FUTURE MEMORY PRACTICES

ACROSS INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND MODALITIES

Edited by
Gertraud Koch and Rachel Charlotte Smith

Future Memory Practices

Future Memory Practices addresses a crucial challenge in contemporary pluralistic societies: the organisation of open, participatory, and socially inclusive memory practices in digital media ecologies. It brings a novel relational approach to future memory work across institutions, people, and modalities.

Advancing inter- and transdisciplinary research and rich empirical cases from across Europe and beyond, this book examines how memory practices in digital media are open for the engagement of people with diverse backgrounds. It analyses the modalities of memory making and how they can enable institutional and public memory making with a broad spectrum of people and groups in civil society at local, translocal, national, and global levels. The chapters examine the mediatised character of memory making, while also critically considering what obstacles and potentials emerge from participatory memory work. As a whole, the book is a comprehensive source of knowledge and ideas for creating socially inclusive, sustainable memory practices and futures. It sets the multidisciplinary research agenda for advancing studies of heritage in contemporary digital media as an element and a driver of cultural and social change.

Future Memory Practices is essential reading for academics, students, and professionals working in the fields of anthropology, museum studies, digital cultural heritage, memory studies, cultural studies, and design.

Gertraud Koch is a Professor of Anthropological Studies in Culture and History at the University of Hamburg. Her research focus is on digital anthropology, cultural heritage and memory making, anthropology of work, and digital methods.

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Participatory Memory Practices
Series Editors: Gertraud Koch, Maria Economou, Isto Huvila, Samantha Lutz, Rachel Charlotte Smith and Elisabeth Tietmeyer

The *Participatory Memory Practices* series provides a forum for research on a crucial challenge in pluralistic societies: the organisation of open, participatory and socially inclusive memory practices in contemporary digital media environments.

Advancing inter- and transdisciplinary research, the series examines how and in which ways memory practices in digital media are open for the engagement of people and groups from diverse backgrounds. It analyses the modalities of memory making and how they can enable institutional and public memory making with diverse actors in civil society across local, national and global levels. In doing so, the series examines the contemporary modes, challenges, and potential futures of participatory memory making in a digitalised and mediatized society. The series provides a state-of-the-art source of knowledge, practices and ideas for creating socially inclusive, sustainable and future-oriented memory practices. It presents future-oriented, empirically grounded research monographs and edited collections that set the multidisciplinary research agenda for studying heritage, memory making and digital media as a driver of cultural and social change.

Titles within the *Participatory Memory Practices* series appeal to academics and students working in memory studies, heritage studies, museum studies, information studies, archival studies, design anthropology and participatory design, social and cultural anthropology, diversity studies, migration studies, media studies and sociology. The Series Editors welcome proposals that explore the political and social significance of memory work and the ethical implications for participatory and socially inclusive memory practices in contemporary digitalized and pluralistic societies.

The following list includes only the most recent titles to publish within the series. A list of the full catalogue of titles is available at https://www.routledge.com/Participatory-Memory-Practices/book-series/PAMEPR

Future Memory Practices
Across Institutions, Communities, and Modalities
Edited by Gertraud Koch and Rachel Charlotte Smith

Crafting Museum Social Media for Social Inclusion Work
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Future Memory Practices

Across Institutions, Communities,
and Modalities

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Gertraud Koch and Rachel Charlotte Smith**

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Contributors

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Foreword

Memory work is a core feature of contemporary pluralistic societies, traversing personal, collective, and societal practices and spheres. Memories are not simply relics of remembrance from the past. They are actively co-constructed through dynamic interactions and dialogues in the present, and they provide meaning, agency, and direction for our possible futures. This volume approaches participatory memory work through a relational and inclusive approach to future memory work across institutions, people, and modalities.

The book is the result of extensive research and collaboration in the POEM project, a European Training Network (MSCA ITN) on Participatory memory practices: Concepts, strategies and media infrastructures for envisioning socially inclusive potential futures of European societies through culture. In the current age of transnational scientific inquiry, the importance of trans- and interdisciplinary research cannot be overemphasised. This book presents the significant achievements of this collaborative knowledge production, based on 13 PhD projects addressing the complex scientific challenges of exploring, imagining, and conceptualising participatory memory work with people and participants across the fields of heritage professionals, creative industries experts, data and cultural activists, civil society groups, and researchers in Europe and beyond.

The contributions in this book lead us on an exploratory journey through the relationality of personal memories, the professional frameworks of memory institutions and museums, and the modalities of participatory memory work in a digital age. Perspectives and strategies are presented for socially inclusive futures making through culture in European societies. The chapters present the results of extensive empirical investigation, collaborative experimentation, and multimodal analysis. These are outcomes of a joint knowledge production, woven from the collective sense and the expertise of transdisciplinary teams spanning diverse contexts across Europe and beyond. Each section and chapter offers unique insights, pushing the boundaries of knowledge and opening new avenues for exploring future memory work.

We extend our gratitude to all those who engaged in and contributed to the POEM research project. This includes the young and the senior researchers as well as the partner institutions who engage practically and academically in the field of memory work. The dedication and passion of these researchers have

laid the foundation for future socially inclusive memory work across people, places, and scales.

Gertraud Koch and Rachel Charlotte Smith

1   Future memory practices

A relational approach to social inclusion in digitalised media ecologies

Gertraud Koch and Rachel Charlotte Smith

1   Introduction: situations, contexts, and temporalities of memory work

As divergent forces pulling apart across European societies and the global North and South increase the urgency of bolstering social and cultural inclusion, collective memory making becomes one of the crucial challenges for contemporary societies. Centrifugal cultural forces bring with them both challenges and potentials for establishing inclusive memory politics and for developing heritage as an imaginative source of identity and belonging (Anderson, [1983] 1991) that could transcend nation-states and global geopolitics and envision possible futures through how we remember the past, both in Europe and beyond (Harrison & Sterling, 2020). Central concerns in this debate are the recognition of 'difficult' and 'dissonant' traditions and the contestation of public memory with respect to how an array of themes are represented – colonial traditions and immigration, multiculturalism and transnational history, non-Christian religious heritages in European societies, female heritages, and the inclusion of neglected groups (Connerton 2008, De Nardi et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020; Häkkilä et al., 2022; Giglitto et al., 2023). Successfully envisioning constructive and socially sustainable futures requires acknowledging the history, identity, belonging, and membership of previously sidelined individuals and groups' (Assmann & Czaplicka, 2015). Questions of eligibility and entitlement are also important in relation to public support, economic outcomes, and ownership claims over memories that are used as cultural heritage resources. But despite extensive work towards participatory and socially inclusive memory work in recent years, the problems and the limitations have not been overcome (Oswald, 2021).

Memories are intrinsically connected to time and space. They encompass both personal and shared experiences, as well as the wider political structures of communities and institutions. Memory work is, therefore, an integral part of life, deeply interlinked not only with individuals' biographical and social trajectories but with the communities they live in (Coraiola et al., 2023). Furthermore, memory work is an important source that can add value to human existence, a value that extends beyond the market sphere (Wadel, 1979; Wallman, 1979). The anthropology of work illuminates the political dimension of memory work and the structural dimensions of adding value to human life through this means. In all four

spheres of human activity – personal, social, economic, and political – the time and resources available to individuals depend on their social group. Memory work is a considerable investment of work; the time, interest, and priorities that people from different social groups are able or unable, interested or willing to allocate to it therefore also varies (Haug, 2008, 2020). In this context we conceptualise memory work as the intentional processes through which people, groups, and institutions engage in – directly or indirectly – in relations with other actors, identities, and past/present/future memory practices. Research on the practices that constitute participatory memory work (PMW) thus should "take into account not only what is done, how it is done and who does it, but also how and by whom it is evaluated" (Wallman, 1979, p. 1). The politics of participating in the cultural production and reproduction of memories is thus a central dimension of contemporary society. It impacts the contingent memory practices of people, communities, and institutions. Memories therefore connect the smallest scale of human existence with the largest scale of national and global politics (Macdonald, 2013). Memory practices range from present/past memories, traditions, and relations to the shaping of contemporary presents and presents/futures in the making (Bryant & Knight, 2019). They relate to personal and collective practices, identities, and agency, as well as place, materiality, and active acts of imagination, resistance, and contestation (De Nardi et al., 2020; De Nardi, 2022).

A further factor is the continuous expansion of digital media ecologies in the various media technologies and infrastructures. These offer new opportunities, on different scales, for engaging with memory making (Marttila & Botero, 2017; Sheehy et al., 2019). Within the contemporary digital media ecosystems and across the range of memory making modes (Erll, 2009), memory practices can refer to all practices of representing, sharing, and storing information, whether in everyday life or institutional contexts (Barth, 2002). This is irrespective of whether this information will later be referred to as part of personal or public memory making (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Digital infrastructures seem to hold out the promise of opening up novel spaces for exploring new ways to address socially and historically contested heritages and new ways to move towards more inclusive cultural memory practices (Haskins, 2007; Drozdzewski & Birdsall, 2019; Rausch et al., 2022; Giglitto et al., 2023). But contrary perspectives point to the disruptive potential of digital media and the internet, and suggest that digital media platforms and infrastructures are not a productive force for social inclusion and participation (Hoskins, 2018; Abend et al., 2019). Digital media in memory and heritage making can of course offer both positive and negative potentials for digital memory making (Benardou et al., 2014). But this is not technologically determined; it emerges through how they are used and implemented. Future research is needed on the conditions and turning points of these developments.

Since the advent of global digital media, participatory memory practices have undergone a process of transnational and somewhat autonomous evolution, as outlined by Reading (2016). To some extent, these practices are independent of cultural heritage politics and develop in parallel with the governance approaches of political bodies seeking to facilitate their specific national identities.

The proliferation of participatory memory practices has been facilitated by transnational communication, and thus the understanding of what participation means in terms of social inclusion and future making has undergone a similar process of diversification (Rosaldo, 1994; Beaman, 2016). The fluidity of memory practices necessitates the development of new approaches to both the practice of memory and its study. These approaches must acknowledge the situatedness of memory making and the multitude of factors that influence the possibilities, meanings, and outcomes of participation. In this sense, participation is not a mere conceptual term but a subject of study in this book. Consequently, a shift towards participation and inclusion will remain incomplete if only the political and discursive levels of memory work are addressed (Koch, 2013). An effective shift towards participation and inclusion in research on and practice of memory making must consider memory making as fluid and negotiated in specific situations. It must also consider the specific contexts and everyday practices of/in memory institutions and their infrastructures as manifest, but contestable and negotiable, forms of previous ideas and possible future trajectories of memory making. Rather than imposing a single, pre-defined definition of participation, we invited the contributors to engage with their own approaches to participation, which were relevant to the context of their case study. This approach reflects the broad range of definitions and approaches to participation that exist today.

Thus, this book presents a relational research framework for participatory memory practices towards social change: a framework that can bridge and integrate meanings, means, and modes of memory practices to facilitate connectivities between the diverse entities involved in the social processes of memory work[1]. In so doing, the book contributes novel research that is capable of creating shifts for these significant social issues in pluralistic societies towards the organisation of publicly accessible, participatory, and socially inclusive memory practices. Building primarily on examples from Europe, one of the places where participatory memory practices are most vividly explored, while also being intensely entangled in transnational and global connections (Koch & Lutz, 2017; Koch, 2019), this book presents a relational research framework for participatory memory practices towards social change. Consequently, it contributes original approaches that can study and, at the same time, create shifts in participatory memory practices. These approaches are not limited to addressing the significant societal issues that exist in pluralistic societies but extend to the organisation of publicly accessible, participatory, and socially inclusive memory practices elsewhere. This is demonstrated by a case study in Namibia, which brings in dimensions of contested everyday socio-historical spaces and temporalities, to include diverse epistemologies into collaborative future making (Smith et al., 2020). Furthermore, the case invites explorations across transnational contexts, spaces, and situations to show how memory practices are dynamically connected and transformational across local and global sites.

The extent and breadth of the subject matter under consideration spans ten countries, numerous personal and institutional participatory memory practices, memory practices with transnational scope in a variety of media formats, and multiple social

groups not yet presented very well in public memory work, first nation people, children and young people, migrant groups, (post-)colonial voices and homeless people. Nevertheless, in light of the substantial range of participatory memory practices, it is evident that a single volume cannot aim to be exhaustive. Among the many possible extensions of the study of future memory practices in digital media environments, we see particular relevance in the study of community-driven archiving, which is not only widespread among minority groups in the United States but also known elsewhere; transnational practices of decolonial memory making that span the global South and North; and interventionist, action and design-oriented approaches to memory work for sustainable futures.

2   Participatory and inclusive approaches to memory work

The book integrates an exceptionally diverse range of research fields. It brings together, and brings into reflexive dialogue, current research paradigms from the fields of the inclusive museum (Sandell, 2002; Morse, 2020), open repositories and participatory archives (e.g., Van Biljon et al., 2017), digital heritage (e.g., Benardou et al., 2018), critical heritage studies (e.g., Giglitto et al., 2023), design anthropology (e.g., Smith, 2022), social media (e.g., Giaccardi, 2012), media studies (e.g., van Dijck, 2020), and science and technology studies (e.g., Horst et al., 2021). The resulting integration of interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multimodal research on memory making and cultural heritage (Sather-Wagstaff, 2015), provides a rich source for ideas, innovations, and interventions for inclusive, sustainable, and future-envisioning memory practices – for individuals and groups in institutions, and across infrastructures of digital media and technology. This comprehensive perspective on a variety of diverse stakeholders in PMW complements the action-oriented shifts towards inclusive future making. The variety among the actors involved is evident in the networks of NGOs, community projects for education and social inclusion, media production and web publishing, open data consultancies, and in cultural policy. And this diversity and variability emphasises, once again, the need for a relational approach to PMW.

The contributions in this book expand current perspectives on participation by addressing the many changing frameworks in the heritage sector – sociotechnical, organisational, legal, economic, and ethical – that have come into play along with the mediatised memory ecologies in digitalised societies. In a host of rapidly expanding fields where research is increasingly interdisciplinary – in anthropology, archive and library studies, critical heritage studies, digital heritage, museum studies, participatory design, sociology, science and technology studies, and sustainability studies – the meaning of participation has become a central topic of debate (Abend et al., 2019; Baetens et al., 2020; Douglas-Jones et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2024). Rather than assuming the benefits of participation for its own sake, the focus of research is shifting to the challenges and limitations, as well as the ideological and practical factors (Boersma et al., 2020; Boersma, 2022; Edenheiser et al., 2020; Zwart, 2024), that influence the ideas and practices of participation in context. The research presented in this book therefore both scrutinises participation

and evaluates it. This calls for a new theoretical framework, sometimes discussed as post-participation (Van Mensch & Meijer-Van Mensch, 2022) and conscious evaluation of power dynamics and social structure. Each chapter provides suggestions to take these essential debates beyond mere participation.

This book therefore introduces a new perspective to the study of participation. On the conceptual level, it pays attention to the modalities in which participatory approaches in memory making enfold their positive or problematic potential. The concept 'memory modalities' (Koch et al., 2021) integrates the socio-material conditions of memory research and provides a heuristic for studying these modalities as one of the crucial elements in participatory and socially inclusive approaches to memory and heritage making. Despite the extensive research on the role of media in memory formation (Erll, 2009, 2020; Hajek et al., 2015; Hoskins, 2018), a systematic problematisation of the socio-material aspect has not been achieved in either memory research or digital cultural heritage. The concept of memory modalities serves to bridge this gap in a meaningful manner, expanding the socio-material dimensions of memory construction beyond the media employed to encompass the broader context of personal, institutional, and civil society memory formation (Koch et al., 2021).

The shift towards digital technologies has brought these issues to our attention, but it should not be the sole approach for examining memory modalities. Memory making exists as a complex bundle of practices, situated within various contexts that encompass and assemble diverse materials and social and organisational forms; it navigates legal, economic, and technological structures and social norms (van Dijck, 2020; Hayden, 2021; Hjorth, 2021; Horst et al., 2021). The experience of this gap in research is widely recognised among practitioners in professional memory making who have experienced the inertia of the existing organisational, infrastructural, legal, and economic conditions, an inertia that frequently hinders approaches to participation and inclusion. Both institutional and individual intentions with regard to participation and inclusion continue to depend on memory modalities that assist them by opening up institutional and public memory making to a broad spectrum of people and groups in civil society on all levels – local, translocal, national, and transnational. Focusing on memory modalities enables practitioners and researchers to examine the mediatised character of memory and heritage making (or to theorise how the mediality affects memory practices) without losing sight of further memory modalities in which digital media and infrastructures are used. The particular relevance of memory modalities in the representation, circulation, and sustaining of cultural knowledge in digital media needs to be complemented through social framings.

Furthermore, the concept of memory modalities allows us to connect to the emerging discussions on memory ecologies and heritage ecologies and thus broaden perspectives from different angles. The concept of memory modalities provides a lens with which to examine the agency of the socio-material in these ecologies as a relevant factor (Harrison, 2015; Zirra, 2017; Rigney, 2017) with its own stake in the 'worlding' of heritage (Fredengren, 2021). It allows us to study the socio-material dimensions as a unique and significant involvement in memory

ecologies. Whether regarding memory ecologies as emergent and predisposed *interactional trajectories of experience* (Schacter & Welker, 2016; Hoskins, 2016), or in relation to worldviews as *cognitive ecologies* (Heersmink, 2020), the concept of memory modalities brings a new lens to the study and care of memory ecologies and memory work as well as to their participatory and inclusive transformation. It furthermore contributes to decentring the human and calls attention to the material conditions of memory work and its transformation.

In providing a novel framework for transformative research in memory and heritage studies, this book presents design anthropology as a unique strand in the exploration of participation in the field of memory making and cultural heritage. This approach engages actively with participation through experimentation and interventions in digitalisation; in so doing, it works towards the decolonisation of heritage institutions and in everyday life (Smith, 2022). Participatory design, with its long-standing tradition of inclusive and creative research approaches, lends opportunities that can empower local communities and institutions through collaborative engagements in prototyping with digital technologies and cultural materials (Bødker et al., 2022). Here, the researchers involve professionals and diverse communities in dialogic processes of curation with the aim of exploring and co-designing novel cultural (material, historical, and digital) representations (Smith & Otto, 2016; Koch, 2021; Otto, Deger & Marcus, 2021). This work extends the idea of participation towards transdisciplinary approaches and contexts – from the collaborative design of exhibitions and community archiving to participatory prototyping of interactive installations, to future memory making and co-designing with marginalised groups and indigenous communities, and beyond (Onciul, 2017). Moreover, as a transformative and decolonial force in memory making, design anthropology opens the way towards decolonial and pluriversal futures that can engage multiple worlds and epistemologies (Escobar, 2018, Stuedahl et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2024; Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2024). It can bring further emphasis to the temporalities of pasts/presents/futures (Kambunga et al., 2023) and to the multimodality of memory work and the making of worlds.

3   A relational approach to future memory work

A central motivation for the contributions presented in this book is an emphasis on connections and connectivity. This is an emerging topic in memory research, as evidenced by the already-mentioned emergent discussions on memory ecologies (Schacter & Weller, 2016; Hoskins, 2016) and heritage ecologies (Bangstad & Rinke, 2021). The book and its contributions provide a novel framework for PMW and thus give direction to the future of memory work. For the first time, the relational research approach of PMW is applied as a lens to delineate and explore how institutions, people and groups, and memory modalities negotiate the building of connectivities and their versions of participatory and socially inclusive memory work. The POEM initiative further developed this notion of PMW founded on the principle of relationality, taking into consideration the social, cultural, legal,
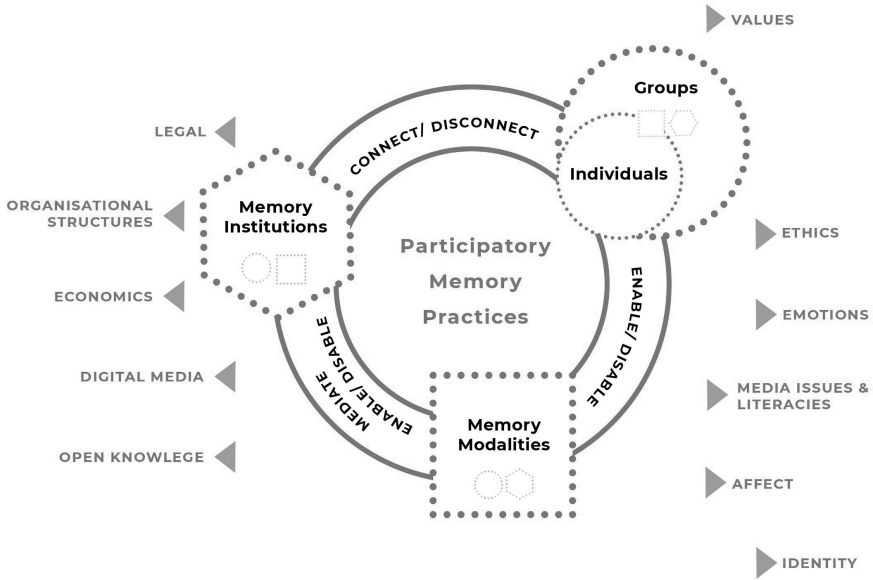
Figure 1.1 Model of Participatory Memory Work.

economic, and material factors involved in memory creation and emphasising the processes and fluidity of participatory memory making. This was done by integrating multiple actors across research and practice in interdisciplinary and empirical research projects that contributed to developing the Model of Participatory Memory Work (Figure. 1.1. above). Relationality in this book refers to the discussion of transformative ontologies in science that seek new grounds to go beyond modern thought. In the tradition of decentring the human, and with the contemporary emphasis on the Anthropocene in the face of current societal crisis, relationality invites us to explore new figures of thought, new material practices, and new politics as transformative possibilities for (re-)making the world through building intersections between knowledge domains and ways of knowing (Escobar et al., 2024).

The Model of Participatory Memory Work (see Figure 1.1) provides a heuristic for the exploration of contextual factors that affect the creation of memories, taking into account individuals and their groups, memory institutions, and the memory modalities as key actors of memory work. As a conceptual framework, the centre of the model focuses on participatory memory practices, and two additional layers are introduced that are specifically related to this core. The next layer consists of the three main zones of agency in PMW: individuals and groups, institutions, and memory modalities. This is followed by a layer of basic concepts that are interwoven with participatory memory practices. In the model these are visualised as triangles: they include ethics, emotions, media issues and literacy, affect, identity, legal and economic frameworks, organisational structures, digital media, and open knowledge.

The model highlights the relationality that enfolds between the diverse components in and across these layers in several modes. The *zones of agency*, encompassing individuals and groups, institutions, and memory modalities, intersect with each other while maintaining their distinct characteristics. The model illustrates this by incorporating the shapes of each zone of agency with permeable lines into every other zone of agency. Secondly, practices are constitutive for memory work through (dis-)connecting, enabling/disabling, and mediating memories, which can either facilitate or hinder participation. These practices are key components for the agency of PMW and circulate between the three zones, with varying relevance and impact on participation. The practices that are crucial for the agency of PMW are situated in specific contexts and are related to the global assemblage of PMW. They have the capacity to either limit or facilitate social inclusion and to envision options for participatory futures. The basic concepts are intensely coupled and more or less relevant in specific social contexts or the research approaches taken to study them.

The three zones of agency are shaped through specific modes of memory. *Memory institutions* such as museums, archives, and libraries are organisational structures that are constantly evolving. As initiators and facilitators of participatory processes, they play a central role in navigating public stakes and motivations, and in defining what is considered to be memory and heritage. They have an official responsibility for PMW and can provide a platform for actors, issues, and discourses. *Individuals and groups* form communities of practice for memory making through personal, often intimate, everyday practices – even if these practices are rarely reflected upon as memory making. Everyday memory practices form the basis for inclusion in public memory, acknowledging the history, identity, belonging, and membership of individuals and groups. This zone is central for participating in economic, social, and political outcomes and representations of society, as well as for ownership of resources emerging from cultural heritage and envisioning possible futures. *Memory modalities* are assemblages that emerge through specific components or socio-material arrangements of open-ended entanglements of intangible components that enable memory practices. They form around socio-material elements such as digital infrastructures, licensing types, ethical codes, algorithms, legal frameworks, economic models, and memory institutions. They co-configure memory work as current and future activity.

As a relational concept, PMW involves three constitutive practices: connecting and disconnecting, enabling and disabling, and mediating between the three zones of agency, individuals and groups, institutions, and memory modalities. These practices do not inherently facilitate or hinder participatory memory practices, but their quality is situational and results from constant negotiation, reflection, and reinvention. Practices take on various forms and are best understood as bundles of actions. For instance, establishing a connection with a migrant group requires a series of small actions using various approaches that are likely to differ across specific contexts. Individual practices of documenting and sharing memories are based on media, but only partially align with the modes of communication provided by digital media infrastructures such as the internet, or with archival practices in institutional memory work. Still, the connecting nature of these practices

has the potential to bridge to other realms and circulate through all three zones of agency in PMW. What actually stabilises or destabilises connections in memory work is an open process: the sources of facilitating or hindering connectivities between groups of migrants or young people or other social groups and museums or archives or the available digital and mobile media are manifold. Communication between institutions and groups can (though it must not) fail for many reasons – misunderstandings or technical errors, a lack of common sense, obscure language, divergent uses of media, and more. Furthermore, organising participation in memory work requires reconfiguring power relations among actors. This transformation involves enabling new groups – migrants, indigenous communities, people from the Global South, and children – who previously lacked the potential to bring their voices to public attention in memory work. At the same time, it involves reducing the prominence of powerful and established speakers in memory institutions or politics. Enabling and disabling practices refer to a wide range of transformations necessary to achieve inclusion and create new forms that facilitate and promote it. Enabling can refer to personal growth and capacity building, transforming memories and identities, to exploring, designing, providing, and institutionalising spaces for envisioning, learning, and experimenting with memory work. Additionally, mediation is a central practice that extends beyond media infrastructures. It includes all activities as an intermediary between the components of PMW – facilitating relationships, communication, translation, and other forms of connecting various elements. This can be achieved through techniques such as interweaving these components through narrations, finding boundary objects for joint activities, or exploring pathways to empathy and stewardship for others.

The Model of Participatory Memory Work enhances research on PMW by introducing a systematic and heuristic framework for identifying and exploring the interactional connections, power dynamics, and hierarchical structures within memory formation. The relational approach to memory practices integrates those dimensions that are relevant to the situatedness of memory making; these further dimensions enhance the initial model, which was used to guide the empirical research undertaken in the POEM project, with further concepts that are inherently entangled with memory practices. Moreover, the perspective shifts from an actor-centred model to a practices-centred model, grounded in the findings of the projects' empirical research. By extending beyond structural dimensions and encompassing frequently unacknowledged components with significance for memory practices, such as values, ethics, emotions, affect, and identities, the Model of Participatory Memory Work allows us to grasp the mechanisms of inclusion and acknowledgement.

The Model of Participatory Memory Work thus facilitates situational analyses by offering a clear and concise approach to problematisation and research. The project's emphasis on under-represented groups and their approaches to memory formation highlights the fact that the power imbalances observed in participatory approaches by institutional actors often stem from colonial traditions that unconsciously perpetuate disadvantage among these same groups, both within Europe and beyond (Smith et al., 2020; 2024).

This relational approach was used to develop a novel understanding of the formation of memories and the conditions under which they come into being. It was applied to investigate diverse contexts, situations, and social groups, as well as their use of media in memory construction practices. Drawing on 13 research projects and diverse research approaches – action research, collaborative ethnography, mixed methods, ethnography of infrastructure, and design anthropology – our project's exploration of relationality could take different directions and advance the knowledge about relevant factors and elements in PMW. The breadth of the work – the multiplicity of approaches, the interdisciplinariness of the research group, the variety of different sites in and across Europe and beyond, the transnational connections and practices of memory work, and the transdisciplinary interaction with various actors in the field from the beginning of the project – contributed to the production of what is called 'robust knowledge' because it is relevant across social domains and contexts (Nowotny, 2003; Weingart, 2008). However, the relational approach does show a clear bias in the emphasis it places on inclusive and empowering practices for often marginalised groups such as refugees, migrants, colonial communities, disadvantaged young people, and gender issues. This emphasis contributes to developing a socially inclusive public memory for future possibilities.

4   Transdisciplinary evaluation agendas for future memory work

Reimagining participation in memory work also requires new methods of assessing participatory activities (Economou et al., 2019). Assessment approaches need to have the capacity to adequately evaluate novel approaches to participation as relational activities of people, institutions, and memory modalities, and to evaluate their applicability in different memory making contexts with their specific digital media settings. Such an assessment must go beyond the conventional methods of averaging click rates and monitoring user behaviour (Clough et al., 2017). A broader understanding is needed of the implications of methods currently employed to incorporate the individuals and communities who have yet to appear in memory making. Social impact measurement and evaluation have developed advanced methodologies for numerous fields, but not for the cultural sector. The research presented in this book contributes to work by young researchers in social impact measurement who have investigated the implementation and effectiveness of these strategies. They draw attention to the intricacies and temporal aspects integral to culture change that impact significantly both on culture itself and on its evaluation. Moreover, the move from theory to practice, from theoretical reflection to implementation of new modes of participation in memory making in and beyond the memory institutions, finds support in the POEM Toolbox, which provides practical entry points for change and reflection in participatory approaches in digital media environments. Translating theoretical insights and reflections into practical approaches that are applicable in and across several cultural fields thus advances a transdisciplinary agenda for evaluating memory work. These novel methodological approaches and practices need to be an integral part of advancing a coherent future research trajectory for future memory work.

5 Relational memory work of institutions, people, and modalities

The relational research approaches presented in this book all share the assumption that memory practices related to institutions, people, and groups, and memory modalities constantly negotiate the connectivities in memory work. This helping or hindering affects the possibilities for, and the ideas of, participation that may be put into place or emerge in the future. Learning from successful examples, as well as from mismatches, conflicts, and obstacles in these processes of PMW, provides the opportunity for reflection on how to bridge these gaps. This approach emphasises inclusive and empowering practices for groups on the margins – refugees, migrants, colonial groups, and disadvantaged young people under consideration of gender questions. It can contribute to a new understanding of how a socially inclusive public memory for future possibilities emerges through theory and practice. The research approaches advanced in this book have transformative potential, both in empirical research and in collaborative engagement with the subjects from various perspectives, sites, and approaches – mixed methods, action research, collaborative ethnography, ethnography of infrastructure, design anthropology, and co-design methods. Integrating diverse approaches and multiple sites across Europe and beyond has enabled the production of knowledge that is applicable across social contexts and future-oriented domains (Nowotny, 2003; Weingart, 2008).

In the first three of the four main sections, of *Memory Institutions*, *People and Groups*, and *Memory Modalities*, the book presents connectivity-building memory practices from the relational perspectives of stakeholders in PMW and their specific zones of agency. Each section integrates complementary perspectives from the single research projects on the agencies in PMW for a joint knowledge production in and across the sections and makes it available for exchanges across research contexts and stakeholders. Owing to the principles of complementarity that were built into the overall concept of the POEM project, knowledge production in each section contributes to representing and contrasting groups, nations, genders, social situations, media formats, and infrastructures. The book thereby provides insights and knowledge across a wide range of interconnected themes and concerns, taking full account of the complex conditions of memory making that emerge from situatedness in various contexts of social and cultural life with a differing spectrum of legal, economic, and ethical affairs.

A fourth main section, *Future Memory Work* is dedicated to the transdisciplinary character and outcomes derived from the POEM research. It displays the interweaving of memory research and memory work in a joint knowledge production of tools and approaches that contribute to the robustness of the knowledge, a joint knowledge production that would not have emerged otherwise. Furthermore, it highlights the exploratory, experimental character of PMW and the complementary character of both theoretical and practical knowledge production. These transdisciplinary approaches call for new formats that can bridge between the sectors and their specific modes of knowing.

5.1   Memory institutions: shifting professional memory practices

Despite all the efforts of the memory institutions, participation is still a difficult topic for them. The chapters in section one provide deeper insights and theoretical reflection on the connectivities built by institutions. They produce knowledge about the variety of participatory approaches that consider the new mediated memory modalities or build them up newly, such as the reuse of digital heritage, or social media communication with audiences. Studying how PMW affects professional memory work at its core and in its organisational structure, as well as expectations about audiences and their role in memory work, can make visible the structures to which people and groups from culturally and gender-diverse backgrounds can connect.

Chapter 2, *Shifting from 'inside-out' to 'outside in': Envisioning ways of structurally integrating participatory principles in museums*, reflects on participation as a fundamental aspect of museum work. While many of the principles of participation remain underexplored or even entirely absent within the internal organisation, it is important to acknowledge and address them. This chapter examines the revised understanding of participation, which requires museums to be accessible, inclusive, and open to the public and also working with communities in an ethical and professional manner. The chapter outlines four principles defining participatory museum practices, and explains how these principles can be integrated into the institution's operations. The authors explore what museums would look like and how they would operate if participatory principles were integrated into their internal organisation to achieve the museum envisioned in the ICOM definition. They suggest that these internal changes are necessary for an institution that is de-centred in relation to its public, committed to continuous learning, and caring for people, their objects, and their stories.

Chapter 3, *Situating participation in the backstage: Infrastructural settings impacting museum work* addresses the challenges faced by staff members at three memory institutions – the Swedish National Historical Museums in Stockholm, the National Museums in Berlin, and the Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow – in aligning their work routines and practices with the imperatives of participatory missions. The author highlights the dynamics that unfold as employees navigate the intersection of their routine tasks with the overarching vision of inclusive memory making advocated by their respective institutions in the interplays of the technical and informational aspects of museum operations. Narratives and behind-the-scenes decisions are scrutinised. The chapter suggests a method for assessing the feasibility of evaluating an institution's dedication to a participatory approach while taking into account the dominant actors and established sociotechnical arrangements within the evolving GLAM institution.

Chapter 4, *Ethical practices in participatory memory work: Examples from the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin*, problematises the relevance of codes of ethics in participatory museum work. The chapter presents a foundation for addressing the necessary work related to these aspects and suggests a participatory method for establishing ethical considerations in a project. In practice, rather than delving into ethical theory, the study of ethics is based on practical examples of

various participatory projects. From participation as a means of achieving truthful representation to consent forms as an integral part of the practice of care, this chapter highlights the various tools and procedures that ensure ethical practices in museums. The examples also point to processes of learning. The chapter concludes with a professional approach to ethics. This translates into practitioners recognising their own positions, while also setting aside the time and space to construct and reflect on ethical practices with the participants. Participatory projects require a participatory process in which staff and participants collaborate to develop ethical guidelines and discuss questions and necessary measures.

5.2   *People and groups: digital memory making at the margins*

Everyone engages in manifold memory making practices as a part of everyday life. Still, not all individuals and groups connect well to public memory work. The chapters in this section provide deeper insights into and theoretical reflection on PMW and the connectivities built by people and groups. They draw on empirical research into personal and public memory practices of people and groups on social media platforms, and their engagement with cultural materials from memory institutions. They produce knowledge about motivations for people and for groups, ideas for the use and reuse of cultural materials, and empowering strategies for young people in marginalised populations harnessing the power of imagination of possible futures through PMW.

Pluriversal futures: Design anthropology for contested memory making at the margins, Chapter 5, presents a decolonial perspective on participation and contributes a design anthropological approach to PMW. The authors promote memory work as a means of envisioning and negotiating pluriversal futures, using digital and mediated spaces for participating in memory work. The approach integrates diverse interdisciplinary research methods, interventions, and technologies to facilitate the emergence of multiple perspectives, memories, and voices. In cases from Denmark, Namibia, and Greenland, under-represented voices are amplified, and dialogue is fostered on contentious issues. With a focus on contested everyday spaces, the framework suggests engagement through three socio-spatial forms: *reflective safe spaces, creative third spaces*, and *dialogic public spaces*. The chapter contributes a design anthropological framework for PMW in contested contexts to advance inclusive memory futures towards pluriversality.

Chapter 6, *Conducting bereavement interviews: Methodological reflections on talking about death, grief, and memory,* addresses the increasing relevance of social media sites as digital spaces for individual memory practices. Social media sites are an increasingly important platform for individuals to engage in memory practices as a digital legacy after death, and, accordingly, as a space for bereavement. From a methodological approach, the chapter presents a study of individual memory practices after the loss of beloved relatives or friends. These are aspects of memory work that are difficult to study due to ethical and sensitivity concerns. The authors offer guidelines for researchers on how to conduct interviews with individuals who are grieving, and how to support research and practitioners in bereavement studies more broadly.

5.3   *Memory modalities: socio-material assemblages of memory formation*

The emerging digital media ecologies held out the promise of a broader inclusion of people and groups in public memory work, but these positive visions do not correspond with actual developments. The chapters in this section provide deeper insights into the connectivities built by memory modalities. The research produces knowledge about the participation-enabling qualities that institutions, as well as people and groups, perceive in their engagement with the current mediatised memory ecology. The chapters provide novel perspectives on the ways in which participation is encouraged or hindered by the specific nature of the regimes within which the professional institutions must operate. These include not only the digital infrastructures for collecting, archiving, displaying, and retrieving information but also the internet platforms for individual or collective memory practices and for sharing cultural materials, as well as the legal frameworks for copyrights and open access, the gendered cultural economy of the digital, and the ethical considerations and codes of conducts guiding public memory work.

Chapter 7, *Memory modalities: Explorations into socio-material arrangements of the past at the present for the future*, introduces and explores memory modalities as a conceptual approach with which to study the arrangements in which memories are made, represented, and mediated. The term 'arrangement' implies that the complexity and diversity of memory modalities, as with any set of memory practices, cannot be reduced to simple antitheses between human and nonhuman, social and technical, cultural and natural features. This chapter proposes ecological thinking that pays attention to neglected entities, invisible work, and hidden layers, both human and nonhuman. Memory modalities operate independently of genres, forms, and media. They direct attention towards action, existence, and transformation rather than mediation or material objects; and they point to participation being a never-ending mission in memory work.

Chapter 8, *Memory loss: Youth and the fragility of personal digital remembering*, focuses on the creation and sharing of personal memories on social media sites or messenger services with digital media as a mundane everyday activity for young people across the globe. Smartphones are ubiquitous and are frequently used for memory practices by young people. This results in ever-growing personal memory archives that often encompass tens of thousands of digital memory objects. This contribution challenges the proposition that the internet never forgets. This investigation of the memory modalities of personal memory making highlights the invisible maintenance work of digital memory objects needed to ensure continuous access. These memory practices are interdependent with the available digital infrastructures and devices to access them. Both of these need to be managed.

5.4   *Future memory work: toolbox and approaches*

There is a general lack of practical tools and practices for concrete engagement with PMW across institutions, people, and modalities. The final section reflects on and presents exemplary practices and tools for future memory work for researchers,

institutions, and communities. All the tools and approaches presented in this section can be accessed from the POEM website and can be directly applied in diverse heritage and memory settings.[2]

Chapter 9, *Towards a relational approach to social impact measurement of Participatory Memory Practices: new concepts for future memory work,* discusses social impact evaluation and the measurement of cultural work as a new memory modality for memory practices – specifically in institutional memory making, but with relevance also for individual memory work. Emphasising the limits of neoliberal modes of assessment, in particular for the cultural sector, the chapter contributes a theory-driven model for evaluating and assessing the impact that addresses the need for benchmarks or baselines that can measure change and the regrettable reality that timescales are insufficient to realise outcomes. This chapter develops a conceptual approach to impact measurement, learning both from research in nonprofit management and from research on social change in cultural anthropology. The relational concept presented is grounded in the heuristics of the Model of Participatory Memory Work in support of the development of relational approaches in the field.

Providing a toolbox chapter is something that scientific books rarely do. This, however, is the contribution of the final Chapter 10, *Towards a toolbox for future envisioning memory practices*. Based on the various research engagements in POEM, the chapter presents novel tools for use in PMW in both digital and non-digital media environments. It critically examines how these tools can contribute to changing memory work by strengthening social inclusiveness and by facilitating reflexivity and the future-envisioning potentials of memory practices. The tools presented demonstrate the interdependence of tools and practices for empowering individuals and promoting agency. They are crucial for PMW research – for process and outcomes, for validation, and for ongoing discussions about potential futures.

Conclusion: future memory work

Participatory approaches to everyday memory and institutional forms of cultural heritage presented in this book, produce new opportunities for engagement in an increasingly digital society. Opening opportunities for reframing and designing alternative futures with groups and communities, these approaches also advance novel future-oriented perspectives. The challenge ahead is to find ways of scaling these approaches across contexts, scapes, flows, and spaces – to explore the wider transformative and participatory potentials of inclusive memory practices as forms of global assemblages. The research contributes to the formation of socio-material arrangements that resonate with the multiplicity and diversity of the social, political, and economic settings of memory practices. These open to multidisciplinary approaches that support the development of policies for inclusive and socially sustainable futures.

The paradigmatic nature of relational memory work builds on the explorative, processual, and experimental character of memory practices. The Epilogue draws together the relational approach to PMW presented in the book and, together, the contributions provide solid research trajectories for future memory work.

Notes

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2 www.poem-horizon.eu/impact

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Part I

Memory institutions

2 Shifting from 'inside-out' to 'outside in'

Envisioning ways of structurally integrating participatory principles in museums

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1   Introduction

Numerous studies have examined the potential of and need for participation as part of museum and more widely, memory practices (e.g. Simon, 2010; Lynch, 2011; Kidd, 2016; Black, 2021; Morse, 2021), ultimately necessitating a revised museum definition by ICOM to reflect this aspect of museum work. The new definition stipulates that museums should not only be 'open to the public, accessible and inclusive' but should also work in participation with so-called 'communities' in a way that is both ethical and professional (ICOM, 2022). Though participation has become a fundamental aspect of museum work, many of its principles remain underexplored or entirely absent within the internal organisation. This chapter sets out to first, explore four underlying principles that define participatory museum practices and in the second part, use these principles to re-imagine the internal workings of the institution. Seeking ways towards the envisioned museum in the ICOM definition, we ask: what would museums look like and how would they operate if participatory principles were integrated into the institutions' internal organisation?

To answer this question, this co-authored chapter draws together four different research projects that were part of POEM's 'Connectivities built by memory institutions' work package. It builds on ethnographic and case study research in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States of America, undertaken between 2018 and 2023. Our analyses across these different case studies, situated in one type of memory institution – museums, highlighted the importance of rethinking the internal workings of this institution. Despite each project focusing on very different participatory endeavours in museums and their online spaces, our findings were easily synthesised to define certain principles and consider their importance for work 'on the ground'. Building on our discussion of four participatory principles, we envision a future museum that has internalised these principles in the day-to-day practice of museum work.

2   Problem statement

Participation has been a subject of study since the museum's transformation following the introduction in the 1980s of new, and later, critical museology (Vergo, 1989; McCall & Gray, 2014; Ünsal, 2019). Wide-ranging reflections on participatory museum work have resulted in propositions for levels or categories of participation (Goodnow, 2010; Simon, 2010); investigations of problems in participatory projects (Lynch & Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2011; Boast, 2011; Kassim, 2017); and its application as a method, such as for the co-production of exhibitions (Mygind et al., 2015) or audience engagement (Lotina, 2014). Alongside these and many others, we have respectively studied co-creation with digital collections (Mucha, 2022), online and digital participation using social media (Kist, 2021), participatory work as a potential means of supporting forced migrants (Boersma, 2023), and community engagement workshops (Zwart, 2023). There is no single, widely accepted definition of participation; rather, it is interpreted and applied to describe different practices. In this chapter, we understand participation in museums as a range of approaches to actively engage external stakeholders, serving goals set by the institution and ideally, also serving those relevant to participants. We also understand participation in the context of cultural heritage organisations as working with and through memory, which from our perspective, can encompass personal experiences, personal and collective memories, and associated objects/collections inside and outside the museum. Participatory practices are often considered a means to interact with (non-)audiences directly, and to include perspectives that are not represented within the museum's team. We see these approaches as inherently flawed, but ultimately advancing the democratisation of museum practice.

   Recent investigations, including our own (Kist, 2022; Boersma, 2023; Zwart, 2023), recognise the organisational situatedness of participation in museums (Morse, 2021). These studies emphasise the importance of practitioners' understanding of and ability to do participatory work, as well as the institutional changes necessary to move away from positioning the museum and its work at the centre. Participatory practices have been suggested to be 'good for us all' when they foster institutional change (Graham et al., 2013, p. 109). However, they can also be used in a performative way to hide the lack of responsibility and investment by institutions themselves to achieve such change. A similar observation has been made by Ahmed (2012) in the context of higher education: the institutionalisation of diversity can work to obscure racism. Here, we turn the lens from expecting participants to change an institution through participatory work (see Berenstain, 2016; Kassim, 2017), and instead posit that museums and their staff need to undertake processes of self-reflection in order to lay bare and navigate 'the mechanisms by which power and authority are exerted within as well as beyond the museum' (Message, 2018, p. 111). The symbiosis between participatory work and the internal workings of the organisation was highlighted by Heumann Gurian, who pointed out that the dynamics between museum staff will inevitably affect the relations between them and participants or visitors: 'if staff members care for each other, visitors believe that the staff will care for them' (1995, p. 15). Shifting our focus to the people

involved in participatory work – the participants and the staff working within the institution – and their experiences and needs, our findings point to four fundamental principles for participation: non-hierarchical collaboration, personal connections, transparency, and reflective practice. In this chapter, we argue that these principles should not only be integral to participatory work but also to the institution itself. We not only understand the challenges of applying these principles in memory institutions and are sympathetic to the difficulties of making fundamental structural changes but also outline the benefits these can bring to all aspects of their work, extending beyond participation.

The principles identified and analysed in this chapter are drawn from four research projects (Mucha, 2022; Boersma, 2023; Zwart, 2023; Kist, 2024),[1] each including several case studies, ranging from co-creative remix workshops to facilitated take-overs, and from online community engagement to on-site collaboration in preparation for an exhibition, in local, small-scale projects as well as large state-funded institutions. For museum professionals, building relationships with participants, audiences, or other stakeholders is considered key to participation. Similarly, personal connections were mentioned by several participants as a reason to join a participatory project. Ideally, with the goal of democratisation in mind, these relationships are non-hierarchical. We found that this can be achieved through reflective practice and transparency about a project's limitations, potential outcomes, and decision-making processes.

