THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

Edited by Elisabetta Costa, Patricia G. Lange, Nell Haynes, and Jolynna Sinanan

First published 2023

ISBN: 978-1-032-00776-2 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-00778-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-17560-5 (ebk)

12

CONTENT-AS-PRACTICE

Studying Digital Content with a Media Practice Approach

Christoph Bareither

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

DOI: 10.4324/9781003175605-17

The funder for this chapter is University of Tübingen

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

12
CONTENT-AS-PRACTICE
Studying Digital Content with a Media Practice Approach

Christoph Bareither

Introduction

Studying media through media-related practices has long been a leading approach in media anthropology (Bräuchler and Postill, 2010). Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field, media practice is a valuable concept for developing shared key interests across disciplinary lines. The conceptual foundations of practice theory – building on the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Anthony Giddens, Sherry Ortner, Andreas Reckwitz, Theodor Schatzki, and many others (for an overview, see Postill, 2010) – have given rise to different strands of media practice thinking. Together, they constitute what I call the "media practice approach," which includes any analytical perspective employing practice theory to understand the relationships between media technologies, human actors, and everyday life.

My first aim is to identify a conceptual and methodological desideratum of the media practice approach. Nick Couldry, in his foundational text for the study of media practices, describes the key aim of this "new paradigm": "to decentre media research from the study of media texts or production structures (important though these are) and to redirect it onto the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media" (2010: 16–17). In following the media practice approach, then, media anthropologists do not only turn towards practices; they *decentre* media texts. As Couldry explains, the decentring of media texts allows media researchers to go beyond content analysis (and beyond questions of production and direct reception) so as to "get a better grip on the distinctive types of social process enacted through media-related practices" (Couldry, 2012: 55).

It is not my intention to interrogate the plausibility and analytical usefulness of practice-oriented media research. On the contrary, my intention is to contribute to the media practice approach by pointing out the lack of conceptual and methodological clarity about how to fit media content into research designs inspired by practice theories, *despite* their decentring of media texts. This is important because, for scholars working on media practices, "media cannot be studied without an acknowledgement of their content," as Sarah Pink puts it (2015: 12).

In their seminal work "How the World Changed Social Media," a comprehensive summary of a multi-researcher anthropological study on social media practices around the globe, Daniel Miller et al. (2016) go one step further. They argue that anthropologists of social media need to pay close attention to user content because it constitutes the relevance of social media in the

DOI: 10.4324/9781003175605-17

first place: "It is the *content* rather than the platform that is most significant when it comes to why social media matters" (ibid.: 1).

But how do we best approach content when following a media practice approach? This question has special relevance for "old" and "new" media, but it is especially important for media anthropologists working on and in digital environments, which is why I focus on *digital content* below. By digital content, I mean any kind of digital image, video, text, or audio recording presented on or circulated via digital media technologies such as social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram), dating and messenger apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Tinder), and other online repositories (e.g. YouTube). I deliberately avoid the term "user-generated content" because it implies a dichotomy between professional producers on the one hand and users or consumers on the other, which does not capture the complexity of social media entanglements (Ardèvol et al., 2010: 264–265). Digital content has become an essential part of many media anthropological studies, but its hybrid, fluid, and manifold nature makes it all the more challenging to conceptualise within complex sets of media practices. How can we conceptualise digital content with the media practice approach? What can we gain analytically from its conceptualisation? And what methodological consequences does it have for media anthropology in general?

In fleshing out conceptual and methodological responses to those questions, I will draw on my work in the multi-researcher project Curating Digital Images (Bareither et al., 2021), which examines the transformations caused by digital image technologies in heritage and museum contexts. I focus in particular on my ethnographic study of Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Bareither, 2019, 2021a, 2021b), colloquially referred to as the Holocaust memorial. Widely known for its uncommon aesthetics, the memorial consists of 2,711 concrete blocks covering 19,000 square metres. It is located next to the Brandenburg Gate at the very centre of the German capital, and is one of the city's most popular tourist destinations and one of the most frequently visited sites of Holocaust remembrance in the world. In my study, I describe the digital media practices of Holocaust remembrance at the Berlin site as practices of "past presencing," which anthropologist Sharon Macdonald regards as "the ways in which people variously draw on, experience, negotiate, reconstruct, and perform the past in their ongoing lives" (Macdonald, 2012: 234). My research also relies on approaches to the study of digital memory practices (e.g. Hoskins, 2018), theories of emotional and affective practices (Scheer, 2012; Wetherell, Smith, and Campbell, 2018), the ethnographic study of digital photography (e.g. Gómez Cruz and Lehmuskallio, 2016), and social media practices more generally (e.g. Costa, 2018).

