

Gay and lesbian public history in Australia

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Although scholarly interest in gay and lesbian history¹ broadly defined is relatively young, research has increased significantly since the early 1990s. This was largely stimulated by the gay liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s which both encouraged collective self-awareness amongst gays and sought acceptance from the broader straight society. During the 1990s gays became a significant 'consumer' group² targeted by various companies and non-commercial organisations as a niche market. One need only scan through gay community periodicals such as *SX* or *Sydney Star Observer* to appreciate the number of businesses and non-commercial groups servicing the gay community. In light of this confluence of increased historical research, gay self-awareness and marketing to the gay community, we can suggest that one item that interests the gay community is a specific gay public history. However, there has been little investigation of the various forms of gay public history in Australia and how these have been utilised by the gay community. *Public History Review*, for instance, last published an article on gay public history in 1992.³

This article comprises a preliminary attempt to identify forms of, and discuss the uses of, gay public history in the Australian context. In particular I will concentrate on the way various forms of gay public history have been employed in consciousness-raising and political education to affirm individual gay identities and consolidate gay communities in Australia. During the 1980s Australian gay public history was largely focussed on identity affirmation and community-building. And despite a broadening of interests and uses during the 1990s and the early twenty-first century—including consideration of the diversity of queer sub-cultures, and messages directed at the broader straight society, reminding it that gays have long contributed to the history of Australia—identity affirmation and community-building have continued to comprise a most important, and essential, use for gay public history in Australia. In order to identify and analyse the forms and uses of Australian gay public history I will use ideas and concepts derived from Ludmilla Jordanova's discussion of public history in her work *History in practice*.⁴ Jordanova has three principal issues in mind in her discussion of the practice of public history: the general cultural uses of the past in the present, the non-academic audiences for history, and specific displays or presentations related to a broadly defined history.⁵ This provides a most efficacious framework for the analysis of Australian gay public history. But before I apply

these issues to the specific context of gay public history in Australia, I wish to define the concepts and signal the ideas involved in each.

Underpinning these ideas is the concept of the 'usable past'. The past is useful in the present and history is available to be used for a wide range of very different purposes. Jordanova identifies a number of these uses *inter alia*:

History as entertainment uses the past for commercial purposes. History as consciousness-raising uses the past for political ends. History as public education uses the past to inform audiences (selectively) about political and social trends.⁶

When a given aspect of the past can be used for a purpose in the present then that piece of history can be rendered as public history. This does not preclude it from being investigated for scholarly purposes, for any aspect of the past may be of interest to both academic history for its own sake and to public history for its usability. For example, Garry Wotherspoon contends that the homosexual past in Australia is important in the present for creating a sense of identity for gays now.⁷ History can legitimate identity, and in terms of gay identity it is important for gays to see that, as a social category, they have a long history in Australia. Gay history also serves the purpose of informing the dominant Australian culture of other aspects of the past that have contributed to its present form. The issue of Australian gay history as a usable past will be considered in the first section of this article.

For an aspect of the past to be usable in the present it needs an attentive audience. Moreover, for a piece of history to be considered *public* history, that audience needs to be an interested *non-academic* audience. This is Jordanova's second principal issue and she identifies a number of meanings of the term 'public', synonymous with non-academic, such as: 'for a mass audience', 'popular', 'non-specialist', 'of concern to an entire polity' or 'available for anyone to see'.⁸

The audience for history is, therefore, very difficult to define. It can range from an entire nation to a specific interest group and is wider than simply professional or amateur historians and their publications. In order to determine a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between history and public audiences, Jordanova employs Habermas' concept of the public sphere and Anderson's notion of the imagined community to argue that the practices used to establish and reinforce national identity and citizenship over the last three centuries have essentially deployed a sense of shared history.⁹ In a very real sense, the concept of 'the public' is an historical formation and the practices of 'public history' have been incorporated into nation-building projects since the eighteenth century. Because of this intertwining, there is a broad public, non-scholarly interest in history and this interest has generated a sub-discipline concerned with the presentation of historical information to non-professional audiences—*ergo* Public History. In the second part of this article I will apply these concepts of the public audience to gays who until recently

were denied citizenship in various 'western' nation-states and lacked basic legal and moral rights in relation to their sexuality. Rather, until the latter decades of the twentieth century, the legislation of most 'western' nations identified homosexual acts—mainly but not exclusively between men—as criminal offences punishable by imprisonment.¹⁰ While homosexual acts between women often (but not always) did not carry the same legal prohibitions as homosexual acts between men, such relations were not viewed any more favourably by moral institutions, such as the church, nor by society generally.¹¹ Moreover, less legislation prohibiting sexual acts between women was a symptom of the marginalisation of women generally from citizenship and the public sphere. What does this legal, moral and social marginalisation of gay men and women from the public sphere imply? In what ways are gays included in the public audience for history, if at all?

The idea of a public audience receptive to history raises the question of how history is presented to that audience. That is, what specific modes of presentation or display can be considered as belonging to 'public' history and how do these convey historical information? Jordanova calls these modes genres and considers a wide range employed in public history: activities and places, such as museums, heritage houses, anniversaries, festivals and memorials; written genres such as novels, biographies, autobiographies and oral history narratives; modes of 'performing' historical events, people and places which include local history lectures, tours, films, documentaries and television programs; and visual forms such as photographic collections. Importantly, the variety of genres used to present history to the public is quite different from the modes employed in academic history: dissertations, journal articles, scholarly books, lectures and conference presentations. Jordanova contends that this difference is the key to understanding how the public develops a sense of the past. For instance, her hunch is that television and fiction 'have done more than anything else to shape popular historical mentalities.'¹² Generic difference is important because each genre involves conventions that are recognised and expected by audiences—for example, readers and viewers of fictions, such as novels and films, expect particular narrative forms and closure, not open-endings and uncertainties. Such generic conventions play a significant role in shaping the content, narrative and presentation of history that is designated as 'public' history. Because of the ability of genres to shape content, different modes may be employed depending on the way the history is being used—that is, the purpose of the message being conveyed to the public. In terms of Australian gay public history, certain genres have been widely used to present aspects of the gay past. The question is: which genres and why these rather than others? What does this reveal about the nature and purpose of gay history in Australia? Which genres could be better employed to publicly convey the purposes of gay history? These questions of mode of presentation and display are the focus of the third and final section of this article.

public history: Australian gay and lesbian history as a usable past

Before we can address the issue of Australian gay history as a usable past, we need to determine whether such a thing as gay history can even exist. There are some conceptual and methodological problems confronting historians wishing to write about Australia's gay past. Foucault introduced an idea that has been very influential in the theorisation of sexuality and sexual identity: sexuality is socially constructed and so conceptions of sexuality, including homosexuality, are historically and spatially contextual.¹³ The term 'gay' properly refers to the constructions of same-sex-attracted sexuality and identity that emerged from the late 1960s and early 1970s in western countries,¹⁴ although there is evidence that 'lesbian' was used to imply sexual relations between women from the early eighteenth century.¹⁵ The medical term 'homosexuality' was only invented in 1869¹⁶ and did not pass into popular usage until the 1890s.¹⁷ Both before and since that time, several terms have been applied to homosexuals: sodomite, tribade, hermaphrodite, invert, homophile, camp, queer. If the concept 'gay' did not take on its current meaning in relation to homosexuality until the late 1960s, can we construct a 'gay history' of Australia which reaches back much further into the past? If so, how will this be done? Which terms and concepts are we to look for in source materials? Gay sexuality and identity are the modern, western construction of same-sex sexual behaviour and so instances of such behaviour in the past can be seen as precursors to this modern gay sexuality and identity. Moreover, same-sex sexual acts were considered sexually-dissident behaviour in Australia's past. Wotherspoon contends that in order to create gay history we should focus on sexual dissidence and how authorities, religious bodies and newspapers recorded and responded to such behaviour.¹⁸ Such references to sexual dissidence and same-sex sexual acts provide source materials for constructing what we can refer to as Australian gay history.

Determining usable concepts and terminology and locating sources from which to construct gay history is all well and good; but as Garry Wotherspoon asked: 'why write gay history?'¹⁹—a good question indeed. The 'authorised' version of Australian gay history from such sources referred to above has been one of homosexual behaviour as a sin, crime and sickness.²⁰ Until the 1980s—and in some cases until the present time—homosexual relations were ordained as immoral and sinful by religious bodies, as crimes against the state and the people by parliaments and courts, and as a curable mental illness by the medical establishment. This was how homosexuality was presented in documents recorded by authorities such as police and court reports, prison correspondence and medical journals. This is how writers of history across the twentieth century presented gays in authorised history.²¹ There has been little to celebrate in Australia's gay past, so why write another gay history? History legitimates one's identity and place in society: understanding one's place in the past is essential in the construction of individual

and group identity in the present. In terms of the history of same-sex desire in Australia, the past is characterised by discrimination, oppression, marginalisation and official invisibility. It is important, therefore, that in order to foster a positive sense of individual and group identity today, gays need to know and understand that same-sex desire has a long history in Australia stretching back to the initial European settlements, and beyond too, as an indigenous practice.²²

A new gay history needs to be written, placing same-sex desire, sodomites, homosexuals, homophiles, camps, queers, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals back into the narrative of the Australian past and engendering pride in same-sex love and gay identity. Wotherspoon argues that this can be achieved through the careful re-reading of the source documents—such as official legal documents, newspaper reports (referred to above)—used to construct the negative, but authorised, gay history of Australia. Although such materials were recorded by those who saw same-sex desire as a sin, crime and sickness and were constructed within such frames of reference, they also allow historians to see into the minds of those accused and convicted. This presents quite a different picture of same-sex desire. Many of those participating in same-sex sexual acts were aware their actions were not sanctioned by authorities or social mores; but they also argued that it was, for them, perfectly natural. Wotherspoon has provided ample examples of how this re-reading can be accomplished.²³ Robert French, in a collection of stories drawn from such records, also teases out an alternative history of same-sex love, desire and identity.²⁴ In addition to these sources, historians such as Wotherspoon have used oral history and autobiographical essays to recover personal experiences of what life was like for homosexuals in twentieth century Australia and so have supplemented the re-reading of the official records.²⁵ These positive images and stories of same-sex desire from Australia's past provide an 'un-authorised' gay history which is important in helping to create and legitimate the individual and group identities of gay Australians in the present.