Previous studies point to the relevance of transparency (Marstine, 2013; Morse, 2021), reflection (Weil, 2007; Lynch & Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2011), personal relations (De Wildt, 2015; Graham, 2017; Morse, 2021), and non-hierarchical collaboration (Heumann Gurian, 1995; Lagerkvist, 2006; Carpentier, 2011; Graham, 2017; Lynch, 2017), but they rarely assessed these principles at an organisational level. These participatory principles are often sought after yet rarely achieved as part of participatory work and not commonly recognised as key to the inner workings of the institution. This chapter investigates these principles in relation to our findings, not only as important values when 'doing' participation but also first and foremost, as action areas for a participatory transformation of museum organisations to pursue the ideal definition set out by ICOM.

3   Key principles for participatory work

This section outlines the four key principles for participation that have been intrinsic to practice and research on participatory practices. These principles are not the only ones relevant for participation, but they did prove prominent across the museums discussed in our research. Some of the principles were brought up by practitioners when prompted about the obstacles they faced in their work on participatory projects. Other principles were deemed dominant factors by some of the participants we spoke to. Yet, all four of them were largely unexplored as paramount principles for the internal workings of the institution. In each of the following sections, we highlight their role across our studies to consider what a museum shaped by participatory principles might look like.

3.1   *Non-hierarchical collaboration*

One of the principles that is understood as fundamental to participation, particularly as a means of democratising museum work, is non-hierarchical collaboration. We could even go as far as describing participatory practice as a tool for removing hierarchies between museums as institutions and their public; the participatory paradigm is underpinned by the ideal of non-hierarchical relations. Thus, this principle and its promise of democratisation have been at the centre of many studies on participatory museum work (Clifford, 1997; Lagerkvist, 2006; Boast, 2011; Lynch, 2017; Graham, 2017). Successful participation, as such, is often measured by the participants' role in decision-making processes (criticised by Morse, 2021), defining maximalist participation, or non-hierarchical collaboration, as an unattainable yet strived-for ideal (Arnstein, 1969; Carpentier, 2011).

Our research confirmed this notion of non-hierarchical collaboration as an ideal that is worth working towards as it supports a practice that outlines and builds on the expectations and needs of everyone involved (Boersma, 2023) and privileges user perspectives (Kist, 2022). At the same time, an attempted non-hierarchical approach fosters practices of reflection within the institution by necessitating continuous conversations about the understanding of participatory goals (Zwart, 2023) and the renegotiation of the roles of museum practitioners (Mucha, 2022). Diminishing hierarchies in participatory work is only possible by reflecting on *how* decisions are made rather than who is involved along the way (Graham, 2017; Morse, 2021). This 'how' ideally reflects the principles outlined in the following sections. To achieve the imagined 'horizontality', processes of decision-making should combine democratic models with affinity models (Graham, 2017). We found that this approach foregrounds the roles of individuals, rather than 'communities' or 'institutions' (Boersma, 2023), and relies on an empathetic relationship between staff and participants (see Mucha, 2022).

Despite the intention to diminish hierarchies, many practitioners pointed to their inability to realise a non-hierarchical collaboration as part of participatory work (Kist, 2021; Boersma, 2023; Zwart, 2023). Understanding a non-hierarchical collaboration as a participatory ideal, practitioners reflected on the different organisational and practical aspects that inhibited the process of becoming truly equal. Their observations highlighted the hierarchies in place. Much in line with this, Piontek (2017) pointed out the impossibility of diminishing power relations by organising a participatory project when the invitation to participate itself confirms the existing hierarchies in place and asks participants to become temporarily dependent on the museum. The hierarchies between practitioners based in an institution and speaking for and from within an institution, and participants who, as part of a museum project, act only on behalf of themselves are evident. An example of this is described by Kassim (2017), who addressed how a project that invited co-curators to decolonise the institution eventually led to few suggestions being taken on board by the museum staff; Lynch (2017), who pointed out that museums are seen as beneficiaries, and their staff do not see themselves as part of the conversations; and Boersma (2023), who further

analysed the roles of practitioners in projects and within the wider institutional infrastructures.

The understanding that participatory practices require a non-hierarchical approach is widespread, yet not all practitioners are readily able to consider and deconstruct their powerful position as part of the institution in relation to the position of participants (Kist, 2021; Mucha, 2022). Participatory work involves a revision of professional practice which brings about uncertainties. Tan (2013) noticed that such uncertainties spark museums (or rather, their practitioners) to increase control and claim authority in processes of decision-making. In one of our cases, an emotional confrontation with the participants caused practitioners to defend, explain, and reinforce their position and expertise (Mucha, 2022). Other practitioners addressed their authority and the importance of their contribution to (participatory) processes (Boersma, 2023). These observations demonstrate the persistence of hierarchies across the prevailing knowledge systems which still define museum practices today.

Similarly, the internal organisation of the museum is defined by these hierarchies that are kept intact throughout (or despite) participatory work. These draw divisions between curatorial positions and community-focused roles (McCall & Gray, 2014; Boersma, 2023), such as outreach positions and social media engagement. This 'hierarchical control' prevents staff members from using social media to its full extent (Kist, 2021, p. 287), limits the possibilities of collecting outputs of participatory projects (Boersma, 2023) and restricts processes of shared decision-making (Zwart, 2023). Working further down the hierarchical ladder means continuously negotiating restrictions and finding loopholes to enable participatory practices and ensure more sustainable outcomes. Hence, even if non-hierarchical collaboration in participatory projects could be achieved by the practitioners involved, hierarchical structures within the museum's institutional context continue to define the work 'on the ground', limiting both internal and external processes.

3.2 *Personal connections*

Personal connections are the social ties that evolve and are actively shaped through repeated social interactions such as participatory activities in museums. The term describes shared interests, feelings, and experiences that connect people with each other. Although museums are commonly communicated as moving from being *about* something to being *for* someone (Weil, 1999), it is the social aspect of doing something *with* other people which is central to participation. Thus, interpersonal connections are both a motivation for and a potential outcome of participation in museums. Recognising connections while also acknowledging differences between participants, as well as between participants and facilitators, gives space for possible relationships to develop over time.

The past decade was marked by a discursive shift towards addressing challenges of building and sustaining personal connections: moving from Simon's (2010, p. 25) cocktail party metaphor, which suggests the museum practitioner should act like the host of a cocktail party to connect individual experiences with collective

engagement, to Munro's focus on 'doing emotion work in museums' (2014), and Morse's 'logic of care' (2021). While Simon (2010, p. 25) recommended designing 'successful social experiences' by intuitively adapting the role of a party host, Munro shifted perspectives by valuing practitioners' affective labour as a professional skill and as key to the perceived social impact of participation. Morse heavily built on this approach, highlighting the attentive, sensitive, genuine, and embodied character of care practices in community engagement while clearly distinguishing it from social work.

Much in line with this, our research highlighted the crucial role of personal connections and the related challenges within participatory museum contexts. Our studies confirmed that one of the main motivational factors to participate in museum projects is the social aspect, even if the type of relationship expected varied widely. Depending on the project's outset and composition of participant groups, the hope for connections can range from 'making new friends' (Boersma, 2023, p. 102) and 'meeting new people' (Zwart, 2023, p. 193) to more short-lived relationships such as 'carsharing' encounters (Mucha, 2022, p. 189). The importance of connection building as a motivation to participate has also been observed from a position of social 'need' and longing for contact, which, especially during the pandemic, came to the attention of museum practitioners. Kist (2024) showed how outreach staff catalysed connections between participants, staff, and objects to enable participants to challenge social isolation. Furthermore, stronger social ties between participants and professionals during projects improved creativity and collaboration. As Mucha (2022) noted about mixed groups of hackathon participants, 'more social and spatial closeness between the team members created an atmosphere of understanding, direct communication, and safety, in which they could better develop ideas together'.

Our findings also touch upon the various ways practitioners 'do' emotion work in participation projects. Contrary to the idea of mechanically designing or even controlling social connections between participation, Boersma points out that 'friendships and other informal relationships can result in a distributed network where the museum no longer sits at the centre of engagement' (Boersma, 2023). However, at the same time, the museum is in a way responsible for providing (safe) spaces or 'engagement zones' (Onciul, 2015) where people can come together. It is a difficult balancing act between the clear responsibility of hosting museums to use their infrastructures to facilitate meetings, while at the same time practising openness and allowing for relationships to grow organically and surprisingly within this space. For these organically grown relationships, the end of a project marks a crucial moment. One of our studies evidenced that personal connections rarely persisted outside of a project's timeline, as the museum stopped providing the spaces and reasons to meet. The continuation of personal connections was not deemed part of staff's professional roles, leaving them no time or means to maintain relationships after a project ended (Boersma, 2023). Zwart (2023), referencing Henke (1999; 2019), further discusses how maintenance work of participation involves embodied work. She argues that this distributed practice as a 'networked body' is crucial to the practitioners' interpersonal contact with participants, both

within a project, as well as in between projects and over the course of various projects. The repeated efforts of one or several practitioners in creating personal contact with (different) participants and each other supports the museum's ability to 'do participation'.

Expertise around relational work in participatory projects is growing, yet this practice remains challenging within the internal logic of many museum organisations. Old-fashioned project-management methods and rigid project timelines limit the potential for an acknowledgment of professional emotion work and organically grown relationships.

3.3   *Transparency*

The ways in which transparency has been considered crucial for museum practices have been tied to concerns of ethics and trust (see Marstine, 2011; 2013). 'Radical transparency', in Marstine's words, should be a concern and goal for museums to act ethically. From her position, participation as a form of 'sustained community engagement' would be a way to achieve transparency, as it could offer ways to be transparent about the work of the museum and involve external stakeholders in processes they might otherwise be left out of (Marstine, 2013, p. 2–3). In turn, Lynch (2013) interprets transparency in relation to the need for practitioners to reflect on participatory projects. 'Radical transparency' to her, is about being radically honest about what goes well and does not (ibid., p. 11).

In our studies, transparency is highlighted as crucial to participation in order to achieve participatory goals such as empowerment (Boersma, 2023), to lower barriers to participation (Kist, 2022), to smoothen workflows within the institution (Zwart, 2023), and to foster socio-affective spaces (Mucha, 2022). Together, our work suggests a manifold interpretation of transparency. We argue for pursuing transparency in three contexts: within the participatory project, within the institution as a whole, and within the institution's societal context.

First, transparency about institutional processes within and around a participatory project can contribute to trust between practitioner-facilitators and participants (Liew & Cheetham, 2016). Boersma posits that '[p]roject roles, collaborative practices and methods of recognition [are] key for empowerment', but even more important is transparent communication about decision making (2023, p. 223). Providing transparency about how decisions are and have been made ensures that participants remain informed about their sphere of influence in the project. Along a similar vein, Mucha emphasises how transparency about institutional processes external to the project can strengthen 'engagement zones' for participation. In the examples she provides, professionals explain their (personal) discomfort with some institutional collections and collection practices to the participants. According to Mucha, such transparency between professionals and participants allows for productive conversations in which 'professional knowledge and affective practices can meet' in a participatory project (2022, p. 183). As such, our understanding of the function of transparency in the case of participatory projects elaborates on what Runnel et al. (2014, p. 229) call 'information literacy' in participation. They define that in order

to participate 'one needs to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the institution, participation possibilities, boundaries that might allow or disallow participation' (ibid., p. 230). Our research shows that there is an important role for the professionals involved in providing such information, through transparency in communication.

Second, transparency is something to look for outside of direct interactions with participants, as a value to strive for inside the institution. Zwart (2023) observed misunderstandings about the particularities of participatory work across the museum staff participating in her research. In the same way that participants require knowledge about the institution (Runnel et al., 2014), professionals need to know what is going on in the participatory projects, even if they are not directly involved themselves. Expanding on Liew and Cheetham's description of trust in participation (2016), we point out this can be achieved through transparency. Liew and Cheetham address different relationships of trust – of the institution in the participant, between participants, and of the participant in the institution (ibid.) – all of which rely on transparency. Beyond the scope of the participatory project, transparency is fundamental between colleagues within an institution. This principle ensures that practitioners are up to date on the different work processes within the museum, and, during a participatory project, how these processes might be affected by the involvement of participants.

Finally, as a third area of transparency in participation, we look at the institution's outward-facing role. Here, it is useful to come back to Marstine's interpretation of 'radical transparency' (2013) as an ethical goal of the museum: transparency about the museum should be offered to the public. As aforementioned, participatory practices could help achieve this goal in the first place. As participatory projects *are* museum work, such public transparency of museum practices should be offered about participation too. In her research, Kist (2024) explored this outward-facing transparency, emphasising how social media motivates a new state of transparency for museums, increasing the ability of local communities and networks to hold institutions accountable and further, to address user needs. Providing transparency through social media can threaten the 'safe space' of participants and challenge participant confidentiality (Boersma, 2023), yet a controlled and ethical approach to transparency can demonstrate the different experiences in participatory projects and lower barriers for (future) participants to engage.

Transparency is a fundamental principle of participation to be developed and applied within participatory projects, within the museum organisation, and within its public role. As such, we see transparency as a multivarious tool and principle shaped through and for the interaction between participants, practitioners, and the institution. Furthermore, we task the responsibility of transparency in and of participation to the practitioners involved. Although challenging to maintain, transparency is something they should continuously strive for within the changing environment of a project, organisation, and societal context.

3.4   *Reflective practice*

Reflective practice, as we observed in our research, is grounded in the ongoing production of knowledge, needing a space to be created (often through 'exploring' or

'doing' participation together) and a willingness to listen, acknowledge, share, and put this knowledge into action. It is about continuously, critically contemplating and evaluating practices in relation to each other, analysing their impact on participation, partners, participants, staff, and the museum itself, whether before, during, or after the project. Significantly, these facets of reflective practice are entangled with and reliant on the other principles discussed previously – the ability of staff to work non-hierarchically, foster social connectivity, and be transparent – and the internal museum structures that support this.

Practitioners' engagement in reflective practice is widely recognised in the cultural sector as an important component of facilitating participation and community engagement if these are to have a real contribution to social goals and social change (Lynch, 2011; Axelsson, 2018; Museums Association, n.d.). Reflecting on practice can help practitioners stay on track by enabling them to identify problems and solve them as they arise, helping to meet participants' (changing) expectations, ensuring staff practices are aligned with institutional social values, and addressing the power relations between practitioners and participants. In turn, reflection enables staff to continuously improve aspects of their participatory practice (and overall work in the museum), from ethics to inclusion.

While sometimes reflective practice is positioned as the act of an individual professional practitioner (Museums Association, n.d.), as we observed in others' (Lynch, 2011; Chynoweth et al., 2020) and our own research, a reflective practice is necessarily and significantly cultivated at the nexus between staff, partners, participants, but also, ideally, as part of the institutional conditions.

Importantly, as we saw in our case studies, to integrate reflective practice into participation, staff must be willing to first and foremost, explore 'doing participation' together, being open to failure. The ability to work together is reliant on both social relationships with participants and staff, and a non-hierarchical context in which staff and participants are not limited by 'organisational red tape'. As Zwart observed in her fieldwork, reflective practice out of critical consideration of what is 'good' participation could also act as a factor in slowing down project development (2023). This means that in preparation or planning stages of participatory projects, critical reflection could turn into a hesitation to act. As Lynch points out, reflection is not always about critique but a method of co-exploration to 'challenge habits of the mind' associated with implicit power relations (2011, p. 444). However, it requires commitment from staff and participants, as well as a supportive institutional context (Martin, 2019). This institutional context might be built on internal practices of evaluation and reflection. A commitment to reflective practice is therefore ultimately grounded in institutional willingness to take risks. In Kist's research (2021), a restrictive approach to using social media for engaging with community members and participants hindered staff and users from discovering how social media could be a part of participatory projects. As such, a supportive and trusting institutional base that is non-hierarchical is essential to support staff and participants in doing and learning together through reflexivity.

Simultaneously, in 'doing participation', staff must be open to consistently listening to their participants, partners, and colleagues. This requires integrated communication and feedback mechanisms that underpin the principle of

transparency, such as regularly shared evaluations (Boersma, 2023), informally checking in with participants (Kist, 2024), reflecting together with colleagues (Zwart, 2023), and welcoming confrontations or discomfort through for example, hackathons (Mucha, 2022). As Boersma (2023) suggests, a reflective approach, based on regularly shared evaluations, allows museums and participants to explore shared goals and meet or reconfigure expectations. Reflecting with participants at different stages of a project can facilitate more positive outcomes, as the process is monitored and discussed, and expectations are 'managed' along the way. Similarly, in Kist's research, after trying out engagement activities with participants and partners on social media, and checking in with participants during this process, staff came to understand the value their work could have for socially isolated individuals (2024).

Listening through different communication channels, enables staff to take the next steps to integrate and share this feedback with colleagues to reshape or adapt practices, but ultimately, it is the institution's responsibility to adapt and change:

> Although exchange and collaboration with audiences and participants is crucial for this process, they cannot bring about institutional change, rather – it is the task of those working within institutions to reflect on their museum practices in relation to discomforting feedback.
>
> (Mucha, 2022, p. 150)

In our studies, reflective practice is based on co-creating knowledge through 'doing' or working together, sharing knowledge and listening, and a commitment to action. The principles discussed here, of being non-hierarchical, enabling social connectivity, and transparency, and the underlying museum systems and structures that support these, are essential to enact reflective practice. In our projects, the conditions for reflective practice encompassed institutional trust in staff; willingness to take risks; time and space to try, share, and adapt practices and perspectives, acknowledging and hopefully shifting implicit power structures (Lynch, 2017); and the ability to embed communication and feedback processes into participatory projects and internally throughout the organisation.

4   Discussion

In consideration of these four principles for participation, we turn to the museum organisation and address how support and enhancement of transparency, personal connections, non-hierarchical collaboration, and reflective practice could extend to internal museum structures and routines. In doing so, we expand on literature in the museum sector regarding ideals of participation with individuals and groups outside the museum, to emphasise the dependency of this ideal on the internal workings of the museum institution. As observed throughout the research underpinning this chapter, the four principles are often absent from the 'backstage' of the museum. In this discussion, we point to the often-overlooked link between the

internal organisation and participatory practices, emphasising the need for these principles to be integrated 'on the ground' so that they can be put into practice when working with participants.

We propose these internal shifts as necessary developments in working towards an institution that is de-centred in relation to its public and dedicated to continuous learning and caring for people (and their objects, stories, and memories). The following institutional imaginings are not intended to be read as a formula or checklist, but rather as a novel idealised provocation for contemplating how these principles may be integrated internally in different institutions. As such, we recognise that many of these changes and suggestions may raise unforeseen challenges, and may be difficult, even impossible to implement – particularly for institutions that are slow to change. With these limitations in mind, we suggest a new perspective on three domains of museum organisation that these principles cut across: the routine of day-to-day museum work; the role(s) of museum practitioners; and the development of museum infrastructures.

4.1   *The routine of day-to-day museum work*

Drawing from our study of participatory principles across our case studies, we found that there are many aspects of day-to-day museum work where these principles are largely absent or not deemed relevant. As addressed by some of the practitioners we spoke to, the 'organisational red tape' reinforces hierarchies between different museum departments, creates a segmented rather than integrated practice across the institution, and limits the opportunities for processes of trial and error. Everyday museum work is often defined by ongoing projects and tasks, all of which require but rarely allow room for reflection. Rather than limiting the application of reflective practices, such as project evaluation and introspection of the institution's role and position, to participatory work, museums would benefit from integrating these practices beyond project timelines, formats, and goals. Equally, personal connections between staff can support non-hierarchical collaboration and transparency about internal organisational processes. A more proactive approach to these principles as part of everyday work would allow practitioners to develop a shared learning environment that prioritises empathy and social connectivity. In practice, this could translate to regular catch-up sessions, shared evaluation of individual and collaborative work, continuous critical reflection on positionalities, and making time and space for colleagues to build personal connections. Integrating these principles as part of the work routine, in turn, makes it easier for practitioners to implement them in participatory projects. However, we recognise the impact these suggested changes to daily working practices would have on the whole team and their individual routines and that they can potentially challenge standard ways of working, including ingrained habits and norms. While such changes can therefore be very difficult and slow, a shared organisational culture that embraces and supports change and inspiring examples can help.

4.2   *Flexible roles of museum practitioners*

Besides reflecting on the institution's role and position, the roles of museum practitioners and the hierarchies between them need to be reflected on and revised to allow for a more agile organisation. As often argued, museum practitioners are not social workers (e.g. Morse, 2021), yet in addressing social issues and working with people who are marginalised, they need to employ related skill sets, knowledge, and empathy. With the aim of instigating change and making it visible in organograms, museums sometimes invent new job titles but run the risk of burning out the newly hired 'change agents' often faced with an institution not truly willing to change. Instead, we suggest more flexible team roles to be taken on by museum practitioners to facilitate this change. The following roles can be assumed by any member of staff, regardless of their job title:

- a planner (responsible for communicating and keeping in line with the time plan and budget);
- a catalyst (responsible for bringing the project forward and considering the various stakeholders' needs);
- a moderator (responsible for reflective and affective practices, such as moderating conversations and meetings, ensuring all people are listened to etc.); and
- a mediator or person of trust (someone outside of a project team, who mediates conflict where necessary and can be addressed if problems arise).

In addition, practitioners and participants with specific expertise for this project form an action team. Ideally, these roles are interdisciplinary, bringing together people across departments, and are re-negotiated for different projects and day-to-day work. As the basic principles underlying this practice are self-organisation and shared responsibility for the process, this approach will help break down hierarchies between individual staff members and departments. Built into this approach is transparency about the challenges, workload, and skills necessary for specific roles and tasks within projects and the organisation at large. Moreover, it allows organisations to integrate continuous reflection on work processes and brings about a constant reconfiguration of relations as well as plenty of opportunities to build new ones.

While we have emphasised the benefits of creating flexible staff roles, our suggestions can contradict existing hierarchies within museum teams and thus, we recognise that it can seem like an insurmountable challenge to overcome rigid organisational structures. Alternative, flexible roles may also challenge established institutional job descriptions and expectations regarding workload, as articulated by the public, management, and politics. Moreover, remuneration might be connected to job roles and associated levels of responsibility, raising critical questions about changes to payment if a flexible job role approach is implemented. While challenging, a flexible job role approach raises key questions that further spark critical reflection on the internal application of participatory principles and how they are supported.

4.3   *The development of museum infrastructures*

The everyday routine work and the flexible roles of practitioners require the modification of existing museum infrastructures as well as the creation of new ones. Museum infrastructures – ranging from organisational structures to online spaces for participation, and from financial systems to the tools available for collaborative working – also need to embed the principles of non-hierarchical collaboration, personal connections, transparency, and reflective practice. To support the internal integration of these participatory principles, museums should have certain communication tools at their disposal to make information accessible and transparent, and to open up spaces intended for shared, non-hierarchical learning. Such tools and spaces would further support the building and maintenance of personal connections and allow time and room for reflective practice as an integral part of museum work. Aspects of museum infrastructures, including available tools, spaces, and dedicated time, are necessary not only to enact participation but also to reflect, socialise with colleagues and participants, and share (participatory) learnings. Non-hierarchical collaboration with participants or internally within teams of practitioners cannot be made possible without a revision of the museum's organisational structure, as processes of decision-making can usually be traced upwards along the organogram of an institution. While reflective practice encourages constant evaluation and negotiation of these infrastructures, at the same time, the potential of reflection, too, relies on these infrastructures. Thus, the willingness to develop museum infrastructures is a prerequisite for integrating these participatory principles in the day-to-day work and allowing for more flexible museum practitioners' roles. The application, adjustment, and removal of the 'organisational red tape' rely on institutional investment into the slow and sometimes invisible work of reflection, communication, staff training and development, and organisational restructuring. However, vice-versa, implementing solely infrastructural changes, such as changing the composition of departments, without reflecting on organisational culture will likely not bring about meaningful change. As we suggest throughout this chapter, the principles of non-hierarchical relations, social connectivity, transparency, and reflection must be applied to and underpin changes to these different domains of museum work, as well as to the infrastructures that support them.

We deem these institutional changes necessary to develop a museum in which participatory memory work sits at the heart of the institution. The principles we defined in this chapter are central to participation and can be a significant means to rethink the inner workings of the organisation. Breaking down hierarchical structures internally allows for non-hierarchical collaboration with external stakeholders. Personal relationships should be acknowledged as part of a project as well as day-to-day work. Transparency about processes and decision-making cannot be achieved in participatory work until it defines the internal workings of the institution. And finally, reflective practice is only possible when the institution and staff are committed to continuously reflecting on their own work and position. The principles we outline here can be crucial starting points for a participatory institution that is dedicated to continuous learning. Building on the challenges encountered

by practitioners and participants across the diverse case study contexts that under-pinned our research, these principles can act as a set of stepping stones towards the non-hierarchical, personal, transparent, and reflective museum.

5   Conclusion

This chapter envisions yet another ideal museum by arguing for a fundamental shift in our focus from 'inside-out' to 'outside in' when examining participation work. While acknowledging the challenges involved, we argue that when implementing this change of perspective, the strive for this ideal museum can make a real difference on the ground support and sustain truly participatory work that benefits all participants. To achieve this, we propose that the participatory principles which surfaced across our research projects should be integrated into the internal workings of the organisation. As we have shown, the principles of non-hierarchical collaboration, personal connec-tions, transparency, and reflective practice are essential but are not the only ones that sustain and encourage participatory practices. Other principles, such as for example, representation, safe spaces, and maintenance as a practice, are equally relevant. The principles that are the focus of this chapter, however, tie together our findings across diverse institutional and cultural contexts, allowing for a thorough analysis of their meaning and importantly, allowing us to propose these principles as scaffolding for their potential integration inside the organisation of the museum.

Previous literature in the museum sector has investigated and highlighted the importance of some of these principles for participation with the public in vari-ous ways. For instance, regarding non-hierarchical collaboration, many academics have critically appraised and created suggestions for working with participants in ethical ways (Lynch, 2017; Morse, 2021). Similarly, social connectivity has been discussed and identified as a priority for participants' well-being and connected to other participant-oriented goals (Simon, 2010; Silverman, 2010). Transparency and reflection too, are often catered towards addressing external public groups, making evident the workings of the institution to participants (Marstine, 2013), and enabling staff reflection on participatory practices with the public (Lynch, 2011; Chynoweth et al., 2020). Comparatively, through this chapter, we signifi-cantly expand on these externally focused understandings by drawing on these principles to create idealised provocations for initiating changes across different museum domains that constitute integral aspects of the institution's inner work-ings. Crucially, we also synthesise and extrapolate from our research findings to suggest how these participatory principles might be integrated into the routine of day-to-day museum work (rather than limited to participatory projects); feed into a more flexible approach to the roles of museum practitioners; and in turn, shift museum infrastructures to better facilitate participation.

We believe that turning the outside in helps envision a museum that embod-ies its practices: a way of working that foregrounds non-hierarchical collabora-tion between staff members is more likely to break down the persistent hierarchies between museums and their public (and participants); an organisation that prioritises personal connections has more chances of utilising them to support participatory

practices; an office that makes transparent its decision-making and existing structures will be less likely to conceal this information from external stakeholders; and, a workplace where reflection is a regular practice will not neglect or forget to reflect on the work done in collaboration with participants. Vice versa, the suggested changes to the internal workings of the museum should enable the institution to become de-centred in relation to its public. The ability to learn and share, experiment, socialise, build social skills, and be supported by institutional resources and structures is a prerequisite for a networked institution that is dynamic and remains in flux. The integration of participatory principles 'on the ground' promotes continuous learning within the institution as well as an extended notion of care as part of museum work. It helps build a museum that understands participation and the institution's relationships with its public as essential.

Note

1 A book based on Kist's thesis research will be published as part of the same book series, Participatory Memory Practices: Digital Media, Design, Futures - due to come out in October 2024; the original thesis is deposited at the University of Glasgow's: https://theses.gla.ac.uk/82812/.

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3 Situating participation in the backstage

Infrastructural settings impacting museum work

Quoc-Tan Tran

1   Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, cultural and memory institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums have aspired to embrace public involvement in memory making practices. Audiences are now invited to contribute via digital means to idea generation and data interpretation with the aim of enlarging the role of these institutions beyond mere object classification and data collection. While the extent of public engagement has varied, a key question has emerged: how do the museum staff at the memory institutions – the archivists, curators, conservators, and technicians – navigate the challenge of aligning their work routines and practices with the imperatives of these participatory missions? As the museum staff dovetail their routine tasks with the overarching vision of inclusive memory making advocated by institutional management, an intricate dynamic unfolds. This chapter sheds light on that dynamic: on the behind-the-scenes negotiations that characterise everyday operations in three sets of memory institutions in Europe: the Swedish National Historical Museums (Stockholm), the Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery (Glasgow), and the National Museums in Berlin. It examines the reconfigurations and adaptations in the 'backstage' of the museum that sustain the informational fabric and ensure the smooth functioning of everyday operations.

This chapter is one of the outcomes of a doctoral project within the research framework of POEM (Participatory Memory Practices). Spanning 2018–2020, my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork concentrated on how cultural heritage experts and practitioners are forging new ways of preserving memories and fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration. Given the pervasive impact of digital technologies in the cultural sector, my study adopted an integrated methodological approach that combined multi-sited ethnographic inquiry with grounded theory techniques. This methodology was designed to address the diverse administrative, technical, and material challenges arising from the increasing impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on various facets of heritage and museum work, including conservation, collections management, and display. Employing an 'ethnography of infrastructure' perspective, as proposed by Star (1999), this study emphasises the intricate interplay between the technical and the social aspects of museum operations by looking at the narratives and decision-making behind the scene, exploring

the often-overlooked work that underpins institutional memory making activities. This type of work, while not directly visible to museum visitors, plays a pivotal role in supporting outward-facing activities like exhibition displays or outreach. Finally, I discuss how an infrastructure analysis contributes to understanding the ways in which memory institutions align their practices with the public participation missions that they aspire to fulfil.

2   Backstage participation in museum work: an ethnography of infrastructure approach

2.1   The 'backstage gap' in museum settings

The emergence of participatory modes in memory making in the museum sector over the last two decades has challenged the authoritative role and legitimising status of memory institutions. Under labels like 'participatory exhibits' and 'participatory archiving' and in combination with certain strands of community-based research, these approaches aim to empower audience and community members – especially those who are marginalised and underrepresented – to actively participate in the creation of public memory. Criticism of rigid organisational structures and knowledge infrastructures at cultural heritage institutions is not recent. Some museum and heritage studies scholars have long advocated for openness to change in the areas of museum management (Janes & Sandell, 2007), accessibility (Sanderhoff, 2014), and cross-sectoral data management (Roued-Cunliffe, 2020). From the institutional standpoint, ensuring participatory structures in the evolving memory landscape involves facilitating the transfer of knowledge production both vertically along organisational structures and horizontally within and beyond institutional walls (Kist & Tran, 2021; Zwart, 2023). An important part of this is ensuring that the backstage systems and subsystems that constitute the information infrastructure continue to provide essential services and equitable access in order to effectively engage users in value creation. Despite growing calls for adaptability and inclusivity, however, the physical and digital infrastructures that facilitate inclusive and participatory memory work have received only scant scholarly attention.

One vivid example of the interplay between backstage and frontstage in museum environments, and one that sheds light on the critical role of invisible work in backstage spaces, is how museums deal with emerging forms of cultural artefacts. Recent scholarship on preservation and documentation in Europe and America has begun to deal with the changing notion of art, regarding it no longer as a 'fixed' material object (Depocas et al., 2003; Wharton, 2005; Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014). The proliferation of new forms of artwork has rendered traditional museum classification systems and other parts of technical infrastructure obsolete. Unlike conventional painting and sculpture, complex and hybrid works of art require special accommodation, maintenance, and conservation. Their conceptual, unstable, complex, and process-like nature contradicts the traditional object-oriented approach to collecting, presentation, and conservation (van Saaze, 2013). Engel and Wharton

(2017) explain how complex contemporary artworks complicate the documentation process by defying traditional schemes of classification of arts, such as classifications of medium and style. Emerging uses for museum objects, especially born-digital and digitised objects, can upend established classification schemes for collections management. As Tran (2023) observes, the replacement of pre-existing cataloguing and knowledge representation systems presents challenges due to their intricate integration into the social (i.e., staff beliefs and practices) and technical components (such as IT systems and architecture) of the museum's information infrastructure. Adherence to existing practices, technical protocols, and standards is crucial for ensuring the effective functioning of the components involved in knowledge representation.

Museums are increasingly viewed as engaging democratic and educational spaces in which visitors are no longer regarded as an 'undifferentiated mass' but as active individual agents in the meaning-making processes, with staff acting as enablers and facilitators (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, pp. 2–5). Nevertheless, the organic relationships between the visible work in the frontstage and mostly invisible, informal work in the backstage have received insufficient scholarly attention. Nearly three decades ago, Kreps argued convincingly that building an infrastructure for the museum or its 'hardware' is one thing, but that it is another thing to create a mentality or 'software' to support and 'go along with it' (1998, p. 5). Given the unique sociotechnical dynamics of the museums as both cultural platforms and memory institutions, the dynamic interplay between the frontstage (outward-facing activities) and backstage (supporting operations), or between formal and informal work practices, warrants further exploration (Tran, 2022). In professional discourses, while some attention has been paid to reforms in front-of-house museum work,[1] the backstage operations have remained largely overlooked.

Further, while both frontstage and backstage at memory institutions are active sites of change, there is a lack of consensus regarding the role of the backstage, the invisible part of memory making activities (Tran, 2021). The limited research on the everyday organisational practices of museums has tended to focus predominantly on outward-facing operations. Morse (2018), for instance, reflects on how community engagement is built and fostered across a range of museum professionals working in various departments. Morse suggests that the way museum professionals structure their perception of community engagement work is based on four types of accountability – local/public, managerial, professional, and personal – and that these four dimensions reflect the museum's various institutional functions: civic, social, cultural, and more recently, economic. These functions, embodying the "museum frictions" described by Kratz and Karp (2006), represent the multiple mandates, diverse sets of forces, and conflicting aims that characterise museums. Morse's (2018) work is concerned with the politics of practice in the context of community engagement, but her four dimensions of accountability highlight the important point that everyday work practices, while being non-transactional and mostly unspoken, are 'a matter of negotiating institutional arrangements and organisational structures on the way to transforming the museum' (Morse, 2020,

p. 185). A consequence is that being open to that complexity, to what people say they do, and to the moment in which we are observing is particularly beneficial.

2.2   *An ethnography of infrastructure perspective*

Focusing on the 'behind the scenes' of museum work can reveal how organisation-ness functions beyond formal processes in offering a richer understanding of museum life. However, some scholars point to the risk of relying on this 'behind the scenes' narrative alone, treating museums as isolated entities and neglecting their connections to broader social, political, and economic contexts (Macdonald et al., 2018). To counter that risk, Macdonald et al. (2018) argue that ethnographic fieldwork can be redesigned to allow for investigation beyond a single organisation while retaining ethnographic depth by conducting multi-sited, multilinked, and multi-researcher ethnography. Multi-sited ethnography involves following people, objects, or ideas as they move across multiple sites, allowing researchers to see how organisations are connected to each other and how they operate in a larger context.

Another limitation in taking the museum as an organisation for granted is that it can lead to a failure to recognise the informal and ephemeral aspects of museum work, such as improvisation, maintenance, and repair. Museums are not static insti-tutions; they are constantly in flux, with new exhibitions being created, collections being reevaluated, and staff coming and going. Rubio (2016) provides an ecologi-cal approach, i.e. looking at the whole picture of how museum objects relate to one another and their surroundings, to the study of organisations that focuses on the processes and negotiations through which different material and symbolic arrange-ments come into being and are constantly renegotiated within different regimes of value and meaning. This approach avoids the pitfalls of object-based thinking, which reifies objects and relations and prevents us from understanding how they come to be, and emphasises the ongoing attempt to negotiate the discrepancy between objects and things, and how this attempt is central to the reproduction or change of different regimes of meaning and power. Rubio (2020) argues that an ecological approach is particularly well suited to the study of museums because it allows us to see how objects are constantly being made and remade, and how these processes are shaped by the wider social, political, and economic context.

In this sense, an 'ethnography of infrastructure' perspective (Star, 1999) could be helpful in revealing the complex ways in which museums are connected to and shaped by their wider environments, including other organisations, government entities, and local communities. Infrastructure studies scholars take seriously a politics of categories that explores both 'invisible work' (Star, 1991; Bowker & Star, 1999) and the neglected entities of sociotechnical networks (Star, 1999). The ethnography of infrastructure highlights the ecological effect of surveying 'boring things' like patient classification systems (Bowker & Star, 1999) or unemployment forms used by a city government (Star, 2002). Star observes that the ecology of large distributed systems around us is influenced by the unstudied infrastructure that pervades all of the infrastructural operations. Taking an example of studying a

city, she argues that we could not have a sharp vision of how the city functions or distributes power or justice if we neglect the sewer system that permeates all the city's functions in everyday life (Star, 2002). Similarly, a study of information systems within an institution must not fail to consider the assemblages of standards, policies, protocols, and settings (Star, 1999).

As in other terrains, infrastructure in digital heritage can be viewed as an adaptive system, because the agential relationships among its technological, social, and human components often shift. Social norms, work conventions, organisational routines, tacit knowledge, and skills merge with technological specifications to shape the functionality of infrastructures (Edwards, 2019).[2] Modern ICTs and their 'affordances' (Hutchby, 2001) also help define the conditions under which museum work is performed, whether this is cataloguing, exhibition planning, or even hiring staff (Turner, 2017). In communicative environments that are technologically mediated, diverse modes of memory making – personal, institutional, and community-related – are enabled by digital infrastructures and their ecologies, mediating the collective past and future (Koch, 2021). Power relations within these modes and systems are not only capable of creating different knowledge regimes but also can potentially affect knowledge production.[3]

Museum anthropology scholars have advanced various interpretations of sociotechnical tensions in memory institutions. Recent work has addressed these tensions as part of the historical underpinnings of museum knowledge work (Krmpotich & Somerville, 2016; Macdonald & Morgan, 2019; Oswald & Tinius, 2020). Merriman (2008) considers museums as 'historically contingent assemblages' that reflect the tastes and interests of both the times and the people who created them. Turner (2017) examines the legacy of earlier cataloguing systems and organisational models and evaluates the sociotechnical aspects of a long history of working with knowledge organisation systems in museums (Turner, 2017). From an infrastructure perspective, staff who work with knowledge infrastructure in their everyday routine cannot avoid 'the inescapable inertia of terms or categories already in use' (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 117), and the information attributed to any new objects would thus be 'read backwards' into the existing technical systems – index cards, ledger books, and databases. One consequence is that entities unknown at the time of data collection would be marginalised or simply removed from the data. Given the lack of a coherent and critical approach that can reveal the hidden layers of memory making practices in memory institutions, this chapter suggests how an infrastructure-based perspective can fill the gap.

3   Research design, methodology, and fieldwork

The research project presented in this chapter aimed to investigate the role of digital heritage infrastructure in facilitating participatory memory work and promoting social inclusion in the European cultural sector. Given the broad scope of this sector and the multifaceted nature of digital and infrastructural practices, my methodology employed ethnographic inquiry and drew upon qualitative data gathered through multisite fieldwork. The empirical focus is anchored in the ethnography of

infrastructure perspective (Star, 1999), which emphasises the importance of delving into the backstage aspects of infrastructure to uncover the intricate settings of technical and informational work, the narratives embedded within, and the decisions made behind the scenes.

3.1   Methodology

The research project was conducted in three phases, with each phase informing the next. Data collection was conducted iteratively to achieve theoretical saturation. The final data analysis was guided by Giampietro Gobo's three-stage model of ethnography (Gobo, 2008, 2018), in conjunction with grounded theory procedures.

- Phase I (deconstruction) comprised defining the research problem and research topic and conducting open sampling based on background research.
- Phase II (construction) comprised conducting interviews, analysing data with initial coding, and producing preliminary findings.
- Phase III (confirmation) comprised further data collection and axial coding until a consistent theoretical system could be established.

Ethnography was employed to examine the formal organisational structures, the backstage systems (referring to the less visible operational aspects), and the daily practices and thoughts of staff within this 'collective multiplicity'. In this context, backstage systems encompass the behind-the-scenes operational mechanisms that are integral to the functioning of the museum but may not be readily apparent in public-facing aspects. A three-stage model of ethnography guided the entwined processes of data collection, coding, and analysis in conjunction with grounded theory procedures.

Grounded theory principles in the data collection process meant that data collection and analysis were interconnected processes interacting in a circular manner (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2000;). Data analysis informed theoretical sampling and data collection, just as the sampling and information collection strategy drove the systematic analytic approaches that maintain a balance between explicitness and flexibility in data analysis (Charmaz, 2008). Grounded theory (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) was particularly instrumental in this research as it allowed for the systematic analysis of the rich and diverse data gathered from the interviews, enabling the emergence of key themes and patterns that inform a comprehensive understanding of the complexities within museum digital infrastructure management.

3.2   Fieldwork

The three-phase fieldwork strategy was designed to incorporate ethnographic studies that go beyond single-site infrastructures, following the multi-sited ethnographic approach commonly used in the fields of science and technology studies (STS) and computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) to understand how

practices evolve and are adapted across various local settings (Blomberg & Karasti, 2013; Silvast & Virtanen, 2019). The multi-sited approach entails organising multiple ethnographic studies in a horizontal comparative arrangement (Blomberg & Karasti, 2013, p. 394), each establishing a distinct field site. The fieldwork periods, spanning February 2019 to January 2021, unfolded as follows:

- **Cultural Heritage Organisations in Scotland**

    In the first field trip, 'open' and 'provisional' sampling methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were used. This flexible sampling strategy aided in developing the abstract concepts of 'backstage operations' and 'infrastructural practices'. I conducted interviews with professionals working in a range of cultural heritage organisations in Scotland, including the Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery (operated by the University of Glasgow), Glasgow Museums, the National Museum of Scotland, and the National Library of Scotland. The selection of various types of memory institutions aimed to capture the broad spectrum of backstage operations, and the geographical concentration within Scotland allowed for a nuanced exploration of cultural and regional influences on the sampled institutions, influencing their operational dynamics.

    In addition to the flexible sampling approach, I adopted grounded theory techniques to gather and analyse early qualitative data not only from museum institutions but also from libraries and galleries. This approach aimed to extract insights into the interconnections between museums and the broader cultural sector in Europe and in so doing to highlight the intertwined relationship between the technical and social components of infrastructure. The objective was to 'sample types of actions and events' (Gobo, 2007, p. 417). During this deconstruction phase, the study explored how information infrastructure functions within memory institutions, particularly as a link that connects the various stakeholders – the internal and external actors, museum employees, users, and communities. The focus was on gathering observations about how memory institutions operate, especially regarding the settings and conditions for participatory practices.

- **Uppsala University Library**

    The second field trip took place in Uppsala, Sweden. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members of Uppsala University Library and other Swedish cultural heritage agencies who were actively engaged in digital cultural heritage. Sweden was chosen as another site for fieldwork because of its proactive national policies in digital technology and innovation, as reflected in substantial recent investment at both regional and university levels in advanced data-management infrastructure and collaborative data repositories.

    During this field trip, the snowball technique was employed to select interview partners: initial participants referred additional subjects who shared similar characteristics or met the participation criteria of the study. This strategic sampling approach enhanced the study's coherence by identifying participants with relevant insights and experiences in the realm of digital cultural heritage in Sweden. Preliminary findings from the initial coding were then used to inform

more targeted questions, which were condensed at the end of the second phase (construction). At this point, I was able to define the two layers of museum infrastructure:

Backstage: includes the physical and digital architecture, information systems, team interaction and communication methods, data standards and protocols, and personnel responsible for systems maintenance.
Frontstage: encompasses all agents interacting with the user – exhibition spaces, textual and visual interpretation, websites and social media channels, user interfaces for cataloguing systems, and open access platforms.

- **National Museums in Berlin**
    The final phase of fieldwork took place at the National Museums in Berlin (SMB), a large museum group chosen for its potential to illuminate the challenges faced by participatory memory making practices within complex institutional structures. A government-commissioned report had suggested that the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz or SPK), of which SMB is a member, was facing issues arising from a complex hierarchical structure and unclear decision-making processes, which obscured responsibilities and resulted in prolonged and non-transparent procedures (German Science and Humanities Council [Wissenschaftsrat], 2020). I opted to conduct fieldwork at the Museum of European Cultures (MEK), a medium-sized museum within SMB with about 20 full-time employees. My goal was to gain insights into how decisions were made and responsibilities were handled within a specific museum setting. Employing axial coding in this phase, I focused empirically on documentation and data management in the backstage. This type of activities, as was widely recognised by the museum staff, is a critical aspect of maintaining the museum's informational fabric. I conducted observations, semi-structured interviews with museum staff, and analysed a diverse range of documents, including the collection concept as well as systematic catalogues, collection development statements, and digital strategies. My objective was to understand how the museum's stated goals were translated into day-to-day operations.
    In each of the three field sites, the overarching goal of the staff interviews was to extract personal and detailed responses from the participants about their professional lives and daily experiences in their direct engagement with the management and maintenance of the digital heritage infrastructure. In total, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 professionals who engage in digital infrastructure management across various areas, including digital services, curation, collections management, digital content management, education, and outreach. All the participants were employed in the European cultural heritage sector, with 14 of them working at the museums. Staff interviews were guided by an interview guide with open questions comprising five core themes: (a) professional roles, (b) information architecture and governance, (c) connective capabilities, (d) public engagement, and (e) digital strategy and evaluation. This format ensured comprehensive coverage of pertinent topics while

balancing the researcher's interests with the respondents' active engagement. The interviewer–interviewee dynamic fluctuated between formality and rapport, mirroring Silverman's (2013) approach for semi-structured interviews.

