DPH innovations.

1.2 Fundamentals

1.2.1 The Evolution of History: From Tradition to Narrative

History is the systemic study of the human past; A branch of knowledge analysed and interpreted, commonly through documentation of evidence such as artefacts, and oral traditions, covering all aspects of human society across political, social, economic, scientific, technological, cultural, intellectual, and religious spheres.

Historical truths have long been understood as a static entity rooted in the past, requiring fact-based investigation supported by tangible evidence. It is a body of knowledge for which the historian has traditionally been regarded as the sole custodian. Over time, history has come to be understood not merely as an investigation of past events but as an interpretation. These discussions have also drawn attention to the methods historians employ to evaluate and reinterpret sources or “historic evidence”, uncovering new insights into the past.

While radically different interpretations of past events may emerge as a result of looking at history through an interpretative, narrative lens, it is worth noting that the diverse viewpoints of looking at history, mostly stem from the same set of evidence. The only distinguishing factor is thereby the methods of interpretation and organisation of sources to produce a unique understanding of the past. (ImazSheinbaum, 2023) When history is viewed as a narrative, it makes the interpretation of history multi-dimensional, reflecting it as a meaning-making activity. The narrative lens thereby directly challenges the assumptions of truth and reality of historical realism, the prevailing dominant school of thought not only among the masses who consume history but also among the historians who "write" or "do" it.

The narrative outlook of history denies the idea of a coherent, structured, and organised flow of experiences, waiting to be discovered, but as something actively constructed and imposed from the present onto the past. Imaz-Sheinbaum highlights the historical narrative as “unconnected, unstructured units of data”, giving order to a chaotic flux of disorganised, unstructured past events. She expands on how the role

of the interpretation in historical narratives opens many gateways of bringing order to such chaos; “a mode of organising one's perception of the world.” (Domańska, 1998, p.15)

This non-linear quality of historical narratives is an expansive topic of interest. philosopher Louis Mink in “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument”, explains that stories are not lived but told, as experiences are not inherently structured in a linear storytelling format; instead, narrative is imposed after the event has concluded. (Mink, 1978) Art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto, further argues that the judgment of history is indefinite and unpredictable. In his essay “Narrative Sentences,” he presents a thought experiment featuring “The Ideal Chronicler,” a hypothetical entity capable of recording everything as it happens, who possesses a complete 360degree view of the world and its entire history, and unlimited capacity to integrate and analyse that information. (Danto, 1962) This analogy acknowledges that even if one were an ideal chronicler, certain aspects of the past can only be clarified by the future, and the judgments of historians are inevitably influenced by events that have yet to occur. According to him, the future not only assigns different meanings to past events, but it possibly changes the meaning of the past and the way we talk about certain experiences. A correlation can be drawn with the concept of hermeneutical injustice introduced by philosopher Miranda Fricker, where she talks about how one may be unable to interpret certain experiences due to a gap in collective interpretive resources, drawing parallels with people who have experienced sexual harassment before the term became popular in the 1970s. (Fricker, 2007)

Imaz-Sheinbaum discusses how cognitive principles underlying the construction of narratives are rooted in Gestalt psychological principles, which explain how histories are constructed and how they vary based on application. (Imaz-Sheinbaum, 2023) Gestalt principles are a set of laws popular in the design world, guiding the arrangement of elements for visual coherence. Consider how Gestalt Principles apply to historical narratives of World War I. According to the figure-ground principle, one may choose to focus on the brutal experiences of soldiers and civilians (the figure),

amidst a backdrop of machinery and industrialised warfare (the ground). In another narrative, one can choose to frame the “figure” as the experiences of particular groups, such as young unmarried soldiers, older soldiers with families or even experiences exclusive to homosexual soldiers, in the overarching context of war (ground). Similarly, the proximity principle groups events like the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, trench warfare, and the Treaty of Versailles to demonstrate how they shaped the trajectory of the global conflict. Similarity uses shared imagery, such as propaganda posters or military uniforms, to highlight the parallels across nations involved in the conflict. Closure invites audiences to inquire about the war’s impact by connecting fragmented events and themes like imperialism and the rise of modern warfare while continuity helps position the war within the broader narrative of the 20th century, linking it to the Second World War and decolonisation, ensuring a coherent understanding of its long-term implications.

Despite the fluid, storytelling nature of the historical “narrative,” it’s worth noting that the cognitive processes involved in narrative construction do not downplay or negate the importance of historical evidence in history education. Rather, these principles explain how historians organise and interpret the evidence to construct meaning. A narrative gives historical events a shape. It simply emphasises the many faces of historical truth or reality with a basis of interpretation, rather than a rigid, objective reality that insists on a singular factual accuracy.

Imaz-Sheinbaum illustrates the depth of the historical narrative through the case of the discovery of America, discussing the tension between local and global narratives. The question is, if the discovery of America is framed solely within Eurocentric perspectives, does that mean the experiences and interpretations of Indigenous communities of pre-colonial America are false and invalid? This calls for a more inclusive approach to history that acknowledges diverse voices: the historical narrative.

Viewing history as a narrative, prompts why we have so much variability of historical accounts about a single historical event, without dismissing that discourse. The

multiplicity of perspectives on the past calls for double the historical discourse, enriching the historical discipline overall.

1.2.2 “Doing” History: Foundations of Public History

1.2.2.1 History beyond the Campus

As discussed in the context of traditional historical knowledge, it is commonplace for the historian to be the sole custodian of the study, practice and making of history. Throughout time and across borders, history has been a conversation meant for the classroom or campus faculties. However, scholars and practitioners have attempted to blur the lines of this rigid academic confinement for decades. Even before the 1960s, oral history movements have involved individuals and community groups outside the academic setting for various purposes. The History Workshop, a British movement that originated at Ruskin College, Oxford with the contribution of historian and sociologist Raphael Samuel, supported the democratisation of historical knowledge by expanding definitions of authority and ownership of historical affairs. By the 1990s, Samuel further expanded discussions on the historiographical tradition coined “history from below” or “people’s history.”

“History is not the prerogative of the historian, nor even, as postmodernism contends, a historian’s invention. It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.” (Samuel, 1994)

Samuel’s emphasis on the involvement of “a thousand different hands” when it comes to historiography, posits the urgency of actively engaging with multiple parties in addition to academic experts. British social historian Arthur Marwick insists that historians “do” history, highlighting the importance of dynamic and highly analytical historical practices. While Marwick hasn’t explicitly referred to “people’s history” by name, he has made many indications on why such an approach might as well be a necessary solution to his many claims. For example, he refers to the “fallible” role of the historian, (Marwick, 1999) whose role was thus far known as the supreme allseeing and all-knowing impartial judge in “doing history.” According to him, it is

crucial to clearly distinguish between history produced by “the fallible historian”, and the past “whether known, or written, about by historians or not.” Such ideas reiterate the necessity of historical practices that genuinely reflect the history as experienced by people, inevitably requiring the involvement of diverse stakeholders in the process.

Similarly, the academic research sector has shown an interest in co-produced historical research in the recent past. In the UK, the ‘Connected Communities’ scheme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), discusses the dynamic ways in which academic historians can work in collaboration. The UK National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement promotes engagement activities among universities and other academic institutions to share knowledge, resources and skills with the public, but also learn from “the expertise and insight of the different communities with which we engage.”

While working with “non-experts”, is hardly a novel practice, it’s worth noting that such co-creative efforts are hardly proactive, in a way that values the expertise of the nonexperts. It is more common for the non-expert public to be passive participants in academic history-making, which does not fall under “co-creation” in any sense, falling short of Samuel’s vision of a history made with “a thousand different hands.” King and Rivett argue that history-making continues to be in academic confinement, without active engagement with “the world beyond the campus.” They are particularly critical of the ‘reach’ and ‘significance’ criteria for judging the value of research in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK. (King & Rivett, 2015) They argue that such measurements of research excellence correlate push towards “achieving certain outcomes and end points rather than exploring the multitude of ways in which the research might be of use or of interest to varying groups and individuals outside the academy.”

If practised in close proximity to its founding principles, the concept of “Public History” would be the closest approach to commit to Samuel’s ideal vision of historical knowledge.

1.2.2.2 Public History: A “People’s History” Practice

Public History recognises that those with voices traditionally deemed credible, such as historians, museum professionals, archivists, curators, cultural resource managers, and policy advisers, do not hold the final word in the making of history. This conversation is especially relevant today, in an era where history has become a vast subject consumed through various mediums, with different retellings of the past emerging as national and political narratives globally. Public history therefore pays explicit attention to the past as it is made and used by the present. (Laite, 2018)

Public History as a discipline raises fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of historical work. What is the role of the historian? Who qualifies as a historian, and what are the boundaries of this role? Who is history really for? How is history created, interpreted, and communicated? It challenges traditional notions by broadening the definition of who can narrate history, emphasising the collaborative and evolving process of creating history in dialogue with the present.

Firstly, Public History “employs historians and historical methods outside of academia.” (Kelley, 1978) This resonates with Public Historian and educator Thomas Cauvin’s definition as, “a way of doing history with a public perspective.” It examines the myriad of ways history can be made for the consumption of the masses. This contrasts with traditional historical practices primarily produced by and for academics. If traditional practices focus on advancing historical theory, engaging with historiographical debates, or contributing to scholarly discussions within the discipline, Public History aims to contribute on behalf of the public, in public spaces. i.e. History Pin is a digital project that allows ordinary people to “pin” historical photos to Google Maps, and share stories of their local communities, creating a publicly accessible memory collective of contemporary spaces that matter to people.

Secondly, Public History is done with the people, broadening the horizons of what history can be and how it is practised. The traditional practice is largely individualistic,

conducting independent research or academic collaborations. Public History creates a broader, richer system in which historians can play a role with its interconnected parts. (Cauvin, 2020) This interconnected system-design aspect of Public History means that there would be other stakeholders involved, playing an active role in making history alongside the historian, cultivating a culture of shared authority. When history is created for the public, with the public, such as partner cultural institutions, other professionals such as designers and marketing experts, non-experts and the lived experiences of local communities, history is humanised. Hence, the practice of Public History is inherently participatory, offering “democratisation of the historymaking process, opening up the process of making history.” (Cauvin, 2020) This does not mean that the seasoned expertise of the historian is dismissed. Rather, it underscores the importance of a collaborative approach to history-making, acknowledging the inherent “fallibility” of the historian; a natural consequence of being human that enables interpretations shaped by personal biases, cultural contexts, and the limitations of available evidence. The practice is less about credentials and more about the intent of engaging the public in the history making process.



Figure 1.1 Recreated Schneider's Lager Beer Salon from 97 Orchard Street (1864-1886) at the Tenement Museum

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York represents the shared-authority approach to Public History, celebrating the Lower East Side's working-class immigrant and migrant experience, sharing their stories through guided tours of recreated tenement apartments, and neighbourhood walking tours. Having been developed in collaboration between historians, architectural preservationists, local community organisations, and most notably, the insights and expertise of former residents and their descendants, the initiative represents the importance of the shared-authority approach to Public History through example. ROOTED, an exhibition by Collective for Historical Dialogue and Memory (CHDM) and Institute for Social Development (ISD), to celebrate 200 years since the arrival of the first Malaiyaga Tamils on Sri Lankan soil, effectively incorporates lived experiences of the Malaiyaga Tamil community through folk songs, personal documents, and audio interviews of testimonies, moving beyond academic research to create inclusive historical narratives.

Public historians are often tasked with translating complex historical research into accessible and engaging formats for non-experts, such as museum exhibits, documentaries, or digital history projects. This calls for the development of new skills, methods, and even innovative media to effectively practise and communicate Public History. A Public History practitioner can no longer rely solely on the traditional approaches of locating, extracting, and interpreting primary and secondary sources. To make history with the people with a people's perspective, they must embrace new media and methodologies that allow for the integration of diverse information into the interconnected network of Public History.

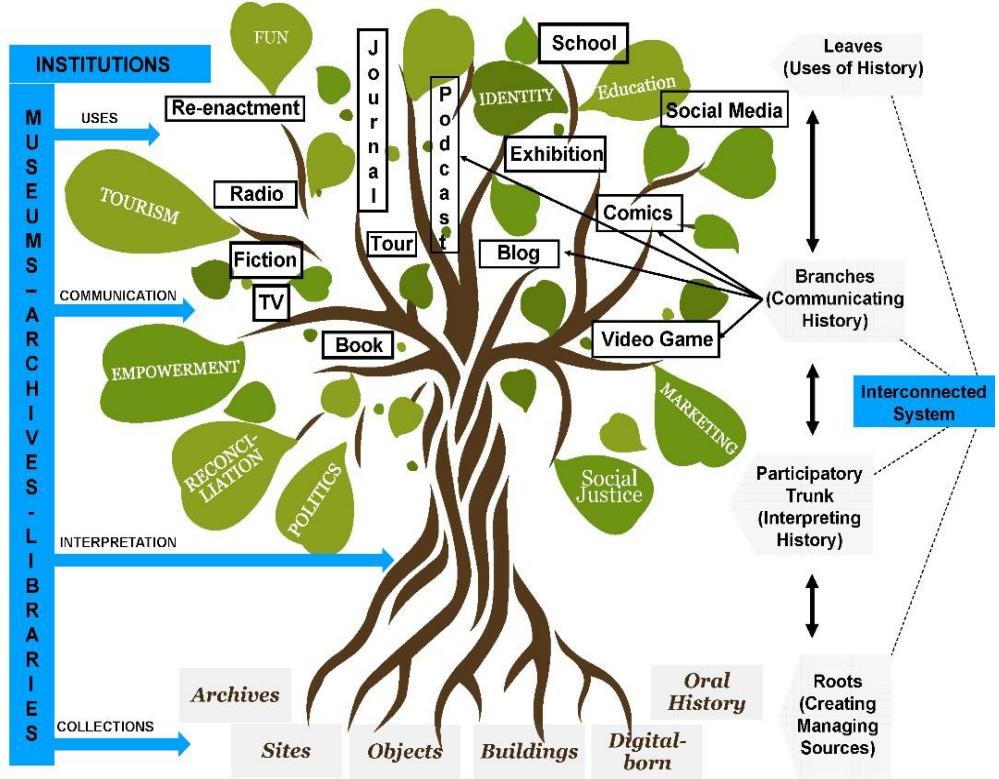


Figure 1.2 Public His'tree by Thomas Cauvin, 2020

In terms of dissemination and accessibility of historical knowledge, traditional history is often confined to academic publications, journals, and monographs, which are not easily accessible to the wider public due to barriers such as paywalls and specialised academic jargon. Public History, by contrast, applies historical methodology to present-day issues. (Cauvin, 2016) To do this, however, it has to communicate in the language of the people, using a variety of relatable and engaging formats. It has to be designed to be accessible, inclusive, and welcoming of public participation and interaction, aiming to bridge the gap between academic history and everyday experiences. It legitimises diverse forms of historical storytelling, community histories, oral traditions, digital platforms, and non-Eurocentric perspectives, broadening how the past is remembered and shared, and often actionable for those who engage with it in their everyday lives.