My previously published articles have focused on the empirical results of my study (Bareither 2021b) and on discussions of digital media's "emotional affordances" at sites of Holocaust remembrance (Bareither 2019, 2021a). By contrast, this chapter raises general theoretical, conceptual, and methodological questions regarding the role of digital content from my ethnographic work. I am particularly interested in revisiting my ethnographic data to explore new theoretical terrain in developing an anthropological understanding of digital content that builds upon the media practice approach.

My study comprised participant observation at the memorial and online, 17 face-to-face interviews with 41 visitors at the site, and 24 chat interviews with Instagram and Facebook users. The interviewees had an equal gender balance, ranging from 12 to 77 years of age (most between 20 and 40), and representing 29 nations. The interviews and participant observation were accompanied by a computer-assisted ethnographic analysis of 800 social media posts taken from Instagram and Facebook. The posts typically include one or more digital images (and occasional videos), text captions (often in combination with emojis, hashtags,

and geo-tags), and comments from other users. In the following, I use these posts as well as the material I gathered from my fieldwork and interviews in outlining my approach to digital content.

In order to illustrate some of the arguments, I provide links in the endnotes to examples of Instagram posts, which can be viewed without creating a user account. All links were active as of June 2021. Alternatively, readers may visit the Instagram subpage that brings together all posts tagged with the Holocaust memorial location.[1] The subpage's source code indicates that it contains more than 314,000 posts related to the memorial, although the exact number is unclear. All examples that I mention can be easily identified by browsing the page.

Understanding Digital Content-as-Practice

Digital content is an elusive analytical object. It consists of binary code that appears to us as an image, video, text, symbol, and, as in the case of social media posts, a combination of all three. The term "content" usually does not refer to the medium itself – for example the image as a medium, the video as a medium, the text as a medium, and so on. Rather, it directs our attention to what the media *contain* – for example the image of a particular person at a particular place, a video showing a particular activity, a text containing particular words, and so on. But digital media technologies do not contain content in the way that a photo album does. Instead, they store and/or access digital data and process it in such a way that it can be displayed on electronic interfaces such as smartphones, cameras, and computers. This makes the question of what digital content *is* difficult to answer.

My aim is not to resolve the ontological status of digital content or to offer a static definition in its place. My concern is epistemological: how can we understand digital content through the lens of the media practice approach? To answer that question, one could turn to Theodor Schatzki's ideas about the relationships between practices, sayings, texts, and discursive formations (2017), to Andreas Reckwitz's notion of discursive practices (2008), or to Guido Ipsen's semiotic reading of the media practice approach (2010). Though I find these approaches helpful, I propose a practice-theory approach to digital content that does not rely on categories of text, discourse or representation.

To that end, I suggest a simple analytical shift: instead of making a clear-cut distinction between digital content and its associated practices, we can understand digital content itself *as* practice. Whereas a media text approach focuses on the meanings or semiotic implications of digital content, a media practice approach allows us to ask: What does digital content *do*? This is not to suggest that digital content is itself an actor in the sense of actor-network theory (e.g. Latour, 2005: 71–72). My position is much simpler: I argue that the practices of content creators *live on* through digital content while being shaped by the affordances of digital technologies. I call this constellation *content-as-practice*.

This may first seem counterintuitive. Can an image, a text, or an emoji be understood in a meaningful way as a practice? I believe it can. Consider the example of selfies taken at the Holocaust memorial showing a person or persons with sad facial expressions, which I term the "sad selfie."[2] When we think of the bodily routine of making a sad facial expression (independently from any technological device), we can certainly conceptualise this as a practice in the sense of practice theory, and the same goes for taking photos in front of memorials and posting them on social media. So why should the practices lose their status once they are transformed by digital technologies and appear as digital images on social media? A social media post showing a sad selfie taken at the Holocaust memorial is a digital continuation of the bodily gesture captured by a camera. It sustains the original practice in digital form.