4   Museum infrastructure dynamics

4.1   *Unveiling the invisible work*

My initial findings revealed the pervasive influence of documentation practices, a form of invisible work, on local practices within the cultural heritage organisations. These documentation practices serve as an infrastructural foundation, enabling informed decision-making and fostering coordination across teams or lines of work. Following the clarification of the backstage domain during the second field trip, local practices in this context were defined as the specific routines, procedures, and daily tasks performed by employees.

The intricate interplay between documentation standards, conventions, and local practices became particularly salient in the second and third phases of the study in the context of the potential friction that could arise between a focus on object care by the staff and the institution's overarching digital strategies. The emphasis on object care often evident in the staff's own inquiries into the relevance of their work, the authenticity of emerging object forms, and the institution's ownership of such objects, has the potential to present structural and technical difficulties. On the structural level, the prioritisation of object care may clash with the institution's digital objectives, which prioritise the inclusion of digital cultural assets, innovative technologies, and the development of online experiences. On the organisational and technical level, the absence of a well-defined strategy and consistent protocols, as expressed by Adam,[4] a curator at the Hunterian, underscored the complexities faced by memory institutions in managing these conflicting priorities.

> Challenges are too much work, too many competing demands, too much short-term problems. And lack of strategy, lack of consistent protocols. There are lots of things that could be streamlined, but which are not. So things that should be quite routine. We should be repetitively [doing them] in the same way, using the similar agreed upon language, which doesn't happen.
>
> (Interview at the Hunterian, 2019)

The seamless integration of documentation practices is vital in streamlining the diverse and laborious tasks performed in the backstage and ensuring a consistent approach to both physical object care and the digital evolution of cultural assets. Adam's identification of the 'lack of strategy [and] consistent protocols' resonated with the issues highlighted when I examined documentation practices in other memory institutions in the study. The absence of a comprehensive strategy and consistent guidelines for managing emerging object care practices at the Hunterian undermines the overarching strategic vision, while also converting routine tasks into monotonous and burdensome responsibilities for staff members.

The challenges faced by curators at the Hunterian in streamlining their operations were strikingly similar to the ambiguity experienced by backstage employees at the MEK in Berlin, who were overseeing cataloguing and documentation tasks that went beyond their official duties. The ambiguity in backstage operations experienced by staff at the MEK – an ambiguity that can lead to staff uncertainties and a reluctance to embrace change – was exemplified by their dissatisfaction with the arduous transition from an outdated electronic catalogue system to a newer one. This transition required a significant amount of time, effort, and training. The 'mistake cycle' observed at the MEK can be summarised under the following two issues: data were being entered into incorrect fields, and inaccurate or incomplete information contributed to staff uncertainty and fatigue. Across the SMB museum group, a primary challenge that emerged was in the integration of data from various sources. The lack of an automated method for detecting inconsistencies in existing databases forced staff to undertake a time-consuming 'test and check' procedure to improve data quality.

Data-related issues stemming from inadequately catalogued collections at the MEK had far-reaching implications, not only affecting the workload and daily operations but also engendering confusion regarding staff roles and responsibilities. Staff faced challenges in searching for specific objects, requiring knowledge of the item beforehand. Addressing incorrect fields necessitated manual, one-by-one modification of problematic records, which in turn exposed a lack of streamlined processes for maintaining the informational fabric. This labour intensive and in effect never-ending cycle of object-related tasks contributed to staff fatigue. Whether it was expressed as 'too much work' at the MEK or 'too many competing demands' at the Hunterian, the social impact of these cataloguing issues was palpable. While the MEK staff expressed reservations about launching the new system due to concerns about incomplete data being made publicly accessible, staff at the Hunterian faced 'too much short-term problems' that required immediate attention. Curators who were typically familiar with the collections found themselves navigating a spiral of problems related to a single object, leading to frustration and a sense that they were under-used and misunderstood, echoing Adam's observations. Addressing these challenges requires intricate negotiations – not only among departments and working groups but also with nonhuman entities such as IT systems, subsystems, protocols, and object datasheets.

4.2   *Adaptations from below: shaping museum practices*

It was noticeable that within the organisational structures of the memory institutions in study, essential yet nondominant actors were rarely involved in the initiation of participatory missions and tended to be at a distance in these strategic planning stages. Further, museum staff were carrying out additional tasks over and above the formal roles indicated by their job titles to keep the institution running smoothly. Exploring cross-departmental contexts in documentation work showed how the staff's daily practices shape sociotechnical arrangements – protocols, IT standards, systems, and subsystems – that support institutional memory making.

In the memory institutions I studied, documentation work constitutes an ongoing process of reflection and tinkering, improvisation, and maintenance that arises from the workplace order. Fieldwork in Berlin revealed that documentation-related activities were sometimes viewed as invisible work. These tasks, often perceived by employees as burdensome ('too much work') and under-resourced, are nonetheless integral to the functioning of these compartmentalised organisations.

Local adaptations and adjustments often emerged at the fringes of museum infrastructure, driven by frontline staff rather than top-level management. At the Swedish Historical Museums and the Hunterian, these adjustments took the form of adapting outdated work conventions to meet contemporary local needs and were driven by the initiative and ingenuity of museum employees. At the Hunterian, curator Adam eloquently emphasised the need to streamline repetitive tasks and ensure uniform execution, for example by establishing clear protocols for dealing with massive objects. His advocacy for a shared language and standardised practices exemplified the notion of local adaptation whereby the backstage staff plays a pivotal role in shaping procedures. Adam's decisions to photograph objects and interview those who discovered them, driven by concerns for future use and storage space, were instances of localised decision-making influenced by backstage constraints and by staff aspirations to maintain order and relevance in response to contemporary demands. Backstage participation, in this context, refers to the involvement of staff working behind the scenes to maintain the essential informational infrastructure of memory institutions.

Given that one important purpose of memory institutions is to preserve collections and disseminate their value to diverse audiences, the responsibility for maintaining the essential informational infrastructure mainly rests within the confines of these institutions, but this crucial task is often overlooked. The everyday workforce, typically operating behind the scenes, plays a pivotal role in safeguarding invaluable cultural heritage. Closer examination of my interviews with personnel in these museums sheds light on the not outwardly visible, yet indispensable practices related to the maintenance of information infrastructure. This maintenance work encompasses labour-intensive and time-consuming tasks such as object identification, photographic documentation, data entry, photographic record storage, and systematic organisation of object data. Over and above safeguarding institutional holdings, a museum's documentation system plays a crucial role in preventing bottlenecks in collections management, ensuring seamless coordination across departments.

5   A bottom-up perspective towards infrastructural change

From the perspective of infrastructure studies, part of the infrastructural ability to reach beyond one-site practice is making and breaking boundaries (Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Aanestad et al., 2017). The SMB case considered in detail below delves into a critical question arising from the diverse sociotechnical realities of the cultural heritage sector: How might one evaluate an institution's commitment to accessibility without solely relying on a top-down approach centred on established

political structures within the sector, but rather, by alternatively considering the extensive infrastructural networks that have evolved to facilitate the expansion of these institutions?

5.1   *Digital transformation: IT governance challenges in multilayered organisations*

The multilayered and hierarchical organisational structure of memory institutions often presents a challenge to their adaptability. The MEK, one of 17 museums within SMB, has been undergoing a transition in its collection data-management system from the legacy Windows-based MuseumPlus Classic to the cloud-based MuseumPlus RIA. Within the SMB's complex structure, blurred lines of responsibility have emerged, particularly in IT governance activities. The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK), under which SMB operates, entrusted a small team of IT governance specialists with overseeing the digital transformation initiative. This digital transformation team not only coordinated projects but also facilitated knowledge exchange among the institutions and provided advisory and support services during the digital transformation of SMB's museums. When asked about their team's involvement in information governance, Karl,[5] an SPK digital officer primarily focused on data management, stated:

> IT governance is a special thing […] when a project was created, the task was to specifically design, plan the workflows, who has what responsibilities, and make decisions on IT infrastructure and the IT part of projects because IT resources, especially human resources, are very limited. And this planning process is a separate initiative, or [it may constitute] a standalone project created for that purpose.
>
> (Interview at SPK, 2020)

SMB's multilayered structure and the lack of a dedicated IT governance team posed significant challenges to efficient IT governance implementation and change management. In his role as an SPK digital officer, Karl highlighted the need for clear processes, enforceable standards, and efficient workflows to effectively coordinate IT governance activities across various departments. In addition, Hannah [6] an SPK employee responsible for digital communication, underscored the need for stronger support from senior management to promote digital transformation and mobilise institutional involvement in formulating a digital strategy. The convoluted lines of accountability within the hierarchical structure hindered effective coordination and top-down guidance and necessitated additional support from the senior hierarchy engaging directly with staff and employees.

Discussions regarding digital transformation became challenging when senior management at some of the SMB museums expressed doubts about the necessity and implementation of these initiatives. Karl expressed surprise at this scepticism but acknowledged the possibility that not all institutional leaders share the same perspective on the digital transformation efforts of the whole robust foundation.

Hannah further attributed their team's isolation to the broader organisational structure and its operational dynamics. As digital officers who were assisting the chief digital officers in implementing the SPK's digital transformation, Hannah and Karl had limited direct connections to individual institutions, and this impeded their ability to effectively engage with museum staff and leadership. As Hannah said:

> So we can't really say, hey we need an addition strategy for SPK, [because] then everyone will say, Okay, do your stuff, but [I have] nothing to do with that. So, I think this makes it a little bit harder for everyone to accept that… we are like intruders in their institution.
>
> (Interview at SPK, 2020)

Hannah and Karl were the staff responsible for disseminating the digital transformation mission initiated by the SPK Foundation to its museum members, but they struggled to make their voices heard. Their responses pointed to a notable gap between the SPK's IT governance team and the member institutions. IT governance plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between business and IT in the decision-making process, but the perspective of the member institutions is also crucial for informed decision-making. Both perspectives are crucial. The SMB museum group case highlights the importance of ongoing representation from both sides – including business representatives (typically museum staff) and IT representatives represented by the digital transformation team – throughout all phases of software procurement and implementation. I observed that the absence of such dual representation can lead to a disconnection between senior management, who hold decision-making authority, and frontline staff, who are responsible for implementing those decisions. Such misalignment can result in a lack of understanding and appreciation of frontline staff's perspectives and needs, ultimately hindering their engagement with and support for digital transformation initiatives.

5.2　*Momentum for infrastructural change*

Two recurring themes emerged in my exploration of the intricate dynamics of the museum infrastructure: the need to safeguard staff practices and knowledge, and the need to support backstage operations. The research findings underscore the invisible labour of backstage activities and adaptations from below, suggesting that these are capable of collectively driving infrastructural change. While some cultural heritage institutions are proactively adapting to the digital age, others face institutional inertia due to entrenched knowledge infrastructures and organisational structures. In the institutions I studied, I found that local adaptations emerged primarily from the ingenuity of everyday employees. Backstage employees in these institutions possess a keen awareness of technical issues, often resorting to ad hoc solutions and repairs to address immediate needs. Their ongoing negotiations of everyday practices can lead to infrastructural improvements.

The National Museums in Berlin exemplify the importance of breaking boundaries as infrastructure is expanded beyond single-site practices. In line with Kist and

Tran's (2021) notion of 'boundary-breaking', this case demonstrates that a digital heritage infrastructure can transcend conventional constraints, including institutional legacies with hierarchical knowledge structures, so as to become capable of extending its impact beyond a single institution. Within the context of my study, boundary-breaking means enhancing the adaptability of infrastructural practices to cater to a diverse user base. In the large-sized memory institutions in the study, digital transformation efforts were often mediated by existing institutional structures and power dynamics. The hierarchical organisational structure and the compartmentalised knowledge production have the effect of intertwining memory making activities within a complex environment of diverse voices and perspectives.

The SMB case underscores the value of a bottom-up perspective that prioritises the perspectives of the museum staff, perspectives that are frequently overlooked in infrastructure development. While upper management envisions collective missions such as digitalisation and digital engagement projects, the staff tasked with coordinating these projects frequently struggle to dovetail them with the work of the middle-level institutions, that is, the work of the SMB museum members. The ethnography of infrastructure approach taken by the study helped to reveal the unspoken experiences of the staff who have to navigate the complexities of digital transformation. On the one hand, the broad dynamics of social change generate a slew of entwined social and cultural forces that compel museums to adapt in order to maintain their social relevance in a changing landscape of cultural heritage; and as part of this process, emergent infrastructural settings generated by digital networks and technologies have brought about new dimensions of publicness, visibility, and commitment. On the other hand, as the SMB museum group and Hunterian cases show, implicitly accepting standards and standardisation in effect reinforces the institutional legacy of bureaucratisation and hierarchical organisation. Resonating with the work of Macdonald et al. (2018), therefore, these cases show how the digital transformation initiatives at museums are not being – and should not be – carried out in 'isolated islands'. Rather, these initiatives are deeply interwoven with a diverse array of social actors and communities of practice, including those who work in the backstage and are responsible for documentation, professional imaging, conservation, and preservation.

6   Conclusion

This chapter delves into the question of whether museum infrastructure can potentially transcend local and institutional boundaries. Employing Star's ethnography of infrastructure perspective, it illuminates the roles of the regular museum staff and assesses the constraining impacts of institutional legacies on data-management and decision-making processes. As demonstrated in all three cases – the National Museums in Berlin, the Swedish National Historical Museums, and the Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery in Glasgow – while contentions and conflicts can arise in the backstage museum environment, so can local adaptations that represent creative solutions to bridging the gap between traditional museological practices and evolving community needs.

In exploring the dilemma of digital transformation at the National Museums in Berlin, the chapter provides practical insights into the challenges posed by the organisation-wide mission of digital transformation. It has highlighted the need for a balance between emerging community needs and organisational constraints. By emphasising the importance of flexible policies that can adapt to the ever-changing demands of digital transformation initiatives, the chapter encourages continued exploration of effective strategies for integrating top-down directives with bottom-up employee contributions. This contribution seeks to foster participatory memory making practices that authentically serve the diverse needs of communities, users, and stakeholders while navigating the complexities of institutional structures and resource constraints.

Notes

1 See, for example, the UK Museums Association's Front-of-House Charter for Change at https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/workforce/a-front-of-house-charter-for-change/, or the 'One by One' initiative at https://one-by-one.uk.
2 See Chapter 2 of this volume, in which the authors outline how both everyday routine work and the flexible roles of cultural heritage practitioners require the development of existing museum infrastructures as well as the creation of new ones.
3 See Chapter 7 of this volume for elaboration of the concept 'memory modality', which can be viewed as a distinctive 'mode' of representing and processing knowledge of the past.
4 Anonymised name.
5 Anonymised name.
6 Anonymised name.

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4 Ethical practices in participatory memory work

Examples from the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin

Susanne Boersma and Elisabeth Tietmeyer

1 Introduction

Ethics are intrinsic to everyday museum practices (Besterman, 2006, p. 432; Museums Association, 2016, p. 3), yet the currently available ethical codes primarily point to ethical considerations for collecting practices, provenance research, and repatriation. Practices of exhibiting objects and collaborating with groups and individuals are only briefly addressed in the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) Code of Ethics (2017), through which it dismisses the importance of outlining and ensuring the application of ethics within these increasingly prominent aspects of museum practice. As a participatory and social institution (Simon, 2010; ICOM, 2022), the museum requires a revised code of ethics from international and national organisations such as ICOM, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and the Museums Association to support its work. The museum's participatory practices come with significant ethical challenges for practitioners, especially because internationally recognised ethical guidelines fall short in supporting this particular aspect of museum work.

The Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK)[1] is committed to participatory practices ranging from co-creating additions to the permanent exhibition to facilitating processes of co-curating entire exhibitions. Its work also includes collaborative provenance research, through which it aims to include perspectives of people who are marginalised. The MEK's collection of over 287,000 objects historically developed to push for a predominantly German perspective, yet its current primary focus is on everyday life and cultures in Europe. Building on mementos from cultural history and ethnography, the museum seeks ways to include multiple perspectives as it sheds light on themes from everyday life as well as contemporary debates. Examples of this are themes that are considered taboo in public debate, such as menstruation, and political issues such as the refugee protection crisis, to which the museum responded with a participatory project described in Section 3.4 of this chapter. The mission statement of the MEK proposes its work to promote dialogue, build on multi-lateral collaborations with individuals and organisations, and actively challenge discrimination[2]. The museum's staff can actively work towards these goals, whilst assessing how their work at the museum serves its (potential)

public, partners, and further stakeholders. To serve their work, this mission state-ment, which was last reviewed in 2020, as well as the guidelines for ethical prac-tices should not be static and inflexible. Instead, they should be developed over time in response to learnings from previous projects and feedback from collaborat-ing institutions and participants.

Building on examples of participatory projects from the MEK, this chapter identifies which ethical practices are fundamental to participatory memory work. Rather than focusing on the museum's backstage (Morse et al., 2018), we zoom in on the interactions that constitute participatory practices within the museum as a public institution (Graham, 2012, p. 569). These do not only show the ways in which ethics come into play but also reveal the need for defining these guidelines for and through participatory work. First, we draw from previous studies and cur-rent guidelines and discussions to assess the meaning of ethics within museum practices. Thereafter, we outline different ethical practices through a discussion of both exemplary and critical projects at the MEK. Doing so, we assess where the museum fell short and how practitioners can learn from mistakes, and support the idea of an ethical practice that foregrounds care (following Morse, 2021). Finally, based on the provided examples, we critically assess where these ethical practices sit in the museum and whose ethics are taken into account as part of participatory memory work. We put forward a final example in which the ethical considerations form an integrated part of the project; an example that combines our learnings and proposes how these ethical practices might take centre stage within a participatory project. As such, this chapter not only reflects on ethical practices particularly rel-evant for participation but also suggests ways in which ethical considerations can be part of the participatory process.

2   Defining ethics in museums

In the wake of the lengthy discussion that resulted in the new ICOM museum definition (ICOM, 2022), the ICOM Ethics Committee, ETHCOM, is revising its Code of Ethics, which was last updated in 2017 (ICOM, 2017). The revision process includes several consultation rounds with ICOM members to "ensure that the Code will be useful to museums well into the future" (ICOM, 2023b). The for-mer code primarily focuses on object-based museum work, offering guidelines on an ethical approach to and interpretation of collections (ICOM, 2017). Referring to and opposing collecting practices born from colonial contexts and still present in museum structures today (Modest, 2020; von Oswald, 2020), the code particularly points to the acquisition of heritage. However, the necessity to start from informed and mutual consent applies to the entirety of museum work that involves exter-nal parties. Accordingly, the revised code addresses (in the following order) the museums' responsibilities to communities, the professional practices of museums and staff, the educational role of museums, collections, and the responsibilities of governing bodies and leadership (ICOM, 2023a). Much in line with what was suggested much earlier by Marstine (2011), the revised code acknowledges the social responsibility of museums. Discussions and earlier studies on the role of

ethics within museum practice (i.e. Marstine, 2011; Murphy, 2016) draw out two main convictions. Ethics, on the one hand, are interpreted as a means to ensure museum work according to certain "professional standards" (ICOM, 2023a). On the other hand, they are understood as key for the collaboration with and learning from people who are seen and portrayed as 'the Other' (Said, 1978; Riegel, 1996; Blankenhol & Modest, 2020).

The first idea underlines the responsibility of museum staff to recognise and act in accordance with their own moral agency (Marstine, 2011, p. 7). This is supported by the notion that every museum practitioner engages with ethics in their day-to-day work (Edson, 2016, p. 135). In a more recent discussion on ethics, Marstine pointed out that a code of ethics is particularly relevant for "establishing and maintaining professionalisation of museums" (2023). The revised code proposes professionalism as a means to ethical practice in order to "sustain the trust of the public" and to "responsibly steward and safeguard the collections" (ICOM, 2023a, p. 2). The code also suggests that one can act professionally by "demonstrating courtesy, respect, and objectivity" (ibid.), hence proposing that practitioners are able to be objective, much in line with the myth of museums as objective, neutral institutions (such as described by in an example of Labadi, 2018, p. 53; and addressed by Vlachou, 2019). This is in stark contrast with the current approach to museums and practitioners as subjective, social, and political institutions (Janes & Sandell, 2019; cf. Gesser et al., 2020). This subjectivity is not only relevant in considering what is understood as 'professional practice' but also comes into play when ethics is seen as key to the relationships built between museum staff, participants, and the public.[3]

The second idea, instead, underlines the relational aspect of museum work, sought through participatory practices and other means of community engagement. This ethical understanding highlights the museum's social responsibility as a public institution (Janes, 2007; Janes & Sandell, 2019), and acknowledges its shortcomings towards including 'other' and alternative perspectives in the past. This approach to ethics in particular is central to participatory museum work. Participation in museums was introduced with Vergo's New Museology (1989), and has since manifested through a wide range of practices and approaches, offering participants different 'levels' of agency (Simon, 2010; Carpentier, 2011; Piontek, 2017). Whether participatory work follows the notion of 'care' (Morse, 2021) or prioritises the inclusion of 'other' voices in public-facing museum practices (Sergi, 2021), a thorough understanding of ethical practices is required to actively avoid negative outcomes (Boersma, 2023, p. 236). It is very unlikely that a code of ethics, be it the new one developed by ICOM (2023a) or the one made available by the Museums Association (2016), is universally applicable. Therefore, especially when taking a participatory approach, much in line with what is suggested by the Museums Association, "practitioners should conduct a process of careful reflection, reasoning, and consultation with others" (2016, p. 3). Ethics, as such, should be the result of a collaborative process. In doing so, museum practitioners can ensure that the people they work with, be it individuals, or members or representatives of a larger group, consider the collaboration and its outcomes ethical.

Ideally, participatory museum work would allow for a participatory approach to establishing a project's ethics. To consider what this might look like, museums can learn from other fields as well as research in social sciences and humanities, where ethics has been acknowledged as a fundamental aspect for many years (see, for example, Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; De Koning et al., 2019). A recent chapter on the ethical challenges in citizen science describes the significant shift in the field towards more participatory methodologies, and consequently, the necessity to move towards a participatory approach to research ethics (Tauginienė et al., 2021). This approach builds on the idea of "discursive ethics", which constitutes a dialogic process between the stakeholders involved on potential or perceived ethical dilemmas (Helgeland, 2005, p. 554). Despite participation being part of museum work for several decades, ethical guidelines for museum work are rarely considered part of the participatory process; instead, the ethical considerations for a project, as well as whose ethics are deemed relevant, are often left up to museum staff. An impressive exception to this is the set of Guidelines for Collaboration, last revisited in 2019, which "were developed over a three-year period of collaboration between Native and non-Native museum professionals, cultural leaders, and artists" (Indian Arts Research Center, 2019). The guide consists of two complimentary sets for museums and 'communities' that offer "principles and considerations for building successful collaborations" (ibid.). Both this guide and the aforementioned principle of "discursive ethics" formed the basis for our understanding of what a code of ethics for participatory museum work might look like (or, at least, what it would have to include).

Despite the relevance of the ethical codes and guidelines for practice (as well as how they are understood in relation to the concept of 'professionalism'), museum practitioners can only apply ethics in practice by learning from practical examples. In the following section, we build on the existing codes of ethics as well as practical examples to define what ethics look like in practice.

3   Ethical practices in participatory museum work

The ethical guidelines and codes available to museum practitioners have developed over time, adapted to reflect practices and museum missions, though often lagging behind the most recent shifts. Participatory practices developed alongside ideas about what is ethical; it understands the need for shifting museum practices to becoming more inclusive and considerate of perspectives that were previously (and often still are) left out. At the same time, the practices fundamental to this approach might not be ethical for all people involved. Based on different examples from practice, we focus on four ethical practices and their practical implications for museum work: accessibility, representation, positionality, and care. The selected examples represent the museum's approaches to participation and ethics in relation to a range of topics and debates at different moments in time.

3.1   *Practices of accessibility*

In the ICOM Code of Ethics, a small section on accessibility is included to address the responsibility of a museum in preserving and promoting tangible and intangible

heritage. The statement (numbered 1.4) reads "the governing body should ensure that the museum and its collections are available to all during reasonable hours and for regular periods. Particular regard should be given to those persons with special needs" (ICOM, 2017, p. 3). This section points to the physical barriers, such as those outlined on the MEK's website under 'accessibility'[4], that might stop visitors from coming to (or entering) the museum. Similarly, the revised code of ethics defines accessibility for all as a prerequisite for museums being able to serve society (ICOM, 2023a). These references to accessibility point to providing access as an ethical practice, yet offer a limited scope on what this might (or should) entail. In practice, museums struggle to make their collections accessible to use, view, or study; physical and technological barriers keep visitors from seeing most of the museum's objects, and resources to tackle these issues are lacking. At the same time, museum practitioners are unsure about how to break down barriers for potential museum visitors who do not feel welcome in or feel actively excluded from museums, such as someone who understands the museum as an exclusive and elitist space, or someone whose experiences and knowledge are not reflected in what is on display. In this section, we broaden the potential practices of accessibility through an ethical approach to removing emotional thresholds (Heumann Gurian, 2005), defined by "a shared sense that these cultural spaces are not for them, not welcoming of them" (Morse, 2021, p. 134), as well as physical, technological or further, rather practical barriers.

As aforementioned, the MEK preserves a large, heterogeneous collection of cultural-historical and recent everyday objects from across Europe. It includes objects from ethnic minorities and other people in Europe that are being marginalised. The collection provides fertile ground for research, especially of cultures that are under threat, and one that might speak to different individuals and self-identified communities. With the aim of providing access, the MEK assumes its role as a facilitator by supporting interested stakeholders in finding the artefacts and information relevant to them. Objects from the collection that have been photographed are made accessible through the online database. Visitors of this database get access to a small selection of the collection for a look at what else is preserved at the MEK, people can request a look at the database available to internal staff. Access to the collection requires an understanding of the museum's security regulations, the necessary safety measures when handling objects, and the means to overcome potential language barriers (as all documentation is only available in German). Though offering this information online ensures practical accessibility, it does not necessarily make the museum and its collection accessible for those faced with the emotional thresholds of the institution.

The MEK sought to identify what might make the museum an exclusive space through a participatory project. Starting from the assumption that some of the non-visitors do not come to the museum because they do not feel welcome or represented in the museum, the MEK developed a project entitled 'Things that (would) make me come to the museum'[5] to diversify its collection. The project identified three non-visitor groups – senior citizens with experiences of migration, Black German families, and young people – and reached out to people who consider themselves part of these groups through mediators already connected to

the museum. Through various sessions, the participants became familiar with the museum and staff got to know the participants. The process included conversations with the participants about their reasons not to visit the museum, through which the MEK learned people did not steer clear due to a lack of representative objects but rather because of the lack of relatable personal stories in the exhibitions. During the final session, they presented personal objects and stories to the museum, all of which were documented and installed as an intervention[6] in the MEK's permanent exhibition. Though the outcome revolved around objects missing from the museum as per the original plan, it also allowed for the integration of personal and more relatable stories, as suggested by the participants.

The project was a means to introduce non-visitors to the museum, its exhibitions, and its collections, and to make them feel welcome in this process. Their new familiarity with the museum helped lower the barriers, leading to some of the participants to return on a regular basis. At the same time, it demonstrated that further accessibility might be achieved through the presentation of relatable personal perspectives alongside the objects on display. The described practices of accessibility prioritise the needs and expectations of visitors inside the museum building by focusing on its relevance for particular groups. These learnings now feed into exhibitions, where multi-perspectivity plays a larger role and personal stories that otherwise often remain invisible are more actively included. At the same time, the museum should continue such projects in order to define further potential thresholds and seek out possibilities for tackling them.

3.2   *Practices of (truthful) representation*

Museums have long been understood as institutions that preserve and present knowledge, supporting the idea of the museum as objective or neutral (cf. Janes & Sandell, 2019; Gesser et al., 2020). Reflecting on former practices, exhibitions, and interpretations of objects, however, demonstrates the subjective and often unethical representations of 'the other'. This aspect of museum practice is addressed in Museums Association's 'Code of Ethics', which proposes that museums should "provide and generate accurate information for and with the public" (2016, p. 9). At the same time, they are expected to "respect the right of all to express different views within the museum unless illegal to do so or inconsistent with the purpose of the museum as an inclusive space" (ibid., p. 10). As such, these ethical guidelines call for practices of truthful representation in the museum's database and in exhibitions, the content of which to be ideally developed in collaboration with (or, following ICOM's revised code (2023a), in consultation with) people whose heritage is collected or on display. This ethical practice recognises people's understanding of themselves as the most accurate and representative.

An example of a participatory project at the MEK reveals what this might look like for the development of exhibitions. The project that led to the exhibition 'Fulfillable dreams? Italian women in Berlin'[7] started when the MEK was contacted by the Berlin-based fraction[8] of the Italian women's network in Germany called 'Retedonne'[9] in 2014. The group of female scientists and artists – some of whom

had been living in Germany for a longer time, and some of whom had recently come to Berlin – reached out to the museum with a proposal for an exhibition about their experiences of migration. By means of artistic interventions in the permanent exhibition with reference to specific exhibits, they presented objects they had taken with them to Germany, their experiences of migration, and how they looked at their life in Berlin. The exhibition, though located within the MEK's permanent display, was put together entirely by the participants. Whilst the group of women developed the objects and content for the intervention, the MEK solely acted as a facilitator, providing the space, supporting the work logistically and helping with the scenography. In addition, the participants organised a series of events to run alongside the exhibition and promoted their project on social media. Despite the many challenges that arose as part of this hosted form of participation, the participants proudly presented the exhibition as their own.

Practices of truthful representation are not limited to the exhibitions and programme presented in the museum but also include what is collected and how this is documented by the museum. ICOM's revised 'Code of Ethics' points to the importance of diligent and thorough accessioning procedures that ensure the validity of the information documented for posterity (2023a, p. 2). Representation especially coincides with collecting when the topic deals with the present (Meijer-van Mensch & Tietmeyer, 2013). From 2008 to 2010, the MEK and ten partnering museums from all over Europe were involved in the project 'Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities'. The outcome was a series of presentations on the innovation potential of small or medium-sized enterprises based on different local examples. The MEK's sub-project presented its research results in the workshop exhibition 'Doner, Delivery and Design – Berlin Entrepreneurs'[10] (Klages et al., 2010). The project zoomed in on the life and work of 27 Berlin entrepreneurs in different cultural contexts. It built on interviews conducted by the project's curators, who had asked the entrepreneurs to bring in things they connected with their living environment and, especially, with their occupation. The exhibition presented biographies, photographs, and objects, most of which were acquired for the collection as important European cultural heritage. The entrepreneurs were actively involved in this project, not only by deciding which objects should be on display but also by determining what information was conveyed through the exhibition and what should be included in the museum's documentation system. In practice, this meant that the curators formulated the exhibition texts and labels based on the information obtained, after which they had them corrected, supplemented, and confirmed by entrepreneurs. As a result, the data gathered in the process and still available in the database offers a truthful representation of the participants' lives and perspectives at the time. This approach reflected the museum's fundamental understanding that people are experts on their own culture. Their perspectives as the most truthful and, perhaps, objective should be respected by museum staff, and considered integral to the ethical practices of collecting, processing, preserving, and presenting (truthful) data.

This tried and tested ethical practice steers away from the long-standing museum practice of interpreting 'the other' from the perspective of a supposed

homogeneous 'us'. The interpretation of objects in a museum's exhibitions, as well as what is preserved in the museum's database, should be a truthful representation according to those whose objects are at stake. These practices require staff to take on different, potentially new positions in the process, as well as to acknowledge and reflect on their own and the museum's positionality and relation to the participants and their heritage.

3.3   *Practices of positionality*

Recent literature on museums debunks the myth of neutrality and understands that the positionalities of staff as well as the institution affect museum work, especially for participatory practices (Janes & Sandell, 2019; Vlachou, 2019; Boersma, 2023; Marstine, 2023). The examples addressed above present diverse approaches to participatory practices, for which the museum and its staff need to take on different positions or roles. At the same time, staff members have their own political views, ideologies, personal social contexts, and knowledge bases. ICOM's new 'Code of Ethics' prescribes an objective approach for staff, yet, at the same time, it acknowledges the relevance of staff's personal positions for museum work by suggesting that museums should "recruit staff and volunteers that reflect the diversity of the museum's communities" (2023a, p. 2). Museums and their staff cannot be objective or neutral in the decisions they make to address certain issues, nor in the narratives that they develop in the process. Participatory work relies on staff acknowledging and *unlearning* prejudices (Lynch & Alberti, 2010, p. 30) and *acceding* privilege (Kassim, 2017); this approach, "in turn, requires significant self-awareness and empathy from museum practitioners" (Boersma, 2023, p. 248). Practices of positionality, therefore, cannot be broken down into a series of steps to be taken by staff members, but rather are a continuous process of self-reflection, conversation, and adaptation.

To describe what these practices might look like, we draw on an example from the preparatory phase of a participatory project concerned with the definition of target audiences and potential participants or participant groups. In preparation for the development of the MEK's new semi-permanent exhibition, the curatorial staff gathered for a series of full-day meetings on the goals of this exhibition, target groups and practices inclusive of those groups, and potential participatory approaches to engage these and/or other groups.[11] The meeting about participation followed discussions on the overall goal of and reason for this exhibition, as well as a first selection of relevant objects and related themes. Together, the curators outlined the exhibition's target audiences (and how these differed from the audiences reached through other exhibitions at the MEK), but struggled to narrow it down to a select few and rather ended up widening the definitions of each group with the aim to facilitate to (and/or represent) "everyone". The target groups that were agreed on in the end were primarily defined by age; these "groups" – which spanned from 18-year-olds interested in current debates to senior citizens interested in culture – discarded other characteristics that were considered too complex or, by some, as exclusive. The group defined as "Berliners, especially Black people

and People of Colour (BPoC) in Berlin" was dismissed as a target audience for this reason. Instead, the team agreed that the potential interests, perspectives, and barriers perceived especially by BPoC are to be considered across all of the identified age groups. Based on a persona developed to represent someone from each "target audience", the curators then set out to identify potential limitations, expectations, and needs of these (prospective) visitors to the museum. This process, during which the curators worked in teams, revealed that the personas as well as the agreed-upon target groups mirrored perspectives and experiences of the curators themselves. This, in turn, highlighted that curatorial work relies on and represents the positionalities of the staff and the museum and that these positionalities need to be reflected and deconstructed in order to allow for a more equitable practice and institution. Though this project is still in process and it is yet unknown how their positionalities will be visible in the new exhibition, it is certain that the staff relies on participatory practice to challenge their own positionalities and perspectives.

3.4 *Practices of care for people*

Though perhaps not immediately connected to the concept of 'professionalism', care is a vital aspect of museum work (Morse, 2021, p. 1) as is also reflected in the various codes of ethics, old and new (AAM, 2000; Museums Association, 2016; ICOM, 2017; ICOM, 2023). These codes primarily address care in relation to the preservation and handling of the objects in the museums' collections, rarely pointing to the role of care in relation to museums' work with external stakeholders (Ibid.). An increase in participatory approaches within museums, however, points to a shift from a practice shaped by the relationships to museum objects to one shaped by the relationships with people (Kreps, 2003; Witcomb, 2003; Kreps, 2008). As such, rather than curators functioning as the experts on objects, they often support communities' and individuals' interactions with and interpretations of museum objects (Schorch, 2017; Macdonald & Morgan, 2019). This, too, applies to the museum at large, as processes towards decolonisation question how practices of care could (or should) be applied across all aspects of museum work (such as suggested by Morse, 2021). Care for people and (their) objects can take different shapes or forms: it may include a practice of asking for informed consent for different aspects of the collaboration; providing safe spaces (Boersma, 2023; Kambunga et al., 2023); and an overall *careful* approach (Zwart et al., 2021) to the ethical guidelines and practices in the collaborative process.

The need for some of the outlined ethical practices, like that of informing participants about the project and project outputs and requesting their permission to use these outputs, as well as their names, photographs of their process and other materials, only becomes truly apparent after it has gone wrong. The practice of asking for informed consent is an integrated part of ethnographic research practices, yet it is not always part of participatory memory work. The project 'daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives' (2016–2017) at the MEK provides the evidence. This project responded to the refugee protection crisis in Europe through a most 'radical' form of participation hosted by the museum, which led to an exhibition, a number of

events and a free, open-access publication (Tietmeyer, 2017). The project was radical in the sense that the museum took a step back as the artist group 'KUNSTASYL' (brought together by the leading artist of the project) took over 550 square meters of empty exhibition spaces for several months to develop artworks, installations and bring these together in an exhibition. Over 100 participants were involved – most of whom had only recently arrived in Germany and were still living in temporary shelters at the time – yet only a small group took part in the process from beginning to end. The museum's role was limited to initial negotiations with the leading artist, providing the funding as well as materials for the project, developing a historical narrative to be included in the exhibition and catalogue, and arranging press and public relations (PR) for the project. The museum did not guide the workshop-like process in its exhibition spaces but left this process and the communication with the participants up to the leading artist. When a problem arose, such as when the museum guards told off the participants for walking barefoot in the spaces made available to them, museum staff stepped in to resolve the issue. However, not all issues were noticed or addressed by staff members at the time, as came to light as a result of a research project by one of the authors of this chapter (Boersma, 2023). It uncovered ethical problems that could have been avoided by openly discussing and obtaining informed consent. In interviews, former project participants discussed how they had not been asked for permission to be included in film, photographs, and text by the press who had visited and reported on the project, nor had they been asked to sign a form for what was released by the museum on social media. The MEK hired an external PR company to develop a print marketing campaign, produce short films, do interviews with the participants, post on social media, and interact with other users. They did all of this without having asked the participants for permission or discuss the importance of their informed consent beforehand. The museum and the PR firm had not discussed practices of informed consent, nor had they considered the implications of this approach, which left many participants feeling overwhelmed or ignored. They did not feel represented by, nor did they feel a sense of ownership over the images in which they appeared.

A practice of informed consent could have heightened the participants' awareness of what the visual materials were created for and ensured that they agreed with what was shared online. The example demonstrates the significance of this practice, whether what comes next is carried out by museum staff or by an external company. The museum is responsible to ensure a practice of care, whether this is limited to informed consent, or extends across further tools to ensure a shared understanding. An ethical practice of care should not be limited to what the museum can and is willing to provide, but rather be a collaborative process, in which the goals, objectives, rules of internal and external communication, and further guidelines for the process are identified together with the participants.

4   Collaboratively developing and practicing of ethics

The projects discussed so far vary greatly and present a small sample of the participatory routes taken by and in museums. Due to their diversity, the examples offer

insight into an array of practical challenges and considerations to ensure an ethical approach. They reveal the ways in which ethics manifest through the tools at hand and the actions of practitioners (and participants, should they be able to weigh in on this process). The ethical practices of accessibility, representation, positionality, and care only reflect a selection of what needs to be considered and discussed in preparation for, during, and after a project. They provide a lens through which to assess what happened in the process, and at what point practices, practitioners, or the institution fell short. The practices outlined in this chapter build on the updated codes of ethics and recent studies; rather than addressing ethical practices of handling objects (of those perceived as 'others'), the ethical practices outlined in this study highlight the human aspect of museum work. This underlines the importance of where ethics sit within a project – at what point in the process, in which spaces and through which objects and tools practices are defined – as well as who is included in these conversations and, therefore, whose ethics are considered relevant.

A participatory project can ensure an ethical approach in museums as public spaces by providing access, prioritising participants' views and perspectives, integrating first-hand knowledges in the interpretation of objects and histories, critically reflecting personal and institutional positionalities and beliefs, and ensuring care, respect, and consideration throughout. As part of this process, practitioners must question and confront the potential tokenisation of participants and their perspectives as a result (Kassim, 2017; Boersma, 2023, p. 113). What becomes especially apparent from the examples is that ethics have become an integrated aspect of the museum's participatory work only recently. Ideally, as for the project that is currently ongoing and the one planned for the near future, ethical practices are discussed, defined, and evaluated throughout the process rather than dealt with by practitioners as and when issues or concerns are addressed. The examples point out that a reassessment of the role of practitioners in a participatory process, including the process of defining its ethics, is crucial. It is due to their personal and subjective nature that ethics rely on both the museum's reflection of its subjectivity, as well as the inclusion of participants in the development of ethical guidelines for a project.

As part of a currently ongoing participatory project, the MEK is building on learnings from previous participatory work, drawing from the aforementioned 'Guidelines for Collaboration' (Indian Arts Research Center, 2019) and working together with the stakeholders in this project to develop and maintain ethical practices. Since 2022, the museum has been working on a collaborative research project[12] with the aim of conducting provenance research and assessing the possibilities for the repatriation of the objects once taken or acquired from the Sámi people[13] and currently part of the MEK's collection. Collected between 1880 and 1929, most of the objects, predominantly objects from everyday culture and handicrafts (*duodji*), are heterogeneous in terms of material, use, and meaning. The project entitled 'The Sámi Collection at MEK. A Multiperspective Approach of Provenance Research' combines indigenous and Western knowledge systems to assess the Sámi collection. Apart from archival provenance research, the MEK, and institutional partners from Sápmi and Sámi individuals developed a workspace

and depot which was titled 'Áimmuin' (meaning: achievable, nearness, as well as: in safe place). The space has been used by a selected group of crafters (*duojárat*), researchers, and artists who have spent and will spend time at the MEK to study (parts of) the collection. The first week of collaborating in this dedicated space has led the participants to request another week of working in the space as a group, as it has proven to establish fruitful connections, allowing for the shared study of the objects and facilitating discussions across different Sámi cultures and languages. It is a project that comes closer to Carpentier's maximalist participation (2011), being collaborative from the very beginning and bringing together political, institutional, and personal levels of involvement. The project serves both as a response and as a means to challenging colonial relations; yet this approach, naturally, requires clear ethical guidelines and approaches.

Building on learnings from previous projects and drawing from the aforementioned 'Guidelines for Collaboration', the museum staff discussed ethical procedures and requirements with the group of collaborators. The consent forms that were developed in the process reflected practices of care, as they prioritised creating a 'safe space' and ensured transparency about rules and procedures. A careful practice requires the museum to create a welcoming, warm, and friendly environment, in which the collaborators and the objects they will be researching and working with are treated with respect. The room in which the participants are working functions as a safe space: it is adapted based on their needs, it is entirely at their disposal, and will not be open to visitors during their work there. The museum guarantees access to all objects and information to hand. Throughout the project, the museum staff supports the project through the willingness to learn from the participants, whose approaches to and treatment of the objects, as well as the terminologies used to describe them will likely differ. A careful approach, too, requires the museum staff to be transparent about the museum's rules for the use of the space and clear about the finances of the project, including which costs are covered as part of the contracts with the *duojárs*. A significant aspect of this practice is that of consent, for the conditions surrounding the publicity of the project, including photography of people and objects and their publication on social media. All parties agreed on the form of collaboration, and during the first week at the MEK, the group asked to have the space to themselves too, so they could discuss how they wanted to move forward. The project is still in process at the time of writing this chapter. Throughout the collaboration, these guidelines will continuously be adapted as the project develops and its potential outputs become more concrete, both for the collaborators and for the museum. At the end of the project, the MEK hopes to work together with the *duojárs* and the participating Sámi institutions to evaluate this process and assess its shortcomings, in order to review the more practical steps that ensure a *careful* approach.

5   Conclusion

In this chapter, we have described a selection of different ethical practices fundamental to participatory memory work. As participation is deemed an increasingly integral aspect of museum work, practitioners are expected to review their

approaches to a participatory project and processes of collaboration, as well as the ways in which these affect the people they work with. Through a study of the updated codes of ethics and recent literature in combination with a review of a selection of exemplary projects at the MEK, we defined what ethical practices look like, and how they could gain a more central role in a participatory process.

Throughout the years, the MEK has taken a participatory approach to different aspects of its work, yet, especially during the initial participatory projects, ethical issues were considered to be inferior to organisational issues. Though ethics was acknowledged as an important aspect of museum work overall, its practical implementation was often understood to rely on staff having "people skills" – a notion that was not defined nor something for which training was provided. In addition, limited space and time were dedicated to evaluating the projects and addressing potential ethical issues that had arisen as part of it. Intending to learn from its mistakes, the museum initiated a project in which exchange with participants shaped the process both beforehand and throughout. Together with the collaborators in the project on the Sámi collection, the museum is developing and maintaining ethics in practice. The collaborative approach to ethical practices at the MEK is a work-in-progress and the staff continuously learn from and reflects on the conversations with the collaborators. Participatory projects are more likely to thrive when the ethical guidelines, questions, and necessary measures are negotiated together with the participants. It requires museum staff and participants to be transparent about their needs, expectations, and possibilities.

This chapter has shown how ethical practices take shape and pinpointed to where they might fall short. There is still a lot to learn about what this should look like, yet it is clear that international codes should address participation explicitly and point to the complexity of putting any given guidelines into practice. The available guidelines only present a potential starting point for ethical practices. Questions like "how can staff create a welcoming atmosphere?", "what should a 'safe space' in a museum look like?" and "what does care mean in practice?" cannot be answered by staff members alone, or even through previous participatory memory work. They need to be considered in collaboration with the project participants to identify what this means to each of the individual stakeholders. This chapter only looked at a fraction of potential participatory approaches in museums, drawing solely on examples from practices within the MEK. However, the examples pointed out that a professional approach to ethics does not pursue objectivity or a neutral approach. Instead, it recognises the need to see both the participants and the practitioners as a group of individuals with personal positionalities and perspectives and to recognise these positions and the relations between them in the process. Ethical practices that investigate and ensure accessibility, representation, positionality, and care should be seen as integral to a collaborative process that prioritises *the ethics of the participants*.