The Public History initiatives sparked by the 2022 Protests (Aragalaya) in Sri Lanka, demonstrate the expanding possibilities of historical documentation.

These projects centred around artistic approaches to capture real-time dissent at GotaGoGama, the protest hub at Galle Face, Colombo. While these historical artefacts were civilian-led, they represented the initiatives and the diverse perspectives of activists, legal experts, policymakers, artists, designers, and nonexpert protesters, creating a rich tapestry of lived experiences. Notable initiatives included sculptures like "Peretha Kaakka" by designer and art-ivist @mangachan Manga Samarasinghe along with many collaborative anonymous sculptures and installations that became symbols of the people's movement. These historical markers were later cleared from the protest site. Artist Anoma Wijewardene's "Art from the Aragalaya...One Year On", makes a 360-degree angle to people's experiences of the movement, inviting political analysts, human rights activists and media personnel to title her paintings according to their interpretations. An initiative that utilised innovative methods was the projection mapping protest at the Presidential Secretariat building in Colombo, where interdisciplinary creative professionals from multiple organisations used video projection mapping to transform the historic building into a platform for visually amplifying dissent. The movement also saw the rise of "Aragalaya Cinema", (Hiranyada Dewasiri, 2024). Documentaries such as Kannan Arunasalam's Anatomy of a Protest (2024), People's Voice is Louder (2023) #GoHomeGota (2023) by Sulochana Peiris; and Cross of Justice (2023) by Anoma Rajakaruna and feature films like Prasanna Vithanage's Paradise (2024), used on-ground testimonies as testaments of new media documentations of people's history.



Figure 1.3 . Peretha Kaakka and anonymous installations at GotaGoGama



Figure 1.4. Wall Projection Mapping at the Presidential Secretariat



Figure 1.5 Collaborative pieces from Art from the Aragalaya

Note: A Year On titled "The executive presidency serves the ruling elite, never the common good" by researcher Dr. Asanga Welikala, "Violence begets violence" by Attorney-at-Law Dr. Gehan Gunatillake and "The Ninth was the perfect illustration of the entrenched nature of the deep dysfunctionality of the violent and abusive state which is the constant and must change" by activist and Former Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka Ambika Satkunanathan.

1.2.3 Public History in the Digital Realm

The democratisation of historical knowledge is a cornerstone of Public History. If Public History is to reflect the people, it must move to the pace of the people and speak their language. In an increasingly digital world where technology has become an indispensable part of life, "if the aim of public history is to reach a wide audience

that includes historians and citizens in the collective discussion of the past, then it must use the dominant ecosystem: the digital one.” (Pons, 2022)

Almost any historical product can potentially be accessed online. Public History too is, therefore, forced to be digital. It should be noted, while the Internet can aid in creating or accessing Public History in the digital space, not all historical work available online qualifies as Digital Public History. Additionally, while accessibility is a key goal of any form of Public History, “accessibility does not mean the work is inherently public history” (Leon, 2015) This is where the interchangeably used terms, within the digital space come into play. Digital Humanities, Digital History, and Digital Public History share a commitment to utilising digital tools and resources to democratise knowledge and increase public engagement with historiography. Yet, each field represents distinct aims and approaches within the broader digital landscape. Understanding the nuances of each is essential for recognising their intersections and how digital technology has shaped them.

Digital Humanities is an interdisciplinary field that merges traditional humanities disciplines with digital tools to enhance data analysis, visualisation, collaboration, and scholarly inquiry. One of the first references to the idea of humanities and machines dates back to the Memex concept by engineer and inventor Vannevar Bush. In his essay “As We May Think”, Bush describes a hypothetical mechanical device for organising and navigating personal information using associative trails, inspired by the human brain. In the 1950s, Italian priest Father Roberto Busa, in collaboration with IBM, pioneered the Humanities Computing Project to mechanise textual analysis of Thomas Aquinas’ works. Subsequently, what was known as Humanities Computing, mostly focused on textual and text-based literal analysis, was coined “Digital Humanities”, coming to widespread use with “A Companion to Digital Humanities”, (Schreibman et al., 2004) in an attempt to broaden beyond literary disciplines. (Scheinfeldt 2014) This includes visual representation and public participation. (Svennson, 2010) The 2009 Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0 reads that Digital Humanities explore a universe in which: a) print is no longer the exclusive or

the normative medium, instead, “absorbed into new, multimedia configurations” and digital tools, techniques, and media have “altered the production and dissemination of knowledge in the arts, human and social sciences.”

Digital History is a part of Digital Humanities, to access sources for historical inquiry and/or to communicate its results. According to the Journal of American History, Digital History is “anything (research method, journal article, monograph, blog, classroom exercise) that uses digital technologies in creating, enhancing, or distributing historical research and scholarship.” Until the late 1980s, historical computing was limited to qualitative research, lacking public engagement. The technological shift from analogue to digital enriched the field into what we know as Digital History today. Digital history is not simply a set of practices; it is also a new format to produce history, with new actors and new results. (Ayers, 1999) One of the field’s pioneer projects was the Valley of the Shadow initiated by historian Edward Ayers’ team from the University of Virginia in the 1990s; a digital archive of primary sources that documented the experiences of Union and Confederate soldiers during the American Civil War. Another was the CHNM created in 1994; a major actor in defining digital history and its public uses. As opposed to the textual analysis of Digital Humanities, Digital History expands and connects to broader cultural discourse. According to Cohen and Roszenweig, Digital History is about “gathering, preserving and presenting the past on the web.” “Presenting” or visualising history sparks new possibilities for historians to present their work beyond scholarship, among which digital mapping is key. The three major aspects of the field are, “searching and researching sources through digital technology, the manipulation (and creation) of digital documents (visualisation, mapping, and so on), and the new audiences provided by digital sharing”, most specifically with the advent of the Internet. (Cohen et al, 2008)

In the early stages of the World Wide Web (1993), HTML and browser technologies allowed historians to present their work through read-only static websites, only updated and controlled by webmasters. It is through the advancement of the World

Wide Web, that Digital Public History was made possible. The second generation of websites in the early 2000s, ‘Web 2.0’, (O’Reilly, 2005) also known as the “readwrite web”, enabled and encouraged interaction among users and also with the content of the webpage. This transformation allowed Digital History to be social, making it widely shareable and accessible to the public.

It should be reiterated, while Web 2.0 enables a public component to Digital History and Digital Humanities at large, that “there is a difference between ‘public-facing’ digital projects and digital projects of public engagement.” (Heppler, undated) While Digital History projects can be used for historical study in novel dimensions, they may have no public engagement. “If our questions are driving our projects, then the project is not public. It’s our project” (Cantwell 2015). Simply, public access guaranteed through the Internet does not activate user engagement required for a Public History project by default. Through user-generated content, it must make the public an actor in the Digital Public History network. The key signifier of Digital Public History from Digital Humanities and Digital History is the intent of user-centred history. (Leon, 2015) Despite the evolutionary shift in ecosystems, it is necessary for Digital Public History projects to be in touch with the core principles of Public History. They should be created for the public, through a public perspective, in public spaces. Alongside user-centric notions, it is critical to be intentional about the process and the digital tools through which public participation is enabled. A Digital Public History project should also be designed with the public, defining necessary collaborators and audiences for specific types of projects.

Crowdsourcing (Citizen Science) is a method commonly used by Public Historians to drive public participation from the get-go. One of the earliest usages of the term defines the strategy as “the act of taking work once performed within an organisation and outsourcing it to the general public through an open call for participants.” (Howe, 2006) Crowdsourcing derives a certain level of authority from the “crowd” it involves. One use is for transcription and correction where users can convert texts into machine-readable formats. Europeana 1914-1918, a project to uncover and share

unique histories and first-hand accounts from World War I, uses crowdsourcing to transcribe and annotate handwritten texts, letters, and other materials through activities like the “Transcribathon.” Crowdsourcing is also used to identify places, people or items. (Marston, 2015) For instance, Placeography is a project by the Minnesota Historical Society that invites users to share personal stories about the history of sites, buildings, neighbourhoods, or other places with a sentimental attachment. Other crowdsourcing projects may ask users to directly contribute with content such as stories, and artefacts for digital collections, creating a digitised collection of everyday things that matter to the audience the project serves. The Europeana 1914-1918 projects falls under this category as well, collecting crowdsourced stories, letters, and artefacts to build a digitised collection that captures diverse experiences of the First World War. The method can also be used to manage existing collections, asking users to process, describe, and tag. Crowdsourcing ensures public participation in the project process as it involves an audience during its creation. This guarantees a definite level of public engagement, even in an instance where the project falls short of being consistently accessed and actively used. It provides authenticity, allowing communities to be actively involved in projects concerning their heritage while providing historians with a better sense of what users value for collection and preservation. Further, it shares the burden of the historian through the default public participation the method enables.

In the making of Digital Public History projects, creators may explore many innovative digital mediums to craft engaging user experiences. This raises the question of what skills Digital Public historians and practitioners should be equipped with. In terms of computer programming, coding involves an array of complex languages that enable humans to communicate with computers such as C, C++, C#, Python, Ruby etc. These languages have evolved to the extent that language specialists in specific languages exist. While user-friendly, do-it-yourself digital tools and software such as WordPress, Dreamweaver, Omeka for curating digital exhibitions, and PastPerfect for managing digital archives are widely available, most Digital Public History projects

remain collaborative efforts between historians and tech experts, such as computer scientists; While high-fidelity digital projects required to create immersive user experiences require complex codes, it is also highly dependent on the scope and type of the project, as each programming language may be associated with a particular use (Pinola 2013). Similarly, in terms of web design, it is commonplace for historians and organisations to outsource digital projects. However, they should at least know of the types of web design technologies such as HTML, CSS, JavaScript, PHP, Flash, or AJAX, and be aware of their design challenges and limitations to communicate seamlessly with web designers. Particular attention to the accessibility and usability of websites is crucial, as accessibility is an integral aspect of digital public history as a user-centred process and aligns with general web design best practices. Usability, navigation, interactivity, and user-focused design should be at the core of digital public history websites, as well as colour, size, and font choices. (Petrik, 2000; Cohen & Rosenzweig, 2005, pp. 51–58) In correspondence with the audience of the project, public historians must always consider user requirements to determine design choices and lead the developer accordingly. Additionally, creating usable digital sources for collection management is crucial, to aid in sorting, organising and making a plethora of online sources searchable. For more user-friendly search options, historians must move beyond basic database management systems like Excel and Access, adopting relational databases for more accurate searches and web databases for online accessibility.

While it may not be essential for historians to be experts in cutting-edge programming languages, digital public historians must not be passive in the face of digital spaces. Public historians must understand which digital tools best suit their project needs and how these tools work to some extent. This helps them better understand what computers and tech experts offer, while maintaining a level of systematic and creative control to ensure the core vision of the project is not lost in translation. Computer scientist Gregory Crane argues the need for “polyglots” or “connectors” to bridge the gap between humanities and computer scientists. (Manan, 2006) While historians

may not need to be experts in all aspects of digital history, having a sound understanding of the components that influence the public aspects of digital projects is quintessential.

1.3 The Role of Innovators in Digital Public History

As established in previous sections, Public History, founded on the principle of democratising historical knowledge, is perhaps the most receptive to viewing history through a narrative lens. Democratising access and participation inherently promote tolerance to diverse perspectives in historical discourse, specially through the open access the Internet facilitates for Digital Public History projects. Subsequently, when public historians create such projects, the public reasonably assumes that the historical information presented, visualised, and designed is free from the historian's personal biases or moral judgements.

This section argues that Public History projects are not immune to the influence of the historians' assumptions. Moving forward, Digital Public History projects will be referred to as "DPH innovations" and the historians and practitioners who create such innovations as the "innovators" or "creators."

1.3.1 Innovators' Utopia

Innovation of any kind is a complex process that calls for a chain of successive decisions. According to the father of the study of innovation in the economy Joseph Schumpeter, innovation means "combining materials and forces that are within our capacity to influence." (Chavaglia Neto et al., 2022) In light of the "influence" that dictates the decisions that ultimately shape the innovation, the innovators' decisionmaking becomes more crucial than ever if the innovation is based on a market that does not yet exist. This becomes particularly relevant to DPH innovations, which are in infancy of truly novel and experimental development.

