

Consuming Memory

Towards a Conceptualization of Social Media Platforms as Organizational Technologies of Consumption

Friis Nielsen, Martin

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COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL
SOLBJERG PLADS 3
DK-2000 FREDERIKSBERG
DANMARK

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**CONSUMING MEMORY: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SOCIAL
MEDIA PLATFORMS AS ORGANIZATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES OF CONSUMPTION**

PhD Series 04.2021

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Martin Friis Nielsen

Supervisors:

Professor Robin Holt, Department of Management,
Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School

Professor Timon Beyes, Department of Management,
Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School

Head of Department Benedikte Brincker, Department of
Sociology, University of Copenhagen

CBS PhD School

Copenhagen Business School

Martin Friis Nielsen
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Abstract

In the last decade, social media platforms have expanded and proliferated, bringing with them a range of new digital activities and functions, including to ‘like’, ‘share’, ‘filter’, and ‘scroll’ through images, videos, and text. These activities have become such routine practice as to permeate many aspects of individual, social, and organizational life. This dissertation frames this all-encompassing positioning of social media platforms and the ensuing technological reproduction and circulation of experiences and memory in terms of consumption. The dissertation builds on the proposition that the particular technological organization of such platforms requires a theoretical and conceptual attention to the nature of the objects produced and consumed on and through these platforms and ultimately a reconceptualization of the concept of consumption. As such, this dissertation presents a reconceptualization of consumption through a reading of Jean Baudrillard’s theory of consumption, Bernard Stiegler’s philosophy of technology, memory, and time and an analysis of various features of the Instagram platform. The dissertation argues for a conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies through which individual and social experiences themselves become primary and generalized objects of consumption. As such, the dissertation proposes to consider social media platforms to be organizational technologies of consumption, and contribute to the conceptualization of consumption as recast by such new technologies of organizing.

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Introduction

In the last decade, we have witnessed a global celebration of and fascination with a phenomenon that goes under the general and popular term ‘social media’. Although numerous scholars have sought to understand this phenomenon, it remains profoundly enigmatic. From a social-theoretical viewpoint at least, no one is certain where this phenomenon begins or ends; yet, there is a feeling that it is somehow expanding. Sociologically speaking, social media is difficult to confine to a particular organizational sphere of human life. Indeed, one might be reminded of Marcel Mauss’s notion of a ‘total social fact’, as the phenomenon raises questions of value, expenditure, social organization, and the aesthetic experience of the self, others, and the world.¹ In everyday use, social media is perhaps less enigmatic; people tend to see it as a set of online platforms used for various purposes, such as to communicate, to organize, and to find information, goods, and ‘cultural’ content. It is also generally seen as enabling individuals and organizations to relate, to organize, and to express themselves more or less willingly and more or less on their own terms. Over the course of the past decade the general public has familiarized itself with the ‘language’ of social media, which uses words like ‘sharing’, ‘liking’, and ‘following’. Moreover, so-called old media such as TV and newspapers have integrated social media into their broadcasting and publishing structures: public and private organizations have embraced the organizational and communicational possibilities of social media platforms; businesses use social media platforms to promote themselves and to integrate the consumer into specific brand creation and product branding; and in advertising ‘hashtag’, ‘share’, and ‘like’ have become common organizational (digital) tools through which advertisements engage with and produce individuals as consumers.

¹ As Mauss writes of the total social fact: ‘These phenomena are at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological (...)’ (Mauss 1966:76).

As social media platforms have expanded and proliferated, a wide range of digital activities and functions such as to tag, like, share, filter, and scroll through images, videos, text, etc., have become so routine as to become enmeshed in the very fabric of humans' individual, social, and organizational life. Such an integration involves and is structured by a diverse set of technological devices (smartphones, GPS devices, etc.) and social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.). These digital platforms have different interfaces, functions, and features, with some being preferred in certain organizational contexts but not others, and with some being primarily text-based, while others centre on images and videos, although all of this remains in flux. We find on these platforms a myriad of aspirations, intentions, and purposes that evolve in a continuous feedback loop between the user, peers, and the specific platforms that produce what is called 'digital content'. In this loop trends emerge, peak and die. It can be an entire platform, a bodily gesture, a meme, a place, or an image. Everything has the potential to rise to virtual fame, as experiences, bodies, feelings, places, situations, and goods on a rise curve and with increased temporal intensity are brought into circulation and disseminated as images, text, data, likes, and videos consumed primarily through and in an intimate relation with the smartphone screen. This thrusts us into a (social) media-saturated environment in which every physical object immediately points to a potential virtual twin and where human sensations, thoughts, activities, and experiences are all potential images to be shared, data to be circulated, or text to be tweeted. What has emerged with this, should we say, *organizational trinity* of the smartphone, social media platforms, and the stream-like organization of content, is what I, using Jean Baudrillard's terminology, will describe as a 'proliferation' and 'profusion' of text, data, images, and videos *of individual and social experiences* brought forward by the material and technical

possibilities of these new digital technologies and organized by the aforementioned platforms, among others.²

Baudrillard used this terminology of proliferation as the sphere of consumption grew in post-war (consumer) societies, observing that ‘[o]ur urban civilization is witness to an ever-accelerating processing of generations of products, appliances and gadgets by comparison with which mankind appears to be a remarkable stable species’ (Baudrillard 2005:1). With the rise of social media platforms, internet shopping platforms, and various digital media services, this accelerating production and consumption of objects, which Baudrillard eminently analysed as a system of signification (ibid, 4), seems to have entered a digital or virtual phase. Today, the process of buying, watching, and relating to objects is increasingly shaped and mediated by various digital platforms that suggest, recommend, and thus ‘personalize’ online shopping experiences (Alaimo and Kallinikos 2017). As such, the same old physical consumer goods continue to proliferate – for example, through social media platforms such as Instagram – and their digital and algorithmic structuration produces certain new consumer experiences and practices. Still, in the context of social media platforms, the emerging consumption seems to differ from a mere digital reorganization of existing consumer goods and practices, particularly in view of all the new activities through which social life is uploaded to, exchanged through and circulated within and across various platforms. I contend that, in this profusion and proliferation of social media platforms, images, videos, and smartphones, it is individual and social experiences that are transformed into objects as people capture, share, and like everyday life situations on social media platforms such as Instagram, where over 100 million

² I am here referencing to the introductions in *The System of Objects* and *The Consumer Society* (Baudrillard 1998, 2005), yet proliferation and profusion remains terms Baudrillard uses in his writings (see for example *The Agony of Power* (Baudrillard 2010:83–84))

photo images and videos are not only shared³ daily but also *consumed*. In uploading, sharing, liking, filtering, and scrolling through photo images and videos, people are experiencing a new form of consumption, that is, if consumption is understood as an organization of objects that involves structuring human experiences, practices, and social relations (Baudrillard 1998, 2005). A pertinent question therefore becomes: what precisely are people consuming through social media platforms and in the perpetual stream of photo images and videos? How are we to conceptually grasp and analytically approach the multiplicity of activities through which individual and social experiences proliferate as digital content and that are daily brought into circulation, reproduced, and consumed, for example, through social media platforms? And how is this technological reproduction and circulation also shaping human experience as such.

Neither this proliferation of individual and social experiences nor the media technologies through which this proliferation expands and circulates are to be as understood or confined to simply a question of communication and social interaction. Following the media philosophy of Bernard Stiegler, I will argue that as these platforms organize social life and the ensuing exchanges, they are, indeed, simultaneously shaping human experience, relationships, and behaviour. As experiences pertaining to our individual and social lives become more entangled with social media platforms, I suggest that an exploration of social media platforms as technologies of consumption and production of individual and social experiences or what I, following Stiegler (Stiegler 2009), call *technological memory* is a pertinent avenue for analysing how these platforms – in this case Instagram – take part in organizing such experiences. Hence, as multiple social media platforms increasingly reproduce, shape, and organize our individual and social lives and activities as digital objects, we need to expand our conception of these platforms

³ <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/social-media-statistics/>. Accessed on October 20th, 2020.

beyond the mere notion of media technologies that organize human interactions to an acknowledgement that they are technologies of consumption. It is the pursuit of this acknowledgement that has motivated this study.

The dissertation is governed by the attempt to reconceptualize consumption in the light of individual and social experiences, activities, and relations increasingly are being technological reproduced, organized, and brought into circulation through multiple social media platforms. This is done through an organization-theoretical reading of Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumption, Bernard Stiegler's philosophy of technology, and in an analysis of various features of the social media platform Instagram. This dissertation presents a reconceptualization of consumption arguing for a conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies through which lived experiences become a primary and generalised object of consumption. I ground this reconceptualization of consumption and the analysis of Instagram in a specific understanding of the relation between media, processes of organizing, and human experience – a grounding explicated in the following.

Media, consumption, and organization

'Objects', Baudrillard writes, 'are never offered for consumption in absolute disorder' (Baudrillard 1998:27). They are not consumed as singular entities but in a relation to each other; they are always organized. Baudrillard theorizes and analyses consumption as a differential and semiological organization of objects. In his rendering of 'consumer society', objects come to constitute a system of meaning and communication that structures social relations, human perception, and experiences (Toffoletti 2011:73). Consumption as a social and cultural system exceeds, first, the confinement of consumption to the use, possession, and purchase of consumer goods, and, second, the analysis of consumption as a process of commodification. Consumption is further theorized and analysed as a specific

(modern) social and cultural phenomenon and, as I will stress, a specific organizational process: *what is consumed is not a single object but an organizational principle*. For Baudrillard this principle is difference (Baudrillard 1981:67), for which reason he and, as I will show, Stiegler indicate that individual and social relations are conditioned by and organized through a system of objects. For Stiegler, a process of inventing and creating objects characterizes the human being, and in this process knowledge and experience are *exteriorized* into and materialized as tools, objects and technology. In this technical exteriorization, human experiences are *organized* as the human being produces and invents objects, yet the process is as much the same in reverse: the material and technical environment and its objects condition and *organize* human life, aesthetics, and thinking (Stiegler 1998, 2009, 2009). For Baudrillard, objects constitute a system of social integration and communication where any object is a medium for the system of consumption, whereas, for Stiegler any technological object is a medium in the sense that it mediates between past experiences materialized in the object and the present in which these experiences are actualized as objects being put into use in orientation towards some future expectation.

As such, the world of objects and technology is an extension of the human, but it is also extended through the human because such material environments also shape and organize human experience and perception (Beyes, Holt, and Pias 2019:504). Although Baudrillard himself does not emphasize the concept of organization in his work, in the context of social media platforms such an organizational thinking of consumption and of the relation between objects and human experiences – the full consequences of which are unfolded in Part I – serves to shift the attention ‘from *social* organization (which implies, still, a human primacy) to the technical means of organizing the (techno-)social’ (ibid). This makes how specific media technologies organize human life and the everyday sense of experience a pertinent question (ibid, 509). In this sense, social media platforms

are considered less as mediating devices of communication and information and more as organizational devices and active participants in shaping human experience, relations, and perceptions. As Reinhold Martin writes, ‘media organize social and political life, as well as the social and political imagination, through a variety of channels that extend well beyond the communicative functions traditionally ascribed to technical devices (...)’ (Martin 2019:12). This makes social media platforms an important object of study for social theory.

Speaking of media, human experience, and processes of organizing in this sense does not confine the concept of media to *the media* (Beyes et al. 2019:504), which implies the institution made up of newspapers, television, and other journalistic media. The conception of media is, and this follows the theory of Marshall McLuhan⁴, pluralized because the term comes to convey a broader range of objects. The plural understanding of media does not demarcate an ontological field of *the media* (ibid), yet media in this sense is also ontologized: *media technologies* are not passive vessels of, for example, communication and information, but work on and shape human perception and experience and are themselves part of an organizational complex that exceeds them (ibid). With this conception of media, and following the work of Baudrillard and Stiegler, I point to ‘objects as technological apparatuses of mediation that form the infrastructural conditions and contexts of perception, experience, and agency’ (ibid, 505). Thus, media points to a fundamental organizational (material and technological) conditioning of human life, indicating (media) technologies of reproduction through which the human experience of and relation to the self, others, and the world are continuously shaped and configured in the very process by which they are technologically mediated and reproduced.

⁴ As pointed out by John Durham Peters points, Marshall McLuhan is both pluralizing and ontologizing the concept of media (Peters 2015:15).

Given this understanding of media, organization, and human experience, and given the expansion and immersion of social media platforms into the fabric of individual and social life, an abiding question therefore becomes: how are human experiences organized as they are uploaded to and mediated through social media platforms, and how is human experience in turn organized through this technological mediation and reproduction? Liking, sharing, uploading, filtering, and scrolling through images, videos, and so forth on various platforms are, I argue, a prevailing means by which everyday experiences are technologically organized, but these activities also express how human experiences *have already been organized* as something to be shared, liked, uploaded, and so forth. Thus, as I understand the entanglement of media and organization, social media platforms such as Instagram are not just conceived of as organizational devices because they transmit content or because they enable individuals to manage social relations ‘online’. They are organizational devices also because they mediate beyond the online space of their apparent use as well as relations to and experience of the self, others, and the world. I theorize and explore this mediation and organization of social media platforms through the analytical lens of consumption developed from the work of Baudrillard.

By framing the relation between media platforms, human experience, and the process of organizing as a question of consumption, I am not pointing to the specific use of social media platforms, nor do I think of consumption as a set of services and functions – whether of communicational, relational or informational origin. What is consumed is not the materiality of an object or its use value, but rather, as I will argue by following Baudrillard, *the way in which objects are organized* and in this case *organized by platforms*. As I expand on in Part I, Baudrillard positions in his analysis of consumption, the object, in the words of Gilbert Simondon, at a certain mode of existence that directs the analytical attention towards how objects are organized and how consumption operates as a broader system of anticipation. In light of the social media platforms that have emerged, I

use this conception of an inherent relation between media technologies, human experience, and organizing processes to propose a reconceptualization of consumption. As such, I seek to reconceptualize consumption from being a semiological organization of objects, practices, relations, and experiences to being a technological – or what I following Stiegler will call a tertiary – organization of human experiences, practices, and relations. This organization takes place in the process by which individual and social experiences is exteriorized and reproduced as technological memory, with the platform being a proponent technology of such organization.

The interrelatedness of media, technology, and organization framed in the above implies a set of assumptions and conceptual framings that position the work that this dissertation presents within a tradition of media theory and organization theory that emphasize the *reproductive* and *organizational* capacities of media technologies – and less the more obvious capacities of content production or transmission – as the main phenomenological effect of media technologies (Baudrillard 1981; Beyes 2018; Beyes et al. 2019; Martin 2019; Peters 2015; Steinberg 2019). This conceptual framing is mirror in the analysis of Instagram as an organizational technology of consumption because I focus on the platform's features and functions, that is, the technical means of organizing. Positioning this understanding of media and organization in relation to Baudrillard and Stiegler, I conceive of social media platforms as organizational technologies that reproduce and organize human experiences in a way that renders these experiences themselves a primary and generalized object of technological circulation and consumption.

Let me then summarize the problems, intentions, and rationale that define what is about to follow. Thus far, I have described an *empirical* condition involving a profusion and proliferation of digital platforms and activities accompanied by an intensified circulation and reproduction of videos, images, data, and so forth uploaded to and produced by individuals, which is to say user-generated

content. This condition, I argue, requires a *reconceptualization of consumption* that analytically and conceptually frames this circulation and reproduction not simply as a transmission and consumption of content, as communication, or as representations of social life, but also as a broader phenomenon of organizing human experiences and relations into objects of consumption. As such, I recognize that the present-day technological mediation of smartphones and platforms requires us to think consumption beyond a semiological organization as theorized by Baudrillard. As part of this reconceptualization of consumption I analyse the Instagram platform, focusing on the technical means of organizing, such as ‘the stream’, ‘Instagram filters’, and the ‘selfie genre’. To this end, I examine three instances of how individual and social experiences are organized and consumed through the platform. Having framed the overall problem, I dedicate the next section to explicating the method that governs the inquiry.

The method of conceptual interventions

I label the overall method governing this investigation *conceptual interventions*. By this I mean that the framing of Baudrillard’s theory of consumption through Stiegler’s philosophy of technology (Part I) as well as the analysis of Instagram (Part II) are interventions aimed at contributing to the conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption and to a broader theorization of social media consumption. The method consisted of three steps. 1) I observed the phenomenon by creating an Instagram profile and spending time on the platform, including by collecting official documents from Instagram.com; 2) an organization-theoretical reading of Baudrillard’s notion of consumption framing it through Stiegler’s conceptualization of technology, time, and memory; and 3) I summarized existing ways of conceptualizing platforms as organizational technologies. In the next section I lay out how Baudrillard approached consumption and analysed the proliferation of objects – his method, one might say – as I am

inspired by this approach and use it to conceptually and theoretically frame social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption.

Framing consumption: An affinity of proliferation

When entering into a media platform like Instagram, one cannot but be overwhelmed and fascinated by the vast amount of content with the potential to become empirical data. As anthropologist Annette Markham writes, ethnographically speaking, the sheer number of videos, texts, and photo images available to the researcher on digital platforms and with digital recording technologies poses a problem of too much data (Markham 2013:439). The question of digital proliferation raises the problem of overabundance but also of how to analyse platforms in a perpetual state of updating. For example, what is the value and purpose of closely studying Instagram if the interface, the features, and functions – or even the algorithm – have changed overnight? As media scholar Jodi Dean writes: ‘A problem specific to critical media theory is the turbulence of networked communications; that is, the rapidity of innovation, adoption, adaptation, and obsolescence,’ and, she continues, ‘[d]rowning in plurality, we lose the capacity to grasp anything like a system’ (Dean 2010:1/3). The techno-capitalist complex of ‘communicative capitalism’, as Dean labels the contemporary variant of capitalism, is highly resistant to theorization because the system moves too fast. In other words, digital proliferation effects the very conditions for theorizing and empirical research that make the object of study elusive. As Wendy Chun so precisely writes: ‘New media exist at the bleeding edge of obsolescence,’ but leave traces in the habits they foster (Chun 2016:1). Media theorist Geert Lovink, who – somewhat ironically in the context of this specific text – writes about PhD students doing software – and by extension media platform – studies, states that they face ‘the risk that their object of study will already have vanished before they hand in their thesis’ (Lovink 2016:39). In other, words, the rapidity by which media platforms are born, expand,

and transform potentially makes an analysis obsolete as the platform studied mutates and individuals flee to new media and technologies.

With this digital proliferation framed as a question of consumption, it is in this context useful to quote the following passage from the introduction to *The System of Objects* (2006), published in 1968. Baudrillard writes:

Everyday objects proliferate, needs multiply (...) yet we lack the vocabulary to name them all (...). How can we hope to classify a world of objects that changes before our eyes and arrive at an adequate system of description? There are almost as many criteria of classification as there are objects themselves: the size of the object; its degree of functionality (i.e. the object's relationship to its own objective function); the gestures associated with it (are they rich or impoverished? traditional or not?); its form; its duration; the time of day at which it appears (more or less intermittent presence, and how conscious one is of it); the material it transforms (...). (Baudrillard 2005:1).

In the above, Baudrillard describes a predominant tendency of post-war society and the analytical challenges this trend involved. The attempt to develop a sociology of objects and consumption was confronted with the problem of an object-world that was expanding and proliferating with an increasing temporal intensity. The 'ever-accelerating procession of objects' (ibid, 1) posed methodological and analytical challenges. With what strategies and with what tools was the emerging sphere of objects and the new relations to objects it implied to be analysed since it appeared to be in a perpetual state of mutation and expansion? The profound world of objects being built with mass media, pop culture, shopping malls, and advertising meant that more and more objects were produced and consumed, but this world also reconfigured human relations to and the meaning of objects themselves. Retrospectively, Baudrillard characterized this situation as the problematic of the

object as being a way to break with the ‘problematic of the subject’ (Baudrillard 2013a:3). Against this backdrop, allow me to propose that one could, albeit in different terms, describe the present social media condition of proliferation and profusion as introducing methodological and analytical problems somewhat similar to the one described by Baudrillard. My point is not the accelerated pace at which people are buying new smartphones or shopping for clothes online, but rather the abundance and circulation of photo images, videos, text, and data with which people have so naturally come to experience and be in the world. Yet, given the material nature of the inscription of these social media objects and the social life they attain as they travel from one platform to another, from one device to the next, are we then not speaking of a development involving not only that of a proliferation of objects but also of objects of proliferation? As we ‘re-tweet’, ‘comment’, and ‘like’, content circulation and consumption become intensified. Proliferation is built into our relation to these objects themselves. How does one account for this proliferation of digital objects on social media platforms (such as photo images on Instagram), and, crucially, for the human experiences and relations these objects express and that emerge from them and their proliferation? Does one begin by categorizing according to the material condition of their production (technological devices); to the platforms through which they circulate; or to the context in which they are experienced, produced, and consumed? Does one look at the particular content mediated or emphasize geo-data pinpointing the time and location at which a photo image was produced and uploaded. Does one consider the real-time speed with which content circulates; the number of times it is shared, commented on, and enacted; or the intersection between different platforms and the network of relations it actualizes? By pointing to Baudrillard’s observation of the proliferation of objects, I intend to do more than simply argue for empirical resemblance. Describing our contemporary condition as one of proliferation is a first step in conceptually framing social media consumption as an object of study and in exploring social media

platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. Thus, I will underpin the approach and framing of social media consumption advanced here, on the one hand, with the idea that a kind of affinity and shared analytical problem exist between the proliferation of objects in post-war societies – theorized by Baudrillard as a ‘system of objects’ – and, on the other hand, the current situation where millions of photos, videos, and texts proliferate and circulate on multiple social media platforms every minute of every day. This acknowledgment of such a contemporary media environment guides the approach to and the basis on which I have constructed social media platforms as an object of theoretical and conceptual interest.

Conceptual intervention: From a system of objects to systems of memory-objects

The proliferation of consumer goods, services, messages, and the whole language and system of meaning that this proliferation constituted were the empirical phenomenon from which Baudrillard developed his theory of consumption. Through an analysis of interior design, antiques, ATMs, credit systems, advertising, mass media, and magazines, Baudrillard described the emerging sphere of consumption, using these as examples to explicate the system of objects and the human relations it produced (Baudrillard 1998, 2005). Contemporary consumption involves digital objects, images, videos, and text, and is related to activities of tracking, sharing, liking, etc., that proliferate on contemporary social media platforms and are organized on platforms by streams, hashtags, visual photo filters, and the like. An initial step towards conceptualizing these social activities as a form and essentially a phenomenon of consumption lies, I propose, in expanding into our contemporary social media condition Baudrillard’s analysis of consumption as a *system*. Baudrillard is relevant because he not only develops a novel theory of consumption but also, as I will unfold, directs our attention to the *organizational conditions* required for objects to circulate, to proliferate and, as such, to become objects of consumption. As I expand on in Part I, adopting Baudrillard’s notion of

consumption enables me to define consumption as *a certain relation to and experience of objects* that offer an analytical lens through which to pursue the question of what constitutes the objects of consumption when people daily upload, exchange, and scroll through millions of images of their own and other people's life situations on platforms such as Instagram. The following schematically presents a reading of Baudrillard's theorization of consumption and how I have used it as a method to reconceptualize consumption through Stiegler's concepts and empirics of digital objects.

	Consumer society	Social media consumption, social media society
Empirical phenomenon	Objects, consumer goods, TV, magazines, advertisements, fashion, credit system, shopping malls.	Media platforms, smartphones, photo images, videos, likes, hashtags, streaming/streams, updating, sharing, commenting, photo filters.
Existing approaches	Natural needs, use value, usage, functions.	Communication, information, visual aesthetics, commodification, services, use.
Analytical frame (the object at the level of consumption)	System of needs and system of objects, signs, signification.	Process of exteriorization, system of memory, organization of lived experiences as technological memory.
Argument	Objects circulate and are consumed as signs. Individual and social life mediated through object signs. Consumption is a system and a code, a way of decoding the self,	Individual and social experiences themselves becomes a primary and generalized object of consumption. Produced and consumed through technological processes of

	others and the world. Consumption as a form of being and of directedness.	organizing lived experiences, understood as general process of tertiarizing.
Organizing principle	Consumption is the consumption of signs. Signs attain meaning in their <i>difference</i> . Differences are what are consumed.	Social media consumption is the consumption of tertiarizing processes through which practices, experiences, and relations are organized as technological memory. A general organizational principle is that of technical exteriorization.

As the above figure shows, I use Baudrillard's approach to consumption as a method for reconceptualizing it by framing it within Stiegler's notions of technics as a process of exteriorization and within his concept of technological memory or what he calls 'tertiary retention' (Stiegler 2018:157). This is a conceptual intervention that reconfigures consumption from being understood as a structured field and system of sign objects to being that of processes of technical exteriorization that involves the organization of lived experiences as technological memory within different social media platforms - with platforms thereby being understood as systems of memory.

Platforms: From production to consumption

Having framed this empirical condition of proliferation within a general perspective of media, organization, and consumption, in the following I situate the dissertation within a body of work that concerns the platform as a developing technology of organizing (Dijck et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2010; Srnicek, 2016; Steinberg, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). The platform is an emerging organizational form that structures and shapes relations to objects, people, and the world (Beyes 2020; Steinberg 2019) and

is thus also a media technology of consumption. In this section I present theoretical and conceptual perspectives on platforms as an organizational technology, as well as the discussions and themes around which these perspectives are centred and that inform the inquiry of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. For now, I provide only a brief overview, as I will discuss the platform as a technology of organizing at length in Chapter 3, in light of the reading of Baudrillard and Stiegler done in Chapters 1 and 2.

In recent years the term ‘platform’ has developed into a significant diagnostic concept. ‘The platform society’ (Dijck et al. 2018), ‘platformed sociality’ (Dijck 2013), ‘the platform economy’ (Steinberg 2019), ‘platform capitalism’ (Srnicek 2016), and the ‘platformization of the web’ (Helmond 2015) are all examples of the prevalence of the term. As media and organizational scholar Mark Steinberg writes in *The Platform Economy*: ‘What *network* was for the 1990s and the following decade, *platform* is for the mid-2010s onward’ (Steinberg 2019:8). In the influential work *The Politics of Platforms* (Gillespie 2010), Tarleton Gillespie decouples the notion of the platform from a purely computational and technical sense, arguing that platforms are not platforms simply because they ‘allow code to be written or run, but because they afford an opportunity to communicate, interact or sell’ (ibid, 351). The platform term is a discursive construction, Gillespie argues, emphasizing how media corporations rhetorically and strategically mobilize the term for promotional, political, and regulatory purposes. In the book *Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (2013) media scholar José Van Dijck argues for a historical shift from ‘networked communication’ to ‘platformed sociality’ and places social media platforms at the core of this transformation, maintaining that social media platforms are social, technological, and economic constructs that by encoding social activities and interactions render ‘people’s activities formal, manageable, and manipulable, enabling platforms to engineer the sociality in people’s everyday routines’ (Dijck 2013:4/12). Media scholar Anne

Helmond's technical conception of platforms describes the contemporary transformation of the web as a process of platformization grounded in the success and expansion of media technologies, such as Facebook, that expand the logics of datafication and the commodification of online social interactions into the very development and architecture of websites (Helmond 2015).

In Nick Srnicek's *Platform Capitalism* (Srnicek 2016) and Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff 2019), the rise of platforms is theorized from a historical perspective of the development and transformation of capitalism. Although not explicitly a theorization of platforms, Zuboff's work describes and diagnoses how the rise of media platforms such as Facebook and Google is completely entangled with the rise of a new capitalist logic of accumulation where 'human experience' is the new natural resource – a transformation that leads to a process of extracting ever-more human interactions and experiences and turning them into data (Zuboff 2019:99/128). Nick Srnicek primarily conceptualizes the platform as a firm and a business model that are based on providing a digital infrastructure for interaction and then capitalize on the data that emerge from this interaction (Srnicek 2016:48). In Srnicek's conception of platform capitalism, as well as in Zuboff's account of surveillance capitalism, *data* attain a significant role in terms of explaining the logics and incentives governing contemporary business and corporate strategies, as data become 'the raw material that must be extracted, and the *activities* of users to be the natural source of this raw material' (Srnicek 2016:40).