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Notes

1 Museum of European Cultures – National Museums in Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.
2 https://www.smb.museum/fileadmin/website/Museen_und_Sammlungen/Museum_Europaeischer_Kulturen/MEK_Mission_Statement_2020.pdf (Last accessed: 24/01/2024).
3 Participants and publics are mentioned separately to describe the different relationships between them and the museum staff, such as previously discussed by Morse (2021, p. 72) Participants usually are, for the duration of the project, internal to the organisation and involved in conversations that are not open to or shared with the public. Publics, made up of visitors and non-visitors, only come in once the project is open to the public (after the behind-the-scenes work is completed).
4 https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/plan-your-visit/address/
5 This project was part of the initiative 'Hauptsache Publikum!? Das besucherorientierte Museum' (The main thing is audience!? The visitor-oriented museum) of the Deutscher Museumsbund (German Museum Association), funded by the Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (2017–2019).
6 https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/exhibitions/detail/the-things-of-life/ (Last accessed: 20/08/2023).
7 https://www.smb.museum/en/exhibitions/detail/fulfillable-dreams-italian-women-in-berlin/ (Last accessed: 24/01/2024).
8 https://retedonneberlino.wordpress.com/ (Last accessed: 20/08/2023).
9 https://retedonne.net/it/ (Last accessed: 20/08/2023).
10 https://www.smb.museum/en/exhibitions/detail/doener-dienste-und-design-berliner-unternehmerinnen/ (Last accessed: 24/01/2024).
11 The meetings took place on February 2, February 16, April 25 and August 29, 2023.
12 More about this project can be found on the museum website: https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-europaeischer-kulturen/collections-research/research/sami-collection-at-mek/ (Last accessed: 20/08/23).
13 The Sámi are the only indigenous population in Northern Europe. They are at home in the region of Sápmi, which extends across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula. From the sixteenth century onwards, Sámi were subjected to marginalisation and faced strong assimilation policies. Their cultural traditions and languages as well as their practical and spiritual knowledge were suppressed and nearly destroyed. At the same time, museums in Europe and North America collected material and immaterial expressions of Sámi historical and contemporary culture.

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Part II

People and groups

5 Pluriversal futures

Design anthropology for contested memory making at the margins

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Asnath Paula Kambunga

1 Introduction

Decolonising discourses in the field of technology and design research argue that we need to move away from the universalising 'grand narratives' of knowledge production and focus instead on contextualising diverse and situated experiences, epistemologies, and narratives (Tlostanova, 2017; Schultz et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020; Lazem et al., 2021). This requires researchers to turn away from grand narratives and pay attention to contested everyday concerns, to voices that have been marginalised, and to power relations that are deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts. Such concerns are core to Participatory Memory Work, but there are few inclusive approaches to designing alternative futures in contested contexts through the participatory use of digital technologies (Onciul, 2015; De Nardi et al., 2019).

This chapter presents a design anthropological approach for the promotion of pluriversal futures, using design research and digital technology to enable the emergence of multiple voices and perspectives to emerge (Smith et al., 2016; Otto, 2016). Building on Fabian (2014 [1991]), we frame the contested – or the *contested everyday contexts* – as a strategy for exploring pluriversal futures by amplifying previously unheard voices and creating dialogues about contentious issues. Our focus on contested everyday spaces involves paying attention to mundane and marginalised voices – in our case, to the voices of young people and of communities who on a daily basis experience 'othering' or oppression in relation to dominant narratives and positionings (ibid.).

Design anthropology offers an interdisciplinary approach that can engage with emergent cultural practices and collaborative memory making (Otto et al., 2021; Smith, 2022; Kambunga et al., 2023). Our approach in this chapter addresses focuses on the cultural and digital practices in which young people in Namibia routinely engage in everyday life, practices that cross-cut the dominant grand narratives of coloniality in different ways. Intervening in these everyday practices and co-designing technologies allows new dialogues to be formed, new dialogues that reframe grand narratives and challenge political structures. This orientation towards pluriversality is based on the creation of a plurality of different conceptual spaces during the research process. Pluriversality refers to the possibility of people

designing and building multiple worlds as an alternative to the universal world that promotes a single future for all (Escobar, 2018; Leitão, 2023; Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2024). With pluriversality as our aim, we distinguish between three spaces: *reflective safe spaces*, *creative third spaces*, and *dialogic public spaces*. Together, these three spaces bring in different voices to enable particular dialogues at set stages of the research process.

The chapter presents our work using these spaces across three participatory case studies involving communities of young people in two centres, Denmark and Namibia. We brought together relations between personal everyday life and public discourse on contested issues. Across both cases, we found, there was a need for a deeper mutual understanding among our participants of the complexities of personal experience and of the temporal and political entanglements at stake. The creation of a safe space that met these young people's concerns became key to enabling mutual learning, shared goals and visions, and engagement in sensitive and political discussions. From this safe space, we moved into a creative third space, co-designing digital technologies as probes with which to scaffold the reframing of narratives and discourses in the wider public and virtual space. Our design anthropological approach to creating inclusive spaces thus took its point of departure in contested everyday concerns. The creation of tangible technologies then empowered it to open up public spaces for dialogue that would bring forward alternative futures and potential actions. The chapter is guided by the following questions: How can we co-design culturally situated spaces and dialogues around contested issues which allow for pluriversality? How can digital technology enable and amplify marginalised voices to create alternative future narratives at a wider scale? These questions address central issues in the approach to decolonisation in practice – by intervening and experimenting with complex everyday concerns, memories, and experiences towards pluriversal futures.

In the following section, we outline our theoretical orientation towards pluriversality and the three conceptual spaces on which we base our approach. We then introduce our case studies across Denmark and Namibia and discuss how a design anthropological approach to the contested can address contemporary futures at the margins. In the final section, we present our research framework as a contribution to participatory memory work towards pluriversality.

2   Decolonising design towards pluriversality

2.1   *Decolonial design and computing*

Discourses of decolonisation and ideals of pluriversality are an integral part of ongoing theoretical debates in the field of design and human–computer interaction (HCI) research (Smith et al., 2021; Leitão & Noel, 2022). These debates are about changing the terms of designing futures and acknowledging and appreciating diverse and coexisting epistemologies, both historical and contemporary (Escobar, 2018; Leitão & Noel, 2022). Researchers in the field are seeking ways

to decolonise design that, rather than promoting dominant historical realities and entanglements, can help generate future possibilities for people living with the consequences of the colonial past. Pluriversality is a challenge to universality and to Western ideologies of modernity (Mignolo, 2018a). There has been a significant shift in conversations, with many now seeking to challenge and move away from the grand narratives of technology design and *de-link* from the Western hegemonic principles, focusing instead on dialogues and on the missing knowledge pieces at the margins (Tlostanova, 2017; Wong-Villacres, 2020; Garcia et al., 2021; Schultz et al., 2018). Garcia et al. have proposed pathways to help HCI researchers reflect on such difficulties by acknowledging the many approaches to knowledge generation while avoiding 'othering' (2021). They argue that our positions and actions as researchers can achieve change in the HCI field:

> It is through understanding our histories, the impacts of the methods we use, the communities with whom we work, the multiple voices present in our work, and the ways in which power courses through it all, that we will be able to enact the change that we desire.
>
> (Garcia et al., 2021, p. 8)

In earlier theoretical debates, before discussions of decolonisation became prominent within HCI, researchers drew perspectives from postcolonial theory to address inequality and cultural differences. For example, Irani et al. (2010) defined *postcolonial computing* in response to the rising concern within the HCI field about a lack of cross-cultural awareness and the problematisation of power relations facing users within historically colonised contexts. Within the decolonial discourse however, postcolonial theory is not seen as emancipatory, because it neglects in practice to incorporate marginalised perspectives, and as such is often considered a "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism" (Ali, 2014). As a result, surprisingly few contributions have actively demonstrated what a shift to decolonising design could mean in practice, and researchers have made the case that even "well-intentioned decolonial HCI approaches often promote neocolonial design" (Smith et al., 2020).

2.2   *A transcultural lens to decolonising design*

A transcultural HCI approach focuses on inclusiveness and on marginalised voices, a focus that makes it well-suited for using or designing modern technologies that can bolster inclusive and comprehensive computing (Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2017; Himmelsbach et al., 2019; Lazem et al., 2021). Despite much criticism of Westernised mainstream HCI, Himmelsbach et al. (2019) argue that inclusive and diversity-sensitive research approaches in HCI do have the potential to empower participants and provide legitimacy to the pragmatic results of a project. Rooted in global south research contexts and indigenous traditions, transcultural community technology design aims to support the continual creation and re-creation of new meanings that are continuously reflected within the existing design context (Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2017). Narratives and counter-narratives are

encouraged and freely collide to form joint narratives that are in turn subjected to reflection. Within a transcultural technology design approach awareness of cultural and indigenous knowledges, is explorative and nuanced, addressing the familiar and the unfamiliar, the temporal past-present-future, and the empirical and the abstract at the same time (ibid.). Translating such visions into concrete research practices and strategies that can build pluriversal participation and knowledge production, however, is a task that still needs more attention.

2.3   *Participatory design for inclusive futures*

Participatory design research has its own long-established political traditions of focusing on the central values of equality, democracy, and empowerment. Creative methods have been developed for engaging communities in the co-design of their own possible (technology) futures (Simonsen & Robertsen, 2013; Bødker et al., 2022). The field has succeeded in engaging with and facilitating participatory innovation and future making at the margins, and with its well-developed tools for creating agonistic spaces and processes, it has addressed the sensitivity of power relations (Björgvinsson et al., 2012; Ehn et al., 2014). As new forms and meanings of participatory design emerge in the Global South – forms that pay particular attention to local conditions and values and underlying political and historical entanglements (Winschiers-Theophilus et al., 2010; Bødker & Kyng, 2018) – agendas of contemporary societal injustice and marginalisation advance diverse epistemologies and shifts towards pluriversality with the aim of amplifying oppressed voices (Calderon Salazar & Huybrechts, 2020; Smith et al., 2020; Bray & Harrington, 2021). This has given rise to a new wave of culturally inclusive and situated design practices for supporting future post-disciplinary research.

2.4   *Design anthropology for decolonising design at the margins*

The potential, as we see it, lies within an integrated design anthropological approach that combines participatory and transcultural HCI approaches with a deeper attention to and understanding of the social, cultural, and epistemological entanglements of everyday practices – especially with minority communities and stakeholders in contested contexts (Kambunga et al., 2023).

Design Anthropology has been put forward as a decolonised methodology (Tunstall, 2013) that is well-positioned to address local cultural values and historical entanglements. Its future orientation towards heterogeneous futures is aligned with Escobar's notion of 'pluriversal design' in which a multiplicity of voices are created and pluriversal ways of worldmaking emerge (Escobar, 2015, 2018). Smith and Otto (2016) highlight how the conditions of futures in design anthropology are imagined, negotiated, and co-constructed through contextualised sites of cultural engagement. Emphasising "emergence" and "intervention" as core design anthropology principles, they argue that these processes are inextricably linked in a dialectical movement of investigation, knowledge generation, and

transformation (Akama et al., 2018; Smith, 2022). Design anthropology is committed to an extended temporal context that includes different versions and narratives of pasts-presents-futures, and is prepared to engage with these through both theoretical analysis and hands-on experimentation (Otto & Smith, 2013). The critical positionality of the researcher in design anthropology – simultaneously analyst, interventionist, and co-creator – facilitates an approach to shared knowledge-making in which different ways of knowing and world-making are scaffolded through the process (Escobar, 2017; Smith, 2022). Futures here are seen as emergent, and contingent, in their plural forms:

> as *multiple* and *heterogeneous* versions brought within experimental reach and shaped through uncertainty, experimentation, collaboration and contestation at specific sites of design anthropological engagement.
>
> (Kjærsgaard et al. 2016, p. 2, emphasis in original)

The emphasis is therefore on the situated making of particular futures, and how these might constitute other ways of knowing and other forms of world-making than dominant perspectives. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018b) and Escobar (2017) point out, decolonial work cannot just be observed through ethnographic participant observation. Those who seek to challenge the status quo must I experience, embody, and enact it. Advancing other forms of design based on such integrated and participatory approaches can scaffold moves towards pluriversality and "a world where many worlds fit" (Escobar, 2018: xvi). In this way, we can support the development of decolonial design in practice (Smith et al., 2021; Kambunga et al., 2022; Terry et al., 2024). Such approaches require the building of spaces, we argue – not just for academic researchers, but for engaging diverse citizens and communities in addressing the contemporary challenges of social and racial justice, economic and political inequality, and past injustices, specifically, those at the margins (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

3   Extending spaces for pluriversal voices

Building on such trajectories, we anchor our approach to pluriversal futures solidly in the everyday experiences of people in situated and contested contexts. Based on our empirical research with communities at the margins, we introduce below the three conceptual spaces, that form the foundation of our contribution to participatory memory work – the *reflective safe space*, a *creative third space*, and the *curated public space*.

First, there is the *reflective safe space*. This can be seen as an exclusive space, a purposeful intervention in which people can facilitate and reposition their understanding of their own positions in everyday life. Kambunga et al. (2023) define the safe space as:

> a consciously developed social environment for thoughts, situated actions, and mutual learning that allows participants both to engage in dialogues

about their everyday experiences, tensions, and contested pasts, and conse-
quently to imagine and co-create alternative and plural futures.

(Kambunga et al., p. 2)

The safe space deals with intricate relations between the researchers and partici-
pants whose voices are marginalised or oppressed, who experience othering and lack
of 'coevalness' (Fabian, 2014 [1991]), or who are unable to voice their concerns
about sensitive, political, or contested topics. We characterise the safe space as a
space of mutual trust and cultural sensitivity where – unlike consensual decision-
making – multiple epistemologies can be explored, and personal and collective eve-
ryday experiences can be probed (Smith et al., 2020). As Tsing advocates, the safe
space enables entanglement and contamination through collaboration across differ-
ence (2015: p. 28), allowing local worldviews to work as assemblages that expand
across space and time (ibid.). These voices are brought into a detached design space
and 'elevated' so that they can be collectively explored, de-constructed, and re-
constructed. The safe space is therefore a space for mutual reflection on narratives
and counter-narratives, for the collective scoping of common objectives and visions
for the process. Achieving the safe space therefore requires researchers to build ago-
nistic spaces based on trust, values, and ethics (Tunstall, 2013) between exclusive
participants, agonistic spaces that are detached from external threats or from any
risk of political repercussions from dominant narratives (Kambunga et al., 2023).
For marginalised voices and political contexts, the safe space allows for particular
worldviews to emerge. It is therefore a precondition for entering into the third space
equipped with a reflective perspective that can then be synthesised creatively.

Second comes the *creative third space*. This is a design space that involves diverse
stakeholders in acts of learning and engagement through experimentation. The con-
cept of the 'third space' is well known in participatory design (Muller & Druin,
2012), rooted in colonial theory (Bhabha, 1994). Here, people with hybrid identities
can continue to negotiate an ongoing merging of colonising cultures. We denote this
space as a collaborative process and space for continual co-exploration, reflection, and
creativity, in which a wider group of stakeholders are engaged to instantiate diverse
narratives and counter-narratives in a creative manner. Within the creative space,
diverse analogue and digital materials, technologies, and platforms can be used as
part of a process of dialogic curation and technology design (Smith & Iversen, 2014;
Palmieri et al., 2021). The narratives and materials that have been co-created through
this process are then selected and integrated with new materials and technologies in
a prototyping process. The affordances and qualities of these new technologies allow
them to function as probes that are circulated and continuously reworked within the
process so as to remain flexible and open to different epistemologies, temporalities,
and worlds-in-the-making (Kambunga et al., 2021, 2022). As Tsing argues:

World-making projects overlap. While most scholars use ontology to seg-
regate perspectives, one at a time, thinking through world making allows
layering and historically consequential friction.

(Tsing, 2015, p. 292)

In this regard, just de-linking worldviews is not sufficient; rather, the crucial objective is the intentional entanglement and prototyping of alternatives. Like this, the creative third space becomes an exploration and careful curation of coexisting narratives and their instantiation with a view to a more open and public space.

Third and last comes the *public curated space.* Here, topics or aspects from the safe space and the third creative space are used to create wider engagement with diverse publics and politics (DiSalvo, 2012; Smith & Otto, 2016; Stuedahl et al., 2021). This can take various forms –exhibitions or media debates, or inviting broader communities to engage in dialogic space to produce alternative narratives. The public curated space is characterised not only by intentional disruption or contention of power structures but also by a determination to remain constructively oriented towards future-oriented dialogues that cannot be directly controlled by one group of stakeholders or participants. The aim in achieving this dialogic and reciprocal space is not to pursue or agree upon 'the truths', but to negotiate diverse, multiple, and conflicting understandings. Third spaces are therefore deliberately agonistic spaces, in which technology design and curated narratives probe, provoke, and engage the political (DiSalvo, 2015) with the aim of integrating and shifting perspectives through democratising processes of innovation at the margins (Björgvinsson et al., 2012). Ultimately, the goal is to create a circular movement back into the everyday lives, knowledges, and ongoing practices of a wider group of people – to make the everyday spaces, and who controls them, more inclusive and pluriversal.

4   Participatory memory making(s) – addressing contentious matters

This section presents two earlier research cases in Denmark (first author) and Namibia (second author) to demonstrate the background on which we developed the conceptual framework we present in this chapter. The two cases show our previous exploration of very different cultural arenas and contexts using design anthropological and participatory approaches and advanced interactive technologies to frame, facilitate, and engage diverse voices, communities, and stakeholders in creating future memories.

4.1   *Co-designing everyday digital futures in contested museum spaces*

The research and exhibitions experiment, *Digital Natives*, investigated the transition of cultural heritage institutions in a digital and participatory age (Giaccardi, 2012; see Chapter 1). The objective was to explore possible futures involving technology and participation in museums, based on emergent everyday digital practices among young people in Denmark (Smith, 2013). Rather than focusing on digital heritage communication inside the museum, the project was framed to explore emergent digital practices and narratives in Danish teenagers' everyday lives. This framing challenged assumptions about 'digital generations' and 'participation or

new forms of 'digital memories' in the future museum (Smith & Otto, 2016). With this constellation, a diagonal and contested power structure was created, on the one hand, between the museum expert curators and the (by comparison) inexperienced young participants and, on the other hand, between the young digital experts and the inexperienced traditional museum staff.

The museum professionals insisted on their expert understanding of formal versions and knowledges about cultural heritage. Wishing to retain their authority in the institutional space, they resisted the evolution of the young people's everyday narratives into a co-designed exhibition space. To experiment with alternative narratives and approaches to digital (everyday) futures, the project in its early phases therefore had to be taken outside the museum institution and into a more experimental art-hall context. We now conceptualise this as the *reflective safe space*. Within the reflective safe space, the initial process of co-exploring the teenagers' digital worlds yielded awareness of their own digital practices and behaviours (e.g. ways of collecting and storing data, images, text messages, film, their use of social media to pursue social relations, and their interests in artistic film, fashion, or politics) in their early uses of Facebook, iPhones, and online games. These created new practices, relations, and means of expression in their everyday lives (Smith & Otto, 2016).

Through weekly workshops and a co-designed mock-up exhibition and prototyping of their digital worlds, the young participants shifted between the safe space (working with the design anthropologist) and the creative third space (working with the interaction design researchers). The participatory process was framed as a series of collective events, with smaller interdisciplinary groups working around separate topics and technologies. The point of this co-design process of dialogic curation (Smith & Iversen, 2014, Smith & Iversen 2011) was to develop new types of engagement, using novel interactive technologies that could connect these young people's everyday practices and the museum space in new ways. While the collective events worked to align and create commitment towards the common goal of the exhibition, work in the individual groups was marked by tensions between interests and ambitions among different group members, for example between the young (digitally expert) participants and the interaction design (technologically expert) researchers. While the collaborative process was structured with the aim of co-exploring and reframing the young people's emergent everyday cultures and digital practices, the interaction design researchers' focus often remained on the emerging interactive technologies and, in turn, the ideas or concepts afforded by these technologies. These ongoing frictions of interest were central to the work of the design anthropologist, who had to continuously facilitate the integration of everyday experiences taking into account the potentials and abilities of the technologies into an interactive exhibition format that could highlight new forms of memory making practices and that could thus enable audiences to engage with radical representations of existing and potential cultures of the future (Smith & Otto, 2016).

Towards the end of the project, as signs for the final opening of the exhibition were made public, the museum came back into the project as a formal partner. Uncertainty about how the exhibition would develop in concert with the audience in the museum

space was a challenge to the established museum processes (Stuedahl et al., 2021). However, the dialogic processes of curating the exhibition broke down the created tensions. Ultimately, the dialogic processes worked to augment similar dialogues that had been explored earlier in previous phases of the project, but now in the context of a larger public domain. This meant that diverse groups and generations were now engaged in exploring and negotiating the emerging everyday digital practices and memory making processes of the young people in new ways.

4.2   *Contesting San stereotyping on an inter-media platform*

The San people of Southern Africa constitute about 2 percent of Namibia's inhabitants. They are among the most marginalised of Namibia's ethnic groups (Suzman et al., 2001). Their livelihoods and education are minimal, they lack access to resources, and they have extremely limited political influence (Dieckmann et al., 2014). Across Southern Africa, the San tribes have suffered from "othering" propagated in contrasting portrayals of their history ranging from the derogatory to the glamorised (Dodd, 2002). Fernando et al. (2018), a group of San authors, describe their situation as follows:

> In contemporary Namibia the San face many forms of discrimination, including prejudices such as being drunkards, childish, incapable of sustaining themselves, and primitive. Even the term "San," which has negative connotations, was designated for a set of various tribes with dissimilar languages.

> (Fernando et al., 2018: p. 207)

We wanted to address the "othering" and the promulgated misrepresentation within the digital space. We therefore engaged a number of Namibian San in the production of a web-based mediated intermedia installation that sought to provoke a public dialogue that would openly challenge stereotypes about the San (Stichel et al., 2018).

First, within the *safe space,* a group bringing together both urban and rural San community members with trusted researchers explored and reflected on existing versus anticipated portrayals. Then within the *third space*, conversation provocations were co-created in the form of video clips presenting diverse impressions. These spanned a motivational speech by a young female San, an account of struggle by a young male San, a traditional dance in full attire, San people as digital media producers of lost cultures, and a staged promotion of multiculturalism with different tribal representatives. A group of mostly urban Namibian citizens were recorded reacting to these videos and played back to the San people, whose reactions were also recorded. These threads of provocation and reaction built the basis for the third space, the public online *curated space.* Here video clips were arranged as threads of reactions to themes in which audiences can contribute to an open dialogue directly addressing social stigma.[1]

A preliminary analysis of the reactions showed a large range of variation in emotions, appreciation, and encouragement as compared with judgements. The preliminary analysis also showed the need for an ongoing dialogue between the tribes and among the San with the aim of deconstructing the established narrative fuelled by the media and by the hearsay of distorted personal accounts. The remoteness of many of the relocated San communities, combined with their lack of access to social media and other technologies, has hampered their contribution to the grand narrative of their place among Namibia's people, silencing their voices over a long period. Thus the project initiated a mediated public conversation in the digital space to accelerate the creation of authentic and alternative narratives, providing the San people with an opportunity to co-create a more pluriversal future.

In the following section we demonstrate our approach of co-creating decolonial futures departing from contested contexts in a recent research project on future memory making with young people in Namibia. Here our conceptual framework – the *reflective safe space*, the *creative third space*, and the *curated public space* – is used as a lens for demonstrating aspects that are relevant (across the cases) for developing decolonising research practices towards pluriversality.

5   Memory making in contested spaces – Namibian Born Frees

The *Futures memory making with Namibian born frees* project was a research and exhibition project (2019–2022)[2] conducted by the authors of this chapter, in collaboration with ten Namibian Born Frees (young Namibians born since 1990, the year of Namibia's formal independence). Namibia gained independence in 1990 after having been a South African protectorate (1915–1990) dominated by an apartheid regime, following a long era of German colonisation (1884–1915). Today, the legacies of apartheid and colonialism are omnipresent in Namibia's everyday life, ranging from monuments to sociopolitical discourses that propagate a one-sided 'grand narrative' in which an older generation of politicians cast themselves as freedom fighters and politicians (Melber, 2014; Becker, 2023, 2017). In this contemporary landscape, the born free has been given a spectator position only. This is justified on the grounds of their lack of first-hand experience of colonial times. The Born Frees' voices, memories, and everyday concerns are consequently marginalised.

Amidst these sociopolitical tensions, we engaged our group of Born Frees in collaborative interventions in which they shared their everyday narratives relating to Namibia's colonial pasts, prototyping technological interactive installations that could amplify their voices as Born Frees (Kambunga et al., 2020). We engaged these young people in addressing matters of concern to them by creating a 'safe space' in the form of a series of closed sessions in which they could engage freely in highly political discourses about Namibian postcolonial realities (Smith et al., 2020; Kambunga et al., 2021, 2020). What became clear through the sessions was these Born Frees' lack of awareness and critical reflection about their postcolonial present related to the colonial pasts. They did not challenge their perception of high expectations from the older generation and their lack of agency in the present. They attributed these solely to their identity as being Born Free and not having

contributed to their country's liberation struggle and their limited knowledge of the country's colonial pasts. Debates and traces of colonialism were ever-present in their surroundings but were rarely included in private conversations or reflected in educational practices. Yet, with colonial and apartheid legacies omnipresent in their everyday life (Fairweather, 2006; Becker, 2023), it was evident that they lacked means or platforms for critical discussion that could reduce their fears of repercussions or judgement from members of society who criticise their position in postcolonial dialogues.

The project provided the 'safe space' for reflection through probing and dialogue about the young people's cultural realities. Everyday forms of postcolonialism were discussed, along with how memories of the past are entangled in the present (Smith et al., 2020; Kambunga et al., 2023). Through the safe space established, the researchers were able to engage in dialogues with the Born Frees, using dialogues, archive materials, and everyday narratives to support diverse perspectives of decolonial issues. Here, one of the local researchers' insider position as a Born Free herself provided a clear vantage point in shaping this space. Voicing her own experiences and guiding the dialogue, she was able to blur her roles as researcher, facilitator, and co-participant, shifting continually between insider/outsider positionalities. This move towards 'correspondence' (Gatt & Ingold, 2013) and 'coevalness' (Fabian, 2014 [1991]) between the Born Frees' experiences and aspirations as both research objects and subjects allowed the safe space to emerge and continue to co-develop. The ongoing engagements between the participants, the growing trust, and negotiations of shared goals served as a significant impetus in creating a relational (St John & Akama, 2022) space in which alternative voices and narratives could be explored and generated.

5.1 Postcolonial narratives of the Born Frees museum exhibition

Positioning the born free within the postcolonial grand narratives through their everyday engagement provided the group with incentives and agency relating to their own futures. In order to move against the authoritarian public representations, and engage with the possibilities of participatory memory work towards pluriversal futures (Koch & Smith, Chapter 1); De Nardi et al., 2019), the group planned to provide a major contribution to the discourse in the form of an interactive technology-enhanced public exhibition in the Independence Memorial Museum in the capital (Kambunga et al., 2020). A small group of interaction design students were invited to the 'third space' to co-design interactive technology installations amplifying the youths' voices, and through weekly design sessions over three months, five distinct installation concepts were ideated, prototyped, and evaluated, connecting the past, present, and future. The present was modelled as a soundscape playing simultaneously different stories, some louder than others, representing the current confusion of the born frees amidst a polyphonic noise and the desire to amplify unheard voices. The past showed the importance of indigenous knowledge and understanding history using augmented reality applications, while a photo booth simulated the feeling of being part of the struggle through photo

Figure 5.1 Two Born Frees in the Postcolonial Narratives of the Born Frees exhibition
directing the audience. The backdrop paintings are part of the permanent exhibi-
tion in the museum showing Namibia's liberation struggle.

collages. More challenging was the representation of possible futures. While the
prototypes demonstrated different elaborate future scenarios depending on choices
being made in the present, the concrete realisation of the installation was reduced
to a simple question-answer game path not leading to any specific concept of a
future (Kambunga et al., 2020a, 2020b).

The five installations and the other artefacts and probes were carefully curated
within a vast museum space against the omnipresent backdrop of the colonial era
(see Figure 5.1). The audience was directed through the stage of present confusion,
then seeking understanding and belonging in the past, then, back in the present, con-
fronted with ethical and corrupt decisions leading to economic inequality, ending in
a semi-decorated future space composed of VR education and entertainment and a
whiteboard wall of audience contributions (see Figure 5.2). Triggered by the instal-
lations, pluriversal dialogues emerged with and between museum visitors and the
youth, on contested issues of the past, the postcolonial present, and possible futures.

5.2   *Pluriversal design by virtual global exhibition*

According to Escobar (2018), designing for the pluriverse means designing differ-
ently to repair, heal, and care in a way that does not destroy the many worlds that
have been dominated by Western civilisation and patriarchal cultures of coloniality

Figure 5.2 Scenes from the Postcolonial Narratives of the Born Frees exhibition. A: an exhibition visitor controlling the soundscape. B: school children learning from the past installation.

and dominance. It also means designing '*otherwise*' to foreground different epistemologies, such as the previously unheard voices and marginalised groups. As demonstrated, designing towards the pluriversal can create inclusive forms of participatory memory work on contested issues to decolonise engagement into the public museum and debate (Onciul, 2015). Likewise, it can connect everyday concerns at the margins to the policy level and wider societal groups through deeper engagement with the future (Bryant & Knight, 2019).

To demonstrate how such potentials of pluriversal design might unfold within a larger global scale, we extended the physically curated, dialogic public space into a virtual cross-cultural exhibition that included six decolonising projects across diverse marginalised contexts (Kambunga et al., 2021). Based on the Namibian case, elements from the museum exhibition were extended into a virtual environment where global audiences, researchers, practitioners, and the communities involved in each case, could engage with diverse contested issues through a virtual reality platform (Kambunga et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). The Pluriversal Design Exhibition showed different perspectives of decolonial and pluriversal work involving researchers from nine very different global contexts (Australia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, Ghana, Greenland, Italy, Malaysia, and Namibia, see Figure 5.3. below). The researchers from Namibia, Denmark, and Greenland, who were part of the POEM project, created two separate virtual exhibitions, building on their collaborative museum exhibitions in the dialogic public space. The Namibian pluriversal (pluri-virtual) exhibition was co-designed with the same group of born frees and researchers, with the objective of exploring extending the safe space into a public (global) virtual environment in which young people could engage with policymakers through their avatars.

The Greenlandic project focused on the contemporary decolonial discourses in Greenland, specifically those relating to Denmark's colonisation of Greenland, and young people's calls to transform discourses in the public and private domains (Kambunga et al., 2021; Chahine, 2022; Jensen et al., 2022). This shift into a virtual domain required us to re-conceptualise our understanding of the three spaces
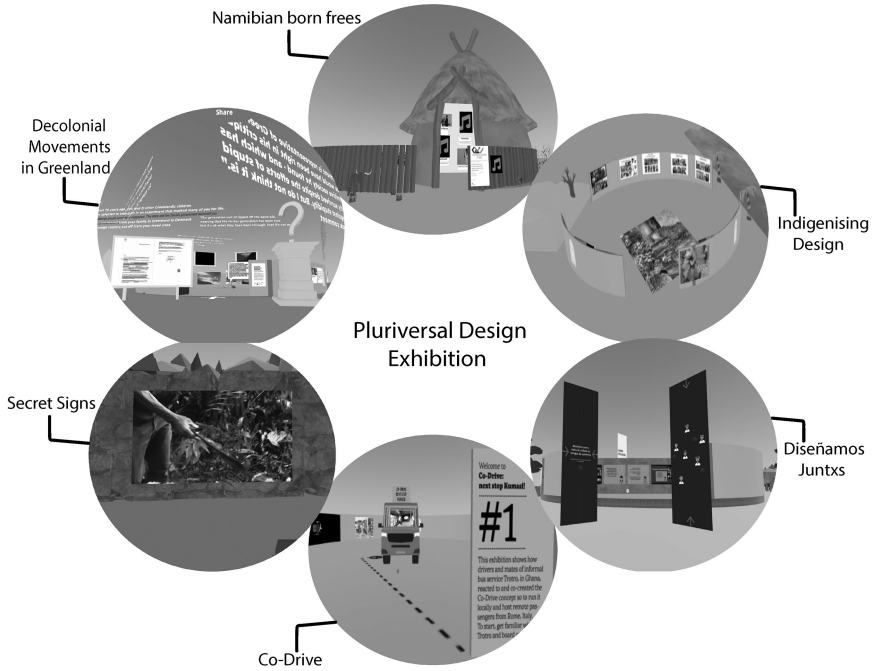
Figure 5.3 Overview of the Pluriversal Design Exhibition. Photo from the Pluriversal Design Exhibition.

in relation to a virtual environment, and explore how characteristics of a reflective safe space, and creative third space, could be extended into a virtual dialogic public space. This process of dialogic curation (Smith & Iversen, 2014; Stuedahl et al., 2021) afforded new types of participation across time and space.

The Namibian exhibition design was inspired by traditional architectural designs for houses and by the Namib Desert and Namibia's fauna and flora (see Figure 5.5). It was co-designed with the born frees to share their pride in their indigenous cultures and values. The born free wanted to engage local Namibian policymakers and critical scholars in discussions about the future, within the context of the contested pasts-presents-futures. These intergenerational dialogues traced the genealogy and positionalities of the born free in the political landscape in Namibia. While the VR environment opened up possibilities for engaging with local policymakers and people and communities more globally, it also presented challenges as it excluded people with poor or limited internet connection and smartphones which did not meet the technological specifications and data networks required to participate in the virtual reality. Similar to the Namibian VR exhibition, the Greenlandic VR exhibition made visible how the virtual spaces were created as culturally infused environments for politically charged debates across generations and domains (see Figure 5.4). Here, the formerly accepted and omnipresent public narratives that existed in the everyday contested contexts, collided with decolonial shifts and
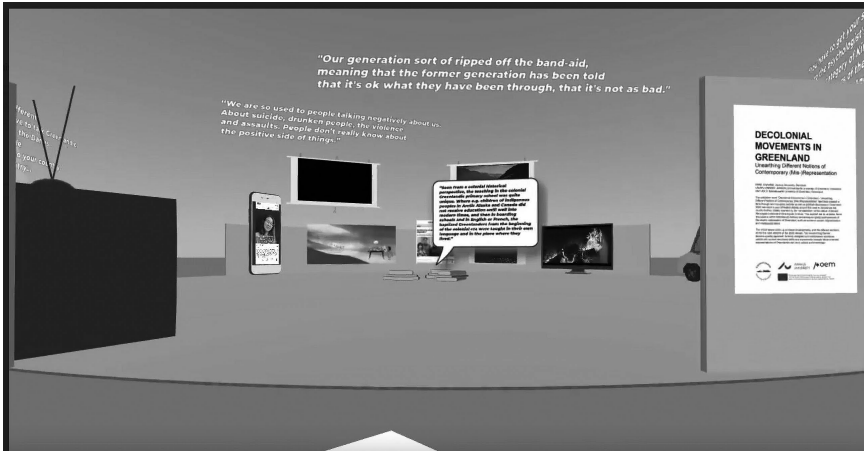
Figure 5.4 Entrance scene from the Decolonial Movement in Greenland exhibition. Photo from the Pluriversal Design Exhibition.

Figure 5.5 Overview of the Namibian born frees virtual exhibition. Photo from the Pluriversal Design Exhibition.

movements towards future-oriented representations of Greenlandic and Inuit culture and knowledge (Kambunga et al., 2021, p. 3; Chahine, 2022). In the virtual space, excerpts of popular media, educational history books and newspaper clippings with interviews and public social media comments were juxtaposed, and the virtual space became a collage of contemporary past-present-future experiences and voices. Simultaneously, as audiences and publics were able to move across

multiple virtual environments, it became evident how decolonial debates about disempowerment, in fact, connected across diverse global marginalised communities.

Pluriversality in this way, was brought to life in the dialogic public space through a combination of the virtual, tangible, and sensory exhibition pieces and narratives, which, combined, represented the many worlds of contemporary Namibia, Greenland, Malaysia, and beyond. The cultural, historical, and political situatedness of each context strengthened the potential for engaging audiences in local-global discussions on decoloniality. The born free exhibition created a virtual space for intergenerational dialogues, which clearly aligned with contested concerns in the Greenlandic exhibition, even if the representations here were curated mainly by the researchers to represent the wider public debates and outcomes from their collaborations with local youth communities (Jensen et al., 2022; Kambunga et al., 2021). In this way, the virtual exhibition created a kaleidoscope of differently positioned everyday contested contexts, which enabled audiences and researchers to co-explore contentious issues and epistemologies in a global dialogic public space, enhanced through the use of digital, spatial, and temporal frames.

6   Future trajectories for pluriversality at the margins

The chapter has presented a design anthropological approach to promote pluriversal futures in which different modes of research, interventions, and technologies enable multiple voices, memories, and perspectives at the margins. Demonstrating how we worked towards pluriversality through different conceptual spaces, the chapter contributes with a framework for decolonising participatory memory work through *reflective safe spaces*, *creative third spaces*, and *dialogic public spaces*, which together support the shift towards pluriversality.

We have presented a range of diverse digital and mediated dialogic public spaces, where we used interactive and emerging technologies to probe, curate, and scaffold dialogues and alternatives to contested everyday narratives. Across all these cases, young people and communities moved into and occupied the everyday spaces they have routinely 'othered' and in which their voices are deliberately excluded, overwritten by dominant power structures and narratives. While in a position of oppression and defensiveness, battling with the dominant narratives everyday leads to the use of counter-narratives, which maintains the dominant narrative at the centre and does not allow for young people to reposition themselves.

Design anthropological and participatory design can support inclusive research and practices that seek to achieve purposeful intervention to facilitate and reposition people's roles in everyday life – both for the participants and for the researchers. Thus, through a carefully facilitated intervention that creates a safe space, participants can reclaim agency and define their own position – no longer through the main narratives, but through their own concepts, experiences, and identities. Scaffolding such processes of participatory memory work requires paying close attention to different voices, positionalities, and epistemologies; anthropologists and design researchers with deep local knowledge and relational expertise can facilitate and shape such spaces of exploration and world-making and thus avoid

prematurely focusing on dominant cultural representations, on product and design outcomes. Such approaches, we argue, can engage more deeply in decolonising research and design practices through inclusive, coeval and relational engagements with contentious heritage and future memory making (Fabian, 2014 [1991]; Smith et al., 2020). Thus, in the safe space, the Digital Natives could explore their own socio-technical practices, the San community explored their identity independent of stigmatisation, and the Born Frees could set their own independent agenda redefining their agency for an inclusive future.

Once participants are re-rooted in their own alternative ontologies (Tsing, 2015), other futures become possible when entering the creative third space. To this end, interactive technologies can be a powerful ally for young people and for other seldom-heard voices, not only by providing an outlet to participate in the public dialogue but also by actively alternating the grand narratives towards promoting "pluriversal futuring". Futuring (Fry, 2019; Bryant & Knight, 2019), or pluriversal futuring here, enables us to connect our proposed framework and approach in everyday contested contexts, to the overarching pluriversal negotiation processes relating to alternating grand discourses in the context of participatory memory work. Our hope is that these approaches will invigorate the debates and practices in the field of HCI, participatory design and memory studies within decolonisation – by demonstrating how designers and researchers in diverse global contexts are working with and adapting design anthropological modes, concepts, methodologies, and sensibilities into decolonizing design practices. Careful curation of dialogic public spaces by those who so far have been oppressed enables new dialogues for a wider audience that promote the collective, relational, and imagined space(s) that emerge.

The framing of research projects in relation to 'the contested' is crucial if we are to move beyond current abstract discourses of decolonisation, and beyond contesting dominant narratives, towards a multiplicity of voices and memories in the making. The three spaces we outline in our framework can be used as a strategy to frame and navigate these processes. Moreover, they can support the researcher in continuously directing and driving the processes towards the shared goals of pluriversality. Common to all our cases is, first, a focus on marginalised people and everyday life, brought together with stakeholders and representations of dominant cultural narratives, and secondly, work using multiple technologies as probes for dialogues and to collectively reframe cultural narratives, memories, and futures. A transferable design anthropological approach towards pluriversality, should be guided by central concerns which need to be continually debated and developed into more nuanced in-situ practices. These include: How do we create safe spaces for contested dialogues which allow for pluriversality? Who owns or dominates the space, and can this be modified? Whose voices are heard, and how can we help amplify marginal voices? How can technologies help create spaces for contested dialogues and futures otherwise?

Digital technologies can be used to amplify voices and develop alternative narratives to move beyond the contested spaces. Following Tsing (2015), this process can make diverse ontologies visible, thus in turn enabling alternative worlds

to become possible. Navigating the politics of historicities, participation, and futures in a responsible and inclusive manner that takes the cultural, historical, and socio-political concerns of people's everyday lives into account as they continue to unfold, is thus core for advancing knowledge and modes of pluriversality at the margins.

Notes

1 https://africhi.installation.michaelworks.io/
2 The research project was part of the subproject *Decolonising design: futures memory making with Namibian born frees,* in the MSCA-H2020 *Participatory Memory Practices* (POEM) project, see https://www.poem-horizon.eu/. (Accessed 18 January 2024)

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6 Conducting bereavement interviews

Methodological reflections on talking about death, grief, and memory

Lorenz Widmaier and Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert

1   Introduction

Doing research in thanatology that involves talking to the bereaved can be challenging. This chapter discusses the methodological, ethical, and practical aspects a researcher must consider when conducting bereavement interviews. The methodological reflections are based on a doctoral research project exploring the impact of digital legacies on bereaved people. Given the dearth of literature on how researchers can talk to the bereaved, this chapter aims to support researchers who want to be well prepared for interviewing the bereaved.

First, a brief outline of the doctoral research project that inspired the methodological reflections offered in this chapter.[1] The aim of this project was to examine the impact of digital legacies on the bereaved individuals' practices of grief, mourning, and memory. Digital legacies comprise all the digital data a person leaves behind after their death, such as photographs and videos, messenger chats, or social media posts. The empirical research utilised a constructivist grounded theory methodology with an emphasis on interviews with the bereaved, media elicitation, and researcher-generated photography (for more details on the research methodology, see Widmaier, 2023). This research project provided some insights that can be useful to researchers working with the bereaved, especially when conducting interviews.

In the following sections, we discuss the aforementioned methodology for bereavement research. Furthermore, we discuss the ethical implications of conducting such research; offer some tips on recruiting participants for bereavement interviews; reflect on talking about death, grief, and memory with research participants; and address how these participants may be impacted by the interview. The sections are presented in a way that allows them to stand on their own, thus catering also for readers who are only interested in certain aspects. We discuss empirical examples from the doctoral research project throughout in order to provide practical guidance.

2   Methodological considerations for bereavement interviews

Accessing the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the bereaved is a multilayered and, above all, sensitive task. Applying qualitative, interview-based methodologies can

be particularly effective in unfolding the complexity of thought processes, emotions, grief, and memory practices of the bereaved. This section presents methodological considerations for bereavement interviews.

2.1   *Constructivist grounded theory methodology for thanatology*

First presented in 1967, grounded theory methodology (GTM) was developed by Glaser and Strauss while they were studying the awareness of dying in hospitals (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; see also Charmaz, 2006, p. 4); the subject matter that GTM is based on means that its methods have been developed to fit well with empirical bereavement research.

Of the many versions of GTM that exist today, Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach seems to be particularly fitting for empirical bereavement research for three reasons: First, in interviews on an emotional topic such as death and bereavement, the interview conditions can have an impact as to what the bereaved individual will share. This can include factors such as the interview location, the level of trust and rapport between researcher and participant, the researcher's responses to the participant's grief, the questions the researcher asks, and how they ask them. Second, a subjective attitude on the part of the researcher is unavoidable when carrying out interviews on death as many will have had direct or indirect experiences of bereavement (Meitzler, 2019, p. 121). Reichertz (2016) argued that admitting a degree of subjectivity on the part of a researcher can stimulate conversation (p. 82). Participants in the doctoral project on which this chapter is based showed that it was important to them that the researcher did not hide his subjectivity and personal experience in the interviews. This meant, for example, disclosing his own experience of grief when the participant asked about it. Subjectivity in research can be beneficial if researchers are reflexive "about their own interpretations as well as those of their research participants" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Third, the interview itself may change the participant's perspective, as talking is also a process of reflection. One participant, Mareike (aged 49, lost her 72-year-old partner two and a half years before the interview), said at the end of the interview: "I've just realised some very important things…. So I have been sensitised again by this conversation… I think that's quite good… that I'm taking a different look at things."[2] A constructivist GTM asks the researcher to embrace and reflect on the dynamics of emotional bereavement interviews and is therefore well suited as a methodology for empirical bereavement research.

2.2   *Media-elicitation interviews with researcher-generated photography*

The doctoral project on which this chapter is based used media elicitation and researcher-generated photography – two techniques that can be used in interviews to produce richer data. The study also took into account that contemporary mourning and remembering practices increasingly rely on multimedia (see

Stylianou-Lambert & Widmaier, 2023). This section examines these techniques in detail, as they can be used for future research projects on bereavement.

The method of media elicitation is not yet well defined, but it is closely related to the well-established method of photo elicitation (Harper, 2002). With media elicitation, research interviews can discuss media beyond just photographs. Bereavement practices are inextricably linked to memory, and memory is inextricably linked to media. Van Dijck (2008) said "we have constructed our experiences and our memories through and in media" (p. 79), leading to "mediated memories" (p. 76). Participants in the doctoral project were encouraged to bring up and discuss not only photographs but also videos, messenger chats, voice messages, or social media timelines. Harper (2002) stated that talking about a photograph in an interview setting "leads to deep and interesting talk" (p. 23); the media-elicitation interviews of the doctoral project confirmed this for diverse forms of digital media. The significance of memory and media in bereavement makes media elicitation an effective instrument in bereavement interviews: they can initiate emotional and dynamic conversations, elicit memories and stories from the participants, and provide a deeper understanding of their life stories and how the loss impacted them.

There is no mention of photography for data collection in key GTM literature (for example, Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Bryant, 2017 do not mention photography). Overdick (2010) reflected on the use of photography as a tool for empirical research in ethnography and stated that it can be consistent with the iterative process of GTM (p. 17) if integrated into a continuous process of discovery (p. 286). Taking photographs during the interviews of the doctoral study added a visual documentation of the participants' practices of bereavement and memory for analysis, and facilitated a visual narrative to express what could not be said in words.