During the innovation process, innovators' assumptions inevitably translate into their innovation. In the psychological literature, "confirmation bias" supports this, a

phenomenon “seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand.” (Nickerson, 1998) Some argue that biases are perceived with intention. While this may apply to deliberate case-building among prosecutors in a court of law or parliamentarians in session, psychologists assert that confirmation bias is “a less explicit, less consciously one-sided casebuilding process” referring to “unwitting selectivity in the acquisition and use of evidence.” (Nickerson, 1998) This sub-conscious phenomenon is embraced by some, claiming “human beings are creative confabulators designed to invent stories that impose coherence on the world,” (Tetlock & Gardner, 2016) claiming that it is the nature of human design to “impose” meaning and interpretation onto objects. This human tendency, developed through human interaction, environments and contexts, seeks to give broader meaning to life’s narratives.(Chavaglia Neto et al., 2022) Nickerson further classifies the subconscious or unconscious confirmation bias; “Motivated confirmation bias”, is where individuals treat evidence in a biased manner, motivated by the passion to defend preferred beliefs without being deliberate or aware of the selective judgement. “Unmotivated confirmation bias” is when individuals are biased in their use of evidence even in indifference, not driven by a compelling desire. This phenomenon goes back to the time of Francis Bacon, where he expressed that the tendency of individuals to assert their worldviews “remain inviolate” across sectors, be it philosophy or the sciences.

Scholars point out the negative effects of “the trap” that is confirmation bias, noting how it skews a rigorous innovation process, affecting the quality of the output. They argue that the human tendency to prefer information that adheres to their hypotheses and ignores contradictory evidence limits innovative idea generation, potentially paving the way to the failure of a venture, (Bazerman, 1998; Kahneman, 2021) ultimately producing, “a distorted view.” (Gary, 2006) This conversation extends to “Explanation Bias”, the tendency to underestimate the uncertain nature of past events, leading to overstated causal connections, even among expert innovators (historians). (Mukharji & Zeckhauser, 2019) For DPH innovators, whose foundation

lies in the fluid, dynamic historical narrative, explanation bias may influence static, deterministic views of historical events, without their knowledge.

Moreover, when innovators bring an innovation to life, their main focus is the overwhelmingly favourable aspects of their inventions, shaped by their worldview and belief systems. (Reece et al., 2022) Most prevalently in the DPH domain, innovators driven by passion towards their niches are afflicted by Nickerson's "unmotivated confirmation bias", where they impose assumptions onto creations without their knowledge, which may "lead to neglect, ignore or downplay any potential negative impact." In the context of DPH, this means that the historical narratives presented are shaped by the innovators' underlying ideologies.

To further extend this discussion within the DPH landscape, the term "Innovator's Utopia", will be used, referring to the term utopia (the good place) coined by Thomas More in his book Utopia (1516), where he describes a fictional ideal island society. (Sargent, 2016) In "Innovator's utopia", the term draws parallels to the general context of the innovator's ideal vision or worldview; the driver of all his design choices across innovations.

1.3.2 Innovators' Utopias in the Digital Public History Landscape

The continuity of historical discourse lies in the various philosophies of truth asserted by historians and practitioners. What historical truth should be and how it should look like, is an argument that extends to DPH innovators in the same. Having established that cognitive biases play a role in innovators' decision-making during the innovation process, exploring how "innovators' utopia", the idealistic worldview that guides innovators applies in the DPH landscape is necessary.

It is vital to highlight the diversity of assumptions among digital public historians, even within a shared community of practitioners who believe in doing history for the public and with the public, while making historical knowledge as accessible as possible. To illustrate the existence of differences among innovators' utopias of DPH innovators, discourse around crowdsourcing will be discussed as an example.

As stated in earlier sections, crowdsourcing as a public participation tactic in DPH innovations, despite its many merits, raises concerns about the role of the historian and the extent of shared authority especially in the context of quality control. Some DPH innovators believe that the unexpected consequences of meritocracy crowdsourcing enable, outweigh its convenience as a public engagement method, fearing an absence of authenticity assumedly guaranteed by authority. Innovators with this line of thinking may focus on ways to contain the extent of shared authority of the public in their innovation methodology. Others highlight the significance of a predominantly historian-mediated system to critically assess crowdsourced information and create knowledge, avoiding “the multiplication of pure opinions.” (Grove 2009). Such innovators may arrange a team of experts to rigorously analyse checks and balances, moderating and even recreating crowdsourced histories. In contrast, DPH innovators who believe in complete autonomy of the user, may not employ such moderation methods in the innovation’s design. Some may choose to view crowdsourcing as a commitment guided by rules, commonly observed in transcription projects, employing a select sample of volunteers to assist research experts. Such innovators may incorporate options in their innovation, for volunteers to connect with them, as a means of understanding the motivations for participation. While DPH creators believe that “crowdsourcing projects must not act as cultural missionaries,” creating a passive public, they should be enabled and encouraged to apply historical analysis to sources. (Cauvin, 2016)

Similarly, in terms of assigning roles for the public, observing to which extent creators assign opportunities and responsibilities as well as restrict them, elucidates the difference in assumptions of DPH innovators. It is important to emphasise that the purpose of this study is to analytically explore how utopias influence the design choices of DPH innovations and to examine the differences in these choices across utopias, rather than to scrutinise innovators’ biases and utopias in general.

1.4 Philosophies of Truth and Reality

As elucidated in earlier sections, the historic practice runs on diverse notions people

(historians, included) have of “the real historical truth.” This is the “distinction between what is really true and what is merely believed, even with good reason, to be true” (Longino, 2002). In journalism, ‘objectivity’ is a contested term with multiple connotations by various groups according to their interests. (Goldstein, 2007) Similarly, in the Public History domain, objective historical truth is often shaped by the worldview of those who interpret it] Much of the current literature on truth stem from the early 20th century, the most prominent being the correspondence, pragmatist and coherence theories of truth. (Glanzberg, 2023) These theories inquire the general question: “What is the nature of truth?” Therein, the philosophy of truth becomes highly relevant in the study and practice of Public History.

The following sections will analyse innovators’ utopias in relation to the epistemological and ontological assumptions of historical truth, as they apply to innovators (public historians), through the lens of three overarching philosophies of truth: Realism, Pragmatism, and Anti-realism. These philosophies of truth will discuss relevant theories of truth, key scholarly arguments, critique and relevance across philosophies.

1.4.1 Historical Realism as a Lens

Originating from Platonic traditions, the correspondence theory of truth, often embodies realism. (Putnam, 1978, p.18) The likes of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell dominate the early 20th century literature regarding the theory. The basic idea of the theory is ontological, a belief is true in the existence of a corresponding fact and is false when there is none. (Russell, 1912) It largely relies on objects of reference to satisfy the outcome.

Realism asserts that:

1. The world exists objectively and independently of how we think about or describe it.
2. Our thoughts and claims are about that world, grounded in a correspondence theory of truth.

3. The principle of bivalence applies, where every contradicting proposition is either true or false. (Dummett, 1959; 1976; 1983).

The key phrases here, are “objective”, “facts” and “true or false”. Accordingly, in the context of Public History, Realism emphasises that historical truth must correspond to an objective reality, and that justification of belief must be more natural than local or subjective. (Rorty, 1991) Thus, Realism closely aligns with positivism, highlighting the importance of independent verification of truths.

The realist understanding of truth contrasts sharply with the theological and authoritarian epistemology that dominated Europe between the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of democracy, where truth was “decreed” by divine authority. Highly subjective moral judgments on knowledge and human behaviours were filtered through a “God’s eye view”, which were later challenged by intellectual movements such as the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution that saw the work of Kepler, Galilei, Bacon and Newton. These movements laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment era or the Age of Reason (17th-18th cent.), which had close ties to rationalism and empiricism and called for the formal separation of the church and the state, where thinkers like Descartes, Locke and Kant explored the relationship between human cognition and objective reality. According to the Cartesian tradition, the human mind was directly responsible for inhibiting correspondence. (Descrates, 1641) Kant followed suit by introducing ‘transcendental idealism’, where hardwired universal ‘conceptual schemes’ of the mind shape sensory data, where he argued that “thought should not mirror reality”, but regulate it instead. (Maras, 2013) In contrast, Locke viewed empirical data, along with sensory data, as essential to better reflect reality. (Hetherington, 2012) Hume insisted on the need for a more rigorous scientific method to gather 'objective' empirical evidence. This is where it connects with the 20th-century modern realist discourse, which focuses on language as an aid to better access the mind. (Rorty, 1991)

Given this foundation, it comes as no surprise that historical realism has emerged as the dominant ideology since the inception of history as an academic discipline.

Perhaps, why a vast majority of laypeople, by estimate, seem to adopt a realist understanding of history. The 19th century German historical school where the ideology of facts and the past was propagated, had a major influence over the West. The key goal of historians at the time was to craft the best methodology to unveil the objectively accurate truth through facts. 19th-century German historian Leopold von Ranke, among the founding fathers of modern historiography, advocated for a strictly source-based approach focused on factual accuracy, according to his dictum "wie es eigentlich gewesen" (to show things as they actually were). (Ranke, 1836) In doing so, he believed that history may achieve pedigree "objectivism", freeing it from the influence of external forces such as religion and political propaganda, establishing it as a completely independent discipline.

Historical realism believes that the role of the historian is to act as the vessel through which the ultimate "accurate truth", concerning past events is uncovered. Therefore, many realist assumptions may center around the significance of the empirical skill of the expert historian. As outlined earlier in the chapter on the evolution of historiography, a historical realist's understanding of the past is twofold. Ontological, due to the belief in an organised, structured sequence of past events, which can be accessed through credible sources. Epistemological, due to the belief that the accessibility of the organised past is directly proportional to a well-tuned historical methodology. (Imaz-Sheinbaum, 2023)

Peter Novick, in "That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession", critiques the pursuit of absolute objectivity in history. He discusses the inherent contradictions in the concept of pure "objectivity," pointing out that historians, as human agents, bring their biases, ideologies, and cultural contexts to their interpretations. According to Novick, objectivity is more of an ideal than an achievable standard, as historical narratives are shaped by the perspectives of their creators (Novick, 1988). Postmodernists like Foucault and Derrida also challenged the idea of a fixed, immutable objective truth. Foucault emphasises the interplay of power and knowledge, suggesting that what is considered "truth" is shaped by the

prevailing power structures. Derrida, through deconstruction, highlights the instability of language, showing how meaning is contingent and cannot claim universal objectivity. Hayden White points out how historians are proactive “agents of the truth” that interpret and actively give meaning to past events, rather than standing before facts as “vessels”, exempting them from impartial judgement. He believes that history has both “scientific and artistic faces”, granting the means to analyse sources and examine archives through scientific tools, but also write about or present it as a narrative. He regrets that historians do not acknowledge this, criticising the 19th century scholarly foundations that sought to exclude “literary and poetic effects” from historical writing. (Domańska, 1998) For instance, since Descartes, the metaphor in terms of historical writing is regarded as an error or a “category mistake.” (Ryle, 1949)

Public historians, working with the public on matters that influence them, may adopt empirical and positivist assumptions of historical realism in their innovations. It is important to remember that while public access offered by DPH innovations provides opportunities for user engagement, the innovation ultimately remains in the hands of the creator, whose decisions will be shaped by their utopia, which, in this case, is rooted in realism. It is important to note that while the public access enabled by DPH innovations creates opportunities for user engagement, the innovation ultimately remains at the mercy of its creator, whose decisions are guided by utopia—in this case, grounded in realism.

1.4.2 Pragmatism as a Lens

Pragmatism stems from the United States in the 1870s, credited to scientist and logician Charles Sanders Peirce for his maxim where he highlighted the “practical effects” of objects at conception. (Peirce, 1878) Additionally, pragmatist theories of truth are largely accredited to William James and John Dewey.

Pragmatic theories of truth are often represented as an alternative to the static correspondence theory of realism, which sees truth as a bivalent relation between

truth-bearer and truth-maker. In contrast, pragmatism views truth as a function of practices that include making assertions, and scientific inquiry. It focuses on the practical and performative dimensions of truth in action, inferring what people mean or do when describing a truth. It's more than making generalisations, rather an integral tool to the practice of discourse and problem-solving, across domains. (Haack, 2001).

Initial definitions of truth by Peirce state that truth is a function of ongoing inquiry. If a belief withstands future inquiry, agreed by all who investigate it, it is true: "Truth is the end of inquiry." (Peirce, 1878) This statement was later brought to a more lenient standpoint, that truth results from sustained scientific inquiry and what is satisfactory to believe in, with less focus towards unanimous agreement. (Peirce, 1901) James understood truth concerning utility, emphasising "practical and dependable" aspects of a belief. He claims that "truth is expedient in the way of our thinking", (James, 1907) because it guides thought and action. His reference to the "cash value" of truth supports this claim. Dewey reframes truth as what is eventually verifiable, reflecting through the results of testing and examination.

While pragmatism does not directly correspond to an "objective" truth, the acknowledgement of the external world through empirical verification makes it similar to realism. While terms such as 'accurate' and 'biased' connect with realism, pragmatism is concerned with a 'balanced' approach. This ties in to "the Marketplace of Ideas", a term publicised by Former Associate Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court Oliver W. Holmes and Louis Brandeis' dissenting opinion in the US Supreme Court decision Abrams v United States (1919), which insists "the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market." The concurring opinion on Whitney v California (1927) additionally states that the truth may be exposed through discussion through "the remedy" of "more speech, not enforced silence." (Quoted in Fraleigh and Tuman, 1997 pg. 98-102) This concept diverts from realism to an extent, by indicating that the corresponding truth is rather, the best, most practical idea at the given moment as established through sufficient discourse. Similar thoughts were brought up long before the term was coined, in poet

and philosopher John Milton's 'Areopagitica'; an appeal to the British Parliament to reconsider imposed press licensing regulations. He argued that truth must emerge by grappling with falsehood, "put to the worse in a free and open encounter." (Milton, 1644) In contemporary literature, the notion of the Marketplace of Ideas resonates with free speech open to the public sphere, a principle strived towards by many current governments globally, that supports the articulation of ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship or legal consequences. It puts individuals in a position of responsibility to "read carefully...in order to discount the biases and see through to the truth." (Fowler, 1991, pg. 11) Noam Chomsky is an avid supporter of the concept, highlighting the need "to uphold the commitment to a free marketplace of ideas." (Chomsky, 1973) Rorty affirms this, discussing how the sciences and the arts will always provide a competition between alternative theories, movements and schools of thought; "the end of human activity is not rest, but rather richer and better human activity." (Rorty, 1991)

Some argue that the marketplace analogy is fundamentally flawed, as it does not adequately reflect differences between products for sale versus how ideas are exchanged. Unlike tradeable, commodified goods in the market, ideas are often interlinked, forming complex networks in which value is developed and determined in relation to other ideas. These "network effects" connect seemingly independent ideas with larger schools of terminology and structures. (Sparrow & Goodwin, 2001) The "public" nature of ideas does not diminish its value, further deviates the analogy between ideas and products. (Goldman & Cox, 1996, pg 25–26) Further, the possibility of free exchange of ideas in relation to the exchange of goods is contested, due to the emotional attachments individuals maintain with their ideas and beliefs. (Herzog, 2023) Thus, the independent, rational ideal of the pragmatic truth unrealistic and raises concerns about freely tradeable ideas among an unsolicited public. The consequence is a polarisation effect rather than the reasoned debate pragmatists desire.