The depictions of platforms as entangled with a historical transformation of capitalism and a new logic of accumulation are concerned with social media platforms primarily as organizational technologies of production rather than consumption. Critical media studies engage with social media platforms as technologies of production *and* consumption, however, often with a focus on consumption as a process of commodification. For example drawing on Dallas

Smyth's concept of 'audience commodity' (Smythe 2009), Christian Fuchs, among others, develops the idea of valorizing human attention in a social media context (Fuchs 2012, 2014). A key proposition in the use of social media platforms is that user attention becomes a source of value creation and a commodity, which is why attention becomes a valuable object that is captured, manipulated, and sold as available brain-time to advertisers, and why the concept of 'free labour' has also been deployed to describe online social media use as a productive force (Beverungen, Böhm, and Land 2015). The notion of the 'prosumer' and 'prosumption', understood as a dissolving separation of producers and consumers, also plays a significant role in the conceptualization of social media platforms as organizational technologies, as such a notion addresses how these platforms dissolve traditional distinctions between processes of production and consumption. George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson have developed this notion into a general sociological frame of analysis (Ritzer 2014; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010).

In *The Platform Economy* (2019) media and organizational scholar Mark Steinberg traces the rise of the platform as a term and technology within management literature. Steinberg theorizes platforms as managerial constructs 'that mediate our relationship to our worlds, that create habits, addictions, and impulses (like the drive to check notifications)' and 'shape us and the relations we enter into with other people, companies, and objects' (Steinberg 2019:3). Steinberg's view on platforms is particularly intriguing, as his conception of the platform as an organizing device and managerial construct parallels a historical transformation of consumption (Steinberg 2019:54–62). Platforms reorganize our relation to cultural goods and how they are configured as objects of consumption, as they are increasingly becoming the 'middle' that shapes how a person engages with, experiences, and consumes objects (ibid, 124). For this reason, Steinberg argues, our 'attention should therefore shift from the cultural content of goods to the supposedly neutral platforms that mediate these cultural goods' (ibid, 18), an

understanding that is in line with the conception of media, organization, and consumption outlined earlier.

The rise of social media platforms and platforms in general have been scrutinized for how such platforms render human experience and social interactions productive (free labour, attention commodity, prosumption, etc.) but less on how they are entangled with new forms of consumption. So, in continuation of platforms conceived of as organizational technologies of the social (Dijck), as technologies that render human experiences productive (Zuboff), as technologies that render the consumer productive (Fuchs, Ritzer), and as organizational devices that expand managerial logics to the entire social field (Steinberg), this work contributes to the research on platform by exploring it as an organizational technology of consumption. This, I argue, necessarily requires one to consider how the emergence of the platform as a dominant organizational form not only reconfigures the consumption of consumer goods but brings with it a new type consumption. With the aim to reconceptualize consumption, the following inquiry contributes to the theorization and conceptualization of social media platforms as technologies of organizing.

Outline of dissertation

In Part I, I expand on Baudrillard's notion of consumption (Baudrillard 1981, 1998, 2005) by interweaving it within Stiegler's conceptualization of technology, time, and memory (Stiegler 1998, 2009, 2011c). The aim is to develop a perspective on contemporary social media platforms as 'systems' where both individual and social experiences are produced and consumed as technological memory. The first chapter of Part I provides an organization-theoretical reading of Baudrillard's early work on objects, consumption, and media. I explore his notion of the consumer society, focusing on his general conception of objects and value and how this conception influences his theorization of consumption. In this reading, I emphasize

Baudrillard's attention to the organizational conditions under which objects proliferate in the consumer society and his theorization of consumption as a system and particular semiological organization, as well as the theory of value informing this theorization. Building on this work, Chapter 2 engages with Stiegler's conceptualization of technology and time in terms of memory. I frame Baudrillard's notion of consumption through Stiegler's conceptualization of technics as a process of exteriorization and his differentiation between primary, secondary, and tertiary memory. The intention is not to compare or identify differences and similarities between two respective conceptions of media, consumption, and subjectivity, but to mobilize different theoretical, analytical, and conceptual resources as a means of grasping a diverse set of activities, features, and functions from a consumption vantage point.⁵ In light of this reading, Chapter 3 returns to the theorization of platforms in order to expand the conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. The conceptual and analytical framework developed in Part I forms the basis of my approach to and analysis of the Instagram platform, which is the subject matter of Part II.

Part II consists of four chapters. Chapter 4 outlines the strategies by which I have approached Instagram as an empirical phenomenon, and how I work with concepts and the role they assume in the analysis of Instagram. Chapters 5 to 7 point to different aspects of Instagram as an organizing technology of consumption. In Chapter 5 I address the constellation smartphone/stream/platform, analysing how content is temporally organized in this matrix as well as what the medium-specific features and functions of Instagram are, such as the Archive and Stories features. In Chapter 6 I analyse such features and functions as Instagram filters, engaging with the question of personalization. Framing the ability to manipulate, adjust, and modify photo images and videos as a question of

⁵ For a comparison reading of Stiegler and Baudrillard, see (Abbinnett 2018:57–61).

personalization, I explore how such personalizing functions organize and make individual and social experiences mutually exchangeable. Chapter 7 concerns the selfie phenomenon and includes an analysis of two different types of selfies, thus showing how the subject is configured as an object of consumption in and through the generic form of the selfie.

To qualify the conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption, in Part III I explicate and discuss the implications of Parts I and II. Drawing on the notion of social media platforms as systems of the production and consumption of memory, Chapter 8 turns to the question of social media platforms as media technologies of temporally organizing human experience contributing with a notion of social media consumption being a form of directedness and human anticipation of the present. Chapter 9 discusses platforms as organizational technologies of prosumption, and how the reconceptualization of consumption might help develop the notion of prosumption. In the final chapter I take the notion of a ‘consumption of memory’ beyond social media platforms and discuss this in relation to what is called the ‘Internet of Things’ pointing to further research on platforms.

Part I. Consumption: from a system of signs to systems of memory

To account for the proliferation of everyday objects, Baudrillard used, among other disciplines, the methodological and theoretical resources of semiology, leading him to develop, for example, his notion of a ‘system of objects’ (Baudrillard 2005). Baudrillard spoke of a proliferation of objects and a system of objects analysed in structural terms as a more or less coherent ‘system of signs’ (Baudrillard 2005). I shall, proceeding through this perspective on consumption as a *system* and Stiegler’s philosophy of technology, begin to speak of the digital proliferation and circulation of ‘experiences’ organized through social media platforms taken as more or less coherent systems of technological memory. In order to go from a ‘system of signs’ and an understanding of consumption as semiological configuration to the notion of a *system of memory* and a conception of social media consumption as the general process of technological reproducing and organizing lived experiences, the first chapter of Part I engages with Baudrillard’s early work on objects, consumption, and media (Baudrillard 1981, 1998, 2005). Building upon this work, Chapter 2 frames Baudrillard’s notion of consumption through Stiegler’s conceptualization of technology, time, and subjectivity. In Chapter 3 we return to the notion of the platform as a particular organizational technology in light of the notion of consumption developed in Chapter 1 and 2.

Chapter 1. Consumption, Objects, and Value

The following reading of Baudrillard's theory of consumption and objects emphasizes three aspects, each of which contributes to the conceptualization and analysis of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. Firstly, there is in my reading an emphasis on consumption as a broader organizational and circulatory process. Secondly, the reading carves out consumption as being a specific relation to and mode of existence of objects that at the level of analysis accentuate an attention to how objects are being organized. That is, when we speak of consumption and analyse the object at the level of consumption, we accentuate a mode of inquiry beyond that of focusing on single objects as fulfilling certain needs or consisting of objective functions and uses. Finally, the reading emphasizes the phenomenology of consumption, drawing to attention how consumption is theorized as a system and a code that structures perceptions, experiences, and relations to the world. These three aspects are in the following not written as three separate sections where the first section would correspond to the first reading, second section to the second reading and so forth. Each section evolves into and provides the condition for the next in a manner that all three aspects retrospectively stand out in each section. The following is not to be read as an outline of Baudrillard's theory of consumption but a reading that emphasizes certain aspects of his theory of consumption and objects, and leaves others out, as a means of actualizing it in the present context of social media consumption.

1.1 The Consumer Society

Baudrillard's preoccupation with consumption and the logics governing the relation to and experience of objects is a main theme in his early writings, which includes *The System of Objects* ([1968] 2005), *The Consumer Society* ([1970] 1998), and *For*

a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign ([1972] 1981).⁶ In *The Consumer Society* Baudrillard writes that people ‘are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by **objects**’ and that this ‘represents something of a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species’ (Baudrillard 1998:25). *The System of Objects* and *The Consumer Society* begin with descriptions of Western post-war society as one in which mass-produced industrial objects reign over the human world.

The ‘proliferation’ and ‘profusion’ of consumer goods in the sphere of everyday life that emerged full-force in the post-war societies was, according to Baudrillard and others, the rise of a new ideological edifice taking hold of the individual and the social body. Not only was the individual being disciplined at organizational sites of production such as the school, the church, and the workplace but also within the emerging sphere of consumption and consumer goods (Baudrillard 1998:81). This new world of objects represented a mutation in the economic system of capitalism and more broadly in the organization of social relations. The sphere of consumption and the new types of relations to objects was not an ephemeral phenomenon – as opposed to the sphere of production – on the contrary, the emerging sphere of everyday objects and the human relationships they imposed was a privileged vantage point for understanding the increasing intertwinement of culture and capitalism and the forms of social relationships and social formation that emerged with it. As Baudrillard retrospectively remarked ‘the transition from the primacy of production to the primacy of consumption brought objects to the fore’ (Baudrillard 2013a:3). The expansion of objects in the sphere of

⁶ Baudrillard’s attention to consumption and the everyday life of objects made him far ahead of his time in terms of describing the social and cultural logics of consumption. Baudrillard’s early acknowledgment of consumption, media, and images as a defining aspect of post-world war society aligned him among others with the work of Guy Debord, why he in relation to this contemporaries has been described as not only a theorist of culture but as a proper theorist of consumption (Campbell 1995:103)

everyday life marked an internal shift in the dynamics of capitalism and society. From one dominated by production to one dominated by consumption: ‘The system needs people as workers (wage labour), as savers (taxes, loans, etc.), but increasingly it needs them as *consumers*’ (Baudrillard 1998:83). Central to Baudrillard’s theorization of the consumer society at this point was to avoid opposing the sphere of production and work to the sphere of consumption and leisure.⁷ The latter was to be conceived as a function of the former (ibid, 78). However, with the consumer society consumption increasingly became the prevailing and determining organizational force (social, economic and cultural) transforming the very nature of production itself (ibid, 78). For example, it was no longer sufficient to produce material goods but of rising importance to produce the *needs* that responded to these goods. The circulation of objects therefore relied on an industry of mass media and advertising to promote and sell consumers goods.

According to Baudrillard, an analysis, and ultimately a theory of consumption and the role consumption has in reproducing the economic system of capitalism could not be based on the notion of natural needs or ‘personal enjoyment’ as the object’s natural reference point and psychological destiny (Baudrillard 1981:31). Needs, Baudrillard insisted, are a function of production, and thus needs must be conceived as a ‘system of needs’ that is not external to but internal to the system of consumption. The notion of an interrelatedness of these two systems was an important method to capture how the reproduction of the capitalistic system of production increasingly depended on a sphere of consumption (Smith 2010:40). A social theory of consumption and an analysis of the diverse settings and practices in which objects emerged in the consumer was to be analysed as a *system* that reconfigured social organization, relationships, and culture. Kim Toffoletti explains:

⁷ With the advent of social media platforms this is today largely recognized (Ritzer 2014)

(...) the consumer society is more than a tagline for an era typified by the relentless purchasing of commodities. For Baudrillard, it is an entire *system* that organises individual and collective practices, relationships, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. (Toffoletti 2011:73).

The proliferation of consumer goods (refrigerators, coffeemakers, TV sets, etc.), the diverse set of practices and relationships to objects (gadgets, collections, antiques etc.), the expansion of mass media (TV, pop culture, magazines), and advertising was to be analysed as a system that integrates the individual into society. In that sense, the consumer society is not defined by affluence or simply by the individual being surrounded by an unprecedented quantity of objects. The consumer society rather implies a structuring of these into a coherent system of objects and consumption, as a particular phenomenon in its semiotic organization of society (Merrin 2006:16).

Consumption as...

What, does Baudrillard then exactly mean by consumption? In his introduction to the English version of *Le système des objets*, George Ritzer points out that Baudrillard does not straightforwardly define the concept of consumption, but rather defines it in many different ways (Ritzer in Baudrillard, 1998, p. 14). Baudrillard defines consumption as a 'system of exchange' (ibid, 60), a 'function of production' (ibid, 78). Consumption is a 'language' (ibid, 80), a 'social institution', and 'morality' (Baudrillard 1981:31, 1998:78). Consumption is a 'myth' (Baudrillard 1998:193) that involves the 'manipulation of signs' (Baudrillard 2005:218). Consumption is defined as an 'active form of relationship to the world (...) which founds our entire cultural system' (Baudrillard 2005:217) and involves 'one's being' and 'directedness' (Baudrillard 1998:170). The many ways in which Baudrillard defines consumption, Ritzer points out, is an effect of the diverse

theoretical resources that Baudrillard integrates into his analysis of consumption (Ritzer in Baudrillard, 1998, p. 14). To name a few we can mention Marx's analysis of production; the semiological structuralism of Roland Barthes; the media theory of Marshall McLuhan; the sociology and anthropology of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss; and the sociology of everyday life of Henri Lefebvre (Butler 1999; Gane 1991; Merrin 2006; Toffoletti 2011). Baudrillard describes his interest in and focus on objects in the following way:

[t]he advantage of studying the object was that it required you to move across these disciplines [psychoanalysis, Marxism, linguistics]; it forced a cross-disciplinarity on you. The fact was that the object was reducible to no particular discipline and, rendering them all enigmatic, helped us throw into question their very postulates (...). (Baudrillard, 2013a, p. 4)

As Baudrillard explains, 'the object' could not be confined to a particular discipline but required him to move across disciplines applying a diverse set of theoretical and methodological resources. Although Baudrillard anticipates the system of objects as functioning as a system of signs, he is reluctant to reduce the question and analysis of objects to the level of language (Baudrillard 2013a:4–5). As Gary Genosko explains in *Critical Semiotics* (2016), Baudrillard's ambivalence with structuralism derives from the fact that although he uses the methodological and theoretical tools of structuralism in order to capture the particular way in which objects, experiences, and social relations in the consumer society are structured as a differential field of signs, he deviates from structuralism in that he valorizes and imagines the object beyond its structural configuration (Genosko 2016:56). Behind the structuralist method central to Baudrillard's theorization of consumption as a differential logic of signs in which individuals strive for meaning lies an attempt to restore the object to a position outside the order of signs to what he calls 'the symbolic' (ibid, 56-57). I do not intend to resolve the theoretical and methodological

tensions inherent in what has been described as Baudrillard's 'social phenomenology of objects' (Gane 1991:43) and 'phenomenology of structuralism' (Levin in Baudrillard, 1981, p. 11). What I do suggest is to read Baudrillard's theory of objects and consumption as a theory of how objects circulate; that is, for Baudrillard consumption is a particular organizational process by which objects are brought into circulation and organized as signs according to a code and principle of differentiation. Thus, what Baudrillard acknowledges in his theorization of the consumer society is the particular organizational conditions for objects to proliferate, to circulate, namely the configuration of the object as sign, which constitutes the basis for which it becomes an object of consumption.

1.2 From the vantage point of objects

To Baudrillard consumption is a novel, contemporary phenomenon. To consume is therefore more than the mere acquisition and purchasing of objects; it is something other than the material use of objects, nor can it simply be defined in quantitative measures (affluence):

From time immemorial people have bought, possessed, enjoyed and spent, but this does not mean they were 'consuming'. (...). And if we are justified in using this term [consumption] to describe present-day society, it is not because we now eat more or better, not because we absorb more images and messages, and not because we have more appliances and gadgets at our disposal. (Baudrillard 2005:217–18).

These are, Baudrillard writes, 'simply the preconditions of consumption' (ibid). In order to fully grasp Baudrillard's notion of consumption and his diagnosis of post-war societies as, strictly speaking, consumer societies, his general understanding of objects and the role he assigns to them in social organization needs to be clarified. Here, a return to the analysis in the beginning of *The System of Objects* helps to exemplify Baudrillard's conception and analysis of objects.

The object as mirror of social organization

The System of Objects begins with a description of the transition from the traditional milieu of the bourgeois home to the modern home and the milieu of design and industrially produced consumer goods (Baudrillard 2005:13–29). In the milieu of the bourgeois home the rooms and furniture were ordered by a morality that they reflected: each room tended towards a closure of space securing each room's 'unifunctionality' and 'immovability' that founded their hierarchical position within the general unity of the home (ibid, 13). The individual pieces of furniture were ordered according to a strict moral code of usage having only a limited autonomy within the general structure of the room. In this environment, the human-object relationships were heavily constrained by traditions and symbolic relations that they also signified. The primary function of objects was to personify human relationships (ibid, 14). This constraint inflicted upon the object in the traditional home reflected, according to Baudrillard, the limited autonomy of the individual family members and the highly formal organizations of interpersonal relationships (ibid, 14). In this space, the objects received meaning in relation to an *outside* that they also symbolized (religion, morality etc.) (Borum 2005:86). The proliferation of consumer goods and the still shorter lifespan of industrially produced objects indicated changes in social organization and the role objects played in the formation of social relationships and in social integration:

Symbolic values, and along with them use values, are being supplanted by organizational values. (...). These objects are no longer endowed with a 'soul', nor do they invade us with their symbolic presence: the relationship has become an objective one, founded on disposition and play. (Baudrillard 2005:19).

With the transition to the modern home objects ceased to be ordered along a hierarchical axis that dominated the interior space of the bourgeois home. The object

was partially ‘liberated’ from its ceremonial and ritual duties and the moral code of order it embodied, instead gradually gaining its autonomy within a new paradigm of functionality (ibid, 16). In the modern home objects gain a ‘mobility’ and ‘multifunctionality’ that allows the individual ‘to organize them more freely, and this reflects a greater openness in his social relationships’ (ibid, 16). There is, Baudrillard argues, a profound relation between the liberation of the object in its functionality and then the process whereby the social individual is ‘freed from his involvement with religion, morality and family’ (ibid, note p. 16). That objects are ‘free as *functional objects*’, having the freedom to function without the constraints of tradition, is mirror in the social individual who is free to function as labour power (ibid, 16). It is in this sense, that the object and the individual are partially liberated as they gain the freedom to function.

In the transition from the traditional home to the modern home and mass-produced industrial objects Baudrillard notices a shift in the meaning of objects themselves and how objects integrated the individual into the social whole. In the modern discourse objects cease to receive their meaning from an outside order (tradition, family, God, etc.) and increasingly receive meaning in an internal relation to each other (Borum 2005:86). Increasingly objects form a system in which they receive meaning in their reference to each other. Thus, objects no longer integrate the individual by placing it within an organized whole that it symbolizes. They become something the subject can play with and organize around itself in order to express itself, to distinguish from and relate to social groups. Increasingly objects take on an individualizing role. It is in this sense that the relationships to objects ‘has become an objective one, founded on disposition and play’. It is in this specific relation to objects that consumption emerges as a structural field of differentiation, that is, as a particular modern phenomenon.

From this I want to highlight an analytical and a conceptual aspect. The first is how objects function as a mirror for an analysis of processes of social

organizing. That is, in Baudrillard we find an affinity between the status of the object, the way by which people relate to, use, and experience objects and then particular forms of social organization and relations between individuals and between individual and society: 'The arrangement of furniture offers a faithful image of the familiar and social structures of a period' and '[t]he style of furniture changes as the individual's relationships to family and society change' (Baudrillard 2005:13–15). Thus, objects function as a 'vector of a social order' (ibid, 209), which is why the everyday ordering of and relations to objects occupies a privileged place to study social organization, relations, and transformations.

The way objects are used in everyday life [in the modern society] implies and almost authoritarian set of assumptions about the world. And what the technical object bespeaks, no longer requiring anything more than our formal participation, is a world without effort, an abstract and completely mobile energy, and the total efficacy of sign-gestures (Baudrillard 2005:61).

Objects and how they are organized are a mirror for social ordering and thus position objects as a privileged vantage point for sociological analysis. Furthermore, Baudrillard tells us that the essential aspect of the object lies beyond what is strictly necessary (function, use etc.) and that relations to objects are symbolic in nature (Baudrillard 1998:44). The object takes on a role of integrating the individual into social structures and in this sense subject and object are bound together through economic, social, and symbolic relations. Thus, and I will expand on this, consumption is a mode of relation to objects that operates beyond so-called objective qualities of use, needs, and functions, and this is why an analysis of consumption does not operate on this level of existence of the object.

Secondly, Baudrillard's sociological account of the phenomenon of consumption cannot be reduced to that of the commodity-form and a use/exchange-

value distinction. Yes, the sphere of consumption is a function of the sphere of production but objects play a far more substantial role in the structuring of social relations than that of being the end product of circuits of capital (i.e. commodity) within a capitalistic mode of production (Gane 1991:26). To Baudrillard the commodity form is one form the object can take in the consumer society but the way in which objects structure social organization cannot be reduced to that of the commodity form as an abstraction of the capitalist mode and relations of production. Baudrillard (and also Barthes) specifically uses the term 'object' instead of 'commodity' in order not to fall into the conventional critic of exchange-value based on some sort of authentic experience of its use value (ibid, 35). Objects as they are organized in the system of consumption constructs a field of social meaning – a structured field of industrial produced differences – in which individuals comes to express themselves and strive for meaning through objects. Baudrillard writes:

Consumption is a system which secures the ordering of signs and the integration of the group: it is therefore both a morality (a system of ideological values) and a communication system, a structure of exchange. It is on this basis, and on the fact that this social function and structural organization far surpass individuals and impose themselves upon them by way of an unconscious social constraint, that we can found a theoretical hypothesis that is neither a mere reciting of figures nor a descriptive metaphysics [based on needs and personal enjoyment]. (Baudrillard 1998:78).

We are at the point where consumption is laying hold of the whole of life, where all activities are sequenced in the same combinatorial mode, where the course of satisfaction is outlined in advance, hour by hour, where the 'environment' is total – fully air-conditioned, organized, culturalized. (Baudrillard 1998:29).

What Baudrillard is after in his analysis of objects and consumption is how the meaning and sense of objects themselves are transformed and how this is producing new types of relationships and experiences (Gane 1991:35). It is as a structure belonging to a field of signs (meaning) that objects in the consumer society function as social integrators. The analysis of consumption, according to Baudrillard, cannot be reduced to that of exchange value but rather that when objects increasingly are permeated by signs and the structural play of industrially produced differences everything becomes exchangeable for each other, losing any possibility of singularity. Thus, Baudrillard's analysis of objects and consumption favours not the ownership of the 'means of production' in which objects are produced, but centres on how objects integrate the individual into social structures by constructing a field of social and cultural meaning – that is, his analysis emphasizes the 'mastery of signification' (Genosko 2016:60).

A particular emphasis on and analysis of objects as objects of consumption emerges; how they are organized within a system and how this system of objects by constructing a field of social meaning itself organizes (i.e. the relations between objects mediate and organize relations between subjects). What is instructive here, is to take this strategy into the field of social media platforms and social media consumption. Before I expand on that we must take a closer look at what Baudrillard means by 'system' and how it can work in the present context of exploring social media platform as organizational technologies of consumption.

The 'System' of Objects

As the title of *The System of Objects* indicates the notion of a 'system' informs Baudrillard's analysis of consumption. But what does Baudrillard actually mean by 'system'? And how can we use it in the present context in which we want to go from a system of objects to an understanding of social media platforms as systems of memory? In the introduction to *The System of Objects* Baudrillard discusses three

levels of the object through which one could start to give an account of objects: a functional level, a technical level, and a level of social and cultural meaning. Baudrillard – quoting Gilbert Simondon's work on technology – notes the possibility of a science of structural technology, a study of 'technemes', that would account for the objective technological plane of the object (Baudrillard 2005:5). Baudrillard recognizes this technical level as the essential level of the object that 'governs all radical transformations of our environment' (ibid, 3). Baudrillard writes: '[these] technological models (...) provides the ground from which our direct experience of objects is continually emerging' (ibid, 6). The significance of the technical level of objects however cannot account for the social and cultural articulation of the object. Baudrillard writes:

Each of our practical objects is related to one or more structural elements, but at the same time they are all in perpetual flight from technical structure towards their secondary meanings, from the technological system towards a cultural system. (Baudrillard 2005:6).

We shall not (...) be concerning ourselves with objects as defined by their functions or by the categories into which they might be subdivided for analytic purposes, but instead with the processes whereby people relate to them and with the systems of human behaviour and relationships that result therefrom. (ibid, 2).

In everyday life objects do not correspond to their technical structure as they are articulated on the level of social and cultural meaning. The human relationships to objects cannot be grasped by returning to their technical structure or the apparent function it is designed to fulfil. It is the social and cultural system of meaning that objects come to constitute and how this structures social relations that is the concern of Baudrillard, as it is here everyday objects are directly experienced (ibid, 5-7).

The production side of the object: the material, functional, and technical aspect of objects along with the mode or relations of production is of secondary importance to Baudrillard (ibid, 2-3). It is the social relationships and the social and cultural system of meaning that objects impose that is in question. Baudrillard's notion of a *system* of objects refers to this 'secondary' and 'spoken' level of the object, the level of social and cultural meaning (ibid). In this sense, the system of objects operates at the level of language as a 'system of signs' in which each term (object) receives its meaning in relation to other terms. Thus, the consumption of objects cannot be accounted for as an individual act or practice of purchasing and possessing objects. To consume an object implies a larger system of meaning, collective practices, beliefs, and perceptions (Toffoletti 2011:73).

It is evident that objects are never offered for consumption in absolute disorder. They may, in certain cases, imitate disorder the better to seduce, but they are always arranged to mark out directive paths (...). Clothing, machines and toiletries thus constitute object *pathways*, which establish inertial constraints in the consumer: he will move *logically* from one object to another. (Baudrillard 1998:27).

Human relations to and consumption of objects are configured within a system of objects as the individual object is experienced and becomes meaningful in relation to other objects. Hence, the relation to and experience of objects in the consumer society are never founded upon a singular relation between an object and a subject. The *system* stresses that objects are always already organized within a larger structure of objects (the shopping window, the drugstore, the shopping mall). Yet, Mike Gane argues in *Baudrillard's Bestiary* (1991) that although Baudrillard tells us that the system of objects operates as system of signs he does not delineate this system by pinpointing where difference occurs, alter, and where they lose their meaning (Gane 1991:44). According to Gane, Baudrillard's notion of a 'system' is

far from straightforwardly given and remains a theoretical and methodological problem in Baudrillard's sociological investigation of everyday objects as we are 'never presented with a formal analysis of this system' (ibid, 43). Instead we are presented with vignettes and sketches of how everyday objects in the consumer society are experienced and mediate individual and social relationships (ibid). The drugstore, advertising, credit, robots, and gadgets are taken as objects of analysis and function as a way into analysing how consumption and relation to objects is a system structuring social relations, perceptions, and experiences. How can this notion of system then inform the question of social media platforms as systems of memory? Despite Baudrillard does not delineating the system in a diachronic fashion nor analysing this system using a 'rigorous system of analytical concepts' (ibid, 44), the idea of object systems is useful in the present context as he initiates an analysis and perspective on how consumption and consumptive practices is never configured as a single relation to an object but that consumption implies a broader organization.

The principle of analysis remains as follows: you never consume the object in itself (in its use value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs (...). (Baudrillard 1998:61).

To account for consumption as particular way in which objects are organized Baudrillard argues we must consider how objects relate to each other as signs. System, in this sense, entails that we cannot account for objects and how they are experienced by preserving in them some sort singularity as they – when taken at the level of consumption – are given to us and consumed within an organized whole. Rather than defining and analysing consumption and practices of consumption on the basis of a particular use or function or that of a particular content; to consume operates on a structural level organizing the engagement with and experience of objects beyond that of a singular object.

1.3 Consumption and value

Whereas the ideologists of consumption spoke of human needs and pure commodities, we began to speak of consumption as a structural and differential logic of signs. (Baudrillard 2009b:16).

Consumption: beyond use value and natural needs

Baudrillard's theorization of objects and consumption in structural terms (as a system and differential logic of signs) problematizes the concepts of need, utility, and personal enjoyment as a means to account for consumption. These concepts presuppose an individual relation between subject and object involved in the consumptive practices. In the consumer society; 'he [the consumer] no longer relates to a particular object in its specific utility, but to a set of objects in its total signification' (Baudrillard 1998:27). Needs and utility are not natural categories and the natural destiny of object but express a social relation in which the relationship to objects have been rationalized.