This discussion reveals two things about the nature of history: history itself is constructed and history is used to construct identity. As the recent re-writing of Australian gay history demonstrates, the same source materials can be used to produce differing historical narratives: in this case, an authorised past which reflected the narrow-minded oppression of same-sex desire by the wider society and an alternative past where same-sex desire was seen as perfectly natural, fulfilling and loving. The first historical construction marginalises gay identity; the second legitimates it. These twin ideas—history as constructed and identity as constructed through history—relate directly to the concept of the usable past. In a slightly different context (that of the public), Jordanova introduces Anderson's idea of the imagined community to argue that the practices used to establish and strengthen national identity since the eighteenth century have basically deployed a shared sense of

history—a connected history of a territory and its people.²⁶ But the notion of the imagined community can help us to understand the usability of the past as well. To put it crudely, the government and professional bureaucracies in a given territory craft and construct a shared history and then deploy it so that as people scattered across the territory encounter these ideas of a shared history they construct their identities as a national belonging, held together by a mutual and heroic past. This is a very simple description and the actual mechanisms that generate a shared national history and identity are much more complex, not necessarily so totalitarian in intent, and involve the coalescence of world-views and preconceptions held in common. However, the point I wish to make here is that regardless of its actual genesis, the 'common past', once constructed as a narrative of shared national history and deployed across the centrally-administered territory, becomes a means to construct, organise and understand national identity—*ergo* a usable past.

Anderson's imagined community has been applied not only on the scale of the nation-state but also on the smaller scale of the social category. Importantly, Kath Weston has applied the imagined community to explain how individual gays in isolated rural situations come to understand themselves as gay and simultaneously realise that there are other gay people 'out there' who could be found through migration.²⁷ Through print and television media images, references in books, historical allusions and stories from the city, these isolated gays came to recognise and feel an attachment to a fictional group defined by same-sex attraction—the imagined 'gay' community—and to interpret themselves and construct their own identities through that attachment. This sense of common identity with the imagined gay community was so strong that it precipitated migration to find other gays. Although this application of Anderson's concept is not patently historical—historical accounts were only one source used to construct gay identity—it does show, in the light of Jordanova's discussion of imagined communities and shared history, a use for the gay past as a means to construct individual gay identity and an imagined gay community.

How can this discussion help us understand Australian gay public history as a usable past? As mentioned earlier, Jordanova indicates a number of possible cultural uses for the past in the present—educational, political, commercial, entertainment, *inter alia*. The preceding discussion signals how Australian gay history can be recognised—and indeed employed—as a usable past. Perhaps the clearest way that Australia's gay past is usable in the present is 'as consciousness-raising [which] uses the past for political ends.'²⁸ As the earlier discussion of the authorised version of gay Australian history demonstrates, gays have been discriminated against, oppressed and made invisible by the dominant historical narratives. Rendered a minority group unworthy of celebratory inclusion in national histories, gays have had no past to draw upon to construct sexual identities and imagined communities. The recovery and construction of a positive gay history based upon exam-

ples of same-sex attraction provides a necessary corrective to this invisibility. Moreover, it provides an historical narrative to employ in consciousness-raising efforts by political activists, among others: a means by which to construct a positive and proud individual gay identity—as opposed to a closeted identity—and to create a conscious, resistant gay community.

Narratives of past victimisation and oppression by governments, legal institutions, religious bodies and the medical establishment—and appeals to resist further discrimination—were used by gay liberationists in the 1970s in political consciousness-raising efforts to encourage the development of a proud and defiant gay community.²⁹ Identifying the same-sex attracted as 'victims' of history, activists exhorted closeted gays to 'come out', be publicly visible and united, and to adopt a new self-identity—gays as historical 'agents', capable of defining their futures on their own terms, emplaced as legitimate members of society.³⁰ Thanks to this encouragement to historical agency, liberationists furnished the development of not only a strong gay community but also a diverse one. In fact, it is incorrect to speak of *the* gay community as if there was a unitary community. Rather, the imagined gay community is in practice a network of interconnected communities divided by gender, age, race, ethnicity, politics, religion, 'scene' and even sexuality but connected through a mutual historical experience of homophobia and heterosexism on the one hand and gay pride and historical agency on the other.³¹ The imagined gay community is, in reality, a multiplicity of communities not a unitary community. Gay activists recognised this diversity and multiplicity in their community-building efforts. Throughout this article, then, I have this multiplicity in mind when I refer to both the generation of the imagined gay community and the actual practice of community-building.

As a result of the efforts of these activists, today gays are (mostly) free of legal, moral and medical recriminations although general social acceptance is still forthcoming. Writings on the Australian gay past have proliferated and they are used to remind us of both the history of gay oppression—so that we do not fall back into such a situation through complacency—and the long history of same-sex attraction in this country. Jordanova designates this practice of history as 'identity history'³²—history written as consciousness-raising around an identity politics, aiming to re-construct the previously authorised versions of history to include those who heretofore have been marginalised. Jordanova's example is women's history but other beneficiaries of identity history include indigenous peoples, Jews and gays. Identity history is important because it facilitates one's identification with the past. The writing of identity histories creates shared pasts for previously marginalised groups in a manner similar but not identical to the way that governments and elites have constructed shared national histories to create national identities. Following from Wotherspoon's argument, a shared identity history fosters both individual and group identity thus legitimating one's place in the social order as a no-longer-marginal subject—belonging to a no-longer-marginal

group—and so providing the very grounds for one's meaningful existence. In this way, Australian gay history can be recognised as a usable past: it legitimates individual gay identity and contributes significantly to the building and re-building of the imagined gay community. At the same time, the narrative of Australian gay history serves to educate the dominant national culture, that other minority groups have contributed to, and continue to contribute to, the dominant national culture's own history and its current manifestation. Gay identity history reminds the broader society that it has not always been inclusive of difference.

But does this present use of gay history for public political education and consciousness-raising—for both gay people and the broader society—mean that all Australian gay history is public history? It would seem that all Australian gay history writings belong to Jordanova's identity history, and hence are a form of consciousness-raising for political purposes and therefore are public history. Are there ways to distinguish a specifically public form of gay history from a broadly defined scholarly gay history? Given the potential usability of all gay history in consciousness-raising for identity politics and community-building, is such a separation possible?

Public history: the audience for Australian gay and lesbian history

To further address this issue we need to analyse Jordanova's second principal issue: the non-academic audiences for public history. *Non-academic*, in this instance as I noted earlier, is synonymous with *public*. Jordanova renders the non-academic audience essentially congruent with 'the public'. If we divide the term 'public history' into its two elements—'public' and 'history'—then we could argue that the discussion of usable pasts is concerned with the 'history' component whereas the determination of the non-academic audiences will focus on the issue of the 'public'.

How can we determine who the public audience is? Early in her analysis Jordanova states that 'public history is *popular* history—it is seen and read by large numbers of people and has mostly been designed for a mass audience.'³³ Later she demonstrates the difficulty involved in defining the term 'public' by outlining the number of meanings it can denote. These range from popular, for a mass audience and available to anyone, to non-specialist, to the concerns of an entire polity and finally to the specific interests of the state.³⁴ In order to try to establish a reasonably useful framework from a slippery and ambiguous range of meanings, and at the same time determine a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between history and public audiences, Jordanova, as indicated above, employs Habermas' concept of the public sphere and Anderson's notion of the imagined community. Habermas is concerned with the development of 'public opinion'—and of progressively national arenas within which matters of broad interest could be openly debated—during the eighteenth century in Europe. Anderson is

concerned with the concept of nationhood and specifically with the mechanisms that generated a national sense of belonging between people scattered over a centrally-administered territory. What we can draw from these theories is that 'the public' is bound up with the concept of the nation-state, national belonging and citizenship. Those who were included in the ideas, ideals and narratives that reinforced the public sphere and the imagined national community were the public. Those distanced from these ideals were *not* part of the public and were only incorporated in national narratives in a marginal way, to the extent that they could demonstrate what was 'other' to national identity and citizenship and define what characteristics and attributes did 'not' belong to the nation-state. Those marginalised in national narratives included, among other groups, the same-sex attracted. Rather than being incorporated into ideals of national identity and citizenship as espoused by nationwide newspapers and displays of shared national history, those attracted to their own sex were vilified as immoral and—particularly in the case of male homosexuals, but not exclusively—criminal.³⁵ Since same-sex sexuality was understood as immoral and criminal, same-sex attracted men and women were thereby divorced from citizenship, rendered as 'other' in national narratives and had to otherwise cultivate a sense of national belonging.³⁶ As long as their sexuality remained closeted these people could be citizens. If they were caught performing same-sex sexual acts, they would have been tried as criminals by the state and rejected by the wider society and religious bodies as immoral and sinful. Consequently, with respect to their sexuality, the same-sex attracted were marginalised in the national narrative, did not cultivate a sense of public or national belonging with respect to their sexuality, risked revocation of citizenship and were therefore distanced from the public.³⁷

Jordanova is also concerned with what these theoretical concepts reveal about the general relationship between history, the public and public audiences. One of the most significant mechanisms used to convey a sense of national public belonging was the development of a sense of national history, 'shared by a significant proportion of the population and incorporated into their lives and identities.'³⁸ She contends, then, that:

the concept and practices of 'the public' are themselves historical phenomena, and more specifically what I am calling public history has been bound up with nation-formation for nearly three centuries.³⁹

People scattered across the territory encounter displays and publications concerned with national history and through these encounters in part construct their identities. Citizens become part of an imagined national community through having a shared, publicly available history, accessed through such objects as memorials to rulers, national heroes, anniversaries and symbolic events. Because of this intertwining between national history, the public and national identity, there exists a broad public, non-academic interest in

history. This interest has generated the notion of 'public history'. But, again, the same-sex attracted are rarely, if ever, visible in these national historical narratives and heroic stories. The same-sex attracted are generally excluded from the very narratives and memorials that give citizens a sense of shared national history and which contribute to the formation of imagined national communities. History may have played, and continues to play, a significant role in the generation of the public—hence 'public history'—but gays have been marginalised from that shared historical narrative and distanced from the mechanisms used to generate the imagined community and 'the public'.

