Between practice and materiality: Seeing memory work through the lens of practices and affordances
Technologies may constrain, but they do not determine […] Technologies lead
double lives.
(Silverstone, 2003, pp. xi-xii)

The matter, nature, and function of memory never changes as a result of technol-
ogy; rather, the concomitant transition of mind, technology, practices, and forms
gradually impinge on our very acts of memory.
(Van Dijck, 2007, p. 49)

The previous chapters discussed rather ‘grand theories’ of the relationship between mem-
ory work and media. In this chapter, I introduce two approaches or ‘middle-range theories’
that take us a step closer to the empirical analysis of this relationship: practice theory and
affordance theory. Practices are the bridge between individual agency and societal struc-
ture, since they comprise individual, yet shared patterns of action. Practice theory allows us
to see memory work as something people do—with or related to media—within a broader
space of social interaction in which certain norms and values emerge. The second section
discusses affordances as a dimension between practice and technology. Affordances are
theorized here as the perceived possibilities for interaction with technology. As such, af-
fordances both invite and shape certain practices vis-a-vis technologies such as media.
At the same time, affordances also leave open the possibility for unintended practices to
emerge. The third section brings practices and affordances together and locates memory
work as situated in between practice and materiality and realized in cultural forms.

**Media and memory practices**

Both media and memory work are tied to practices, which are, according to Schatzki (2001,
p. 11), the “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized
around shared practical understanding.” Similarly, anthropologist John Postill (2010, p. 1)
defines practices as “the embodied sets of activities that humans perform with varying
degrees of regularity, competence and flair.” Practice suggests action and creation on the
part of the individual, but also on the part of the group as ritualized and/or normalized
behavior. Practice, as a definer of self and being, is a strategic concept that bridges indi-
vidual agency and societal structure. It also allows for a concretization of the theories of
mediatization and media ecology, since it is on the level of practice that these becomes
apparent: practices such as playing, reading, consuming, sharing, and learning increas-
ingly have come to involve media or take places within mediated spaces. This is also true
of the practices associated with memory work, ranging from mourning and memorializing,
to curating and documenting.

Nick Couldry (2004) proposes to view media “as an open set of practices relating to, or
oriented around, media” (p. 117). Regarding media as practice, Couldry (2012) argues,
brings about four advantages in researching the topic. First, practice is concerned with a “regularity of action” (p. 33). In other words, when media are used repeatedly, at particular times and in specific ways, a certain practice evolves from that. Media practice is intertwined with our routine and it partly defines our lifestyle. Second, practice never takes place in isolation; it is social: “Practices are not bundles of individual idiosyncrasies; they are social constructions that carry with them a whole world of capacities, constraints and power” (Couldry, 2012, p. 34). Practices take place in contexts and contexts are affected by practices. Practices thus can be seen as socialized and socializing action. Third, practice is intrinsically connected to what is dominantly considered as “need” (p. 34). In that regard, media as practice are needed in various kinds of interaction and coordination within groups and communities. Additionally, in the context of Western modern democracies and global capitalism, media practices are shaped under pressure of assumed “basic needs” such as freedom and trust (p. 34). Fourth and last, seeing media as practice guides us into discussions about how we should live with media. Here, the question of normativity concerning media practices arises. Norms appear through socializing action in the form of practice and when practice is standardized, it needs to be legitimized within a collective of practitioners. Underlying the practice approach to media is one seemingly simple question: “what are people doing that is related to media?” (p. 35).

In a reaction to Couldry’s view of practice, anthropologist Mark Hobart (2010) prefers to “think of practices as those recognised, complex forms of social activity and articulation though which agents set out to maintain or change themselves, others and the world about them under varying conditions” (p. 63). This broad definition of practices invites a classification or categorization of “media-related practice,” rather than media as practice. Hobart clearly delineates what he means by his approach to media-related practice by an example:

In answer to the question ‘Is television viewing a practice?’ we cannot decide a priori, but must inquire about kinds and degrees of viewing, for what purposes and according to whom. I consider my flopping in front of the television after a hard day at work an activity, but a practice if I am critically watching an ethnographic film. So accounts of (usually) men watching news as part of making themselves informed citizens might be considered a practice in some situations, as might the couch-potato life of the British TV series, The Royle Family, where television watching is constitutive of their social life and roles. (p. 72)