They do not see [theorist of consumption] that needs, taken one by one, are *nothing* and that there is only a system of needs. (...). All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as signifying element. In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite* function or need (Baudrillard 1998:75/77).

As was shown with the modern home the singular object has no value in itself but comes into existence in a signifying relation to other objects. Consumption as a particular phenomenon of consumer societies has to do with the appropriation of the object as sign (Merrin 2006:16). The system of objects precedes the particular object or in other words the individuality of the object is an effect of the system. It is therefore useless, at the level of consumption, to begin with defining the object as a singular functional or technical entity. Yet, this also reveals a paradox. With the

transition from the traditional home to the modern home the object was liberated from its ceremonial and symbolic duties in order to *function*. At the same time, Baudrillard argues that we cannot account for consumption in relation to function, need or use. The point Baudrillard is making, is that functionality no longer resides within the object itself. As objects become meaningful and experienced in a signifying relation to other objects functionality itself becomes a sign through which objects relates to other objects (Baudrillard 2005:67). As Rex Butler explains: ‘At the same time the system expresses function better than ever we do not have real function but only a function on the basis of the sign’ (Butler 1999:33). In this sense functionality, needs, and use is both the limit of the system but also what it produces and thereby what makes it continually expand (new needs, new functions etc.). Therefore functions, needs, and use are a consequence of the system not its cause, hence proliferation. The same accounts for the system of consumption as such; the promise of satisfaction and fulfilment through consumption is the very limit of consumption as we are never satisfied (because what can be fulfilled and satisfied is not external to the system but a result of it). Yet, this limit of the system of consumption is also why consumption has no limit because consumption is not a material practice but the appropriation of signs (Butler 1999:50–53).

That Baudrillard avoids the concept of natural need, use, and function is equally a critique of the concept of use value as a critical measure against which to evaluate consumption. For Baudrillard it is not about normalizing consumption nor about restoring objects to their proper use value, which supposedly has been distorted by the play of exchange value. There is not some true use value or functionality to be liberated beneath the signs of function and use. On the contrary, the notion of the human being as defined by needs and its relation to object as one of function and utility is a myth and ideological construct of political economy, which is not challenged by Marxism but extended and naturalized by it (Baudrillard 1975). Thus, Baudrillard reverses the conception of needs and its function within

the system of consumption: whereas political economy argues that the individual express itself in the economy through its needs and the personal enjoyment she puts into objects, it is in fact the economic system that expresses itself in the individual as it thinks of itself as a being of need and use (Merrin 2006:18–19). The concepts of utility and need are a function of political economy, it is an effect of this system constructing them as its own natural and external reference point. Hence, Marx's concept of use value cannot be the vector for a social critique of consumption as use and utility is at the very core of the ideology of political economy. The concept of use value simply naturalizes and expands the metaphysics of use and utility of political economy and with it the anthropological assumptions of the human as a rational and utility seeking being (ibid). Opposed to the use and exchange value distinction Baudrillard develops through the works of Durkheim and Mauss the notion of 'the symbolic' as his critical concept: a refusal of use value permeates Baudrillard's concept and critique of media.

Media consumption

In the essay, *The Requiem for the Media* (1981), Baudrillard extends his critique of use value to media. A critical media theory directed at the ownership of production or directed at media content falls, according to Baudrillard, into the same myth and metaphysic of use that permeates the critique of exchange value. The ideology and power of media, Baudrillard argues (through McLuhan), does not foremost reside in what it transfers but in the very structures of communication and mode of social organization it imposes on human relations (Baudrillard 1981:164–72). A critique of media content or ownership of media is equivalent with a critique of exchange value. Both are based on some sort of hope to restore media to their proper use value (for example to democratize content production and distribution etc.). Baudrillard writes:

The real effect [of TV] is more subtle: it is the imposition upon us, by the systematic succession of messages, of the *equivalence* of history and the minor news items, of the event and the spectacle, of information and advertising *at the level of the sign*. (...). What we consume, then, is not a particular spectacle or image in itself, but the potential succession of all possible spectacles (...). (Baudrillard 1998:122).

[w]e have to accept as a fundamental feature of the analysis of consumption McLuhan's formula that 'the medium is the message'. This means that the true message of the media of TV and Radio (...) is not the manifest content of sounds and images, but the constraining pattern (...) of the disarticulation of the real into successive and equivalent signs (...). (Baudrillard 1998:122).

What is consumed through television is strictly speaking not a content but a principle of organization of content. What is consumed in a medium is less the content that it transmits than the organizing and structuring principle of the medium (i.e. the medium is the message).⁸ Thus, we here attend to a conception of consumption that extends the focus beyond that of consuming a singular content, why I suggest that social media consumption is not foremost that of consuming a specific content but rather how platforms shapes, configures, and organizes content. This notion of consumption as system again stresses an analytical attention to how specific platform organizes and brings content into circulation; and this is the level at which we analyse consumption as a system. In Part II, the stream and Instagram filters are analysed as an expression of how this system of memory organizes lived

⁸ To which one is reminded of John Durham Peters characteristic of digital technology and media: '(...) digital media traffic less in content, programs, and opinions than in organization, power and calculation' (Peters 2015:7).

experiences into objects of consumption. To explore social media consumption, consumption cannot be that of fulfilling an objective need or a function. In the context of social media consumption, I suggest this brings the analysis beyond questions of communication, self-expression, and meaning as supposedly objective functions of media platforms. To speak of consumption, requires I argue an attention to how 'media organize' understood beyond that of media technologies being devices of communication (Martin 2019:1) and as such attend to the features and function through which individual and social life are organized on the Instagram platform. In television for example, the singular programme or event is organized by the succession of events and programmes and in the present case of social media platforms I extend this perspective to the features and function of Instagram.

Four logics of value

With the idea of consumption as a 'structural and differential logic of signs' we have seen how Baudrillard's discourse on consumption extends beyond that of needs, utility, use value, commodities etc. Consumption is a signifying process; it has to do with meaning and the striving for social meaning and operates as a code on an everyday level. The ideology and social role of objects works at the level of signification as individuals learn to express and experience themselves through the appropriation of sign that is already produced for them. Social prestige and the strive for social meaning is the social logic of consumption (Baudrillard 1998:74). Baudrillard writes in relation to consumption:

To differentiate oneself is always, by the same token, to bring into play the total order of differences, which is, from the first, the product of the total society and inevitably exceeds the scope of the individual. In the very act of scoring his points in the order of differences, each individual maintains that order, and therefore condemns himself only ever to occupy a relative position within it. (Baudrillard 1998:61).

We see that consumption has to do with a certain semiological organization of objects that at an everyday and individual level is experienced as a freedom of choice but on a structural level integrates the individual through processes of personalization and individualization as it comes to express and experience itself in this system. Let us now then consider this semiological organization in relation to what I have called Baudrillard's theory of circulation.

Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1981:123–29) outlines four types of values and a scheme that describes the transition between them. This scheme describes how objects circulate and are exchanged according to different logics. These are: the functional logic of use value, the economic logic of exchange value, a logic of sign value and the logic of symbolic exchange. These four values are logical contexts in which objects attain meaning (Genosko 2016:60–61). Each of these values are governed by a principle. Use value derives from need and use and is governed by the principle of *utility*. Economic exchange value is governed by the principle of *equivalence*. Sign value is governed by the principle of *difference*; and the symbolic is governed by a principle of *ambivalence* (Baudrillard 1981:66). These are logics through which objects circulate and attain a social and cultural meaning, outside of which we can barely speak of objects (ibid, 69). As we have seen Baudrillard argues that what characterizes the modern consumer society is that objects are organized and circulate according to their sign value and the principle of differentiation.

An object is not an object of consumption unless it is released from its psychic determinations as *symbol*; from its functional determinations as *instrument*; from its commercial determinations as *product*; and is thus *liberated as a sign* to be recaptured by the formal logic of fashion, i.e., by the logic of differentiation (Baudrillard 1981:67).

As have been discussed to *consume* an object, to experience objects, to buy, possess, and relate to objects do not foremost correlate to an experience based on natural

needs, utility, and functionality – this is not, so to speak, the mode of existence of the object when analysed at the level of consumption. Consumption means that the object is pre-organized within the logical context of differentiation through which the object attains meaning and is experienced and appropriated as a sign. Consumption is therefore not a material practice, it is never the materiality of the object that is consumed but the difference between objects (Baudrillard 2005:218). And as sign value organizes objects according to the logic of differentiation, the object is experienced and consumed in its difference to other sign objects. A radical transformation of the object is here presented: to consume an object is to consume it in its difference to other objects. Hence, the experience of objects in the consumer society is affected by a transition in which the object decreasingly attains meaning and value from a referential plane of need and utility and the functional logic of use value to one where objects attain meaning within the sphere of the differential logic of sign value. Baudrillard's theory of consumption and value presents us with a theoretical intervention into the field of political economy and the sociology of consumption, as it shifts the very terms through which consumption and consumer goods are problematized and analysed; from one of use, natural needs, utility and functionality to one of signs, signification, and a system of needs.

I want to bring out an important aspect of Baudrillard's notion of consumption in relation to develop it in the context of our present media condition. If the consumer good does not primarily receive its meaning from a plane of use, need and functionality but rather within a system of objects, then to consume, and to consume (sign) objects, is never an individual action based upon some sort of singularity of the object (a natural need, an objective use and so forth). On the contrary, each consumer good is itself a medium for the total system of consumption from which it receives its meaning. Hence what is consumed in one object is the total organization of objects. In this sense, I suggest, consumption as Baudrillard defines it is first of all the consuming of a logic or principle through which objects

are organized, namely difference. That is, *we consume an organizational principle*. This entails that anything can become an object of consumption as consumption is less defined by a material object than by an organizational principle. And in relation to media consumption what is consumed here is less the specific content than the organizational principle of the medium. It is exactly this conception of the object and consumption as based on a certain organizational principle that is of interests here far more than the theorization of the system of objects and consumption as a system of signs. Thus, Baudrillard, brings at the fore a certain organizational condition for objects to circulate and proliferate. This also reveals Baudrillard's use of the term system and how he interrogates the system of object and consumption through individual examples. If what is consumed is an organizational principle then any object, as Rex Butler also suggest, becomes an allegory and a sign for the total system of signification which can justify Baudrillard's method of analysing the system through individual examples (Butler 1999:33).

Is it then possible to speak of consumption and analyse consumption not on the basis of the differential logic of the sign? Is it possible to say that what is consumed in and through social media platforms are not the abstraction of the real into a succession of signs, but what is consumed is the way in which human experiences are reproduced and organized as technological memory? That is, consumption related to the exteriority by which human life increasingly is experienced, reproduced, and organized by a variety of technological devices and social media platforms. And is it possible to speak not of a circulation of objects configured by the sign but rather the circulation of individual and social experiences as technological memory? Is it not the individual itself, its experiences that become the object of consumption in and through social media platforms? These are the question that I will pursue in the next chapter through a reading of Stiegler's differentiation of primary, secondary, and tertiary memory. But first I shall emphasis a last perspective in Baudrillard's conception of consumption.

Consumption as a mode of being

As consumption is occurring at the level of signs then what is consumed is a differential organization of objects. This differential organization permeates not only material objects but also becomes a form of being in, and directedness towards, the world. Baudrillard writes:

It has to be made clear from the outset that consumption is an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and to the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural systems. (Baudrillard 2005:217).

To enter the cycle of consumption and fashion is not simply to surround oneself with objects and services as one pleases; it is to change one's being and directedness. (Baudrillard 1998:170).

Consumption is 'an active form of relationship' not only to objects but to the world in general. It is 'a systematic activity (...) which founds our entire cultural systems' and it involves changing 'one's being and directedness'. Baudrillard's discourse on consumption substantially widens the scope of its effects from that of a conventional consumer goods. Consumption is not here reduced to the consumption of material objects in their newly attained differential sign form but rather encompasses a larger process whereby the world as such can become an object of consumption. Let us consider two aspects.

First, the code of differences occurs at a structural level surpassing the individual. Yet, individuals become aware of this code and start to play with it why consumers are also analysts (Butler 1999:35/125). Increasingly this code is integrated into our form of being as an awareness of how objects have specific meaning and expresses certain individual qualities that affiliates the individual to certain social groups. But this does not mean that individuals have reached a point

outside the order of differences but rather that this awareness further develops the code. Consumers are in this sense also analysts as they decode objects in terms of the code (ibid). That is, what we saw with the transition from the traditional home to the modern home of interior design; the relation to the object becomes a relation based on disposition and play. In this perspective, anti-consumerism and the refusal to consume is itself a way of playing with the code of difference. The refusal to consume does not transcend the system of consumption but becomes a sign itself and thus a form of differentiation (Baudrillard 1998:90–91). Secondly, when Baudrillard defines consumption at the level of signs, he thereby also asserts that anything can become an object of consumption (events, the body, social relationships etc.). Consumption is therefore a certain decoding and reading of the world. I suggest that consumption as a certain ‘directedness’ and mode of being should be understood as a form of *anticipation* where the code of difference permeates the individual. As a form of anticipation, consumption for Baudrillard, is a certain way in which the individual appropriates, plays with, and manipulates signs but also that the world is always already experienced within a logical context of industrially produced models and differences. Thus, consumption is a certain way of anticipating and bringing forth the present and this is crucial to understand and advance the notion of social media platforms and social media consumption as a broader system of organizing human experiences that, as I will argue, operates beyond the consumption of content and thus beyond the interaction with digital devices, interfaces, and screens.

Conclusion

In this reading of Baudrillard, it has been emphasized how consumption is theorized as an organizational process through which objects proliferate, expand, and are brought into circulation as signs. I have brought out a perspective on consumption as a broader system that structures objects, perceptions, experiences, and social

relations; a system of structured pathways in which the individual engages with and expresses itself through the appropriation of objects as signs. As such the consumer society and the sphere of consumption emerges on the basis of a certain organizational structuring by which objects, social relationships, and in general the world are produced and consumed as a differential logic of signs.

In this reading, I have draw to attention how Baudrillard's theorization of consumption as a system can contribute to an analysis and conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. Firstly, consumption is a specific modern phenomenon of organizing and bringing objects into circulation. To understand consumption focus should be to the organizing principles and structures through which objects are exchanged and brought into circulation and the experiences and relations that emerges from this. Secondly, a consumptive relation involves as specific mode of and relation to objects beyond that of objective use, needs, and functions. The conception of consumption as a system brings to the fore an analytical attentiveness not so much on specific media content but rather to the means by which this is being organized. At the level of consumption, what is consumed is less a specific object or a specific content than how the specific content or object is configured in the process of being organized. Thus, an analysis of consumption does not precede by presupposing an individual relation between user and content; a consumptive relation is not simply that of consuming a particular digital object or that of the 'use' of specific features and function. Instead, analytical attention is to how images, data, text, and so forth are organized as it is not an individual content that is consumed but the specific succession and ordering of content that these functions do. This directs, I suggest, the analysis of consumption towards the functions and features of a particular platforms. It is that level that we analyse consumption and it is here that the analysis of Instagram an organizational technology of consumption will be proceed. Finally, consumption at a phenomenological level involves a certain engagement with the

world; it is a certain directedness of the individual in which the present is appropriated and experienced. I suggest, in the context of social media consumption, to understand this directedness and mode of being as a form of anticipation and a way of projecting oneself into the present. An analysis of social media platforms as technologies of consumption is therefore to focus on how the phenomenological lived Now is produced in the process by which it is technologically mediated through these platforms. It is in this way that Baudrillard's work on consumption and objects provides analytical strategies with which, and with great advantages, it is possible to grasp the proliferation and profusion of digital objects, how they circulate, and are organized as question of consumption. This organizational reading of Baudrillard's consumption is a first step in reconceptualising consumption.

While Baudrillard theorizes and analysis consumption as a semiotic organization I suggest not to explore social media consumption from such a theoretical starting point. Consumption today is thoroughly grounded in a technological organization and proliferation of digital content produced in the process by which people exteriorizes themselves to different platforms. Before we proceed with framing Baudrillard's theory of consumption through Stiegler's philosophy of technology let me first clarify why I do not proceed with the analysis of social media consumption through Baudrillard's notion of consumption as structural and differential logic of signs. And what better way to do this than on the beach as it was observed by Roland Barthes in 1957.

Barthes on the beach

In Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1972) from 1957 we find an early account of how objects are experienced as a structural field of signs. In a note to the main text Barthes describes how he observes the beach.

In a single day, how many really non-signifying fields do we cross? Were few, sometimes none. Here I am, before the sea; it is true that it bears no

message. But on the beach, what material for semiology! Flags, slogans, signals, sign-boards, clothes, suntan even, which are so many messages to me. (Barthes 1972:112 note).

The objects on the beach, clothes, suntan etc. are messages, they convey meaning and as Barthes observed in 1957 one rarely finds oneself in a non-signifying space, in some hidden place outside the discourse of objects. This passage by Barthes is intriguing to read and is drawn to attention as I cannot but think what accumulation of signs and messages that we have been witness to in the timespan between Barthes's observation and today. Are we not exposed to even more signs and messages and hence even less likely to find ourselves in a non-signifying space? Yet, the passage is also intriguing because although still rich on material resources for semiology has the beach not transformed in nature beyond the operation of and growth in signs and messages? If we return to the beach – to the present-day beach – is there not something different here, a new kind of object that structures our relation to the beach? The new object that reigns over all other objects is the smartphone. Perhaps it can be argued that the equivalent to the non-signifying field of the consumer society is today the non-connected field. To rephrase Barthes: how many non-connected fields do we cross during a day? How many interactions do we have where there is not the luring presence of the smartphone? This does not mean that the smartphone cannot be accounted for in semiological terms. The gesture by which the hand takes the smartphone out of the pocket, the touches on the screen that smoothly unlocks it; although all of this can be seen as new raw material for semiology from the vantage point of consumption something slips this perspective. Along with the system of objects and meaning, the saturated space of signs and signification, along with this system there is a media technological organization of the individual, its fellow beings, and its environment that shapes and alters the way in which for example the beach is experienced as a beach. That is consumption today is embedded in organizational processes of media platforms and

devices. To account for social media platforms as a particular phenomenon of consumption requires a reconceptualization of consumption that goes beyond the mediating effects of signs. With the smartphone, various types of social media platforms, and the stream-like organization of content, requires a rethinking of consumption beyond that of consumption being as a differential field of signs towards that of conceptualizing consumption as an organizational process in which the present lived Now is technologically mediated, exteriorised, and brought into circulation. That is, the ever-accelerating production and consumption of objects that Barthes and Baudrillard recognized as an essential aspect of post-war societies and eminently analysed as a system of signification, it might be suggested that although still functioning to perfection alongside this a *system of production and consumption of memory* has emerged. While Baudrillard provides an analytical frame for essentially understanding and analysing (social media) consumption as a system and broader organizational process that, as I have argued, frames the question of consumption as one of organizing, how and what social media platforms organizes and brings into circulation is to be developed in relation to Stiegler's philosophy of technology.

Chapter 2. Technics, Memory, and Consumption

As I have argued we find in Baudrillard a conception of consumption as an organizational principle and system through which objects, events, etc. are brought into circulation as signs. Initially, consumption refers to a specific existence of and relations to objects, and, more generally, consumption is a system that imposes itself as a code that structures the engagement with and relationship to the world. It is consumption, as a form of relationship to the world and organizational process, that comes to structure post-war societies; from the material production of objects to that of ‘culture’ and social relations, and, so to, properly speaking define society as a ‘consumer society’. Yet, I have questioned to what extent that the way by which social and individual experiences today are turned into digital objects – circulating through multiple technological devices and media platforms – are to be grasped as a consumption and circulation that operates at the level of *signs*: that is, the object of consumption and what is being brought into circulation as people share, like, and upload various types of content and experiences is, I suggest, to be explored beyond that of a notion of consumption operating as a system of signs. While Baudrillard was well aware of media consumption – attaining to mass media a substantial role in the semiotic organization of society – the nature of the digital objects that proliferates on social media platforms, being objects of inscription and attention, are different in nature than the kind of objects that proliferated in the consumer society. The nature by which individual and social experiences are organized and produced as digital content, I argue, requires a conception of consumption beyond that of the semiotic organization of human relations and experiences. Thus, Baudrillard enables a thoroughly organizational conception of media consumption however analysing consumption as a semiotic organization remains limited in terms of grasping the nature of present-day proliferation of digital content and the human relations and experiences that emerges from this. Hence, we go beyond the

conception of consumption as a system of signs and attend to social media platforms as technologies of organizing.

It is on the basis of this reasoning that we now turn to the work of the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler. In *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation* (2009) the second of three volumes in his seminal work *Technics and Time* (Stiegler, 1998, 2009, 2011), Stiegler writes:

If the current continuous flood of information develops into a *true memory consumerism*, it would tend as such toward the delegation to machines of “expertise” and “writing skills,” as the technical tendency’s full fruition and toward the becoming-merchandise of memory. (...). Since consumers access to a network [or platform] is only through an intermediary output device, reading analogic and numeric memory traces requires that the receivers have an appropriate device [i.e. smartphone]. (Stiegler, 2009, p. 130) (my emphasis).

A ‘true memory consumerism’? What is entailed in such an expression is, perhaps, the provision of a media environment in which everyday life and experiences at a new scale and with an unprecedented organizational force are being reconfigured by, and brought into circulation as, what Stiegler calls technological memory or ‘tertiary retention’ (Stiegler 2011c:39).

The purpose of this chapter, is to further develop a conceptual frame for grasping the proliferation and material reproduction of individual and social experiences, happening through and structured by diverse set of digital media functions, features, and platforms. I want to advance a conception of social media platforms as systems of memory objects as so to analytically grasp the material proliferation and organization of individual and social experiences, and by the same token argue that these are systems through which individual and social experiences become primary objects of circulation and consumption. As means to develop such

a conceptual understanding of social media platform I examine and frame, in relation to my reading of Baudrillard's notion of consumption, Stiegler's conceptual reservoir, with special attention to the relation between 'exteriorization', 'anticipation', and 'tertiary retention'. Grounded in this conceptual and theoretical analysis, I argue, for a reconceptualization of consumption in the context of social media as a *consumption of memory*. It must be emphasized from the beginning that when I provide a conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption of memory, memory is not reducible to an act or process of recollection but that perception and experience itself is a process of memorization (Stiegler 2011c:19).

The chapter unfolds in three steps. First I introduce Stiegler's general conceptualization of technology, time, and subjectivity as it is developed in his seminal three-volume work *Technics and Time* (Stiegler 1998, 2009, 2011c). As a means to capture social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption I examine how Stiegler's notion of 'technics' as a *process of exteriorization* and his concept of 'tertiary retention' as a third and technical form of memory are theorized as an originary organizational force. This reading is not merely an outline of Stiegler's concepts, as a mean to apply them, but a reading that takes them beyond Stiegler himself.⁹ The second part, emphasis the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions as means for understanding platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. As I have argued elsewhere Stiegler's philosophy can provide a general framework for thinking social media usage in general as a process of 'exteriorization' and social media as

⁹ We are in a mode of going beyond Stiegler, to take his concepts into the realm of social media consumption and the organization of everyday forms of technical exteriorisation through platforms why what follows is not a critical examination of Stiegler's reading and interpretation of the philosophical interlocutors through which these concepts are developed that among others are André Leroi-Gourhan, Edmund Husserl, Gilbert Simondon, and Martin Heidegger.

‘mnemotechnologies’, that is as technologies that organizes lived experiences (Nielsen 2016). However, when it comes to conceive and analyse social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption Stiegler’s notion of consumption remains limited. Yet, the effort to synthesis Baudrillard’s theory of consumption with Stiegler’s notion of technics requires an engagement with the latter’s account of consumption and the conception of the ‘consumer’ as a specific historical configured attention. This is the theme around which the third section evolves. Thus, Stiegler’s techno-phenomenology enables a conceptualization of platforms as technologies of organizing understood as a process of organizing human experiences and Baudrillard’s notion of consumption enables a conception of this organizational process as one of consumption.

2.1 Technics and technological memory

In order to read contemporary social media practices and platforms as a phenomenon of consumption I pay particular attention to the notions of ‘exteriorization’ and ‘tertiary retention’ and the role they attain in Stiegler’s seminal work *Technics and Time 1, 2, and 3* (Stiegler 1998, 2009, 2011c).

Technics as an originary process of organizing

In the introduction to *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998), Stiegler announces: ‘(...) that between the inorganic beings of the physical sciences and the organized beings of biology, there does indeed exist a third genre of “being”: “inorganic organized beings,” or technical objects’ (Stiegler, 1998, p. 17). This third type of beings – technical objects – emerges in the process of ‘technics’. Technics is a *process of exteriorization*. In the work of Stiegler, technics accounts for the general process by which human beings exteriorize themselves making experiences and knowledge external to the individual. This is a process of retaining individual experiences and knowledge beyond the individual from which a material and symbolic milieu emerges. In this sense of technics, the surrounding environment of

objects, tools, books, and images are the material expression of previous lived experiences; they are an effect of a process of exteriorization. No longer merely lived experiences retained as individual memory inside a consciousness but something that has been made exterior, the process of exteriorization is one where lived experiences become what Stiegler calls ‘epiphylogenetic memory’ or ‘tertiary retentions’. This produces a new genre of technical beings – that is tertiary retentions – that are neither to be reduced to a living substance nor to dead matter; it is ‘inorganic organized’ the result of an organization of human experience and dead matter crafted in the process of exteriorization.

(...) we must mark as tertiary retentions all forms of “objective” memory: cinematogram, photogram, phonogram, writing, paintings, sculptures – but also monuments and objects in general, since they bear witness, for me, say, of a past that I enforcedly did not myself live. (Stiegler 2011c:28).

Exteriorization as the general process through which technical objects come into being, the materialization of lived experiences, marks a specific moment in history. Stiegler writes that ‘(...) “exteriorization”, (...) must not be understood as a rupture with nature but rather as a new organization of life—life organizing the inorganic and organizing itself therein by that very fact’ (Stiegler, 1998, p. 163). Thus, the process of exteriorization is not secondary or ephemeral to human existence but is a constitutive moment of human existence itself; it is the historical event where biologically organized life, that is, life without any transmission of cultural knowledge, enters into a stage where life is *technically* constituted and mediated. Technics understood as a material process of exteriorization by which life is retained technically and thus beyond an individual is for Stiegler that which constitutes and is the possibility of a new form of organization of life transgressing a strictly biological organization of life (Colony, 2017, p. 67). It is in this sense that we can understand Stiegler’s proposition that ‘[a]s a “process of exteriorization”, technics

is the pursuit of life by other means than life' (Stiegler 1998, p. 17). Technology and tools, as the outcome of a general work of exteriorization, is not opposed to some kind of pre-technical human nature. Rather, with the notion of technics as exteriorization, Stiegler designates the beginning of a specific form of organized life. In *The Thought of Bernard Stiegler* (2018) Ross Abbinnett writes:

What Stiegler refers to as 'technics' is woven into the development of humanity; it is the organization of life not just as a defensive and productive modes of cooperation, but also as the singular forms of culture and spiritual sensibility that arise from the elevation of human being beyond a state of mere subsistence. (Abbinnett 2018:11).

What I want to stress is that, with *technically mediated life* as the transgression of a purely biological organization of life, human life is essentially to be understood as a historical process of organizing and disorganizing lived experiences into technical *memory* or *tertiary retention*. Human life unfolds as a continuous process of technical exteriorization of lived experiences forming 'inorganic organized' beings. According to Stiegler, the pre-condition for culture and intergenerational knowledge becomes exactly this process of exteriorization by which human experiences and knowledge are retained and materialized outside and beyond the finitude of individual beings why 'tool use predates every other 'origin'' (Abbinnett 2018:38). As such, technics coincide with the invention of the human and vice versa why exteriorization attains a quasi-transcendental character in Stiegler's philosophy. By asserting the centrality of technicity for human life and culture Stiegler not only puts into question any pre-technical understanding of human culture but also any pre-technical conception of human subjectivity. Stiegler writes: 'Tertiary retention is in the most general sense the prosthesis of consciousness without which there would be no mind, no recall, no memory of a past that one has not personally lived, no culture' (Stiegler 2011c:39). If technical exteriorization is what opens up a certain

form of organization of life beyond that of a solely biological form, the human qua its originary technicity is essentially also viewed as *a technically organized being*. Thus, Stiegler writes:

If the individual is organic organized matter, then its relation to its environment (to matter in general, organic or inorganic), when it is a question of a *who*, is mediated by the organized but inorganic matter of the *organon*, the tool with its instructive role (its role *qua* instrument), the *what*. It is in this sense that the *what* invents the *who* just as much as it is invented by it. (Stiegler 1998:177).