All the participants in the doctoral project gave permission for photographs to be taken of their memories and memory practices; for example, of their smartphones or computer screens showing their social media accounts, or of their loved ones' farewell letters. Their openness in this regard could, to an extent, be attributed to the fact that they were informed the photographs would only be used for analysis and that they would be asked again if a photograph was a candidate for publication. In highly emotional interviews, a researcher may think that taking photographs would be disruptive or even inappropriate, but participants signalled the opposite, perceiving it as a sign of interest and appreciation. Nevertheless, participants were asked for their consent each time before a photograph was taken during the interview. Moreover, photography allowed for a short break to reflect or regroup emotionally – which can be beneficial in bereavement interviews.

3 Ethical considerations for bereavement interviews

Ethical principles are important in qualitative research in which people are asked to participate, but even more so when those people are from a vulnerable group. This

section discusses whether there are specific ethical principles researchers should be aware of when interviewing bereaved people. Dyregrov (2004) pointed out that "the vulnerable groups themselves are the best judges of whether participation in research is perceived as harmful or beneficial" (p. 392). Grief hurts, but learning to cope with the experience can also lead to personal growth and empowerment – and the bereaved are capable of self-determination about participation in research (cf. Whitfield et al., 2015).

While some bereaved would be unwilling to talk about their grief and would not participate in interviews, the participants in the doctoral study valued the opportunity to do so and had personal motivations for participating. They also found the interview process to have impacted them positively and commented that it is precisely not talking about their grief that burdens them. A number of studies have reached similar conclusions around participation in bereavement studies (Cook & Bosley, 1995; Dyregrov, 2004; Hynson et al., 2006; Buckle et al., 2010; Dyregrov et al., 2011; Gekoski et al., 2012; Omerov et al., 2014; Akard et al., 2014; Stiel et al., 2015; Whitfield et al., 2015; Andriessen et al., 2018; Andriessen et al., 2022). Largely independent of the characteristics of the participants and the circumstances of the death (cf. Andriessen et al., 2022, p. 8), these studies broadly agree that the participation of bereaved people in research projects does not lead to long-term negative consequences. In addition, most participants reported positive effects of participation. On the whole, the studies tend to support that it is ethically safe to conduct research with bereaved people.

However, bereavement interviews can still be highly emotional and sometimes distressing. In particular, open-ended interview questions invite participants to delve deep into their stories. For example, the participants in the doctoral project reflected on the dying process of their loved one, described how they discovered their loved one after a suicide, or re-experienced the grief they felt immediately after the death. But it was precisely such reflections that participants often found particularly helpful in retrospect, even though they may have been distressing at the time of the interview. As Rosenblatt (1995) mentioned, "hurting may be part of healing" and "bereaved people may gain enormously from talking with someone who takes their stories seriously and witnesses and acknowledges their pain" (p. 144).

Because grief reactions can occur in bereavement interviews, some authors have considered it essential that researchers themselves are trained in bereavement counselling, or at least receive supervision from a counsellor or therapist (Parkes, 1995; Stroebe et al., 2003). But if researchers feel that they cannot talk to the bereaved without special training for fear of harming them, this could reduce the amount of bereavement research being carried out. We would like to question the necessity of such special training and to allay this potential fear of researchers new to the field of bereavement research. On the one hand, some authors already noted a closeness between research and counselling – even if their objectives are different (Meitzler, 2019) – which calls into question the need for additional training. They saw similarities in the open, intimate, and narrative style of the conversations, in the empathic and attentive listening of the interviewer (Buckle et al., 2010; Meitzler, 2019), in "acknowledging, avoiding being judgmental" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 149),

and observed some therapeutic effects of the interview (see Section 6). On the other hand, painful grief is not only experienced in the presence of trained therapists, but bereaved persons cope with it in their daily lives. It is therefore unlikely that bereavement interviews will cause pain that hits the participants unexpectedly; or, as Buckle et al. (2010) put it, "the interview did not cause pain, it allowed for its expression" (p. 114).

In short, identifying the bereaved as vulnerable per se, is likely to contribute to the societal problem of much talk about bereavement but little talk with the bereaved. This is not to say that talking to the bereaved does not have its own considerations – what this chapter is about – but that it is not a particular ethical challenge. Rather, it is the assumption itself that talking to the bereaved is a particular ethical challenge that is ethically questionable.

4   Recruitment and building trust

Finding interviewees for bereavement research and building the trust needed to secure their participation can be challenging. This section offers suggestions, based on the doctoral project with 33 participants, on how to recruit participants for bereavement research.

4.1   Recruitment

For the doctoral project, initial participants were found by contacting a variety of individuals and groups from the researcher's own social and professional networks and beyond: family, friends, academic peers, bereavement counsellors, bereavement group facilitators, priests, hospice employees, funeral directors, mourners who expressed their grief on social media, and visitors of a museum dedicated to sepulchral culture in Kassel, Germany.[3] The search for participants was also published in death and bereavement journals and newsletters, in bereavement groups, or tweeted by popular death-themed Twitter accounts. Later, intentional theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 99–113) guided the search for bereavement cases that fit the criteria of the study. Particularly supportive were bereavement counsellors who arranged contact with bereaved people they knew, and bereavement group facilitators who spread the request to their online or offline groups. Following this variety of avenues helped secure an adequate number of interviews and a diverse group of participants. Also, searching for participants both online and offline made it possible to reach those who use online bereavement practices as well as those who do not. The avenues indicated may guide other researchers in finding participants for bereavement interviews. To recruit participants for the research, it is essential to build trust and know the reasons for participation.

4.2   Building trust

Building trust with potential participants is particularly important when dealing with grief and memory. For the doctoral project, trust-building measures

included interview invitations that outlined the study's topic and aims, emphasising the role the participants' contributions would play (a similar approach was used in a thanatological study by Meitzler, 2019, p. 98). The invitation was first titled "Interview invitation." However, the initial potential participants said that, while they would be happy to talk about their grief, they were uncomfortable at the idea of being formally interviewed (cf. Dyregrov, 2004, p. 396). Therefore, the invitation was renamed "Invitation to talk" to make the meeting sound friendlier and more casual. For those who were interested in more details, a project description was provided.

In addition, the researcher created a website for the doctoral study as a measure of transparency and trust building. It included the invitation to talk, the context of the research, the institutional setting, as well as the researcher's earlier publications and a short CV. Participants said that the website helped them to locate the research and recognise its official nature. Sharing the link to the website on social media helped to spread the word about the search for interview participants.

In order to personalise the invitation and humanise the individual behind the research, the researcher added a profile photo to the invitation and to the website. Several participants mentioned that seeing the researcher with whom they would be talking about their grief beforehand supported their decision to participate. This shows that the bereaved are more likely to respond positively to an invitation that promises a lively and personal conversation.

Trusted intermediaries – such as bereavement counsellors and bereavement group leaders – were particularly helpful in encouraging potential participants to join the research. They helped with great dedication, and being introduced or referred through such intermediaries created confidence in the researcher, and some participants said they would not have agreed to be interviewed otherwise. For example, Ulrike (a participant in the doctoral project, aged 60, lost her 57-year-old partner three years prior to the interview) said:

> First of all, it came through {name of bereavement counsellor}, if I had found the invitation just on the internet, I would never have done it, no way, so without a reference, so no, because that's really, that's really close to the bone.

The recommendations of the participants themselves were also invaluable. Some wrote in online bereavement groups about their experience of being interviewed and passed on the interview invitation.

Before each interview, a short, introductory telephone call was arranged with potential participants. The interviewer introduced himself, the research project, and the interview process, i.e. that it would be an open conversation rather than a formal interview, which was a relief for some. In their turn, the potential participants introduced themselves, shared a short version of their story, talked about their connection to the research subject, and had an opportunity to ask their own questions. Some mentioned that they might become emotional and cry during the interview; hearing that this was considered natural made it easier for them to agree

to be interviewed. The introductory telephone calls proved to be an important tool in building mutual trust before the interview. It also reassured both the potential participants and the researcher of the value of the participant's contribution.

5   Talking about death, grief, and memory

There's a great deal of public-facing media offering advice and support on how to talk to the bereaved. In contrast, academic literature on how researchers should talk to the bereaved is lacking. Existing literature discusses the ethical aspects of bereavement interviews or the appropriate time to conduct them (Bentley & O'Connor, 2015), but offers little practical advice for interviewing grieving participants. An exception is Meitzler (2019), who shared practical experiences from bereavement research, although he warned that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for interviewers.

This section focuses on providing practical advice for researchers interviewing bereaved people. Based on experiences from the doctoral project, it details the benefits of conducting face-to-face interviews at the participant's home, proposes a possible entry into the interview, calls for non-judgemental research questions, underscores the importance of listening and sufficient time, suggests empathic ignoring to deal with grief reactions, and reflects on debriefing and aftercare.

5.1   Interviews in the participants' homes

The doctoral project, and other bereavement researchers (Dyregrov, 2004; Hynson et al., 2006), have described it as beneficial to conduct the interviews in the participants' homes, where participants felt comfortable and could talk freely (cf. Meitzler, 2019, p. 104). In emotional situations, being at home can give the participants a feeling of security and autonomy, for example to get up to fetch a handkerchief if they started to cry.

In addition, visiting the participants at home facilitated observing and photographing their practices of bereavement and memory. In the study, participants scrolled through the deceased's smartphone, digital photo galleries, social media timelines, and family chat groups on applications like WhatsApp. They also showed family photo walls, digital photo frames, memorial altars, or the deceased's clothes and furniture. Interviews conducted in a neutral location or remotely are likely to miss these insightful perspectives. Surprisingly, almost all participants agreed to be interviewed at home; the trust-building measures (see Section 4.2) may have contributed to this.

Conducting interviews face-to-face can be highly beneficial for bereavement research, as it allows the researcher to recognise gestures and facial expressions, react sensitively, and wait out pauses when they occur. The participants of the digital legacy study said that when sharing their grief, it is important for them not to overburden or upset the other person. Conversely, the researcher can use gestures and facial expressions to show that everything is "okay," which often means keeping both relatively neutral, expressing neither shock and pity nor positivity and joy.

This allows the participant to concentrate and continue to tell his or her story, even when feeling particularly moved.

5.2   *Starting the interview, debriefing, and aftercare*

Meitzler (2019) highlighted the importance of a successful start to the interview: an appropriate narrative stimulus can invite participants, who may still feel insecure, to freely express themselves (pp. 104–105). The interviews of the doctoral project began by asking participants open-ended questions about the circumstances of their loss; some answered briefly, but most with long backstories or detailed descriptions of the loved one's dying process. These extensive personal reflections sometimes took up to an hour and were crucial to understanding the biographical context of later answers (cf. Meitzler, 2019, 113). Furthermore, the open-ended question allowed participants to ease into and set an angle to the conversation.

A debriefing session at the end of the interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the interview and to ask the researcher about the motivation for doing this research. This kind of small talk allowed both the participant and the researcher to wind down from the highly emotional session. Buckle et al. (2010) noted that "debriefing sessions can allow participants to bring closure to the process and to be provided with a list of available support services, should they need it" (p. 118). In one interview of the doctoral project, the participant was given the details of a bereavement counsellor. The researcher followed up on each participant a day or two after the interview to thank them again, give them an opportunity to provide feedback and reflect on the impact of the interview.

5.3   *Interviewing without making judgements*

Many participants in the doctoral project expressed their desire not to be judged for how they grieved. Mareike (aged 49, lost her 72-year-old partner two and a half years before the interview) described how she would like someone to engage with her during her intense grief:

> He doesn't have to communicate much with me; for me it was much more important at that time, okay, I can just get rid of this now, it's not going to be evaluated… it's not going to judged, I can just be in the moment, I can just get everything off my chest in this moment… without having to explain why my mood might change from one moment to the next… that this understanding is just there, and it's simply not going to be judged at this point.

However, contrary to this wish, many participants in the doctoral project reported that they were often judged for their way of grieving when they opened up. These negative experiences are likely to have happened to many bereaved persons, which is why it is important to stress to participants that the qualitative research does not judge their accounts for right or wrong forms of grief. To this end, the research

questions themselves must be non-judgemental and avoid mentioning theoretical models of grief unless the latter are the subject of the study.

Participants noted that each grieving person needs to be talked to differently, depending on their needs. Sometimes, no matter how well-meaning the other person is in conversation, they just "can't get it right" (Inga, aged 50, lost her 18-year-old son five years before the interview). For the researcher, especially during a lengthy interview, this means that despite all the care taken to be open and non-judgmental, they may still upset the participant with a statement, question, gesture, or facial expression. In the doctoral project, participants let the researcher know when that happened. In such a situation, the researcher can choose to adjust their behaviour to keep the interview going or take the opportunity to discuss the incident.

5.4   The importance of listening and sufficient time

Listening is of utmost importance when talking about death and grief. Many of the participants in the doctoral project had experienced rejection when talking about their grief in everyday life, and they had developed a fine sense of whether someone was actually interested in their story. Louis (aged 55, lost his 23-year-old daughter four and a half years before the interview) explained how he checks closely for the other person's attention when talking about his grief:

> And then I start to talk, but I've just spoken a sentence, then I know, then I already feel that he's no longer listening. And then I stop talking in the middle of a sentence. And if the other person doesn't notice that (laughs), then I know, okay, you don't have to go on with the story.

Even in interviews that last for hours, the researcher must remain highly focused, listening to each word, while remembering every question that arises. Attentively listening also requires the ability to wait out pauses and to signal to the interviewee that these are okay. Pauses can occur when participants are thinking about what they want to say next, getting lost in memories, or are getting emotionally or physically affected by the interview. Researchers may struggle with pauses during highly emotional conversations as they may feel compelled to intervene and guide participants in order to redirect their focus from memories to the present moment or address their emotions and provide comfort. Being patient through pauses allows participants to regroup emotionally, reflect, and go on to tell their stories. Whether initiated by the participant or the researcher, pauses can also be beneficial to reflect on the conversation and to sharpen or shift its focus.

Listening also means allowing the bereaved to veer off the focus of the interview. Participants sometimes want to recount the circumstances of the loss, tell anecdotes about the deceased, show memories, and stave off forgetting. Allowing this space, and time, for biographical and anecdotal accounts is important in bereavement interviews – not only because disinterest would be disrespectful and offensive but also because these accounts are crucial to understanding bereavement

practices. It is therefore also beneficial for both parties to avoid setting time limits for the interview (Dyregrov, 2004).

5.5   *The empathic ignoring of grief*

It was important for the participants in the doctoral project to talk about grief as one would talk about any other subject. Martina (aged 54, who lost her 26-year-old son five years before the interview) said, "You should talk to people normally. We are not sick, we are not dumb, you can talk to us." The interviews showed that speaking to participants in clear words and without beating around the bush or excessive caution stimulates the conversation. However, participants may still have reactions like crying, and the researcher should be prepared for such expressions of grief.

The participants revealed how they expected other persons, including researchers, to react to their expressions of grief. Inga (aged 50, lost her 18-year-old-son five years before the interview) said that some people she talks to about her loss "feel that they must say something consoling, although sometimes it's just good to listen to us, and just be able to stand it, without giving great tips on how to make it better." The other person must be able to bear the pain, including the pain of not being able to help. Louis (aged 55, lost his 23-year-old daughter four and a half years before the interview) highlighted the difficulty of talking about grief when the other person is overly pitying:

> Under no circumstances should the person you are talking to show any horror, I think that is a very important point, but he must remain very composed. So if they say, oh, for God's sake, I'm sorry, I think that's exactly it, then I know at that moment, okay, he can't take much or she can't take much…. When you notice that it gets very, very close to someone, then that's almost not a person to talk to.

Similarly, Sandra (aged 49, lost her 19-year-old daughter three years before the interview) said, "I don't want a sad look from the other person, somehow I can't stand that… such pitying, sad looks, they destroy me." The longing for compassion and the rejection of pity were a common theme in the interviews. It is crucial for researchers to provide space for emotional situations, not to take action to avoid them (cf. Meitzler, 2019, pp. 115–116), and to signal to the participant that their expressions of grief are not distressing to the researcher.

We suggest the method of *empathic ignoring* which means to acknowledge participants' expressions of grief, without directly addressing them. The researcher remains composed and attentive, keeps eye contact, continues to ask questions, and listens to the stories. Things to avoid include consoling, looking away, suggesting a break, changing the topic, or offering advice. Only when the participants themselves address their grief reactions, e.g. if they apologise, the researcher can briefly respond with "it's okay," "no problem," or "that's normal." Empathic ignoring helps participants continue talking, which makes it easier for them to deal with their emotions.

But empathic ignoring also helps the researcher – it can be a tool to deal not only with the participants' emotions but also their own. Focusing on the interview and empathically ignoring participants' expressions of grief can help researchers avoid becoming too emotional themselves. Nevertheless, the researcher may feel their own eyes filling with tears; then, empathic ignoring can also be adopted to cope with one's own emotions. This means not addressing the emotions, not apologising, but continuing the interview, which shows that one is emotionally touched but not distressed. Finally, participants' emotional moments are often rich in insights valuable for research – and empathic ignoring allows these insights to come to the fore.

6 Motivations for participation and impact on participants

Understanding what motivates participants to take part in bereavement interviews and how these motivations might impact them can have multifold advantages: it can help researchers to recruit participants (cf. Varga, 2021) and conduct the interview in such a way that it is also beneficial for the participants, and it can convince ethics committees that bereaved people are open to research participation. The following two sections show that participants in bereavement interviews have personal motivations for participating and that the impact of the interviews on them is positive. The interviews are therefore not only informative for the research but also empowering for the participants.

6.1 Motivations for participating

Several studies have examined what motivates bereaved individuals to participate in bereavement research, and their findings are largely consistent with those of the doctoral project this chapter is based on.

Broadly, participants are motivated by altruistic reasons, in other words, to help other bereaved individuals (Hynson et al., 2006; Dyregrov et al., 2011; Akard et al., 2014; Varga, 2021) and provide them with what Inga (aged 50, lost her 18-year-old-son five years before the interview) described as "a ray of hope." Furthermore, some participants indicated an interest and curiosity in the subject and an explicit desire to support academia. All the participants said that they would like to read the results of the research, some mentioned the need for further research in the field of grief and were glad to personally contribute towards this end, and some had an academic background themselves and understood the difficulty of finding interview participants.

In some studies, participants articulated a need for self-reflection (Dyregrov et al., 2011). Similarly, participants in the doctoral project wanted to reflect on what had happened – for example, by recounting the medical history of their deceased loved one or by recalling the events preceding a suicide – or on their grieving process. Isabella (aged 63, lost her 64-year-old partner a year before the interview) participated because she wanted "to use the opportunity to learn how to deal with [the loss] or to become able to talk about it." Other participants had more practical

needs – they wanted to ask their own questions or get help, and the interview came at the right time. For example, some participants had never looked at the digital legacies of their deceased loved ones because it had been emotionally difficult or they lacked technical knowledge to do so. The interview provided an opportunity to gather the courage to look at the digital legacies or to seek technical advice.

Some participated in the doctoral project because they felt the need to talk about their grief, something that did not happen often enough in their daily lives. Jasmin (aged 39, lost her 45-year-old partner a year and a half before the interview) said, "I always like to talk about it because… you can do it much too seldom, I think, which is why I always take advantage of every opportunity." Meitzler (2019) noted that the bereaved usually talk about grief with their close social contacts, but not with strangers, except in the context of professional grief counselling (p. 94). In contrast, many participants in the doctoral project reported that they could not talk about their grief at work or with friends and family and deliberately sought to talk to strangers, including researchers. Louis (aged 55, lost his 23-year-old daughter four and a half years before the interview) reflected on who is best to talk to about his grief: "It's always easiest for me, that's what I've learnt, for it to be a stranger I've never met before who I may never see again afterwards." This motivation to participate in bereavement research is confirmed by Varga (2021), whose participants also preferred to talk to strangers because "disconnection was key" (p. 493).

Having experienced suppression when talking openly about grief, many participants in the doctoral project were pleased to be able to contribute to making bereavement more public, which was another reason for participation absent from the literature. As Jelena (aged 45, lost her 19-year-old daughter three years before the interview) mentioned:

> I think it's also important that such things are made public, because I think grief is still an extremely taboo subject, so many people don't know how to deal with bereaved people…. I just think that people who… go public with it are also doing humanity a favour, because I believe that people will then also learn how to better deal with grief.

Finally, participants in bereavement research have a desire to share their stories (Buckle et al., 2010; Varga, 2021), which includes reminiscing and remembering the once shared life. Most participants in the doctoral project enjoyed telling stories about their late loved ones; Verona (aged 51, lost her 13-year-old daughter seven years before the interview) said about her late daughter: "She's always part of my life… and for me, it's really nice to be given the space to talk about her, with her, and through her, you know."

Oliver (aged 63, lost his 24-year-old son six years before the interview) posted a quote (Figure 6.1) on a Facebook support group for families of deceased children, which states: "The greatest gift you can give to grieving parents is to ask them about their deceased children. And then listen to them attentively… (author unknown)." Even an academic interview can help participants to keep memories alive and to stave off forgetting.

Figure 6.1 Post by a participant in the doctoral project, published in the Facebook group "Leben ohne Dich" ("Life without you"), a support group for families with deceased children. (Screenshot taken by the researcher, 2020.)

6.2   *Impact of bereavement interviews on participants*

Several studies have examined the impact of taking part in bereavement research on participants, and their findings show positive results. Often it was the interview itself that gave something valuable back to the participants and had a therapeutic effect (Dyregrov, 2004; Hynson et al., 2006; Gekoski et al., 2012; Koffman et al., 2012). The effect can be attributed to the participant getting the rare opportunity to tell their story from beginning to end (Dyregrov, 2004), to reflect (Meitzler, 2019), to experience the surfacing of buried memories (Gekoski et al., 2012; Koffman et al., 2012; Meitzler, 2019), or to feel acceptance of their story and grief (Cook & Bosley, 1995; Hynson et al., 2006; Gekoski et al., 2012; Meitzler, 2019). Feedback from the participants in the doctoral project confirmed this therapeutic effect: they appreciated the opportunity to reflect on what had happened, on the grieving process, and on where they stand today. Ulrike (aged 60, lost her 57-year-old partner three years prior to the interview) was surprised that we had talked for three hours about her loss – something she had not done for a long time – and reflected on the interview:

But it's interesting, it's so totally interesting for me too that I also know where I stand now, roughly, so I'm certainly not over it, but I definitely feel

like I've sorted through it in the meantime… and that's something nice when you realise that. You also listen to yourself a bit.

Helena (aged 70, lost her 30-year-old son three years before the interview), too, mentioned a therapeutic effect, saying that the interview had brought her a little closer to her late son and that "it was another piece of processing his death." For Anna (aged 69, lost her 72-year-old partner a year and a half before the interview and her 32-year-old daughter three and a half years before the interview), buried memories surfaced in the interview, which was the first occasion in a long time where she felt empowered to look at photographs of her late daughter. Two interview participants asked for their recorded interview – which was, of course, shared with them – with the intention of listening again for reflection.

Participants found taking part in bereavement research positive not only because of the therapeutic effects of the interview but also because they felt they were helping others in bereavement or academic research (Dyregrov, 2004; Gekoski et al., 2012; Koffman et al., 2012; Andriessen et al., 2018). Participants in the doctoral project found altruistic fulfilment in helping to bring bereavement into the public eye. Some went on to be involved in two public exhibitions,[4] where they could commemorate their loved ones, suggest bereavement practices to other grievers, and make their voices heard. Furthermore, it was possible to give the participants a voice by connecting them with the press as interviewees or by giving press interviews together.

The doctoral project extends the literature mentioned in this section by showing that the media-elicitation method felt pleasant and valuable to the participants and allowed them to open up about their grief. All participants enjoyed talking about their late loved ones and looking at memories – such as photographs, videos, or social media timelines – together with the researcher. Furthermore, some participants found inspiration during the interview to engage in memory practices that were new to them. For example, a participant who was not familiar with digital memory practices considered creating an online memorial page while some other participants, whose memories were mainly in digital form, considered turning their digital photos and instant messages into print books. Another participant, who prior to the interview had reservations about grieving with strangers on the internet, considered joining an online bereavement group. Finally, a few participants came to the interview with an explicit need for support; they lacked the technical skills to access or back up the digital legacies of their late loved ones, asked for help, and were delighted that some memories could be rescued and secured during or after the interview. Using the media-elicitation method, providing inspiration for new bereavement practices, and helping with particular questions can be further components to make a bereavement interview valuable for the participants.

7   Conclusion

Talking to the bereaved about their experiences of loss and bereavement practices can be challenging, but it is also necessary, not to mention immensely rewarding.

In this chapter, we discussed the methodological, ethical, and practical aspects that a researcher must consider when conducting interviews in the context of bereavement research.

For those researchers who have not yet decided on the methodological basis for their empirical bereavement research project, one interesting option is constructivist grounded theory methodology, as it encourages the researcher to embrace and reflect on the dynamics of emotional bereavement interviews – including the interview setting and researcher – participant rapport, researcher subjectivity, and the transformative nature of the interview process itself. Regarding data collection methods, we argue that bereavement has a strong visual dimension. Of the many visual methods available, we chose media elicitation and researcher-generated photography; while the former introduces the visual dimension of bereavement into the interview, the latter captures it for further analysis and publication.

Ethical considerations need to be addressed before any research is undertaken, and we discussed whether bereavement research entails specific ethical requirements. Grief hurts, but it can also lead to personal growth and empowerment – we do not see bereaved people as a vulnerable group per se, but as capable of self-determination around participation. Talking to bereaved people as a researcher does have its own peculiarities that need to be considered, but it is not a particular ethical challenge.

Finding interview participants for bereavement research can be challenging. We have mentioned various avenues that may guide other researchers and suggested trust-building measures that help participants to connect with the researcher and to understand the context of the research. When talking about death, grief, and memory, face-to-face interviews at the participants' homes can be helpful for the participants for emotional reasons and for the researcher to gain insight into otherwise private practices of bereavement. Starting the interview with an open-ended question helps participants to feel comfortable and talk freely. At the end of the interview, a debriefing session provides a space for reflection on the interview process and allows for some small talk to wind down from the highly emotional session. Listening carefully, allowing for pauses, asking questions without being overly cautious but avoiding being judgemental, and allowing participants to stray from the research focus enable and stimulate conversations about emotional topics. Being mindful of the effect of the interview on the participant, it is also vital for the researcher to be prepared for the participant's expressions of grief; we have suggested the technique of empathic ignoring to implicitly acknowledge grief reactions without explicitly addressing them.

It should also be said that participants have their own motivations for participating, that they generally value talking and reflecting on their grief, and that the impact of the interview on them is positive overall. In the best case, a bereavement interview not only serves the research but can also act as a valuable memory practice for the participant. By identifying these positive and sometimes therapeutic effects, we hope to encourage researchers who are concerned that the value of bereavement interviews is one sided or that they might be distressing for grieving participants.

The methodological, ethical, and practical reflections in this chapter can be valuable to researchers interviewing those who are grieving and want to be well prepared for the interview process. The chapter may be particularly helpful for researchers who are new to bereavement research, have little experience of interacting with bereaved people, or feel insecure about how to react to participants' expressions of grief. The recommendations can also be applied to empirical research on other highly emotional subjects.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 The research project titled "Digital Legacies: Records of Everyday Life for Grief, Mourning, and Remembrance" was carried out by Lorenz Widmaier under the supervision of Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert, and conducted at the Cyprus University of Technology as part of the European training network H2020 POEM. see www.memory-anddeath.com and www.poem-horizon.eu for more information.
2 All participant quotes in this chapter have been translated from German into English by the researcher.
3 www.sepulkralmuseum.de
4 "MEMENTO" (2020–2021) and "Suicide – Let's talk about it" (2021–2022), both at the Museum for Sepulchral Culture in Kassel, Germany.

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Part III

Memory modalities

7 Memory modalities

Explorations into the socio-material arrangements of the past at the present for the future

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1   Introduction: memory practices in context

The development of the internet and rapid changes in digital media have raised the question of how these technologies affect memory. Unsurprisingly, a plethora of concepts (Erll & Nünning, 2010; Garde-Hansen, 2011; Hoskins, 2018) related to memory and remembrance have emerged in the field of cultural and memory studies. After two decades of research on mediated memories, a new discussion on the relevance of memory modalities (see e.g. Bowker, 2005; Reading, 2016; Merrill et al., 2020; Koch, 2021), has come to the fore because of the need to consider the socio-material frameworks in which mediated memories are made. The research field on mediated memories calls for new concepts to analyse and describe the variety of socio-material arrangements that provide the means for individuals, groups and communities, organisations, and societies to make memories in the multiple available modes of remembering, inscribing, transmitting, or fixing memories.

In a cultural sense, memory is inherently social and political (Landry, 2019), because it is conditioned by and made through and with a variety of conceptual and physical objects, including records (Yeo, 2018) and material objects (Bonshek, 2019), interfaces through which memory is achieved (Ramsay, 2018), institutions and displays (Falk et al., 2006), and sites of memory (Lehrer, 2019). Memory practices also take place in cultural and epistemic contexts of remembering (Chazan & Cole, 2020), and they are embodied in actions (Gibbons, 2014; Landry, 2019).

Definitions of memory work and memory making vary widely in the literature. For our purposes of exploring the socio-material arrangements of memory making, we follow an understanding of memory making and memory work as forms of active engagement with the past and as a key practice for imagining possible futures. Kuhn (2000) describes memory work as an "active practice of remembering that adopts an inquiring attitude to the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory" (p. 186). In this sense, memory work aligns with practice theory (Spaargaren et al., 2016) as a conceptual background for the study of how

memory is made and embedded in specific social contexts with specific socio-material arrangements that enable and limit memory making. These arrangements may vary widely among and within groups such as young people, professional groups, institutions, or online communities, and their specific "activities involved in creating, capturing, storing, destroying, sharing, communicating, preserving and managing information as a tool for memory" (Gibbons, 2014, p. 9).

Memory work and memory making are both individual and collective as cultural undertakings, and they are also central to the functioning of the social sphere – both for specific social systems and for the society as a whole (Halbwachs, 1925; Ocasio et al., 2016; Assmann, 2018). Bowker (2005, p. 8) emphasised the role of institutions in imposing modes of remembering that "abstract away" individuality: he demonstrated that memory institutions, though their formal record-keeping, management processes, and regulatory standards, change how memory and remembering are arranged. In a sense, they expropriate it from what were previously personal undertakings and the responsibility of individuals. In the context of memory institutions (Dalbello, 2004), memory work and making are often conceptualised in conspicuously collection-oriented terms (Brown & Davis-Brown, 1998) and from a material rather than a social perspective. Institutional perspectives on their own memory role can be controversial (Cook, 2013; Ruschiensky, 2017). Sather-Wagstaff (2015) has established not only how memory is made and how memory work is conducted but also what counts as memory in specific contexts and situations is influenced by the forms, modes, or *modalities* of memories and remembering.

These are the premises on which this chapter bases its exploration of the concept of *memory modalities* in the context of participatory memory work and practices. Section two briefly reviews the literature discussing memory modes and modalities of memory making. After identifying gaps in the earlier conceptualisations, we demonstrate the relevance of a conceptual perspective that allows for the problematisation and systematic study of the social and technological modes and forms – or, as we call them, the *modalities* – of memories. Section three builds on the review of earlier work to discuss the initial directions for the development of a new conceptual approach to studying memory modalities. This is further explored in section four, against the backdrop of ethnographic and ethnographically inspired studies from empirical research projects by four scholars: Jennifer Krueckeberg, Quoc-Tan Tran, Dydimus Zengenene, and Angeliki Tzouganatou. These four projects inquire into the modalities of memory making in young people's everyday lives, in memory institutions, in the work of digital heritage professionals and activists, and in the Wikimedia ecosystem. The modalities of memory making are used as a lens for scrutinising socio-material arrangements in these four fields of memory making to interrogate and demonstrate the usefulness of the concept, and to sketch how the modalities and practices of memory making relate to and condition each other. Finally, section five reflects and expands on the four empirical studies to examine how the memory modalities concept can inform future cultural research on memory making and mediated memory practices.

2   The state of the art in research: modes and modalities of memory making

2.1   *Mediating memory practices in different modes*

Earlier work in social and cultural memory studies has highlighted the multiplicity of remembering. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (2010) distinguish between two modes of memory: *cultural memories* (which are normative, formative, and sometimes monumental) and personal, experienced, *communicative memories*.[1] In a more fine-grained categorisation, Erll (2020) distinguishes between commemorative, generational, scientific, collective, and social habitual memory. These characterisations highlight memory as a social and cultural process that emerges in relation to the multiple ways, contexts, and standpoints of how memory making is practised. However, paralleling the lack of interest pointed out by Pickering and Keightley (2006) in the modes of 'representation and operation involved in the communication of nostalgia' (p. 930) is a similar lack of interest in the modes of how memory is represented and in how it operates. There are certain exceptions. In important empirical work that contributes to a better understanding of the modes of memories as social and cultural phenomena, Knudsen & Kølvraa identify diverse modes of memory making, for example in relation to attitudes towards colonialism (Knudsen & Kølvraa, 2021). Comparably, the research literature has distinguished between sensory and affective modes (Hamilakis, 2014), and modes are sometimes used to refer to the means of mediating and regulating memories (Kallinikos et al., 2013, p. 14). However, the various modes of memories identified in the multidisciplinary memory studies literature cannot be subsumed under a single theoretical concept or category system, but rather point to multiple possibilities for classifying representational, operational, socio-structural, and cultural aspects of memories. Any attempt to specify what modes or modalities of memory can entail is thus as multifaceted an enterprise as cultural theory and terminology itself.

With the advent of digital media and the exponential growth of media for individual mnemonic practices, further discussions of the modes and modalities of memory making have emerged. The peculiarities of digital (as opposed to non-digital) memory making draw on earlier discourse in social and cultural memory studies and underline the centrality of mnemonic systems (Assmann, 2011; Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 113f) in the digital sphere, with their specific media repertoires and genres. In the Italian digital memory studies literature, Sisto (2020) refers to modes or modalities (*le modalità* in Italian) of articulation and expression to describe the characteristics of genres and digital infrastructures. Merrill et al. (2020) call for "nuanced approaches to digital modalities of memory" for current practices, while also writing about the "multimodality of mediated memory" (p. 8) to describe the plurality of memory making in the digital realm. Lagerkvist (2017), for example, following the lead of earlier social memory literature (Connerton, 1989), has emphasised that affective dimensions and bodily practices should not be forgotten as constitutive of social memory in the current digital era.

A common trait of the earlier references to memory modalities and related terms is that while they all highlight relevant dimensions of memory modalities from the perspective of cultural research, so far there have been no comprehensive attempts to systematically integrate the perspectives.

2.2   *Structuring memory practices*

Besides proposing different perspectives to identify different modalities of memories, the earlier literature also theorised in terms of modalities for diverse memory-related practices. Reading's (2016) conceptualisation of memory making modalities, in the context of her research on gender and memory in "globital" memory assemblages, builds on Giddens' theory of structuration. Giddens (1984) had referred to modalities of structuration to explain systems of interaction, "relating the knowledgeable capacities of agents to structural features" (p. 28). Reading then applied this idea of modalities to memory making, introducing modalities as the significant structures within which memories are made. An example is the economic and legal framework provided by YouTube, which has been adapted to function as a memory modality for sharing family films. Reading (2016) refers to the "extent to which a memory assemblage travels and is transformed across sets of patterns or categories that assert or deny the possibility, impossibility, contingency, or necessity of content" (p. 56) as trans-modality.[2] In a similar sense, Kallinikos et al. (2013) refer to modalities when discussing technological developments in memory institutions (libraries, archives, and museums). Modalities such as routines, rules, automation, norms, and perceptions are used to achieve goals and tend to imply certain "forms of agency". This perspective on the modalities of social practice emphasises organisational and material properties; but these are interdependent, changing their face with interpretive schemes and normative frameworks. From another theoretical standpoint, through the lens of science and technology studies (STS), Geoffrey Bowker (2005) highlights the socio-technological aspects of memory making in his study of memory practices in the sciences in relation to mnemonic practices. In that study, he seeks to understand how shifts in mnemonic practices at certain points in history are relevant to scientific epistemologies in different epochs. Bowker does not explicitly define the term modalities but refers to it in a sense that emphasises the changes in socio-material dimensions over time and the implications for concepts of memory making. He understands "information" as a new memory modality of the contemporary informational memory regime that has grown since the nineteenth century: a memory regime with a particular ontological proposition of framing reality in terms of information (Bowker, 2005, p. 73).

In the large corpus of literature on the material aspects of memory, the literature on the modalities related to memory practices discussed above broadens the perspective towards the entanglement of socio-material arrangements in memory assemblages with other social and cultural practices, for example in the sciences (Bowker, 2005), in "global memory making" of women's experiences of pregnancy (Reading, 2016), or in memory institutions (Kallinikos et al., 2013). These

perspectives highlight the dynamic and changing nature of memory making and describe modalities of memory practices as forms of regimes of memory making in specific epistemic cultures, thus emphasising the framing character of individual memory practices. Building on this perspective of modalities as framing devices and the earlier posited relevance of heuristic concepts in memory studies (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 112), we propose that a fruitful vantage point to study the nexus of modalities of memories and memory practices is to approach the socio-material elements of memory work itself as an assemblage, negotiated, and contested, facing frictions and stabilising relations in specific ways.

3   Relating socio-material elements

Rather than thinking of a single memory modality as a specific mode of structuring or a media form with particular properties, drawing on Bowker (2005), Kallinikos (2013) and Reading (2016), we understand memory modalities as inherently multi-faceted and relational arrangements with a changing face in each individual context of inquiry. Referring to memory modali*ties* in the plural rather than the singular captures their multifaceted nature; using the plural form also points to the dynamics of the modalities and their emergence together with their associated social practices in a given context. As Miller (2011) has convincingly demonstrated, no aspect of the infrastructures of memory either is the same or has the same meaning everywhere for social life, not even in global memory infrastructures like the internet or its major platforms. Nor is the structuring effect of those global infrastructures a given. That structuring effect is relational to social practices; it emerges in the interplay of a multiplicity of additional structuring elements, including the available devices, historical predecessors, resources in hand and beyond.

Rather than conceptualising a singular memory modality, we consider it more productive to recognise the plurality inherent within each individual memory modality. And rather than thinking of a single memory modality as having specific characteristics, we propose a concept of memory modalities as made up of diverse relational and socio-material elements that constitute particular memory modalities within specific epistemic communities, communities of practice, and other forms of collectivities. Memory modalities are then not tied to an individual technology, media form, or platform (as with YouTube or Facebook today), but emerge out of the relations between them, their users, and their different socio-material elements in a given context and situation. Specific platforms, technologies, and media forms gain their structuring effect in that particular social context and situation, in that epistemic culture, in a specific community of practice or in another comparable form of collectivity only through and in relation to the plurality of all of their constituent elements.

Thinking of the single elements as constituting specific memory modalities *together*, rather than alone, may also allow for a more detailed characterisation of the effect that each particular element has on memory practices. Scrutinised alone, the individual constituents of the socio-material mesh can easily seem too enmeshed and too multiple to make sense of the abundance of ways they participate

in myriad arrangements of the social lacework. In contrast, when memory modalities are approached as *relations* of these elements, memory modalities can be summoned to explore, negotiate, contest, and incorporate not only their constituting elements and how the elements as socio-material entities (including media objects, bodies, and minds residing in these relations) are (de)mobilised for memory making. In addition, memory modalities approached in this way also allow us to probe further into the organisational, institutional, financial, and legal frameworks and cultural conventions expressed through norms and rules of feeling – rules of feeling in which the elements are mutually shaping each other to form memory modalities (in the plural) as arrangements of meaningful forms.

4   Memory modalities in context

In this section, we examine four vignettes, based on four research studies, which illustrate the opportunities that arise when socio-material arrangements are conceptualised in terms of memory modalities in four different fields. Drawing on research on memory practices in four different social contexts provides insights into different types of memory modalities and allows for contrasting observations in each field. Our aim here is not to provide a comprehensive account of all possible types of memory modalities but to explore how the use of the concept can aid in navigating the complexity of the diverse social settings.

4.1   *Digital assemblages of personal memory making* (Krueckeberg)[3]

As the memory modalities concept can help to understand the formation of cultural and collective memories, it can also aid in explicating personal memory making and its connections to wider society. In this context, memory modalities can be conceptualised as "modes" of representing and transforming knowledge of the past. These modes are formed by sociocultural norms, rituals, ideologies, and value systems; they can take shape as images, physical objects, speech, writing, or other technologies. In this first vignette, I use memory modalities as a means to describe parts of a wider assemblage that describes the relations between human and non-human actors in the creation of digital memories. Moreover, the usage of modalities highlights the digital infrastructures and material limits of digital technologies. These assemblages of memory making are particularly noticeable in the context of digitally mediated memory, which allows ordinary people to communicate directly with a wide audience and to give their memories greater visibility by shifting from a mere consumption of mass media to acting as its (co-)producers (Sommer, 2018).

Based on my doctoral research, in which I investigated the memory practices of young people aged between 13 and 27, I defined three main forms of digital memory modalities: (1) smartphones, (2) social media, and (3) storage units. These modalities are not separate from each other but have a networked and deeply relational character. This can often make it difficult to demarcate where one modality ends and the other begins (Krueckeberg, 2022). For example, neither social media nor smartphones can fulfil their functions without storage units, and many

social media platforms withhold full functionality unless people access these platforms through a smartphone app. Therefore, I have classified the three modalities based on the practices of my participants. Focusing on practices rather than technological capabilities highlighted the specific character of the smartphone and social media. The smartphone, in particular, could otherwise have been classified just as another computer or server, despite its significant cultural role and place in participants' everyday lives. Conversely, 'storage units' describe where young participants mainly stored their memory objects for later use: in computers, external hard drives, and cloud services.

An emphasis on *practices* in defining memory modalities also highlights the relations between human and nonhuman actors in the creation, sharing, and maintenance of digital memories. For example, as Ross (2019) shows, young women on Instagram often feel pressure to conform with a particular set of aesthetic expectations to be interesting and to entertain in order to be able to benefit from the platform's 'like' system. The individuals calculate what might be received positively by others and adjust their postings to the anticipated expectations of their audience. At the same time, the postings become a part of individuals' memories and their autobiographical self-expression. It has been often noted (van Dijck, 2009; Dumont, 2015) that with the rise of digital media, people have become (co-)producers of media content. The shift from media consumption to media co-production and co-consumption means that personal memory making is transcending personal archives like family photo albums (van Dijck, 2008) and is expanding beyond that to become distributed between personal and corporate archives as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, between individuals and public archives (Garde-Hansen, 2011, p. 71). I would like to expand on this notion and speak of a co-creation of memories between humans and nonhuman actors like devices, servers, algorithms, and user interfaces. The arising flow of data, infrastructures, sociocultural norms, and economic interests then forms digital memories while remaining in constant flux and subject to change.

Digital multiplicities enable memory objects to move between different modalities and take on new meanings depending on the affordances of a modality. Moreover, it is possible for an object to exist within different modalities simultaneously – for example, when a photo is uploaded to social media but a copy is also held on a smartphone or on the cloud. As digital technologies are frequently proprietary and express a company's business goals, memory objects are then also subject to the respective norms and power regimes of the modality. The influence of these companies also defines how access to creating and sharing personal memories is regulated.

Concluding from the perspective of personal remembering, the concept of memory modalities can be beneficial in understanding and conceptualising the relations within the assemblages formed by sociocultural norms, digital infrastructures, algorithms, interactions, designers and corporations, and personal preferences and creativity. Understanding memory modalities as relational – as expressions of assemblages – opens up a more comprehensive view of how memories are created and maintained with/in digital media. In this sense, memory modalities unfold

as the means through which an assemblage exists – but also, simultaneously, as embodiments of the relations that tie these components together. Explicating such modalities-based links can help to make visible how knowledge about the past is created. Moreover, the concept offers a possibility to talk about different components – not as separate units but as co-dependent makers of memories.

4.2   *Memory modalities as trans-institutional arrangements* (Tran)[4]

Our second vignette shifts the focus to institutional memory making as a key factor that constantly steers the dynamics of mediated memory work in the wider society. Institutional memory making refers to the practices of memory institutions, such as libraries, archives, and museums, that aim to serve the public's need to record, preserve, and access artefacts. In this context, memory modalities unfold as trans-institutional arrangements. In focusing on the infrastructural qualities of digital heritage work – qualities that influence the ability of memory institutions to support participatory and socially inclusive missions – this vignette underscores two pivotal institutional dimensions of memory modalities: their capacity to permeate and integrate various lines of work within and beyond institutional boundaries, and their role in facilitating institutions' efforts to harmonise the tasks, objectives, and ideals of diverse stakeholders.

In my doctoral research (Tran, 2022), I employed the infrastructure-based approach (Star, 1999) to delve into the everyday practices of memory institutions: the unseen activities behind the scenes of exhibitions and visitor interactions, encompassing the routine tasks associated with collecting, cataloguing, displaying cultural artefacts, and retrieving pertinent information. Drawing on ethnographic data sourced from various museums and heritage data-management agencies in Scotland, Sweden, and Germany, my research findings unveiled the multifaceted negotiations that take effect between the social and technological components of memory institutions' infrastructure. The findings indicated how these socio-technological negotiations affect the ability of institutional infrastructures to accommodate and support growth and development in service of their aim to expand access and establish modes of connection to external partners and services, such as national data aggregators, linked heritage repositories, and Wikimedia.

The digital transformation within the cultural heritage domain and the striving for openness, participation, and social inclusion at memory institutions are not isolated pursuits. They actively involve multiple lines of work within the institutions and the communities of practice across them. My research found that while technical components of the infrastructure are necessary for memory making and knowledge production, it is the social part of the institutional infrastructure that enables more open and decentralised modes of memory making. By paying close attention to behind-the-scenes practices, institutions effectively coordinate the diverse goals, objectives, and values of their various stakeholders.[5] In addition, this approach allows them to navigate and address the overlapping and sometimes conflicting norms and expectations concerning public participation and audience engagement.