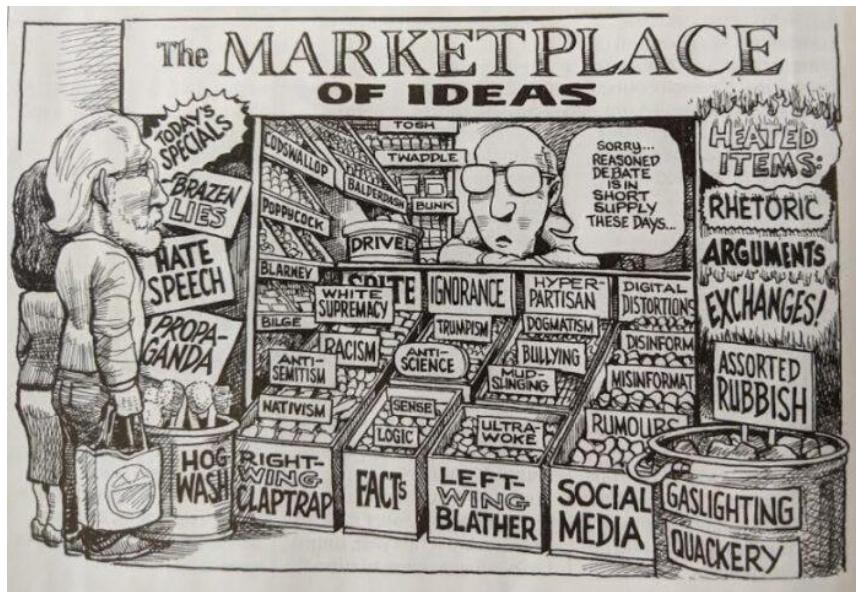


Figure 1.6. A Cartoon critique of the Marketplace of Ideas published on the May 8, 2021 edition of *The Economist*

Considering that the marketplace analogy is an oversimplification of how ideas are exchanged, Milton's need for "truth and falsehood grapple" is revisited, suggesting that analogies of battles or sports games are more suited representations of the exchange of ideas. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, quoted in Dutilh Novaes 2020) It emphasises the quality of "play" of the argument than merely the result. Kitcher holds that the proposing and opposing evidence must always be evenly evaluated. (Kitcher, 2011) Similarly, Mill highlights the significance of "fair play to all sides of the truth" (Mill, 1991), encouraging the public to study one's "adversary's case with as great, if not with still greater, intensity than even his own."

While debates around the pragmatists' marketplace analogies persist, pragmatic historians and innovators hold that markets, much like ideas, require regulation. The question, therefore is how to regulate and "verify truths" in a way that balances free speech whilst ensuring a level playing field.

1.4.3 Anti-Realism as a Lens

In the late 20th century, with the rise of post-modernism and structuralism, the ontological and epistemological foundations of realism began to be challenged. This created a space where philosophy could question and inform historical practice, shifting its monolithic foundations. Anti-realism (constructionism), as the name suggests, is the antithesis of historical realism, largely accredited to the work of Michael Dummett in the late 20th century.

Influenced by pragmatist thought, it rejects realism's objective correspondence theory of truth. Instead, aligning better with verification theories, advocating for a more active and interpretive role of the historian in history-making. For instance, Dummett's antirealist views stress verifiability conditions over truth conditions, hailing that the meaning of a historical claim rests on the evidence that supports it. Thereby, historical anti-realism does not deny the significant role of evidence, rather emphasises how its truth is grounded in its capacity to justify it with evidence. (Pataut, 2008) In parallel, the coherence theories associated with British idealists posit that a belief is true if it fits within a coherent system. Joachim argues that only the "whole complete truth" can be true, indicating that individual judgements are only partial truths. (Joachim, 1906 pg 90) This aligns with anti-realist perspectives which reject the bivalence of realism. Historical anti-realism is based on the premise that the past, being inaccessible as a whole, cannot be fully comprehended, as historians' statements rely heavily on subjective evidence. Constructionists are therefore uninterested in "what really happened", but in the present empirical data that helps "construct" multifaceted narratives about the past. (Černín, 2019) As discussed in earlier sections, narratives claim that historiography is a construction of the past. (Goldstein, 1976) Anti-realist constructionism can be understood through three main perspectives:

1. Determined constructionism: there is a consistent family of theories and methods for interpreting evidence according to rigid professional norms. The

result is not necessarily true but only the most plausible interpretation of evidence.

2. Undetermined constructionism: there are several historiographic methods for interpreting evidence that produce multiple, inconsistent interpretations lacking definitive ways to choose between them.
3. Skeptical constructionism: all historiographic propositions are equally indeterminate and indistinguishable from fiction. (Pataut, 2008)

These views not only highlight anti-realism's disinterest in the objective past, but also its emphasis on the constructed nature of historical knowledge shaped by available evidence and the historian's interpretive framework.

A prominent approach to historical anti-realism is the fictionalist (narrativist) approach represented by W.B. Gallie, A. C. Danto, H. White and F. Ankersmit. It largely relates to fictional aspects of historical writing, stressing the diversity of historical accounts by the storyteller—the historian, whose spatiotemporal and cultural background thoroughly influences the outcome. As opposed to realism which posits a chronological arrangement of data, for narrativists, singular “chronicles” are merely assets to build narratives, “for the purpose of showing part of the past” (Ankersmit, 1986 pg 19) Certain philosophers claim the functionality of historical narratives is similar to scientific models such as the atom; idealised constructs or a “work of fiction” that helps scientists test their assumptions through observations and controlled experiments to understand phenomena. (Cartwright 1983, 153)

When considering anti-realism in the narrative sense, note that it,

1. Does not disregard the importance of the ontological status of “the real past”, rather only questions its credibility as a subject for historical inquiry.
2. Does not accept any and all interpretations devoid of well-supported justifications based on evidence and epistemic values and practices, while being tolerant of competing theories.

3. Is not limited to specific areas of history, but rather includes all aspects from explanations, narratives, research methods, etc. (Černín, 2019)

Goldstein is critical of narrativists for being confined to historical writing and the semantics of anti-realism in the language of texts. He argues they have neglected the “infrastructure” of history (methods and reasoning of historians in inquiry), in the pursuit of the “superstructure” (the end-product in narrative form for layman consumption); (Goldstein, 1976, pg 139–82). This practice that hyper-focuses on framing presets of individual chronicles into a single narrative, ironically reconnects with realist notions of perfectly aligning with the real past by overlooking complexities in interpretation and narrative construction. (Goldstein 1996, pg 334) Further, Ginzburg heavily criticises Hayden White’s book “Metahistory: Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe”, asserting that its anti-positivist rhetoric is subjectivist, manipulating facts for aesthetic appeal. (Domańska, 1998) Another accusation of anti-realism as a whole, is the alleged cherrypicking of past events that best suit respective theories. (Nowell-Smith, 1977, pg 4)

The ideal anti-realist model of history is therefore meant to focus more on “infrastructure,” urging historians to go beyond merely providing explanations of the past. Instead, the primary aim is to constitute a model based on present findings and to explain, in-depth, the various parts and aspects of this model.

1.5 Implications for Research

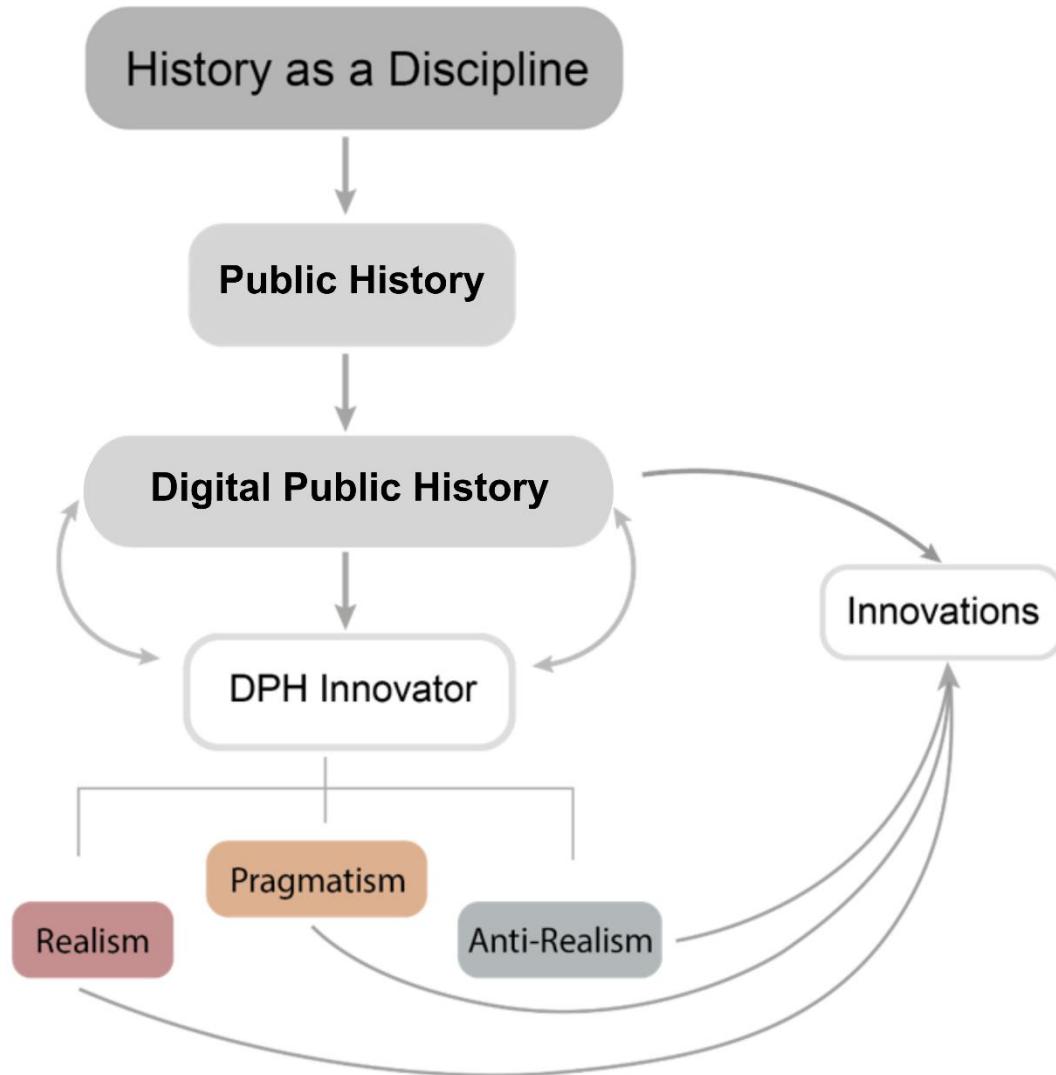


Figure 1.7: Overview of Research

2 Chapter 02 A GUIDE TO ASSESSING ASSUMPTIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN DIGITAL PUBLIC HISTORY DESIGN

2.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous focus on epistemological and ontological assumptions in DPH design, acting as a guide to explore their influence on historical narratives and user interactions. The research adopts a qualitative approach on multiple case studies; representative examples of DPH tools as they exist and operate in the larger DPH landscape. They will be examined in depth to understand the creators' ideologies about the history they practice, the assumptions embedded in their digital designs, and the user experiences they enable through these interactions. The methodology incorporates Madeline Akrich's "De-scription" framework as a primary analytical tool to critically examine how designers' assumptions are materialised through digital tools, and how audiences receive them.

The chapter outlines a three-phase methodology: surface-level analysis for case categorisation, in-depth "De-scription" analysis of creators' philosophies and user interactions, and triangulation through think-aloud studies and interviews to bridge gaps between creators' intentions and user experiences. It concludes by addressing methodological limitations.

2.2 Research Design and Approach

2.2.1 Phase One: Preliminary Data Collection and Case Categorisation

In phase one, the task was to address RQ1: "What are the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions of creators about Public History?" This phase aimed to initially identify the creators' attitudes towards Public History as both a concept and a practice, before diving deeper into the specifics of the digital innovations themselves. The focus was on understanding the philosophical frameworks that guide creators in their approach to representing history in the digital space. By analysing how creators perceive the nature of historical knowledge, truth, and reality, this phase sought to

uncover the foundational assumptions that shape their design choices. These insights provided a critical context for examining how these assumptions manifest in DPH tools and platforms.

As made evident in previous chapters, the literature review was crucial to explore the concepts of Public History (PH) and Digital Public History (DPH), focusing on their academic and public significance. It provided the theoretical foundation necessary to analyse the assumptions of historians and any other DPH creator.

2.2.2 Surface level content analysis

In addition to the literature review, which provided the theoretical foundation for understanding Public History (PH) and Digital Public History (DPH), the primary method to address the first research question involved conducting surface-level analyses of multiple DPH projects.

After conducting a series of agnostic analyses of various DPH projects, it became clear that most were widely available and offered the necessary depth for in-depth analysis, particularly those focused on documenting violent conflict or crimes against humanity or serving as knowledge-sharing hubs. Due to these factors, my next rounds of analysis specifically focused on DPH projects within these areas. The analyses focused on:

- **Language Semantics:** Analysing the choice of language, specific terminology and narrative tone used in the DPH projects and related digital archives to discern underlying assumptions about history, truth, and knowledge representation and to understand how these choices reflect the creators' philosophical standpoint.
- **Design Frameworks:** Observing the design elements and user interfaces of the DPH projects to identify how creators' assumptions are materialised in the user experience.