The conceptual challenge here is the temporal delay. It might seem that a sad selfie simply encapsulates something that happened in the past, that it *results* from a practice. But from a practice-oriented perspective, it is impossible to determine where practice ends and the digital object is all that remains. Think of a person who shows a friend a picture of herself making a sad facial expression at the Holocaust memorial. We certainly would consider it to be a practice. So why shouldn't we think of this as a practice when the same process is enacted and multiplied (sometimes thousands of times) at a later time on digital interfaces, albeit without the presence of the original creator?

The same goes for other types of content such as textual captions. Writing captions can surely be regarded as a media practice. Why would we think the practice constituted by writing stops once the writing stops? For example, visitors to the Holocaust memorial frequently articulate their emotional relationship to the past through captions and through the hashtags and emojis embedded in them. The captions themselves continue to articulate the visitors' emotional experiences, even after the visitors who posted the content log off.

The content-as-practice approach draws from the theoretical work of Kevin Pauliks and Jens Ruchatz, who regard digital images such as those circulating on social media as materialised practice. While my own approach attends to texts, emojis, hashtags, and the like as well as to images, their key argument is nevertheless helpful for my purposes: "A picture materializes a practice insofar as it is the result of a practice that gains a perceivable, definable, and at least to some extent stabilized (because reproducible) form in the aesthetic object" (Pauliks and Ruchatz, 2021: 124). The notion of a materialised practice allows us to think of digital content as both object *and* practice. In contrast to Pauliks and Ruchatz, however, I argue that digital content is not only the "result" or the "trace of practices" (ibid.); instead, it allows practices to live on in digital form. In other words, digital content-as-practice is both materialised *and* lived practice.

Like other practices, digital content-as-practice does not exist in a vacuum (Pink et al., 2016: 57). It is closely entangled with other media-related practices. For instance, a digital image taken at the Holocaust memorial and then posted on social media is connected to the practices of visiting the memorial, finding a good place to take a picture, and positioning one's own body or the bodies of others, before finally taking the picture, editing it, and posting it online. A digital caption is shaped by practices of reading, writing, and online communication (e.g. using emojis). Images and captions related to the Holocaust memorial are also bound to broader social and cultural practices such as visits to other heritage sites and emotional performances of Holocaust remembrance. For example, a sad selfie is connected to the bodily routines of displaying sad facial expressions when being present at sites of atrocities such as the Holocaust, which many visitors have internalised in accordance with their particular social and cultural backgrounds. The content-as-practice approach always understands digital content to be imbricated in a whole range of social, cultural, and emotional practices and assigns it an active role within them.

Human Actors, Practical Sense, and Technological Affordances

To recapitulate, the content-as-practice approach considers how the practices of content creators live on through digital content. But who or what is the "actor" behind content-as-practice? Practice theories assume that actors are not subjects preceding practices but "body/minds who 'carry' and 'carry out' social practices" and who "'consist in' the performance of practices" (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). The bodies linking practices and actors have incorporated a "practical sense" (Bourdieu, 1990) – a "shared practical understanding" (Schatzki, 2001: 11), or a "practical knowledge" (Hörning, 2001) – that guides everyday actions.

The consideration of human bodies and their practical sense is crucial for understanding the agent who enacts digital content and who performs media-related practices more generally. But this is only the first step. For media technologies are not passive objects; they bring specific potentials of their own. Analytical tools are needed to comprehend how media technologies actively participate in media practices. One approach that meets this need is actor-network theory (ANT), which understands technical devices as *actors* (Latour, 2005: 71). Media anthropology has a somewhat ambivalent relationship with the ANT approach, however. While it has certainly influenced work in the research area, ANT implies (or is at least understood to imply) a strong decentring of human actors, which is not suited for every kind of ethnographic description, and has thus been rejected by many practice theorists (Schatzki, 2001: 20).

Another approach, which relies more strongly on practice theories, understands media practices to result from the interplay between human bodies and the practice potentials within media technologies. In the mid-1990s, Stefan Beck developed an approach for the study of technology and media that became very influential in German-speaking cultural anthropology (1997). Building on the practice theories of Bourdieu and others, Beck pointed to the role of the body as repository for incorporated knowledge that guides everyday practices, including the use of technologies and media (ibid.: 272). As Beck puts it, the body enacts "the social and cultural formation of comparatively 'soft' cultural orientations, dispositives and habitualisations" that shape our everyday relationships to technology (ibid.: 169, my translation). In other words, our bodies are infused with a practical sense shaped by cultural and social conventions for handling technological devices in our everyday lives.