Hobart’s example shows that not every media-related activity is a practice. Hobart’s view suggests a certain purposive engagement with media and its content and the resulting change in the lives of their users. This also includes “women cooking their meals so the family can view favourite programmes; family decisions about capital investments in radio, television or computers” (Hobart, 2010, p. 63).
A problematic conceptual phrase such as the “mediatization of everyday life” can be reified on the level of media-related practice. The question is here: how do everyday practices change because of the existence and implication of ubiquitous media? This is not to say that action, practice and behavior are steered by a mediated center; media can very well be at the peripheries of practice yet do exert influence over that practice, for example when children ‘play’ their favorite TV-characters, when families have TV-diners, or when students study while listening to Spotify’s ‘study music’ playlist. As a result, research is currently shifting from focusing on moments of viewing, reading, listening, and interpreting media to practices of remixing, sharing, talking about, being a fan of media and to the more “ephemeral ‘moments’ of audience activity” (Bird, 2010, p. 88). Thus, media-related practices can be “more deliberative and conscious” (e.g. fan practices), the result of an “unconscious performance of mediated scripts” (e.g. weddings become like weddings in a film), or simply emerge by chance (e.g. trivial media content “goes viral”) (Bird, 2010, p. 100).

There is room for play in practice, however. Couldry’s analysis of practices does not account well for imagination, improvisation and spontaneous practice to appear—characteristics of a new media ecology in which people carry their media on their bodies and spontaneity and play are interwoven with everyday media practice. Couldry’s analysis of practice is informed by two assumptions, argues Ursula Rao (2010): “firstly, practices are ordered; and secondly, this order is transparent and can be understood through (academic) reflection” (p. 149).

Resistance to everyday ordering mechanisms of practice can powerfully be theorized as tactics, as introduced by Michel de Certeau (1988). De Certeau (2009) calls a “strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, and army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” (pp. 35-36). A tactic, on the other hand, is a “calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus” and it comes into being as a “guileful ruse” (De Certeau, 1988, p. 37). In De Certeau’s original sense, individuals use tactics of bricolage, assembly, and customization in order to negotiate the strategies set out for them by institutions such as businesses, the government or city planners. In order to appropriate things and surroundings for personal use—to make them “habitable”—individuals employ different tactics. De Certeau uses the example of the city in order to illustrate his point: cities are designed and planned strategically in particular ways. Yet, when a person moves about in the city she uses short-cuts, a favorite route instead of the fastest or runs a red light. Thus, she tactically engages with the environment strategically planned for use (De Certeau, pp. 91-110).

This theoretical lens can be adopted and adapted to the analysis of media practices, and more specifically to the new media ecology in which content production springs not only from the hands of the powerful and the few. Audiences have the possibility to creatively interact with media content or create their own content, hence practicing media tactically.
Bottom-up production and remix might be added to De Certeau's tactical toolbox of bricolage, assembly, and customization:

People are playfully engaging in media production practices in different ways and with different motivations, including political activism, fun, fame, creating social bonds or even the pleasure of playing with the media system itself. The point is here that media produced by ordinary people must be considered a constitutive part of media practices that are rooted in creative production processes from the very beginning, not as secondary practices but as primary sources. (Ardèvol et al., 2010, p. 261)

Remixes, peer-productions and other interactions with media texts are practices that are tactical expressions of the audience vis-à-vis institutionally mediated texts and society at large. They are “appropriative practices” that enable audiences to make media their own (Ardèvol, 2010, p. 266). This argument comes close to what De Certeau (1988) calls “poaching”: an individual audience member takes from any text what she wants and uses it for her own benefit. However, De Certeau was writing before the digital era and he calls these poaching practices “quasi invisible” (p. 31). At least in part, this changed with the rise of digital spaces in which appropriative practices have become increasingly visible and part of “the media.”

Even though De Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics is still valuable in the discussion of practice, his theory might need amendment when applied to the new media ecology. Basing his argument on The Practice of Everyday Life, Lev Manovich (2009) asserts that, on the level of practice within the Web 2.0 paradigm, “the logic of tactics has now become the logic of strategies” (p. 324). Institutional strategies are today explicitly developed to facilitate customization of any kind and therefore strategies and tactics are linked interactively (Manovich, 2009, p. 323). In other words, technological design of new media explicitly promotes bricolage, assembly, customization, remix and user-generated-content. Thus, bricolage and play has been appropriated and incorporated by new media owners and designers. This view curbs some of the (academic) enthusiasm about spontaneous and affective production springing from imagination and creative practice.