The human being that Stiegler, in the above passage, refers to as the *who* is essentially organized by the *what* as it takes shape in each period of time. So, the exterior milieu of organs is an outcome of a process of organizing lived experiences that are then *interiorized* (individually and collectively). Yet, this interiority of the *who* ‘is nothing outside of its exteriorization’ but is composed with the *what* ‘in a single stroke, in a single movement’ (Stiegler, 1998, p. 152). This means that what is specific to the human being, Stiegler argues, is not only the fact that it invents these *technical organs* through a process of *exteriorization* but that the technological environment constitutes an organizational condition for human life. This composition of the interior and the exterior of the subject is theorized as a process of mutual organization. The organon or the *what*, becomes both that which is organized (i.e. infusion of dead matter and lived experiences) and an organizational force itself as human aesthetics are shaped and condition by the formation of a technical environment. Thus, we find in Stiegler’s philosophy of technology an aporetic (re)organizational relation between the human being and its technical organs. In Stiegler’s techno-anthropological conception, the human is essentially viewed as an *organizational being* insofar that; it enters the stage of history at the moment when technical exteriorization begins; and that this originary

technicity of human life confines the human being to a never-ending process of being organized and reorganized by its technical environment. In other words, human aesthetics and subjectivity are, in Stiegler, intrinsically bound to a specific organizational process: the technical organization of lived experiences outside the individual which in the course of history produce ‘tertiary retentions’ of various forms (tools, painting, writing etc). Thus, Stiegler’s thematization of technology, culture and human experience is thoroughly permeated by an organizational thinking as the *organon* is a mediating and constitutive force – clearly reverberating with the argument of an ‘organizational a priori’ (Beyes 2020) and that ‘media organize’ (Martin 2019) here formulated as processes of organizing and materializing, in a broad sense, lived experiences as technology memory. It is on the basis of this perception of an aporetic organizational relation between human aesthetics and technology that Stiegler theorizes the consumer and the consumer society as a specific ‘aesthetic programme’ (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 123) which we turn to at the end the chapter.

Exteriorization as a contemporary organizational force

Technics as a process of exteriorization attains a quasi-transcendental character in Stiegler’s philosophy. Technics is what opens up and continuously conditions human life, and, it is a historical process in which a material environment of objects continuously reconfigures human experience, perception and attention. To explore social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption entails re-framing the concept of exteriorization within a social-theoretical setting. First, this implies a generalization of various kinds of media activities and functions: ‘uploading’, ‘sharing’, ‘liking’, ‘tracking’, ‘commenting’, ‘tagging’, and so forth. Despite their variety in nature, I argue, that 1) these can be conceptualized as an *exteriorization* process of lived human experiences and 2) that the digital objects produced through such activities – for example photos, videos, data, likes, and so

forth – are a reproduction of lived experiences and considered to be what Stiegler refer to as ‘tertiary retentions’.¹⁰ Thus, while we must be alive to the philosophical discussions (and problems) that arise from the assertion of an originary technicity of human aesthetics and social organizing – grounded in and continuously unfolds as a process of technical exteriorization of lived experiences – in this context the novelty of the concept of technics as exteriorization re-asserts itself in its ability to reveal how contemporary social media platforms and activities is a profound phenomenon and process of *exteriorization and circulation of lived experiences as tertiary retention*. Platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram are in this sense media technologies that organize this process of exteriorization of lived experiences in different ways.

Such a conception of a diverse set of media platforms and activities – bringing in both memory and time – reverberates with the perspectives on contemporary digital media culture found in for example Wendy Chun’s book *Updating to Remain the Same* (2016). In Chun’s account of the experiential relation between new media platforms and subjectivity is equally theorized in terms of memory. With new media platforms comes new habits, which Chun theorizes in terms of memory – meaning that media practices continue despite the specific media in which they have emerge have disappeared. Habits are an activation of memory through which the present is enacted and thus memory is not simple a past separated from the present. Habits involves an activation of memory that foster repetition (Chun 2016:85–89) and, thus similar to Stiegler, Chun conceives memory beyond recollection. Framing these media platforms in terms of exteriorization and tertiary retention I suggest that the relation between platform activities (of updating, liking, etc.) and human experiences involves not only the activation of memory, but that in these activities memory (in the sense of experience) itself is in a process of

¹⁰ As I have argued for in (Nielsen 2016)

becoming technological and this is what is repeatedly produced and organized as an effect of the habits that emerges with social media platforms. Sharing, liking, updating, and so forth becomes habits but they are also technological mediated activities in which the individual is producing itself as memory – it is tertiarizing itself – and this is a process in which individual and social experiences are turned into objects of consumption.

In the repeated use of platforms human experiences takes a tertiary form that, in the words of Zuboff, transforms ‘human experience’ into data that becomes an asset and a source of economic profit (Zuboff 2019:98–100). Yet, with the notion of exteriorization and tertiary retention the focus is beyond the processes and operations of a totalizing system of surveillance and exchange value that renders human experience productive. With the conception of social media platforms as a distinct form and phenomenon of organizing technical exteriorization I emphasize the systematic and material configuration and reproduction of social relations and human experiences as it continuously being organized by and towards different forms of tertiarizing. With Instagram for example we will see that Stories and Archive are tertiary forms that in different ways organizes this process of exteriorization and the circulation of individual and social experiences as tertiary retentions. Social media consumption is, I argue, to be theorised in relation to this process of tertiarizing; it is profoundly bound to the tertiarizing process by which individual and social life is organized as technological memory. And it is in light of this perspective that I suggest to reconceptualize consumption and to argue for something like a system of social media consumption.

Finally, I suggest that this tertiarizing of oneself is not only to be analysed as a function of communication, information, and documentation. While Baudrillard theorized consumption as a system of communication in the present context of social media consumption the idea of platforms being tools of communication is too functional, too close to use value, and reverberates with the

medium's own discourse (as I will show in Chapter 6). Clearly these are an important aspect of how social media platforms are used and are part of the intentions, goals, and aims when people share, like, and filter images and videos. But with the concept of tertiary retention and the concept of consumption as an organizational and circulatory process I suggest a perspective on these platforms, features, and function beyond such means. Furthermore, the concept of tertiary retentions means that I do not take 'digital content' on Instagram as isolated objects of communication or information but as objects through which human experiences have been and continuous to be technologically organized. Framing social media platforms as a distinct phenomenon of tertiarizing, the latter is conceived as a process that mediate, constitutes, and shapes human relations and experiences in the process by which they are being organized by social media platforms.

2.2 System, memory, and anticipation

In this section, I expand on Stiegler's conception of the relation between memory, human anticipation, and technology as means to further clarify and develop the conception of social media platforms as systems of production and consumption of memory. Through a reading of Stiegler's conception of technology and human anticipation I expand on the argument that social media consumption is not to be confined to use of an interface or to the engagement with a screen through which media content is consumed but that social media consumption involves an organization of experiences, practices, and relations beyond that of interfaces and screens.

The prosthetic nature of anticipation

In *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998), technics' constitutive role in human experience is framed within a question of the relation between prostheticity and anticipation. In a reading of Heidegger's analysis of the temporal structure of Dasein, Stiegler argues, that it is the process of materialization of human

memory that as such constitute experience of past, present, and future (Stiegler 1998). To Stiegler, the constitutive role of technics in time and in the human experience of time is a matter of how a milieu of objects opens up anticipation and the future in the first place. Stiegler writes: ‘There is no anticipation, no time outside of this passage outside, of this putting-outside-of-self and of this alienation of the human and its memory that "exteriorization" is’ (Stiegler, 1998, p. 152). The originary organizational process of exteriorization is constitutive of time as such. Technical exteriorization opens up the very phenomenon of time because without the material inscription of lived experiences in the non-lived (forming tertiary retention), there is no past nor is any relation to this past possible. Tracy Colony explains this relation between exteriorization and anticipation in Stiegler:

This passage from a genetic to non-genetic memory via the non-living “artificial” organization of memory in the tool is the opening of an exterior to the merely biological scope of memory. (...). This techno-logical memory is described as the “already-there” which makes possible the distension of time in anticipation and the conservation of a specific past. Access to a past and a future are first opened when life becomes technically exteriorized. (Colony, 2017, p. 70).

The materialization and preservation of experiences beyond and outside the individual consciousness opens the phenomenon of time as such, because without such processes there would, according to Stiegler, simply be no past. Stiegler’s argument evolves around the question of whether the possibility of the unique temporality of what Heidegger calls ‘Dasein’ is in the first place opened up by technological inscription of experiences. Paraphrasing Heidegger, Stiegler writes ‘Dasein is temporal: it has a past on the basis of which it can anticipate and thereby be’ (Stiegler 1998:5). Stiegler’s argument is that the world which Dasein is thrown into is only possible because of a preceding materialization of cultural and

individual experiences in exterior objects. Experience of time and space are intrinsically constituted by and enfolded into the specific historical and material conditions of media and technology (tools, writing, printing, photography etc.)(Stiegler 1998:152) According to Stiegler, there would be no past and no future without *exteriorization*, without experiences being retained and materialized *beyond the individual*, and, there is no retention, no reproduction that is not a process of grammatization, of selection, that is, I argue, of organizing; thus, the question of *organizing* emerges with and is embedded in the specific technical and material reproductions of media technologies, and, we might add, in the 21st century particularly that of social media platforms.

The concreteness of this relation between technology and anticipation becomes apparent in the examples of writing and photography. Writing for example creates the possibility of an exact recording of speech as a certain reproduction and materialization of thought and lived experiences (Stiegler 2009:12–13). Thus, through writing there is an access to a past and to a world that an individual has not itself lived but which it can engaged with because of the material sedimentation and organization of lived experiences beyond an individual consciousness. However, writing opens up not only for a distant past but also structures and effects how an ‘attention’ anticipates and makes sense of the future. As I am writing this dissertation I am already bring forth and anticipating a future situation in which this writing is present (read, evaluated, defended). Writing gives access to a past one has not lived and it produces a future that is not yet there but nevertheless effects this present. The system of technological memory (tools, writing, books etc.) is not only present as past experiences but also structures the way in which an ‘attention’ imagines and projects itself into the future. Another example could be photography. As Barthes for example shows, the photograph is not merely an extension of the exactitude of writing. Rather, the specific technical reproducibility of the camera adds to the photograph a certainty of that which is on the photograph; Barthes names

this the ‘that-has-been’ of the photograph (Barthes 1981:76–78). The specific type of reproduction and exteriorization of lived experience that photography enables produces a new relation between past and present. The photographic image transmits the past into the present with an unprecedented reality effect, and, equally not simply producing a new access and relation to the past, in the act of taking a photograph the individual is already in the process of imagining the future as something in which it has access to this present moment (through the photograph). It is in this sense that anticipation as the bring-fourth of and the making-present of the present as well as the projection of the individual into the future is continuously filtered through and organized by media and technology.

The examples given above were writing and photography but this prosthetic nature of anticipation also accounts for the car, the bike, and so forth. The car and bike are objects on the basis of which space is anticipated (the landscape, the city etc.). The experience of distance is configured in relation to the technological environment in which distance can be overcome. However, there is a fundamental distinction between a car, a bike, and a table, and, then writing and photography. One must therefore, according to Stiegler, distinguish between technics as a milieu of epiphylogenetic memory in general and then ‘mnemotechnics’ (Stiegler 2014a:7). With this distinction between ‘epiphylogenetic memory’ introduced in *Technics and Time, 1* and ‘tertiary retention’ as a key concept in *Technics and Time, 2* Stiegler differentiates between exteriorization as *storage* and as *memorization* (Stiegler 2009:8). The former is the transmission of experience and knowledge in *general*. The table, the car etc. is a preservation of lived experiences in objects through which cultural knowledge is transmitted. In the use of the car or the table there is an activation of memory, a re-temporalization of past lived experiences as the object is put into use; but the use of the object is not an activation of a *specific* experience of for example driving. The car as a material object cannot transmit a specific experience of driving a car, it is

not made to transmit specific experiences as such (however this might be changing as there currently is a process where objects like cars and refrigerators become objects of memorization and which I discuss in Chapter 10). This is exactly the difference between tertiary memory in general and then mnemotechnics. With the concept of ‘mnemotechnics’ Stiegler designates a type of objects and tools with which it is possible to transmit *specific* experiences as such, as for example the case with writing and photography. Opposed to material objects such as the table, the car or a piece of clothes – in a broad sense also kinds of media – technologies of memorization possess organizational capacities in their ability to organize and reproduce *specific* lived experiences of the individual and across individuals. It is on the basis of this distinction that I previously have suggested to understand social media platforms as technologies of memory or ‘mnemotechnologies’ (Nielsen 2016).

The cinematic structure of time-consciousness: primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions

To further advance the notion of social media consumption as a system of memory and what consequence it implies for thinking social media platforms as organizational devices of consumption I now turn to Stiegler’s distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions.

In *Technics and Time 2, and 3*, the constitutive role of technological memory is pursued in relation to Husserl’s notion of ‘time-consciousness’, as a matter of how technological memory filters and become part of the temporal flow of consciousness. Time-consciousness is phenomenological time, time understood as lived and experienced by an individual, and an understanding of time being constituted by consciousness (Hansen 2012:55–56). With the concept of ‘time-consciousness’, consciousness itself is understood to be a temporal flux in which the just-now is retained within the present Now as well is the anticipation of the

just-to-happen (Stiegler 2011c:20). Consciousness as a temporal flux means that the fabric of experiences is not perceived as a unity of discrete Nows but an overlapping process in which the just-now is continuously retained within the individual consciousness in the flow time. Stiegler writes:

The formation of at-tention always consists of the psychotechnical accumulation of re-tentions and protentions. Attention is the flow of consciousness, which is temporal and, as such, is created initially by what Husserl analyzes as “primary” retentions – “primary” because they consist of apparent (present) objects whose shapes I retain as though they were themselves present. This retention, called “primary” precisely because it occurs in perception, it then “conditioned” by “secondary” retentions, as the past of the attentive consciousness – as its “experience”. Linking certain primary retentions with secondary retentions, consciousness projects protentions, as anticipation. The constitution of attention results from accumulation of both primary and secondary retentions, and the projection of protentions as anticipation. (Stiegler 2010b:18).

‘Primary retentions’ are what constitute the unity of perception, why experience itself is understood to be the work of a process of memorization. Memorization not understood as act of recollection, of the bringing forth of a distant past no longer there, but as the processes by which an attention links the just-past with the just-to-come (Stiegler 2011c:19). Secondary retentions are memory as recollection, as activation of a past experienced in the present in the form of remembering. Thus, the production of the unity of experience there is filtering process understood as an organization of primary retentions:

[p]rimary retention is also a primary memory *lapse*, a reduction of what *passes by* to a past that retains only what the criteria constituting the secondary retentions allow it to select: secondary retentions inhabit the process of primary retention in advance. (Stiegler 2011c:19).

To the distinction between primary and secondary retentions Stiegler adds, as I have already shown, a third type of memory ‘tertiary retentions’. While Husserl opposes the unity of ‘time-consciousness’ and in general human perception to the material inscription of tertiary retentions, Stiegler argues that the temporal flux of consciousness is continually being filtered and structured by secondary retentions; past experiences i.e. memory as recollection; and tertiary retentions i.e. experiences retained outside the individual. Stiegler writes, ‘tertiary memory always already inhabits my secondary memories as well as my primary memories and my present “itself” (...)’ (Stiegler 2009:42) why conscious life consists of an organization of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions (Stiegler 2014a:52). It is therefore not possible to distil a ‘pure’ experience. On the contrary lived experience and the Now of a consciousness is a product of a relation between primary, secondary, and tertiary memory. This is what was shown with the example of writing and photography however without the primary, secondary, and tertiary scheme. In the context of operationalizing this scheme it is important to remember that the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary retention remains an analytical distinction. We can distinguish between a lived experience and experiences retained outside the individual (i.e. tertiary retention) however phenomenological speaking this distinction is impossible as ‘tertiary retentions play a primordial role in the constitution of consciousness’ as such (Stiegler 2011c:41). This primordial role of objects and technology for human experience and perception means that consciousness is not just a temporal flux – as Husserl argues – but according to Stiegler a temporal flux that essentially functions as a cinematic structure. Stiegler writes:

Consciousness is *already cinematographic* in its principles of selection for primary memories, a selection that relies on criteria furnished by the play of secondary memory and associated tertiary elements, the combination forming a montage through which a unified flux is constructed (as “stream of consciousness”), but which is identical in form to the cinematic flux of an actual film, as temporal object and as result of a constructed montage (...). (Stiegler 2011c:17–18).

Human consciousness is an effect of a selection and filtering process in which disparate elements are organized into a coherent temporal flux through which a particular attention is produced (ibid, 14). The reorganizational relation between the *who* and the *what*, and the originary technicity of the human beings resides in the fact that tertiary memory (objects, images, text etc.) is always-already there in the sense that tertiary retentions and secondary retentions operates within the present of ‘time-consciousness’ and functions as filter devices for how the present is experienced. The relation between retentions and protentions is what constitute a coherent temporal experience within an individual attention despite the Now’s inevitable and constant evaporation (unless of course it is technically exteriorized). The phenomenological Now is an effect of the relation between primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions and it is in this sense that Stiegler argues that ‘technics produce time’ (Stiegler, 2009, p. 18).

The entanglement of processes of organizing and media becomes present here: Social media are *organs* so far, the reproduction of lived experiences (for example through the Instagram platform) is also an organization of what is reproduced, which in turn *organizes* and conditions future experiences; that is, it effects human anticipation. Let me give an example. If I stood in New York looking at the new World Trade Centre what would I then see? In front of me is a skyscraper, but my experience would go well beyond identifying the building in front of me as a skyscraper. What I properly would bring forth in my mind is TV images of the

two Towers of the World Trade Centre falling into the ground. And what would likely come into my mind is where I was when watching the TV images. Now, this is an example of how tertiary retentions (TV images) and secondary retentions (my own memory) filters and produce the present experience of the skyscraper. It is in this sense, that there is no 'pure' experience (of the skyscraper) but the interpretation and making-present of the present goes through the workings of secondary and tertiary retentions. The example can be taken further. As I am standing here in front of the World Trade Centre I want to take a photo of myself and the World Trade Centre: I want to take a selfie. Here, the smartphone and the social media platform on which I want to upload and share the selfie, are examples of tertiary retentions that partakes in the construction of me anticipating the present moment as something to be photographed as a selfie. In this sense, secondary and tertiary retentions shapes 'protentions' and anticipation through which the just-to-come is brought into the present as a selfie moment. It is on the basis of such a conception of social media platforms as organizing human attention that I in chapter 6 analyses Instagram filters not merely as digital tools to adjust, manipulate, and modify photo images but also as perceptual filters that is part of how Instagram as system of memory organizes human experience as such.

2.3 Consumption and disindividuation

What have initially been done is the articulation of the concepts of exteriorization, anticipation, and tertiary retention in relation to Baudrillard's notion of consumption as an organizational and circulatory process that operates beyond the purchase, use, and acquisition of consumer goods. Strictly speaking, and beyond the quasi-transcendental figure it has in Stiegler's philosophy of human becoming, contemporary media consumption, I argue, relates to the technically exteriorization and organization of individual and social experiences as tertiary retention. In this effort to synthesize Baudrillard and Stiegler it is necessary to engage with the theme

of consumption in Stiegler's work as it occupies a central position in his diagnosis of contemporary society.

Modernity as an organization of consumption

As pointed out by several commentators the theme of consumption is foundational of Stiegler's philosophical and political engagement with and critique of contemporary media technologies (Abbinnett 2018; Beardsworth 2010; Howells and Moore 2013; Ieven 2012). Modernity, Stiegler writes, is a historical period defined by an 'organization of the adoption of industrial products, or the organization of consumption' (Stiegler 2014a:61) claiming that we are in a 'consumerist model' that in its scopes is global, hegemonic, and toxic (Stiegler 2014b:17–22). Stiegler's various diagnosis and critique of contemporary society and capitalism predominantly evolves around the destructive effects of the globalization of this consumerist model. Stiegler characterization of society as being in a state of 'disorientation' (Stiegler 2009), his analysis of the present epoch as one of an 'epoch without epoch' (Stiegler 2019), and his argument that we are witnessing a general 'proletarianization of sensibility' that has led to a 'symbolic misery' (Stiegler 2014a): these various diagnoses of the present centres around consumption as the defining, if not, the primary organizing (and destructive) principle of contemporary hyper-industrial societies.

The hegemonic character of the consumerist model is intertwined with and sustained by what he calls the 'programming industry' (following here Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the 'culture industry' (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 119; Adorno, 1991)). The power of the culture industry, Stiegler argues, is linked to the originary cinematic and technological nature of human attention. Stiegler writes:

With the birth of public radio (1920), followed by the television programs (1947), the program industries produce the temporal objects that *coincide in the time of their passing with the time flow of the consciousnesses of*

which they are the objects. This coincidence enables consciousness to *adopt* the time of these temporal objects. The contemporary cultural industries can thus make masses of viewers adopt the time of consumption of toothpaste, cold drink, shoes, cars, etc. This is nearly exclusively how the cultural industry finances itself. (Stiegler 2011b:56)

What the ‘time of consumption of toothpaste, cold drink, shoes, cars’ exactly consist of is not further clarified. Yet, such consumer goods are important in terms of understanding the role Stiegler attains to the cultural industries and how he theorizes the consumer as specific historical configured attention. The culture industry constitutes a specific ‘aesthetic programme’ in the sense that it is a certain historical stage in the construction of human attention (Abbinnett 2018:123). Stiegler writes: ‘In the twentieth century a new aesthetics was established which *functionalized the affective and aesthetic dimension of the individual so as to produce a consumer*’ (Stiegler 2014a:4). That hyper-industrial societies are organized around consumption is expanded into the notion of the consumer as a specific historical configured subject (a consciousness, an attention) that emerges out of the programming industries. This ‘aesthetic programme’ is essentially in the service of the economic model of consumerism as it promotes the urge to purchase more and more consumer goods (Stiegler 2011a:29, 2018:163).

Because industrial temporal objects are able to capture, monopolize, and penetrate attention in ways unequalled in history, in the twentieth century they become industry’s principle products; their mediation fashions certain ways of life in which biopower and biopolitics become secondary matters, no longer any more than aspects of psychopower. Industrial objects’ *economic* power short-circuits the *political* power of the State, taking massive control of behaviours. (Stiegler 2010b:182).

‘Psychopower’ surpasses ‘biopower’, the former operating through the capturing and modulation of attentions made available with the invention of new technological possibilities of recording and transmission in 19th and 20th century such as the radio and television. The State’s effort to organize and optimize the social body and individuals for production decreasingly defines the matrix of knowledge, strategies, and techniques through which subjects are being produced. In the 20th and 21st century it becomes of increasing importance to direct people towards markets of consumption rather than disciplining them towards markets of production (Stiegler, 2010, p. 128). Whereas Baudrillard theorized the intertwinement of capitalism and culture as a semiological process, for Stiegler it becomes a question of an ‘aesthetic programme’, a new form of grammatization of attention emerging from a specific historical conjunction of technology (cinematography, photography, phonography) and economic organization (industrial capitalism organized around consumption) – where media and technology play a significant role in creating the individual-as-consumer and in maintaining the consumerist model.

Proletarianization: consumption as an extension of production

Baudrillard and Stiegler both emphasize the sphere of consumption as a primary organizational force around which post-war societies are structured. In *The System of Objects* and in *The Consumer Society* the system of consumption was for Baudrillard conceived as an extension of the system of production (i.e. the production of needs). As the operation of signs enters into the material production of consumer goods this transforms social, cultural, and economic organization.¹¹ Stiegler’s notion of ‘proletarianization’ operates with a similar interpretation of

¹¹ And in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993) from 1976 Baudrillard argues that the sphere of production falls into the sphere of consumption as labour and money enters the sign system of consumption (Baudrillard 1993a:14).

consumption as an expansion of the system of production. Proletarianization, Stiegler defines as:

(...) the process by which an individual or collective form of knowledge, being formalized by a technique, a machine, or a device, can escape the individual – who thus *loses* this form of knowledge that previously had been *his*. (Stiegler 2014b:23).

Stiegler diagnoses three forms of proletarianization. Firstly, the proletarianization of the producer/worker that involves a loss of the workers ‘savoir-faire’, their know-how to the machine. This produces a worker that adapts to and is organized by the operations of machines and technologies of which it has no knowledge. In the 19th century workers are deskilled and lost their ‘savoir-faire’ (know-how) as it in the process of industrialization was exteriorized into machines a process that, it is argued, continues today with the digitalization of intellectual work (Hutnyk 2012:128). The second form of proletarianization, that of the consumer, begins in the 20th century with the cultural industries and mass media. Consumption, is for Stiegler, an extension of the process of the loss of savoir-fair to the machine. The age of consumption involves a loss of savoir-vivre the loss of how to live well and how to invent one’s own life, a destructive process to which Stiegler ascribes television a key function (ibid, 128-130). The production of industrial temporal objects, cultural models, and commodified ways of living (lifestyles), the tertiary retentions of the cultural industries substitute the family and the state as primary sites of identification and socialization through which attentions are organized (Stiegler 2010b, 2014a). Stiegler’s theorises the consumer as a particular 20th century fostered attention that is the product of a deskilling process that resembles the loss of know-how of the worker in the period of industrialization. Loss of savoir-faire and savoir-vivre leads in the 21st century to a third form of proletarianization, according to Stiegler. The proletarianization of aesthetics and sensibility understood

as the inability to imagine a sense of future communality with others (Stiegler 2014a:3–4). The transition from industrialization to hyper-industrialization is the progressively overtaking and construction of aesthetics by a techno-economic regime organized around consumption (Ieven 2012:77). The consumer appears, in Stiegler’s philosophy, as a specific historical organized attention, the product of an ‘aesthetic programme’ that is both technological and economic. In what follows, I clarify Stiegler’s notion of consumption and the consumer as a specific historical configured attention.

Three versions of the disindividuated consumer

What then characterizes this historical configured attention that Stiegler calls a consumer? I suggest three overlapping traits in Stiegler’s account of the consumer; firstly the consumer is theorized as a ‘synchronized’ and ‘standardized’ attention as it adopts to the time of the industrial temporal objects of television; secondly the consumer is defined temporally, as involving a short-term engagement with objects that is related to the functional separation of the individual as producer and consumer; and thirdly the consumer is configured as profiled and segmented individual whose own capacity to understand and project itself into the future is circumvented by the algorithmic calculations of digital platforms whom anticipate and reasons for it.

Firstly, there is *the consumer as synchronized and standardized attention*. With the globalization of media technologies and the emerging global systems of broadcasting in the 20th century it becomes possible to reach millions of people around the world with the same content presented to them at the same time. This is by Stiegler described as a process of standardization and synchronization of attentions:

Viewers, who are synchronized with each other by repeatable watching the same programmes as one another, tend thereby to find their secondary retentions homogenized. In this way, they tend to lose the singularity of the criteria by which they select the primary retentions that they see in the programmes that they interiorize, their protentions being transformed little by little into behavioural stereotypes *concretely expressed in the form of purchasing behaviour*. (Stiegler 2019:23) (my emphasis).

The standardized cultural models and contents of the cultural industry becomes stereotypes to which the imagination of individuals conform. If people globally experience the same things at the same time the past of the individual (i.e. secondary retentions) on the basis of which it projects itself into the future, is standardized. Industrialization of tertiary retentions (movies, TV programmes etc.) becomes global and comes to form the basis of the selection of future primary retentions. Stiegler argues, this process destroys the singularity of the individual as its past – on the basis of which it can individuate itself through the collective – is no longer its own but is identical with that of millions of others. The consumer emerges as synchronized and massified consciousness that conforms to the time of the temporal objects of the cultural industries.

Secondly, *the consumer as involving a short-term engagement with objects*. Recognizing transformations in the exterior milieu of technology notable with digital media and the rise of social media platforms Stiegler's critique of the 'programming industries' progress from a critique of 'synchronization' towards a critique of the destructive effects of the imperative to consume goods. Stiegler writes:

His [the consumer's] relation to objects of consumption is intrinsically destructive: it is founded on disposability, that is, on disinvestment. This disinvestment releases a destructive drive, whose consequences (...) is the

systematic and destructive generalization and articulation of the drive-based behaviours of consumers, as well as speculators, such that systematic stupidity is engendered. (Stiegler 2014b:17–18).