Beck maintains that technological devices themselves are not passive objects; rather, they unfold what he calls "object potentials" (ibid.: 169; my translation) that offer or prompt a range of practices while restricting others. Crucially for Beck, the potentials go beyond the physical properties of a given technology. Instead, they are highly relational: what kind of practices a technological device allows, prompts, or restricts, depends on an actor's practical sense. By calling our attention to the interdependency of technology practices with human bodies, social conventions, and technological potentials, Beck offers a practice-theory approach to the study of technology and media that remains valuable today.

The book in which Beck lays out his approach was never translated into English, so its impact on the international field of media anthropology has been limited. Similar approaches have evolved through the rise and popularity of affordance theories, however. Growing out of the work of James W. Gibson (1986), the idea of affordance has become a key concept for describing the relationship between media technologies and everyday practices. "Affordances," Ian Hutchby writes, "are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object" (2001: 444). In contrast to Beck's approach, affordance theories have not been explicitly developed to extend practice-theory thinking. They are nevertheless highly compatible with practice theories, especially when we consider the many similarities between Beck's approach and the practice-oriented language used by Hutchby and others.

Elisabetta Costa has argued that affordances always exist in relation to the practices through which they are enacted. Her concept of "affordances-in-practice" means that "affordances are not intrinsic properties that can be defined outside their situated context of usage, but ongoing enactments by specific users that may vary across space and time" (2018: 13). Costa's concept, which inspired my idea of "content-as-practice," contains an implicit criticism of approaches that reduce the affordances of technologies to their functions (ibid.:10). Costa and other authors such as Julian Hopkins (2016) advance a decidedly relational notion of affordance, which emphasises the role of social and cultural context. Combine their approach with Beck's

emphasis on the body's practical sense, and we have a framework that acknowledges complexity of the interplay of human bodies, their practical sense, the cultural and social conventions in which both are embedded, and the affordances of media technologies.

From Social Media Algorithms to Routinised Practices

How does this contribute to my understanding of digital content? First, it helps us to treat digital content not simply as a practice enacted by human actors in isolation, but as an integral part of the complex entanglements of bodily knowledge, social and cultural conventions, and media technologies. At the same time, it allows us to see what sets digital content-as-practice apart from other types of media practices. We can say that typical media practices (taking photos, writing, editing, posting, etc.) depend on both human bodies and media affordances, but human actors are the primary agents. Once these practices become digital content, however, the agency shifts towards the media technologies. Through their affordances, media technologies allow human practices to live on through digital content, even when said creators are not actively involved in the process anymore. But this also means that the affordances control, shape, and restrict how these practices unfold over time.

As the platforms' affordances take over control, they employ a complex system of algorithms. Recall that digital content does not exist per se. It consists of binary code that is processed in such a way to appear as specific images, texts, and symbols. Algorithms are important to consider because they shape that process. For example, social media algorithms can determine which posts are displayed to whom and when. A complex example for this is Instagram's use of artificial intelligence, which determines what is shown to individual users through the platform's personalised "explore" feature (Medvedev, Wu, and Gordon, 2019). Two more well-known and comparatively simple examples for social media algorithms are location feeds and hashtag feeds. These are continuously growing lists – or "unruly archives" (Geismar, 2017) – that can be easily accessed by Instagram users. A location feed brings together all public posts with a particular geo-location tag. A hashtag feed does the same for particular hashtags such as "#holocaust" (Lundrigan, 2020).

From the content-as-practice perspective, the algorithms social media sites use carve out *routines* from a vast amount of seemingly random posts. Practice is never a random, one-off activity, but a form of repetition. Indeed, "for practice theory," Andreas Reckwitz observes, "the nature of social structure consists in routinization ... [and] the idea of routines necessarily implies the idea of a temporality of structure: routinized social practices occur in the sequence of time, in repetition" (2002: 255).