2.2.3 Designing the Case Study Methodology

Cases were selected across three thematic categories: DPH innovations related to the Holocaust and History Education Initiatives. These categories were curated due to their abundance, accessibility, thematic relevance, and depth they offer for analysis. “Abundance” in this context does not refer to convenience; rather, it underscores the prominence of the extensive documentation of recognised crimes against humanity within the DPH landscape, and the wealth of under-represented initiatives dedicated to historical education in a more contemporary style, all of which naturally position them as focal points for research.

Table 2-1 Initial Case Study Categorisation based on Surface-level Analysis

Assumed Philosophy of Historical Truth	Thematic Variables
Realism	Holocaust Case 1 (Dimensions in Testimony)
Anti-realism	Holocaust Case 2 (Attentat 1942)
Pragmatism	History Education Initiative Case 1 (It's About Time)
Anti-realism	History Education Initiative Case 2 (Museum of Religious Freedom)

Cases under each category are classified using theoretical replication, (Yin, 2015) based on initial surface-level analysis grounded in Realist, Pragmatic, and AntiRealist assumptions of truth. This classification allows for an in-depth exploration of how different philosophical frameworks influence the design, visual presentation, and interaction mechanisms of these projects. By employing this structure, the research also enables cross-category comparisons to uncover broader patterns and divergences. These classifications will later be cross-validated through De-description analysis to ensure rigor.

2.2.4 Phase 2: De-description of Technical Objects

2.2.4.1 De-description as an analytical tool

To explore how assumptions of innovators reflect through their DPH innovations, the selected method, “The De-description of Technical Objects”, is based on the work of French sociologist of technology Madeline Akrich. Akrich is known for developing the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) alongside Bruno Latour, Michael Callon and John Law, who have contributed to the field of sociology of technology. Akrich’s work revolves around understanding how innovators design technical tools for targeted users and the relations between users and tools.

To understand Akrich’s de-description, a basic understanding of Latour’s ANT is vital. ANT goes beyond social constructivism, the idea that people and society shape technology—and technological determinism, which suggests that technology drives societal change. Latour argues that society has undergone revolutionary changes due to the expansion of science and technology, following which the social and the technical world are equally interdependent for survival, as “it is no longer clear whether there exists relations that are specific enough to be called ‘social.’” (Latour, 2005) The theory posits that humans and non-humans are equally valuable within shared, interconnected networks, suggesting that everyday objects play more significant roles in human connections than traditional sociology accredits. Everything, including humans, exists within a vast network of relationships and dependencies of diverse forces. Similarly, Akrich expands on how technical and social interactions shape the relationships defining our society and our understanding of it. Akrich is interested in two key areas:

- 1) The composition of technical objects and their influence on its network: How much does a technical object's design limit or shape how other participants (“actants”) (Latour & Akrich, 1992) interact with it and with each other?

- 2) The nature and relationships of entities involved in the network: What are the characteristics of these actants and their connections? How much can actants modify the object, and in what different ways can the object be used?

When Akrich examines how technical objects define actants and their relationships, she highlights that actants are “assumed” in relation to the object, as “a function of decisions made by designers.” She also emphasises that an object’s flexibility depends on the “distribution of competences assumed when an object is conceived.” (Akrich, 1992) She discusses how the assumptions of designers may not align with the assumptions of users in real-world conditions, stressing the need to examine scenarios where “the inside” (the design and its intended use) and “the outside” (external interactions) of the object are mismatched. This is where Akrich’s work becomes highly relevant in the methodology for analysing DPH innovators’ assumptions that influence the design of DPH innovations and how this design shapes the interactions between the innovation and the user.

Akrich refers to the predicament designers inscribe or “prescribe” into the technical object as a “script.” The methodological proposition of “De-description” insists on listing and analysing the components, features, and processes that shape the relationship between the technical object and its intended versus real-world meanings or functions, by continuously shifting between the designer’s intentions (script) and the user’s experiences. It is also important to monitor the designer’s intentional or unintentional “exclusion” and how the user makes “adjustments” or fails to adjust.

2.2.4.2 De-scripting Digital Public History Innovations

De-description of the selected DPH cases will be conducted in two levels. Firstly, the individual affordances and micro-interactions will be mapped out, acknowledging how they “afford, facilitate, oblige or forbid actions” (Yaneva, 2009) of users, identifying the prescriptions, chreods, delegates, and translations at play, effectively answering RQ2. Here, It is recommended to study tasks that would need to be performed in the absence of those affordances.

Secondly, user interactions and potential modifications of the micro-interactions will be studied to measure the deviation between innovators' assumptions versus user assumptions, answering RQ3 by exploring if user adjustments are made at all, and if yes, to which extent.

Table 2-2 De-description Approach

Research Question	Approach using de-description
RQ2. How are the underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded into the design and functionality of Digital Public History innovations?	Analyse affordances, microinteractions, and user pathways.
RQ3. Do users re-interpret or modify the micro-interactions of the design of Digital Public History innovations?	User-observation studies via think-aloud method

To analyse DPH innovations, the method borrows from the vocabulary of Arkrich, Latour and technologist Jim Johnson, which avoids terms that imply distinctions between the technical and the social. (Refer Glossary)

2.2.5 Phase 3: Observational Studies and Interviews

Observational studies were conducted with a sample of six participants (ages 21-26) to solidify de-scripted findings. By examining various user interactions, answers for RQ3 were answered, covering multi-faceted user interaction styles through the selection of participant samples. The sample included three design students (User 1–3) with backgrounds in Visual Communication Design and Motion Graphics, and three humanities students (User A–C) with backgrounds in humanities such as Sociology, Law and Languages and Linguistics. This group ensured a comprehensive evaluation of both the design and interpretive dimensions of DPH innovations.

These participants, newly introduced to selected DPH innovations, were asked to engage with the technology during one-on-one virtual meetings via Zoom. Each participant was requested to screen-share their activities for the convenience of observation and note-taking. As participants organically explored the assigned innovation, the think-aloud method was followed, encouraging them to vocalise their thoughts on the innovations, including likes, dislikes, challenges, and other reflections. Design students educated in UI/UX design principles extensively focused on the affordances and micro-interactions of innovations, while humanities students explored broader socio-political implications of the technology. Non-obtrusive prompts were used where needed to guide user pathways, following up with unstructured interviews.

Table 2-3 Observational Study Framework

USER	INNOVATION	INTERACTION TIME (mins)
User 1	Attentat 1942, Dimensions in Testimony	120, 45
User 2	It's About Time, The Museum of Religious Freedom	45, 60
User 3	It's About Time, The Museum of Religious Freedom	45, 60
User A	It's About Time, Dimensions in Testimony	45, 45
User B	Dimensions in Testimony, The Museum of Religious Freedom	45, 60
User C	Dimensions in Testimony, Attentat 1942	45, 120

2.3 Assessing Opportunities and Limitations

As the methodology is rooted in theoretical frameworks such as De-scription, an extension of the established Actor-Network Theory, the study provides a robust foundation for analysing the interaction between design and use in DPH innovations.

The use of terminology from Akrich, Latour, and Johnson enhances clarity and analytical depth. The phased approach, combining surface-level analysis, Description of affordances, and user-focused observational studies ensures a multifaceted exploration of user interactions. By including thematically diverse cases, the study uncovers patterns across contexts, making it highly relevant to contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the emphasis on user experience through protocols such as think-aloud interviews bridges the gap between creator intentions and user experiences, strengthening its applicability to the UI/UX design domain.

It should be noted, however, that de-scription is a time-consuming methodology as it dives into the crevices of innovation at hand. To complement this, a limited sample size of user observation studies was conducted in the same for RQ3. As this limited sample itself could pose limitations, to address this, participants were selected to include both UI/UX design experts and non-designers with humanities knowledge, ensuring diverse, yet highly relevant perspectives and feedback. Additionally, the conducted observational studies followed time-intensive interactions, allowing a comprehensive view of their organic interactions with the technology. Incorporating a broader demographic in future studies could mitigate this limitation. Finally, categorising cases into fixed epistemological categories (Realism, Pragmatism, Antirealism) risks oversimplification. To counter this, the study acknowledges overlaps and nuances, inviting further exploration to refine the classifications.

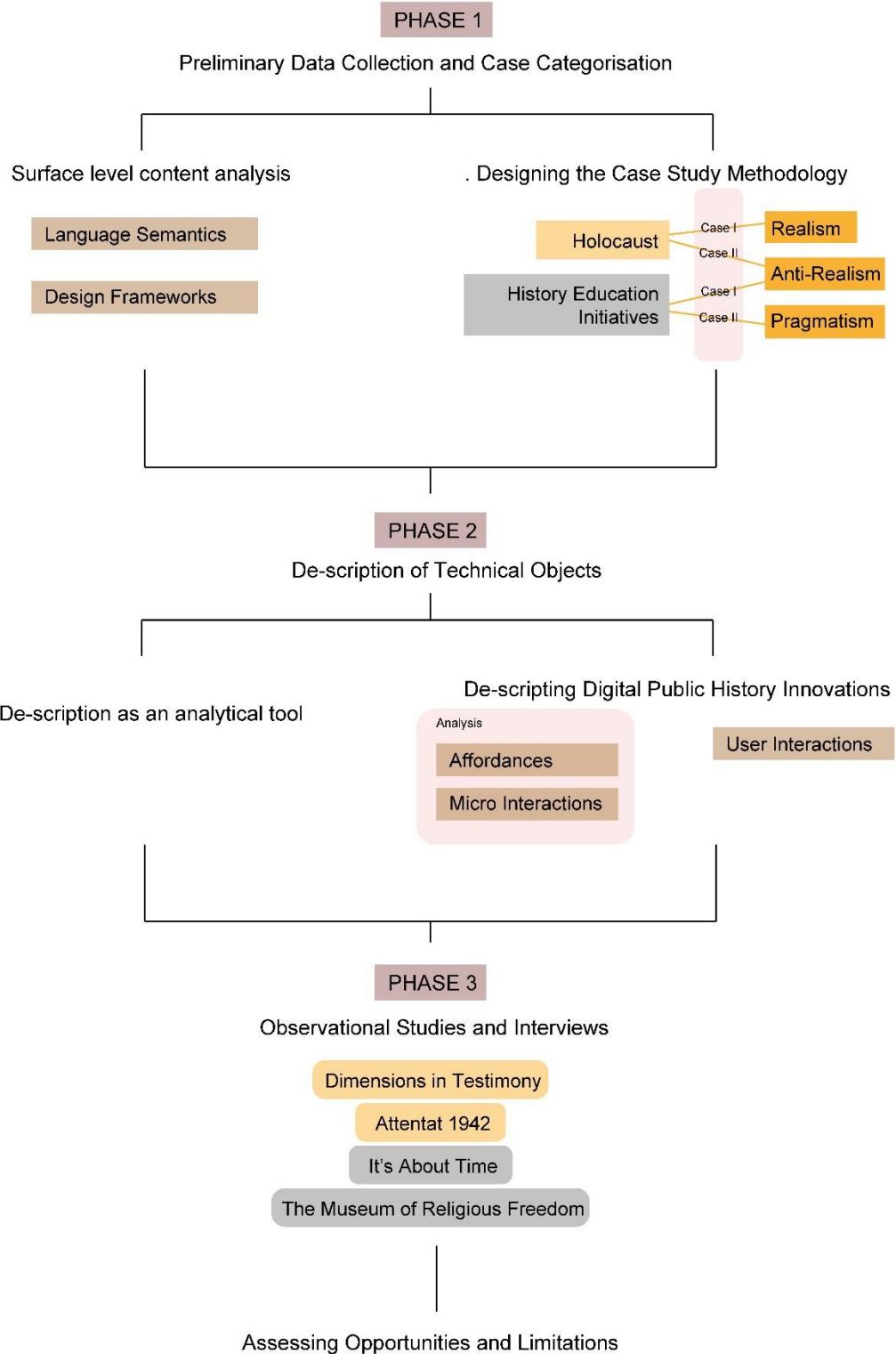


Figure 2.1 Methodology breakdown

3 Chapter 03 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ASSUMPTIONS AND USER INTERACTIONS IN DIGITAL PUBLIC HISTORY DESIGN INNOVATIONS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a critical analysis of the identified cases introduced in the previous chapter. First, an overview of the background and contexts of cases will be explored. Having established that Akrich's "De-description" methodology will be the primary driver of the study; each case will break down the affordances and microinteractions of the respective DPH innovations. Firstly, it will primarily de-script the creators' embedded assumptions. Additionally, real-time user interactions will be evaluated to determine whether modifications or adaptations to existing microinteractions of the selected DPH innovation cases can be observed. The chapter will conduct a cross-case analysis to compare how embedded philosophical frameworks manifest across cases. Finally, it will connect this evaluation to the study's purpose of exploring the significance of epistemological and ontological assumptions in DPH tools, focusing on creators' biases, motives in history design, and the broader implications for historical narratives and user experiences on digital platforms.

3.2 Overview of Case Study A: The Holocaust

The Holocaust (1941–1945), orchestrated by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler during World War II (WWII) is widely considered one of history's most prolific genocides and crimes against humanity, resulting in the systematic extermination of approximately six million Jews, alongside millions of others, including disabled individuals, and political dissidents. The genocide was driven by an ideology of racial superiority as a policy based on ethnic cleansing. Atrocities committed during this period included mass shootings, gas chambers, forced labour camps, and starvation. The Holocaust remains a subject of ongoing research and debate, with certain opposing ideas that question its very existence. As one of the most extensively documented atrocities in human history, the DPH innovation landscape offers diverse approaches to commemoration and study.