What does a practice approach bring to the study of memory work? As could be read in chapter one, memory work has always involved practice, whether it is training of the mind (memory techniques) through memory exercises or rituals such as dances, sacrifices or celebrations (memory performances). Yet, today, memory practices have increasingly become media-related or taking place within media(ted) environments. On a functional and conscious level, for example, people store information on their personalized media for later usage and write blogs for autobiographical purposes. Memory practices have also become scripted by media images and events; mass-broadcasted media texts such as historical documentaries and televised funerals or anniversaries steer audiences in
certain directions of remembering events and persons; they provide schemata or frames of remembrance (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994). To remember, to mourn, to indulge in nostalgia, to discuss and talk about the past, to reenact it, and to challenge it involve media in implicit and explicit, direct and indirect ways. Moreover, we increasingly use media to remember for us, or to capture, save, and archive recorded experience.

Investigating practices involves studying the dynamics of power on the level of people’s sayings and doings. In terms of memory practices, this comes down to scrutinizing what ‘right ways’ of remembering are, what is remembered and when and where. Thus, Sturken (2008, p. 74) argues:

The concept of memory practices allows for an emphasis on the politics of memory, precisely because of the ways in which the production and construction of memory through cultural practices has as its foundation the notion that memories are part of a larger process of cultural negotiation. This defines memories as narratives, as fluid and mediated cultural and personal traces of the past. A practice of memory is an activity that engages with, produces, reproduces and invests meaning in memories, whether personal, cultural or collective. Thus, an emphasis on practices, rather than objects or sites of memory, highlights the very active aspect (and hence the constructed nature) of memories.

A question that flows out of Sturken’s observation is how media affect memory work. That is, how do they exert influence over how memory is practiced. In his landmark study How Societies Remember Paul Connerton (1989) differentiates between incorporating and inscribing practices, as two different types of practices by which humans remember and transmit knowledge about the past. Incorporating practices like smiling, gesturing, and handshaking require the presence of a body to communicate a certain message. Inscribing practices entail the storing and retrieving of information through devices such as media. Connerton (1989) is primarily interested in incorporating practices, when he writes: “culturally specific postural performances provide us with a mnemonics of the body” (p. 74). In a mediatized culture, however, incorporating and inscribing practices increasingly conflate and convergence. For example, the practice of recording, inscribing, an event or an action immediately has become the thing one does; it has become a gesture, a postural performance in and of itself, with its own mnemonic functions and goals.

**Affordances and materiality**

A practice approach to media and memory has a strong focus on the sociological dimension of action. Agency, in most practice theory, is located within human beings alone. The technological or material dimension of action is somewhat at the periphery in practice theory. However, materiality matters within social organization, especially when we regard
media as technologies of memory, since “the material properties of artifacts are precisely those tangible resources that provide people with the ability to do old things in new ways and to do things they could not do before” (Leonardi and Barley, 2008, p. 161). New media invite and enable new practices. Simultaneously, they shape and limit them. This insight is particularly important when rethinking the relationship between media technologies and memory work within a new media ecology, in which our environments are inhabited by technologies that shape our communicative interactions. In much research literature within the field of media studies, the concept of affordances has been applied in order to scrutinize the relationship between media users and media technology. This section presents some of the most important insights into this term and relates them to memory work.

Environmental psychologist James Gibson (1979) first coined the term affordances. He described it in the following way: “An affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like […] It is equally a fact of the environment [artifact] and a fact of behavior [action]. It is both physical and psychical [social] […] An affordance points both ways, to the environment [artifact] and to the observer” (pp. 129-130). Put differently, “technology affordances are action possibilities and opportunities that emerge from actors engaging with a focal technology. Affordances are rooted in a relational ontology which gives equal play to the material as well as the social” (Faraj & Azad, 2012, p. 238, emphasis in original). This means, write Faraj and Azad (2012) that “an object in the environment will offer different possibilities of action depending upon the actor’s abilities” (p. 251). Notwithstanding the term’s wide usage, the term ‘affordances’ is applied in many different ways and in many different disciplines.