The notions of routine and repetition can easily be applied to media practices that are repeated by the same person every day. Someone who reads the news on her smartphone every morning enacts a routinised media practice. Ditto for those who routinely publish the same type of digital content. But now consider digital content dispersed across platforms, media formats, and hundreds or thousands of online user accounts. Many sad selfies taken at the Holocaust memorial and other sites of Holocaust remembrance appear on social media platforms. From the perspective of their creators, each post is a unique, individual act. Can we then still understand sad selfies as *routinised* practice?

This is where the algorithmic affordances of social media platforms come into play. For an individual user, a sad selfie might be an individual act. But scroll through the several hundred thousand posts on the location feed for the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," and it becomes apparent that the sad selfie is one routinised practice among many. The social media algorithm that assembles all sad selfies under a geo-location tag renders individual acts into

collective routines. In the following, I discuss these routines co-constituted by human actors and the affordances of digital technologies and living on through digital content-as-practice.

Content-as-Practice and the Holocaust Memorial

I employed computer-assisted ethnographic coding (Emerson Fretz, and Shaw, 2011: 171–200) to analyse 800 social media posts on Instagram and Facebook taken from location feeds linked to the Holocaust memorial. The sample was based on an inductive selection process. I collected smaller samples first and used the coding to identify the most relevant practices within them. The sad selfie is one example. In the process, I sought to deepen my insights into specific practices and identify new ones that previous samples did not include. In this way, I was able to pinpoint the most common and most dominant types of content-as-practice related to the Holocaust memorial. I was not looking for the meaning ascribed to the content. Instead, I focused on what a particular type of content is *doing*, how it functions as a routinised practice.

It's worth noting that the analytical distinction between different types of content-as-practice is relative. The routines I outline here do not describe objective characteristics. Rather, they emerge inductively from the particular interests of my work and the specifics of the ethnographic data. Accordingly, they represent a broad selection of different types of content-as-practice related to the site.[3]

As a first example, let us return to the sad selfie. First and foremost, I submit, it presences the past by articulating and mobilising emotions: the visitor in the photo looks directly at the camera while expressing sadness; the memorial in the background connects the emotion to the commemoration of the Holocaust. The sad selfie's past presencing engages in a thoughtful remembrance of past atrocities that honours victims and, through its emotional power, raises awareness for Holocaust remembrance, and may even help prevent future atrocities.

Another type of social media image shows visitors as they look into the distance as if lost in thought.[4] Typically, visitors sit on one of the concrete blocks or stand between them. These images, too, are practices of past presencing that work through the display of emotions. In contrast to sad selfies, however, they achieve this goal by documenting how visitors interact with the memorial (instead of interacting directly with the camera). Notably, these photos are often taken by friends or family members, but it is the persons portrayed who post them on social media. For them, the social media posts allow their emotional practices to live on and to participate in shared routines of Holocaust remembrance.

Other digital images posted on social media refrain from depicting human bodies at the memorial, and instead foreground its materiality and spatial structure. The photos articulate relationships to the past by visually capturing the memorial space. For example, one type of content-as-practice consists of shots with seemingly endless rows of grey stone.[5] An interviewee who took such a photo explained that "when I was really inside, I really felt like, you know, that you are … like a depressing feeling, because it's so tight, so that's what I kind of tried to fit in the picture, that you are [so] small in this huge, massive structure." Images that capture the spatial structure of the monument can articulate the photographer's emotional experiences at the site and share them with others. While they do not show the visitors' bodies, they are still a practice of presenting emotional relationships to the past.

These image-based practices are usually accompanied by text-based practices. The writing styles and text types used for social media captions come in many forms. Text-based practices that articulate one's own emotional experiences at the monument are particularly dominant. An analysis of more than 300 such captions revealed many variants. For example, captions articulate how visitors were emotionally moved by the memorial,[6] how they felt small, isolated

or lost when walking through the blocks,[7] and how some felt hopeful and positive.[8] The overwhelming number explicitly or implicitly articulate sadness, melancholia, compassion, and remembrance[9] – in this way, they sustain the practices of past presencing enacted by their creators.

An integral part of many captions is emojis. They display hearts, praying hands, falling leaves, or sad faces that supplement or replace textual captions.[10] A visitor who posted a sad emoji (followed by 30 hashtags) under a photograph of the memorial explained to me: "I didn't really know what to write. So the emoji was only to express how I was feeling at that moment. I really think that it says more than everything."