Table 3-1 Case Study Group A Overview

Predicted Assumption of Truth	Innovation/Project	Description	Justification
Realism	New Dimensions in Testimony	<p>An interactive project developed by the USC Shoah Foundation using advanced filming techniques, natural language processing (NLP), artificial intelligence (AI), and holographic technologies to enable real-time Q&A interactions with pre-recorded video interviews of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses. The initiative is twofold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Preserves eyewitness accounts, allowing museum-goers and students to engage in conversational learning. b) A prototype dialogue system that allows virtual conversations with Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter on a screen through IWitness. 	<p>Aim to preserve the testimonies of Holocaust survivors as accurate reflections of their lived experiences</p> <p>Directed, moderated flow</p> <p>Tolerance of only certain kinds of questions</p> <p>Resists relativism: Responsive to only pre-determined topic areas</p>

Anti-Realism	Attentat, 1942	<p>A point-and-click adventure game developed by Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences that explores Nazi-occupied Czech lands during World War II. Using interactive comics, cinematic interviews with survivors, authentic historical footage, and dialogue-based gameplay tells the untold story of a family during the war.</p>	<p>Blurs fact and fiction: Prioritising artistic narrative over adhering to historical facts as they are.</p> <p>Focus on subjective memory</p> <p>Mid-moderation or unmoderated flow of gameplay</p>
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The analysis of language semantics and design frameworks of these works make the target audience and the projects' foundational goals abundantly clear. In Dimensions of Testimony, the creators assert that the project, while enjoyed by laypeople and casual museum-goers, is primarily meant for "students and educators." The prototype version being hosted by IWitness, an educational platform that produces a wealth of history educational resources for classrooms, further establishes this. The emphasis is on "holocaust survivors" in their website biography, where they assert the importance of testimonial-based oral history education, through "interactive biographies", stresses the significance of "eyewitnesses to history", and "learning from those who were there." Further, using "pre-recorded interviews" for the holographic technology showcases how important maintaining "credible" sources of evidence that connect to the real past is important to the creator. The great lengths the developers have gone to create this technology that is ultimately based on "real" testimonials to "redefine inquirybased education" with "real-time responses", attempts to mimic authentic representations of past histories. (Appendix A)

Similarly, Attentat 1942 focuses on the educational intent of the edutainment game, through the distinct mention of the affiliations of the game creators and

developers to the Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences, it promotes “Attentat for the Classroom” packages with discounted licenses for schools, affirming it is “designed by academics and teachers.” While the game describes itself as, “A World War II game through the eyes of survivors”, giving value to the eye-witness testimony in historical narratives, it avoids sticking within an explicitly realistic world-building. To do this, the creators have used “historically accurate interviews” only to facilitate the story narrative, avoiding, “gamifying” real experiences of the Holocaust. The inclusion of “authentic documentary footage” as well as a “carefully researched and peer-reviewed” vocabulary by Czech and American historians, the game presents a fictitious story that blends real-life film, with animated cartoons, “mini-games and interactive comics”, through which the players are free to engage with and manipulate the story outcomes with the choice-based mechanism. The game further invites the user to “relive” memories from their own perspectives and “judge for themselves.” (Appendix B)

3.2.1 De-scripting Affordances and Micro-interactions

A) Dimensions in Testimony

While the applications of this project around the world range from digital projections with voice recognition for classroom and museum interactions, to fully fledged hologram theaters, for this study, only the virtual prototype version available on IWitness will be studied, due to accessibility and its digital-specific nature.

Table 3-2 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Speak with Pinchas at IWitness

Scene: Dimensions in Testimony home page on the USC Shoah Foundation website	
Affordance	Chreod
Affordance Speak with Pinchas at IWitness button 	Affords: 1) The button colour suggests clickability directs user to a prototype user experience upon clicking, to engage with holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter through IWitness
Micro-interactions 1) Colour change with hover  1) Loading spinner upon clicking 	Forbids: 1) Limits interaction to the IWitness prototype experience to Pinchas Gutter 2) Forbids users from viewing or learning about other interviewee options
Delegates/Lieutenants: - The human delegate (educator/student user) initiates the interaction. - The nonhuman lieutenants (Button, system code, and renderer)	
Pre-inscription Notes: - Basic knowledge of how interactive buttons work. (clickable objects, visual cues on colour changes) - English language proficiency.	
Translation Notes: The button directly links to the IWitness experience. In its absence, users would have to manually search or navigate through other sections of the website to engage with the testimony	
Prescription Notes: Guides users to IWitness to engage in an educational experience with Holocaust survivors, in addition to Pinchas Gutter. Users have to encounter Pinchas' experience before viewing other available interviewees.	

The design of the button, leading to a single testimonial (Pinchas Gutter's), assumes that **personal testimony** is a valid and meaningful way to convey truth. It positions **individual survivor testimony** as central to the truth about historical events. **truth is subjective and individual**, conveyed through **personal narratives**. Assumes that engaging with Pinchas's testimony provides a reliable, authentic, and impactful form of learning about the Holocaust. Suggests an epistemological **hierarchy of truths**, where the story of **Pinchas** (chosen perhaps for its historical or educational importance) is viewed as foundational or more significant than others, creating a **sequenced progression** in how historical truths are accessed.

The design implies that existence, in the context of Holocaust survivors, is tied to the **memory of the past**. This positions the ontology of the Holocaust survivor as a **continuing presence** through technology, where the user can interact with the "alive" **memory** of Pinchas. implying a **continuing, evolving existence** of the testimony.

*Table De-
scripting Dimensions in Testimony* [View all interviewees](#)

Scene: Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter's Education page	
Affordance	Chreod
Affordance View all interviewees button 	Affords: 1) Yellow button and label signals clickability. 2) >> symbol indicates the ability to navigate to an interviewee list when clicked.
Micro-interactions 1) Colour change when clicked 	Forbids: 1) Forbids direct engagement or customising the interviewee list without first navigating to the given list.
Translation Notes: The button centralises access by eliminating the need to manually search or navigate through multiple pages to find the interviewee list.	
Prescription Notes: Directs users to a curated interviewee list, enabling access to various testimonies beyond the ones highlighted on the homepage. Users are informed that Gutter's testimony is the blueprint.	

The limitation of engagement to Pinchas Gutter's story before moving on to other testimonies suggests that users' experience of the Holocaust reality is controlled and structured. The button limits the pathways, ensuring the user follows a scripted journey through specific experiences.

Implication: This points to an ontological belief that reality (or history) is best understood through controlled, curated experiences—the user must adhere to a predetermined structure in which certain experiences are prioritized (Pinchas Gutter's testimony first), suggesting that the curatorial choices of content. Almost like the other interviewees are generalized multiple perspectives and narratives.

Table De-

Implication: This encodes a pluralistic approach to truth, emphasizing the value of collective memory over individual testimony.

3-5 scripting Dimensions in Testimony Page Navigational Sections

Scene: Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter's Education page navigation section labels.	
Affordance	Chreod
Page Navigation Sections 	Affords: 1) Direct access between sections without manually scrolling.
Micro-interactions Implicit scroll animation to the corresponding page section only when clicked.	Forbids: 1) Limits interactivity through implicit clickable styling
Delegates/Lieutenants: Anchor tags, CSS scroll animations, browser render engine	
Pre-inscription Notes: Moderate knowledge of page navigation to maneuver implicit navigational labels.	
Translation Notes: Users would need to manually scroll and locate each section, easing navigation of relevant content.	
Prescription Notes: Prompts to "Have a conversation" first, then directly user to obtain optimum education about Pinchas through learning materials to enhance the user experience.	

3-6 scripting Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter Holographic Avatar

Table De-

Scene: Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter's Education page, Have a Conversation with Pinchas Gutter section: Holographic-chat bot interface	
Affordance Pinchas Gutter Holographic Avatar 	Chreod Affords: 1) Direct access between sections without manually scrolling.
Micro-interactions 1) Click activation of avatar enables microphone activation for voice recording 2) Colour change of microphone icon 3) Voice recording sound wave animation 	Forbids: 1) Interaction unless enabled via click activation.
Delegates/Lieutenants: The holographic avatar, microphone icon, and system code (animation and audio)	
Pre-inscription Notes: Basic knowledge on the holographic chatbot concept	
Translation Notes: Users would have to resort to traditional text-based chatbot interface lacking an immersive experience.	
Prescription Notes: The holographic representation of Pinchas with subtle interactivity elements aim to provide an immersive, life-like atmosphere for users. Script mimics real-life conversations.	

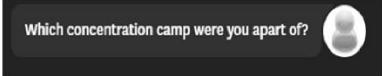
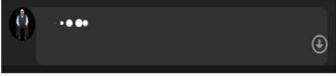
Encourages the user to **actively engage** with the content, implying that the **user's participation is integral to understanding the past**. truth about history is not passively received but **actively constructed** through interaction. "learns" the truth, i.e., the lived experience of Pinchas, not just passively reading or viewing information. Interaction as knowledge validation. **Real-time, User-Generated Truth:** The conversation mechanism (voice recording, feedback loops) implies that truth is not

static but generated in real-time. Authenticity of representation: mimicking realism: The system assumes that such realism helps convey a more authentic, truthful representation of the survivor's experience. The hologram itself is animated and lifelike, which assumes that embodied actions (like sitting, waiting, subtle movements) are an essential part of human experience. Truth is presented as something that is actively pursued and elicited by the user rather than something simply given. embodying the real "person" and that this contributes to the user's belief in its authenticity and truth.

Truth as Immediate Feedback: The real-time feedback

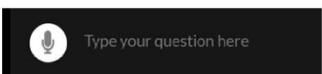
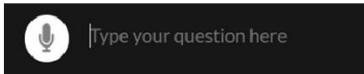
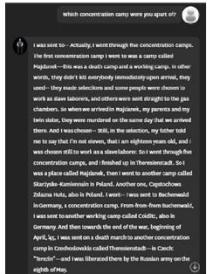
Table 3-7 De-scripting Dimensions of Testimony – Microphone

Affordance	Chreod
Microphone button 	Affords: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To ask questions by voice recording by clicking and holding the button. 2) Real-time feedback and two-way conversation 3) Proactive responsiveness through speaking and recording indicators 4) Naturalistic holographic responses from Pinchas
Micro-interactions	Forbids:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Colour change once clicked 2) Click and hold mechanism to record audio. 3) Sound wave animation when clicked or clicked and held for recording. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Recording without click and hold 2) Foreign language use 3) Users cannot interact with Pinchas until a recorded voice prompt is submitted.

<p>1) Appearance of user's voice prompt as a chat bubble in the chat box after recording the prompt</p> 	
<p>1) Pinchas' speaking indicator visual cue 2) Delayed reaction time</p> 	
<p>1) Appearance of Pinchas' response as a chat bubble in the chat box.</p>	
<p>Delegates/Lieutenants: The microphone button, voice recognition system, chat interface, and feedback loops and mechanisms.</p>	
<p>Pre-inscription Notes: Basic knowledge of voice recording click-to-record mechanisms, chat bot interfaces and interactive design practices.</p>	
<p>Translation Notes: 1) Without voice recognition, users will use the input box option. 2) Without the chat box interface, the immersive, conversational interaction will not prevail, perhaps even do</p>	
<p>Prescription Notes: Scripted to simulate real-life conversations and provide user autonomy. Considers literacy skills/accessibility of individuals.</p>	

Truth as Accessible Communication: By providing chat bubbles and the ability to interrupt holographic responses, the interface assumes that truth should be accessible and comprehensible, regardless of individual user needs (e.g., hearing impairments or language barriers). users have the right to control the flow of interaction, prioritizing the user's autonomy and accessibility over the realism of the simulation.

Table 3-8 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter Holographic Avatar

Affordance	Chreod
Message input box with placeholder text 	Affords: 1) Typing questions as an alternative to voice input 2) Real-time feedback and two-way conversation 3) Clickable holographic avatar 4) Naturalistic holographic responses from Pinchas 5) Accessibility options through the text display feature of the chat box
Micro-interactions 1) Cursor activation when clicked for text input 	Forbids: 1) Input box does not allow submission until text is entered. 2) Clicking on the holographic avatar during speech progression 3) Simultaneous use of both voice and text inputs.
1) Appearance of the user's voice prompt as a chat bubble in the chat box after typing the prompt 1) Pinchas' speaking indicator visual cue 2) Delayed reaction time 	Appearance of Pinchas' response as a chat bubble in the chat box
 Animated Holographic visuals and audio: Animated holographic visuals are ceased, and replaced with the default pose.	
Delegates/Lieutenants: The input box, placeholder text, blinking cursor, chat bubble system, and the holographic avatar	
Pre-inscription Notes: Basic understanding of chat interfaces (Text input mechanisms, animations indicating delay)	
Translation Notes: 1) Without the input box, users need to rely solely on voice interaction causing accessibility concerns. 2) Without the chat box, users will struggle to comprehend Pinchas' accent, resorting to surface-level/generalised responses 3) Without interruptibility, users will have to wait idly for extended periods till the holographic recording is completely played	
Prescription Notes: Interruptibility ensures a balance between realistic animation and usability, catering to a diverse user base with varying needs and preferences.	

Truth as Accessible Communication: By providing chat bubbles and the ability to interrupt holographic responses, the interface assumes that truth should be accessible and comprehensible, regardless of individual user needs (e.g., hearing impairments or language barriers).

Table 3-9 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Fullscreen/Windowed Mode Toggle Buttons

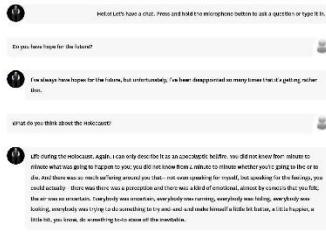
Affordance	Chreod
Fullscreen/Windowed mode toggle button 	Affords: Switching between full-screen and windowed modes
Micro-interactions No visual feedback. Only indication through screen transformation after clicking	Forbids: Preview of the effect before toggle
Delegates/Lieutenants: UI toggle button, system code, and renderer mediate to activate transition.	
Pre-inscription Notes: Understanding of how a basic toggle button works.	
Translation Notes: If absent, users are unable to control their viewing experience, resorting to manual adjustments through browser or system shortcuts.	
Prescription Notes: Encourages an immersive viewing experience as per user requirement.	