It is only in the last few decades that uncloseted gays have been able to become 'citizens' in western nations and able to be included in national identity and shared history. Until the latter decades of the twentieth century in Australia, gay men especially, but lesbians too, lacked basic legal rights in relation to their sexuality—homosexual acts (mainly between men) were legislated as criminal offences punishable by imprisonment, employees could be dismissed as homosexuals, and hate crimes were perpetrated against both gay men and lesbians.⁴⁰ Some legal barriers remain. Now that gays are largely part of the public, they have been able to start re-working the shared national history and, to some extent, place themselves in that national narrative. These ideas are covered above. However, the re-construction of history involves not an actual re-writing and replacement of existing historical narratives to include only, or mainly, positive images of gays, for this would obliterate an historical record which shows a history of oppression, discrimination and marginalisation suffered by gays. Both gay people and straight society need to be reminded constantly of this past so that (hopefully) it cannot recur.⁴¹

Rather, the re-construction of history involves creating specifically gay historical narratives. The principal, though not exclusive, audience for this gay history is gay people. If we re-visit Weston's application of Anderson's imagined community we can see why. Through print and television media images, references in books, and historical allusions, *inter alia*, Weston demonstrated that gays in isolated rural situations came to recognise and feel an attachment to a fictional group defined by same-sex attraction—the imagined gay community—and to interpret themselves and construct their own identities through that attachment. How much stronger will this sense of attachment to a gay community be if the images used to evoke gay identity are not fleeting and biased media images but actual narratives and histories of a gay past written and compiled by gays? How much deeper will the attachment become if the mechanism involved is the dissemination of an actual gay history? For as Ken Plummer contends, gay communities develop and flourish by feeding upon the interchange of 'sexual stories' which weaves together a shared history and identity.⁴² In the same way that a shared national history coheres an imagined national community, rendering it a national public audience,

stories of a shared gay past cohere an imagined gay community creating a gay public audience—an audience of gays who otherwise lack significant contact with like others.⁴³ These people are not only those in isolated rural situations but also those in homophobic families in metropolitan areas. Anywhere where gays are isolated from a sense of gay community—the means to establish a gay identity through community—gay public history can provide a sense of belonging to a group identity called ‘gay’.

This appears to be a central aim of some of the earliest examples of Australian gay history.⁴⁴ Garry Wotherspoon’s *Being different*, published in 1986, is a collection of autobiographical life stories by nine gay men, which spans the twentieth century.⁴⁵ The title emphasises what these men felt as they were growing up—their difference from everyone else. At the same time the book indicates the connectedness of these men’s experiences: they were different because of their shared homosexuality. *Being different* suggests that shared community and identity between gay men can exist because of their individual yet shared histories of sexuality. Consequently, the book appears to be targeted at gay readers who have the most to learn from the experiences described—the oppression and discrimination yet love and hope. The intent, as expressed by one contributor, Sim Lee, is ‘to give encouragement to others who may be just starting out, or who, like myself, are some way along the road.’⁴⁶ Likewise, Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling’s *Words from the same heart*, a collection of eighteen autobiographies by lesbians published a year later, emphasises a ‘collective lesbian consciousness’ that exists because of the historical exclusion of lesbians from Australian society.⁴⁷ The intended audience is a lesbian one and the readers are invited to identify with the recurrent concerns of the contributors. An even stronger indication that the intended audience is gay and non-academic, and that they are invited to partake in a shared Australian gay history, comes from Robert French’s *Camping by a billabong: gay and lesbian stories from Australian history*.⁴⁸ He sets the aim of his collection of twenty-five biographies with a quote from Martin Duberman:

Gay men and lesbians—so long denied any history—have a special need and claim on historical writing that is at once accurate and accessible.⁴⁹

In this context, French states that his objective is:

to bring to light the lives and experiences of the ancestors of today’s gay men and lesbians—in a sense the ancestors of our tribe.⁵⁰

French’s intent is to provide a shared gay Australian history for the gay public, so that they might cultivate the sense of an imagined gay community based on this shared history. In attempting to engender an imagined gay community using shared history, these three books render the gay audience for their work as a ‘public’, a community with shared history and identity yet distinct from the imagined national community. In this way, just as common news, events and history created a national public by generating a shared

national history, community and identity, so too do these works of Australian gay history create a gay public by providing a shared gay history through which gays can construct individual identities and imagined gay communities. Just as ‘the public’ is an historical phenomenon and public history has been bound up with nation formation, so too is the generation of the gay public audience for history bound up with the recent development of research and writing in Australian gay history.⁵¹

Consequently, rather than resolving the question of whether all Australian gay history is public history, I have rendered this hypothesis even more likely by augmenting the issue here. Not only is all Australian gay history public history, but also the public audience for this history is the entire gay community, which was in turn created through the dissemination of such historical writing. Whether one is a professional historian, scholar, businessperson, factory worker or farmer, the problem remains the same for all gays—there has been no shared history on which to establish and cohere a sense of community and identity. All need a public gay history. Australian gay history is an identity history that renders itself as public history at the same time that it fosters a gay community-cum-audience.

However, we also have to recognise—as Jordanova does—that the audiences for public history are non-academic and that they will not respond to the conventions of scholarly history—the journal article, the dissertation, the lecture. Only a minority of the gay public—mostly the writers of Australian gay history—are inclined to scholarly genres. Rather, most are not academic and they will empathise with non-academic representations of history. This is the focus of the next section and this is perhaps how we may finally distinguish a specific Australian gay public history from a scholarly one. Even though, through the application of Jordanova’s ideas, it seems apparent that all Australian gay history is public history and that the entire gay community is the public audience, there are still conventions around what modes can be used to present history to non-academic audiences. Moreover, not only the non-academic audience, but also the usability of gay history, helps to determine the genres employed in the presentation of gay public history.

Public history: presenting Australian gay and lesbian public history

Earlier I mentioned various modes of public history display suggested by Jordanova, and these take several forms, including written and visual genres, performances, activities and sites. Only some of these have been deployed in the presentation of Australian gay history to public audiences and this limited range relates to the two previously discussed principal issues of public history. Following Jordanova, in the first section I argued that all Australian gay history could be considered public history because of its use in consciousness-raising for political purposes to legitimate identity and foster community-building. In the following section I argued that just as national

publics are generated through a shared history, the gay public is constructed by Australian gay history. Thus the entire gay community can be seen as a public audience. What follows is that history, used for consciousness-raising—to reach and strengthen a particular social group—to serve political ends, affirm and legitimate identity and furnish community-building, will be packaged in ways most likely to convey its socio-political intent.

I contend that the most widely-used genres for presenting Australian gay public history, replete with socio-political messages used for consciousness-raising, are didactic or instructive ones. As an inverse example, I would suggest that monuments and memorials are 'missing' as they are symbolic representations rather than didactic presentations and their intent may not be clear without accompanying instruction.⁵² Moreover, since they are fixed artefacts, monuments and memorials cannot be used to distribute historical information to a widely scattered gay constituency. Rather, the audience must come to the actual site to find information which could be problematic for non-local, closeted gays. Likewise, the message of stand-alone photographic exhibitions will be obscure unless context is provided and the gay audience required to attend the gallery, risking perhaps unwanted public visibility. While the same argument of fixity could be made about museums and heritage places—which infrequently report on dissident sexual relationships and practices—I believe that different reasons prevail for the general absence of gay history from these prime, didactic history sites. These will be discussed later.

Among the most popular genres used to package Australian gay history for public consumption are written accounts that document the lives and experiences of gay Australians, such as autobiographies, biographies and oral histories narratives. Similarly, because isolated gays are seeking community, and since community is not only imagined but also spatialised, written accounts of gay-identified cities and places have been utilised. In this context, the incorporation of photographs into such local community histories—as visual historical material that *supports* the message of the text—materialises the story of the gay community and renders it tangible. Apart from books, radio shows have been used to provide gay histories of Sydney and Melbourne. Such shows have been incorporated into websites. Related to the localisation of gay history is the place of anniversary festivals in disseminating information about gay politics and the gay community. In this light, the much-lauded Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has an important historical function for the public that is often over-looked. While not overtly historical, AIDS commemoration events can also provide a focus for the affirmation 'of gay identity and the continuity of community in the face of massive loss' through the public exercising of socio-political functions.⁵³ Films, because they reach a wide and scattered audience, have the potential to be useful for political consciousness-raising. Yet few gay-themed Australian films have incorporated historical images of gay life. Finally, museums and her-

itage sites, as institutions established for the didactic presentation of public history, could play an important role in the dissemination of gay public history in Australia. Indeed Museums Australia Incorporated has instituted a policy for the inclusion of gay history in museums.⁵⁴ However, there have been few exhibitions of Australian gay public history in museums, and heritage sites often fail to report on gay sexualities even at sites of known and documented homosexuality. Although this is not an exhaustive list—I have not considered historical novels or theatre for example—I will focus on these genres in the following discussion, indicating successes and lacunae: which genres are now widely used and which could be utilised more.