The consumer as particular organized attention is defined in relation to a distinction between drives and desire that respectively represent a short-term and long-term engagement with object. The figure of the consumer emerges as a certain temporal relation to objects the effect of a system and industrial model that has a ‘structurally short-termist tendency (..)’ (Stiegler 2010a:91) and is defined by endless consumption promoted by the cultural industries that services the consumerist model. The consumer is one that has been excluded from the production of culture (of symbols, art, language) reduced to a passive consumer of industrial produced temporal objects. Commentating on Stiegler’s work John Hutnyk writes:

(...) for Stiegler, a long-circuit means the use of technical prostheses to produce transindividual knowledge and desire, whereas short-circuit refers to the passive fulfilment of drives. (Hutnyk 2012:145).

The techno-capitalist complex organized around consumption turns the libidinal economy of desire into pure and simple drives. This process is what Stiegler describes as process going from singularities to particularities:

I am the relationship with my objects inasmuch as it is singular. But the relationship with the standardized objects of industry is ‘profiled’ and categorized into particularisms which, for the purposes of marketing, constitute market segments. In this way, the singular is transformed into the particular (...) (Stiegler 2014a:5).

What Stiegler points at is not a deterministic feature inherent in the nature of digital technologies but that the technical system today is subsumed an economic system

of capitalist production that effectively makes technology and media destructive of social systems.¹²

Thirdly, *the consumer is an effect of the algorithmic anticipation and profiling of social media platforms*. With the emerging of what Stiegler calls ‘reticular technologies’ or ‘relational technologies’ such as social media platforms (Stiegler 2011a:29) he argues these new digital technologies provides new opportunities for collective individuation. With mass media and the cultural industries there was a build in functional separation between producers and consumer of cultural symbols. These new digital media platforms create new opportunities for participation, elaboration, and corporation:

Whereas the industrial production of analogue tertiary retentions massified psychic secondary retentions by replacing them with standardized collective secondary retentions, thereby eliminating the dia-chronic play that primary retentions make possible psychic individuals [are today] themselves the producers of tertiary retentions (...). Reticulated digital tertiary retention, then, gives the appearance of being essentially participatory, collaborative and contributory. (Stiegler 2019:25).

There is a new potential with new media platforms because the asymmetry between those that produce and those that consume cultural symbols can potentially be overcome. But for Stiegler this possibility has not yet materialized itself as a genuine process of collective individuation. On the contrary social media platforms produce another kind of standardization and automatization.

What is massified today is no longer the criteriology by which primary retentions are selected, which are achieved by standardizing secondary

¹² As we will see in Part II Chapter 5 Baudrillard developed a notion of ‘personalization’ that describes a similar process.

retentions: it is the formation of circuits between secondary retentions via intensive computing, capable of treating gigabytes of data simultaneously, so as to extract statistical and entropic patterns that short-circuit all genuine circuits of transindividuation – where the latter would be always (...) singular, and as such incalculable: intractable. (Stiegler 2019:26).

The problem is no longer that of the standardization of memory but that of media platforms anticipating and selecting through profiling and data-gathering what the individual encounters as it enters into platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. That is the delegation of anticipation from the individual to platforms, a question I will return to and discuss in Chapter 8.

Consumption as the destruction of the symbolic

In *The Thought of Stiegler; capitalism, technology and the politics of Spirit* (2018) Ross Abbinnett makes one of the rare attempts to compare respectively Baudrillard and Stiegler's critique of the contemporary techno-capitalist complex (Abbinnett 2018:57-62/128-144). Abbinnett's reading is centred around the notion of the 'symbolic' in respectively Stiegler and Baudrillard's critique of the contemporary constellation of capitalism and technology. For both 'the symbolic' is that which is distorted, destroyed, and exhausted as the techno-economic system expands, yet their concept of the symbolic is not identical. In *The System of Objects* Baudrillard plays on a distinction between the symbolic and semiotic organization of objects. In the symbolic order the object is characterized by the logic of ambivalence. The object comes to embody a direct and immediate relationships from which it receives its symbolic and singular character. This is opposed to the object as sign in which the meaning of the object is established through the differential order of the code and therefore outside the concrete relationship. However, in *The Consumer Society* the symbolic is not directly opposed to the semiotic organization of society but is what constantly haunts it and is the energy on which a semiotic organization can

rise as such (Butler 1999:81–83). In his later writing, the symbolic is that which cannot be rationalized and as such stands as a counterforce to the dream of a perfect functionalized technological society – the moment of Singularity and AI – why the symbolic, from a Stieglerian perspective of originary technicity, according to Abbinnett, comes to stand as a kind of fetishized ‘pre-technological truth of human sociality’ (Abbinnett 2018:136–37). For Stiegler, the symbolic order is not some pre-technological organization of social relationships. The material inscription of lived experiences into matter – that is technics – is what opens up the possibility of culture as such. Abbinnett writes:

The concept of the symbolic order that informs Stiegler’s critique is based on the originary experience of anxiety, for the lack of substantive being which is the fate of humanity after the fault of Epimetheus, is constantly to seek satisfaction in the ideal objects of ethical life (morality, love, patriotism, religiosity and beauty). This is the ‘great addiction’ of the human soul to its epiphylogenetic inheritance of spirit. (Abbinnett 2018:60).

The symbolic (which encompasses language, art, religion and so forth) arises out an originary lack of being and is continuously manifested in the technical process of exteriorization. The symbolic is only possible and sustained by the intergenerational transmission of lived experience in technical objects that constitutes the technical nature of the already-there of the human being and manifest itself in certain aesthetics programmes. For Stiegler it is that originary and necessary connection between the social, symbolic, and technical systems of inscription that the techno-capitalist system in hyper-industrial societies of endless consumption of consumer goods destroys. The short-term engagement with objects characterized by the consumer and the speculator and the acceleration of economic exchange fostered

by a capitalist system in demand of surplus value leads to a destruction of the domain of the symbolic and therefore to a ‘symbolic misery’. As Abbinnett writes:

(...) the dominant form of social attachment [today] is proletarianized desire; labile object attachments stand in for the established orthographic forms of social engagement, which has led to a state of moral stupidity (...) among the citizens of hyperindustrial society. This regime of proletarianized desire has arisen from the demands of technoscientific production. (Abbinnett 2018:162).

The consumer is theorised as a proletarianized individual with a scattered possibility of symbolic attachment to a collective We, a project, as the individual is constantly being urged to consume more objects, a condition sustained by the fact that socialization goes through the cultural industries whose primary function is to create the condition for a never-ending consumption of consumer goods.

To Stiegler, the consumer is a historical configured attention; it is a consciousness and as such a figure with a certain form of attentiveness. It is an attentiveness that Stiegler defines temporal characterized by a short-term relation to objects. The cultural industries service this short-term engagement with objects as it is here new lifestyles are continually promoted and substituted by new ones. The objects of consumption of this consumer attention – itself the product of consumption of media content – is for Stiegler material consumer goods. The human consciousness and attentions of the consumer is being organized as it adapts to the temporal objects of the programming industries that directs it towards the consumption of consumer goods. Furthermore, the consumer and the order of consumption is theorized as an ontological condition of ‘proletarianization’. The consumer emerges an individual deprived of its knowledge of how to live; her *savoir-vivre*. In the consumer society, proletarianization effects not only a certain class of people but expands, democratically so to speak, to the whole of society as

a general proletarianization of sensibility. The consumer is a condition of ‘thwarted individuation’ as Bram Ieven writes:

When Stiegler talks about a consumer or a consumer society he is not referring to sociological concepts, but to ontological figures of thwarted individuation. Hyper-industrial society has made individuation and group formation impossible and replaced it with consumers. (Ieven 2012:91–92).

This notion of the consumer as an ontological figure of ‘thwarted individuation’ is, as I have argued, theorized in different terms; as a synchronization and standardization of attention, involving a functional separation of the producers and consumers in the symbolic order; as a short-term engagement with objects; and in terms of a construction of an automated sociality through algorithmic profiling and segmentation of users all of which is related to the programming industries that sustain and expand the consumerist model. And it is this theorization of consumption as an ontological condition of disindividuation that limits the possibility to think with Stiegler a contemporary and ‘true memory consumerism’. For Stiegler, the essential aspect of the cultural industries is the organization of attention towards the consumption of consumer goods. Attention is turned into a market of competition that can be accessed, manipulated, sold, and directed towards certain products. Such a notion of the role of media technologies of attention is present in a number of books on the topic of attention economy and economization of attention (Beller 2006; Bueno 2017; Lanham 2006). Although we might contend that the consumer is an attention that is configured in the process by which it consumes temporal objects such a notion remains attached firmly attached to the purchase of consumer goods. In this sense, the kind of consumption and consumer that Stiegler describes remains attached to the consumer society of the 20th century. I have already pointed out that this form of consumption – which Baudrillard tells us functions as a system of signs is still prevailing and is one aspect of contemporary

social media consumption. But what is the interest here is less how the material consumer goods now circulate on new digital media platforms and how they are profiled to meet the intended attentions. It is to expand the question and the notion of consumption beyond that of consumer goods and into the realm of individual and social experiences through platforms are becoming a generalized object of consumption.

Conclusion

There is an organizational thinking at the heart of Stiegler's philosophical project of thinking the co-constitutive relation between technology and human aesthetics that, as I have argued, provides a frame for conceptually grasping social media platforms as particular organizational technologies of structuring and ordering of human attention. If 'media organize' in the sense that media technologies are devices of social ordering that effect social and political imagination (Martin 2019:12), they are to be understood to partly do so by impacting and organizing the relation between primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions because this is organizing the possibilities of human anticipate and making sense of the future. Stiegler's notion of technics as a process of exteriorization allows for a novel perspective on and a general framing of social media platforms, features, and functions – and on the proliferation of individual and social life as digital content – as a distinct and contemporary phenomenon of technologically organizing individual and social experiences. With this framing, social media platforms are first of all approached as different 'systems of memory' that allows for and are technologically organizing the circulation of a *Now* of an individual. Whether this *Now*, through technologies such as smartphones, GPS devices and so forth, is a transformation and discretization of the movement of the body into numbers and graphs (typically the case with sports application such as the social medium Strava), or if it is a moment or activity that is turned into a picture or a video (characterizing

for example Instagram), or into text (for example Twitter), what we have is the platform as an organizational construct that generalizes and systematically organizes individual and social experiences, activities, and relations into objects of consumption. It is a form of organizing that I suggest involves *the transformation of individual and social experiences into objects of consumption happening as people 'capture', 'share', and 'like' everyday life situations conceptually framed as a process of exteriorisation*. Social media platforms are devices that organizes human experiences, and what is repeatedly given to us is the possibility to organize ourselves technologically. Despite Stiegler's own emphasis on consumption as a primary organizational force in contemporary society permeating individual and social life there remains in relation to the present aim of reconceptualising consumption a limitation to his notion of the consumption. Stiegler's notion of 'consumption' and 'the consumer' as a specific historical figuration of human attention remains therefore to be developed. What can be taken from Stiegler is his attention to consumption as involving an aesthetic organization of human attention and the understanding of this as an organizational process of configuring human attention through the structuring of primary, secondary, tertiary retention. In prolongation of Stiegler's thematization of consumption as a construction of attention through technological processes of organizing primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions I frame social media consumption as a form of consumption related to the technical process of exteriorizing and organizing individual and social experiences as tertiary retentions. Reading Baudrillard's notion of consumption as a system and an organizational and circulatory process through Stiegler's distinction between three forms of memory it now possible to expanded our conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption: social media platforms are 'systems of memory' where individual and social experience through different features and functions are reproduced and thereby organized and consumed as tertiary retention.

Chapter 3. Platforms, Consumption, and Memory

In light of this reading of Baudrillard's notion of consumption and Stiegler's theory of technics I have advanced a conceptual framing of the proliferation of media platforms, digital activities, and content as a generalized and systematic organization and circulation of individual and social experiences as technological memory. We shall now revisit the different theorizations and conceptualizations of the platform briefly outlined in the introduction, and why social media platforms are a privilege vantage point for attending to this tertiarizing organization and consumption of individual and social experiences. Central to this, is the notion of the platform as an emerging and predominant organizational form that is different than that of the network (Beyes 2020).

3.1 Platform as an organizational form

The term platform (similar to that of the network) thrives both as a self-descriptive term in the sense that it is a term strategically deployed by media corporations (as pointed out by Tarleton Gillespie), and as a term and concept used to capture a particular organizational configuration that is technological, economical, managerial, discursive, and social in nature.

'Platforms', Steinberg writes, 'are everywhere': as social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram), as streaming platforms (Netflix, Spotify), and as e-commerce platforms (Amazon, Alibaba) just to mention a few (Steinberg 2019:1). If the network was the key term of late 20th and early 21st century, then platform is the keyword of our time (ibid, 7). Sociological and social theoretical conceptions and diagnosis of society such as for example *The Rise of The Network Society* (Castells 2009), *The Wealth of Networks* (Benkler 2006), and *Networked publics* (Boyd 2011) are followed by notions of 'the platform society' (Dijck et al. 2018), 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek 2016), 'platformed sociality' (Dijck 2013), and 'platform economy' (Steinberg 2019) pointing to an expansion of platforms into the

strata of contemporary society and with its new forms of organizing. While the latter depictions not necessarily dismiss the network as a conceptual prism or method of analysis, nor assert that networked forms of organizing have vanished altogether, the rise of the term platform foregrounds and suggests a different organizational form than that of the network (Beyes 2020). The displacement of the term network with platform is, among scholars, being perceived and related to the transformation of the Internet into a commercialized infrastructure and enterprise. Steinberg writes, that while the ‘network, which offered a sense of openness, freedom, and rhizomatic extensivity (...) the platform concept is generally applied [by scholars] to the definitive closure of the network, the reigning in of a moment of perceived freedom that the open web was to offer’ (Steinberg 2019:22). We now turn to conceptions of platform as a particular technology of organizing.

Platforms as organizational devices of sociality

Media scholar José Van Dijck’s influential work on platforms theorizes social media platforms as social, technological, and economical constructs (Dijck 2013). Platforms, Van Dijck writes, are ‘programmable digital architecture[s] (...) geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data’ (Dijck et al. 2018:4). Social media platforms are technological constructs that encode social activities and interactions. The ‘like-button’, ‘friending’ and ‘following’ are examples of how social relations and interactions are programmed and integrated into the data structures of social media platforms (Dijck 2013:13). This encoding process is social and economic as the technological encoding and programming of social activities and relations also reflects intentions and strategic choices of platform owners (for example to stimulate more interaction or direct users towards certain content) (ibid, 29). Specific to the platform is that social activities that hitherto produced limited material traits are now through a variety of functions integrated into these platforms

that program them with a certain objective; a transformation where ‘networked communication’ and ‘participatory culture’ evolves into ‘platformed sociality’ and a ‘culture of connectivity’ (Dijck 2013:4–5). In this process of mediating and encoding human activities platforms render ‘(...) people’s activities formal, manageable, and manipulable, enabling platforms to engineer the sociality in people’s everyday routines.’ (ibid, 12). Van Dijck conceptually frames platforms as mediators rather than intermediaries – mediators between users and between users and organizations – that shape and construct the relations it enables rather than ‘merely facilitating them’ and does so according to platform specific logics (ibid, 29). Platforms are in that sense active participants in the construction of sociality, why the ‘social’ of social media must not be taken as existing prior to but rather as constructed through and as an effect of the particular organizational architecture of platforms (Couldry and Van Dijck 2015). Van Dijck attends to platforms, in the words of Stiegler, as technologies of grammatization, as she points to how the digital inscription of social relations through these platforms necessarily implies an organization of the relations that is mediated. Van Dijck identifies three overall mechanisms that characterize online platforms: *datafication* as the ability of platforms to quantify and render into data aspects of the world that was previously not quantifiable (Dijck et al. 2018:33); *commodification* as the ability of platforms to transform online and offline objects and activities into tradable commodities (ibid, 37); *selection* which is the ability of platforms and users themselves to filter, curate and ‘personalize’ content that in turn trigger and shape interactions online (ibid, 40). These three mechanisms are central in Van Dijck’s conceptions of platforms as organizational construct and in Chapter 6 we attend to the question of ‘personalization’.

The rise and expansion of social media platforms beyond specific websites has led to the notion of platformization. Media scholar Anne Helmond explicitly links ‘platformization’ to the transformation and expansion of media

technologies such as Facebook that goes from being social network *sites* that one enter to become larger infrastructures as they are offering their APIs (application programming interface) for the development of websites and applications (Helmond 2015:5). Platformization is understood as a technical transformation of the web that has emerged with the expansion and success of media technologies such as Facebook that expand logics of datafication and commodification of online social interactions into how websites are developed and constructed (ibid). The like button being an example of this extension of platforms into the fabric of web (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). Thus, if a defining aspect of social media platforms consist in a transformation of what ‘used to be informal and ephemeral manifestation of social life (...) into formalized inscriptions’ embedding them in ‘the larger economy of wider publics’ (Dijck 2013:6–7), then by way of tertiarizing and bringing into circulation the ‘ephemeral manifestation of social life’ the latter also becomes a generalized object for others to consume. While these tertiarizing functions and the integration of individual experiences into a variety of platforms and webpages are not confined to social media platforms (for example most newspapers have commenting function) these nevertheless occupies a privileged position as the generalized object of consumption and circulation are individual and social experiences. Helmond’s argument of a platformisation of the web further underlines as platform are primary vehicles in the extension of these tertiarizing functions into the web – the like button form example being a standardized form of tertiarizing. Social media platforms as an infrastructural technology that expands into the web and produces the condition for proliferation of human experiences as technological memory while at the same time being *systems* that manage this proliferation.

The platform as a new logic of capitalist accumulation

With the diagnostic term ‘surveillance capitalism’ Shoshana Zuboff describes a contemporary techno-economic complex of media platforms, capitalist mode of production, and process of organizing. Facebook and Google are technologies that collect data about human experience in order to modify and intervene in human life with, as she writes, a ‘radical indifference’ towards anything but economic profit (Zuboff 2019:377). Zuboff’s attention to the extraction and rendering of human experience into data can be read as a critique of the organizational logic of scripting and rendering human experience profitable by means of collecting and monitoring increasingly more aspects of human life, a logic that permeates contemporary platforms such as Google and Facebook (Beyes 2020). Similar is Nick Srnicek’s theorization of platforms as an emerging firm and business model attentive to platforms as creating infrastructures of relations (for example between users and users and organization) while at the same time monitoring and rendering these relations into data (Srnicek 2016:44). Srnicek distinguish between five different types of platforms where social media platforms fall under the category of ‘advertising platforms’ (ibid, 49). Both Zuboff and Srnicek captures how a contemporary constellation of a capitalist logic of accumulation and digital technologies have evolved into an organizational complex that renders human experiences and relations profitable. How this new organizational complex reconfigures the sphere of consumption and relations to objects – remains in large outside the scope of their attention. In *Platform Capitalism*, social media platforms fall under the advertising platform and are therefore foremost analysed as a specific business model. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* the question of consumption tends to be confined to how the use and functions of media technologies involves and forces the consumer to accept certain terms of use that allows for and is the condition for the extraction, collection, and commodification of human experiences in the first place. Thus, consumption is primarily understood as the process by the

use of media technologies enables the process of extracting, capturing, and commodifying ‘human experiences’ with the intended purpose of selling advertisement or controlling future behaviour. How the relation to and experience of objects (that is: consumption) is being transformed through this digitalization of objects and human interactions – which Zuboff and Srnicek ascribe an essential role in contemporary capitalism – remains in large outside the scope of respectively *Platform Capitalism* and *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. This does not undermine the perspective they bring to the contemporary intertwining of media platforms and capitalism but it nevertheless points towards how this organizational complex of media platforms and capitalist logic of rendering human experience productive is also a process of rendering human experience *consumptive*.

Platforms as organizational technologies of prosumption

In critical media studies the notion of ‘prosumption’ and ‘attention economy’ have been applied to understand the process by which social media platforms valorize and profit from user activities (Charitsis 2016; Fuchs 2012, 2014; Ritzer 2014; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Zulli 2018). A pertinent question is how distinctions between work and free-time and between activities of production and that of consumption are being blurred by social media platforms (Beverungen et al. 2015; Charitsis 2016; Fuchs 2014). It is for example argued that with social media platforms ‘prosumption’ (i.e. the inability to separate processes of production from processes of consumption and vice versa) is at the very core of contemporary economic value creation (Charitsis 2016; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). This is why social media platforms are emblematic of the contemporary economic value creation. A key debate is how consumers’ use of platforms are rendered productive; productive in the economic sense of term and productive in the sense that user’s themselves produce the content as that which is the object of consumption (i.e. user-generated content). In this context platforms are foremost taken as organizational

technologies of prosumption where focus is on how the *use* and *services* of social media platforms involves processes of commodification and valorization (of attention, of social interactions, of free time etc.) and how the use (i.e. consumption) foremost is integrated into structures of production (of value, content, of the services, of the medium itself). Consumption is perceived and theorized primarily as an active moment in the production of economic value. Following the reading of Baudrillard's notion of consumption as a broader system of experiences and practices through which human experience and anticipation are configured I suggest broadening the attention beyond that of processes of commodification and valorization that occurs in the 'use' of social media platforms to also notice how social media content (i.e. tertiary retention) is technologically organized and the human experiences and relations that emerges from this. Thus while work on social media consumption and production has been explored as the production and consumption of data, of time and/or of attention (see for example Charitsis, 2016; Fuchs, 2014; Herman, 2013; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) revealing how the consumer is integrated into the production of content, of value and so forth, the reconceptualization of consumption through a reading of Baudrillard's notion of consumption and Stiegler's theory of technics can develop and further qualify our conception of social media platforms as technologies of consumption. In Part III, Chapter 9, we will return to this question of prosumption in light of the analysis of Instagram in Part II.

Platforms as managerial devices

In *Platform Economy* (2019) Mark Steinberg encourages us to think foremost of platforms as 'apparatuses for the management of relations — economic but also social—allowing platforms to insert themselves into any and all relationships' (Steinberg 2019:120). Steinberg, connects the rise of platforms to the emergence of a new marketing strategy and thus involving a re-configuration of how cultural

commodities are produced. In that context, Steinberg suggests, three historical phases of consumption. A phase based on marketing consumer goods based on needs and objective functions, which is replaced by a strategy that infuses and produces the object as sign. Sign based marketing was then replaced by narrative marketing in which it is not a specific object that is branded but the universe in which the object exists. With platforms, narrative marketing is developed into what Steinberg defines as ‘contents’ marketing (Steinberg 2019:54–62).

If the model for media production is no longer a discrete commodity (a book) but rather a trans-media commodity array (book-anime-game-toy, and so forth), a word is needed to describe this medium-agnostic sequence. *Contents* seems to be the ideal candidate (...). (Steinberg 2019:65). Contents, then, is a ‘schema’ rather than a mere substance. It is a form of packaging, a filter that endows entertainment goods with economic value. (...) ultimately my claim is that contents functions as a form of discursive and economic packaging that endows cultural entertainment goods with economic value, preparing them for platform intermediation (...). (Steinberg 2019:62/64).

With ‘contents’ marketing Steinberg describe the process by which consumption of cultural goods transverse different media. Taking Steinberg’s point, a bit further we can say that he, similar to Baudrillard, understands consumption not as the consumption of singular content, but that consumption involves an ordering and sequencing of multiple content into ‘contents’. Platform consumption involves a reconfiguration of relations to objects in a way in which it is not a relation to a single object but involves multiple objects as they are organized and sequenced across different media platforms. While Steinberg in this context does not speak specifically about social media consumption, the conception of platforms as managerial constructs that ‘shape us and the relations we enter into with other

people, companies, and objects' (Steinberg 2019:3) is sensitive to the platform as organizational form that reorganizes process of consumption, as attention is directed towards how platforms as managerial devices induces different relations to objects and how this implies a sequencing and organization of objects. I shall return to Steinberg's notion of 'contents' in the analysis of the stream-like organization of content in Chapter 5.

3.2. Towards a conception of platforms as organizational technologies

We have by now acknowledged that the organizational form of the platform, being technical, social, managerial, discursive, and economic in nature, partakes in the immense project of rendering human experience and the entire social field productive, and in shaping relations to objects, to people, and to organizations. The predominance of the platform as organizational form also requires an attention to the reconfiguration and transformation of processes of consumption, why we now and in light of the notion of the 'consumption of memory' developed in Chapter 1 and 2 expand on the framing of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption.

I have suggested that Baudrillard's theory of consumption can be read as a theorization of a broader organizational process and system that brings objects (in the broad sense of the term) into circulation and that this involves a structuring of human experiences, relations, and practices. Let us then consider the consumer society and Baudrillard's theorization hereof first of all as a particular form in which objects are organized and brought into circulation. Baudrillard present us with the following theory. Objects can circulate as symbols according to a principle of *ambivalence*. It is here difficult to speak of objects as such as they attain no separate value than symbolizing a relationship; objects circulate as use values through the medium of utility and according to a logic of *functionality*; objects circulate as exchange values organized by a logic of *equivalence*; objects circulate as signs as a

medium for social prestige and social meaning organized by a logic of *difference*. These four spheres of value cannot be separated as if there were a historical stage for each. But in the consumer society the object's use-value and its exchange-value is caught up in the differential logic of signs that defines the consumptive relation to objects. In the consumer society objects circulate as signs and it is increasingly through the differential play of signs that objects get an exchange value. In this order, the individual is permeated by a code of differences according to which the individual comes to experience and express itself as an individual and unique human being. In this perspective Baudrillard's early work is an attempt to describe how the organizational logic of differentiation (signs) operates at the level of everyday experience of objects, in the reproduction of the economic system of capitalism, and how it is part of mass media transforming culture. For sure, this semiological organization is still prevailing. However, the digital proliferation and circulation of photo image, videos, texts, likes, and so forth predominantly taking place through different social media platforms brings forth the question: what has become an object of consumption through these platforms, and whether it can still be approach as essentially a semiological organization and configuration of objects, social relations, and human experiences? Is it similar to TV an operation of disarticulation of 'the real into successive and equivalent signs'? It is from such a vantage point, that I have drawn attention to the present media condition of proliferation; what has become a primary object of circulation in and through for example social media platforms? What is it that is continuously produced, consumed, recycled, and brought into circulation? And how can we conceptually and analytically grasp this phenomenon?

Following Baudrillard's theorization and analysis of consumption as a system related to social organization and the use of the term object rather than commodity the question of social media consumption is positioned beyond questions of commodification. In prolongation of the notion of consumption as

implying a wider system that organizes social relations, experiences, and practices I am not advancing such a perspective on social media platforms nor are we to confine social media consumption to the process by which, in the use of social media platforms, human experiences are rendered productive. It is in this context that I have proposed the relevance of the concepts of ‘exteriorization’ and ‘tertiary retention’ as means to understand platforms as organizational technologies of consumption as they point toward how the object of consumption in and through social media platforms is configured in the material and technical reproduction and exteriorization of individual and social life. I have suggested that in the activities of tracking, liking, sharing, and so forth taking place through various forms of technological devices and media platforms it is individual and social experience that becomes a primary object of consumption, as all kind of experiences are technologically exteriorized. Whereas the system of consumption was conceived by Baudrillard as a semiological configuration of the object infusing it with sign-value, with the conception of social media platforms as systems of memory I suggest consumption in this context is related to *technical means* by which primary retentions are organized as tertiary retentions on different social media platforms. In the context of social media, system means that the analytical attention is on how a variety of features and functions (that is tertiary forms) organize and relate individual and social experiences to each other. That is, at *the level of consumption* the analytical attention is directed towards how lived experiences are organized through a variety of features and function. It is, I argue, exactly in the tertiary organization of lived experiences that the question of a system of social media consumption. Hence, if the system of object means that it is never an individual object but a relation of objects, from which a consumption relation emerges then what we mean by a social media platform being a system of memory is that what is being consumed is *the process by which lived experiences are organized and reproduced as technological memory rather than particular experiences*

themselves. When I say that it is tertiary retentions rather than it being content that is organized, it is to stress that the photo image, videos, and how they are organized on social media platforms is not simply taken as representations of something lived, of social experiences but part of an organizational process of ordering individual and social life. Throughout the analysis of Instagram in Part II it is explored, how this might have consequences not only for what constitutes consumption on the specific platform Instagram, but more importantly how this reconfigures individual and social experience. So, we move from a conception of consumption as a structural and differential logic of signs to that of the notion of social media consumption as related to a systematic organization and circulation of lived experiences as tertiary retentions with Instagram as an exemplary platform for this kind of phenomenon. This, then, is the first conceptual interventions that contributes to a conceptual framing of the proliferation of individual and social experiences as digital content, to the conception platforms as technologies of organizing, and to the phenomenon of contemporary consumption. It is within such initial conception of the phenomenon of social media – bringing here the work of Stiegler (technics as memory) and Baudrillard (consumption as a (semiological) organization and circulation of objects) together – that Instagram is explored as an organizational technology of consumption. Having established this general perspective, I can now turn to Instagram as a particular technology of organizing consumption.