Again, we see here how digital content functions as a practice. All types of images, texts, and emojis mentioned here are practices of past presencing in relation to the Holocaust. In addition, we see how digital content-as-practice is entangled not only with other media-related practices such as taking pictures, writing texts, and so on, but also with each other. Images, texts, and emojis are not singular and isolated routines; they often work together. The notion of content-as-practice always denotes an entanglement of practices that move and flow into one another.

Methodological Consequences

The content-as-practice approach also raises methodological questions, and one issue is central here: Is it sufficient to analyse *only* content-as-practice in order to provide thick ethnographic descriptions of digital media practices? I believe that the answer is no. The content-as-practice approach is truly productive only as part of more comprehensive ethnographic research. While the approach enables the study of visitors' media practices via the interfaces of social media platforms and uncovers specific routines and relationships in digital networks, it also needs participant observation, qualitative interviews, and other ethnographic approaches that provide contextualisation.

To clarify, whether it is necessary to combine the content-as-practice approach with other methods depends on one's disciplinary perspective. Pauliks and Ruchatz convincingly argue that their "materialised practices" allows the analysis of media practices from the perspective of a "praxeological media philosophy" (Pauliks and Ruchatz, 2021: 124) *without* resorting to interviews and fieldwork. For studies in the field of media anthropology, however, I believe that any analysis of digital content needs as much ethnographic context as possible under the circumstances provided by the given empirical field (see also Hobart, 2010: 64–65).

To understand why, consider photos of visitors to the Holocaust memorial looking into the distance. If we examine these posts only through what we see on a social media platform, we would conclude that they capture and display the creators' bodily practices in digital form. But participant observation at the site and conversations with visitors show this practice from a different perspective: most of the time, visitors adopt such reflective poses for a mere matter of seconds. They have family or friends take the photo, check the picture, perhaps repeat the process once or twice and then immediately share the image on social media.

This is not to say that digital content-as-practice reveals only the "surface" of the actual practice; on the contrary. My research shows that, from the perspective of the posts' creators, the act of commemoration is not constituted in the bodily practice on site but through the social media post itself. That is to say, the post *is* the act of commemoration. And thanks to the algorithms of the social media platform, each act of commemoration is connected to similar acts of commemoration, forming a clearly visible and routinised practice. My methodological point is that it is precisely these links that remain hidden if we study digital content-as-practice in isolation. This means that ethnographic research cannot be replaced by an analysis of digital content

alone. It requires triangulating the analysis of content-as-practice with participant observation, interviews, and other methods.

Conclusion

My aim in proposing the content-as-practice approach is not to introduce a new theory. Instead, I want to provide an analytical tool enabling the analysis of digital content as media practice. What can we gain from this perspective? The answer to this question depends on the analytic purpose we assign to practice-theory thinking. As an ethnographer of digital cultures, I want to better understand the role of particular media-related routines in everyday life. And understanding content not only in terms of text and meaning but also as an entanglement of active routines that sustain the practices of their creators serves that purpose.

In the case of digital content related to the Holocaust memorial, this has clear analytical consequences. While text-centric methods focus on the meaning of the content and how it reflects contemporary memory cultures, the content-as-practice approach makes plain that digital content is not simply a reflection or representation of practices of remembrance. Digital content is a way for memory practices to *live on* through social media and, in this way, co-constitutes contemporary cultures of Holocaust remembrance on a massive scale.

The practice-theory perspective also points us to the role of practical sense and how it connects human bodies to media affordances. A content-as-practice such as the "sad selfie" shows how distinct everyday routines – taking of selfies and expressing sadness at a site of Holocaust remembrance – flow into one another to create a new practice. Integrating smartphones, digital cameras, and social media in everyday life gives rise to a practical sense for new routines that forge personal relationships to the past in different ways. In terms of affordance theories, this means that the analysis of content-as-practice shows how digital media do indeed afford new kinds of past presencing in contemporary Holocaust remembrance. Speaking on a more general level, digital content is one more area besides fieldwork and interviews in which to examine how the affordances of media technologies enable and shape different kinds of lived practice.

Several core questions have emerged from my concept of content-as-practice: How do the practices of content creators live on through digital content? How is content-as-practice shaped by the interplay of human bodies, their practical sense, the social and cultural conventions surrounding them, and the affordances of media technologies? How does digital content-as-practice constitute routines? What role do the algorithmic affordances of social media platforms play here? How are these routines entangled with other practices? And why do they matter in everyday life?