While oral histories, biographies and autobiographies involve different conventions, in the presentation of gay history they serve a similar role of disseminating written information about the personal lives of gay Australians to a scattered gay public in order to foster a community. Nevertheless, conventions have limited the use of biography here. Jordanova provides an excellent discussion of the limitations placed on biographers who often require special permission to access private papers and must remain sensitive to the wishes of the subject and his/her family.⁵⁵ In relation to Australian gay history, Wotherspoon notes that 'biographies of well-known homosexuals have invariably had a silence about this aspect of their subject's lives that can only be described as 'deafening'.⁵⁶ Consequently, there are few biographies of gay Australians that include extensive information about their sexual identities. David Marr's biography of Patrick White is a notable exception, albeit published a decade after White's own autobiography.⁵⁷ Another exception is Paul Freeman's biography of Australia's only openly gay high profile sportsman: *Ian Roberts: finding out*.⁵⁸ Roberts' expressed intention in agreeing to the book was to foster a positive gay identity and community, now and in the future. He hopes that his story 'is of help to some kids out there punishing themselves [for being gay], when they really should be celebrating their lives with as much esteem as everybody else' and that other high profile gays are encouraged 'to stand up and provide the gay role models that future generations of Australians truly and obviously need.'⁵⁹

In terms of scope and intent, perhaps the most important biographical work is Robert French's *Camping by a billabong*. These stories are based mainly on archival material rather than private papers and are not limited by family prohibitions on disclosure. With the aim to provide the gay public with accurate and accessible histories of the lives and experiences of gay Australians from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this book is an important contribution to gay public history. Very few of the other genres have located Australian gay history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, *Camping by a billabong* can be used in identity politics and community-building to affirm gay identity by demonstrating the longevity of same-sex attraction in Australia. French's intent is to provide a sense of continuity of gay identity and community across two

centuries of European habitation by providing gays of today with stories of their 'ancestors'. Together the stories construct a 'tribal' past that can be drawn on to legitimate gay identity and community in the present.⁶⁰

Autobiographies and oral histories are not limited in the same way as biographies. As first-hand accounts, the writer or narrator decides what is disclosed and what remains private. It is s/he who boldly chooses to 'come out' in print—a declaration of gay identity not only to one's self, confidants, colleagues and family but to a public audience. This self-disclosure is also intimately personal for readers; it is not a distanced second-hand account delivered by a biographer. There are, of course, some potential problems with this genre such as omitting information through self-censorship or fallible memory, or commissioning and editorial change that shape life stories in a particular way. But the personal nature of declaring one's gay identity through published autobiographies and oral histories serves as an example to isolated gays indicating that they are not alone and that a gay community does exist—a community of which they can be part. Perhaps the authors' own sense of isolation underpins their urge to create a sense of community, imagined and real, and this isolation finds resonance in the lives of their readers.

Autobiographies, in particular, have been a prominent means to construct Australian gay history and render it a public history by alerting a scattered same-sex attracted audience to the existence of a gay identity and community and demonstrating its historicity. Above I discussed two of these autobiographical collections—Wotherspoon's *Being different* comprising life stories by nine gay men and Bradstock and Wakeling's *Words from the same heart*, a collection of life stories by lesbians. Both include a range of contributors of various ages and aim to demonstrate what life has been like for Australian gays over the twentieth century. These works show a historicity of same-sex attraction and the presence of gay sub-cultures in large Australian cities by the inter-war period.⁶¹ In terms of providing a basis for identity politics and community-building, these autobiographies demonstrate that the size, visibility and confidence of the gay community has been growing over the twentieth century, and, as Plummer asserts, that the life story of each individual gay person contributes to an ever-expanding and complexifying collective gay consciousness.⁶² This can be used to encourage a sense of pride amongst gays today and alert isolated gays to the presence of substantial communities in large Australian cities.

Apart from these patently historical autobiographies there have been others that contribute to gay pride and collective gay consciousness. Erin Shale's *Inside out* is exemplary. It is a collection of thirty-eight coming out stories from various publicly prominent and 'ordinary' gay Australians.⁶³ Because of the range of contributors, we gain an understanding of what it has been like to come out in various eras and places—the initial problems and ultimate joys. Shale's expressed aim is to show those struggling with

issues of sexuality that they do not have to do so in an atmosphere of hostility and silence:

The reality is that gay people are represented in all walks of life. They are more than the sensationalised media images often passed off as representative of the entire gay community. These stories seek to put a human face to the stereotypes and to give voice to those who have remained voiceless for so long.⁶⁴

These stories are intended to provide the basis for a proud gay identity and contribute to the end of homophobia. Equally important in this light are volume-length autobiographies such as Timothy Conigrave's *Holding the man*, a personal account of growing up gay in the 1970s and 1980s in Melbourne and Sydney, and Robert Dessaix's *A mother's disgrace* which explores his life-long questioning of his own identity and sexuality.⁶⁵ These types of autobiographies are important in fostering and affirming gay identity and community by, as Shale says, putting a human face on gay stereotypes.

Finally in this group are oral histories that are much like autobiographies in that they are first-hand stories provided by a narrator. They differ in that the narrator is interviewed by a researcher who then uses the interview to create an oral history. There is, thus, a shared authority over the form and content of the historical narrative between the narrator and the interviewer.⁶⁶ Oral histories, however, are useful for creating community histories. They provide multiple views and experiences of the community and so demonstrate its depth and complexity.⁶⁷ For example, as well as using traditional documentary sources, Wotherspoon's work on Sydney's gay sub-culture was also based on extensive oral history research.⁶⁸ An even more explicit use of oral history is found in Dino Hodge's 'community history of gay and homosexual men who have lived in Darwin' where thirteen of fourteen chapters are transcripts of oral history interviews focussing on 'what it is like to grow up gay or be gay in the Top End'.⁶⁹ Again, these interviews provide first-hand, personal stories of gay lifestyle and identity for those who are unable or unwilling to come out. More importantly, because oral histories have been employed in studies of actually 'situated' communities—not just imagined communities—they could play a significant role in ongoing consciousness-raising and community-building in that specific place. Other isolated gays in the area may have been unaware that such a community existed. These oral history-based studies bring their attention not just to an imagined community but a real community, with places and people they may recognise. Hence, these people may be more inclined to come out of the closet, acknowledge a gay identity and become part of a situated gay community, assisting in further political and community projects.

Such community histories could also be considered part of another focus of public history—a history of localised places. For much of this article 'community' has referred to the imagined community, a collection of individuals connected through shared history and sexual identity. But communities, as demonstrated by Hodge's work on Darwin, are also materialised in specific

spaces and places. Because of this spatialisation, particular places come to be associated with the imagined gay community and gay identity generally. Apart from oral histories, Hodge's book utilises another important tool that works to localise and *emplace* the history of Darwin's gay community, on the one hand, and make the book even more publicly accessible on the other: it includes a number of photographs pertaining to Darwin's gay community. Photographs—when contextualised by discussion—materialise the gay past and sub-culture in specific places, rendering the community or locality under discussion more tangible and 'real'. The reader can 'see' the local community, not only read about it. Because we are becoming an increasingly visual culture, extensive use of photographs render community histories (or any histories really) more publicly accessible. This accessibility is even more pertinent to the gay public. Through such community histories, isolated gays in the area not only become aware of the existence of a local gay community, they can actually 'see' where it is located 'in place'—which neighbourhoods, clubs, venues, *inter alia*, are 'gay'—and hence recognise how to access the community. Since the reality of the community is brought home to them, they may be more inclined to forgo isolation and join the local gay community.

As Hodge's work shows, localised community histories of specifically gay places, especially those incorporating photographs, could also serve the purpose of widespread consciousness-raising and community-building. However, most place-bound, site-specific histories are presented in scholarly genres such as dissertations and edited volumes of academic papers.⁷⁰ Apart from Hodge's book, there are few publications that could be considered public history. One is *Street seen: a history of Oxford Street* by Clive Faro and Garry Wotherspoon.⁷¹ Oxford Street is synonymous with gay sub-culture and is the site of the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade. Faro and Wotherspoon show that the history of Oxford Street is one of minorities and parades; it has been a site of minorities and a thoroughfare of festivals for over a century. In terms of research, the book is scholarly but its presentation and extensive use of photographs, illustrations, advertisements and cartoons of historical interest render it a work of public history, not by making it less scholarly but rather by making it more publicly accessible. Oxford Street is visual, tangible and 'real'. Comparable works on other gay precincts in Sydney, such as King Street, as well as other cities, are lacking. Perhaps this is because few places in Australia have had such a long and visible connection with gay sub-culture. Nevertheless, gay histories and geographies of Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, lacking visual material, can be found in scholarly publications: but not in genres primarily for public consumption.

Despite the widespread use of written publications, these are not the only genres suitable to present Australian gay history to a public audience. Given the need to reach isolated gays, they may not even be the best modes of presentation as gays in isolated situations may not have access to written resources, either because bookshops or libraries may not stock gay-themed

books or because purchasing or borrowing such a book would be tantamount to a public coming out, thus drawing unwanted attention. Another, safer way to present Australian gay history is via radio broadcasts. These allow for easy dissemination of information about gay communities and activities in major cities and for unencumbered access to such information by interested parties. *The Coming Out Show*, later known as *Women Out Loud*, broadcast on ABC Radio, was an important focus for lesbians.⁷² Weekly broadcasts commenced in 1975 and the show continued for over twenty years. The program was actually a feminist one, not specifically lesbian, and it served as a public forum for all women from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences. These women included Australian lesbians. Because of the lack of resources available to lesbians, *The Coming Out Show* was an important meeting place and source of information. However, only a small number of programs concentrated on lesbian issues and the overall intent of the series was not historical (although historical context was not disregarded).⁷³

More significantly for the gay public, there have been at least two radio series specifically about Australian gay history broadcast in Australia. They take the form of community histories described above and are historical tours of major sites and events in Australia's largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Barry McKay produced both series—the *Sydney Gay and Lesbian History Walk Radio Series* and the *Melbourne Queer History Radio Series*—with the Melbourne series broadcast on JOY FM and the Sydney series on OUT FM.⁷⁴ As both of these stations cater for the gay community, both history series are aimed at the gay public to inform them of the historical development of the gay communities in both of Australia's largest cities, and thus historically legitimate the presence of such communities in these cities.