In an attempt to clarify the major positions in the study of the social shaping of technology, sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001) further elaborates on the concept: “Affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object. In this way, technologies can be understood as artefacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them” (p. 444). This position Hutchby calls a “third way,” in between the constructivist view on technology, which favors human agency in shaping technology, and a realist view, which emphasizes the “constraining power of technical capacities” (p. 444). This makes the concept of affordances useful as a middle-range theory for communication and media researchers that can “bridge observations about technology use with our broader understanding of technology at individual, group, and organizational levels” (Evans et al., 2017, p. 37). This is in line with Van Dijck’s view on technology (most explicitly argued in The Culture of Connectivity) but also with De Certeau’s (1989) theory of strategies and tactics.

Affordances are where strategic design meets tactical usage. Technologies are designed, developed, configured, programmed, as well interpreted, decoded, and used. Both stages, design and use, are subject to negotiation: designers take into account and adapt to
perceived needs and desires, whereas users and consumers make sense and appropriate the designed object. This is as true for automobiles and bicycles as it is for television and Facebook. Obviously, different things can be done with an automobile than with Facebook and this is where affordances come in. Affordances “constrain the ways [technologies] can possibly be ‘written’ or ‘read’” (Hutchby, 2001, p. 447). Empirically, this dynamic and fluid relationship between writing and reading technology can be examined on the level of practice, because it is on this level that the negotiation between prescribed (or, better, inscribed) use and actual use takes place.

When applied to media, affordances “facilitate, limit and structure communication and action” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 121, emphasis in original). That is, media invite certain uses and practices and restrict them at the same time. Affordances are the potential and perceived uses of an object, depending on whether or not it “matches” with the user’s physique and needs (Hjarvard, 2013, pp. 27-28). It is important to stress, though, that technological features or design of media are not the same as affordances. Features are rather static, yet adaptable, whereas “affordances are dynamic, emerging from the relationship between the user, the object, and its features” (Evans et al., p. 40). Faraj and Azad (2012) explore this idea further: “If features are defined as technical attributes and ways of working inscribed in the artifact by technology designers, then affordances represent possibilities of using select features or combinations of features in a way meaningful to the user’s goals, abilities, and lines of action” (p. 254). The implication of such thinking is “to abandon the talk of generic users or to think of technology as bundles of features. Context such as user intent, abilities, social, environment, as well as the specifics of the situation will matter even more” (p. 255).

For example, “follow” and “like” buttons are features, while the affordance is connectivity (the ability to connect with a person or brand). Pertaining to memory work, the options to tag, title, and describe a video on YouTube are technological features, while the affordances here could be archiveability or searchability. Whether or not the technology is used in this way depends on the user’s intent, context, background, and perception of that technology. Designed or implied usage might not correspond with actual usage, or the relation a user has with a particular technology. Therefore, as Faraj and Azad (2012) point out, “[w]e will also need to abandon the view that affordances are about a technology or an object. They are about actions in the world that involve technology” (p. 255). Affordances, then, are not only about the material technology or object itself, but as much about user’s actions, perceptions, and actual usage of that technology or object. Therefore, Evans, et al. (2017) regard affordances as a relational structure “between an object/technology and the user that enables or constrains potential behavior outcomes in a particular context” (p. 36). The concept is analytically useful because it allows research into “the attributes and abilities of users, the materiality of technologies, and the contexts of technology use,” which are often dynamic (Evans, et al. p. 36).

An affordance perspective on media further validates the view that they are not static, unchanging technologies. An implicit, yet excellent application of the concept of affor-
dances to media comes from a study by Lisa Gitelman. She (2008) argues that the media do not exist because this suggests a natural, stabilized body, while media and their attached protocols, rules and uses continuously change according to the historical circumstances—time and space—in which they are being used. In Always Already New, Gitelman (2008) consciously chooses to work from her case studies because media “are very particular sites for very particular, importantly social as well as historically and culturally specific experiences of meaning” (p. 8). Therefore, she defines media as

socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation. As such, media are unique and complicated historical subjects (Gitelman, 2008, p. 7).

By showing how phonographs were described in the discourse surrounding the new technology, Gitelman demonstrates the “multifaceted process of design and domestication” (p. 64). In Gitelman’s case study of the phonograph, media affordances are clearly explained. The intended usage—inscribed in the design—differs from actual usage. While intended for office usage, the affordances of the phonograph invited other uses and served a certain cultural need. “Like the discursive lives of those later media, the discourses making sense of recorded sound formed a matrix of heterogeneous, changing, and even contradictory messages” (p. 68). The Edison Speaking Phonograph Company targeted intended users in business, but the device was appropriated for entertainment and home use. Moreover, the medium was new in a society that was marked by a rapidly growing middle class and changing role perceptions of women. The phonograph fitted well in what Gitelman calls the “domestication of mechanical reproduction” at a time in which the woman was “the arbiter of musical activity within the home” (pp. 68, 74).