Given the typical hierarchical organisation of cultural organisations and the compartmentalisation of their knowledge production processes, as outlined by Macleod et al. (2012), institutional memory work is entangled in a complex tessellation of actors with diverse perspectives, goals, and priorities. Consequently, the behind-the-scenes of an institution's daily operations is an arena of negotiation and continuous efforts to "work things out" (Tran, 2021). These interactive activities serve as the means through which arrangements are established, sustained, and amended.

For instance, within sizeable memory institutions, separate departments responsible for collection management and digitalisation often employ distinct workflows in their production processes. Various kinds of digital items and digitised materials are generated to serve various purposes, and these images are frequently stored on a file server, with links established to corresponding objects in the collection management system. Some institutions resolve these workflow disparities by adopting a digital asset management system that securely centralises their digital resources. Working it all out requires negotiation not only between departments and working groups but also with such nonhuman entities as IT systems and subsystems, protocols, and object datasheets.

In this context, these negotiations and efforts to "work things out" and keep the organisation's informational fabric together emerge as a memory modality in their own right, a socio-material arrangement that redefines connections, extends beyond human sociality, and enables technological arrangements (see the previous vignette, which conceptualises these as "assemblages") to create, manage, and maintain memories. Thus, when we characterise these streamlined processes and associated socio-material or technological configurations not just as workflows, protocols, temporary repair, or articulation, but when we address them as modalities, they emerge as closely linked with the realms of memory and remembering. Importantly, these processes do not merely mediate or underpin memories; they are constitutive elements of the institutional memory itself.

4.3   *Digital networks and communities* (Zengenene)[6]

One of the impacts of the internet and the digitalisation of social exchange mechanisms for memory practices has been the online formation of new forms of networks and connectivities (Hoskins, 2018). The internet, through a slew of digital platforms, established new social spaces of interaction with new ways of memory making and remembering. These new ways transcend geographical, spatial, and temporal boundaries; they lead to the formation of new groups and societies that create memories, remember, and forget *together* (Jones, 2013). Hoskins (2018) refers to these as imaginaries and collectivities; he sees them as capable of acting in concert, of remembering, of holding on to a vision of a shared past, making and remaking collective memory. In these constellations, the concept of memory modalities can be used to describe the specific characteristics of these various networked online digital memory spaces, collectivities, and societies that have formed to create and share memory resources and to *collectively* remember and forget. At

the same time, however, the study of such online formations including communities and their practices implies a particular understanding of the concept.

My doctoral research applied ecological lenses to look into how groups of people and institutional actors in Wikimedia manage themselves as a network as they participate in the creation and exchange of memory resources, and how the management practices interface with Wikipedia's memory functions. The findings hint at a loosely connected network of actors with quasi-shared management practices, intersecting in various ways with the Wikimedia ecology's memory functions, identified in my work as documentation of memory, preservation of memory, provision of access to memory, arena of memory, centre of power on memory and being a memory entity (Pentzold, 2009; Ferron & Massa, 2014; Pentzold et al., 2017). These intersections are scattered and unpredictably interlinked and are often overlapping. While some memory functions appear to intersect with management practices longitudinally as practices are performed, others are attained as the ultimate goals of such management practices. In addition, some memory functions are incidentally attained as unintended but relevant outcomes of identified management practices.

Memory modalities in the study unfold as the networks of actors and communities that form and collectively interact in memory work, including the arrangements that bring the network actors together. While the study looked at Wikimedia as an online memory ecology, the findings showed that the modalities exist both online and offline. Even while their nature offline is not necessarily the same as their nature online, online modalities are to a considerable extent a result of the offline modalities, meaning that they are intertwined. For example, it was found that Wikipedians who meet and interact offline collaborate and communicate better while online.

The understanding of memory modalities applied in my study draws on Erll and Rigney (2009), who argue that the modes or modalities of memory can be seen as the *hows* of "remembering". The duo focused their understanding on one memory function – remembering – arguing that various modalities of memory manifest, for example when an event or incident is remembered as a formal event of political history, yet also as a personal traumatic experience (Erll & Rigney, 2009). My work, however, widens the "how" thinking beyond remembering to include "how" actors come together and manage themselves in online participatory memory work. This work includes fulfilling the memory functions within the Wikimedia ecology.

Understanding memory modalities as networks and communities of actors concur with perspectives discussed in the two previous vignettes, perspectives that perceive memory modalities as arrangements. In my case, however, arrangements are networks and communities of human and institutional actors whose practices enact the memory functions of Wikimedia.

4.4   *Practices of openness and closure in memory ecosystems (Tzouganatou)*[7]

In parallel with the use of memory modality as a lens to shed light on the social and cultural situatedness of institutional and personal memories and remembering, memory modality can also be used to explore the evolution (or the ecologies) of

the digital ecosystem. In the fourth vignette, I reflect on practices of openness and closure across the whole range of digital modalities for cultural knowledge production, and consequently for future memory making.

One of the research questions in my doctoral research explored the conditions for openness of cultural data (Tzouganatou, 2023). Based on in-depth interviews with 23 experts (staff in cultural heritage institutions, social innovators, service designers, open-knowledge activists, academics, and researchers on relevant domains) as well as a formative evaluation, I proposed a framework to define the conditions affecting the openness and/or closure of cultural data. These conditions are the hierarchical structures of cultural heritage institutions: the legal aspects, the business models, the standards and technical infrastructures, the mindsets, practices, and motivational aspects, as well as the know-how and ethical aspects. My research used the theoretical lens of assemblage theory to identify the relationality and interdependencies of the conditions for enabling or hindering the co-production of knowledge. Framing the digital assemblage as an ecosystem means that it is crucial to study both memory practices and the influence the ecosystem has on them (van Dijck, 2020) in order to understand how they steer each other's scope and aims, as well as how they impact both within and beyond the boundaries of the digital assemblage. In addition to the need to develop an understanding of a snapshot of the social organisation of memory making – whether conceptualised in terms of an assemblage or a social world – perhaps more than ever, the digital domain calls for means to elucidate its change. To this end, the notion of memory modality can be leveraged to refer to the ecological whole made up of the elements that influence how memories are constituted.

In my doctoral work, I observed that the conditions for openness of cultural data prescribe how a user would access or (re)use a particular cultural asset online, and therefore how it might pass on for future memory making. The processes and interrelations between these elements are alluded to as memory modalities. I, therefore, concluded that memory modalities emphasise the modes and processes that can affect how something would be remembered. The assemblage lens shows that owing to their relationality and the interdependency of these conditions, the practices and processes of the ecologies work to co-produce knowledge through the multitude of memory modalities.

In the ever-changing digital heritage landscape, the production of knowledge is interdependent on the relationality of legal matters, the users and staff of cultural heritage institutions, the institutional infrastructure, and consequently the technology that operates through them, the business model behind them, and motivations and related practices. All of these make up the assemblage, and all of these are consequently co-producing knowledge. An example is offered below to explain how intellectual property rights (IPRs) and the business model as elements of the ecosystem can affect future memory making.

The digital realm in particular illustrates that the evolution of memory practices is a complex socio-technological issue. Copyrights and other IPRs form a regime that exercises power on the ecosystem. Some cultural heritage institutions have based their business models on receiving copyright fees of digitised works. In that sense,

copyrights and the business model are both elements of the digital ecosystem; as such, they are interconnected to one another. However, within this ecosystem, the need to pay to engage with a particular memory becomes a hindrance. It is conceivable that someone might not take or be able to take this extra step to acquire access to an artwork. This requirement influences knowledge production and accessibility; consequently, it also influences what or how something should and can be remembered (Marttila & Hyyppä, 2014). Marttila and Hyyppä (2014) ask whether this model of enclosure could lead to "a society of dementia or amnesia", reflecting on how memory making and memory modalities are (inter)dependent on IPRs.

A key facet of interrelations between these ecological elements is how memory modalities exercise influence on how the ecosystem operates, and also on how its openness is dependent on them and their related practices. However, the capability of the modalities and the ecosystem as a whole to construe and synthesise future memory making is simultaneously dependent on their interdependence. A pertinent question in this respect is, how an ecosystem can promote openness and fairness rather than creating monopolies of knowledge (Pollock, 2018) and additional hierarchies, as we currently observe in the platform economy (Srnicek, 2017).

5   Discussion: memory modalities as socio-material arrangements

The four vignettes outlined above provide examples of – and perspectives on – how the concept of memory modality can be applied to inquire into different aspects of memory making. There can be a focus on personal memory, memory institutions, online communities, or internet ecologies. Our discussion of memory modality according to these four perspectives has identified a selection of potential applications for the concept in cultural memory research.

5.1   *Memory modalities as arrangements*

The first two vignettes focus on the interplay of physical infrastructures and practices, yet express diverging views on the forms that memory modalities take in each case. In the second vignette, memory modalities are defined in relation to communities of practice as arrangements of trans-institutional decision-making that ultimately shape digital infrastructures and memory modalities themselves. These memory modalities grow out of authoritative arrangements and institutional intents. The third vignette, on memory ecologies, highlights power dynamics, but rather than seeing regimes of power as antecedents of memory modalities, it focuses on the political practices of social inclusion and exclusion in memory work (Landry, 2019): power that is exercised by the ecosystem as a whole. In contrast, the first vignette does not focus on hierarchies within the components that define the arrangement but sees them as co-dependent on each other in their memory making. While the first three vignettes see media and information as central to memory modalities, the fourth sees them primarily as social arrangements within which people and their relations are defined by memory practices. This fourth vignette

emphasises a conceptualisation and inquiry into memory and memory work from the perspective of asking "how" they are achieved and practised.

As we proposed at the outset of the chapter, for all four of the vignettes, their being or becoming modalities they represent are better understood as a process of becoming socio-technological arrangements than discrete facets of memories. The first vignette describes memory modalities as assemblages, whereas the others frame them as trans-institutional arrangements, ecologies, and networks. Rather than describing genres or forms of memories, modalities in all four contexts account for the relationality and interdependence of the related memory modes and the sociality (Landry, 2019) of memory work. Changes in one mode lead to changes in others and in the relationship between them. The third vignette highlights this by showing how the politics of memory practices (Landry, 2019) – and more specifically, policies of openness and closure, as well as openness and closure as distinct memory modalities – in one institution affects other parts of the ecosystem and the ecosystem as a whole.

5.2   *Representational and conceptual memory modalities*

The notion of memory modality lends itself to multiple related conceptualisations with distinct emphases. All of these, however, align with the basic understanding of modalities we outlined above: as aspects relating to how memories are and how they are made or conditioned. In this sense, Erll and Nünning's (2010) proposal to see modes of memory as "hows" of remembering aligns well with how the vignettes develop and use the concept of memory modality to denote different aspects relating to and characterising the modes (i.e. means or ways) of memory and remembering. Similarly, Erll and Nünning's (2010) categorisation of the modes of memory into *cultural* (which are monumental, normative, and formative) and *communicative* memories (which are personal and experienced) as two distinct categories align with how memory modalities are applied in the vignettes to explicate personal or cognitive communicative memories (first vignette) as opposed to institutional or cultural memories (second vignette). However, even when the personal and cultural modes and the resulting modalities are very different (compare institutional and personal memory practices, e.g. in Bowker 2005), the vignettes suggest that in both cases the modalities can serve a roughly comparable purpose. In the first vignette, the modalities are personal and relate to the individual's ways of appropriating digital infrastructures, media, and technologies; in the second, the modalities are institutional and trans-institutional and relate to the institutionalised manners of doing the same thing: of developing and using technologies and infrastructures for organising cultural remembering and memory.

Besides distinguishing the personal and the collective (or the cultural and the communicative, to use Erll & Nünning's categorisation) dimensions in memory modalities, in light of the observation that it is possible to identify both tangible and intangible arrangements of remembering, it seems plausible to suggest that a comparable distinction can be drawn between *representational* and *conceptual* dimensions of memory modalities.

Representational memory modalities would cover aspects relating to ways or manners of how memories are and how they are represented and communicated. A representational perspective orients towards how, for instance, Reading (2016, based on Giddens, 1984), Pickering & Keightley (2006), and others focus on sensory (Wallach & Averbach, 1955; Masek & Keene, 2016; Amar-Halpert et al., 2017) or affective (Hamilakis, 2014) modes of the "representation and operation" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 930) of memory. Depending on the level of abstraction, as illustrated in the vignettes, these modalities could refer to, for instance, the visuality or textuality of the means in which the memory making is expressed, or their combinations as compound forms of modalities, for example, in different social media services.

Conceptual memory modalities would, in contrast, cover aspects relating to the ways or manners of how memories are conceptualised and understood – for instance, as personal, institutional, legal, or collective matters, or as a positive or negative experience, nuisance, or catastrophe. This type of memory modality aligns with how Erll and Nünning (2010), Reading (2016), and Kallinikos et al. (2013) conceptualise the notion in terms of patterns, categories, routines, rules, automation, norms, and perceptions. There are also perceivable affinities here with Lloyd's (2010; 2011) notion of information modalities. The distinction between conceptual memory modalities lies in the manner in which memories are formed and constructed, distinguishing traditional and contemporary memory institutions from each other and from individuals and their personal remembering even in cases where their representational modalities may appear similar or identical. In rough terms, as described in the second and fourth vignettes, the conceptual memory modality that predominates in the memory function in libraries, archives, and museums is characterised by institutionalisation, whereas the new commercial and community organisations and digital platforms are underpinned by the logic of relationality, linking, and serving individual interests.

Needless to say, these two types of modalities coincide, overlap, and are interlinked. Together, they influence how memories unfold and act in the context of memory work. As the first vignette argues, the way a collection of personal images is managed (i.e., framed within a specific representational modality) on a personal device or shared on a social media account changes its conceptual memory modality, and consequently its meaning and related memory work. But rather than unidirectional, the influence of memory modalities and memory work is reciprocal. The second and third vignettes illustrate this by providing a glimpse of how the institutional and legal modalities of conceptualising memories influence the ways memories are made and the ways institutions and individuals engage in memory work. Their agency is not necessarily intrinsic but derives from the interactions of human and nonhuman elements (e.g. users, media infrastructures, algorithms[8]) of the complex memory ecosystem. Being agential and relational, memory modalities organise memory work by pulling and arranging together representations and conceptualisations of memories that, for their part, exercise influence on the practices and procedures of memory work.

5.3   *Memory modalities and related concepts*

A parallel question to what memory modalities are, what they could be, and how they can be used in research is how memory modalities relate to neighbouring concepts. As demonstrated both in our literature review and the vignettes, memory modalities operate on a different level from genres, forms, and media. In contrast to the memory genres of both Olick and Robbins (1998) and Becker (2018), our understanding of memory modalities and how they have been described in earlier literature does not see them in equally normative terms as an array of formulas or an indication of self-referentiality. Modalities are, by definition, aspects of things that relate to modes, that is, to ways or manners in which something is done or takes place, rather than categories or genres. Similarly, while concepts like mediated memory (Grønning, 2020) are useful in understanding how practices of memory making are constituted online and offline, media as a lens tends to focus on mediation and media artefacts rather than actors and the broader social and material ramifications that function as the means of memory making. Their significance is exemplified by our second and third vignettes and the way these underline the influence of the *ownership* of artefacts and reproductions and of memory institutions' institutional business models on memory making. Digital and nondigital media work functions differently at these institutions, not merely because of differences in how, what, and when they mediate, but rather in how it unfolds for the institutions as distinct conceptual memory modalities of preserving and communicating memories in a legal and financial sense.

More broadly, it seems plausible to propose that the concept of memory modality could help to explicate distinct patterns of memory work between different institutions and between institutions and individuals and to provide means to probe into the poorly defined borderland (Dudai & Edelson, 2016) between individual and cultural memory work. Differences in memory modalities could explain why and how very similar, sometimes in fact the same physical and digital artefacts are treated differently by individuals and institutions and by different types of institutions. These differences could help to describe how memory can travel (Reading, 2016) from one representational and conceptual modality to another. Part of this account is that different actors can focus on different representational memory modalities. In a museum, for example, the tactility of an artefact can be more important than merely being able to see it. On a social media site, a photograph is not complete without comments and likes. Part of it is that, as shown by the discussion of the economics of working with physical artefacts and digital reproductions for memory institutions, the economic repercussions for institutional memory work depend not only on the medium, but rather on their different, much broader memory modalities.

As a complement to the concept of media, memory modality provides a comparably useful alternative lens to examine the fragility and the interconnected nature of digital collections. Even if digital optimists declare that the circulation and exchange of information has been dis-embedded from its material constraints, it has become increasingly apparent that the "immaterial" and "delocalised" digital flows

of ones and zeros never exist by themselves but "are always embedded somewhere and in something" (Rubio & Wharton, 2020, p. 217). The new cultural logic that values time and information more than physical material objects is not a feature of the digital medium, but rather a way – or a conceptual (memory) modality – that influences its engagement in personal and societal memory work.

Given how useful the concept of memory modality may turn out to be, this chapter gives just a glimpse small range of possible ways to interpret the notion. Rather than attempting to provide a single account of what a memory modality is and needs to be, our aim has been to scope and explore different options in which the concept can offer an analytical understanding of contemporary memory work. Moreover, as we have outlined possible distinctions between memory modality and parallel neighbouring concepts, it is necessary to stress that memory modality unfolds first and foremost as a complement to other concepts rather than as their replacement.

6   Conclusions

This chapter has interrogated the intriguing, but so far only sporadically discussed, concept of memory modality in an attempt to showcase its usefulness in research-ing memory practices. The four vignettes presented describe a selection of potential perspectives for applying the concept to explicate *personal* or *collective* (or insti-tutional), and *conceptual* or *representational* arrangements of how memories *are* and how they are *made and conditioned*. Memory modalities can be used as a con-ceptual device to arrange modes of memory practices into constellations that are at one and the same time both condensed and open-ended or entangled. We describe memory modalities as socio-material-technological arrangements that mediate and constitute both the past and knowledge about the past at the present. The reference to "arrangements" suggests that the complexity and multiplicity of memory modal-ities, or of any set of memory practices, cannot be reduced to their merely human and nonhuman, social and technical, cultural, and natural features, but rather pro-poses a more ecological thinking that pays attention to neglected entities, invisible work, and hidden layers, human and nonhuman alike. Rather than being a physical, sensory, political, or material category, the notion of memory modality paves the way for acknowledging the inseparability of all these categories.

Memory modalities operate on a different level from genres, forms, and media. They help to shift our attention to doing, being, and becoming rather than to sim-ple mediation or artefactual materialities. In that respect, the four vignettes work as a reflexive probe into what Erll (2020, p. 869) recently proposed as necessary for memory research: distinguishing different "systems and modes" of memory work. Our work underlines further the importance of identifying what the differ-ent modalities are, when and where they come into play, and how they interact, interfere, and engage with each other. As the four vignettes illustrate, different research settings and perspectives can lead to considering vastly different types of things as memory modalities. We propose that thinking of memory modalities as arrangements that are in the process of becoming rather than as fixed forms of

media or materiality can direct critical inquiry to keep asking the questions of *by*, *through*, and *in what* memories are made in the evolving media and information landscape.

Notes

1 In psychology and neuroscience, the term 'memory modalities' has been used as a parallel to sense modalities to refer to how and in what mode individuals remember: for instance, auditorily 'by the sound' or visually by the outlook (Wallach & Averbach, 1955; Masek & Keene, 2016; Amar-Halpert et al., 2017).
2 Reading (2021) relates memory forms to the states of mnemonic capital they represent according to whether they are embodied, objectified, institutionalised, or ecological.
3 This vignette is authored by Jennifer Krueckeberg and reflects her doctoral research project.
4 This vignette is authored by Quoc-Tan Tran and reflects his doctoral research project.
5 See more in Chapter 3 of this volume.
6 This vignette is authored by Dydimus Zengenene and reflects his doctoral research project.
7 This vignette is authored by Angeliki Tzouganatou and reflects her doctoral research project.
8 See more in Yeo (2018), Ramsay (2018) and Bonshek (2019).

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8   Memory loss

Youth and the fragility of personal digital remembering

Jennifer Krueckeberg

1   Introduction

Today, a growing number of young people are highly dependent on digital technology for their education, communication, and leisure time. This daily interaction means that much of what young people do is recorded through these technologies. This includes not only unintentional records like conversations or left-behind traces when interacting with websites but also the creation and sharing of personal memories that are part of these everyday encounters. For example, much of young people's early childhood has been documented through digital photographs and videos, either by their parents or themselves. These digital memory objects are frequently shared through messenger services or social media where the affordances of applications and platforms give these objects specific mnemonic qualities. Moreover, because digital media provides higher connectivity between individuals, the lines between personal and collective memory become further blurred. While physical memory objects such as photo albums, journals or postcards continue to play a crucial role in personal memory, digital media is integral to contemporary memory making. Yet issues of loss, decay, or inaccessibility are still mainly associated with the 'physical' and not the 'digital'. Hence, the consequences of losing personal digital memories are rarely investigated.

Looking at young people's personal memory practices shows the fragility of digital memory. The loss of digital memories is frequently experienced by young people, and concerns about how to maintain these objects for the future are already present. While institutions can afford to set up data-management strategies, hire professionals, and put resources into developing in-house solutions, non-professionals struggle with the organisation and maintenance of ever-growing personal digital archives. Young people in particular depend on using proprietary software, devices, and platforms that are rarely designed to last and often lack adaptation to their needs.

The relationship between youth and digital media has been widely explored, particularly in connection with social media (Bennett & Robards, 2014; Ross, 2019) and online communities (Smith & Kollock, 1999; Vickery, 2018). Indeed, youth and digital technology have been treated as heavily interlinked in comparison to other age groups, an approach that has recently led to more attention being

paid to young people and their connection to digital memory (Annabell, 2023). However, young people's work behind maintaining personal memory objects, their experiences in case of loss, and the structural issues behind them have rarely been discussed. Looking at young people's practices of maintaining digital memory (Krueckeberg, 2022), this contribution explores the material and infrastructural conditions underlying digital memory. Furthermore, by highlighting the assemblage that embodies human and nonhuman actors in the creation of digital memory making, it attempts to show the complex connections and disconnections that complicate the maintenance of digital memory objects.

I will use the personal experiences of my research participants to address the emerging practices of maintaining that build various access points to digital memory objects and involve relations between various types of digital media and devices: social media, smartphones, and storage units. Lastly, I will also speak about the importance of analogue memory objects in maintenance practices, as they are often seen as safer while being perceived as embodying greater emotional value than digital objects.

2   Methodological Adaptations: Exploring digital memories amidst a pandemic

This chapter is based on my doctoral research, for which I conducted 12 months of digital ethnography between 2020 and 2021. For the purposes of this study, which looks at the memory practices of young people, I chose an approach that could investigate memory and media practices, online as well as offline. Moreover, it was important to integrate methods that could explore the role that digital infrastructures play within memory assemblages. Thus, my approach highlighted the interconnectivity between the 'physical' and the 'digital', which are often perceived as a binary. While a digital ethnography was planned from the beginning, in-person fieldwork was cut short due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure the health of the participants and my own, interviews were mainly conducted remotely through video-conferencing software. I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with participants living in London and in several German cities. The interviews explored participants' daily usage of digital media, their memory making practices, and their opinions on their generation's relationship to digitalisation.

Using digital ethnography and 'being there remotely' (Pink, 2015, p. 134) allowed me to gain additional insights into the everyday lives and digital media practices of participants. Digital ethnography applies the principles of ethnography to digital media by proposing that the researcher immerses themself within digital cultures. Moreover, many proponents of digital ethnography also argue for integrating 'offline' practices and material objects, such as infrastructures, computers or smartphones, as part of the ethnographic research (see Coleman, 2010; Miller & Horst 2012). As both the United Kingdom and Germany placed restrictions on in-person social interactions, the pandemic increased digital media use as the only safe way of communicating and interacting with others at the time. Hence, the pandemic highlighted and quantified the digital media practices of my participants,

but also their relationship with digital memory objects, as they were reminiscing about a time before Covid-19 while wondering whether the world would ever 'get back to normal'.

In addition to interviews, I used photo elicitation to investigate participants' relationship with their digital memory objects – mainly their social media accounts. Through photo elicitation, I explored with the participants their memories, feelings, and thoughts (Collier, 2013) about certain images on their social media accounts. Photo elicitation, as a method, utilises photographs during qualitative interviews to spark conversations based on what is shown in the picture. Because of its visual form, it can bridge cultural, educational, and economic barriers. To conduct photo elicitation, I shared my screen with the participants during video conference calls. We then scrolled together through participants' Facebook and Instagram accounts (Instagram being the more popular one). The participants then contextualised where the pictures were taken, who was shown, and their relationship to the people depicted in the photos, from which stories about themselves and their past emerged. Participants mainly chose the pictures they wanted to talk about; I only probed about images at the beginning to start a conversation. Thus, participants could highlight which images were interesting and important to them, revealing personal meanings and emotional attachments behind these memory objects. Moreover, these images also contained metadata like geolocation and links to the accounts of tagged people. In many cases, the captions also provided justifications and explanations for why a picture was posted. For example, the phrase 'Felt cute. Might delete later' can be commonly found on social media, to justify the posting of a selfie.

3   The materiality of digital memory and young people's maintenance practices

In the early study of digital memory, its difference from physical memory objects was often pronounced (Esposito, 2013; Sommer, 2018), particularly, its presumed resistance against the hands of time. Because digital media does not 'naturally' wither as a book or photograph does, the apparent absence of this form of decay was used to strengthen the argument about digital media's disembodiment. Mayer-Schönberger (2009) warns of the 'demise of forgetting,' emphasising the global movement of information, the access to cheap storage space that enables the creation of endless copies of original information, and the standardisation of digital formats that make digital information 'future proof'. Gudmundsdottir (2017) also states that:

> Forgetting, as in the natural erosion of the past, is, at least not in theory, offered by digital technology. We may think of material on the web, blogs, comments, status updates on Facebook, etc. as in some ways ephemeral. It is not necessarily meant to last – it carries with it the taste of the everyday, as we comment on current affairs, family news, or the weather. But as with everything digital, it refuses to disappear, to be forgotten.
>
> (p. 76)

In addition, Andrew Hoskins speaks of 'the end of decay time' (2013), contrasting the continuous copying of information and its dispersion through hyperconnectivity with the 'yellowed, faded or flickered, susceptible to the obscuration of use and of age' (p. 387) of predigital media.[1]

These approaches reflect an uncertainty about the flow of data, the obscurity of where they are stored, and what the rights to personal data are. Digital media, and the internet in particular, often give the impression that information can always be recovered – and thus can never be forgotten. These instances of unwanted personal information popping up are a well-documented phenomenon that mirrors underlying privacy concerns. However, approaches that oppose digital media to analogue media in terms of their susceptibility to natural decay also frame digital media as essentially immaterial. They neglect that the interaction with digital media remains physical through objects like a smartphone, computer screen, speakers, or mouse. Moreover, these views tend to equate digital technologies and digital media with the internet and its content.

The ability to reproduce digital objects and hyperconnectivity between different people, servers, and infrastructures across the globe does not mean, as is often claimed, that the internet does not forget. The material turn in digital media studies points out the importance of studying digital media's physicality: that is, its infrastructures, materials, and manufacturing (Allen-Robertson, 2017). This material perspective criticises the tendency of media scholars to look at the content rather than the technical structures and the uncritical adoption of marketing language developed by technology companies. For example, terms like 'the cloud' or 'wireless' perpetuate the idea of ephemeral technologies that are virtual and do not exist in 'real life'.

Reading and Notley (2015) criticise the adoption of these marketing concepts in academic analysis and propose a material lens when conceptualising digital memory. They point out that large parts of the internet are already disappearing, meaning that historical data might well be lost. Link rot – the restructuring of websites and directories that makes information on the internet inaccessible – is one of the main phenomena in this regard (Royster, 2019; O'Connor & Doherty, 2020). As Jonathan Zittrain (2021) puts it, the disappearance of some information and the persistence of other information are not mutually exclusive, but rather show that these issues arise from the internet's distinct architecture, which is structured to centre immediacy and the 'now', rather than long-term stability. This fixation on the 'now' is also engrained in the cultural understanding of the internet as being part of the future, and thus as needing to constantly innovate and change.

Digital materialism also concentrates on parts of digital memory and its potential loss that are often overlooked when speaking about digital media. For example, Kirschenbaum's (2007) work criticises the overemphasis on textual analysis of digital media while ignoring the specific technical mechanisms that make these texts possible. In his work, Kirschenbaum shows the constantly occurring loss and recovery of information, exposing the usually invisible process behind digital processes. Storage units are essential in the working of the internet, with large data centres being responsible for the functioning of cloud services. In his article on the

'global assemblages of digital flow', Graham Pickren (2018) points to the role of the data centres that make the production and exchange of big data possible. Pickren stresses that data centres are placed in only a few key geographical landscapes, often part of economically struggling communities, such as former mining towns. The growth of digital media thus has 'real' material, that is, ecological, economic, and social implications. Considering the materiality behind digital technologies thus reveals the entanglements of human and nonhuman relations that constitute digital memory.

Young people interact with digital media through different devices, providing a variety of digital affordances, to collect and share their memories. In particular, the presence of the smartphone leads young people to take more pictures and to capture moments throughout their everyday. The participants in this project often pointed out how their interactions with smartphones were part of an automatism, such as reaching unintentionally for their phones. Several participants described how this automatism influenced their behaviour. To Janine (aged 26), it was most noticeable in how she started her day: 'Somehow the first thing I do in the morning is reach for my smartphone,'[2] whereas Didier (aged 20) likened it more to a bodily need: 'In the end it just a habit […] but also something haptic somehow. This haptic stimulus is to fiddle with something all the time. Some people smoke all the time and others, when they feel uncomfortable hold their phone in their hands all the time.'[3] Moreover, Louise (aged 27) linked reaching for her phone to taking pictures frequently. 'Uhm, and sometimes it is something subconscious. [You think]: "Oh, a nice moment." And then you've already pulled out your phone.'[4]

Because young people are taking pictures with their smartphones frequently in all sorts of daily situations, encouraged by the constant companionship of the smartphone, large interconnected personal memory archives are being created that are mainly located on phones, computers, social media, hard drives, and cloud services. This dispersion of personal memory and of large numbers of digital memory objects (participants often held from 3,000 to 10,000 images and videos just on their phones) complicates the engagement and management of digital memory objects.

Often the wish for immediate communication with others, whether in visual, textual or audio form, functions as the main motivator for young people's digital memory making (van Dijck, 2008). The focus on immediate communication also means that audio and text messages can become valuable memory objects over time, even when they were created for more practical matters. Conversely, through the ability to constantly produce photographs, images can lose their primary function as a way 'to capture special moments': for example, when screenshots are taken of train travel times, or to snap and share something a person has seen online. These screenshots are often seen as clutter in phone galleries and need to be reviewed to decide whether they should be kept or deleted. However, objects like screenshots as well as text and audio messages can become memory objects over time. Zijlema et al. (2016) call such objects 'emerging relationship companions' which are 'mundane objects that accrued meaning over time, often carrying marks of the owner's personal experiences, and evoke feelings of comfort and

contentment when interacting with them' (p. 4). Thus, personal digital memory objects go beyond more conventional mnemonic objects like photographs and videos and contribute to difficulties in keeping an overview of personal memories.

Personal archives are routinely extended through exchanges with family and friends via messenger services, but also with objects shared on social media that provide different mnemonic affordance based on their features. As Luca (aged 26) described:

> Or somehow where you get a photo of yourself or you get images sent in the family [Whatsapp] group and then Mama is sending you the same picture again privately and then somehow you have everything double and triple. And these are things I'm also deleting.[5]

Social media itself often prompts young people to share what they are doing and to expand their archives to their platforms, because memories are important for retaining users (Jacobsen & Beer, 2021). It is important to note that social media is subject to social norms and digital affordances that create specific dynamics that lead many young people to perform their identities through personal memories. On social media, memories are being shared to communicate with others about personal experiences, but identity performances also have to appeal to algorithms that curate feeds to be seen by other people (Krueckeberg, 2021). To meet these social and technical demands, young people create images specifically for social media – which requires a lot of preparation and creative work. For example, participants who were particularly involved with their Instagram accounts would travel to certain locations just to take pictures with their friends for social media. Taking pictures for Instagram would also become a way for them to spend time with their friends and socialise. Hence, as with smartphones, the presence of social media and its prevalent role in young people's daily lives prompts the taking of images and videos.

Young people rarely have a centralised way of keeping all their digital memories. Instead, they are distributed over smartphones, social media, and storage units like computers, USB sticks, cloud services, and external hard drives. It is in the material context of data loss and recovery that I place young people's practices of maintaining personal memories. I am speaking of maintenance here rather than preservation, because the creation of copies and repurposing that occurs when shifting between modalities often represents temporary solutions to the issues. The ongoing creation and sharing of personal memory objects create a constant flow of digital memories in young people's smartphones, social media, and other storage units, which are extended by the smartphones, social media accounts, and devices of their close social relationships. This dispersion, however, is not disembodied: it requires physical storage units, like servers and routers, to enable the movement of this information. The flow and preservation of digital memory objects can only be achieved through the maintenance of the infrastructures digital media depends on.

Although my categorisation of maintenance practices emerged from the analysis of the ethnographic data, loosely following a grounded theory approach, it is

important to mention that maintenance and repair have previously been theorised in science and technology studies, often in relation to care. These perspectives highlight the vulnerability of the material world; they challenge the sociopolitical preoccupation with innovation, growth, and progress by highlighting decay and the ongoing process of keeping things from falling apart. As Steven L. Jackson (2014) describes maintenance, it is the '[…] ongoing activities by which stability (such as it is) is maintained, the subtle arts of repair by which rich and robust lives are sustained against the weight of centrifugal odds, and how sociotechnical forms and infrastructures, large and small, get not only broken but also restored, one not-so-metaphoric brick at a time.'

While the study of maintenance and repair has often been paired with ethnography – for example, in researching ICT networks in rural Namibia (Jackson et al., 2012), or investigating activities involved in repairing and maintaining a block of flats in Switzerland (Strebel et al., 2015) – the importance of maintenance practices for personal digital memory has been mainly overlooked.

Maintenance of digital memory involves a curation process that is performed irregularly. In order to care for digital memory objects a person has to go through and evaluate each memory object, which can be time-consuming. Because of the large amounts of digital information produced, some objects must be discarded to create meaning, while others are selected to be backed up on storage devices. Backing up also means that it is rarely the original that is kept over time, but rather its multiple copies that are frequently reappropriated to different contexts, in which the objects take on new meanings. For example, the same image of one's childhood dog might exist on a young person's phone, their guardians' phones or computers, and on an Instagram account. In each of these locations, the meaning of the object shifts.

Maintenance of digital memory objects is required because devices might get lost or broken, but also because changes to the software of a device and greater digital infrastructure occur frequently that might mean that data formats are no longer readable, or that one becomes disconnected from access. Practices of maintaining are therefore often time- and labour-intensive. Many young people aim to outsource parts of these tasks to services like cloud storage, where backups of phones can be created automatically. Practices of maintaining require a certain level of technological knowledge to judge which mode of storing memories might be the best long-term option without having to back up memories again soon. Maintaining personal digital memory therefore raises several challenges: (1) the increasing dependence on a few companies and their products, (2) the need to review, move, and create copies of digital memory objects to maintain them, and (3) the obsolescence of devices and storage spaces.

Hurdles to practices of maintaining are linked to wider structural issues within digital memory, like data rot, or digital design that is focused on immediacy rather than longevity. Hence, the act of digital forgetting is more complex than previously assumed. In fact, the practices of maintaining digital information, and thus digital memories, have remained hidden in these discussions. Maintenance recreates connections between material conditions, technological mechanisms, relations, and

young people's practices that are co-creating personal memories. Hence, the larger the amount of digital information and the greater its dispersion between personal archives, the more difficult it is for individuals to engage with these objects. In this complex web, loss of memories occurs frequently.

4   Lost devices and failures

Looking at young people's lived experiences, the loss of digital memories is not an anomaly, but a frequently occurring phenomenon. At its simplest, digital memories are lost by losing or damaging the devices they were stored on. The centralised role of smartphones in taking and sharing digital memories also makes these objects more vulnerable to loss. The materiality of digital memories is the most visible in this instance. For example, Neele (aged 26) told me, 'I can't tell you how many phones I've lost or destroyed.'[6] In one incident, her smartphone fell into a toilet while attending a party at a club. Having failed to produce backups meant that the images that had documented a certain period of her life were lost with the device. She was only able to recover a few by asking family and friends whether they could send her shared images of that time. According to Neele, still, most of her images were lost.

Besides getting lost, devices often stop functioning as they initially did, for example through malfunctioning hardware, or because software updates for the device's operation system are no longer provided. Moreover, many digital devices, particularly smartphones, are produced with built-in obsolescence that incentivises people to replace them in a span of a few years (Chun, 2016; Ploeger, 2017). This, again, necessitates the movement of data to other storage units to rebuild access to memory objects. Hence, despite their essential role in young people's lives, smartphones as individual objects are seen as replaceable and are rarely intended to be the final destination for memory objects.

Unless the storage on their phone was full, the young people I talked to rarely reviewed images in their phone galleries. Hence, the images were mostly unordered and not curated as they no longer had a clear overview of their images, stating that it took them a lot of time to find specific images. This 'overload' also disturbs the relationship with individual memory objects, making them appear less precious until they are lost. As Sophia (aged 19) described:

> Uhm, I'm doing backups on my computer afterwards or on an external hard drive and then I'm usually deleting the images that I've already saved from my phone. But I'm not doing this in regular intervals or something like that. Just when I realise 'Okay, at the moment there are too many images.' Then I'm usually saving them and sort them again.[7]

The uncertainty about how long a device might last leads young people to turn to alternative options that are intended to save time by maintaining memories automatically. Most commonly, participants turned to cloud services, as this allowed

them to create automatic backups and to outsource maintenance practices to companies. As Janine remarked: 'I used to have a laptop and I had a lot [of images] on it. Then it broke and since then I've kept everything on my smartphone or on the cloud.'[8]

Cloud services are offered as a technical solution to a technical problem. The large numbers of images and the need to maintain them create issues for individuals managing these archives in the long run. Uploading their memories to the cloud meant that participants did not have to worry about backups or about their devices failing, as the maintenance of servers and connected services become the responsibility of technology companies. Most cloud spaces are free of charge up to a certain storage limit before they charge monthly fees. For example, Apple's iCloud costs between €0.99 per month for 50 gigabytes and €59.99 for 12 terabytes. However, subscription models can be volatile, as pricing and the conditions of the usage can change with the providers' business decisions. Moreover, young people are dependent on these services to preserve their memories long-term.

Despite the convenience that cloud services offer, participants were often uncertain about whether backups had actually been made, as they rarely checked. Moreover, they sometimes had problems accessing their clouds because of forgotten passwords or synchronisation issues when purchasing a new phone. This was a particular issue for participants who thought of themselves as being not very 'techy'. When I asked Janine whether she thought her memories would be safer in the cloud, she responded: 'Well, depends on what you mean by safe. It is of course a question of how safe the cloud actually is, but it is simply more practical.'[9]

In deciding to store their memories on cloud services, young people give up a certain level of control over their memory objects for convenience, but they also aim to protect them by integrating them into a greater networked structure. However, the growth of cloud computing contributes to perpetuating the 'myth of immateriality' (van den Boomen et al., 2009, as cited in Reichert & Richterich, 2015, p. 5), a myth that surrounds digital media and shifts maintenance practices to providers. Large data centres are not failproof: they are subject to breakage, software failure, and the elements, thus requiring constant cooling and large amounts of electricity (Aragona et al., 2018; Brodie, 2020). However, because failures and issues are rarely experienced by the end-users, these material failings remain hidden.

5   Fragility of social media

Social media is deeply integrated into young people's memory practices of creating and sharing memories. While it is mainly a means for instant communication with peers, it is also an important personal memory archive. However, compared to smartphones and other storage units, it is subject to frequent revisions. Because of the visibility of their memories, young people often opt to delete pictures or remove them from public view. This can be due to changing interests, but is often

done to carefully craft an online persona. For example, Viktor (aged 20) reflected on his relationship with his online performances as follows:

> Hm, well. I wouldn't say that what I do is fake, but I'm thinking about what I'm showing. I'm somehow only showing a part of it and maybe manipulate it a bit so that it [the photo] fits in. But somehow I'm also only showing the nicest part and not the rest.[10]

Casper (aged 19), who used his Instagram account mainly to share his music and grow his career, had a more calculated approach.

> So there was this point when I wanted to step up the whole thing. And uhm… that's when I deleted all the more amateur-type videos. When I was really inexperienced and I just posted some like, you know… it's a business page! You cannot have pictures of your dog on your business page if you're selling music. Uhm, 'cause your customers for example might not like dogs.[11]

Having to curate images recontextualises memory objects – which makes social media accounts dynamic archives. These archives change through the removal or addition of new features, but also through the actions of young people, as their interests and the ways they want to be seen change over time. The visibility of one's identity performances thus influences what stays on social media. Moreover, the interviews and the photo-elicitation showed that participants were aware of issues concerning the sharing of their personal data, the impact of social media on their mental health, and how uploading to social media sites diminishes their control over where their images might end up. These issues have expanded recently with the emergence of algorithmically generated images and the advancements in 'deep fakes', whereby images from the internet can be misused to train algorithms or to produce manipulated images without a person's consent. Lydia (aged 26) expressed her concerns about this as follows: 'And I would say nothing is safe on the internet, you know. This means of course that you have to be careful with what you share because practically anything can be used [by someone else].'[12]

Pressure to conform, and social media's reputation to damage mental health, form part of the reasons why young people might leave or entirely delete their accounts. When young people decide that they no longer want to be part of a social media network, they face several dilemmas. Memories and the social connections they have built with other users over the years are a strong reason for young people to remain. While they rarely decide to delete their accounts, they can also lose access if their accounts are suspended through the platform, as happened to one of the male participants, Luca.

According to Instagram, Luca had violated the community guidelines, although he could not understand which exact action had led to the suspension. Seeking an explanation from Instagram, Luca was told that reinstatements were only possible for accounts that had a large following of 10,000 people and upwards. Being a casual user, Luca had no choice but to start a new account from scratch. During

the interview, he was still upset about the suspension and complained that some of the memories he shared were gone forever because it was impossible to back them up.

Social media exemplifies how corporate decisions directly impact the way digital media is built and how we interact with social media platforms. In addition to being able to ban users, social media platforms like Instagram are also vulnerable to disappearing altogether. Looking back at the internet's history shows that forums and social media websites are not immune from disappearing from the internet without trace. Myspace, for example, was hugely popular in the early 2000s. The website was founded in 2003 and is estimated to have had more than 300 million users at its peak. Twenty years after its foundation, the site is virtually unusable. Due to a failed data migration in 2019, the site lost a large amount of 'pictures, videos, and audio files', including any data uploaded before 2016 (Hern, 2019). It is not impossible that such a mass loss of digital personal memories might happen again, as today's popular platforms are not immune to similar systems issues.

Facebook, for example, experiences periodic glitches when pictures are damaged or deleted due to 'technical issues', as the company puts it.[13] The last such incident happened in June 2023 (Krishnamurthy, 2023). Moreover, pictures on Facebook lose their quality over time as their size is compressed when they are uploaded to save storage space. The loss of image quality can also be a motivator for young people to delete images entirely. When asked about the reason why she might delete images from her social media profiles, Lydia said:

> […] things where I thought 'Okay, this does not have to stay on my profile', because that were some images that I didn't like that much anymore. Images that had also lost their quality and weren't that good anymore […][14]

This highlights the material constraints of digital media and their consequences for people's capability to keep digital memory objects. Apart from the repercussions for personal memory loss, scholars have also started to address the effects on collective memory and the documentation of historical events should companies like Facebook, now Meta, disappear (Öhman & Aggarwal, 2020). While social media companies' durability and their ability to safeguard personal memories have yet to be seen, simply moving personal memory objects from social media to personal storage devices removes the context in which the memories were created. Furthermore, the digital affordances of the platforms, which add specific mnemonic qualities and meanings to the objects, are also lost with the move.

6   From analogue to digital to analogue

The experience of losing digital memories is frequent and leads young people to rethink their relationship to these memory objects, which appear fleeting in comparison to analogue objects. The advent of digital media has not erased but rather complemented preexisting practices of remembering. The difficulties in maintaining digital memory and the resulting distance from these objects have led many

young people to see analogue memory objects as more reliable. While personal digital memory objects often exist in the tens of thousands, the number of nondigital memory objects is usually more limited and assessable, which allows for more individual engagement. Moreover, many of my participants who had experienced the fragility of digital media also appreciated that they could have more sensory engagements with analogue objects and could keep them 'safe' more easily. Sophia, for example, spoke of a photo album she had put together with printed pictures. She enjoyed that she could take the book out when spending evenings with her friends to go through it and reminisce. During our conversation about whether she thought the photos on her social media account would be accessible to her in the future, she replied: 'I don't think so, because I would have already deleted another account of mine. Because I'm realising that it's somehow unnecessary. I believe that my photo album will be safer in 50 years than those online.'[15]

Keeping printed photos also removes the concerns over ownership and access that arise when using the services of technology companies. Not only did the preservation of personal memory objects give a sense of security but participants also appreciated the creation of analogue images. As mentioned above, digital media encourages young people to take pictures more frequently. Analogue photography is seen as oppositional to the digital mass production of imagery in a few clicks. Louise liked taking pictures with an analogue camera because she enjoyed the care that went into adjusting the camera and being restricted in how many pictures she could take. This restriction also made her choose more deliberately what pictures to take in comparison to photographing with her smartphone. Moreover, she said that she enjoyed the time between taking the pictures and developing them and the sense of surprise she felt about how they turned out. While Louise also felt that these physical pictures would last longer than their digital equivalents, it was the emotional value and the way she could engage with them that made her appreciate them more as memory objects.