The Sydney series is structured in a spatial manner, organised around three virtual walks of three distinct localities that have had historical connections with Sydney gay sub-culture—the CBD, Kings Cross and Paddington, and Oxford Street and Darlinghurst—with a series of historical stories spanning up to two centuries connected to each locality. In contrast, the Melbourne series is organised chronologically, starting with stories from the mid-nineteenth century, moving through over a century of events and characters and culminating with the 1980s. Various localities frequented by same-sex attracted people are mentioned throughout as the sites for particular events. But there is no clear historical development of specific places associated with gay sub-culture. This underscores an important difference between the two cities: Sydney's current reputation as a 'gay capital' is related to the earlier development of localised and visible gay precincts compared with Melbourne.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the series reveal the longevity of gay sub-culture in both cities and the contribution of gays to Australia's history, thereby legitimating the place of gays in contemporary society and validating ongoing gay community-building in these cities which already possess considerable gay community history.

importantly, both of these series can still be accessed as they have been converted to websites with audio files of each story and broadcast. This is even more suitable for isolated gays as they do not even have to tune their radios to a particular frequency at a particular time. Rather, they can log onto the internet and access the information at leisure. The Melbourne series is particularly accessible in this format as it provides transcripts of the broadcasts as well as audio files. (The Sydney website does not.) The conversion to web also permits the inclusion of historical photographs, paintings and illustrations as well as maps of localities with many images on the Sydney website drawn from Faro and Wotherspoon's *Street seen*. Both sites are also linked to *The Bob Hay Sydney gay history home page*, another 'walking tour' website of Sydney composed by historian Bob Hay which has been archived by the National Library of Australia.⁷⁶ The 'walks' on this website are organised both chronologically and spatially which indicates how the localities in Sydney frequented by same-sex attracted people have shifted over the last two centuries. This historical geography of Sydney is also linked to the changing terminology applied to the same-sex attracted: the Sodomites' Walk, 1788–1843; the Homosexuals' Walk, 1860–1969; and the Gay Walk, 1969–1984. This use of the internet to present Australian gay history to a public audience is significant, permitting easy access by gays to historical information used for consciousness-raising to legitimate pride in gay identity and community-building efforts.

Related to the localisation and specific emplacement of Australian gay history is the role of gay anniversary festivals in major cities as a type of public history. In this context, we can see that the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG) and other such festivals have an important historical function which is often over-looked: the dissemination of information about gay politics and the gay community to the public. Annual 'gay pride' festivals and street parades occur in all/many of Australia's large capital cities but the SGLMG is the largest internationally, and historically and politically the most important in the struggle for gay equality.⁷⁷ I therefore take it as emblematic of gay anniversary festivals and the arguments applied here to the SGLMG can be applied to similar annual events in other cities.

The SGLMG is an annual festival and parade established in 1978 to recognise Stonewall Day—the event that, through symbolic deployment, galvanised gay liberation movements in the United States. It draws the attention of the Australian public to the legal and social oppression experienced by gays. While the overt political goal of the SGLMG has narrowed over the last twenty-five years, from a demonstration to demand equal rights, to a celebration of coming out, the festival and parade continue to show the size and variety of the gay community and to argue for the right for gays to freely use public space.⁷⁸ The festival, over the years, has played a vital role in the creation and mobilisation of the gay community both in Sydney and in other Australian cities.⁷⁹ However, many people today, gays included, see the SGLMG

as a carnival of glitz and glamour, not a statement of politics and community. This is partly because the gay liberation movement, being relatively young, has not paid a great deal of attention to passing on its history.

Already, there is a new generation of Australian gays who have no experience of the early gay liberation era.⁸⁰ They cannot appreciate and celebrate the struggles of their forebears and have little recourse to acquire an understanding of the origins and early goals of the SGLMG as most research on the festival and parade concentrates on its touristic, economic and cultural dimensions rather than its history and intent.⁸¹ Graham Carbery's *A history of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras* is an important exception, investigating the political origins of the SGLMG, its historic role as a community-building event, growing commercialisation (and associated exclusion based on lack of purchasing power), and the changed political focus of recent times.⁸² However, I contend that the event itself could be more clearly advertised, recognised and celebrated as an historical festival. As an annual gay celebration, if the SGLMG were to incorporate overtly the political and community history of the gay sub-culture of Sydney it would be rendered an event of Australian gay public history. Moreover, as an annual reminder of the past—of the ongoing battles for equal rights and freedom from discrimination—it would serve as a much more potent vehicle for political consciousness-raising and community-building.

The annual Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Candlelight Memorial rally is another anniversary festival closely tied to the gay community. This rally, which occurs annually in several Australian cities, and the AIDS Quilt Project, are the most prominent AIDS commemoration events in Australia organised via members of the gay community. While AIDS is not an exclusively gay disease, especially from a global perspective, in Australia it has largely affected gay men and so has become closely associated with gay male communities.⁸³ Because of the severity of death, grief and loss experienced by gay male communities in the 1980s, the Quilt Project and Candlelight Memorial were initiated in the late 1980s to provide a focus for the expression of collective grief, to remember those who have died of AIDS-related illnesses, and to evoke robustness and solidarity amongst the surviving gay community in the face of the epidemic.⁸⁴ The Quilt, for example, is composed of a patchwork of panels commemorating various individuals who have died of AIDS-related illnesses. In remembering and mourning the loss of individual (and mainly) gay men, the Quilt also represents 'the collective loss of a community under siege ... [and] reminds us of the miracle of our survival, and the survival of the gay community.'⁸⁵ Likewise, the Candlelight Memorial rallies have two explicit functions: for survivors to grieve and to demonstrate the solidarity of the gay community in the face of death.⁸⁶ Ariss suggests that because the commemorations are public and collective, they 'take on powerful socio-political functions' where gay identity is affirmed, where gay male communities are consolidated in the face of great loss,

and where the concerns of gay men are rendered visible to the broader society.⁸⁷ At the same time, though, such events often fail to adequately incorporate lesbians who have been much less affected by the AIDS epidemic. While the AIDS crisis and associated commemorative events have strengthened gay male communities and made them more visible to the general community, Drake argues that lesbian sexualities, lifestyles and needs remain invisible.⁸⁸ In this light, whereas the SGLMG serves as an identity-affirming and community-building event for both gay men and lesbians, AIDS commemoration events have been important for consciousness-raising and community-building efforts of gay men, but have not been effective in affirming lesbian identities and communities. Nevertheless, because the AIDS epidemic is ongoing, such commemorations remain an essential focus for identity and community affirmation in the lives of many gay men.

Film is another genre that could potentially be used to disseminate information about Australian gay history to a public audience. There have been a number of Australian films in recent years that have incorporated gay themes and characters: *The sum of us*, *The adventures of Priscilla—Queen of the desert*, *Love and other catastrophes* and *Head on*. None of these films, however, is historical and only one, *The sum of us*, includes a sequence that refers to the place of gays in the Australian past. Historical 'flashbacks' reveal that Harry's (Jack Thompson) mother had a lengthy lesbian relationship in her later life. However, because of the social conventions of the time and the potential effect on the family this relationship remained hidden from society and the family. The two women were separated before death and were not buried together. As part of a major Australian movie, this reveals to a wide audience, both gay and straight, the social sanctions and the fear of oppression that weighed on gay Australians in the past. This is contrasted with her grandson, Jeff (Russell Crowe), who is accepted by his father, Harry, and generally has an easier time in society. Yet oppression still exists today and this is shown through the ejection of Greg (Jon Polson) from the family unit when his father discovers his sexuality.

Films and television series, notably from the United Kingdom, have applied gay themes to historical events and eras to create truly gay historical films such as *Maurice*, *Edward II*, *Tipping the velvet* and *Wilde*. These works convey to public audiences, in a very accessible and tangible fashion, the social and legal discrimination suffered by the same-sex attracted in past eras and plead for understanding and acceptance today. Despite the numerous stories of Australia's gay past collected in the written works discussed above, there have been no major gay historical films produced in Australia. Several events and characters would make informative and entertaining viewing if rendered in film. How about a feature on Captain Moonlight and his relationship with James Nesbitt?⁸⁹

Finally, museums and heritage places are prime sites for the didactic presentation of public history and could play an important role in the dissemination of Australian gay public history.

Museums Australia Incorporated has instituted a policy for the inclusion of gay history in museums, citing that the social, political and cultural issues of gay communities are elements of Australia's complex cultural diversity.⁹⁰ While recognising that the potential audience for gay public history is composed of not only gay people, but also their families and friends, Museums Australia argues that the primary beneficiaries of the provision of gay public history are gay people themselves, who historically have been persecuted, assaulted, murdered and marginalised in Australian society:

The absence of lesbian and gay culture, history and concerns from the museum is a powerful way of ensuring that each [gay] woman and man will continue to make that painful journey to a sexual identity alone and often ashamed; will continue to be deprived of a rich and satisfying history; and will continue to feel the exclusion and marginalisation that characterise Australian society today.⁹¹

Despite this policy, there have been few exhibitions of Australian gay public history in museums, and heritage sites often fail to report on gay sexualities even at sites of known and documented homosexuality. For example, the Tasmanian factories for female convicts are among the few known and documented sites of lesbian activity in nineteenth century Australia. Yet the plaques at the site of the Hobart factory contain no references to sexual relations between female convicts, and the information at the site of the Ross factory includes only a one-paragraph reference to 'unnatural practices'.⁹²

Correspondence with museum curators involved with Museums Australia's gay and lesbian special interest group (GLAMA) indicates that the group is currently conducting an audit of past and current exhibitions and programs with gay themes held at major Australian museums and galleries.⁹³ To this point GLAMA has found only four institutions that have conducted gay themed exhibitions: the National Museum of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia, the Western Australian Museum, and the Hyde Park Barracks Museum. Why have there been so few gay themed exhibitions and programs? Is there a paucity of material artefacts—photographs, diaries and the like—around which to construct exhibitions? Are there concerns over the intimate nature of displays based on sexuality? Further correspondence with GLAMA reveals that the reason for the absence of gay history from museums and heritage sites is more likely to be that institution management, governments and private funding bodies have not generally favoured the depiction of gay themes on political grounds. I also suspect that such inclusions would not appeal to the straight tourists who comprise the majority of museum and heritage visitors. It is hoped that in the near future museums and heritage sites will include exhibitions and programs concerned with Australian gay history. This would provide not only a means by which gays could affirm their identities and learn about their communities, but also allow the broader society to recognise the ongoing contribution gays make to the cultural development and diversity of Australia. Such exhibitions could educate the general pop-

ulation about the past exclusion of gays from Australian society, encourage acceptance and affirm the continued role of gay Australians in politics, the arts, sport, scholarship and social justice.