By proposing the content-as-practice approach, I do not wish to claim that digital content should be analysed *only* as practice. "Practice," Mark Hobart observes, "is not a natural object but a frame of reference that we use to interrogate a complex reality" (2010: 62). In the field of media anthropology, the content-as-practice approach can help us to better combine the study of digital content with the study of everyday life. In doing so, it provides a new form of ethnographic content analysis and a new tool in the expanding toolbox of media anthropological research.

Notes

1 www.instagram.com/explore/locations/213676284/memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe/
2 www.instagram.com/p/BdF_ZaWD5zd/, www.instagram.com/p/BebPrjIF7M4BE5Q4AIGWC8ldCqUgoFcolkLfjg0/

3 For example, I deliberately ignore the many "happy" social media posts related to the memorial: photos with visitors smiling brightly in front of the Holocaust memorial, climbing on the blocks, making funny faces or gesturing towards the camera. While these images are certainly salient and highly controversial for the digital cultures of Holocaust remembrance, they require a much deeper empirical analysis that would distract me from the conceptual questions at the heart of this chapter (but see Bareither, 2021b).
4 www.instagram.com/p/BcFSqbOHqiL/, www.instagram.com/p/BdADaXIDH4F/
5 www.instagram.com/p/BcFapmhhvdD/?taken-at=213676284, www.instagram.com/p/BcF4-lml4-j/
6 www.instagram.com/p/BcHv6i4AxFD/, www.instagram.com/p/BcJGAXJBxt3/
7 www.instagram.com/p/BjcpyfuHv43/, www.instagram.com/p/BjKmR39FJWG/
8 www.instagram.com/p/BcBAhSGDOsb/, www.instagram.com/p/BjarVqzHum9/
9 www.instagram.com/p/BbpEfqvDSrT/, www.instagram.com/p/BbxFzwego7j/
10 www.instagram.com/p/BZL12TnFvPE/, www.instagram.com/p/BkLQCUoFzQo/

References

Ardèvol, E., Roig, A. , San Cornelio, G. , Pagès, R. , and Alsina, P. (2010) "Playful Practices: Theorising 'New Media' Cultural Production" in B. Bräuchler and J. Postill (eds), *Theorising Media and Practice*, New York: Berghahn, 259–279.

Bareither, C. (2019) "Doing Emotion Through Digital Media: An Ethnographic Perspective on Media Practices and Emotional Affordances," *Ethnologia Europaea*, 49 (1): 7–23.

Bareither, C. (2021a) "Capture the Feeling: Memory Practices in between the Emotional Affordances of Heritage Sites and Digital Media," *Memory Studies*, 14 (3): Special Issue: "Locating 'Placeless' Memories: The Role of Place in Digital Constructions of Memory and Identity," edited by Huw Halstead: 578–591.

Bareither, C. (2021b) "Difficult Heritage and Digital Media: 'Selfie Culture' and Emotional Practices at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 27 (1): 1–16.

Bareither, C., Macdonald, S., Greifeneder, E., Geis, K., Ullrich, S., and Hillebrand, V. (2021) "Curating Digital Images: Ethnographic Perspectives on the Affordances of Digital Images in Heritage and Museum Contexts," *International Journal for Digital Art History*, 8 (1), "The Digital Image – A Transdisciplinary Research Cluster," edited by Hubertus Kohle and Hubert Locher: 87–102.

Beck, S. (1997) *Umgang mit Technik: Kulturelle Praxen und kulturwissenschaftliche Forschungskonzepte*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bräuchler, B. and Postill, J. (eds) (2010) *Theorising Media and Practice*, New York: Berghahn.

Costa, E. (2018) "Affordances-in-practice: An Ethnographic Critique of Social Media Logic and Context Collapse," *New Media & Society*, 22 (1): 1–16.

Couldry, N. (2010) "Theorising Media as Practice" in B. Bräuchler and J. Postill (eds), *Theorising Media and Practice*, New York: Berghahn: 35–54.

Couldry, N. (2012) *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*, Cambridge: Polity.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., and Shaw, L. L. (2011) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Second edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Geismar, H. (2017) "Instant Archives?" in L. Hjorth, H. A. Horst, A. Galloway, and G. Bell (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, New York: Routledge, 331–343.