Part II: Instagram as an organizational technology of consumption

To further investigate social media consumption and platforms as an organizational technology of consumption, I have chosen Instagram as an object of study. Instagram was first introduced in October 2010 as an iPhone application created for sharing images (Laestadius 2016:574). In April 2012 Facebook bought Instagram for USD 1 billion without Instagram's original developers having applied for any patents. By 2014 Instagram had reached 150 million monthly active users, a number that had increased to over 1 billion by 2018 (Constine 2018; Zulli 2018:140). While Instagram started out as a photo-sharing platform, it has since evolved to include the launch of a video-sharing platform (IGTV) in 2018. In 2016 Instagram had more than 25 million business accounts (Instagram 2017a).

I have chosen Instagram as an object of study not merely because it is a popular platform that has nonetheless been overshadowed by platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in academic research, but also because it is a platform that revolves primarily around the sharing of visual images and videos. Although not an exclusive feature of Instagram, the visual nature of the platform reflects a key aspect and tendency of contemporary digitally mediated cultures: individual and social life today is increasingly organized by and constituted through the production, circulation, and consumption of visual images. As has been asserted by multiple media scholars, it is in particular the proliferation of images and the growth in image-sharing that characterizes our current media landscape. The fact that Instagram is a platform created for and first launched as a smartphone application (first on the iPhone then the Android) also reflects the current mobile internet centred on the smartphone as a key technological device. Retrospectively, the platform also became an appealing springboard for exploring social media consumption as the evolution of its functions and features is entangled with the branding and promotion of products and businesses. As Instagram formulates it: 'Bringing you closer to the people and things you love' (Instagram 2020a), which

indicates how individual and social experiences has become what I will call an alibi and a function for promoting and bringing material goods and brands into circulation.

Part II unfolds as follows: the first chapter, Chapter 4, clarifies the approach to and construction of Instagram as an empirical object of study. The next three chapters each analyse different aspects of Instagram as a system of production and consumption memory. Chapter 5 addresses the platform/smartphone/stream relation, providing an analysis of the platform as a material setting in which lived experiences are temporally organized as tertiary retention. This temporal organization is further explored in an analysis of the Archive and Stories features. Because a central aspect of the Instagram platform is the ability that it enables to adjust, play with, and alter photo images, Chapter 6 focuses on such functions and features – in particular the filter-function - which I frame as a question of personalization. Chapter 7 is focused on a particular genre of photo image: the selfie. Although not explicitly a technical means of organizing, the selfie is a generalised form of tertiarizing and bringing the face and body into circulation and thus an example of how the individual is constituted as an object of circulation and consumption in and through Instagram.

But before our journeying into the platform, I will briefly describe how I have approached (and thus constructed) Instagram as an object of study.

Chapter 4: Constructing Instagram as object of study

My study of Instagram consisted of observations conducted on Instagram in the winter of 2018 through a researcher profile I created on the platform. Over a two-month period I followed profiles and hashtags, scrolling my way through images and videos. My intention with this research was not to become a native on the platform, and my observations were therefore those of an observer, not a participant. To gain a knowledge and sense of Instagram as an organizing device, I also turned my attention to the documents, news, and information Instagram provides to its users and stakeholders. My observations of the platform's user interface were thus supplemented with a collection of official Instagram blog posts on <https://about.instagram.com/blog>, where updates and changes to the platform are announced. This webpage functions both as a blog for press releases (news, updates, etc.) and as a timeline of Instagram's history (although this has now disappeared from the webpage). The blog is publicly accessible through the Instagram homepage, which is to say that, unlike the Instagram platform, access is not contingent on one creating an Instagram account. I read through the updates about the platform design and the interface, generally taking note of news related to the Instagram enterprise, but more particularly of the new features and functions announced. For a researcher that had not used Instagram, news about updates of the interface and app proved a valuable introduction to the platform. The historical timeline outlining the development of the interface and app provided information about key functions and features of the medium, when they had been integrated, and how they had developed over time. These updates provided insight into not only changes to the platform but also to how Instagram itself observes its users and speaks about itself.

As such my interest here was and continues to be less in individual Instagram users, uses and experiences and more in the platform itself and its structuring logics as it pertains to the intended (and perhaps less intended)

organization of user experience. Informed by the literature I read alongside carrying out observations three particular features of the platform became prominent: *the stream* as a way in which content is temporally organized, *Instagram filters* as a way of personalizing images, and the genre of the *selfie image*. Against the backdrop of organization theory and the theorists of media and organization that I included in my reading – i.e. Baudrillard and Stiegler – all these features seemed to contain organizing qualities and that of a nature that challenged conventional ideas about how we can understand the relation between organization, consumption, and technology.

Fragments: the stream, Instagram filters, and the selfie

As I pointed out in the Introduction media scholars point to methodological, analytical, and theoretical challenges related to the condition of digital proliferation. This technological proliferation and the increasingly digitally mediatized world effect the analytical conditions and thus the means by which to proceed with one's research, one's method, so to speak, for getting into and interrogating the contemporary social media 'system'. In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Frederic Jameson describes a condition of the present as imposing a specific aesthetic experience, as that of being 'exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed'; a condition that affects the very possibility and role of analysis and theory as the contemporary course of the world seems to resist any 'adequate figuration' – a statement in which Jodi Dean's assertion of the increasingly impossibility of grasping 'anything like a system' reverberates (Dean 2010:3; Jameson 1991:413). This condition destabilizes any external and stable plane of reference that would have provided any reassurance and certainty from which an analysis could proceed and theory be developed. As Baudrillard writes (Baudrillard 1993a:5) in a similar vein one eventually ends up in a state where it is impossible to

separate the work of theory from that of hypothesis – a fundamental assertion that the course of things, the development of the world effects the condition, possibility, and strategy of analysis itself. Although this goes for all objects of study, this description particularly encapsulates the ever-evolving and expanding object of social media platforms. This is not only because social media platforms are technologies that can change overnight and are thus slippery objects of study, but also because we humans let these technologies organize much of our lives – researchers or not – and hence, the ground from which we can approach and apprehend the world around us.

The strategy for dealing with this condition for analysis and theorization has been to isolate specific Instagram functions. Entailed in this strategy is that I have constructed the organization of content in *streams*, *Instagram filters*, and the genre of *the selfie image* as three figures that I take to be telling of how the Instagram platform technologically organizes individual and social life. These three figures make up the empirical objects of my research and have been framed as, respectively, questions of the temporal organization of content, personalization, and the configuration of the subject as an object of consumption. These objects, each analysed in a separate chapter, function as a method of getting into and analysing Instagram as system of production and consumption memory. Theodor W. Adorno's description of the essay and the use of fragments as method has also inspired this approach to and construction of these objects as an entryway to describing a broader system. Adorno writes in the *Essay as Form*: 'It [the essay] thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the fissures, rather than by smoothing them over' (Adorno, Hullot-Kentor, and Will 1984:164). The construction of the stream, Instagram filters, and the selfie as fragments is a method, a way in and through which to analyse a system of memory in constant expansion and mutation. This method of the essay and its fragments also imply a certain perception of the role and function of concepts and theory. Adorno writes:

The essay does not obey the rules of the game of organized science and theory that, following Spinoza's principle, the order of things is identical with that of ideas. Since the airtight order of concepts is not identical with existence, the essay does not strive for closed, deductive or inductive, construction. (...). If the essay struggles aesthetically against that narrow-minded method that will leave nothing out, it is obeying an epistemological motive. (Adorno et al. 1984:158/164).

In the methods of the essay concept and reality, epistemology and ontology are not to be reconciled. The role of concepts is not to exhaust their objects of study, for there is a recognition that concepts play an active role in bringing forth the object of study, of constructing it. In this sense, concepts are used as devices of inquiry. In the words of Gilles Deleuze, they are 'tools' (Foucault 1980:208) and a lens through which an analysis operates in a state of unfolding a variety of perspectives rather than of providing an assured space for exhausting the object. From this standpoint, theories and concepts are phenomenological devices that produce theories and hypotheses in the same move, although not as a matter of falsification (Popper) or verification (positivism) but as a method and part of an aesthetic mode of inquiry.

In the context of my dissertation work, this means that I do not take the chosen empirical objects of the stream, Instagram filters, and the selfie image to exhaust how lived experiences are reproduced and consumed through Instagram, but take them, rather, to be a way of getting into and analysing a media phenomenon that is in a permanent process of expanding and in a perpetual flight towards being altered. My exploration and analysis of the stream, Instagram filters, and the selfie is theoretically motivated, in the sense that I seek to contribute to the further theorization of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption, rather than to the (equally important) empirical exposition of the behaviour and experiences of Instagram users. As suggested by the broader method of conceptual interventions that I outlined in the Introduction, the analysis does not

seek to identify the potential cracks, the negotiations or the alternative uses that necessarily come with such media platforms, but through phenomenological description and analysis to distil and abstract an ideal version of the stream, Instagram filters, and the selfie. That is to say, the analyses and arguments in this dissertation have not emerged through a large-scale collection of empirical data aiming at uncovering how people use Instagram or their intention and motives for doing so. The analysis has rather been developed in an equal conversation between observations of the platform and collection of documents from Instagram.com, my reading of existing literature on social media platforms and the theoretical and conceptual work that I presented in Part I. Following the method Baudrillard used in *System of Objects*, my analysis of Instagram proceeds in a vignette style using phenomenological description as a means of capturing and thickening the description of the aesthetic organization of human experience as it takes place and is organized by the Instagram platform. As such, the three analyses of the stream, filters and the selfie, presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, should be understood as conceptual interventions that use a phenomenological and essayistic approach to contribute to a novel conceptualization of consumption; a reconceptualization that I see as necessary, as the nature of consumption is being reorganized and – I argue – recast by Instagram as one of today's dominating organizational technologies.

The selfie and what the notion of tertiary retention implies

To end this chapter, I will just note that in Chapter 7 I approach the selfie genre and the selfie as a visual phenomenon. As I have pointed out, at the consumption level the analysis does not presuppose a singular relation between a subject and an object, but examines how objects are organized within a broader organization of objects. In the context of Instagram and social media platforms, I have related this organization to the question of tertiarizing individual and social life through different features and functions. The stream and filters are functions and features built into the

Instagram platform and through which *any* photo image, can, independent of content, be brought into circulation. The selfie, however, is not a function but a particular photographic genre and depiction of self/body/face, albeit a genre in which images can be edited through various filters and which the stream organizes in the same way as other photo images. In other words, the selfie is not a function or feature of Instagram and thus not strictly speaking part of how the platform, as a system of memory, organizes lived experiences into tertiary memory. Still, the gesture of the selfie has become a generic form through which the individual brings its face and body into circulation, for which reason the selfie tells us something about Instagram as a system of memory. Thus, when it comes to the filter, I ask what the organizing principle of this function is and how the filter transforms lived experiences into consumable memory objects. With the selfie, though, my question concerns how the subject is configured as an object of consumption in and through the different distribution of subject and object positions in two different types of selfie images (the so-called presented selfie and the mirror-selfie). I ask: What is being consumed in these generic genres of visual tertiarizing and exteriorization of oneself? This also follows the strategy of Michel Foucault, of whom Nicolas Bourriaud writes: 'Foucault is less interested by what the image says than by what it produces – the behaviour that it generates, and what it leaves barely seen among the social machinery in which it distributes bodies, spaces and utterances' (Foucault, 2009, p. 13). The analysis is less concerned with what the specific image says, with what the intention or purposes of the selfie as generic genre of images are; rather it looks at the effects that come from distributing subject and object positions and in the gazes brought into play. This approach does not preclude a focus on specific Instagram photo images and thus on how for example Nature or the Body is consumed, as they are also reproduced and distributed as photo images on Instagram. Indeed, even at that level of analysis, the greater concern is the distribution of object and subject positions, the use of filters, and so forth, not the

message of each photo image. The conceptual framing of ‘digital content’, including its organization, as tertiary retentions, entails (in a lineage of thinking that follows the work of Stiegler and Baudrillard) that photo images (including selfie photos) are primarily taken not as representations of something in time, of lived life, but are considered to play an organizing role in the fabric of temporal experience itself. Thus, in Chapter 7, I address several variations of the selfie genre and analyse these as particular ways in which the lived experience of self is exteriorized, organized, and consumed as technological memory.

Chapter 5. The stream and the service of memory

Digital media platforms, the smartphone, and the organization of digital content in real-time streams have profoundly transformed how the internet is used (Berry 2011; Steinberg 2019:7). In *Philosophy of Software* (2009) David M. Berry speaks of a ‘computational subject’, which he describes as a ‘stream-like’ subject that emerges from and is mediated by real-time streams (ibid, 146). What might a stream-like consciousness experience be, Berry asks (ibid, 146)? He uses the term ‘lifestreams’ to refer to streams composed of inputs from users themselves (ibid, 162) – those types of streams that I have defined as systems of memory and as involving an exteriorization of self as technological memory. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play and have played a decisive role in expanding the internet’s stream-like structure and therefore – because of their widespread use – in expanding the organization of social and cultural life in and through real-time streams. To consider how social and individual experiences are organized and consumed as technological memory objects on and through Instagram, one must consider the stream-like organization of memory objects along with the platform and the smartphone.

If one considers consumption not as simply the use of an object or the devouring of a particular content but rather considers consumption to be a broader system of organizing (Baudrillard), then exploring social media consumption entails analysing the particular way in which individual experiences are organized as memory objects. In prolongation of this understanding of consumption this chapter analyses the trinity of the smartphone, the platform, and the stream. This analysis is unfolded as a phenomenological inquiry into the way in which this trinity organizes human experiences. That is, by way of phenomenological analysis it seeks to describe the relation to and experience of memory objects on Instagram as they are configured by and organized through the matrix of the stream, the platform, and the smartphone. This will be done from three perspectives: the stream as a practice

related to the smartphone as object; the stream as a technology of re-temporalization of lived experiences; and the stream as part of a broader platformization of objects.

5.1. From television and zapping at a distance to smartphones and intimate scrolling

Television is an earlier technology equally embedded in and structuring social life as the ‘disarticulation of the real into successive and equivalent signs’ (Baudrillard 1998:122). If the stream is to social media platforms what the channel is to television, then scrolling is to the stream what zapping is to television. Television viewing is characterized by a distance to the object itself. In this spatial organization of the television, the individual control and experience the object at a distance, as the television and its programmes are operated with the intermediary of the remote control. The use and operation of the smartphone and the stream implies a closer proximity, as its use is tied to the hand and the index finger. The dyad constellation of the smartphone screen and index finger dissolve the distance between medium and body, a dissolution further manifested in the gesture used to operate the medium.¹³ Put differently, we humans have gone from a culture of zapping to one of scrolling that induces another relation to objects. The gesture of scrolling obfuscates the distance between the medium and the individual, its being impossible, for example, to scroll with gloves on or if one has wet fingers. In this sense, one is denied an intermediary, as if by the scrolling gesture of the smartphone, one was striving for permanent contact and symmetry between subject and object. Thus, television zapping gives one a sense of control over the object by virtue of its distance (with the aid of the remote control), while when scrolling, one achieves control through and because of an absence of distance. The spatial and bodily distance to the television object mirrors the mental distance to the production and

¹³ Following Claus Pia’s definition: ‘Gestures are units that—through “observation” of some kind—can be separated as spatiotemporal figures from a background that can be ignored’ (Pias 2017:271)

consumption of whatever flows from the television screen, which is to say mass media, where one rarely sees oneself, but rather strangers or others living a life distant from one's own. The new dyad of the smartphone and the index finger mirrors a mental, or attentional, proximity between the stream of consciousness and the stream of social media platforms, as individual smartphone users themselves become an object of consumption and an actor of production through a variety of exteriorization activities.¹⁴

Mass-media celebrities vs. social-media celebrities

How the spatial relation to the television object differs from that to the smartphone object is reflected in how the mass-media celebrity and the social-media celebrity are differently configured as an object of consumption. Alice E. Marwick describes the emergence of the social media celebrity:

The contemporary shift from broadcast to participatory media and the popularity of social media technologies have contributed to two major changes in celebrity. "Traditional" celebrities like pop stars and actors have embraced social media to create direct, unmediated relationships with fans, or at least the illusion of such. (...). In the broadcast era, celebrity was something a person was; in the Internet era, microcelebrity is something people *do*. Subcultural or niche celebrities are now able to amass enough fans to support themselves through their online creative activities while remaining unknown to most and ignored by mainstream media. (Marwick 2015:139–40).

The distance yet proximity that defines the individual's relation to the television object and classical mass-media outlets is also what produces the figure of the mass-

¹⁴ What we see today with television programmes is that they too try to overcome this distance, as social media are integrated into the broadcasting of programmes.

media celebrity. In mass media the corpus of journalists, photographers, magazines, etc., try to uncover, to reveal, and get closer to the celebrity's life. Take, for example, the drones flying over the home of the Duchess and Duke of Sussex or the many beach photographs taken with a long-lens camera. With mass media the celebrity figure is produced through a distance that is a product of and retained by mass media itself. This effectively creates the sense that there is something to uncover, to get closer to (whether there actually is or not is not the point). The stars and celebrities of social media platforms – YouTubers, bloggers, Instagram influencers, etc. – are not figures produced through the same distance-proximity oscillation. Their celebrity quality and the way by which they receive millions of users' attention comes from their ability to defy distance and play with a sense of the absence of distance between themselves and the medium. The effect here resembles that of reality TV, as analysed by Baudrillard (Baudrillard 2015). The fascinating character of and effect produced in reality TV precisely derives from the attempt to overcome distance and thus create an illusion of a real-time reality – that is, the real without delay, without filter, and without mediation. The difference between the figure of the mass-media and of the social-media celebrity can be understood as the difference between Baudrillard's third- and fourth-order simulation. In mass media, simulation works through and produces the idea of something hidden, a mystery that the medium grants itself the role to uncover. Mass media produces the celebrity as a hidden reality that, despite faithful attempts, the medium cannot fully reveal, its being a product of the medium itself. The more images and information people are given, the larger the celebrity's mystique grows. The social media celebrity is configured, if not through an opposite process, then at least one that does not fascinate and attract a following by simulating something from which the idea of a concealed reality is produced. Rather, by the very nature of the medium (stream/platform/smartphone), the effect of closeness is utilized, thus giving rise to the idea that nothing is hidden, that there is no simulation. In other

words, mass media operates by simulating something (an objective real life we can get closer to) and thus hides that there is nothing (that is, a third-order simulation). In social media, the nothing is utilized – which is to say the idea that nothing is hidden, that there is only the immediate transparency of lived life to create something – the illusion of a real unfiltered life (fourth-order simulation/Instagram). Importantly, this real, unfiltered life is neither measured against nor receives its organizational force from something prior to or external to Instagram (i.e., an objective real life and real experiences out there). The real unfiltered life produced through the immediacy of Instagram's organization of lived experiences as tertiary retentions is not a form of simulation that operates by referencing to something outside it. On the contrary, it comes into being as a possibility of Instagram itself and, as such, can only be experienced through the medium. The real unfiltered life is experienced as the possibility of the medium itself.

The point is not that the one figure takes over the other, or that, being each other's opposites, they mirror a fundamental break between the organizational effects of mass media and those of social-media platforms. Indeed, they can nicely complement each other, and as Baudrillard shows, reality TV already carries this effect of transparency, the illusion of the real-real. The point is that the spatial organization of the television object, the gesture of zapping, and mass media are characterized by and configure the individual in a distant, yet proximate relation to what it consumes, whereas the smartphone, the gesture of scrolling, the stream, and the Instagram platform operate with and produce a sense of overcoming distance between medium and life. And this is seen in the differing celebrity figures that mass media and social media respectively produce.

The stream and the infinity of memory

The traditional webpage structure of the Internet with its associated browsing of webpages has some similarities to zapping. If reality TV is a figure existing between

mass media and social media, then browsing is perhaps in between that of zapping and scrolling. Browsing, like zapping, is related to what media theorist Claus Pia calls the ‘hegemony of the keystroke’, its being operated through the intermediaries of the mouse and the keyboard (Pias 2017:271). Moreover, as with zapping in which the user shifts between channels and programmes, browsing goes through the discrete structure of webpages. However, with zapping the television’s linear organization of channels eventually returns the user to the beginning (channel 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4),¹⁵ thus building a circular movement within a fixed linear direction returning the zapping individual to the starting point. Browsing does not produce the same circularity, instead creating a sense of infinity that comes into full force with the stream and scrolling. Further, unlike zapping and browsing, scrolling does not – phenomenologically speaking – belong to the culture of keystrokes but is an ‘operational gesture’. This is because, in the case of scrolling, the shape of a movement is calculated and forms the basic relation to the smartphone and what flows on it.¹⁶

This leads me to the stream. The stream of Instagram consists of a perpetual flow of lived experiences that in Part I was conceptualized as tertiary retentions. The stream de-temporalizes and then re-temporalizes lived experiences (photo images, videos) as the individual scrolls through, stops, and recommences scrolling. The interest lies in the specific way in which the stream re-temporalizes content, as it is through the stream that individual and social life is (partly) organized and consumed as memory objects on Instagram. The stream’s re-temporalization is a form of organizing through which lived experiences are consumed. In the present context, one should thus revisit the dictum that objects are not given to us in

¹⁵ Of course, this is a specific version of the television.

¹⁶ In relation to the gesture of swiping that inflates with the iPhone and iPad, Pia writes that although ‘[t]echnologically we are dealing here with keystrokes, [we are] phenomenologically [dealing] with gestures’ (Pias 2017:271).

isolation but in succession (as Baudrillard writes) as being a question of the temporal succession and organization of lived life as memory objects in the stream. This re-temporalization can, for example, be structured by the clock-time of the computer, the code and algorithm of the platform, a variety of geo-data (place, time, etc.), hashtags, a minimum delay between production and distribution of content, and so forth. The user can make individual and deliberate choices about what profiles and hashtags to follow, and Instagram also provides a degree of manual control and adjustment, such as the ability to ‘mute’ comments and posts from specific profiles without unfollowing them (Instagram 2018c). For a stream-like consciousness, control is perhaps primarily about handling the immediacy of the stream and the intensity of its closeness. With the television, object control essentially entails overcoming the distance to the medium (by help of the remote control), whereas with social media platforms (exemplified in the physical gesture of scrolling), no distance to the medium exists. For this reason, the individual essentially archives control by blocking, filtering, and controlling the content and thus distancing itself from the immediacy of the medium.

In the stream’s re-temporalization of lived experiences as memory object, a disturbance occurs – a small pause that comes when the user reaches the end of the stream. This pause, this delay, can be considered purely technical, a default of the system and/or the mobile device that, as technology progresses, will eventually be overcome. However, for a moment we shall give it a significance in how individual and social experiences are related to each other and consumed through the Instagram platform. This pause and delay that occurs when the user scrolls ‘through’ the stream is, as everyone knows, only a simulated end. On Instagram, after a brief pause, less than a second, a new set of images appears. A kind of vertical infinity is produced, which is not *disrupted* by the small pauses but rather *produced* by them. It is as if the small pause and delay are there to produce an end, only for the medium to immediately supersede it and thus create a sense of

an endless stream of images and videos to be explored. This delay, this pause, both resets and extends. It resets in the sense that the delay indicates an end, but because this end is immediately transgressed, the delay carries with it a continuation. As such, the permanent circularity of this delay perhaps continuously maintains the individual's attention in the 'operational gesture' of scrolling.¹⁷ The delay, the circularity of pausing is not a momentary sensation that evaporates as the individual overcomes the delay; rather, it effects that which appears after it. The delay is retained within the activity of scrolling and within each memory object. This delay of the stream can be compared with that of an airplane. When an airplane does not leave at the time of its scheduled departure, the temporalization of time after the delay occurs (partly) as an effect of the delay. Time is experienced differently when it is an effect of a delay. In media terms, everything that happens in the time after the scheduled departure (content) is an effect of not departing on time, of the delay (form). However, contrary to the delayed airplane, the temporalization of the stream means that memory objects appear not only after a delay but also before it, that is, between two delays. The stream is a re-temporalization in which memory objects are organized and consumed between two delays. In a non-contradictory way, this re-temporalization of lived experience as memory objects mark them, on the one hand, with a sense of infinity, and, on the other, with a delay derived from a perpetual state of resetting and extension within the stream that thus intensifies the activity of scrolling.

Hence, beyond the specific social or individual situation, feeling, and moment in which memory objects are produced, each is touched by the fact that it

¹⁷ Diana Zulli analyses this intensification and capturing of users' attention with the notion of the 'glance'. Utilising this notion, Zulli shows how the Instagram platform organizes the attention of the user in such a way as to capture, maximize, and capitalise on the time spent on the platform, for example, through a constant presentation of new content and the aesthetics affordance of the platform (Zulli 2018).

is an object in the stream. The vertical arrangement and perpetual succession of photo images, videos and text is *therefore* not – at the level of consumption – the consumption of particular memory objects, because these appear on the stream as an effect of choice, that is, the choice to follow a profile or hashtag, and so forth. The user does not consume the finitude and discrete nature of each memory object, as they are re-temporalized by the stream. Independently of the delay, I admit, each memory object is consumed in relation to the sense of infinity in which it appears, its being organized by the stream. A point can be made here between the shopping mall and the stream. If the 20th-century consumer found pleasure in disappearing in the mountains of objects in the shopping mall, then is the stream – of photo images, of videos, etc., not the privileged place where the 21st-century media consumer can blissfully disappear. As Geert Lovink writes: ‘Situated inside the image-stream, there is no time left for meaning to solidify. Only the next one is significant’ (Lovink 2016:174). Similar to Baudrillard’s account of objects, the perpetual occurrence of memory objects on the stream raises the question of to what extent the sheer amount of, accessibility to, profusion of, and proliferation of lived experiences themselves become something consumed in each memory object, as they are organized through the stream and, more generally, by the Instagram platform. The stream is a kind of organized proliferation in which each individual and social experience is distributed, organized, and consumed as an element in a proliferating whole. The social and individual experiences – taken at the level of consumption – point to each other through the infinity of the stream. However, quantity or accumulation itself is not what solely shapes the relation to memory objects on the stream; the delay in each of them also shapes the relation, as these objects are re-temporalized and experienced within this proliferating whole. I suggest that each photo image on the stream itself becomes a kind of delay; indeed, each image is a stop, but foremost it extends as it points the individual to the next image. What is passed on from image to image is the delay produced from the infinity of the stream. Thus, a characteristic

of the re-temporalization of the stream is that it makes each memory object into a delay and thus provides each object with a kind of lack and insufficiency. In the gesture of scrolling, the individual above all seeks to overcome this delay, nevertheless this remains a futile attempt since it is the effect of the stream itself.

What does a (social media) stream-like consciousness then experience? Perhaps, and this is purely hypothetical, a stream-like consciousness is stretched out between an experience of immediacy, a sense of absence of distance *and* a sense of being in a permanent state of delay. As the stream-like organization of lived experiences becomes integrated into the temporal unfolding of human experiences – and no longer the temporal object of television – human experience itself takes the form of a delay. The stream-like promise of immediacy and an absence of distance produce within experience a delay. But a delay of what? Its potential digital twin and the medium's own promise of the instant – of the Now.