> If I would have time for it I'd continue it…I like it far more than taking pictures with the phone camera. But I'm not carrying this camera around with me. There is a difference and it does much more to you. Yeah, sometimes you take multiple shots with a phone and then you get five times the same picture. And if you then don't sort them out…and those [pictures] from an analogue camera, with real printed pictures are quite nice. And to hold it in your hands and the colours are also different somehow. Yeah. Let's say realer. Crasser.[16]

In addition to the issue of safekeeping and more intentional creation of memory objects, analogue images and other objects can be experienced in a spatial dimension, for example as decoration. Neele had decorated the room she rented with photographs of moments she appreciated.

> Just because when I print pictures, I often hang them up somewhere. And it is somehow really nice when you come home, switch on a cosy light, and then you have a series of cool snapshots. You put all these pictures into connection with a story and I think that when they're really in front of you, physically,

I find them to be more beautiful than when scrolling through them on your phone-thingy. I don't know. At that moment I'm not really thinking about the image. But when it is hanging on my wall I'm thinking 'Wow, nice. That was a really cool time back then.'[17]

While analogue memory objects have strong emotional and moral values attached to them, they are not inherently more meaningful, although the popular discourse often suggests this idea. Digital and analogue memory objects are not oppositional, but deeply intertwined. Analogue objects provide a different sensory experience, one that changes our interaction with them. Moreover, the ability to engage with these objects entirely through physical touch also distinguishes young people's relationship with them. On the contrary, digital devices only ever hold a part of digital memories, as their invisible physical parts are distributed across hidden complex infrastructures.

7   Conclusion

The experiences of the young participants highlighted in this chapter are closely linked to emerging questions about the longevity and stability of digital technologies as their 'novelty effect' wears off. In particular, the idea that anything that was ever uploaded to the internet will remain there is being questioned as the materiality of digital media becomes more evident.

Big internet outages, such as the one occurring in 2021, when thousands of websites, including Amazon, the BBC and the official White House website went offline because of a network error affecting the cloud computing service Fastly (Delcker, 2021), are becoming more frequent. These events expose issues surrounding the sustainability of internet infrastructures and their need for maintenance. Furthermore, in light of the current climate and ecological challenges the world faces, the demand for more data storage and the resulting increased energy needs (Verdecchia et al., 2022) highlight the material challenges and environmental cost of keeping ever-growing digital memory archives.

The loss of digital memories has implications not just for personal or family memory, but also wider ramifications for historical documentation. On the one hand, it is implied that social media companies have an even greater responsibility to safeguard these memories for the future; on the other hand, it also gives them more importance in the digital ecology, which is already dominated by monopolies. Thus, a general rethinking of how we treat and keep personal memory objects is needed to preserve them for future generations. These efforts require further investments into infrastructures that are aimed at preserving information for the public good rather than the generation of profits. While large storage spaces are becoming more affordable, this would still require costly public investments. Nevertheless, it is important to shift digital systems and platforms, whether private or public, to favour longevity over immediacy and constant renewal to assist people in preserving their memories for the generations to come.

Notes

1 In later publications he has softened this stance and refers rather to digital media's unpredictability in decaying (Hoskins, 2017).

2 Interviewed on 8 July 2020. Translated from German: 'Der erste Griff geht irgendwie (I lacht) erstmal zum Smartphone.'

3 Interviewed on 6 August 2020. Translated from German: 'Dass man im Endeffekt einfach so diese Gewohnheiten auch [...] irgendwie auch was Haptisches irgendwie so. Diesen haptischen Reiz, dass man die ganze Zeit an irgendwas rumfummelt so ne. Manche Leute haben die ganze Zeit ne Zigarette und manche Leute haben eben wenn es unangenehm wird die ganze Zeit ihr Handy in der Hand.'

4 Interviewed on 27 May 2020. Translated from German: 'Ähm, und manchmal macht man es aber auch irgendwie unterbewusst. "Ah, schöner Moment". Irgendwie ist dann schon das Handy draußen.'

5 Interviewed on 22 October 2020. Translated from German: 'Oder halt irgendwie auch so Sachen wo man irgendwie n Foto von sich oder man kriegt irgendwie Fotos von der Familie geschickt in der Familien-Gruppe und dann schickt Mama einem das aber auch nochmal privat und dann hat man irgendwie alles doppelt und dreifach. Und das lösche ich halt auch dann.'

6 Interviewed on 16 June 2020. Translated from German: 'Ich kann dir gar nicht sagen, wie viele Handys ich schon verloren oder kaputt gemacht hab.'

7 Interviewed on 7 April 2020. Translated from German: 'Äh, ich sicher die auf meinem Computer dann im Nachhinein noch, oder auf ner externen Festplatte, ähm, und dann lösche ich dann auch meistens dann die schon gesichert sind von meinem Handy einfach runter. Ähm, aber das mache ich jetzt auch nicht in regelmäßigen Abständen oder so. Einfach wenn ich merke, okay, es sind jetzt grad zu viele Bilder, dann sichere ich die und dann sortiere ich auch meistens nochmal aus.'

8 Interviewed on 8 July 2020. Translated from German: 'Ich hatte mal nen Laptop und da war auch noch ganz viel drauf. Der ist dann kaputt gegangen und seitdem ist halt alles über Smartphone in der Cloud eigentlich nur noch.'

9 Interviewed on 8 July 2020. Translated from German: 'Also was heißt sicherer, ist dann natürlich auch so ne Frage wie sicher so ne Cloud wirklich ist, aber es ist halt praktischer.'

10 Interviewed on 26 August 2020. Translated from German: 'hm..also ich würd nicht sagen, dass es fake ist bei mir, aber ich mir halt sehr genau Gedanken was und was ich preisgebe so. Ich zeig halt irgendwie einen Ausschnitt und wisch da vielleicht irgendwann noch n bisschen drüber, was n bisschen angepasst ist. Aber zeigt halt irgendwie auch nur den schönsten Ausschnitt, aber halt nicht den Rest.'

11 Interviewed on 2 September 2020.

12 Interviewed on 9 June 2020. Translated from German: 'Und ich würd mal sagen im Internet ist nichts sicher, ne. Das heißt natürlich muss man vorsichtig sein über das was man irgendwie teilt und alles kann ja praktisch auch irgendwie genutzt werden.'

13 Statement to disappearing images on Facebook Help Center https://www.facebook.com/help/1895646540799868

14 Interviewed on 9 June 2020. Translated from German: Translated from German: "Oder so Dinge wo ich so dachte 'okay, das muss jetzt nicht noch online auf meinem Profil sein', weil das nur irgendwelche Bilder waren, die mir jetzt vielleicht auch gar nicht mehr so gut gefallen. Die auch einfach von der Qualität her halt einfach nicht mehr so gut waren […]."

15 Interviewed on 7 April 2020. Translated from German: 'Okay, nee. Glaub ich nicht, weil ich glaub dass sich bis dahin bestimmt auch schon wieder irgendein Account von mir aufgelöst hat, weil ich den dann gelöscht hab. Weil ich auch merke, okay, das ist dann auch irgendwie unnötig. Ich glaub da ist mein Fotoalbum in 50 Jahren sicherer als die im Netz.'

16 Interviewed on 27 May 2020. Translated from German: 'Wenn ich da jetzt viel Zeit hatte und so würde ich das auch weiter...also viel lieber als jetzt so mit Handykamera. Und ich trag halt diese Kamera nicht mit mir rum. Es ist schon n Unterschied und macht viel mehr mit einem. Ja, manchmal hält man ja auch mit dem Handy ja auch so drauf mehrmals und dann hat man irgendwie auch fünfmal das gleiche Bild. Und wenn man das dann nicht aussortiert ist ja auch...und das von der analogen Kamera, also richtig die gedruckten Bilder das ist schon schön. Und das auch in den Händen zu halten und die Farben sind auch anders oder irgendwie...ja. Wirklicher sag ich mal so. Krasser.'

17 Interviewed on 16 June 2020. Translated from German: 'Ja, auf jeden Fall. Einfach nur, weil wenn ich sie mir ausdrucke, dann hänge ich sie mir meistens auch irgendwo hin. Und dann ist es irgendwie voll schön, du so abends nach Hause kommst, du machst dir so'n wohliges Licht an und dann hast du so ne Bilderreihe von allen coolen Momentaufnahmen. Du bringst die ganzen Bilder halt nochmal mit ner Geschichte in Verbindung und ich finde, wenn sie wirklich vor dir sind, also physisch vor dir und dann finde ich das schöner, wie wenn ich da mal kurz drüber scrolle in meinem Handy-Ding und ich weiß nicht. Da denke ich dann gar nicht so viel über das Bild nach. Aber wenn ich es an der Wand sehe, denke ich mir voll so oft "Boah, schön...war ne richtig coole Zeit damals."'

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Part IV

Future memory work

9 Towards a relational approach to social impact measurement of Participatory Memory Practices

Samantha Lutz, Nils Geib, Peter Schubert, and Gertraud Koch

1 Introduction

An increasingly important aspect for memory institutions to explore as they undertake future memory work is the concept of 'social impact' and the question of how it is to be measured. Shaping socio-cultural changes and near futures, and thus creating 'Impact' in civil societies, is a cornerstone of memory institutions and their missions, as well as related fields of research in the humanities. There is a lively discourse in the nonprofit sector and related research fields, such as nonprofit and public management, on 'social impact' and 'social impact measurement' (Schubert, 2021). Cultural institutions, however, such as galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAMs), are increasingly confronted with questions of 'social impact' in their digitalisation projects, related work contexts, and research projects.

There are persuasive reasons for seeking convincing evidence that GLAM institutions are in fact making a significant difference in the world and providing a meaningful contribution to society. Public funding bodies and other stakeholders nowadays expect organisations to demonstrate results as part of their financial accountability and transparent use of public funds. Discourses centred on 'evidence-based policymaking' and 'citizen science' in the European Union further underscore the growing pressure from funders for the cultural sector and related research fields to showcase practicality and outreach in their knowledge production. This requires presenting tangible impacts and actionable recommendations that can contribute to the ongoing efforts made by the EU Commission and other governmental bodies at both national and regional levels, in line with the most recent EU impact factors within the Horizon Europe framework (van den Besselaar et al., 2018). Moreover, the focus on social impact in funding programmes at the supranational, national, and regional levels (e.g., Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, or the City of Hamburg's eCulture Agenda 2020) requires development in the potential of social impact measurement for the cultural sector.

In light of these realities, cultural, memory, and research institutions are under mounting pressure to demonstrate the practicality and relevance of their work, as

well as their contribution to shaping knowledge production and research agendas in these fields. This raises the question of how the cultural sector and related academic fields in the humanities, such as critical heritage studies and memory studies, are to position themselves in this discussion – not least because of the often narrow definitions of applicability set out for the cultural sector by external bodies. The fact remains, however, that measuring intangible aspects of cultural heritage and traditions poses a significant challenge for the cultural sector. The value of cultural heritage is largely symbolic and thus difficult to quantify. Theoretical concepts that view museums as 'contact zones' (Clifford, 1999) or 'a space of social care' (Morse, 2021) highlight the need for qualitative measures that reach beyond anecdotal evidence in the discourse of social impact measurement in this sector and are capable of supplementing quantitative measures. Given the prevailing relevance of neoliberal 'qualculation' in the cultural sector (Callon & Law, 2005; Welz, 2006, 2019), there is a need for research approaches that go beyond neoliberal practices of auditing the utilisation of culture as a resource for economic progress, or as a means for enacting change management or social engineering. The aim should be to develop more sophisticated techniques for comprehending, interpreting, and conveying the influence of cultural sector initiatives.

To achieve this objective, we propose in this chapter to use social impact measurement frameworks, but to supplement them with qualitative measures capable of acknowledging socio-cultural complexities and overcoming standardisation obstacles. Our approach is based on work in 13 PhD projects in the EU-funded POEM project[1] on participatory memory practices and future memory work. Some of these doctoral projects investigated whether empirical validation and social impact measurement could be used as a means to assess their research findings; they refer to social impact evaluation and measurement as a novel 'memory modality'.[2]

2   Social impact measurement in the cultural sector

2.1   *State of the art: moving beyond primary output measures towards outcomes*

While discussions around impact and impact measurement are prevalent in the nonprofit sector, few initiatives have yet considered studying impact in the cultural sector. According to digital humanities scholars Simon Tanner and Marilyn Deegan, impact in the cultural and heritage sector refers to:

> the measurable outcomes arising from the existence of a digital resource that demonstrate a change in the life or life opportunities of the community for which the resource is intended.
>
> (Tanner & Deegan, 2013, p. 15)

Progress in this research area, however, has been slow: Tanner and Deegan note "a lack of measures to back up assertions about Impact with significant evidence beyond the anecdotal" (Tanner & Deegan, 2013, p. 15). This reliance on anecdotal

evidence raises questions about the social relevance of work in the cultural sector and the development of appropriate measures, which may indeed be valid grounds for the emergence of social impact measurement in the cultural sector. The interdisciplinary Scottish Network on Digital Heritage Resources Evaluation (ScotDigiCH project 2015–2016) has published a comprehensive review of the current state of research and novel approaches to evaluation. They emphasise the emergence of social impact assessment as a novel and important modality for future memory work, identifying a gap in assessing digital cultural resources:

> Yet, we still know relatively little about who uses these digital collections and applications, how they interact with the associated data, how they value these cultural services, and what the impacts of these digital resources are, both on the users and the organisations themselves.
>
> (Economou et al., 2019, p. 1)

The current focus of both interdisciplinary research and practical efforts in professional memory work is on the pragmatic aspects of implementing technology in memory institution settings, as highlighted by the editors of the recent special issue (Economou et al., 2019). This emphasis allows for case studies that evaluate specific digital systems, games, and platforms in memory institutions using both formative and summative evaluation (Economou, 1998; Economou et al., 2017). The structure and interdisciplinary nature of the ScotDigiCH research network show that expertise and research projects are scattered across a range of disciplines in the humanities and beyond, spanning fields such as digital heritage studies, museum studies, information science, and digital humanities. However, the authors note a lack of critical analysis regarding users' engagement and appreciation of evaluated digital tools or infrastructures. In addition, the case studies that evaluate specific digital systems provide a limited comprehensive analysis of the broader implications of the evaluation, such as impacts on organisational structures, institutional epistemologies, or the informational needs of funding bodies and cultural policy decision-makers. The authors advocate for the adoption of innovative methodological and theoretical approaches, stressing the importance of a critical perspective (Economou et al., 2019).

Current research underscores the need for further investigation into the objective evaluation of complex enterprises in the cultural, heritage, and related academic sectors. To improve research robustness, Tanner and Deegan (2013) suggest moving beyond the array of primary measures that include visitor metrics, click rates and other web statistics, anecdotal information, citation analysis, public appearances, and media engagement, and evaluating outputs rather than *outcomes*. However, a significant knowledge gap persists in the cultural sector, posing challenges to the quantifiable evaluation of such diverse enterprises.[3] Steps have been taken to introduce reflective and collaborative research approaches for evaluating digital heritage resources that extend beyond case studies in the cultural sector, with the aim of reconciling the governmental cultural economics viewpoint with the pursuit of more intangible models of value and social impact (Tanner & Deegan, 2013).

These steps seek to negotiate the challenges of assessing the value of cultural heritage in the digital age with both sensitivity and rigour. In the following section, we present two examples – the Balanced Value Impact model (Tanner, 2012, 2020) and the MUSETECH model (Damala et al., 2019) – that offer impulses for a more nuanced approach to the evaluation of culture.

2.2   Case studies in the cultural sector: the BVI and the MUSETECH models

The Balanced Value Impact (BVI) model, developed by Simon Tanner (2012, 2020), seeks to offer a comprehensive and systematic assessment by reconciling "vital tangible gains from economic, social, and innovative perspectives with harder-to-measure cultural values" (Tanner & Deegan, 2013, p. 18). In light of this, a scorecard approach is adopted that draws from a range of impact-assessment disciplines to integrate (digital) strategy development and implementation in change management. The BVI model encompasses four core perspectives for scrutinising and negotiating impact in a logical assessment process for digital heritage resources: (1) social and audience impacts, (2) economic impacts, (3) innovation impacts, and (4) internal process impacts. In addition, the framework introduces five cultural value propositions for digital resources, correlating them with the balanced scorecard impact indicators: (1) utility value, (2) existence and/or prestige value, (3) education value, (4) community value, and (5) inheritance/bequest value. This augmentation seeks to facilitate a more nuanced assessment, illuminating the diverse modes and experiences through which cultural value becomes apparent and manifests in situated memory institution settings.[4]

The MUSETECH model, developed by Areti Damala et al. (2019) as part of the EU-funded meSCH project (2013–2017), prompts users to consider the complex processes of meaning-making associated with human-computer interactions when assessing the social impact of digital heritage resources. It presents a 'living framework' (Damala et al., 2019, p. 19) for evaluating technology's impact on education and learning in memory institutions. This framework encompasses risks and challenges, as well as considerations for the design and management of digital technology implementation. By assessing four key areas of technology introduction – design, content, operation, and compliance – the model integrates theories from computer and information science, audience research, museum and visitor studies, and learning theories in GLAMs (see Figure 9.1). The framework addresses the multiple impacts of technology on the everyday working and living experiences of museum visitors, heritage experts, and memory institutions, allowing the model to be navigated in different directions in an iterative way. By differentiating between heritage professionals and memory institutions, the model sheds light on organisational workflows and the 'invisible work' (Star & Strauss, 1999) of staff behind the scenes[5], highlighting the importance of 'digital literacy' among heritage professionals, who are often the key drivers of many technology initiatives. Visualised as a wheel rather than a scorecard, the
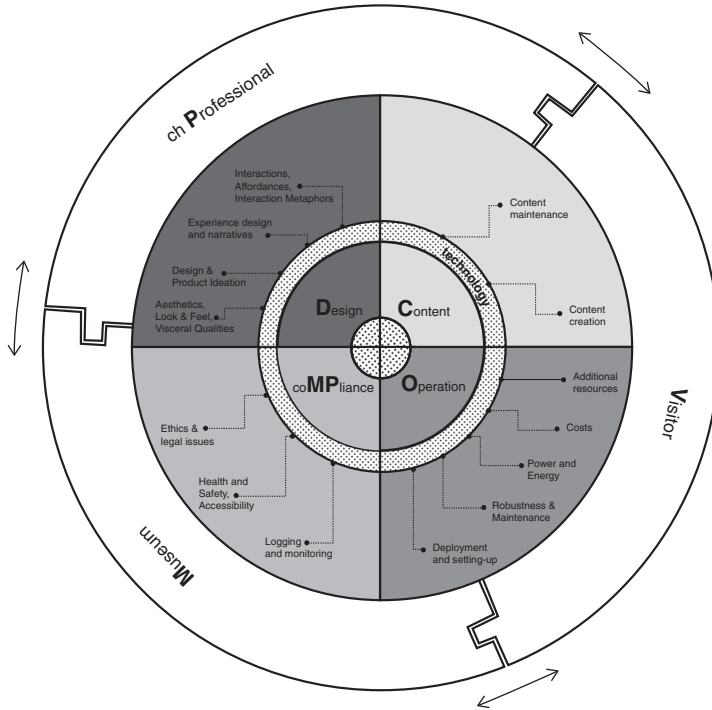
Figure 9.1 The MUSETECH Wheel (Damala et al., 2019, p. 11). (Reprint with the permission of the authors).

MUSETECH model recognises the circulation and socio-technical dynamics at play in the cultural fields.[6]

2.3 *Assessing impact in culture: from research outcomes towards possible futures*

Against this background, we propose aligning social impact assessment more closely with social realities by grounding it in theoretical models that reflect these realities. This will enable assessment approaches that can account for social situatedness and complexity, independent of the technologies in use. Model-building has been a crucial knowledge practice in the POEM research approach.[7] It has enabled the development of robust knowledge about participatory memory work across diverse cultural fields in digital media ecologies. Model-building compresses social reality in order to capture and organise its inherent complexities, acknowledging that these complexities extend beyond the confines of the model in its various facets. The functions of the models differ depending on their application, context, and disciplinary domain. Stachowiak (1973, p. 136) posits that the models have multiple functions, including serving as visual representations of interrelations, experimental tools for formulating and testing hypotheses, representations of theoretical
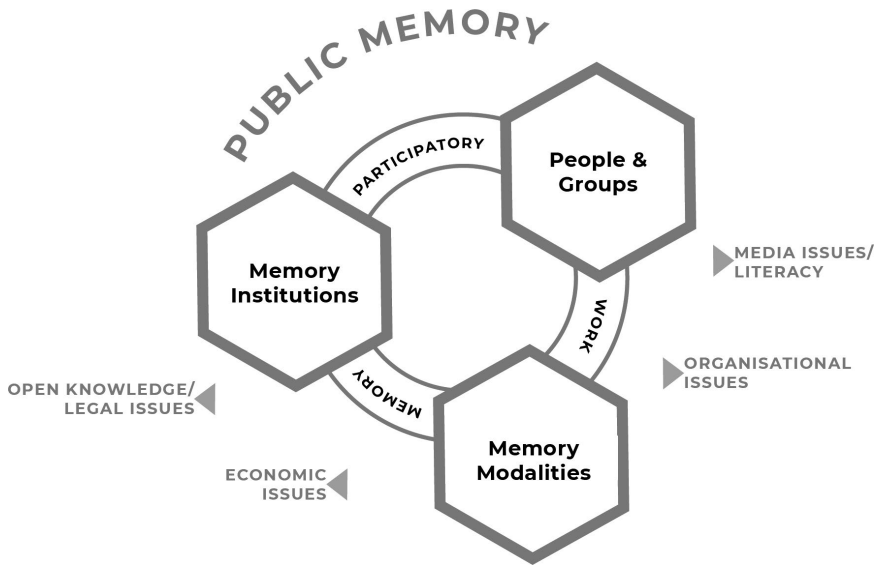
Figure 9.2 Model of participatory memory work.

knowledge, and operative tools for facilitating decision-making and planning pro-
cesses. Three criteria make the models relevant in presenting and communicating
theoretical knowledge for social impact studies within the field of culture (Godulla,
2017, pp. 16–17):

1 improbability (i.e., the originality of the structuring idea)
2 simplicity or economy of means
3 realism (i.e., a concept of reality that can be tested and used for evaluation of the
   model).

The POEM research employed an initial heuristic model, referred to as POEM
Model 1.0, to visually represent the complex social reality of participatory mem-
ory practices (Figure 9.2). Model 1.0 highlights the interplay between the pri-
mary actors and agents in participatory memory practices, including (1) memory
institutions, (2) individuals and groups, and (3) memory modalities, as well as
the key factors influencing the dispersal of memory practices among these agents
and related issues (e.g., open knowledge, legal issues, media issues and literacy,
organisational issues, and economic issues). The POEM Model 1.0, which served
as a heuristic during the three years of POEM research, has been revised based on
the findings of the 13 PhD projects.
    The modified Model of Participatory Memory Work now reflects the complex-
ity of the research field of participatory memory practices, while also reducing it
to its most significant social parameters (Figure 9.3). This model provides a means
of expanding social impact assessment beyond the limited scope of quantitative
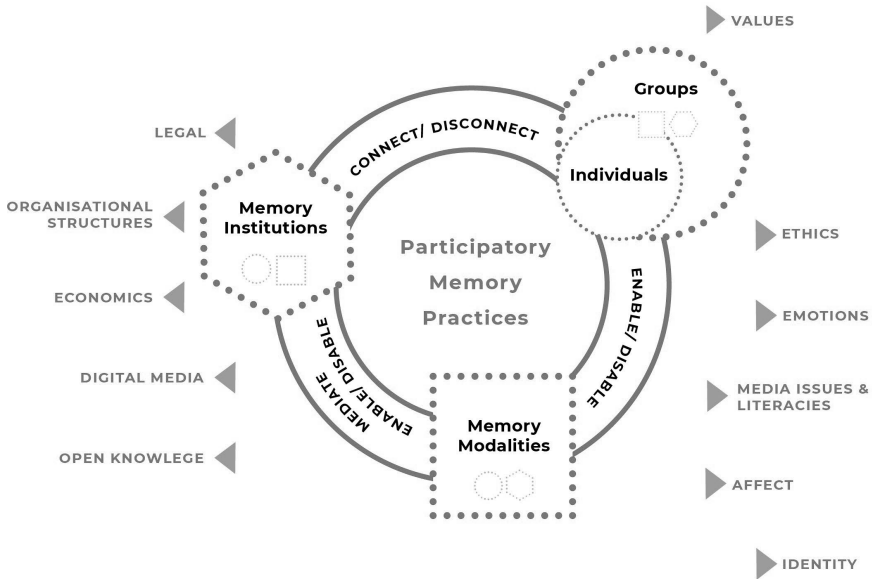
Figure 9.3 Model of Participatory Memory Work: a heuristic for participatory memory practices (POEM Consortium).

assessments of the *qualculative regimes*. It moves towards the evaluation of social impact concepts as a means of openly exploring a wide range of potential social effects that frequently unfold over longer timeframes than evaluations can typically address. While Model 1.0 focused on the actors and framing conditions, the Model of Participatory Memory Work emphasises practices and bundles of practices for constructing connectivities in digital media ecologies. These connectivities serve as entry points for initiating change processes towards participatory memory practices among relevant stakeholders. The Model of Participatory Memory Work is particularly relevant as a connecting point for the POEM Toolbox.[8] From different viewpoints, these two models of participatory memory practices offer insights for facilitating socially inclusive public memory making in digital media ecologies, as well as a heuristic for examining social impact within the POEM research framework.

3   Elements for the composition of social impact and its measurement in the cultural sector

Against the background of an elaborate theoretical model of social reality, our aim is to build on the achievements of social impact research to stimulate discussions within the cultural sector about the potential of social impact measurement for future memory work. To provide a comprehensive perspective on *Impact*, we will examine two currently separate strands of knowledge production. First, we will refer to findings from the field of critical heritage studies – respectively, memory studies and cultural anthropology – which give a basic understanding of current

key issues in the field. They highlight emic and bottom-up approaches to examining social change over time, which – in contrast to insights by auditors and current external evaluations – offer insights beyond short-term social impacts. This connection of perspectives may deepen the understanding of the impact of professional memory work and other cultural projects, providing a conceptual framework for assessing their genuine 'social impact'. Second, the domain of public and non-profit management brings valuable expertise and a diverse range of techniques to the table to address social impact concerns in the public sphere. These techniques encompass both quantitative and qualitative methods and can be used to seek more comprehensive approaches to social impact measurement. The creative tension between these two source fields – critical heritage studies and nonprofit and public management – and their respective concepts and epistemologies invite critical reflection and inspiration, generating fresh ideas for studying social impact research within the cultural field in a more nuanced way that can create validity, produce evidence, and demonstrate impact.

3.1   *'Social impact' as 'empirical validation' and 'collaboration':*
research practices in cultural anthropology

To begin with cultural anthropology. Cultural anthropology offers a critical perspective on the notion of 'social impact.' While social impact is commonly studied in the context of cultural analyses of neoliberal regimes and widely applied across various social domains (Callon & Law, 2005), in anthropological research, the evaluation of outcomes is typically embedded in the research process through reflection, collaboration, and various different modes of 'empirical validation' in the field. Approaches to 'empirical validation' in anthropology prioritise a commitment to public engagement and action-oriented research, with these principles consistently manifesting throughout its academic progression as a means of producing knowledge. Concepts like 'transdisciplinarity' and 'collaborative research' illustrate how these practices have evolved from applied and community-oriented knowledge practices, closely tied to ideas of 'citizen science,' 'public anthropology,' and 'community engagement.' Recent advances in transdisciplinary and action-oriented research methods concentrate on future perspectives, notably in fields such as anthropology of the contemporary (Rabinow et al., 2008), design anthropology (Gunn et al., 2013; R. C. Smith et al., 2016; R. C. Smith, 2022), and anthropology of the future (Bryant & Knight, 2019; Salazar et al., 2020). These fields prioritise the investigation of 'near futures' that are envisioned and actively cultivated in contemporary everyday life, discourses, and materialities.[9] Both the evaluation of research outcomes in diverse contexts throughout the research process and the future orientation in anthropological research serve as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) to promote social impact research that is grounded in anthropological concepts, thus contributing to the progress of more nuanced evaluations in the cultural fields.

Anthropological perspectives focus on long-term developments in changing cultural regimes and economies. They provide insights into governance

approaches – for example, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (e.g., Tauschek, 2010; Bendix et al., 2012), or Open Knowledge (e.g., Lutz, 2017a; Lutz & Koch, 2017b; Koch, 2021). These perspectives highlight the symbolic valorisation of artefacts and traditions as 'heritage' and the 'metacultural operations' associated with that valorisation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004), or the role of symbolic valorisation in an 'enrichment economy' for differentiation in Europe (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020). The critical analyses developed in these perspectives invite reflection on the key concepts and the politicised nature of what is considered 'cultural heritage,' as well as approaches to managing them (Coombe, 2012). Important lines of reflection for how we should think about impact assessment include:

1 *Disconnected cultural practices through professional heritage making and management*
   The issue of social exclusion in heritage-making and preservation is widely recognised. Cultural heritage studies scholars argue that professional memory practices like musealisation, folklorisation, and regressive revitalisation in memory institutions can lead to the detachment of traditions from the everyday memory practices of individuals and groups (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). Recent research critically evaluates the unstructured accumulation of the past exclusively through expert authority, and urges a reconsideration of the increasing categorisation and narrowing down of artefacts and traditions as 'heritage' (L. Smith, 2006; Macdonald, 2013).

2 *Commercialisation of cultural expressions and practices*
   Recent research has problematised the commercial exploitation of cultural traditions, showing how cultural economies can lead to the devaluation and displacement of these traditions – a phenomenon termed 'unmaking heritage.' Circulation into and back out of heritage status is a pivotal concern in the valorisation process, prompting the question of whose interests are being served in heritage-making and unmaking (Welz, 2015). At the same time, in addition to their professional memory work, the cultural industries are regarded as a significant means of keeping heritage vital, rather than being inherently detrimental to culture (Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011; Koch, 2013).

3 *Power relations and identity politics: difficult and dark issues*
   Postcolonial studies investigate the use of traditions in identity politics, focusing on critical discussion of the relationship between heritage and the nation-state's objectives of shaping a national community and distinguishing it from other nations. The discourse addresses 'difficult issues' like references to colonialism, racism, war, and the marginalisation of certain groups in professional memory work. Recent research explores strategies for decolonising current collection holdings and curation practices, considering the potential implications for the epistemologies of professional memory work and education (R. C. Smith & Iversen, 2014; Stuedahl et al., 2021; Wolff, 2021).

4 *Expanding the understanding of 'heritage' to encompass a variety of cultural expressions*

Over the last three decades, global cultural policy has shifted to acknowledge a wider range of expressions of 'heritage' beyond professional memory work. This expansion in the understanding of heritage is intended to comprehensively recognise the diverse ways in which individuals and groups attribute significance to daily life, including the safeguarding of intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003) and discussions related to 'living heritage,' 'ordinary heritage' (Auclair, 2015), or 'public heritage' (Labrador & Silberman, 2018).

5 *Dynamic dimensions and social productivity of cultural knowledge versus originality*

Cultural heritage is seen by scholars as a dynamic asset. It provides cultural knowledge that is relevant to people's everyday lives, rather than a static form of cultural knowledge that has to be protected. A single artefact can evoke connections to a range of social contexts, generating varying interpretations and meanings for individuals and groups. But as a consequence, cultural objects and expressions retain their significance as 'living heritage' even when used in very different contexts, potentially encouraging appropriations and transformations in the domain of everyday life (Loulanski, 2006).

The tensions between originality and change outlined above are ubiquitous in the cultural sector, as they are inherent in the existing heritage regime, where it interferes with the participatory memory practices outlined in the POEM models.

3.2   *Social impact research in nonprofit and public management*[10]

Impact assessment is a well-established research area in the world of nonprofit management and public management. The demand for greater accountability from nonprofit organisations is not a new phenomenon: it dates back to the 1990s, a time when nonprofit organisations were themselves considered a means to improve transparency and trust in public institutions (Anheier, 2009). The emergence of the so-called *social investment paradigm* has accelerated the current discourse on impact significantly. Philanthropic conduct and institutional grant-making have traditionally been conceptualised as a straightforward one-way transaction, with donors providing funds to recipients. However, with a social investment perspective, a fundamentally different logic is introduced, establishing a two-way transaction whereby donors anticipate returns for their contributions. These returns, unlike conventional investments, typically benefit not only donors themselves but also the society at large in various dimensions, including social, cultural, political or economic returns (Then et al., 2018).

However, even when embracing the social investment rationale, it is crucial to recognise that defining and measuring impact is far from trivial. A shared common understanding of impact in general terms is 'significant or lasting changes in people's lives following an activity' (Roche, 1999, p. 21), or 'the lasting results achieved at a community or societal level' (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014, p. 120).

However, developing a sound logic model that clearly maps the mechanisms by which an organisation believes its activities effect change in the world is a challenging task. As with many empirical research projects, the process of developing a theoretical framework and reflecting on its assumptions is crucial in advance of subsequently operationalising key indicators, investing in the costly effort of gathering data, and accurately interpreting results. As organisations develop their logic models, they would ideally adopt a participatory process involving a range of organisational stakeholders. This is important, because different groups may have fundamentally different perceptions of what an organisation is striving to achieve and how it affects people's daily lives.

This holds true in particular for cultural organisations, where impact is notoriously difficult to capture holistically. Cultural organisations do not simply provide 'tangible' or 'instrumental' value as a direct means for another sphere of life (e.g., gaining knowledge and skills, fostering community identity, and contributing to social inclusion). They also offer numerous 'intrinsic' values, where impact is an end in itself (e.g., changes in attitudes, fostering creativity, cultural empowerment, or joy) (Bollo, 2013). The complexity of measuring impact does not just depend on operationalising accurate indicators; more fundamentally, it involves creating a robust research design that acknowledges crucial measurement challenges:

> Impact implies causality; it tells us how a programme or organisation has changed the world around it. Implicitly this means that one must estimate what would have occurred in the absence of the programme – what evaluators call 'the counterfactual.'
>
> (Gugerty & Karlan, 2018, p. 42)

While confronting the counterfactual problem through carefully controlled and randomised studies can be achieved, this is often beyond the capabilities of most organisations. In reality, for many organisations, a more feasible approach to capturing impact dimensions involves using a combination of non-experimental quantitative methods (such as surveys) together with complementary qualitative methods (like interviews). Nevertheless, taking the key impact measurement challenges into account should always be part of any serious impact study. What could have happened anyway, what happened because of other actors and factors? How lasting was the effect? Do we have non-measurable effects? (Then et al., 2018).

The central point here is that any effort to measure impact necessitates significant investment from the organisation in question. Developing a logic model, designing a study, and carrying out data collection requires financial, human, and technological resources. What complicates this investment from a nonprofit management perspective is that these required resources often fall within the realm of overhead costs. While donors and institutional funders alike want organisations to display their impact, they also prefer that resources granted are spent on programmes rather than general administration or operations (Gregory & Howard, 2009; Charles et al., 2020).[11]

Against this backdrop, we can see that increasing the prevalence of impact measurement will depend on introducing a different approach to resourcing organisations. Much of this impetus needs to come from external funders and

donors. In the foundation world, coordinated endeavours are currently underway to encourage capacity building and support the general infrastructure of grantees (Eckhart-Queenan et al., 2019). However, progress towards enhanced impact measurement also hinges on how organisations themselves attempt to demonstrate accountability and trustworthiness. It is important for them to avoid conflating efficiency (or even effectiveness) with individual financial metrics, such as low overhead ratios, and instead to endorse more holistic reporting frameworks that incorporate multiple performance metrics.

4   Relating 'empirical validation' to 'social impact measurement': links, differences, and crossovers

These two spheres – cultural anthropology, and nonprofit and public management – intersect, first, in their contributions to theory-based knowledge production to reflect social reality, and second, in their adoption of mixed-method methodologies that go far beyond the typical final assessments of qualculative regimes. They share a holistic perspective on impact: both emphasise envisioning and probing possible futures across social change, rather than solely measuring outcomes. However, each discipline has its own approach to assessing achieved or potential social impact, with distinct temporalities and entry points.

In the anthropological part of the broad POEM project, 'empirical validation' was embedded within the research design and process of the PhD projects, through the collaborative research approaches in the fields and through the inherent elements of action and design-oriented research. In the nonprofit management and evaluation part, on the other hand, social impact measurement and evaluation were built on the research findings at the culmination of the POEM project, applying a given evaluation methodology to develop field-specific assessment instruments. In the POEM context, the challenges for the necessity of embedded empirical validation lie in addressing the politicised dimensions of memory work: in ensuring that ongoing collaboration with research fields is politically correct without causing harm to the field. Nonprofit management emphasises the creation of valid measures that navigate complexity effectively from a process-oriented perspective without fixating on the operationalisation of qualitative criteria. Our approach leverages the Model of Participatory Memory Work as a heuristic framework, rather than seeking to define a model of the social domain in its own right. The following sections reflect the temporality and entry points for 'empirical validation' and 'social impact measurement' in the context of POEM.

4.1   *Embedding 'Impact' into empirical research approaches*

In the POEM project, impact emerged primarily as embedded in empirical research approaches rather than as a retroactively applied factor created and measured after the research has been completed and the findings published. The 13 PhD projects in POEM employed action research, design anthropology, or collaborative anthropology with an explicit focus on future-oriented work. Employing participatory

approaches meant involving relevant stakeholders from the research fields in order to generate robust and transferable knowledge beyond mere analysis of the current situation. In the anthropological understanding, 'audiences' and 'users' are considered 'citizens' and 'experts', and thus as agents competent to determine what is relevant to memory practices in everyday life and capable of actively contributing to problem-solving and envisioning future perspectives in their fields.

The collaborative action- and design-oriented approaches of the POEM research[12] addressed this competence and capacity in interactions with the research fields and by research design. The overall POEM research concept significantly shaped the nature of the research outcomes, both in terms of the research progress and findings, and in terms of the tools developed in the project for reflecting participatory memory practices in social fields. The tools developed in the POEM Toolbox include, among several others, a booklet for organising a digital legacy, the *Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories*, and postcards for sharing school memories during the Covid-19 pandemic.[13] Moreover, these conversations and exchanges served as meaningful instruments for both creating and assessing impact throughout the research processes, providing inputs for reflection and future action within the fields. The exchanges were systematically integrated into the research process, with 'empirical validation' as/or 'impact measurement' taking place towards the end of the process and guided by the overarching heuristic framework of the Model of Participatory Memory Work.

4.2 *'Empirical validation' in a community of practice and transdisciplinary trading zones*

Thanks to the collaborations with transdisciplinary partners from memory institutions, IT and creative industries, NGOs, and civil society, empirical validation was an ongoing activity throughout the POEM project. These partners acted as critical friends within a heterogeneous community of practice (Lave, 1991): they have contributed diverse perspectives that enhance situated exploration, collaboration, experimentation, and theorisation within their own respective fields. This ongoing dialogue has facilitated reflection on the relevance and usefulness of POEM research in specific domains, and it has enabled robust knowledge production across the PhD projects for various stakeholders in participatory memory work. A key factor in this informal and silent mode of empirical validation has been the network-wide transferable skills training programme (POEM training units 1–6), which provided frequent exposure to topics relevant to participatory memory work – media literacy, media production, social media trends, and legal, economic, and organisational issues (see Figure 9.2). This contributed to the robustness of knowledge across the diverse sectors by establishing significant 'trading zones' (Gorman, 2002) across scientific communities and transdisciplinary stakeholders. Notably, this collaboration was most visible in the validation engagements with our researchers on public and nonprofit management, Silke Boenigk, Peter Schubert, and Nils Geib. This collaborative endeavour has played a pivotal role in catalysing the development of an interdisciplinary approach to social impact measurement

in the cultural sector, in addition to catalysing further synergies that are evident throughout this publication.

4.3   *Social impact measurement: from outcomes to probing possible futures in participatory memory work*

The trading zone between 'social impact measurement' and 'empirical validation' was first explored in the POEM training programme in the training sessions on social impact measurement (training unit 6). This initiative led to systematic reflection on the impact of the 13 PhD projects that made up the POEM European training network during the final stages of the empirical research phase. In the course of these training sessions, it became evident that there were several thematic overlaps with the nonprofit management research field.

In preparation for the empirical validation workshop towards the conclusion of the project, the POEM fellows, with the support of their supervisors, developed a plan on how and with whom they intended to validate their findings. Interest groups were established, each tasked with identifying impact measurements pertinent to one of the three key areas of research: memory institutions, individuals and groups, and memory modalities. To assist in organising and executing the factual verification assignment, a nonprofit management masterclass proved to be essential. This master seminar, entitled "Community Based Research: Social Impact Evaluation in the Cultural Sector" (April to September 2021), saw postgraduate students collaborating with POEM fellows, consortium members, research participants, and partner organisations to assess the social impact of various research and practical initiatives from the POEM Toolbox. The empirical validation was anchored in the Model of Participatory Memory Work and focused on three exemplary case studies drawn from the POEM Toolbox, which explored digital legacies, open knowledge, and cultural work with migrants.[14]

4.4   *Approaching POEM's validity through social impact measurement*

In the summer term of 2021, the POEM European training network, together with 20 postgraduate students enrolled in two master's study programmes at the University of Hamburg – the M.Sc. in Interdisciplinary Public and Nonprofit Studies, and the M.Sc. in Innovation, Business and Sustainability – participated in a master seminar intended to tackle the issue at hand. The seminar consisted of six phases. First, the definitions of social impact and of the theory of change were presented to the students. The second phase outlined challenges related to social impact measurement, including causal inference and key measurement approaches, while also examining scenarios in which impact measurement might not be appropriate. Third, the students (none of whom were enrolled in a cultural studies programme) learnt about the unique characteristics of cultural organisations and projects, with a particular emphasis on futures and the digital. Fourth, after the presentation of cases from the POEM research, the students selected one of these cases to create tailored impact concepts for these initiatives in groups. Fifth, groups worked

on detailed elaborations of the assessment concepts for each case, encompassing impact frameworks and measurement strategies. Sixth and finally, each group translated their assessment concepts into pragmatic tool guides, which were showcased to the POEM collaborators and lecturers and discussed in plenary feedback rounds. In the concluding phase, all teams submitted a social impact evaluation manual (SIEM) as their final examination and for future use in participatory memory work.

5 Discussion and conclusions

Assessing impact in the cultural sector is not a well-established practice. It is a task that presents significant challenges, owing to various obstacles to the evaluation and assessment of Impact. Prominent among these is the absence of appropriate benchmarks or baselines for measuring change and insufficient timescales to realise outcomes. Central to addressing these challenges, therefore, is the establishment of useful indicators and the creation of qualitative *and* quantitative evidence to uncover significant measurable outcomes (Tanner & Deegan, 2013), alongside the need to address the development of long-term effects (Gil-Fuentetaja & Economou, 2019). These findings, together with the activities in the POEM European training network, demonstrate that the assessment of impact in the cultural sector stands in opposition to straightforward calculations (Callon & Law, 2005) and predetermined metrics. Relational approaches build upon trans- and interdisciplinary expertise within the cultural domain, as reflected in theoretical models and sophisticated methodologies, to develop customised approaches to social impact assessment. The process of measuring social impact is not confined solely to the conclusion of an action; it is iteratively intertwined with the formulation of research questions, research design, its advancement, and reflections throughout the research process. It involves building partnerships, trust, and friendships, and co-creating knowledge through participatory work on shared concerns and goals.

Social impact measurement is a collaborative effort involving both individuals and groups. It is characterised by processual and relational qualities, but it is firmly rooted in cultural research and action itself. It involves an ongoing transdisciplinary conversation between people and groups – from the conception of the project or research proposal to its development and beyond the project duration. This approach stands in contrast to usability studies that involve only "users" or evaluations of audiences. The process of social impact measurement consists of several stages, from defining a research proposal to implementing and evaluating it. Further, the use of social impact measurement increases the potential for extending the institutional education mission by involving students in the creation of situated SIEMs. This approach can reveal connections that are not immediately obvious, connections that expand the scope. According to heritage scholars Areti Galani and Jenny Kidd (2019, p. 12), "the evaluation process in this context is an extension of the meaning-making process." Most crucial in this regard is the Model of Participatory Memory Work, which acts as a heuristic for composing a relational approach to social impact assessment and for guiding future research approaches and cultural actions. With their specific focus on participatory memory practices in digital environments, as

investigated in the POEM European training network, these findings highlight the importance of further reflection on strategic approaches to digitalisation in the cultural sector, based on the grounds of an integrated social impact measurement from the outset of project design.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 www.poem-horizon.eu/ (accessed 2 December 2023).
2 See Chapter 7 in this volume for the elaboration of the concept 'memory modality'.
3 Civil society organisations like the Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland (2023), a POEM partner organisation, have initiated 'data literacy' training programmes through the School of Data Germany. Aligned with open data principles, these programmes aim to enhance the ability of public sector stakeholders and researchers to effectively

communicate and disseminate their outcomes as open data. Consequently, discourses and practical efforts related to 'open knowledge' and 'data literacy' are relevant to inquiries into evaluating and measuring social impact in the cultural sector. However, despite their potential to facilitate the evaluation and measurement of social impact within the realm of cultural heritage, civil society initiatives related to this topic have received limited attention in the cultural and heritage sectors.

4 Through the Europeana Impact Taskforce led by Simon Tanner, the BVI model has gained recognition in the context of Europeana and the discourse of OpenGLAMs in Europe (Sanderhoff et al., 2017; Schmidt, 2017), and has inspired further developments (Tanner, 2020; Verwayen et al., 2017).

5 See Chapter 3 in this volume.

6 Additionally, the MUSETECH matrix complements the Wheel by detailing the four key areas along with all sub-categories and 121 evaluation criteria to navigate the evaluation process. These criteria include not only technological qualities but also financial, legal, environmental, and ethical issues such as data security, energy consumption, health, and accessibility (Damala et al., 2019). For more information, see the EU project website: https://www.mesch-project.eu/ (accessed 2 December 2023).