Table 3-10 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony Fullscreen/Windowed Mode Toggle Buttons

Affordance	Chreod
Collapse/Expand Chat Toggle Button 	Affords: 1) Adjusting the interface layout for a more visually focused interaction.
Micro-interactions 1) Collapses/hides chat box 2) The button changes its arrow direction upon interaction, visually indicating the new action.	Forbids: 1) Preview of chat box with collapsed view
Delegates/Lieutenants: The toggle buttons and the chat box.	
Pre-inscription Notes: Users rely on the arrow icons as a semiotic of interaction.	
Translation Notes: Manually rearrange their screens to focus on either Pinchas or the chat box.	
Prescription Notes: Implicitly encourages users to toggle between immersive engagement (with just Pinchas) and information access.	

Table

3-12 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony Download Transcript button

Affordance	Chreod
Download Transcript Button 	Affords: 1) The full transcript of the conversation with Pinchas 2) Accessibility for users who prefer text-based formats for comprehension.
Micro-interactions 	Forbids: 1) Preview of the transcript 2) Obtaining the transcript in a read-write format with the ability to edit 3) Maintaining a record of the interaction for later reference. Chat disappears when the page is refreshed.
Delegates/Lieutenants: The button, transcription page	
Pre-inscription Notes: Users rely on the downward arrow as a semiotic of accessing additional content.	
Translation Notes: When absent, users would have to use screenshots of the chat interface for transcript reference or manually write/replicate chat content.	
Prescription Notes: Made for critical reflection in post-interaction review.	

3-13 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony Biography button

Table

Scene: Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter's Education page, About Pinchas Section, Buttons: Biography, Bio Details, Gallery	
Affordance	Chreod
About Pinchas Biography button 	Affords: 1) Clickability by default red highlight of "Biography" button when navigated to "About Pinchas" section 2) Smooth navigation to specific sections 3) Immediate feedback through visual and interactive cues 4) Access to "View Testimonies" button in both "Biography" and "Bio Details" button sections.
Micro-interactions 1. Button colour change and casts a shadow momentarily when clicked 2. Label turns red to signify page section change.  3. Swiping animation during section transition	Forbids: 1) "The Gallery" button does not grant access to "View Testimonies" button
Delegates/Lieutenants: Button, navigation system, visual hierarchy indicators.	
Pre-inscription Notes: Users recognise red highlights (striking colours) as indicators of an active or selected state.	
Translation Notes: Users would need to scroll manually through the page without feedback on active sections.	
Prescription Notes: Expects users to interpret shadow, red highlights, and swiping as confirmation and feedback for navigation with sequential, structured navigation through sections using an intuitive flow.	

3-14 10 De-scripting Dimensions in Testimony - Education page, About, and Gallery

Table

Scene: Dimensions in Testimony Pinchas Gutter's Education page, About Pinchas Section, Gallery	
Affordance	Chreod
<p>1) Photo swipe in gallery view navigation icons (Disabled/inactive state)</p> <p>2) Photos in gallery</p> <p>3) In-gallery photo navigation tool</p>	<p>Chreod</p> <p>Affords:</p> <p>1) Clickability and navigation</p>

Table

<p>Micro-interactions</p> <p>1) Disabled/absent micro-interactions 2) Highlight effect on the photo upon hover</p>  <p>Pinchas (standing, left), with cousins Rav Abraham Krol (seate...</p>	<p>Forbids:</p> <p>1) Clickability as intended</p>
--	---

Delegates/Lieutenants:

Pre-inscription Notes:

Translation Notes:

Prescription Notes: The Creator expects more photos to be added to the gallery, aiming to provide a diverse gallery viewing.

B) Attentat 1942

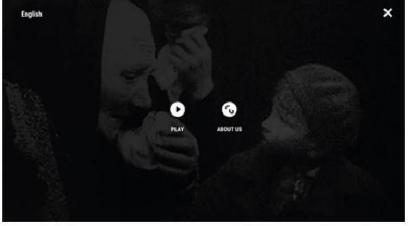
The following analysis is based on two rounds of complete gameplay (120 minutes each) of Attentat 1942 on a Windows desktop device.

Table 3-15 Attentat 1942, Prologue Clip

Scene: Attentat 1942, Prologue		
Affordance		
Attentat 1942 Prologue clip		
		
Micro-interactions Implicit. When the space bar is pressed, the clip stops, and the game begins, else the clip plays completely.		
Chreod		
Affords: 1) Consumption of narrative context for contextual immersion. 2) To skip the as per preference and proceed directly to gameplay. 3) Flexibility	Forbids:	
Delegates/Lieutenants: Prologue video and space bar input.		
Pre-inscription Notes: Basic experimentation or familiarity with general game controls		
Translation Notes: Players would have to sit through the prologue regardless of their preference.		
Prescription Notes: Nudges players to engage with the historical context through an implicit opt-out route. Flexibility for revisiting players.		

3-16 Attentat 1942, Landing page

Table

Scene: Attentat 1942, Landing Page	
Affordance Landing page buttons 	
Micro-interactions No visual cues. The user is directed to the gameplay interface/about us info page after clicking.	
Chreod	
Affords: 1) Starting the Gameplay 2) Exploring Game Context	Forbids: Interacting without clicking
Delegates/Lieutenants: Circular buttons	
Pre-inscription Notes: Expected to recognise button functions through semiotics	
Translation Notes: A more complex navigational effort	
Prescription Notes: Opting to start the game with knowledge of its creators	

Table

3-17 Attentat 1942, About us page

Scene: Attentat 1942, About Us page	
Affordance Next, Previous, Exit buttons 	Chreod Affords: 1) Clickability 2) Navigation 3) Exiting the page anytime
Micro-interactions 1) Clicking Next: 2) Colour change (grey) when inactive at the end of the content sequence. 3) Clicking Previous moves back a section, and activates after at least one section is explored. 4) Clicking Exit 5) Button colours change dynamically to indicate active/inactive states. 	Forbids: 1) Skipping to arbitrary sections 2) Using the Previous button without exploring at least one section.
Delegates/Lieutenants: Buttons, Button states	
Pre-inscription Notes: Basic understanding of navigation buttons through semiotics	
Translation Notes: Manual scroll and search	
Prescription Notes: Leads user through a linear hierarchy of game information.	

3-18 Attentat 1942, Game Play

Table

Scene: Attentat 1942, Game Play	
Affordance	
Disclaimer	
The game is based on historical research and real testimonies, yet the characters in the game and their stories are fictitious.	
Micro-interactions	No interactive elements, immediate progression to the next scene after the duration of the disclaimer.
Chreod	
Affords: Mandatory acknowledgment of the disclaimer's content.	Forbids: Skipping (through the spacebar/any other way)
Delegates/Lieutenants: Unskippable display mechanism	
Pre-inscription Notes: Assumes users value transparency.	
Translation Notes: Users might misinterpret the game's characters and motives.	
Prescription Notes: Expected to experience the game as a blend of fact and fiction, shaping their perception of its educational and narrative value.	

3.3 Case Study Group B: History Educational Initiatives

Some DPH innovations focus solely on being hubs of knowledge related to historical interest. These tools often compile or provide access to large databases covering a wide array of historical topics. While their primary emphasis is on knowledge compilation and sharing, aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the past, these platforms serve multiple purposes and make diverse claims regarding the connected goal of knowledge sharing. Some claim to explore multiple narratives, offering a variety of viewpoints and encouraging critical engagement with diverse historical perspectives. Others highlight lesser-told histories, bringing attention to local stories, everyday experiences, and underrepresented figures. Some may be hardwired to correct historical misconceptions by providing evidence.

Table
3-19 Case Study Group C Overview

Predicted Assumption of Truth	Innovation /Project	Description	Justification
Pragmatism	A) It's About Time	A virtual museum that explores Sri Lanka's recent history through interactive exhibits and personal narratives to foster reflection and reconciliation.	Practical engagement in discourse Interactive learning approach, creating dialogue
Anti-realism	B) Museum of Religious Freedom	A virtual space for exploring, archiving, and reflecting on the complex histories and contemporary issues surrounding freedom of religion or belief in Sri Lanka, from the colonial period to the present, featuring digitised artefacts, architectural elements, archival documents, audiovisual content, community conversations, expert commentary, and online exhibitions.	Subjective interpretations through diverse historical narrative representation Artistic and scholarly interventions

It's About Time virtual museum invites users to “unearth history”, in order to “critically reflect” on Sri Lanka’s underrepresented recent history. The mission statements on its website clearly states the acknowledgement of “multiple narratives of history”, aiming to incorporate personal experiences to typically academic renditions of past events. It questions the infamous phrase “history is written by the victors” from the get-go, showcasing diverse virtual exhibits that disperse similar notions. It further contains exhibits under the categories of “Who writes our history?”, and “whose history is recorded?” Acknowledging multiple historical narratives, the museum focuses on maintaining plentiful

Table

discourse of topics such as food, languages, music to sports, requesting visitors to maintain “an open and inquiring mind.”

The Museum for Religious Freedom also defines itself as an “inclusive space for archiving, learning, and critically reflecting”, stating its tolerance of multiple perspectives and representation of marginalised communities, with a streamlined focus on “freedom of religion or belief.” Its claim to diverse exhibits varying from traditional “material artefacts, archival documents” to audio-visual community narratives and oral histories from multiple stakeholders, underscores a commitment to “coexistence and freedom” as its core values. The “About Us” section on its virtual platform highlights “further learning, reflection and informed conversations” as its goal, rather than outlining the insistence of hard factual evidence.

3.4 User Interaction Patterns

Innovation: Dimensions in Testimony				
	Adjustment			
	Subscribing	Repairing	Resisting	Reinscription
Experience	Enriching Immersive	Confusion		Limiting
Action	User actively searched for and read through given learning materials to gain information to form wellrounded questions before interacting with interviewees Makes personal reflections as a result of the immersive interview experience.	User used a supplementary AI language translator tool to translate interviewees exclusively given in other languages (Spanish, Mandarin) Used Google to learn about unclear concepts and vocabulary listed on the		Prompting questions about the Israel and Palestine conflict and holocaust denial from the Jewish holocaust survivor interviewees

		learning materials		
Innovation: Attentat 1942				
	Adjustment			
	Subscribing	Repairing	Resisting	Reinscribing
Experience				
Action	<p>Using coins to replay scenarios hoping for access to clues the user missed out on during previous tries.</p> <p>In Josef Malek's minigame, the user attempts to align with the non-nationalist, centrist views.</p> <p>User comprehensively read through the collected clues to understand the characters' stance.</p> <p>Makes personal reflections through the experiences of the characters</p>	<p>Attempted to opt for the "less personal" or "emotional approach" consistently prompted by the game script.</p>	<p>Instead of clicking the clue tags (that vanish quickly) for information, the user attempted to manually filter the encyclopedia for the assumedly gained information.</p> <p>Deliberately rejecting certain choice prompts that the user assumed to affect user autonomy.</p>	<p>Replaying new gameplays through new profiles to check for other potential endings.</p>

Innovation: Museum for Religious Freedom				
	Adjustment			
	Subscribing	Repairing	Resisting	Re-inscripting
Experience		Immersive	Discomfort Nausea	
Action	<p>Changing across the multiple language options available.</p> <p>Using linear and moderated timelines and user flows.</p>	<p>User appreciated the interactive comic strip with the immersive backdrop but attempted to rotate the comic as a 3D object for further immersion.</p> <p>Attempted to gain a 360 viewing of 3D spaces by clicking, and dragging to pan around.</p> <p>Attempting to use the scroll option with staggering motions to compensate for the lack of visual clarity.</p> <p>Attempted to enter inside inaccessible 3D objects/spaces.</p>	<p>Attempts to stop the animated/moving background by clicking</p> <p>User backed up significantly from audio exhibits to avoid lagging the 3D space and oral testimony.</p> <p>Ignoring the numbered directed flow and moving through freely according to what piques interest.</p>	<p>On areas where the translucent blocks (navigational visual cues are not available, user resorted to exploration by clicking, and dragging to move around the space.</p> <p>Crosschecking across exhibits for inconsistencies in affordances and microinteractions.</p>

3.5 Discussion

Embedded Assumptions Across Case Studies

Following the surface-level analysis and description of the case studies, the initial classification of cases under philosophies of truth may have drastically shifted from initial assumptions, or they may not have. The explorative nature of this study aims to dissect whether distinct philosophies of historical truth can be traced back to the DPH creator, as embedded in the affordances and micro-interactions of the technology, and if so, to what extent.

Reassessing Case Study Group A – Dimensions of Testimony

Let's regard Dimensions of Testimony, an innovation that keeps testimonials at the forefront. Owing to factors such as reverence for testimonials that are as real as they get, as well as the strive to preserve the real witnesses from "the real past," through major advanced technological interventions, the project was classified as created through a lens of Historical Realism during surface-level analysis. In reference to the descriptive method followed, which broke down micro-details and aspects of the project's make-up, it can be said that the project borrows heavily from realist priorities, especially in terms of the degree of importance rendered to corresponding evidence. The project is a blend of all three philosophies—realist, pragmatist, and anti-realist.

Epistemologically, the innovation asserts that objective truth exists, using the authenticity of the Holocaust survivor testimonials in their life-like glory to correspond to claims regarding the atrocities of the genocide. Authentically recreating the interview experience for generations to come implies that faithfully creating such "real" experiences adds to the validity of the theories of correspondence.

In terms of user adjustments to the technology, one unexpected reinscription by a user stands out: the use of the technology, explicitly meant to educate about the atrocities faced by Jewish survivors during WWII, is reinscribed by a user in an inquiry about Holocaust denial, more specifically, information about the highly contentious Israel-Palestine conflict. Notions of ambiguous hesitation to incorporate such topics,

especially when it concerns Palestine, were observed in the repetitive responses of the hologram avatars, such as “Can you rephrase that?” or “I do not have an answer to that question.”