What does an affordance perspective bring to the study of memory work in a new media ecology? Media scholar danah boyd identifies four affordances that emerge out of networked public’s engagement within digital environments. These are essential for the construction of memory in a new media ecology (boyd, 2011, p. 46):

Persistence: Online expressions are automatically recorded and archived.
Replicability: Content made out of bits can be duplicated.
Scalability: the potential visibility of content in networked publics is great.
Searchability: Content in networked publics can be accessed through search.
With persistence, boyd means that while spoken interaction is ephemeral, technologically mediated interaction is not: communication is saved, recorded, and archived.\footnote{This, of course, does not hold true for technologies such as Snapchat.} The written word gradually changed the way literate peoples around the world communicated and thought and internet technologies are firmly located within the long line of other innovations within media history. The replicability of content is not new in media history, yet the scale and ease with which bits and bytes are copied make boyd argue that “copies are inherent” in networked publics. Print culture enabled vast dissemination of ideas: the scale and visibility of revolutionary thought in colonial America, for example, demonstrated the efficacy of the written word in the public sphere (Warner, 1990). The notion of scale in digital spaces also is about the potential of texts and ideas (in whatever form) reaching a large and broad audience. However, “scalability in networked publics is about the possiblity of tremendous visibility,” not the guarantee of it (boyd, 2011, p. 48). A text “goes viral” only when it enthuses the collective. Lastly, the ease with which persistent and replicated content can be searched might be the most radical departure from previous media systems such as print and broadcast cultures. Especially since the popularization of mobile information technologies, online searching has become a practice that is ingrained in daily life.

The affordances relating to digital communication in networked publics—persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability—are key in understanding memory work today. Persistence makes any communicative act and text online—in whatever form—a potential mediated memory; replicability makes it possible to duplicate and alter these stored or archived texts and creatively engage with digital content; scalability allows content to be potentially distributed widely and thus to be consumed and reconstructed more broadly; and searchability makes memory work “less a question of remembering and more a matter of where to look” or let the looking be done for you by a search engine (Hoskins, 2009c, p. 29).

Additionally, digital media’s principles as described Lev Manovich (2001)—programmability, modularity, variability—permits code, text and audiovisual material to be “frequently modified or remixed.” Also, “while remix is politically contentious, it reflects an active and creative engagement with cultural artifacts, […] amplifying ongoing efforts by people to make mass culture personally relevant by obliterating the distinctions between consumers and producers” (boyd, 2011, p. 54). Additionally, the present and past in digital spaces are subjectively, affectively and virtually produced and made sense of at the same time, or rather in and through time (Keightley & Pickering, 2013). This “possibility of simultaneity” reconfigures the tensions between institutionalized history and cultural memory, broadcast and new media, but also, on a broader philosophical level, individual experience and collective images, and space and time (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009, p. 8). In similar vein, Mark Deuze (2012) asserts that “space and place are best understood as under
permanent construction (like any site online): something continuously and concurrently made, sustained, remixed and taken apart by the very people and things that make up that ecosystem” (p. 15).

Media affordances concomitantly invite and steer certain forms of communication as much as they leave room for alternative applications, practices and employment. The theory of affordances allows for a tension to exist between planned, ideal, and intended use and appropriated and actual use. This suggests creativity, surprise, chance, improvisation, play, and a sense of freedom when it comes to using media. Affordances also bring into question the place of agency of the user and the technology concerned. Both human and non-human actors are active in constituting digital memory work.

Trisecting digital memory work: practices, technologies, cultural forms

What are the implications of the theoretical insights provided above for the study of digital memory work? First, digital practices are viewed as those practices inseparably connected to digital technology or those taking place within the digital environment of the Web. Such practices may be platform-specific, such as tagging or describing a YouTube video, liking or commenting upon a Facebook post, or editing or referencing a Wikipedia entry. Second, broadly speaking, digital technologies are those technologies that can hold and produce information represented in binary code—ones and zeroes, bits—that can be read by computational systems. Social media platforms will be the main digital technologies under scrutiny in the following chapters. Digital cultural forms are seen here as artefacts and objects produced with digital technologies and within digital environments. The word ‘form’ is used here to indicate a culturally recognizable category that may contain different modalities of communication—text, image, audio, or video. Examples of digital cultural forms are: memes, selfies, Facebook profiles, wikis, or emoticons. A danger of trisecting memory work, however, is that its components are seen as separate categories while, empirically, they are inseparable: they produce and mutually shape each other. When people engage in practices in their material environments, they simultaneously interact with technologies and produce and make sense of cultural forms, whether they are internet memes, online memorials, or wikis.