7 The reflections in this chapter on constructing models are partly based on a working paper by Gertraud Koch from September 2020, prepared for the model-building and empirical validation workshops at knowledge hubs six and seven of the POEM-ETN. The working paper includes comments by Samantha Lutz, Susanne Boersma, Elina Moraitopoulou, Lorenz Widmaier, Myrto Theocharidou, Anne Chahine, Quoc-Tan Tran, Angeliki Tzouganatou, Asnath Paula Kambunga, Cassandra Kist, Inge Zwart, and Franziska Mucha.

8 See Chapter 10 in this volume, which presents a selection of tools developed in the POEM project.

9 See Chapter 1: Introduction in this volume.

10 This is a revised version of an article by Peter Schubert that appeared in 2021 in the POEM newsletter as 'The social impact discourse and the cultural sector: How funders promote and at the same time impair impact measurement – and what could be done about it' Schubert (2021).

11 This systemic issue, known as the nonprofit starvation cycle (Charles et al., 2020; Gregory & Howard, 2009; Schubert & Boenigk, 2019), proposes that unrealistic expectations for low overheads create pressure on organisations competing for scarce external resources. This pressure subsequently hinders organisations from investing in their organisational infrastructure, including the necessary financial, human, and technological resources for impact assessment. According to Schubert (2021), this lack of investment in turn reinforces funders' expectations for low overheads. Measuring social impact in the cultural sector is therefore also a question of sustainability, and thus of creating feedback loops to the policy level.

12 See Chapters 2 and 7 of this volume, both of which were authored by a POEM Work Package.

13 See Chapter 10 of this volume.

14 See Chapter 10 of this volume.

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10 Towards a toolbox for future envisioning memory practices

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1   Introduction

One of the cornerstones of the POEM project was engagement with participatory memory practices *literally* in practice. Training and thesis work for the project's PhD fellows were linked to theory development and the shaping of practices. Correspondingly, the development of the Model of Participatory Memory Work[1] was linked to envisioning and designing a 'POEM toolbox' of practical instruments or tools that would support and contribute to the changes inherent in memory work. The toolbox concept was part of the initial project plan and was then iteratively developed in the project's 'knowledge hubs' or combined workshops and training events, as well as in online meetings throughout the project in tandem with the theoretical work on envisioning the POEM model. Work on operationalising the toolbox and producing a definite set of tools started in mid-2020, after two years' work.

The idea of a toolbox plays a twofold role in the POEM project. It was developed to serve as an organised repository of diverse instruments for facilitating and enhancing both arms of the project – the research process on participatory memory practices, and the participatory memory work itself. The toolbox was modelled on a literal, everyday life toolbox, that is, a container of small tools. From the first, however, we understood the tools relevant to our work as transcending the physical realm. The tools we envisioned included an array of methodological approaches and resources that would be useful for effective research and practice within the domain of participatory memory work. Developing from checklists for the various stakeholders, to process descriptions, guidelines, and concept papers, the toolbox became a stockpile of instruments that could help to initiate and enact participatory action and collaboration. As we went further into the digital domain, there were tools for the digitalisation of memory work and for incorporating reflections on the potential of digital applications. As described later in this chapter, the toolbox was supplemented with tools for open knowledge, for science communication, and for negotiating researcher positionality – all essential for a comprehensive approach to participatory research. The POEM toolbox is therefore dynamic and evolving.

Unlike a literal toolbox, however, it now contains not only tangible resources but also conceptual frameworks that can guide researchers and participants in participatory memory work.

After initial discussion of the toolbox concept and after the sixth 'knowledge hub' in spring 2021, the PhD fellows were asked to submit proposals for what could eventually be developed into practical tools or instruments. Sourcing the tools in the fellows' thesis work was a key step in operationalising the project's empirical and theoretical research findings to make them accessible to nonacademics, and it ensured that the tools we proposed were based on and supported by research evidence. Beyond that, the development of the tool concepts also functioned as an exercise of participatory memory practices in practice within the project – both in the jointly developed tool concepts and in the joint validation of individually envisioned tools for the fellows and the project as a whole.

For the doctoral fellows working in the POEM project, the tools were key practical outcomes of their thesis work as well as means to translate the theoretical insights of their doctoral research into tangible and shareable assets. Some of the tools were integral to the theory and practice of the fellows' doctoral research; others evolved out of the projects as what are best described as spin-offs.

A subset of initial proposals for tool concepts from the POEM fellows and teams was prototyped during dedicated sessions at a validation workshop organised in July 2021 as a part of the seventh POEM 'knowledge hub'. Each tool was discussed in individual sessions, to which we invited domain experts and practitioners or in which we engaged in evaluation with a select internal cohort from the project. The validation process showed just how tricky the task of translating research into practical applications and making research findings accessible to nonacademics can be. Determining who would benefit from using the tools also proved to be difficult: a tool originally envisioned for the public might well interest heritage institutions more, or vice versa.

In this chapter, we present a curated selection from the POEM tools, each presented in a short text written by the author of the tools themselves, and their validation process: the *School Memory Work* tool, the *Digital Legacy Booklet*, the *Opening Up Knowledge in an Equitable Way* tool, the interactive board game *Why (Not) Participate?,* the *Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories*, the conceptual framework of *Future Memory Work*, and the decolonial design concept of the *Safe Space for Plural Voices on Contested Pasts, Presents, and Futures*.

2   Tools for future memory work

2.1   *The school memory work tool*

Education is a political project, and so are its futures. Futures in education need to be imagined and designed together with children and young people. Educational affects, or how young people *feel in* and *about* (their) education, are crucial for the imagining and shaping of alternative, possible, and desired futures of education. But children and young people's feelings about their education and its futures remain a largely overlooked area of attention.

The *School Memory Work* tool, designed by Elina Moraitopoulou,[2] draws inspiration from the uses of memory as a methodological tool for conducting research in the social sciences (see Keightley, 2010). It is offered here as an affective methodology (see Knudsen & Stage, 2015) for exploring possible and desired futures of education through emotion. The aim is to elicit and capture affective themes and processes, emotions, and bodily senses, then to foreground these so as to create alternative educational imaginaries. The methodology was originally conceived and designed with a small team of secondary school students in England in 2019, then further developed during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic in multiple conversations with students and teachers across the United Kingdom about how education can be imagined otherwise.

Taking children and young people's school memories that matter to them as a starting point, this methodology aims to facilitate intergenerational dialogue about education futures through affect. It can be a useful tool for research purposes, and it can also be used as a pedagogical tool for facilitating intergenerational dialogue between teachers, students, and other members within and across educational communities. The importance of paying closer attention to how education feels to young people and to the memories of schooling that matter to them was highlighted by Dave, a 19-year-old research participant and education activist. In his interview, he explained:

> I think young people don't often get asked about their memories through education, on our level of 'What did you genuinely love and what did you hate?,' like what were just [doing here]: [what's] one memory that sticks out? […] Young people don't often get that opportunity.
>
> (April 2021).

Taking its starting point in the school memories that matter to young people and the memories that they want future generations to remember, the *School Memory Work* tool can catalyse conversations and potentially mobilise collective action towards more just educational futures.

The *school memory work(shop)* can be practiced individually or in small groups. The process can be implemented in three steps, although these are not prescriptive, as explained below:

> Firstly the group familiarises itself with the notion of personal memory, discusses its importance, and establishes a shared framework of meaning around it. Each group member is invited to share a personal, narrative-rich object that matters to them, the story of which they are willing to share with the rest of the group. Participants are invited to sit in a circle and take a few minutes to think about the story they wish to tell. When the first person feels ready to share, they go first to describe their object memory in as much detail as possible, focusing on what makes their object important to them. When they finish their story, they are invited to place their object in the middle of the room in front of the rest of the group, if they feel comfortable doing so. The rest of the group are invited to write down keywords, if they want to, for the key themes, impressions, and emotions evoked as they listen. The remaining members of the group then take

turns sharing their stories. By the end of the process, the facilitator opens a round of discussion in which the key themes, impressions, and emotions from all the object memory stories are mapped and discussed.

Now it's time to think: 'What is one school memory that you want future generations to remember?' Choose one of the memories that comes first to mind, and write it down. You can also voice-record it, draw it, or capture it in any other format of your liking. You can use the following prompts when thinking about your memory:

- What is happening in the school memory you chose?
- Why did you choose this particular memory, not another one?
- Can you recall any smells, images, colours, or sounds in your chosen memory?
- How did you feel back then, and how does this memory make you feel today?
- Where and when did it take place?
- Who else was involved?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your memory?
- What message do you want to send to future generations through your school memory?

Now take turns sharing your memory with the rest of the group, as before. After everyone has taken their turn, the group comes together to analyse the memories and ask each other more questions and express opinions and look for possible meanings. The following prompts can be helpful: What does this remind you of? What picture comes to mind? The group continues to identify things that could possibly be missing from the memories and to identify similarities and differences across the different memories.

Finally, it is time for the participants to 'rewrite' their school memories – once again, in the format of their liking (and not necessarily in text). The participants decide whether and in what format they want to make these memories public by sharing them beyond their group.

The complete description of the tool and the steps/prompts for its implementation can also be found at https://www.poem-horizon.eu/school-memory-work/.

2.2   *The digital legacy booklet tool*

Today, when people die, they commonly leave behind a digital legacy – on smartphones, hard drives, or in the cloud. Photos, videos, instant messages, voicemails, and social media posts document our daily lives in intimate detail, and for this reason can become treasured memories for bereaved family and friends.

But there are two hurdles that those who have been bereaved need to overcome to unlock the potential of a digital legacy for mourning and remembrance. The first of these is to gain access to the digital data. Encrypted data, unlike a safe in the basement, cannot be cracked if the key is missing. Once access is gained, the

second hurdle bereaved family and friends have to face is not knowing what they are permitted to examine. The digital legacy may contain sensitive information that the deceased did not want to share, or that the bereaved may find distressing to discover. Without knowing the wishes of the deceased and what to expect, many bereaved people choose to leave the data untouched.

Both hurdles can be overcome with the *Digital Legacy Booklet*, a tool developed by Lorenz Widmaier (2020b) in the context of his research on the impact of digital legacies on grief, mourning, and remembrance. The tool provides access to a digital legacy and conveys the deceased's wishes as to how it should be handled. It was published as part of the MEMENTO exhibition (2020–2021) at the Museum for Sepulchral Culture, Kassel, Germany (https://www.sepulkralmuseum.de).

The *Digital Legacy Booklet* is a simple set of password sheets, which encourages us to take responsibility for our digital legacy during our lifetime. The password sheets ask us to name a trusted person and, for each digital account, to leave the login details and our wishes as to whether the account is to be kept active, memorialised, or deleted. A field for notes allows us to leave more detailed wishes, such as giving permission to read inherited WhatsApp conversations, but not those that include certain people (Figure 10.1).
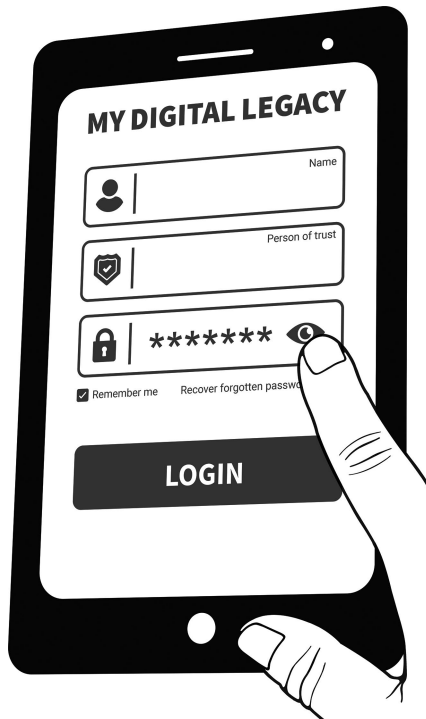
Figure 10.1 Cover of the Digital Legacy Booklet. The booklet is available at https://www.memoryanddeath.com/my-digital-legacy/.

The *Digital Legacy Booklet* is accompanied by a manual and two additional publications: an estate planning guide for digital data (which further assists in the preparation of a digital legacy and advocates the integration of precaution as a lived practice into everyday digital life: Widmaier, 2020a), and a digital legacy checklist (which provides checkboxes for preparing a digital legacy and illustrates the steps to be taken when inheriting a digital legacy: Widmaier, 2022).[3]

Although the *Digital Legacy Booklet* is ready to be used, it was designed with the intention of raising awareness of the need for digital estate planning for future remembrance. It is a stimulus for talking to our loved ones about digital inheritance and for finding our own approach. After the validation session for this tool, Sean Bellamy, co-founder of Sands School Ashoka Foundation Change Leader, and Varkey Global Teaching Ambassador, reflected on digital legacies in an email to us:

> I think it will allow us to communicate and be in communion with the ancestors in a way that is more in tune with our hunter gatherer minds than we can believe. A hundred thousand years ago, we did not believe the dead had left us, they sat on the roofs of our huts living off the fat in the smoke from our fires, they watched over us and informed our everyday, and just because they were no longer present in visceral form, they remained everywhere. An intentional use of digital legacy brings the ancestors into our lives and they may influence us in new and better ways, sitting "on the roofs of our huts living off the fat in the smoke of our fires." And in this struggling world, we need to both celebrate the ancestors and honour their memory, so that we can help design a planet that is fit for those yet to come.

In this passage, Sean Bellamy emphasises the potential of digital legacies not only for remembering the past but also for building the future. The *Digital Legacy Booklet* can help us in this endeavour. Thinking about the inheritance of digital memories is vital for all of us, especially for those anticipating their own or a loved one's death. The tool can also be useful in end-of-life care and hospice work.

2.3   *The opening up knowledge in an equitable way tool*

This conceptual tool proposes a model for managing, producing, and disseminating cultural knowledge online. It envisions memory ecosystems driven by openness, meaningful participation, and fairness. The tool has two parts: first, it presents a knowledge stewardship model for how to open up cultural knowledge in an equitable way; and second, it proposes two frameworks within which to implement this prototype – a participatory way, and a collective way. On the one hand, the participatory framework addresses cultural-heritage professionals who wish to integrate participatory governance into their institution; on the other hand, the collective framework addresses communities that seek to advance the digital documentation practices for their community in ways that ensure ethical, equitable, and inclusive participation. The aim of the proposed tool is to bring forward and facilitate

participation in open cultural knowledge production by empowering users to make (good) (re)use of the data and by helping them to treat data that goes beyond the data commodification model, the model currently prevailing in the digital economy (Tzouganatou, 2023). The cultural assets discussed in this tool can vary, from digitised and born-digital cultural assets to assets that have to be collected and documented, such as intangible and living heritage. The model consists of aspects that form a basis, then elements that build on top of them. Forming the basis are the structural aspects of legal questions, privacy, ethics, and technical infrastructure; building on top of that are the modular elements of data rights, control sharing, data sovereignty, and data portability, all issues that interlock with the elements forming the model's foundation layer. Finally, the knowledge stewardship model builds on top of these two layers. The tool was developed through Angeliki Tzouganatou's doctoral work.

The model and its foundational aspects are enacted when they are applied to scrutinising different type(s) of cultural data that determine how the elements into the model unfold. For example, in cases of cultural data from communities that need to protect their data for privacy or ethical reasons, operationalising the elements to do with legal issues is enabled through managing data rights, the privacy aspect through organising control sharing, and ethics through addressing data sovereignty so as to contribute to ensuring fair data (re)use. All the elements of the model reflect and concern different dimensions of the digital workflow of data organisation, management, share, and (re)use. The prototype has integrated all the elements derived from the analysis and synthesis of research data in the doctoral work, as well as the results of a formative evaluation that was conducted to assess the conceptualisation and potential for operationalisation of the model. The formative evaluation of the model took place online on 1 July 2021 with eight experts over the Zoom platform. A further aspect was subsequently added after the formative evaluation of the initial model: ethics were integrated in the model as an independent aspect. Initially, ethics had been included in the legal questions, but all the participant experts highlighted the need to introduce a separate node (Tzouganatou, 2023).

As outlined above, it is proposed that the model be implemented within two contexts, a participatory context and a collective context. Each of the two contexts would address a different audience. Within the first context, the appointment of one or more knowledge steward(s) as an intermediary between cultural heritage institutions would bring about the facilitation of data (re-)use, as well as empower users to make good (re-)use of their data. This process emphasises the collaborative and co-creative aspect of the relationship between the steward and the users. The second context, located within a collective stewardship framework, can be realised by managing data through self-organised communities. These could take the form of collectives and digital cooperatives, contributing to reinforcement and adhering to democratic values, solidarity, and transparency.

A connective element in this tool is that 'openness' does not refer solely to the notion of digitising artworks and making them available online by providing users with access to them. Using 'open', here, refers to the creative reusability and

remixability of a given asset, resulting in an open knowledge ecosystem (Tzouganatou, 2021). Access is one part of the process; but making digital assets accessible and *actually reusable* for the public beyond 'digital warehouses' (Tzouganatou, 2022) is a further and crucial part. In the digital heritage landscape, the knowledge stewardship prototype aims, first, to facilitate access, and then, second, to move towards accessibility and reusability for these assets. Tzouganatou's tool takes account not only of the economic and legal aspects of the digital ecosystem, but also its social, technical, and ethical dimensions. It envisions emerging open avenues in memory making online, focused on data and digital sovereignty. To operationalise this tool, multiple incremental steps are required: participatory practices need to be embedded in current infrastructures; openness and interoperability need to be reinforced on both the data and infrastructural level; documentation of digital processes is needed that is sufficiently good to be accessible to nonexperts; training of knowledge stewards needs to be inclusive; and quality control mechanisms need to be implemented for evaluating the participatory potential.

2.4   *The why (not) participate? card game*

The *Why (Not) Participate?* card game is an output from the combined doctoral research by Cassandra Kist, Franziska Mucha, Inge Zwart, and Susanne Boersma. It translates participant-centred qualitative research across European museums into a practice-oriented tool that provides insights into the potential obstacles and motivations for participants to help practitioners rethink participatory work. The current prototype of the game contains 30 cards printed with quotes from participants that can serve as prompts for discussing the implications of a participatory museum project.

The tool draws attention to the complexities of organising a participatory project, pointing professionals to the multiple aspects that they need to take into account. Rather than expecting practitioners to find the answers (or the right questions) in the recent literature, the game provides a range of prompts from participants and practitioners that can be used in considering many different aspects of participatory memory work. Each card contains two discussion points: one for the planning phase of a project, and one for evaluation with the participants during or after the project. Cards in seven different categories – knowledge, relationships, space, food and drink, roles and responsibilities, relevance and goals, and expectations and results – cover numerous aspects that are important for participatory work with different people. Through the variety of prompts and discussion points, people using the game can learn from their own and each other's experiences to consider the needs and irritations that may arise when participating in a cultural project.

A prototype of the tool was developed, expanded, tweaked, and validated with museum practitioners; however, as processes change and participatory work becomes increasingly important within memory institutions, the game is intended as a starting point. Institutions are still learning how to 'do' participation, which is why evaluation needs to be part of the process. *Why (Not) Participate?* supports

museum practitioners in taking a careful and reflective approach to participation. The tool can be downloaded from the POEM website. Although our research projects have now ended, both the cards and the participatory practices in memory institutions will continue to be modified on an ongoing basis.

2.5   *The digital archive of forgotten memories tool*

The *Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories* (DAFM) was originally developed by Anne S. Chahine and Inge Zwart as a one-stop shop installation to be set up at public and academic events; it was subsequently included in the toolbox validation session during the Knowledge Hub 7 owing to our wish to make it available beyond the term of the POEM project. Envisioned both on- and offline, the DAFM is an installation that facilitates a conversation about remembering and forgetting in our own lives and in society as a whole. The main question we asked ourselves was how to make people relate and connect to research on memory and participation in the grander scheme of things. We approached this as a twofold challenge; first, we were interested in finding a method that could foster conversation with 'anyone' around a rather abstract or theoretical academic topic; and second, we reflected on which theme could best capture the diverse interest of the POEM research network regarding socially inclusive participatory memory practices.

The *Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories* invites different publics to reflect on the concepts of remembering and forgetting by submitting a 'memory' to the DAFM, and then reflecting on questions posed by the archival team on site. In practice, it offers two different activities that allow people to engage with the concept of 'memory' and what it means in our everyday lives, as well as within an institutional framework. In activity one, 'Forgetting a Memory', the visitor is given a coloured piece of paper on which they are invited to draw, write, or visualise a memory they want to forget. We then invite them to physically destroy it by putting the paper through a manual paper shredder. With the permission of the memory owner, we take a picture of the remnants and upload the image to the DAFM's online archive. Activity two, 'Reflecting on remembering and forgetting', invites people to reflect on a more abstract level on the concepts of forgetting and remembering. Here, visitors are encouraged to take one of the postcards provided and reflect on questions that invite multiple answers. One example text is: 'I think forgetting is either important or unimportant, because….' Once completed, the filled-out cards are exhibited both on-site and online, functioning as an additional entry point to larger discussions. Throughout these activities, the archival team engages the audience in conversations about memory, forgetting, digital participation, and institutional structures around memory practices.

By offering a physical activity that imitates the process of 'forgetting', the *Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories* aims to make rather abstract concepts and applications more tangible. This can serve as a conversation starter in museums and other memory institutions for talking to their visitors about everyday practices.
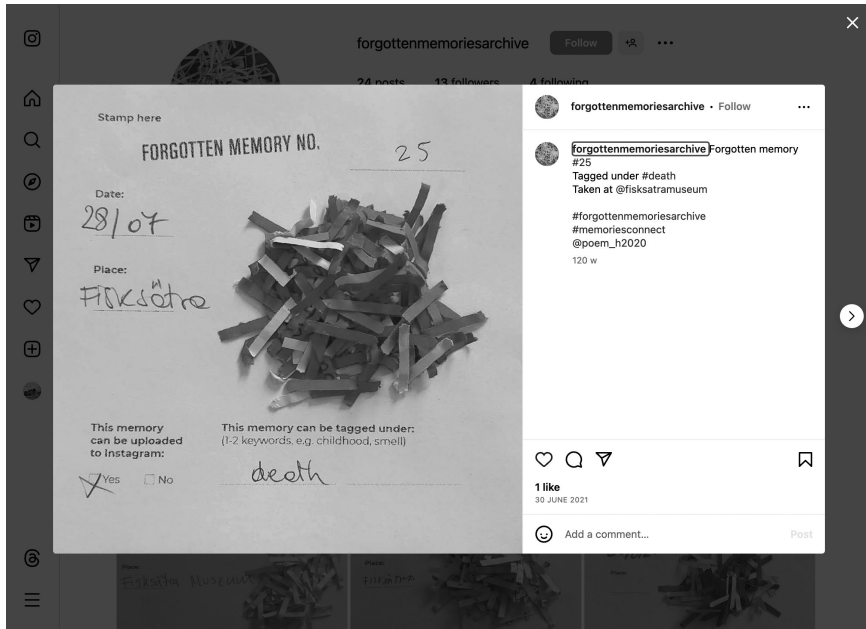
Figure 10.2 Screenshot of Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories' Instagram channel showing a shredded memory from an installation at Fisksätra Museum in June 2021. Taken by Anne S. Chahine and Inge Zwart.

It can function as an entry point to more complex discussions about memory practices – such as sensibilities around sharing or not sharing memories or personal information – in workshops or in a variety of spaces and institutions that engage with questions about memory practices on a regular basis (Figure 10.2).

2.6   *Future memory work*

Future Memory Work can be understood as a 'conceptual framework and speculative practice to unsettle temporal hierarchies in research that are intrinsically tied to the anthropological project' (Chahine, 2022, p. 1). This tool in the toolbox was developed as part of Anne S. Chahine's doctoral work in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and Denmark in 2018–2022. The starting point of the approach is memory work, a methodological tool that allows us to better understand how we make sense of the world around us (Crawford, 1992; Haug, 1999; Kuhn, 2000). The future is then added on to the memory work as an additional dimension so that it can be used to influence the way we (re)construct the past in the now.

As part of the study, young Indigenous people from Kalaallit Nunaat were invited to create 'future memories' for coming generations. They were asked to think about concepts or material things in their life that they considered the

most relevant to preserve for the future. The focus of the concept is on better understanding what matters for individuals and how they position themselves in relation to their communities. *Future Memory Work* is based on approaches from the fields of Indigenous Futurism and Afrofuturism (Cornum, 2015; Nixon, 2016; Oman-Reagan, 2018; Drew & Wortham, 2020); its potential lies in the forward-looking approach that it can empower, embracing the possibility of speculating, thinking, and imagining *otherwise*. It can be understood as a space that pluralises temporalities (Rifkin, 2017) and works towards acknowledging that multiple temporalities coexist, therein unsettling the temporal hierarchies imposed by our colonial/modern world (Fabian, 1990; Deloria, 2004; Fabian & Bunzl, 2014; Rifkin, 2017).

The *Future Memory Work* tool takes Anne S. Chahine's positionality as a researcher into account – as a white, East German, non-Indigenous scholar carrying out a study in a former colony while based at a Danish university. Her positionality is reflected upon, and (temporal) biases are taken into consideration. The approach is rooted in acknowledging the ubiquitous entanglements of the colonial past and present, in which we ourselves as researchers are a part, and aims to contribute to a field that interrogates the status quo of how research in Kalaallit Nunaat and Europe are conducted today (Figure 10.3).

Figure 10.3 Co-analysis of generated 'future memories' with participants as part of a focus group in Aarhus, Denmark in October 2020. Photo taken by Anne S. Chahine.

2.7   ***Decolonial design practices: the safe space tool for plural voices on contested pasts, presents, and futures, by Asnath Paula Kambunga***

Kambunga et al. (2023) define the *Safe Space* tool as:

> as a consciously developed social environment for thoughts, situated actions, and mutual learning that allows participants to engage in dialogues about their everyday experiences, tensions, and contested pasts and consequently to imagine and co-create alternative and plural futures.
>
> (p. 2)

The *Safe Space* was designed as part of the research project Decolonising Design: Futures Memory Making with Namibian Born Frees *(2018–2022).* This project aimed to create approaches to decolonising design by applying a lens of collaborative engagement with a group of young Namibians born since Namibia's independence in 1990. The *Safe Space* is a decolonial design practice that supports alternative ways of knowing and doing in practice (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Smith et al., 2021). It also challenges researchers to reflect on their positionalities within the socio-cultural and historical research context, and their particular adaptations of dominant design methods and approaches (Figure 10.4).
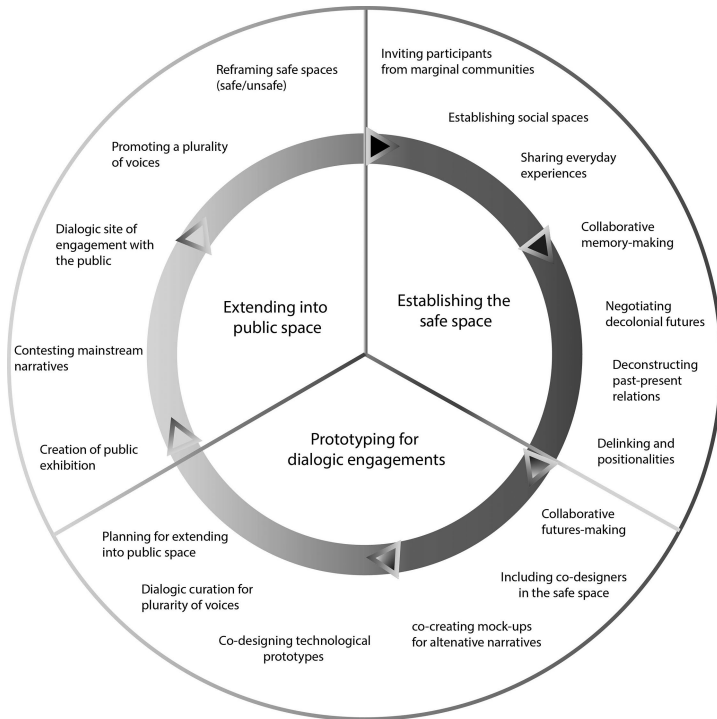
Figure 10.4 The Safe Space framework designed by Kambunga et al. (2023).

Kambunga et al. (2023) proposed the *Safe Space* framework, a framework that allows work with multiple temporalities, addressing pasts, presents, and futures. The framework is composed of three phases that build on each other in a clockwise movement, from *establishing the Safe Space*, to *prototyping dialogic engagement,* to *extending into public space*. Each phase comprises a set of activities practised through design anthropological interventions and participatory design workshops.

In the original research project (*Decolonising Design*: *Futures Memory Making with Namibian Born Frees*), the *Safe Space* made it possible for the Born Frees and the researchers to engage in dialogues about Namibia's colonial pasts, to discuss contested everyday life experiences, and to imagine pluriversal futures. The Born Frees participated as co-designers, contributing to co-designing different public spaces that amplified their voices through different technological prototypes.

3   Reflections on memory tools and practices

Although this chapter can give only a glimpse of a few of the tools developed in the POEM project, it demonstrates the wide range of ideas, topics, and approaches that were covered. Looking back, articulating these practical and theoretical research tools and shaping practical tools from the POEM fellows' doctoral work was a difficult process, but ultimately productive. Judging by the feedback from the validation workshop, the process of developing the POEM toolbox led to a set of "products" that are relevant to a wider public, something that memory institutions, policymakers, and the wider society can use.

Over and above this, the tools we have envisioned go further. They demonstrate how the entanglement of tools and practices is crucial for the empowerment and agency of those who engage in memory work and for the personal empowerment and agency that can come with individual participation and visibility in public memory. A tool works, and makes sense, when it is intertwined with personal and collective practices of memory making. With the *Digital Archive of Forgotten Memories*, *Opening Up Knowledge in an Equitable Way* and the *Why (Not) Participate?*, the critical contribution of these tools is their facilitation of making and articulating these entanglements by making it possible to discuss and enact remembering and forgetting, openness or participation. *Future Memory Work* starts with the participants' ideas about what is relevant to preserve. The ideas for digital archive, model, and card game serve as starting points for how to practise the tool. The *Safe Space* provides the participants with a social environment to engage in dialogues about their personal experiences with the aim of imagining and co-creating futures. The *School Memory Work* tool leverages the context of school, while the *Digital Legacy Booklet* employs digital media, the experience of loss, and the booklet format as foundational elements. From here, memory practices and the tools come together to form entanglements that make sense as settings for the participants' memory work.

The examples also show the global interconnectedness of memories. Little in the tools is specific to just one hyper-local sphere; perhaps even more obviously, they demonstrate that personal memory making forms the foundation of the

emergence of public memories, and vice versa. Much of the memory making of the tools traverses boundaries – spatially, temporally, and in scale from the personal to the collective and from private to public. This memory making engages with near-universal concepts like school memories, archives, and even death, yet it offers ways to develop common ground through conversation, games, and engagements with tangible objects. Through multiple relational and situated approaches, these tools can evoke and empower people's capacity to envision futures through memory making.

Furthermore, the development of these tools in the POEM project was actually a form of participatory memory work in its own right. All of the tools discussed above stemmed from intensive interactions with the research sites of the POEM fellows' doctoral work. All the tools, while more or less tangible (which renders them approachable and actionable), are also deeply theoretical in what they aim to achieve. Rather than being mere instruments for 'doings,' what the tools in the toolbox have in common is that they are instruments for 'thinkings' as well. They catalyse discussions about memory in a school context, thinking about digital legacy, the pursuit of openness of knowledge, (non)participation, remembering, and forgetting.

Working with developing the toolbox from the first to the final stages of the project was useful, not only because it produced a set of predetermined practical tools, but because we could ideate on what a tool and toolbox might entail in the context of each individual doctoral study and the project as whole. The open-ended approach to the practical outcomes of the research underpinning the toolbox concept aligns with the ideals of curiosity-driven basic research. It might appear to be at odds with the logic of much of the increasingly applied contemporary research in the heritage sector, research that features predetermined methods and expected outcomes. On the basis of the work on the POEM toolbox we are, however, inclined to see major benefits in committing to making a practical impact but not determining the exact measures of how to make it in advance. Our work in POEM points to the advantages of letting these benefits emerge from empirical research work conducted in tandem with rigorous open-ended theory development.

Another aspect of the toolbox work in POEM that we like to highlight is the validation exercise described at the beginning of this chapter. It gave useful insights into the tools, their practical applicability and relevance, the robustness of their theoretical underpinnings, and the development process of individual tools and the toolbox as a whole. The insights varied as much as the tools. In some cases, the validation provided invaluable feedback on conceptual dimensions that the practitioners considered crucial in the particular context of the tool. The questions pertaining to ethics and motivational factors in the Model for Open Knowledge tool exemplify the significance of this type of response. In some cases, the validation provided hands-on practical advice that made the tool work better; in others, the response provided valuable input on the contextual aspects of the tool, like the quote from Sean Bellamy with the *Digital Legacy Booklet* evince.

Our work with the POEM toolbox was not intended primarily to develop a formal process or set of procedures for generic toolbox development. But theorising,

tool ideation, a design and validation cycle, and working towards a toolbox have a wider potential than use in POEM alone. The toolbox proved to be a useful action-able approach for bridging the gap between theory and practice, a gap that is often difficult to cross. As a general approach, we can see potential in toolbox work in forthcoming research and practice in the context of participatory memory work, but also as a method for applying in other fields of research as well. It can be applied as an intellectual what-if exercise to devise potential practical tools based on theoretical and evidence-based research; it can also be used, as we used it, to strive for real tools, validate them, and enact them in practice together with partici-pating communities.

Notes

1 See Introduction and Chapter 9 of this volume, which presents the theoretical frame-work of the POEM Model 1.0 and the Model of Participatory Memory Work.
2 The complete description of the tool and the steps/prompts for its implementation can also be found at https://www.poem-horizon.eu/school-memory-work/. School memories from the research project can be accessed on the website https://school-memoriesthatmatter.com/school-memories-that-matter/.
3 All these publications are available at: https://www.memoryanddeath.com/my-digital-legacy/

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11 Epilogue

Future memory work

Ton Otto

This volume builds on a long tradition of research on memory, that has emerged from different disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, literary studies, and media studies.[1] Each of these disciplines has developed their specific disciplinary perspective, focusing, among other things, on individual memory and cognition, collective memory, different cultural practices and techniques, historical evidence, narrativisation, and different media for storing and communicating memories. More and more the study of memory has become an interdisciplinary endeavour and is now considered as a field in its own right, which is testified for example by the appearance of specific journals and associations. Nevertheless, this field is characterised more by common problems and topics than by shared theoretical traditions and methods.[2] The particular contribution of the present volume is that it aims at an integrative and relational approach, which derives not only from theoretical model building, but to a high degree emerges from practical work and collaborative engagement in heritage institutions (in short GLAM institutions – galleries, libraries, archives, and museums); work with digital infrastructures and social media; and with diverse practical interventions, group initiatives and design collaborations. In all these forms of collaboration, the modalities of memory that are afforded by the specific arrangements are in focus.

The result of practice-based research, this volume provides an insight into the diverse challenges and ethical dilemmas of participatory memory work, while attempting to provide conceptual and practical tools to deal with these challenges. The volume is one of the results of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network, called POEM, which involved PhD students, professionals, and established academics working in the field. In this epilogue I will first highlight three elements, I consider central to the POEM approach, namely 'participation', 'work', and finally 'memory' understood as a variety of practices constituting and constituted by a memory ecology that is characterised by ever-changing 'modalities'. Then I will provide an example of my own practice-based research in the form of a museum exhibition to show how the POEM model helps to clarify and reflect on both the process and its results.

The concept of *participation* has been a key guideline for the type of memory work that the POEM scholars and practitioners have aspired and practiced. It is important to underline that this derives from a vision of an ideal society and the

political choice to try to further its realisation. Most of us will be familiar with George Orwell's famous dictum from his novel '1984': "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." In this dystopian narrative published in 1949, Orwell points to the overwhelming political influence the control of memory can have on the subjects of a state, who are prone to manipulation by a ruling elite. Social memory research, especially during the past four decades, has demonstrated how people's subjectivity and identity, their sense of self and agency, are intricately linked to their understanding and knowledge of their collective past (Assmann, 1995; Antze & Lambek, 1996; Cubitt, 2007; Boyer & Wertsch, 2009). The idea of increasing participation in the making of social and public memories is thus a democratic value and ideal, to involve also those groups that otherwise would not have an impact on official and dominant narratives that shape policies and politics. It is an ideal that is embraced by many GLAM institutions in Europe, but that is not easy to realise as several chapters of this volume show (see especially Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Nevertheless it is a key value of our societies that is very much worth pursuing and the inventiveness of a new generation of scholar-practitioners will be able to move it further, as also demonstrated by this volume. Newer theoretical approaches point to the need for opening up the concept of a 'pluriverse' as an antidote to dominant narratives that oppress minority perspectives (Escobar, 2018; de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018). In this volume, this is further connected with decolonial approaches and the creation of 'safe spaces' and 'creative space' through participatory design processes (see Chapter 5).

The term memory *work* has become popular and influential since the turn of the century (Radstone, 2000; Haug, 2000) when it was used to refer to practices of recalling and discussing memories as part of a feminist critique and the connected refashioning of identities and subjectivities. In line with the widely accepted correspondence between identity and memory, these scholars explored memories (and their various products) to open for alternative interpretations of the past. The claim was not that one could define the past at liberty, but that memory work can provide alternative and valid perspectives that may have a liberating and emancipatory effect for the people involved. This idea that working with the past can be transformative towards a different future also lies at the basis of participatory memory work as exemplified in this volume, and can be extended to include, for example, young people, ethnic groups, marginalised groups, and migrants (Chahine, 2022; Boersma, 2023; Kambunga et al., 2023; Moraitopoulou, 2024).[3]

While memory work in this sense thus refers to a conscious effort to work on identities and potential agencies through the re-interpretation of the past, one could argue – by extension – that all memory activity is a kind of work, because it is necessary for the maintenance, and modification, of identities. As Lambek and Antze (1996, xviii) express it:

> In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self. […] People emerge from and as the products of their stories about themselves as much as their

stories emerge from their lives. Through acts of memory they strive to render their lives in meaningful terms.

Any practice that involves the invocation of memory is simultaneously a re-enactment of, or challenge to, existing subject positions and thus confirms or changes human selves as part of a process one could call autopoietic (Margulis & Sagan, 1995; Thompson, 2007).

This brings me to my third point, which is to have a closer look at how and where memory 'happens'. From the previous discussion, it will be clear that memories cannot be conceived without a subject, be it an individual or collective, that does the remembering, and in that process constitutes itself as an agent in the world. On the other hand, performing memory activities requires, apart from active human minds, an enormous diversity of things in the world, such as language, artefacts, images, audiences, institutions, infrastructures, media, etc. In short, memories happen in an environment that is variable in time and space. Following the idea of autopoiesis, mentioned above, one could profitably take an ecological perspective on the process of memory, comparing it to the mutual interdependence between an organism and its specific 'world'.[4] Donna Haraway (2007), Anna Tsing (2010; 2015), Arturo Escobar (2018) and others have extended this biological mechanism to our understanding of cultural processes as instances of 'worlding' or 'world making'.[5]

Important for our purpose is to highlight how the socio-material-technological composition of such a 'world' or 'environment' or 'memory ecology'- which to a high extent is a human product - affects what kinds of memories are possible and what, for example, their reach and specific impact may be. A topical example is how algorithm-controlled social media tend to create 'bubbles' of like-mindedness, thus exacerbating prejudice and social division. Further, the infrastructural instabilities of digital media, as well as issues of their control and participatory potential, affect the quality and impact of the memories thus mediated (see Chapter 8 and Tzouganatou, 2023). In the POEM conceptual framework, the variety of arrangements constituting a specific memory ecology are called 'memory modalities' (see Chapters 1 and 7). Including this concept in our heuristic toolbox allows us to be sensitive to the diversity of influences – social, cultural, material, technical, institutional, and legal – that shape the dialectic or 'relational' process of memory, between a self-constituting subject in relation with and impacted by a produced and constitutive environment.

To make these highly abstract suggestions and claims more tangible, I will now turn to an example of an exhibition intervention that aimed at creating new spaces for remembering. The specific design challenge of the exhibition was the way people in Denmark, and northern Europe more generally, dealt with death and their relation to their dead loved ones. Life's ending is undoubtedly a key concern for people everywhere and many cultural practices are devoted to mediating this concern through rituals of passing, cosmologies about life and death, and social and legal procedures to secure continuities of identities and properties. When Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, was to open its new grand exhibition building

in 2014, the choice for a theme in the anthropology section fell on this universal concern with its myriad of global cultural solutions. The motivation for this choice derived from a lively debate in the media, as well as from research projects at Aarhus University and elsewhere, that pointed to serious anxieties and uncertainties for many people about how to cope with loss, mourning and the prospect of dying (Jacobsen & Haakonsen, 2008; Christensen & Willerslev, 2013). The curatorial group at Moesgaard Museum[6] formulated the informed hypothesis that from a historical and anthropological perspective, these anxieties and uncertainties might be caused by the ongoing secularisation and rationalisation of the North-European welfare states, that had eroded places and times to relate to death and to ponder the place that the dead still occupy in the life of the living. Of course, North Europeans still maintain graveyards, and they entertain personal projects for keeping memories through photos, objects, and even internet sites (see Chapter 6; Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Gibson, 2008), but all this appears insufficient to allow for a presence of death and the dead in their daily lives in a way that may appease their modern selves with the unavoidable realities of life and its ending.

The participatory design solution we developed at Moesgaard Museum focused on using the ethnographic archive as a source of input into the collective memory of the public. Based on available collections and research collaborations at the museum we selected six regional ethnographic themes to build immersive scenes in which the audience could experience alternative ritual ways of relating to the dead.[7] We used the concept of 'transduction' to refer to our aim of transferring meaning and affect from the original cultural practices, via the artificial museum exhibit, to the audience, because this concept better than 'translation' captures the different media that are employed to carry over memories and emotions (Otto et al., 2021, p. 9). Most, but not all, of these six scenes were based on the active participation of source communities (including their memories), such as the Day of the Dead celebrations in Oaxaca, Mexico, and among Mexicans living in the Aarhus area. The example I wish to elaborate here was called 'Christmas Birrimbirr' or 'Christmas Spirit', which was based on the collaboration of a group of Yolngu people (Arnhem Land, Australia), in particular Paul Gurrumuruwuy and Fiona Yangathu, the Australian anthropologist Jennifer Deger, and the Australian video-artist David Mackenzie.[8] Through a video-based exhibit of recent Yolngu Christmas rituals that involved the invocation of the dead, they wished to share this Yolngu Christmas spirit with the audience.

The exhibit included an artificial Christmas tree that resembled the one from the original filmed performance. In the Aarhus version of the exhibit, the audience was invited to decorate the tree with cut pieces of coloured paper that contained the names of their lost loved ones. The curatorial team saw this as an experimental encouragement for the audience to participate even more fully in the meanings and emotions of the Christmas Spirit scene. The result greatly surpassed our expectations and truly surprised us, because the audience used the sometimes artfully cut pieces not only to write the names of the deceased but also to write messages to them or to commemorate them in other ways. The new ritual of hanging messages on the Christmas tree was so popular that we had to remove the old ones

almost every week to make space for new contributions. We carefully collected and kept these messages for the dead – out of respect and for later study – and two-and-a-half years after the opening we had already about 16,500 of them. What this little ritual in a secular museum makes overwhelmingly clear, is that there is a need for this kind of memory practice of the dead, which can be actualised when there are modalities in place that allow for it to happen.[9]

This example shows how a museum-initiated type of memory work allowed people from the audience to create or reinvent a space for themselves to commemorate and thus connect to their deceased relatives and friends. The exhibition intervention involved many actors, stakeholders, and collaborations. In the first place, it was the product of an intercultural collective, consisting of two Australian Aboriginal ritual specialists and two non-indigenous Australians: one an anthropologist with many years of collaboration with the Yolngu and the other a video artist. This collective had made a screen-based exhibition to invite the audience to share in the emotions and meanings of a Yolngu ritual. This product was then transferred, in full collaboration with the collective, to the Moesgaard Museum, where it was transformed to adjust to local limitations, technical possibilities, and design choices and where the possibility of participation via the Christmas tree was added. Finally, the audience took their participation and sharing further than envisaged by the curators, thus showing how the setup had inspired reflection on and enactment of their relationship with the dead.

In conclusion, this case study illustrates how connectivity can operate between people from the audience and memory work in the context of a heritage institution, challenging their collective and personal memories. The memory modalities characterising and constituting the particular ecology of this case involve the arrangement of a series of diverse elements: a cultural heritage museum with its specific resources, policies, and directives; an ethnic group willing to share their way of commemorating their dead; the technique of transduction through immersive exhibits; an audience open to exploring new ways of creating ritual space; and a curatorial team that made a connection between public values, lack of ritual opportunities, and the potential of collaborative memory work in a GLAM institution to connect individual and collective practices. The long-term effects of this case remain to be evaluated, but we can already conclude that a specific ritualised form emerged that has been a source of inspiration for memory work in other places. It is in these kinds of small innovations and inventions in the performance of participatory memory practices that I see opportunities for progress in the project of Future Memory Work, outlined in this volume.

Notes

1 Early and defining classics include Bartlett (1995[1932]) and Halbwachs (1992[1952]).
2 See for example the self-descriptions of the journal 'Memory Studies' (https://journals. sagepub.com/description/MSS) and 'The Memory Studies Association' (https://www. memorystudiesassociation.org/about_the_msa/)
3 It is tempting to quote from another well-known book, namely Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871): "It is a poor sort of memory that only works backwards, the Queen remarked."

4 The notion of memory ecology has also been proposed without the explicit reference to the biological origin of the concept. See for example Hoskins (2016) who sees it as a crucial term to understand the link between individual and collective memories.
5 An important older source of inspiration is Gregory Bateson (1973).
6 The author was then head of the Ethnographic Department at the museum and chief curator for this exhibition. The exhibition was called 'The Lives of the Dead' and lasted from October 2014 until August 2023.
7 See Otto et al. (2021) for a detailed description and analysis of this exhibition.
8 Together they form the collective 'Miyarrka Media'.
9 The attractiveness of this new memory practice is also evidenced by its imitation in other places, in particular in a parish-church in Copenhagen.

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Note: Page numbers followed by "n" denote endnotes.