At some instances, direct bivalence was exhibited by the willingness of the hologram avatars to respond vividly about Israel’s affairs and its safety threats:

User C: “Do you think Palestinians are anti-Semites?”

Pinchas Gutter: “I have no comment.”

User C: “Israel is accused of many human rights violations against Palestinians at the moment. What are your thoughts?”

Pinchas Gutter: “I’m very worried about the state of Israel because I have great difficulties believing there will be a solution to the problem...Everybody else in that area is against Israel.”

In a broader sense, however, the design features the technology affords can be considered pragmatic, and in some cases, even anti-realist. The way the technology works is that truth is revealed as part and parcel of conversation and active engagement. In this sense, the ability to ask questions and receive feedback, engaging in dynamic conversations and inquiry, is inherently pragmatic. Further, the wealth of learning materials available on the platform encourages users to encounter a user-generated understanding by navigating through testimonies, artefacts, and resources, implying that truth is not passively received but actively built.

On the other hand, this “construction” of truth lies close to the anti-realist narrativism or constructivism, where truth is what is built, based on the interpretation of what is learned at present. The opportunity to ask any question as desired supports this. However, the filtration mechanism of truths, based on the interviewee’s response eagerness and comprehensiveness, plays a role here.

The project is explicitly clear that among many inquiries and discourses, the truth that prevails is the tragedy that is the Holocaust. This places pragmatic thought stronger

within the project's core than anti-realist tendencies. With the project's roots within educational contexts, it align with pragmatist interests in fostering education and empathy through accessible, engaging learning. While it incorporates realist and antirealist elements, these are subordinated to the practical goal of fostering learning and understanding through user engagement.

Reassessing Case Study Group A – Attentat 1942

Attentat 1942, previously classified as an ideal anti-realist rendition of historical truth, showcases some mixed perspectives of the pragmatist notions of truth. The gamification element of history may have caused prejudice in terms of the anti-realist label, blending real life with fictitious elements and acknowledging both scientific and artistic facets of truth.

At first glance, the user is convinced of the anti-realist perspective of the game due to its choice-based demeanour. Paired with the comic and animation elements that make the project palatable, it blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. Due to the guise of user agency a game provides, this becomes further believable. However, the game never fails to maintain an evidence-based basis for its claims. While this may directly classify it as a pragmatist, it is within reasonable justification to argue that it is still anti-realist, as anti-realism does not deny the significance of evidence but rather constructs and shapes a narrative to embody the evidence.

While the game provides opportunities to make choices, and for those choices to have some weight through consequences—such as missing certain clues when specific questions are not asked—the player is convinced that the user's perspective may reign in its agency.

User C: "The fact that the game can annoy you out of information if you keep picking the wrong response is nice because it's not a matter of just picking anything straightforwardly, and you might end up with no information at all at the end of it."

However, it should be noted that although not always, the game script attempts to nudge or prompt/encourage the player to make certain choices through iterative

choice questions, providing tokens or coins that redeem more chances and possibilities in the game, as well as warnings of missed clues throughout the play.

Ontologically, the dual nature of historical truth is observed in the game through character interactions. For instance, certain characters with captive loved ones (such as protagonist Ludmila) suspect the neutral or centrist politics of their neighbour Malek, whom she suspects to be a Nazi supporter but is later revealed not to be. This sheds light on characters considered morally grey and justifies their reasoning within their own perspective and context.

Out of its many anti-realist inclinations, the game still holds many pragmatic values, especially outlined by the emphasis on questioning as a mixed method of constructing and also discovering truth as a result of relentless inquiry.

Conclusion

The exploration of Digital Public History (DPH) as a field grounded in the dynamic interplay of technology, historical narrative, and philosophical inquiry has underscored the influence of a creator's embedded assumptions: "utopias." The investigation into how affordances and micro-interactions are crafted within DPH innovations reveals that their design is not immune to creators' biases and worldviews. The philosophical lens of the historical truth of the creator can broadly be categorised among three schools of philosophical truth: Historical Realism, Pragmatism, and Anti-realism, through which the assumed underpinnings are examined.

Philosophical Truths Embedded in Design

Digital Public History tools are not merely technical creations, but manifestations of deep-rooted epistemological and ontological assumptions, much like any other innovation. The case studies, particularly those focused on Holocaust education and history education initiatives, demonstrate the extent to which design affordances reflect the worldview of their creators. For instance, the realist approach evident in platforms such as Dimensions in Testimony highlights a commitment to presenting history as an objective reality, with a blend of pragmatist inquiry-based learning. The design choices, from navigation tools to interactive elements to the responses and feedback mechanism are customised, emphasise a structured and verifiable narrative, aligning with the correspondence theory of truth.

Conversely, pragmatist DPH innovations, as seen in gamified experiences like Attentat 1942, prioritise user interaction and meaning-making as integral to historical understanding. These designs shift the focus from absolute truth to experiential learning, encouraging users to engage with historical narratives through their constructed interpretations, grounded within justifiable truth sources. Anti-realist approaches, while less dominant and nearly impossible to create as a product of curation, highlight the constructed and subjective nature of historical narratives,

inviting users to question the stability of historical truths and to reimagine their role in shaping history.

The Role of Innovators' Utopias

The notion of the "innovator's utopia" highlights the aspirational vision that drives creators. These utopias are not without bias as they are shaped by the creators' cultural, social, and intellectual contexts. As the analysis reveals, these biases are often subconscious, manifesting in the prioritization of certain narratives, user roles, and interaction patterns. For instance, the varying levels of user agency in crowdsourcing projects reflect diverse views on the democratization of historical knowledge. While some innovators emphasize strict moderation to preserve narrative authenticity, others embrace the unpredictability of user-generated content, valuing the multiplicity of perspectives over a singular historical narrative.

Implications for User Engagement

User engagement emerges as a critical component in evaluating the success and limitations of DPH innovations. The affordances and micro-interactions designed into these tools dictate how users perceive, interact with, and reinterpret historical narratives. The think-aloud protocols and observational studies conducted in this research reveal a spectrum of user responses, ranging from subscription to the intended narrative to active resistance and re-inscription. These interactions not only validate the creators' design choices but also challenge them, highlighting the iterative and dialogic nature of DPH.

For example, the case of Holocaust education tools demonstrates how users often rely on pre-inscriptions—existing knowledge and beliefs—to navigate the narratives presented. When the design aligns with user expectations, it fosters a sense of validation and trust. However, when discrepancies arise, users either repair or resist the prescribed interactions, revealing the limits of the creators' assumptions. This underscores the necessity for flexibility and adaptability in design, allowing for diverse interpretations and engagements.

The Tension Between Objectivity and Subjectivity

One of the enduring tensions in DPH design lies in balancing the objective and subjective dimensions of history. Realist approaches, with their emphasis on factual accuracy and linear narratives, often risk alienating users who seek a more nuanced and participatory engagement. Pragmatist and anti-realist designs, while more inclusive of user agency, may face criticism for undermining the perceived authenticity and authority of historical narratives. This tension reflects broader debates within the field of Public History, where the democratization of knowledge must contend with the need for credibility and rigour.

The case studies analysed in this dissertation highlight the potential for digital tools to mediate this tension. For instance, hybrid models that combine realist foundations with pragmatist interaction strategies offer a middle ground, enabling users to explore history as both a structured narrative and a fluid, interpretive process. Such models demonstrate the value of integrating diverse philosophical perspectives into DPH design, fostering a richer and more inclusive engagement with history.

Towards Inclusive and Reflexive Practices

The findings of this research advocate for a more transparent and reflexive approach to DPH design. Recognizing the biases and assumptions inherent in the design process is not a limitation but an opportunity to enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of historical narratives. By foregrounding these assumptions, creators can better anticipate user needs and responses, ensuring that their innovations serve as platforms for dialogue rather than prescriptive tools.

Moreover, the role of collaborative practices in DPH cannot be overstated. The involvement of diverse stakeholders, from historians and designers to educators and community members, enriches the design process, ensuring that the resulting innovations reflect a plurality of voices and experiences. This aligns with the foundational principles of Public History, which prioritise shared authority and participatory engagement.

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Appendix A

Case Group A mission and vision statements and digital archives.



IWITNESS

USC Shoah Foundation | 1994 - 2024

DIMENSIONS IN TESTIMONY EDUCATION

Meet Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter. Through Dimensions in Testimony, students and educators can ask questions that prompt real-time responses from a pre-recorded video of Pinchas—engaging in virtual conversation, redefining inquiry-based education.

Dimensions in Testimony was developed in association with Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, with technology by USC Institute for Creative Technologies, and concept by Conscience Display.

Integration in IWitness is made possible through the generous support of The Snider Foundation.

[View All Interviewees »](#)

Have a Conversation About Pinchas Learning Materials

Share

What is Dimensions in Testimony?

USC Shoah Foundation's Dimensions in Testimony enables people to ask questions that prompt real-time responses from pre-recorded video interviews with Holocaust survivors and other witnesses to genocide. The pioneering project integrates advanced filming techniques, specialized display technologies and next generation natural language processing to create an interactive biography. Now and far into the future, museum-goers, students and others can have conversational interactions with these eyewitnesses to history to learn from those who were there.

USC Shoah | DIMENSIONS IN TESTIMONY

0:00 / 2:19

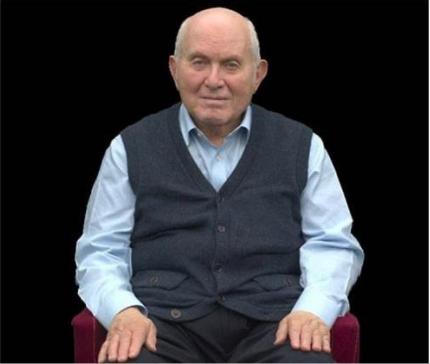
Dimensions in Testimony Available in IWitness

Meet Pinchas Gutter

Through Dimensions in Testimony, students and educators can ask questions that prompt real-time responses from a pre-recorded video of Pinchas—engaging in virtual conversation, redefining inquiry-based education.

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Attentat 1942 was originally developed at the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of Charles University and the institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The game was further developed by Charles Games studio composed of the original game creators. The game is based on historical research and real testimonies, yet the characters in the game and their stories are fictitious.

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Is Attentat 1942 appropriate for educational settings?

Yes. Attentat 1942 is designed by academics and teachers. It has great potential as a classroom tool. The lessons we offer in our curriculum guide will provide you with concrete examples of how to effectively implement the game in a variety of educational settings, from high school surveys to college seminars. Through these lessons, students will learn important lessons about the Nazi Occupation of Prague, the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, and the Holocaust.

You can download a free PDF copy of [Teacher's Guide here](#).



Appendix B

About Us

"It's About Time" is a virtual museum that focuses on Sri Lanka's recent history. It was designed to encourage us to consider multiple perspectives of history, to reflect on the role we play in history, and to find constructive ways of dealing with the past. "It's About Time" was originally conceived as a traveling history museum, showcasing a variety of interactive art and cultural exhibits, audio-visual material, and a series of performances and activities targeting all age groups. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the traveling museum was re-conceptualised in the virtual space, enabling the exploration of the thought-provoking exhibits safely from our homes. Our knowledge of history is often limited to mainstream sources and what we learn from textbooks in school. Personal experiences, perspectives and accounts which contribute to our understanding of history are not often recorded and thus hardly known. Moreover, the formal teaching of history in Sri Lanka strongly focuses on the pre-colonial and colonial eras, and not so much on the period post-independence. Since the end of the Sri Lankan civil war, a growing interest in history can be observed. In its report to the government, the Consultative Task Force (CTF) on Reconciliation Mechanisms concludes: "In the context of healing, the act of telling, for all sides of the conflict, is an important step in the process of reconciliation. Many personal 'truths' exist and they need to be shared." (CTF, 2017). To navigate the virtual museum better, the exhibits are categorised in four key areas, conceived in the form of four questions:

- Who Writes Our History?
- Do Everyday People's Stories Matter?
- What Cultural Elements Influence Our History?
- What is Our Role in Creating History?

By exploring these questions and by inviting contributions from all audiences, the It's About Time proposes a concept of a museum that is innovative, interactive and constantly evolving.

Home About Us All Exhibits Get in Touch

All Exhibits

Search Keyword

Who Writes Our History? Do Everyday People's Stories Matter? What Cultural Elements Influence Our History? What is Our Role in Creating History?

Who Writes Our History?

Have you heard the phrase "history is written by the victors"? The exhibits in this key area will help unpack the veracity of the phrase. They question: Who writes our history? And whose history is recorded?

[Download the Video Script](#)

[Explore All Exhibits](#)

What is Our Role in Creating History?

This key area encourages us to critically engage with its exhibits. To see the societies in which we live and their history not through the filter of our background or what we already know, but from a fresh perspective.

[Download the Video Script](#)

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About Us

The Museum of Religious Freedom in Sri Lanka was imagined as an inclusive space for archiving, learning, and critically reflecting on the complex histories and contemporary concerns relating to the freedom of religion or belief in Sri Lanka.

We invite visitors to explore our interactive, thematized collections weaving together digitized visual and material artefacts, archival documents, and audio-visual community narratives and oral histories to engage with issues and questions of religious freedom in Sri Lanka from the colonial period to the present day. The museum was designed to capture the rich textures and sensory details of religious life, history, and coexistence in Sri Lanka. It also aims to encourage further learning, reflection and informed conversation on the tensions, violence, and enduring institutional constraints and faultlines that continue to hinder religious freedom and harmony in the island. The extensive primary and secondary research that informed the work of the museum has also been made available through the museum repository for the benefit of students and researchers. We are further committed to sustaining an online and offline public programme including exhibitions, guest lectures, workshops, and an e-learning platform centred on our wider communities to promote greater literacy in and respect for the freedom of religion and belief in Sri Lanka. With a view of sharing these values that were foundational to its establishment, we envision the Museum of Religious Freedom as a dynamic and participatory space and community of learning together.