This latter remark requires somewhat more explanation before an answer can be given to the question how to analyze digital memory work. Memory work is practiced in the sense that it involves the sayings and doings of people in their interactions with the past. Out of these practices flow certain norms and values regarding memory work which are continually contested and renegotiated socially. Vice versa, norms and values underlie practices. Not only do ‘right’ or ‘convincing’ ways of representing the past in the present emerge in memory work, also the ways in which the past is transferred into the future is subject to normative struggle. The previous two sections have demonstrated that practices and technological affordances are relational: affordances are activated through practical en-
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gagement with technological artefacts. Technologies may be inviting, enabling, shaping, and restricting practices and cultural forms in memory work.

Following Baym (2010, p. 44), this dissertation holds that “the consequences of technologies arise from a mix of ‘affordances’—the social capabilities technological qualities enable—and the unexpected and emergent ways that people make use of those affordances.” As such, people (and their practices, cultural forms) and technologies are “interrelated nodes in constantly changing sociotechnical networks, which constitute the forms and uses of technology differently in different times and places for different groups” (Lievrouw, 2006, p. 250). Practices, as ways of doing, and affordances, as perceived possibilities for action and engagement, relate to the material environment in which people live. Practices are about what people do with and within their material environment, affordances concern what people perceive they can do with and within their material environment (Nagi & Neff, 2015). Practices are as attached to technologies as technologies are to practices.

Cultural form and the content captured in that form can be seen as the result of people’s practical engagement with their social and material environment, which might include technologies. Practices produce, often with technologies, cultural forms. For example, the practice of cooking, which might involve knives and a stove, results in producing the cultural form of a meal, which contains particular dishes. The practice of photographing, which involves a photo camera, results in the cultural form of a photographic image which contains a particular depiction of a moment in time. Practices, in this regard, are inscribed in cultural forms. At the same time, however, cultural forms may shape practices as well. They can inspire action or change culturally held norms and values.

Cultural forms carry symbolic content and meaning that may be transported in time, across different locales and contexts and through time, across generations. However, Hall (1998, p. 449) reminds us:

The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not inscribed inside its form. Nor is its position fixed once and forever. This year’s radical symbol or slogan will be neutralized into next year’s fashion; the year after, it will be the object of a profound cultural nostalgia. (emphasis mine)

This implies that meaning is encoded, decoded, and recoded differently in time and through time, depending on the socio-cultural context in which recipients encounter cultural forms. Thus, technologies involved in memory work are regarded here as the means by which cultural forms are contained and realized through practice, yet the ‘unpacking’ of cultural forms is an enduring meaning-making process.

Moreover, it is important to stress again that this dissertation does not view technologies as neutral intermediaries in digital memory work. They are as much part of digital memory work as are cultural forms and practices. Obviously, without digital technologies there would be no digital practices and cultural forms, let alone digital memory work. As
a peculiar kind of technologies, social media platforms invite, enable, shape, and restrict communicative interaction and practice. Users can do different things with Facebook than with YouTube or Wikipedia and these platforms do different things with their users and the content they share on it as well. At the same time, users might use these platforms in ways unexpected by their designers. Therefore, this dissertation investigates realized practices on these platforms that are inscribed in cultural forms.

Additionally, memory work as performed on social media platforms is a type of mediated interaction, which “should be seen as a new and eclectic mixed modality that combines elements of face-to-face communication with elements of writing, rather than as a diminished form of embodied interaction” (Baym, 2010, p. 51). The cultural form and content produced and shared in digital spaces is immediately saved and stored. Studying cultural forms online can thus be said to automatically involve studying practices and technologies and vice versa. Digital memory work involves the constant interactions between people, technologies, and the symbolic content these concomitantly produce. In summary, when we study memory work, we investigate how the past is communicatively constructed through practices, technologies, and cultural forms employed by various actors for particular goals. Memory work is, therefore, a particular discursive construction that is the result of a constant power struggle between the various actors involved in it.