Gibson, J. J. (1986) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gómez Cruz, E. and Lehmuskallio, A. (eds) (2016) *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, London: Routledge.

Hobart, M. (2010) "What Do We Mean by 'Media Practices'?" in B. Bräuchler and J. Postill (eds), *Theorising Media and Practice*, New York: Berghahn, 55–75.

Hopkins, J. (2016) "The Concept of Affordances in Digital Media" in H. Friese et al. (eds), *Handbuch Soziale Praktiken und Digitale Alltagswelten*, Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 1–8.

Hörning, K. H. (2001) Experten des Alltags: Die Wiederentdeckung des praktischen Wissens [*Experts of Everyday Life. The Rediscovery of Practical Knowledge*], Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft.

Hoskins, A. (ed.) (2018) *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, New York: Routledge.

Hutchby, I. (2001) "Technologies, Texts and Affordances," *Sociology*, 35: 441–456.

Ipsen, G. (2010) "Communication, Cognition and Usage: Epistemological Considerations of Media Practices and Processes" in B. Bräuchler and J. Postill (eds), *Theorising Media and Practice*, New York: Berghahn, 171–189.

Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lundrigan, M. (2020) "#Holocaust #Auschwitz: Performing Holocaust Memory on Social Media" in S. Gigliotti and H. Earl (eds), *A Companion to the Holocaust*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 639–655.

Macdonald, S. (2012) "Presencing Europe's Pasts" in U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith, and J. Frykman (eds), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe*, Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 231–252.

Medvedev, I., Wu, H., and Gordon, T. (2019) "Powered by AI: Instagram's Explore Recommender System." https://ai.facebook.com/blog/powered-by-ai-instagrams-explore-recommender-system/

Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T., Nicolescu, R., Sinanan, J., Spyer, J., Venkatraman, S., and Wang, X. (2016) *How the World Changed Social Media*, London: UCL Press.

Pauliks, K. and Ruchatz, J. (2021) "Towards a Praxeological Media Philosophy of the Digital Image. Theorizing Pictorial Picture Critique in Social Media," in H. Kohle and H. Locher (eds), *International Journal for Digital Art History.* E1 "The Digital Image – A Transdisciplinary Research Cluster," 121–136.

Pink, S. (2015) "Approaching Media through the Senses: Between Experience and Representation," *Media International Australia*, 154 (1): 5–14.

Pink, S., Horst, H. A., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T., Tacchi, J. (2016) *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, Los Angeles: Sage.

Postill, J. (2010) "Introduction: Theorising Media and Practice" in B. Bräuchler and J. Postill (eds), *Theorising Media and Practice*, New York: Berghahn, 1–31.

Reckwitz, A. (2002) "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5 (2): 243–263.

Reckwitz, A. (2008) "Praktiken und Diskurse: Eine sozialtheoretische und methodologische Relation" [Practices and Discourses: A Sociotheoretical and Methodological Relation], in H. Kalthoff, S. Hirschauer, and G. Lindemann (eds), *Theoretische Empirie: Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 188–209.

Schatzki, T. R. (2001) "Introduction: Practice Theory" in E. von Savigny, K. Knorr-Cetina and T. R. Schatzki (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. London: Routledge, 10–23.

Schatzki, T. R. (2017) "Sayings, Texts and Discursive Formations" in A. Hui, E, Shove and T. R. Schatzki (eds), *The Nexus of Practices: Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*. London: Routledge, 126–140.

Scheer, M. (2012) "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdiesian Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory*, 51: 193–220.

Wetherell, M., Smith, L., and Campbell, G. (2018) "Introduction: Affective Heritage Practices" in L. Smith, M. Wetherell and G. Campbell (eds), *Emotion, Affective Practices, and the Past in the Present*, Milton: Routledge, 1–21.

Funding

The ethnographic research underlying this paper was carried out in the context of Christoph Bareither's membership at the Centre for Anthropological research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) in Berlin, funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation as part of the research award for Sharon Macdonald's Alexander von Humboldt Professorship. At the same time, the research is part of the ongoing project "Curating Digital Images: Ethnographic Perspectives on the Affordances of Digital Images in Heritage and Museum Contexts" funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – GZ: BA 6440/2-1 AOBJ: 660775.