Mediated Memories in the Digital Age

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Presentation by Amber West
Memorization

• “But besides their personal value, collections of mediated memories raise interesting questions about a person’s identity in a specific culture at a certain moment in time” (van Dijck 1).
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- *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* was published by Stanford University Press (2007)
- Forthcoming book on social media tentatively titled *The Culture of Connectivity. Social media and the Engineering of Everyday Life* (will be published later this year)

Source: [University of Amsterdam website](http://www.uva.nl)
Chapter 1: Mediated Memories as a Conceptual Tool

• Mediated Memories
• Memory and Media
• Personal Cultural Memory
• Individual vs. Collective Memory
• Mediation of Memory
Mediated Memories

• “Many people nurture a shoebox in which they store a variety of items signaling their pasts: photos, albums, letters, diaries, clippings, notes, and so forth. Add audio and video tape recordings to this collection as well as all digital counterparts of these cherished items, and you have what I call “mediated memories”” (van Dijck 1).
Memory and Media

• “Memory and media have both been referred to metaphorically as reservoirs, holding our past experiences and knowledge for future use” (van Dijck 2).
Personal Cultural Memory

“A child’s autobiographical memory evolves as a culturally framed consciousness, where personal narratives constantly inter-mingle with other stories: “Personal memories, which had been encapsulated within the individual, become transformed through verbal narrative into cultural memory, incorporating a cultural belief system.” A culturally framed autobiographical memory integrates the sociocultural with the personal, and the self that emerges from this process is explicitly and implicitly shaped by its environment’s norms and values” (van Dijck 3-4).
Individual vs. Collective Memory

• “In *Les cadres sociaux de la memoire*, first published in 1925, Halbwachs sketches the partially overlapping *cadres* (spheres) of individual and larger communities, such as family, community, and nation. ... Halbwachs thus emphasizes the recursive nature of individual and collective memory, one always inhabiting the other” (van Dijck 9).
Mediation of Memory

• “In the influential theories of Marshall McLuhan, electronic media, as “extensions of men,” signaled the unprecedented enhancement of human perceptual capacities: photography and television were augmentations of the eye whereas audio technologies and radio extended the ear’s function” (van Dijck 15-6).
Chapter 2: Memory Matters in the Digital Age

• Brain Systems that Control Memory
• Metaphor – Memory is an Orchestra
• Digitization
Brain Systems that Control Memory

• “Even though some parts of the brain are specialized in specific memory tasks—such as the hippocampus for retaining short- and long-term memory, the amygdala for emotional learning—there is no single vector between one brain system and one type of memory” (van Dijck 31).
Metaphor – Memory is an Orchestra

“Like a performance of Mahler’s Seventh Symphony by an orchestra requires a brass section, a string section, and a percussion section, memory is a function of the brain that manifests itself through the mind and directs our consciousness or conscious acts, such as self-reflection or autobiographical reminiscence; it is a concerted efforts resulting in a momentary performance. Each member of the orchestra plays his or her part, following the prescribed score as well as the conductor’s instructions—their individual performances contributing to the overall sense of harmony. The composer’s notational score may be adjusted under the influence of some single parts or as a result of the audience’s interpretation or appreciation. Even the hardware of musical instruments may be tweaked to accommodate the performance; material changes in musical instruments inevitably result in subtle performance changes. And, as any music aficionado knows, a symphony’s performance changes over time, as each performer tends to interpret the score as well as previous performances through a contemporary ear” (van Dijck 31-2).
Digitization

• “By nature of their creation, many digital memory items are becoming networked objects, constructed in the commonality of the World Wide Web in constant interaction with other people, even anonymous audiences. Technologies of self are—even more so than before—technologies of sharing” (van Dijck 48).

• “Digital culture forms do not simply replace old forms of analog culture; weblogs only partly overlap with the conventional use of paper diaries, laminated pictures are still printed despite the rise of digital photography, and MP3 files are not exactly replacing our tangible music collections. New practices gradually transform the way we collect, read, look at, or listen to our cherished personal items” (van Dijck 48-9).
Chapter 3: Writing the Self

- Blog vs. Diary
- Alzheimer’s Patients and Blogging
Blog vs. Diary

• “As mediated memories, diaries and lifelogs move along the axes of relational identity and time: they are instruments of self-formation as well as vehicles of connection. They are also tools to record and update the past that simultaneously steer future memory and identity” (van Dijck 55).
Alzheimer’s Patients and Blogging

• “For older bloggers with Alzheimer’s disease, their struggle is less about issues of privacy versus publicness and more about intimacy versus openness. Like teenage bloggers, patients with dementia and AD find purpose in sharing their personal experiences as a means to counter the forgetfulness and loneliness forced upon them by the disease. But rather than striving for discursive effect, these bloggers create affect in their attempts to open up their mental processes to readers, whether relatives or an anonymous audience” (van Dijck 74).
Chapter 4: Record and Hold

- Music as a Mnemonic Function
- Reproduction of Recorded Music
Music as a Mnemonic Function

• “Like photographs or diary entries, music has a mnemonic function; listening to records helps inscribe and invoke specific events, emotions, or general moods. Recorded music also has a formative function: young people, in particular, construct their identities while figuring out their musical taste. Building up a repertoire in one’s memory (an inventory of familiar songs) and accumulating selected items of recorded music (a material collection of sound items) are considered important parts of one’s coming of age” (van Dijck 79).
• “Techno-stalgia” (nostalgia / reminiscing for technology) (van Dijck 87).

• The “thingness” of recorded music is unstable and yet this knowledge does not prevent a peculiar yearning for the re-creation of audio quality as it was first perceived, evidenced for instance by the recent vinyl nostalgia accompanying the surge in compact disc sales. People who use recorded music as a vehicle for memories often yearn for more than mere retro appeal: they want these apparatuses to reenact their cherished, often magical experiences of listening” (van Dijck 87).
Chapter 7: From Shoebox to Digital Memory Machine

• Memory is NOT a Machine
• Four Projects that Aid Memory
  – Shoebox
  – The Living Memory Box
  – Lifestreams
  – MyLifeBits
Memory is NOT a Machine

• “As German media theorist Hartmut Winkler puts it: “Material storage devices are supposed to preserve their contents faithfully. Human memories, on the other hand, tend to select, reconfigure, and forget their contents—and we know from theory that this is the real achievement of human memory. Forgetting, in that sense, is not a defect, but an absolute necessary form of protection.” Even if human memory and material information deposits are distinctly different entities, they are inextricably intertwined in the process of remembering: retrieved documents constantly feed upon a twisting and changing memory, whereas the human mind tends to alter information in a depository by replacing, renaming, or deleting its content files” (van Dijck 152).
Four Projects that Aid Memory

• Shoebox
  – A tools for reminiscing (van Dijck 154)

• The Living Memory Box
  – Digital scrapbooking activity (van Dijck 156)

• Lifestreams
  – Documents ordered by linear time (functions similar to a diary) (van Dijck 157-8)

• MyLifeBits
  – Records then makes life events searchable (van Dijck 162)
Works Cited