These genres—biographies, autobiographies, oral histories, community histories, radio broadcasts, websites, anniversary festivals, sites, institutions and films—convey the socio-political content of Australian gay public history in an accessible manner. These modes of presentation have the potential to disseminate to a public gay audience a form of history used for identity politics and community-building—to educate them about social and legal oppression, show them that as individuals they are not alone and help each to connect with other gays. Some of these genres have been more widely used than others. Written forms, for example, have been employed extensively, whereas electronic and filmic media have not. Nevertheless, they all have potential to further the cause of Australian gay public history through didactic storytelling. Importantly, even though they are largely aimed at the gay public, they are not closed to the wider public either. All interested parties can access information about the history of Australian gays, be educated about past discrimination and realise that gays have always had a place in Australian society. This is, in the end, what is important about Australian gay public history even though the genres employed allow for socio-political education and involvement of the gay public, this history is available to all.

Gay times: concluding remarks

The gay history of Australia is a still young and rapidly growing area of scholarly research and public interest. In part because of this youth, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a specific gay public history and gay scholarly history more generally. This article is a preliminary attempt to identify forms of, and discuss the uses of, Australian gay public history with a particular focus on consciousness-raising and political education for identity affirmation and community-building, through the application of ideas derived from Jordanova's discussion of public history. Specifically, I have applied, in turn, the three principal issues Jordanova identifies in her discussion: the uses of the past in the present, the non-academic audiences for history and the genres employed to present history to the public.

We first discovered that gay history is fundamentally an identity history which is used for consciousness-raising for political purposes—to legitimate and affirm gay identity by demonstrating its longevity in Australian society—and to encourage gays to use this history as a basis for pride, agency, community and political action. We then found that the non-academic audience for gay history is, in fact, the entire gay community, although not at the exclusion of straight society. Just as national publics and communities are generated through the dissemination of a shared past, so too the imagined gay community is cohered through a shared gay history which encourages pride. Finally, we determined that to reach the imagined gay community (the non-

academic audience) with a history purposed for consciousness-raising for identity politics and community-building (the usable past) specific, mainly didactic genres have been employed.

Some modes of presentation have been used quite widely, especially written forms, such as autobiographies, biographies, oral histories and community histories. This could be because the writers and editors of these are often scholars who are also involved in producing academic publications. Because of the dearth of source materials for gay history—beyond official records—these scholars often use their public history collections as primary sources in their more scholarly research. For example, Garry Wotherspoon used stories from the autobiographical compilation *Being different* in his scholarly work *City of the plain*. Other genres, such as radio, film, festival and museum exhibitions, could be more widely used for public history presentations for political education, identity affirmation and community-building. Moreover, the content of Australian gay public history reflects the concerns of gay history in general including its lacunae. Among these are serious considerations of specifically lesbian and bisexual histories. Gowing contends that of all disciplines concerned with gay research, history is most divided between specifically gay male and lesbian histories.⁹⁴

In Australia, gay male scholars have been concerned with the history of gay men, and justify their exclusion of lesbian history by stating it fits more properly with the study of women's history.⁹⁵ Recently, several scholars have published research on lesbian history, such as Ruth Ford, Joy Damousi and Kay Daniels.⁹⁶ In terms of public history, lesbians have been included only peripherally in mixed gender studies. For example, only two of twenty-five stories in French's *Camping by a billabong* are about lesbians. Moreover, only one of the works I examined, by Bradstock and Wakeling, is specifically concerned with lesbians. Bisexuals are even more marginalised despite their prominence in the 1970s gay liberation movement. They are mentioned only in passing, if at all, in gay public histories currently available, and there is very little wider historical research on the place of bisexuals in gay history. Angelides is one exception.⁹⁷ In order for both the gay community and the wider society to have a more complete picture of gay history, research on lesbians and bisexuals needs to be expanded and then incorporated into Australian gay public history. This task may not be easy given that during the later part of the 1990s gay history in general, along with gender and class-based histories, has become subservient to issues of 'race' in Australian historical research. Nevertheless, I hope that gay historical research continues to grow and that this article provides a suitable framework for beginning to identify and understand forms and uses of gay public history in Australia and opens the way for further investigations in this area. I also hope that this discussion encourages new directions in the practice of gay public history in Australia leading to the inclusion of lesbian and bisexual histories and the use of a greater variety of genres to reach a widely scattered and closeted audience.

- 1 Throughout the rest of this article the term 'gay' will be applied to gay men and lesbians simultaneously, so that 'Australian gay public history' should be understood to include both lesbians and gay men. Where I refer to male homosexuals specifically, I will use gay men, and where I refer to female homosexuals specifically, I will use lesbian. I recognise that there are difficulties in using gay to denote both male and female homosexuals—for instance, it raises issues of lesbian invisibility in gay politics—but it permits ease of reading. Another term, such as queer, may have been used, but the deployment of queer as an umbrella term is quite recent, and it would have been anachronistic to apply it historically. There is already a general usage of the terms 'gay history' or 'gay and lesbian history'—rather than introduce another new term, I chose to continue with current popular terminology.
- 2 I place 'consumer' in inverted commas to indicate that the word should be taken in its broadest sense—I am referring not only to the consumption of commodities, but also of items of non-commercial interest which have been targeted at the gay community (for example, particular medical services).
- 3 Garry Wotherspoon, 'From private vice to public history: homosexuality in Australia', in *Public History Review*, vol 1, 1992, pp148–59.
- 4 Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in practice*, Arnold, London, 2000.
- 5 *ibid*, p155.
- 6 *ibid*, p147.
- 7 Wotherspoon, *op cit*, p157. For a similar assertion in the American context, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: the making of the gay male world, 1890–1940*, Flamingo, London, 1995, p286. I am aware of the dangers of teleology posed by this argument—the potential to create historical continuity when none may exist. However, what this argument proposes is that same-sex sexual attraction, regardless of the label attached to it, has long existed in Australian society, and this can be used to provide a sense of historical legitimacy and social contribution amongst gay people today. This historical continuity has already been explored and soundly argued by Wotherspoon, *inter alia*, and I will further discuss and expand the idea in this paper.
- 8 Jordanova, *op cit*, p149.
- 9 *ibid*, pp153–55. The references are to Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a social category of bourgeois society*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1989; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities*, Verso, London, 1991.
- 10 For example, homosexual acts between men were not decriminalised in New South Wales until 1984 (Wotherspoon, 1991, full reference below at note 16). Homosexual acts between women were usually not considered criminal, but lesbian relationships were not socially sanctioned because 'real female citizens' showed their allegiance to the nation through heterosexual marriage and child-rearing.
- 11 Laura Gowing (p55, full reference at note 15, below) indicates that it is a misinterpretation that there were no legal prohibitions against sexual relations between women in 'western' nations. She cites the following examples of historical research of same-sex attracted women targeted by repressive legislation in Europe: Louis Crompton, 'The myth of lesbian impunity: capital laws from 1270 to 1791', in *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol 6, 1980–81, pp11–25; Brigitte Eriksson, 'A lesbian execution in Germany, 1721: the trial records', in *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol 6, 1980–81, pp27–40; and Theo van der Meer, 'Tribades on trial: female same-sex offenders in late eighteenth-century Amsterdam', in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol 1, 1991, pp24–45.
- 12 *ibid*, p153, p166.
- 13 Robert Aldrich, 'Not just a passing fad: Gay Studies comes of age', in Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay perspectives: essays in Australian gay culture*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1992, pp1–30, p14.