5.2. Platforms and cultural consumption

Surrounding this organizational trio of the smartphone, the platform, and the stream is a language of mobility, accessibility, and smartness. Everything is made easy and smart for us, and it all fits into one object: the smartphone. If we are promised anything, it is that any social and cultural activity (games, social communication, etc.) or function (refrigerators, verification systems, payment, etc.) not already integrated into this trio will be elevated to a higher degree of perfection if this constellation is allowed to permeate the given activity or function. As Shoshana Zuboff shows (Zuboff 2019), the functioning and use of objects and technology increasingly depends on the access to and production of data about the given activity that the technology supposedly enables. In other words, consumptive practices are transforming such that platforms, the smartphone, and the data streams are reorganizing the relation to the object being consumed. This reorganization ranges from the way in which we get access to and read news and information, to how we

listen to music and watch films, to how people generally consume cultural goods and individual and social experiences. For example, streaming platforms such as Spotify and Netflix produce a different kind of relation to cultural objects than flow TV. One enters into a different relationship with the object one consumes through streaming platforms (a piece of music or a film) than if listening to a record or watching a DVD. In *The Platform Economy* Steinberg describes a reorganization of the relation to objects that is occurring with the rise of platforms as a process in which cultural goods are packaged into and sold as ‘content’ (Steinberg 2019:62–64). Steinberg describes this phenomenon as stemming from a fear that new digital media and the dematerialization of audio-visual commodities will eliminate financial profit from cultural goods such as music, films, and games, discussing how cultural goods are not discursively marketed and produced as singular content but are ‘packaged’ into series of content that are from mixed media (books, films, toys, games, etc.) (ibid, 63-65). Like Baudrillard, Steinberg addresses how objects are never produced and presented as singular entities but rather in a relationship to other objects. In a platform context, this is seen in the way cultural goods are media mixed and produced to be consumed across different platforms. Steinberg describes this as a general process of ‘platformization of contents’ connected with the ‘mobile internet phenomenon’ (ibid, 175). From the perspective of consumption and an understanding of it as a specific organizational relation to objects – what then characterizes this platformization of objects? To be more precise, how does this platformization produce a new relation to objects as objects of consumption? If what is consumed is never a particular content but how this content is organized, then how are objects organized in and through platforms? With this in mind, to explore Instagram as an organizational technology of consumption and the stream-like organization of memory, I now turn to this aspect of platformization by analysing ‘streaming’ as producing a particular consumptive relation to objects.

Streaming and the absence of the copy

The streaming of something, a song or a film, on streaming platforms such as Netflix or Spotify is, of course, not the same as ‘the stream’ of successive content on a social media platform like Instagram. Yet, the particular relation created to cultural objects on streaming platforms might tell us something about the nature of the stream as a technology through which a discrete and diverse range of lived experiences are organized and consumed as memory objects.

What then characterizes the relation to objects on these streaming platforms? Certainly, accessibility and choice on such platforms is greater than on flow TV or Radio, and the sheer selection of music and films available on these platforms tends to exceed that in any physical store. The accessibility of these temporal objects in terms of mobility (one can watch and listen anytime anywhere) combined with their quantity changes how one consumes them.¹⁸ Although it may be the consumption of the same album or film, we are concerned not with our relation to the specific content of the object but with the configuration of film and music in streaming platforms as objects of consumption. When defined in quantitative terms, this accessibility to and mobility of temporal objects provided by streaming platforms is, of course, *relative* to the media that preceded it. Such accessibility and mobility cannot itself stand as a salient feature. Accessibility and mobility can be explained as the pre-condition for the consumption of streaming objects, but do not define them as objects of consumption. Instead, I suggest that what partly defines the consumptive relation to streaming objects is that *the consumer is relieved from the object in the very act of consumption*. The comfort of accessibility and mobility that the platform provides organizes the object in an unprecedented way whereby in our consumption of it we are relieved of its

¹⁸ I use the term ‘temporal object’ in the sense given to it by Stiegler. A temporal object is an object that is not only in time but is formed temporally; for example, a song or a film (Stiegler 2011c:1–4).

materiality. By this I am not suggesting that consumption has become immaterial, that the object somehow loses its materiality when it becomes digital and accessed through platforms. Rather, the object, as a consumptive relation, is organized and presented to us around an absence: in other words, when streaming temporal objects through platforms, we enjoy – consume – the absence of the object as a material entity.

Let me expand on this notion of consuming the absence of the object as a material entity. On these platforms, we have access to the object; we can listen to music and see a film but they are not actually in our possession. In streaming, our relation to and consumption of the object is not based on the fact that we possess it. It is in our possession in the sense that we have access to it, but we do not, strictly speaking, possess it; we do not own it. If you own something, you can within legal limits destroy the object. As far as I know, however, it is not possible to destroy (i.e., delete) a song on Spotify or delete episodes of *Breaking Bad* on Netflix. We are not granted this permission because we are, so to speak, not given a copy. Metaphorically, we might say that platformization and streaming destroys the copy, or, better yet, in streaming the copy is destroyed – which is underlined by the fact that piracy and illegal reproduction of cultural content are no longer significantly debated and are a less severe problem for cultural industries. The copy no longer seems to be a problem because essentially we are not consuming the object as a copy; the platformization of objects – at least in streaming – organizes the object in such a way that in our consumption of it we consume the absence of a copy. This is the sense in which I suggest that, by streaming, the consumer is relieved from the materiality of the object. Taken at the level of consumption, perhaps this is an expression of the ‘phenomenon of digital dematerialization’, as Steinberg formulates it and which he relates to the packaging of content into ‘contents’, as media consumption is ‘unhinged from a particular physical medium and mobile in a way it was not before’ (Steinberg 2019:34–35).

The logic of leasing

Taking a phenomenological and essayistic approach, I would like to continue to thicken the relationship that characterizes the consumption of these cultural objects. When we stream a temporal object, our relation to it is not based on possession; we do not own this or that piece of music or film that we have access to streaming on these platforms. If possession in the sense of ownership does not characterize our relation to the objects on these platforms, does this mean that we are in a relation and constellation where the platforms allow us to rent these objects? Do we rent this or that music or film when we subscribe to Spotify or Netflix? Surely when renting an object, we are legally prohibited from destroying it, and if we do, we will probably be obliged to replace it. Renting an object often, though not always, entails a shorter temporal interval, such as a car rental for a holiday or a DVD rental from the local Blockbuster. Furthermore, when our consumptive relation to the object is based on renting, we are usually renting a specific object – a film, car, or apartment. Renting configures the object within a more fixed time horizon than that characterizing our relation to platform objects. Thus, the organizational logic, if I may use this expression, that defines the relation to streaming/platform objects is not one of ownership, renting, or borrowing. On these platforms, we do not buy, rent, or borrow specific objects like music or films. We *lease* them.

Leasing, I suggest, captures the consumptive relation to streaming objects and is more broadly an aspect of their platformization.¹⁹ There are legal and economic definitions of leasing, but rather than dwelling on these, I will instead explore leasing as a specific way in which objects are organized as objects of

¹⁹ Leasing, I argue, is a mode of relation to objects that defines not only our engagement with digital platform objects but also to more tangible objects. A good example of this is the electric city scooters standing on the street in major cities around the world and used as a transportation service. The whole structure around which these scooters are given to us as an object of consumption enables us to enjoy the object with a minimum concern for its material destiny.

consumption. Indeed, one must remember that the consumed object is never a singular one but a broader organization of objects. When entering into a leasing relation, we neither own nor rent a specific object. In leasing, the relationship to the object is mediated through a service. This I guess is well known. With platforms such as Netflix or Spotify, we buy a service and not a specific object. Thus, leasing is a consumptive relation to objects: we become less attached to the object, per se, but more and more attached to the service through which access to the object is provided. When we buy something, our relation to the object imposes a temporality differing from that for an object as a service. This is because when we lease something in the sense of streaming music or films, we consume the object in the absence of its materiality. This is precisely what happens when we stream music or a film on these platforms: we can enjoy it without its materiality because it is not literally stored or retained on the device. If it were, we could hardly access so much content; process capacity outweighs storage capacity. To stream and, more generally, to lease an object is to enter into a relation with the object in which we can enjoy its presence without the inflexible and static state that comes with its materiality: *we consume the absence of a copy*. This, I suggest, characterizes leasing as a consumptive relation to and organization of objects and partly defines our relation to streaming objects.

However, is it not the same when we watch TV or listen to the radio? Yes and no. True, in flow TV and radio no specific object like a programme is rented or purchased, but it is, nonetheless, independent of us. It continues without us. We tune in to something that will unfold even without our presence and involvement. The object gathers us, and not the other way around. This induces another relation to the object than with streaming and the platform. The restricted and less flexible nature of the temporality of broadcasting imposes a material weight and presence on the temporal object, as the consumer is tied to the television screen or to the radio speakers at a specific time of day. In this sense, the consumer is not relieved of the

object as a copy. On the contrary, this temporality requires the consumer to be present and engaged at a specific time. In flow TV the temporal unfolding of the object produces a relation to the object not based on the absence of the copy and thus produces a different kind of relation to the object consumed. Thus, in these platforms we enter into a relation to the object of consumption as a service through which we (ideally) no longer have to experience the inflexible nature of the object as a material entity. Perhaps one should consider the resurrection of the vinyl record in relation to the platformization and leasing of objects. Does the increase in vinyl sales not go against this tendency with which we relate to and consume objects by means of their material absence? Is the vinyl record not a nostalgia for materiality and ownership, a deliberate regression from accessibility and mobility and the object consumed through a service towards an enjoyment of limitation imposed by the object itself? In this sense, the return of the vinyl record is an attempt to restore the mediating role of cultural goods – that is, for the individual to express itself through a system of objects. This is because, from car leasing to music and film streaming, the platformization of objects weakens the signifiatory and differential potential of objects – something Baudrillard foresaw as he argued that ‘there is no longer a system of objects’ (Baudrillard 2012:19). Instead, leasing may well be the future mode in which objects are brought onto our horizon, defining a new way in which they are consumed. Moreover, one can imagine how this logic of object leasing and platformization might expand to other objects more tangible than temporal objects like music and film. Having ventured into the platformization of objects and with these conceptions (absence of copy, infinity, service) of the organizational trinity of the stream, the platform, and the smartphone in hand, I would now like to turn to Instagram and what might be called the *service of memory*.

5.3. Instagram and the service of memory

From the perspective of this service-like character of platforms and streams, I will now consider how individual and social experiences are organized and consumed as tertiary retention on Instagram. If service in this consumption context means that not the particular objects (in this case the particular memory objects) but the possibility of access to and the relation produced to these objects are consumed, then what does it mean to say that on the ‘lifestream’ of Instagram there is a consumption of the service of memory or memory as a service?

Just in time for Halloween, you’ll see some new creative tools to help you turn any moment into something fun and entertaining: a new camera format called ‘Superzoom’ and Halloween-inspired face filters and stickers. (Instagram 2017i).

Whether it is Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving, or simply the change of seasons, Instagram provides the user with the ‘creative tools to help turn any moment into something fun and entertaining’. Understood as a medium of communication Instagram’s perpetual introduction of new features and functions – along with third-party apps – provides technological and visual resources for social communication. However, instead of treating it as a medium of communication and interaction, and the digital content produced there as pertaining to this particular social function, I will investigate Instagram as system of memory that deploys various tertiary forms to organize individual and social experiences as technological memory.

An archive of Nows

On Instagram, different temporal figures such as Archive and Stories organize this process of exteriorization. I call them temporal because they have a temporal connotation (e.g., archive) and a temporal duration. For example, with Stories the tertiary retention disappears within a given time frame. One way that Instagram

functions as a system of memory is that the platform makes it easy to retain and relive past moments, primarily in the form of photo images or videos. Instagram has a separate function for this: the Archive function, which is a 'feature that lets you move posts you've previously shared into a space that's visible only to you'. The Archive is a 'space just for you, where you can revisit moments without having to keep them all on your profile' (Instagram 2017c). As an individual space of recollection and remembrance, the Archive is a specific temporal organization of lived experiences that lies within the Instagram platform and gives the individual the ability to preserve 'moments that matter' (ibid). Unlike the profile, the Archive is a momentary space of individual recollection. Hence, the Archive organizes lived experiences in a way that counters the otherwise public or semi-public character of the Instagram profile. Yet, at any time a given memory object can be transferred from the Archive and returned to the Instagram profile, where it will be relived beyond the individual closure of memory to which the Archive confines it: 'If you change your mind about a post you've archived, tap "Show on Profile" at any time and it'll show up in its original spot' (ibid). The Archive function removes content from the user's profile without deleting it and the boundary between what does or does not belong in the archive is an individual choice and not in itself an effect of passing time. Instagram as a service of memory partly consists of this ability and access it gives the user to continually curate and preserve a personal and individual archive of Nows. The Archive is not a temporal ordering that distinguishes between content of a distant past that has reached an age for archiving and content that belongs to a near past, that is, which has yet to be archived but will be as an effect of passing time. Archive here takes the meaning of that which is preserved for the individual, for that which is retained for the individual itself is not in a strict opposition to that which is outside of it but serves rather as an archive within the archive. As such, one might suggest that the Archive is a matter of keeping moments private, that it meets a need for the individual to reserve a space for itself, a space

that is continuously constructed (socially) and transformed through different media and technologies. However, through the analytical lens of a system of memory, I suggest another reading. As something that is sealed off from other people, the Instagram archive plays a peculiar role: in a sense everything outside the Archive becomes *not* an archive, not a past that is retained and ‘archived’ but that belongs to another temporal register. This opens up for an almost unanswerable question: is there a past on Instagram? Does the platform operate with a past, given its name is *Instagram*? Of course, the clock-time of the platform produces a temporal sequencing – something was uploaded before something else. Still, can one say that how lived experiences are organized as tertiary retention involves these belonging to the temporal order of the past? At best, it is an *Insta-past*. In general, the process of making present a past is not what is consumed in the image, as the past is confined to that which is retained in the Archive function. As such, Instagram is an archive that tries, by producing an archive within the archive, to circumvent the temporal order of the past inherent in the structure of archiving itself. Neither is this to be confused with the proposition that ‘the question of the archive is not (...) a question of the past (...) [i]t is a question of the future’, as Derrida writes (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995:27), which I in the present context of social media platform have formulated as a relation between retention and protention. Rather, if ‘what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way’ (ibid, 18), then an archiving structure that *within itself* produces a distinction between archive and an outside of the archive must mean that what is tertiarily retained but remains, so to speak, outside the archive of the archive concerns a particular resistance to the temporal order of the past. There is a particular reversal here, as if the photo image itself is haunted by time, by the passing of time itself, which one way or another will confine it to a past. The archival structure is what must be held away, and a means of doing so is to integrate the Archive function within. Moreover, because what is archived cannot be re-temporalized by others through likes, comments, etc.,

the act of archiving is foremost one of de-temporalization. From this perspective, the temporal figure of the archive confining lived experiences for the individual itself becomes a kind of secondary retention, that is, memory as remembrance. This is illogical from the perspective of Stiegler's triad of primary, secondary, and tertiary memory, given that secondary retention is that kind of memory preserved within the individual and not outside of it, which the photo images and videos in the Instagram archive inevitably are. Nonetheless, the Archive is a temporal organization that produces a distinction between that which is confined to the individual and that which is outside of it. The archive is a technological equivalent to memory as recollection, memory as preserved within the individual yet, in this context outside of it. The Archive, so to speak, imitates the distinction between secondary and tertiary retention that characterizes human attention. In this sense, the archive as a particular structuring of lived experiences reproduces these memory objects as secondary retentions, or in other words tertiary retentions (photo images, videos) are packaged and consumed as secondary retentions through the Archive.

Stories

The Stories function is another temporal organizing of lived experiences. The feature enables the user to group photo images and videos throughout the day and thus to create a narrative consisting of multiple posts. Stories are only visible for 24 hours, after which they disappear.

With Instagram Stories, you don't have to worry about overposting. Instead, you can share as much as you want to throughout the day—with as much creativity as you want. You can bring your business' story to life in new ways with text and drawing tools. The photos and videos will disappear after 24 hours and won't appear on your profile grid or in [word missing?]feed. (Instagram 2016).

Stories temporally structures lived experiences in a narrative frame rather than as singular lived experiences that are exteriorized to and organized in the general feed or stream. The feature is a crafted montage, a looping together of lived and social experiences within a specific time frame.

As the Now happening in the visual act of exteriorizing oneself as tertiary retention becomes discretized, the Stories format can be said to reassemble this discretization because multiple acts of exteriorization are organized into one story. This also, Instagram suggests, solves the problem of overposting, although not because the individual must have self-restraint, but because there is a built-in temporal evaporation within the act of exteriorization itself. One might say that, *stories are not supposed to last*.²⁰ While Stories and Archive could be viewed as diametrically opposed forms for temporally organizing lived experience, with archiving being an act of preserving and stories an organized disappearance, Instagram's readjustment of the Stories function has blurred such a clear-cut distinction.

Over the past year, Instagram Stories has become a key part of how you express yourself — but there hasn't been an easy way to keep your stories around for more than 24 hours. Now you can more fully express your identity by grouping stories you've shared into highlights and featuring them on your profile. (...). Today we're introducing two new tools that let you hold on to your favorite moments from Instagram Stories and share them in ways that help you express yourself. Stories Highlights is a new part of your profile where you can express more of who you are through stories you've shared. And to help you build highlights, your stories will now automatically save into a private Stories Archive so you can easily

²⁰ An allusion to Baudrillard, who in relation to the speed of production and obsolescence of cultural artefacts writes that '[c]ulture is no longer made to last' (Baudrillard 1998:101).

relive them whenever you want. (Instagram 2017d).

Since this update, Stories do not necessarily evaporate altogether, but are automatically transferred to a ‘private Stories Archive’ from which they can be reposted on the profile. Yet, within the Stories format, that which is exteriorized has a built-in disappearance that organizes the circulation of self as tertiary retention in a particular way that I would now like to examine.

Stories organizes the process of exteriorization into a longer time period, because the discrete memory objects follow each other in a narrative format while also being given a shorter lifespan (they disappear). The Insta-moment is extended by virtue of its evaporation. Here, the temporal structure of experience itself becomes simulated: in the flow of time, lived experiences disappear, a fact of life simulated by the Stories feature on Instagram. While we humans inevitably know that our lived experiences disappear unless they are exteriorized, on Instagram this disappearing is an effect of the medium, a construct of the particular way in which Stories organizes lived experiences as tertiary retentions. The Stories format is a temporal organizing in which the disappearance of lived experiences occurring in the flow of time is built into the very process of exteriorization itself. No one is sure why stories have to disappear on the platform, but perhaps it intensifies and maximizes the time spent on it. In a business context, this organized disappearance – the Stories format of exteriorization – seems to intensify the interaction with the given content. From Instagram.com:

(...) Vogue's Instagram channel is getting many more impressions than the publication's website, Vogue.com. And the results on the advertising front are equally impressive: Vogue has achieved a 40% higher conversion rate with ads on Instagram Stories compared to campaign averages. In addition, Vogue has a 20% lower cost per acquisition with ads on Instagram Stories compared to ads in other placements. (...). You can increase your ability

to succeed like Vogue did – without its ample budget or unfiltered access to a megastar like Beyoncé – simply by adopting its approach. Translation: Add Instagram Stories to your social media strategy. Thanks to Facebook and Instagram Stories, Vogue achieved enormous success with its September issue. (Instagram 2019c).

500 million Instagram accounts are using Instagram Stories every day, and so are some of the world's biggest brands. Fullscreen, ephemeral and native stories are helping businesses tell bigger, faster and stronger brand stories. And interactive elements, such as polls and questions, bring people closer together by enabling direct participation in the shared expression. 60% of businesses on Instagram Stories use an interactive element in their **organic story** – hashtag, @mention or poll sticker – every month. Now, we're inviting businesses to engage with audiences beyond their followers by using interactive elements in stories ads, starting with the polling sticker. (Instagram 2019a).

What is this organized expiration within an otherwise proliferating whole? Beyond Instagram's possible intention to intensify and maximize time spent on the platform (data gathering, advertisement exposure, etc.), how are individual and social experiences being configured as objects of consumption in this technologically constructed disappearance? José Van Dijck's argument that the function of photography in digital cultures is decreasingly that of commemoration and increasingly that of communication (Dijck 2008:57) offers an apt avenue of analysis. From this perspective, the Stories function responds to a new social use of photo images as a means of communicating rather than commemorating, which in this context is very well exemplified by the fact that the photo images disappear. In this case the analysis would entail looking at the kind of communication the Stories format fosters. In principle I agree with Van Dijck's argument, but it holds for all

photo images on Instagram, not just the stories-style montage of images. Furthermore, the argument is based on use (i.e., commemoration vs. communication), which does not define the level of consumption. Although a story is potentially archived and reposted, in the exclusive and limited time frame in which these memory objects can be viewed, one finds that in the Stories format the copy within the copy itself is absent – that the materialization of experience itself is dematerialized, that is, exteriorized into objects. Stories makes social and individual experiences consumable on the condition of their disappearance.

With Archive and Stories, Instagram as a service of memory provides different temporal orders for the process of technical exteriorization. The Archive creates an external version of memory as recollection, while the Stories function organizes the process of exteriorization to resemble the flux of consciousness itself. In other words, as a system of memory, Instagram integrates a variety of temporal orders within the general process of circulation of the self as tertiary memory that the platform accommodates. Thus, with the multiple temporal organizing of exteriorization, Instagram tries to accommodate the whole person and a variety of temporal experiences.

The future as tertiary memory

At this point, I would like to expand on this idea of a service of memory. Instagram enables one to make a past present to others or oneself, and it gives one access to others' experiences, their being organized with a minimal time delay between their exteriorization, production, and distribution. However, these factors are neither what defines Instagram as a system of memory, nor how it organizes human experience. As such, the 'real-time' and 'nowness' of the Instagram stream is not what is consumed in each memory object. Neither could we say that they are the essential function of a system in which memory has become a personal service. Memory as a service is not first and foremost the consumption of the contraction

between different times across space, nor is it the simulation of real-time. As more than simply the immediacy with which the other's time is re-temporalized through the organizational trinity of the platform, the stream, and the smartphone are consumed in the stream-like organization of lived experiences and the 'nowness' or 'real-time' granted by the stream's more or less real-time organization of the processes of exteriorization, distribution. What is more, the consumption of human experiences does not define the service of memory. In short, the service of memory cannot be reduced to the past as technological memory or to technological memory as the past. Neither can this access to and relation of the consumption of memory objects on Instagram be confined to a question of quantity, although the platform provides an overwhelming access to lived experiences not unlike the accessibility to music or films on Spotify and Netflix. As such, one must instead address how Instagram offers the possibility to play with an image, to add layers of meaning through hashtags, filters, and stickers, and how the different temporal categories such as the Archive and Stories service and continuously provide the *future* within technological memory.

Today, you'll see a new face filter in the camera that lets you choose the perfect pair of shades that can transport you to locations all over the world – even if you're just hanging out in your bedroom. (Instagram 2017h)

Live video helps you share in an authentic way, but sometimes it can be intimidating when you're on your own. It's easy to add a guest while you're broadcasting (...). Share your live video to stories when your broadcast has ended, or choose 'Discard' and your live video will disappear from the app as usual. (Instagram 2017j).

This shows that the platform does more than foster communication or enable one to commemorate or to be together 'live' across spatial distances. If, at the level of

consumption, one is to speak of Instagram as a system of memory that gives access to and provides a function of memorization, then, I suggest, this entails the constant provision of and care for *the future as memory*. In other words, it must constantly provide the condition for future experiences to be exteriorized, create a horizon of anticipation in which the future already contains the form of exteriorization: ‘Today, you will see a new face filter that lets you brighten up the moment by placing a beam of light on your selfie or the world around you – even if the sun isn’t shining’ (Instagram 2017g). Our desire to take and share a bright rather than dark selfie is partly based on aesthetic judgement, which, like fashion, is perhaps determined on a cycle – fashionable filters, generic models and motifs (selfie) and the allusion to and re-use of the past (the aesthetics of analogue photography). However, the key is not whether we choose to place ‘a beam of light’ on our selfie or prefer to use the Mayfair or the Clarendon filter, but is rather that the temporal flux of consciousness itself already holds a consideration concerning a choice between the two. The immediacy with which we can communicate, the liveness and nowness brought forward by the platform design, the stream, and the smartphone, does much more than bring people, information, content, etc., together with a minimal temporal delay; it unites individuals in shared experience of the future as a moment of technical exteriorization. This means neither that anything at any time ends up taking a tertiary form nor that it can. Rather, Instagram with its multiple ways of organizing experiences as technological memory provides us with the service and access to ourselves and others as a potential future moment of tertiarizing. Here, I am concerned not only with how the organizations of specific tertiary retentions affect the filtering process within primary retentions, but also with how the multiple functions and features, understood as tertiarizing models, establish the general form of technical exteriorization within the individual’s temporal unfolding, as these tertiarizing functions partake in organizing the temporal flux of consciousness toward a permanent process of technical exteriorization. In other words, in this form

of organizing, attention is not simply configured through and constituted by tertiary retentions but is itself organized towards a permanent production and *circulation of self as tertiary retention*.

Conclusion

Social media platforms are systems of memory that generalize and organize lived experiences as technological memory. Moreover, consumption is configured in this tertiarizing process of lived experiences and how it is organized as tertiary retention through different systems of memory. Instagram as an organizational technology of consumption is not simply something that circulates material consumer goods. Instagram is a system of memory that generalizes and organizes lived experiences as technological memory, and produces the object of consumption in the tertiarizing process by which social and individual experiences are brought into circulation as technology memory and become exchangeable for each other. In this chapter, I have analysed how Instagram organizes lived experiences into tertiary retention through different temporal figures, with ‘the profile’ being an obvious example. In a very basic sense, the profile is a function through which content or lived experiences are related to each other through the figure of a ‘user’ or ‘users’. The profile, Archive, Stories, and the stream-like organization of content are all functions that systematically structure and relate lived experiences to each other. Certain ‘pathways’ are created in these systems of memory, which leads the individual not only from one memory object to another but also from one form of technical exteriorization to another (from the video, to the like, to the next image). Instagram structures and gives the process of exteriorization multiple variants that take numerous forms on different social media platforms. For example, on the social media platform TikTok the process of tertiarizing is organized by a certain time frame. Stories, the Archive, and the stream are different temporal figures through

which the individual can circulate as tertiary retention while at the same time integrating these temporal figures into each other.

Starting today, you can add photos and videos to your story, even if you took them more than 24 hours ago. Now, you'll be able to easily find and choose anything from your camera roll and share it instantly with friends. (Instagram 2017f).

The boundaries between the different temporal figures are constantly re-adjusted towards a greater flexibility for the individual. Stories do not simply disappear, and the distinction between what is archived and not is constantly negotiable. This establishment of a system of memory with different temporal figures that then blurs the distinction between them should be seen from at least two perspectives. The process of exteriorizing individual and social life should be able to take a variety of forms and thus extend beyond a single way of circulating the Insta-moment. The platform achieves this by constantly creating more flexibility and maximizing the degree of personal choice and the potential interactive features. No temporal experience of past, present, and future should exist without having an equivalent or a natural position within this system of memory. In this sense, *experiences are not supposed to disappear unless they have been (re)produced to do so*. Of course, there is an extension of moments that can be brought into circulation by providing different temporal figures through which the Instant – the Now – can circulate.

More generally, as a media technology, Instagram does more than assist the individual in storing – in retaining and circulating – past lived moments. In other words, Instagram is not simply a system of memory that can be defined as producing an availability across temporal and spatial distances for oneself or others to consume *past* individual and social experiences. Instead, the image as part of the order of the past is to be erased. This is the context in which I suggest the Instagram as a service of memory. In the context of Instagram, the consumption of memory is not primarily

a process by which tertiary memory is consumed in or as a process of recollection. Memory becomes a service to constantly provide the individual, not just with the means of memorization or visual communication, but also with a horizon in which the present and future are experienced as technological memory. The continuous access to the future is retainable outside the retentional finitude and temporal evaporation of individual experiences.

Now, when you're sitting at lunch daydreaming about last weekend at the beach and you decide to share a photo, the location sticker will suggest places from near where your media was captured — making it easier to tag that great taco spot, even if you didn't exactly remember what it was called. (Instagram 2018a).

In becoming a service, memory is not strictly a question of Instagram as a retentional system that enables one to communicate and share experiences across time and space, but of Instagram as a protentional system that enables a constant experience and *circulation of self as tertiary memory*.