- 14 *ibid*, p22. See also the following for an excellent survey of the changing conceptualisations of same-sex desire and identity, with references to the Australian context as well as other western countries: Annamarie Jagose, *Queer theory*, University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne, 1996.
- 15 Laura Gowing, 'History', Andy Medhurst and Sally Munt (eds), *Lesbian and gay studies: a critical introduction*, Cassell, London, 1997, pp53–66, p54.
- 16 Wotherspoon, *op cit*, p150; Garry Wotherspoon, *Being different*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1986, p13; and also Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the plain: history of a gay sub-culture*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1991.
- 17 Gowing, *op cit*, p54.
- 18 Wotherspoon, *Public History Review*, *op cit*, p150; and Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, *op cit*, 'Introduction', pp13–32.
- 19 The argument of this paragraph is based on ideas presented by Garry Wotherspoon in his article in *Public History Review*, *op cit*, *passim*.
- 20 I am well aware that there are no actual 'authorised' versions of Australian history or Australian gay history—this is why the term appears in inverted commas. Clearly, there is no authorising body for history. However, Australian history remains quite heterosexist in terms of the areas and objects of research, which areas of research receive public and private funding, what is published, and what is taught in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Due to this heterosexist focus, there is little in the way of publicly received gay history—it remains absent from the visible topics of Australian history. This is what is implied by the term 'authorised'.
- 21 Outside of these official records of the authorities, there is very little documentary evidence of same-sex attraction in Australia. For example, ten pages of Robert French's annotated bibliography of archival sources for Australian gay history is taken up by official sources, whereas personal and other sources occupy only three pages. See: Robert French, 'Where the action was': archival sources for gay history in Australia', in Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay perspectives: essays in Australian gay culture*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1992, pp181–95.
- 22 Wotherspoon (*Public History Review*, *op cit*, p150) indicates that same-sex sexual relations occurred amongst the indigenous inhabitants of Australia, and that such activities involved much different meanings in their cultural contexts than similar practices in settler society.
- 23 *ibid*, *passim*; and Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, *op cit*, *passim*.
- 24 Robert French, *Camping by a billabong: gay and lesbian stories from Australian history*, Blackwattle Press, Sydney, 1993.
- 25 For some examples of gay histories employing oral histories and autobiographical essays, see: Wotherspoon, *Public History Review*, *op cit*; Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, *op cit*; Wotherspoon, *Being different*, *op cit*; Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling (eds), *Words from the same heart*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1987; and Dino Hodge, *Did you meet any malagas? A homosexual history of Australia's tropical capital*, Little Gem, Nightcliff, 1993.
- 26 Jordanova, *op cit*, pp154–55.
- 27 Kath Weston, 'Get thee to a big city: sexual imaginary and the great gay migration', in *GLQ*, vol 2, no 3, 1995, pp253–77.
- 28 Jordanova, *op cit*, p147.
- 29 Graham Willett, 'Australian gay activists: from movement to community', in *Radical History Review*, vol 76, Winter, 2000, pp169–87, *passim*; and Graham Willett, *Living out loud: a history of gay and lesbian activism in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 2000, *passim*. For further histories of gay oppression and the gay liberation movements in Australia, see: Craig Johnston and Robert Johnston, 'The making of homosexual men', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *Staining the wattle: a people's history of Australia since 1788*, McPhee Gribble, Fitzroy, 1988, pp87–99; and Liz Ross, 'Escaping the well of loneliness', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), pp100–08.

- 30 See especially Willett, *Radical History Review*, *ibid.*, pp110–14, and Willett, *Living Out Loud*, *ibid.*, pp53–59.
- 31 For example, Weston (op cit, pp269–74) demonstrates in her study of San Francisco that migrants' lived experiences of gay society are often at odds with the expectations raised by the imagined gay community—rather than the harmonious, unitary gay community they expected, they encounter a multiplicity of gay communities, divided by gender, age, race, politics, religion, 'scene' and sexuality.
- 32 Jordanova, op cit, p164.
- 33 *ibid.*, p141.
- 34 *ibid.*, p149.
- 35 See note 11.
- 36 For some specific examples of how same-sex sexuality has been 'othered', marginalised and even expelled from constructions of national identity, see: Lee Edelman, 'Tearooms and sympathy, or, the epistemology of the water closet', in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger (eds), *Nationalisms and sexualities*, Routledge, New York, 1992, pp283–84; David Bell, 'Perverse dynamics, sexual citizenship and the transformation of intimacy', in David Bell and Gill Valentine (eds), *Mapping desire: geographies of sexualities*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp304–331; David Bell, 'Pleasure and danger: the paradoxical spaces of sexual citizenship', in *Political Geography*, vol 14, no 2, 1995, pp139–153; John Binnie, 'Invisible Europeans: sexual citizenship in the New Europe', in *Environment and Planning A*, vol 29, no 2, 1997, pp237–248; and Shane Phelan, *Sexual strangers: gays, lesbians, and dilemmas of citizenship*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2001.
- 37 This contention is supported by the work of geographers Michael Brown and Paul Boyle, who demonstrate that gays are closeted by governments and administrative structures at the scale of the nation-state through exclusion from official national census material. Through examining census material from the US and the UK—which asks no specific questions about sexuality or the nature of same-sex households—they argue that governments elide gays from the 'portrait of the nation' rendered by the census, and thus closet gays at a national level, excluding them from the 'national statistical snapshot', and making it difficult for them to cultivate a sense of national belonging. Michael Brown, *Closet space: geographies of metaphor from the body to the globe*, Routledge, London, 2000, especially pp88–115, chapter 4, 'National closets: governmentality, sexuality and the census', written with Paul Boyle.
- 38 *ibid.*, p154.
- 39 *ibid.*, p154.
- 40 Refer to footnotes 10 and 11 for further information on the criminality of homosexuality. In referring to the lack of legal rights for gays and lesbians in Australia, I am thinking not only of criminal law, but also of the relative recency of anti-vilification laws, equal opportunity employment provisions, and the recognition of hate crimes (such as rape) perpetrated against both gay men and lesbians. Other legal prohibitions remain, such as problems with access to IVF programs and adoption, and lack of recognition of same-sex partners as beneficiaries of superannuation schemes.
- 41 The Museums Australia Incorporated *Gay and lesbian policy guidelines* indicate how large the non-gay audience for gay and lesbian public history could be. If we assume the gay proportion of the wider population is 10% (although this figure—derived from Kinsey's study—has come under increasing criticism), and that each gay person has an average of two parents and two siblings, and at least four or five others intimate with their lives, then the potential gay-interested audience becomes a significant proportion of the population. Museums Australia Incorporated, *Gay and lesbian policy guidelines for museum programs and practice*, Museums Australia, Civic Square, ACT, 1998, p3.
- 42 Ken Plummer, *Telling sexual stories: power, change and social worlds*, Routledge, London, 1995, p86–87. The importance of sexual stories in creating a shared history, identity and culture can be seen in the autobiographies written by the youngest contributors to

women's *Being different*, Leigh Raymond and Sim Lee. These writers indicate on a number of occasions that they garnered information on the gay community through books written by other gays, and that these stories told them that they were not alone, that there were other gays 'out there'—a sub-culture with its own history, spaces, venues and members. They learned that a gay lifestyle shared with 'like' others was possible.

- 43 The idea that gay community-cum-audience is generated through shared gay history is supported in the Australian context by the Museums Australia Incorporated *Gay and lesbian policy guidelines*. These state that 'gay and lesbian people often experience a frightening isolation which results from the systematic exclusion of gay and lesbian history and culture from the public record.' Museums Australia Incorporated, op cit, p1.
- 44 As discussed earlier, the gay liberationists also used history to establish a resistant gay community in the 1970s, and although not considered here, this too is a form of gay public history. I suggest that in the early 1970s this took the form of illustrating past oppression and discrimination of homosexuals in order to provoke gay defiance against legal and social recriminations. Later in the 1970s a new gay public history began to emerge, one that incorporated affirming historical stories of gay people's lives, and which was also used to build a strong, proud gay identity and community. An example of this is Martin Smith's history column 'Our Australian Gay Heritage', published in *Campaign Magazine* in the late 1970s (see note 51). These affirming stories were the pre-cursors to the volume length publications considered here—for instance, see French, *Camping by a billabong*, op cit, p1, and Hay, below at note 51.
- 45 Wotherspoon, *Being different*, op cit.
- 46 *ibid.*, p201.
- 47 Bradstock and Wakeling, op cit, pp9–10.
- 48 French, *Camping by a billabong*, op cit.
- 49 Duberman, Martin, *Stonewall*, NY, 1993, as quoted in *ibid.*, p1.
- 50 *ibid.*, p1.
- 51 This idea is reinforced through historian Bob Hay's comments on *Campaign Magazine* and its publication of Martin Smith's history column 'Our Australian Gay Heritage' in the late 1970s. In celebrating Smith's column as the most important pioneer of Australian gay history, Hay also contends that *Campaign Magazine*, through the publication of such identity-forming columns as 'Our Australian Gay Heritage', played a 'seminal role...in promoting the sense of community among gay men in Australia through those early years [of gay liberation in the 1970s]'. This argument appears in Bob Hay's Sydney Gay History Walks website, archived in the Pandora Archive of the National Library of Australia at <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/nla:arc-10257>. The argument and quote above appear in the page 'Martin Smith: Father of Australian Gay History', located at <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/nph-arch/1990/O1999-Mar-1/http://www.ozemail.com.au/~vombatus/msmith.html>. As an international example of the generation of the imagined gay community, Benjamin Forest advances a similar argument in the case of the 'gay precinct' of West Hollywood, USA, which was incorporated as city in 1984. Forest contends that leading into the campaign for municipal incorporation, the gay press presented idealised images of the territory as a 'gay city' which 'tied the physical and social characteristics of the new city to the physical, mental and moral character of gays living in West Hollywood' (p133). This generated a narrative which defined various attributes of gay identity and tied them to an actual place, thus creating an imagined and situated gay community. See Benjamin Forest, 'West Hollywood as symbol: the significance of place in the construction of a gay identity' in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol 13, no 2, 1995, pp133–57.
- 52 For further information on 'missing monuments', see: Marcus O'Donnell, 'The illusion of presence: missing monuments', in Craig Johnston and Paul van Reyk (eds), *Queer city: gay and lesbian politics in Sydney*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 2001, pp42–53. Interestingly, there are parallels here with women's history, which is also bereft of monuments and memorials. But this lacuna could be part of the particularity of the Australian context,

- for other cities in other countries do possess gay memorials. I am thinking specifically of Amsterdam and its Homomonument, a monument designed by Karin Daan and built in 1987 to commemorate the gay victims of homophobia worldwide. Importantly, it is also a feature of Amsterdam City Council's gay tourism program. See Jon Binnie, 'Trading places: consumption, sexuality and the production of queer space', in David Bell and Gill Valentine (eds), *Mapping desire: geographies of sexualities*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp190–93.
- 53 Robert Ariss, 'Re-inventing death: gay community memorial rites in Sydney, Australia', in Robert Aldrich (ed), *Gay perspectives II: more essays in Australian gay culture*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1994, p279, p292.
 - 54 Museums Australia Incorporated, op cit.
 - 55 Jordanova, op cit, pp161–62.
 - 56 Wotherspoon, *Public History Review*, op cit, pp153–54.
 - 57 David Marr, *Patrick White: a life*, Random House, Milsons Point, 1991; Patrick White, *Flaws in the glass*, Cape, London, 1981.
 - 58 Paul Freeman, *Ian Roberts: finding out*, Random House, Milsons Point, 1997.
 - 59 *ibid*, px.
 - 60 French, op cit, p1.
 - 61 Wotherspoon, *Being different*, op cit, pp14–15; Bradstock and Wakeling, op cit. For details of the common themes amongst the contributions, refer to the introduction of each collection.
 - 62 Plummer, op cit, pp86–87.
 - 63 Erin Shale (ed), *Inside out: an Australian collection of coming out stories*, Bookman, Melbourne, 1999.
 - 64 *ibid*, p1, p3.
 - 65 Timothy Conigrave, *Holding the man*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, 1995; Robert Dessaix, *A mother's disgrace*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 1994.
 - 66 See: Michael Frisch, *A shared authority: essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990; Lorraine Sitzia, 'A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?', in *The Oral History Review*, vol 30, no 1, 2003, pp87–101.
 - 67 Not all oral histories are used to create local community histories. An example of another use of oral history interviews is the publication produced by the Gay and Lesbian Immigration Task Force (GLITF) History and Archive Project. Peter de Waal interviewed various gay and lesbian immigrants helped by GLITF; their partners, GLITF staff, activists, bureaucrats and politicians on the difficulties and successes of gay immigration. Despite its use of oral histories, I have not examined the GLITF publication as part of this paper because it is largely concerned with the experience of the immigration process, rather than the history of gay life and community *within* Australia, and is therefore not a work of gay public history as defined in this paper. Moreover, only 150 copies were produced, and it is not available in bookstores, thus limiting its availability to the gay public. See: Peter de Waal (ed), *Lesbians and gays changed Australian immigration: history and herstory*, Gay and Lesbian Immigration Task Force NSW Inc, Darlinghurst, 2002.
 - 68 Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, op cit, p30.
 - 69 Hodge, op cit, pi.
 - 70 For example: Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, op cit; Garry Wotherspoon, 'A Sodom in the South Pacific—male homosexuality in Sydney 1788–1809', in Graeme Aplin (ed), *A difficult infant: Sydney before Macquarie*, University of Sydney Press, Sydney, 1988; Denise Thompson, *Flaws in the social fabric: homosexuals and society in Sydney*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985; Graham Carbery, 'Some Melbourne beats: a 'map' of a subculture from the 1930s to the 1950s', in Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay perspectives: essays in Australian gay culture*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1992, pp131–46; John Lee, 'Male homosexual identity and subculture in Adelaide before World War II', in Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (eds), pp95–112; Clive Moore, 'Pink elephants and drunken police: Bohemian Brisbane in the 1940s', in Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay and lesbian perspectives IV: studies in Australian culture*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1998, pp132–63.
 - 71 Clive Faro with Garry Wotherspoon, *Street seen: A history of Oxford Street*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2000.
 - 72 For overview of the program, see Liz Fell and Carolin Wenzel (eds), *The Coming Out Show: twenty years of feminist ABC Radio*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1995.
 - 73 As Wenzel argues, discussion by feminist historians and dramatisations of women's history 'offered a vibrant historical context to the situation of contemporary women.' See Carolin Wenzel, 'Feminism breaks out on Coming Out', in Liz Fell and Carolin Wenzel (eds), *The Coming Out Show: twenty years of feminist ABC Radio*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1995, p69.
 - 74 For the Sydney series access: <http://historywalk.tripod.com>; and for the Melbourne series: <http://melbqueerhistory.tripod.com>.
 - 75 The emerging commercial sub-culture of the 1970s was confined for the most part to Sydney rather than other Australian cities, including Melbourne. See Graham Willett, *Radical History Review*, op cit, p177, p179. See also Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, op cit, pp19–21.
 - 76 Archived at: <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/nla.arc-10257>; original site at: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~vinbatys/bobhay1.html>.
 - 77 For example, annual festivals and parades occur in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne. For references on the role of SGLMG as a vehicle for political mobilisation, see note 79 below.
 - 78 Graham Carbery, *A history of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Parkville, 1995, pp29–32.
 - 79 Willett (*Radical History Review*, op cit, pp176–77; and *Living out loud*, op cit, pp138–144) demonstrates that the arrests and abuse of the those involved in the first Gay Mardi Gras parade of 1978 was the major contributing factor to the two gay camps of the 1970s gay liberation era—the activists and the scene patrons—finally coming together as a united gay community to oppose continued oppression of gays, not only in Sydney, but also in other Australian cities.
 - 80 Carbery, op cit, p3.
 - 81 This is not to say that such studies are bad research. The assessment of the touristic, economic and cultural benefits of the SGLMG is important. Rather, there has not been enough complementary work on the historical function of Mardi Gras. For examples of such touristic, economic and cultural studies on Mardi Gras, see: Kevin Markwell, 'Mardi Gras tourism and the construction of Sydney as an international gay and lesbian city', in *GLQ*, vol 8, no 1–2, 2002, pp81–99; Kym Seebohm, 'The nature and meaning of the Sydney Mardi Gras in a landscape of inscribed social relations', in Robert Aldrich (ed), *Gay perspectives II: more essays in Australian gay culture*, Department of Economic History with the Australian Centre for Gay and Lesbian Research, University of Sydney, 1994, pp193–221; Peter McNeil, 'The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Party: masquerade and muscle culture', in Robert Aldrich (ed), *Gay perspectives II: more essays in Australian gay culture*, Department of Economic History with the Australian Centre for Gay and Lesbian Research, University of Sydney, 1994, pp223–44; Peter Murphy and Sophie Watson (with Iain Bruce), 'Gay sites and the pink dollar', chapter 4 of *Surface city: Sydney at the millenium*, Pluto, Annandale, 1997; Bridget Haire, 'Mardi Gras', in Craig Johnston and Paul van Reyk (eds), *Queer city: gay and lesbian politics in Sydney*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 2001, pp97–111; Michael Hurley, 'Sydney', in Craig Johnston and Paul van Reyk (eds), pp241–57.
 - 82 Carbery, op cit, *passim*.
 - 83 Mark Edwards, 'Minorities within minorities: AIDS policy communities in Australia', in

Garry Wotherspoon (ed), *Gay and lesbians perspectives III: essays in Australian culture*, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1996, p166; Ariss, op cit, pp283–84.

84 Ariss, op cit, pp285.

85 ibid, p284.

86 ibid, p285.

87 ibid, p292, p279.

88 M. Drake, 'Lesbian visibility at what price?', in *National AIDS Bulletin*, February 1992, p23, as cited in Edwards, op cit, p175.

89 For an overview of this story, complete with historical sources, see: French, *Camping by a billabong*, op cit, pp17–20; and Wotherspoon, *Public History Review*, op cit, p152.

90 Museums Australia Incorporated, op cit, p3, p4.

91 ibid, p1.

92 This information regarding the absence of information on gay history at the sites was collected by the author. For the story of lesbianism at the female factories, see: French, *Camping by a billabong*, op cit, pp13–15.

93 Personal correspondence with the convenor of GLAMA.

94 Gowing, op cit, p53.

95 For example, see footnote 2 of Wotherspoon, *Public History Review*, op cit, p159; Wotherspoon, *City of the plain*, op cit, p9.

96 See, for example: Liz Ross, op cit; Ruth Ford, 'Lesbians and loose women: female sexuality and the women's services during World War II', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Gender and war*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp81–104; Ruth Ford, 'Speculating on scrapbooks, sex and desire: issues in lesbian history', in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 27, April 1996, pp111–27; Ruth Ford, 'Lady friends and sexual deviationists: lesbians and the law in Australia, 1920s–1950s', in Diane Kirkby (ed), *Sex, power and justice: historical perspectives on the law in Australia, 1788–1990*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp36–42; Joy Damousi, 'Depraved and disorderly: the sexuality of convict women', in *Labour History*, no 68, May 1995, pp30–45; Kay Daniels, 'The flash mob: rebellion, rough culture and sexuality in the female factories of Van Diemen's Land', in *Australian Feminist Studies*, no 18, Summer 1993, pp151–73.

97 Steven Angelides, 'Gay liberation and the paradox of bisexuality', in David Phillips and Graham Willet (eds), *Australia's homosexual histories: gay and lesbian perspectives 5*, Australian Centre for Gay and Lesbian Research, Sydney, and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Melbourne, 2000, pp113–32.

White hot history: the review of the National Museum of Australia

GUY HANSEN

The representation of the past contained within the walls of the National Museum of Australia (NMA), and the debates surrounding them, provide a unique meeting ground of popular and academic views of Australian history. Tracing these debates is a difficult task with the ground constantly shifting. In July 2003, however, the Government released *The review of the National Museum of Australia: exhibitions and programs*. This is a fascinating artefact because it crystallises many of the current debates about public history in a single document. Reading the review raises a number of fundamental questions about the practice of history in public institutions. What is the role of a national museum? What influence should a government have over the type of history presented by that institution? What happens when professional practice clashes with governmental expectations? Is it possible, or even desirable, to provide an authoritative account of national history? Is the social and cultural history approach that has been championed by history museums over the last thirty years unable to engage with providing a history of the nation state? Is it even possible to do critical history in a context of a national museum?

As a curator who has worked at the NMA since 1991, I feel these questions are of central importance. Over the last twelve years I have experienced the struggle of attempting to turn the idea of a museum, originally articulated in the Pigott Report (1975) and then mandated in the National Museum of Australia Act (1980), into a working institution. During this time I have contributed to a wide range of exhibitions and collection projects. Most importantly, I worked as the lead curator on the *Nation: symbols of Australia* exhibition, one of the semi-permanent exhibitions produced for the opening of the NMA in 2001. Reading the Review and following the debates surrounding it has provided an opportunity to reflect on this process and to reassess my professional practice as a history curator.

To understand how the Review of the museum came about it is necessary to go back to the first few days of this new institution. On 11 March 2001 Prime Minister John Howard officiated at the opening of the NMA. While politely thanking all who had participated in the museum project the Prime Minister's speech was understated. Describing the Museum as 'un museum like'