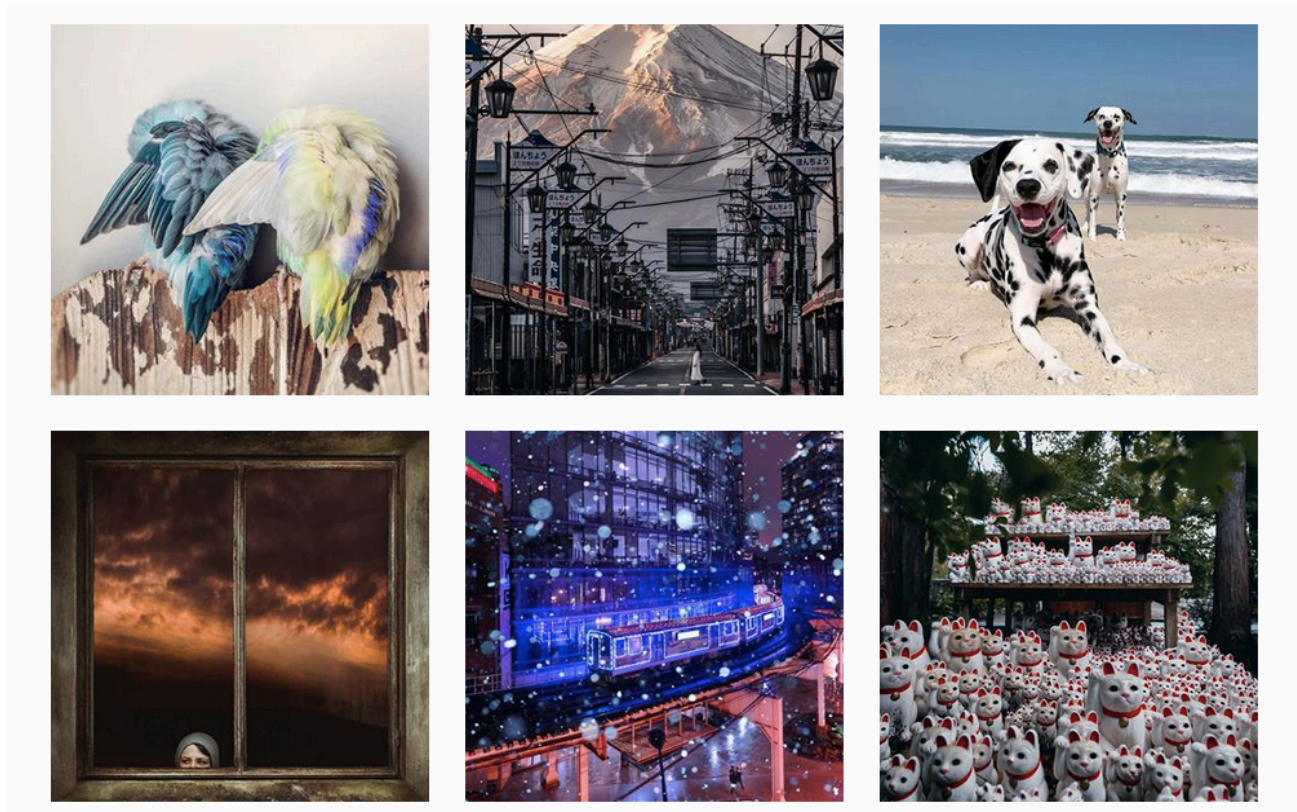
If the 'system of objects' implied that material consumer goods were consumed in an organized relation to each other, understood as essentially a semiotic principle of organizing, then when it comes to social media consumption, this is a new form of consumption related to how practices, relations, and experiences are organized as tertiary memory and how it circulates through different platforms. With Instagram, for example, this tertiarizing was organized through the stream-like organization of content and the temporal figures of Stories and Archive. In the next chapter, I expand the analysis of how lived experiences are organized as tertiary retention by addressing Instagram filters.

Chapter 6. Personalized Experiences

A simple observation made on Instagram: a picture of a white dog jumping in the snow with mountains peaks in the background; the sunlight catching a woman free-diving underwater as she returns to the surface; seven identical bicycles standing side by side, elongated by the shadows they cast, while the Eiffel Tower rises in the distance; two bracelets leaning against a piece of wood on a white piece of fabric. These photo images have all been uploaded to Instagram's own Instagram profile. They are aesthetically perfect, their motifs carefully curated, and they are unlikely to have been taken on-the-go with a smartphone camera (but who knows). A second set of images, this time uploaded to the profile @Welivetoexplore: two birds (perhaps parrots) with different-coloured feathers sitting in similar positions on a chair or piece of wood, their backs turned to the camera; a street running through a city towards a mountain that fills the entire background of the image; two dogs, perhaps siblings, playing around on the beach; a woman's face, only half visible, looking out of an enormous window in which the sky is dramatically reflected; a



metro-train above ground, surrounded by skyscrapers as the snow falls in the night; hundreds of identical toy cats of varying size, surrounded by trees. The images are horizontally placed in rows of three.



Vertically, the images come on to the screen as one scrolls down. As I scroll through these images, a question keeps coming to mind: how can so many images, different in time, genre, and referent exist so peacefully side-by-side without any apparent contradiction? How can Instagram accommodate so many different individual experiences? Just as objects are never offered to us in total disorganization, as Baudrillard argues, here no single image, no single experience is consumed, but always a succession of images. In Chapter 5 I analysed this succession and organizing of lived experiences by addressing the temporal organizing of the stream, the Archive, and Stories. This chapter looks at social media platforms as creating an individual and personalized environment, focusing on Instagram functions and features, such as the easy use of filters to adjust and modify images. Thus, I continue

the analysis of Instagram, exploring not only how Instagram provides a general service of memory but also how the tertiarizing of individual and social experience implies a logic of *personalization*. Fundamentally, the analysis examines how the variety of options for changing, adjusting, and personalizing photo images serves to organize and reproduce this circulation of lived experiences.

6.1. Two forms of personalization

In the previous chapter, the constant introduction of new features and functions was seen as a service. In other words, as a system of memory, Instagram constantly provides the future with technological memory, thus creating a horizon of anticipation in which the means and experience of exteriorization are constantly available. At the level of individual use, these features and functions are given as a set of options to choose between, which makes this circulation of self – this tertiarizing of oneself – ‘fun’, ‘unique’, and ‘personal’. More than a standardized one-size-fits-all, genuine mass medium for easy communication, searching, and finding, Instagram proclaims that it is ‘personalized for you’ (Instagram 2018e). In other words, the platform’s whole set-up is geared to the individual and to meet its requirement to have ‘real experiences’, thus enabling the user to ‘express’ himself as the medium describes it (Instagram 2017d, 2018f). However, how is Instagram personalized for each individual?

Algorithmic personalization

As Van Dijck argues, personalization in the context of social media platforms and platforms in general is a keyword in the discourse surrounding platforms. It is a promise of solutions tailored to meet the specific and unique requirements of organizations, businesses, and individuals (Dijck et al. 2018:1). Personalization, Van Dijck maintains, is central to understanding the working of algorithmic selection mechanisms, which in the specific context of social media platforms is

described as ‘automated personalization’ (Dijck and Poell 2013:9) and in a broader context as ‘algorithmic personalization’ (Dijck et al. 2018:41).

Platforms algorithmically determine the interests, the desires, and needs of each user on the basis of a wide variety of datafied user signals, personalizing the user’s stream of content, advertising and content suggestions. Personalization depends on “predictive analytics” (...). (Dijck et al. 2018:41).

As a system of memory Instagram selects and curates on behalf of the user what memory objects will pop up. For example, the user is given suggestions for potential profiles to follow and can mute comments and posts from specific profiles without unfollowing them.

Today we’re introducing mute in feed, a new way to control what posts you see on Instagram. The new feature lets you hide posts in feed from certain accounts, without unfollowing them. With this change, you can make your feed even more personalized to what matters to you. (Instagram 2018c).

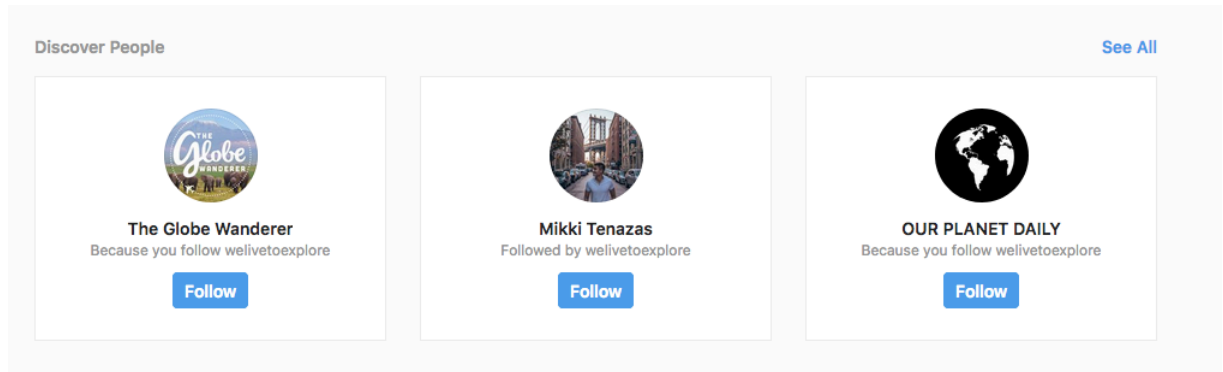
These individual selections available to the individual user along with the algorithmic filtering and curating among a proliferation of content entail a process in which Instagram is adjusted to and personalized’ for each user: ‘Through algorithmic personalization, as well as giving users extensive options to select, search, filter, and follow (...) platforms construct [around each user] a completely personalized environment of services, information, and people’ (Dijck et al. 2018:42).²¹ Platforms create a personalized environment that derives from a

²¹ This algorithmic personalization is what Yuk Hui, following Bernard Stiegler, conceptualizes as ‘tertiary protention’. Tertiary protention is the ability of a technical system to anticipate on behalf of the individual, thus determining links to be made, content to be presented, and so forth (Hui 2016). I

mixture of platform features allowing the individual to find and search for specific content, to make certain connections, and to algorithmically curate and select specific content (news, commodities, relations, etc.). In this mix, the platform decides what appears, what relations are made and excluded, and so forth (ibid, 42). In relation to consumption, the curation and recommendation of content through digital online platforms can be understood as a personalization of the search and find process as well as of online purchasing (Alaimo and Kallinikos 2017). Alaimo and Kallinikos's construction and grasp of social media consumption as an empirical research field resonates with this conception of personalization as a process involving an algorithmic content selection based partly on the aggregation and calculation of data left by users (ibid, 181). The particular logics – that is, the selection mechanism – by which the algorithms of digital online platforms select, filter, and otherwise customize and thereby produce certain relations and not others between a consumer and an object are described as a personalization of the consumer experience. In the algorithmic and automated sense, personalization is understood as a code consisting of a set of criteria and categorizations by which a platform structures a particular field of successive content (for example the personalized feed on Instagram). The algorithm is a curator that selects and filters the proliferation of memory objects, for example, the profiles and hashtags followed, on the basis of individual choices and the specific logic of the algorithm. Personalization is also related to a process of anticipation in the sense that the platform suggests what content, what relations, etc., the individual might find relevant and want to buy, relate to, or otherwise interact with. Explore is a feature on Instagram that allows the individual to browse content that Instagram has selected and thinks the individual might find relevant and interesting.

will discuss this later, as in Chapter 8 I return to the question of human anticipation and machinic anticipation in relation to platforms as organizational technologies of consumption.

People come to Explore every day to discover new ideas, people, and experiences. And now we're excited to bring you a redesigned Explore that makes discovery even easier. *Explore is still personalized for you*, but the content is now organized into topic channels so you can browse across your interests and go deeper on any area you'd like. (Instagram 2018e) (my emphasis).



‘Explore is still personalized for you.’ A personalized exploration strikes me as somewhat of an oxymoron. Nevertheless, the Explore feature, as Instagram describes above, is an example of algorithmic personalization because Instagram selects and anticipates what content the individual user might find relevant to explore on the platform. The above image is a screenshot from Instagram suggesting potential profiles to follow. Third-party payment also determines what is or is not to appear in the selection, which Instagram describes as a distinction between ‘sponsored content’ and ‘organic content’.

Personalization taken as an effect of algorithm work emphasizes the computational prescription of certain relations between user and content (organic or sponsored), thus organizing within a proliferating whole a field of content to be consumed. This technical and algorithmic personalization involves the platform’s anticipating what content is relevant on behalf of the individual subject, and goes into the organization and presentation of memory objects to Instagram and other social media platforms. Now, as Van Dijck states, all social media platforms structure a field of content through various logics of calculating, selecting, and

filtering data. Moreover, as I have shown in the case of the personalized Explore function, although this plays a significant role in how Instagram organizes memory objects, I suggest another perspective on Instagram as a platform that creates and personalizes experience – a perspective beyond the notion of algorithmic personalization. Indeed, I propose the notion of a personalization that goes beyond an automated and digital structuration of content based on a mixture of individual choices and algorithmic calculations that produce, organic or not, a personalized environment. In the context of Instagram, I am not seeking to advance a notion of personalization as referring to a field of potential content configured to be absorbed and consumed, but intend instead to explore personalization in relation to so-called personalizing functions such as Instagram filters, stickers, and so forth, with which the individual can adjust, play with, and modify photo images. I will explore this as a ‘personal personalization’, as distinct from algorithmic and automated personalization.

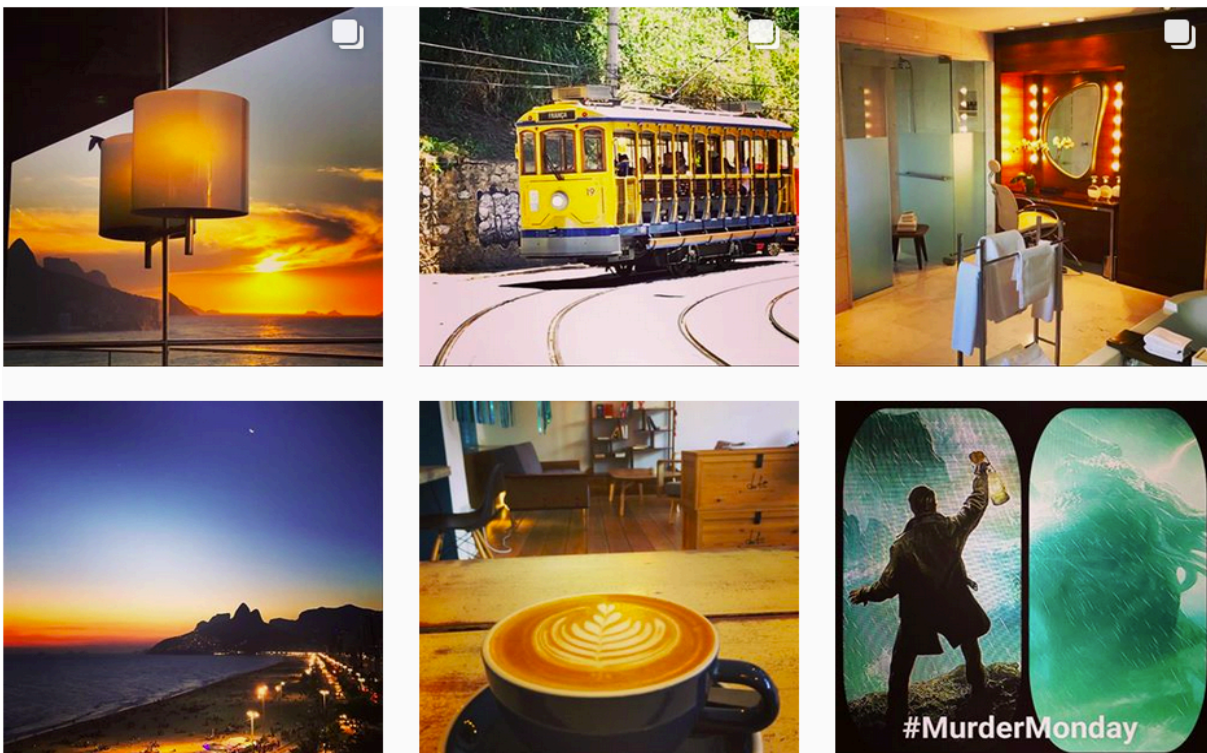
Personal personalization

Moving away from the automated and algorithmic conception of personalization, one finds another form of personalization expressed in the ability to customize, adjust, and change photo images – in other words, a form that makes the exteriorization and circulation of self as technological memory into a ‘personal’ experience. I have already shown how this circulation of self is organized through various temporal figures such as Stories, the stream, and Archive. Next, I explore how Instagram as a system of memory personalizes this circulation of self as tertiary retention.

Face filters, text styles and stickers help turn casual moments into experiences you can’t wait to share. Now we’re unlocking the ability for third parties to design unique, interactive camera experiences for their followers. That means you turn any video into a NBA dunkcam or add a

cloud of hearts and Pomeranians to fluff up your photo (Instagram 2018e). Today, we're rolling out a fun way to express how you're feeling with weather-inspired face filters. Now, you can share your emotions through a happy sun, a sad raincloud, an angry thunderstorm or a laid-back sun. Try them on and watch the mood change, and combine with other creative tools to add that personal touch. (Instagram 2017b).

These platform updates announced by Instagram on its website demonstrate how the platform continuously re-adjusts existing functions and introduces new ones. This does not include those provided by other applications. Features like face filters and text styles enable the individual to add a 'personal touch' to its expression and 'turn casual moments into experiences you can't wait to share'. You can now personalize your own casual moments. The updates mainly concern the introduction to and re-adjustment of small features like the aforementioned ones that enable the people to customize and personalize photo images. What is offered, to the individual user in the



Images appeared when searching for 'Mayfair filter'. Screenshot from Instagram.



From Instagram (Instagram 2017k)

choices of a variety of filters, is then the option to ‘personalize’ what must, as such, be an otherwise impersonal experience. While the Explore feature is a form of personalization operating by way of anticipating and predicting what the individual might want to explore, this form is, as it were, more manual and qualitative. Put differently, with an algorithmic personalization an algorithm creates the individual and the space it enters as a uniquely designed personalized place, while in the Explore feature one is encouraged to do this oneself. As such, the individual can use Instagram’s tools of personalization as a means of creating and expressing himself. As this process is carried out, the individual’s Instagram profile and stream are simultaneously personalized. I suggest that the features and functions such as filters, text styles, etc., with which users modify, add to, and give a ‘personal touch’ to photo images are a way in which lived experiences are organized and brought into

circulation as tertiary retention. Applying this understanding of these features and functions as a kind of ‘personal personalization’, I would like to examine how they integrate and reproduce individual and social experiences as consumable objects on Instagram.

Theory of personalization

A turn to Baudrillard’s notion of personalization is useful here, although I will develop it in a somewhat different context. Personalization in the context of a system of objects is related to consumption as a field of industrially produced differences. As the individual performs the act of buying, possessing, and surrounding itself with objects, it tries to particularize itself. The individual assembles and expresses itself through consumer choices. However, in these acts of particularizing, the individual conforms to what Baudrillard calls the general code of difference. Baudrillard writes of the system of consumption:

There is, *first* a structural logic of differentiation, which produces individuals as *personalized*, that is to say, as different from one another, but in terms of a general models and a code, to which, in the very act of particularizing themselves, they *conform*. (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 92).

The colour of our car, the small choices we make when designing our home, all of these signs imply a process of particularizing in and through consumptive practices. This particularizing process entails conforming to the homogenizing effect of the system of consumption itself, which operates as a structural logic of differentiation. With the notion of personalization, Baudrillard captures the process by which singular entities in the consumer society are substituted with a ‘differential form’ that makes them exchangeable with each other within the general system of consumption (ibid). According to Baudrillard, what might appear on an individual level to be a process of individualizing is, on a structural level, a process of

conforming to the logic of the system of consumption. As I read this, personalization is an organizational logic by which a system integrates individual and singular entities (and in my case experiences), making them exchangeable with each other rather than referring to something outside the system. From this perspective, personalized consumption is therefore a fairly strange conception, as consumption itself is a personalizing process. Borrowing this notion of personalization from Baudrillard, I want to advance the idea that Instagram features and functions like filtering, modifying, and changing photo images are processes that *personalize experiences* or, as Instagram puts it, ‘the casual moments’ of everyday life.

In the consumer society personalization is said to be a process by which acts of particularizing through consumptive practices confine individuality to a set of models. Could one, then, speak of a similar process in the context of a system of memory? I have offered updates and the introduction of multiple filters, specifically those provided by Instagram, as examples through which experiences can be made personal and unique. Could these also be described as a process by which a system – now understood as consisting of memory objects, rather than sign objects – organizes singular entities into a more or less coherent whole, that is, personalizes experience, but in a very different sense than meant by Instagram itself? In the context of Instagram I have advanced a notion of consumption not as a structured field of signs but as something thoroughly grounded in processes of exteriorisation by which lived experiences are organized and consumed through different tertiary forms. This complicates the analysis of memory personalization as a process of particularizing through general models of differentiation, because I do not presume this to be the general structuring principle around which Instagram organizes lived experiences into objects of consumption. In other words, the variety of features and functions through which one can personalize memory objects might not integrate lived experiences through a principle of difference in the way Baudrillard argues occurs in the consumer society. Thus, I propose that the analysis of Instagram as

involving a personalization of lived experiences should not be conducted through the analytical lens of consumption as a differential field of signs where the Mayfair filter would refer to, say, the ‘happy sun’ or the ‘angry thunderbird’ as a chain of signifiers and more generally as a code of difference that individuals appropriate, manipulate, and modify to create a personal visual identity. The possibilities of giving photo images a personal touch that makes them distinct, authentic, and real, serve to integrate different lived experiences through the general principle of exteriorization rather than a principle of differentiation. To paraphrase the Baudrillard quote above: there is first a system of memory and a cultural logic of circulating the self as tertiary retention, which produces lived experiences – a Now – as something that can be personalized, adjusted, and transformed but that has already conformed individual and social experience to the principle of exteriorization itself. The point is not that everything is exteriorized, but rather how these personalizing functions enable any given Now to be experienced and exchanged for any other Now through the very idea of a personal Now. This idea of a personalized Now is what increasingly makes diverse situations, places, and individual and social experiences exchangeable as memory objects *on* Instagram.

This way of understanding and analysing Instagram as creating a personalized and individualized environment supplements the idea of personalization as an algorithmic and automated process of selecting, curating, and filtering content. For the purposes of this analysis, I am not seeking to consider this idea of personalization as an automated process performed by the platform, but instead examining how these personalizing functions organize individual and social life as memory objects and thus make them exchangeable for each other within the platform. The key here is that these possibilities of using visual effects like filters to adjust, manipulate, and circulate lived experiences do not, so to speak, operate *after* experience. That is, the aporetic (re)organizational relation between the interior of the subject and the exterior technical memory milieu entails that how

Instagram as a system of memory retains and organizes lived experiences feeds into the way future experiences can come into being – that is, an organization of the selection of primary retentions. Thus, when I assert a personal personalization, I intend to suggest not only that this is an adjustment of photo images on Instagram, but also how these features and functions already structure human attention and thus produce the very idea of a personalized Now. In continuation of this discussion of personalization, I will focus on a particular feature of the Instagram platform, namely the filter, as being not only a particular technological and aesthetic organizing of images but also a phenomenological organizing of human experiences.

6.2 Personalization: the case of Instagram filters

The fact that filtering photo images is becoming a generalized form of expression, a kind of universal and global language, is a pertinent development to explore analytically. The filter is therefore a privileged object of analysis in terms of exploring how the Instagram platform organizes individual and social life as technological memory. Filters are not a feature confined to Instagram, but can also be found on platforms such as Snapchat. Similarly, several third-party applications, such as VSCO, make filters additional to Instagram's available. Hence, as an easy photo enhancement tool, the filter is not a feature restricted to the Instagram platform, its actually being a common element in many contemporary image and photo-sharing technologies.²² However, the widespread practice of filtering images remains substantially undertheorized within contemporary social theory and media theory. Research on Instagram rarely treats the filter as a topic of conceptual

²² To play with, change, and manipulate colours and shades of a photograph, digital or non-digital, for various purposes is far from being a new phenomenon. On the contrary, to manipulate – or filter – images is a part of the history of photography. Yet, differences exist between analogue filtering, the early forms of digital filtering, and contemporary filters such as those provided by Instagram (see, for example, Bakhshi, Shamma, Kennedy, & Gilbert, 2015; Mitchell, 1994, p. 90)

discussion, although Instagram's introduction of filters is a significant reason for the platform's success. Nor does the filter appear to be a prevalent topic within broader theoretical and conceptual discussions of the new media condition. To be clear, I am not arguing that no research on Instagram filters has been done, and, in fact, will critically discuss this research in the following pages. However, I contend that contemporary research on filters rarely goes beyond questions of usage, communication, and visual aesthetics, and that this is partly due to a conceptual constraint: filters are conceived as technological means or tools through which photos are enhanced and through which meaning is expressed and communicated visually. Following the conceptual framework developed in Part I, I seek to expand the understanding of Instagram filters and see them as more than mere technological tools of expression. To this end, I argue for a conceptual understanding of the filter as operating *phenomenologically* beyond and prior to the Instagram platform. From this perspective, the filter as something organizing lived experiences into consumable objects concerns not only how photo images are consumed *on* Instagram but also how lived experiences themselves become exchangeable by means of these personalizing functions. Having established this conception of filters, in the next section I look at how filters personalize and bring experiences into circulation.

What is an Instagram filter?

One could imagine these many filter variants as having their own fashion seasons: they proliferate, they spread across various environments (platforms), they peak, they die, and they re-emerge in a mutated form. One could describe these filters by focusing on how they are used in certain social contexts, or one could try to categorize them according to the social and cultural meaning communicated and expressed through them. One could even seek to describe some sort of general visual aesthetics of Instagram filters. Important though these aspects are, in the following

inquiry, I focus more broadly and conceptually on filters as an organizational logic through which lived experiences are brought into circulation and organized as technological memory. As such, I have entitled this section ‘What is an Instagram filter?’ to pose a question not only about the technological or aesthetic qualities of the filter, but also about how to approach the filter as a foundational organizational logic of contemporary social media platforms – and thus of the social life embedded in them.

This Instagram filter analysis can benefit from the following question: does a filter primarily *add* something to the Instagram photo image, or *remove* something from it? Posing this question allows one to critically examine the logic governing existing conceptions and analyses of filters while not presupposing that the filter has such qualities. In other words, contemporary research strategies tend to assume that the use of filters *adds* something to the photo image, which, as I will argue, mirrors how Instagram imagines and discourses itself. Second, despite and in opposition to the somewhat obvious and general assumption that the media user adds something to the photo image by using the filter, I will tentatively suggest the following hypothesis: *the organizational logic of the filter is one of subtraction*. This hypothesis of subtraction is inspired by a reading of Baudrillard’s conception and analysis of advertising (Baudrillard 1998, 2005). As I will argue, it is what filters subtract rather than what they add that makes them a constitutive element in the organizing and consumption of individual and social life on Instagram.

Before proceeding with the *hypothesis of subtraction*, I would first like to clarify and critically discuss the other somewhat more obvious and popular conception of the filter, namely that the individual and social use of filters adds something to the photo image. This overview of the work on filters has been divided into three sections: filters conceived of as something that enhances and adds *quality* to the photo image; filters as a means of individual and social *communication* and *self-expression*; and, finally, these aspects placed in relation to how Instagram

speaks about itself and its users. Through a reading of Baudrillard, I will then develop the other idea that filters remove something from the photo image.

Filters add quality

From a technical perspective, the filter function is a tool with which people can automatically enhance and modify a photo according to some pre-defined settings (Bakhshi et al. 2015). With the Instagram app, the user can choose between various filters and face stickers that automatically modify the photo image. These filters can be divided into two overall categories: filters that change the colours and shades of the images and face filters that create effects like fake cat ears, a nose, or a huge mouth on a face when a photo is taken. The first category includes the Mayfair, Clarendon, Hudson, and Juno filters, while some examples of face stickers are a 'happy sun', a 'sad raincloud' or an 'angry thunderstorm' through which you can visually 'express how you're feeling' (Instagram 2017b). The variety of Instagram filters and third-party applications offers users multiple filter choices with which to adjust the colour tones and shades of photo images or add different kinds of face stickers to them. These colour adjustment filters seem to share a general characteristic: they enable users to improve the aesthetic quality of an image on the go and with relative ease. The notion that filters enhance the aesthetic qualities of images is a common conception among scholars.

When we see our pile of dirty laundry framed in a photograph we may be better able to see the beauty of the bright colours, and if it does not look beautiful to us, we can easily add a filter to the photograph to enhance its aesthetic qualities. (Walker Rettberg 2014:25).

Because the Instagram filter function is user friendly, a bad photo can easily be turned into a good one, an amateur photo into a professional-looking one, or, as Lev Manovich puts it, the filter has 'democratized making good-looking images'

(Manovich 2016:73). A once time-consuming process requiring professional cameras, editing programs, and technical skills has now become a standardized and automated element of many apps and cameras (Bakhshi et al. 2015). In a sense, Manovich is right: there is something profoundly democratic about the filter. No longer the privilege of a particular group, a filter like the Mayfair can be used by the rich or poor, famous or ordinary, professional or amateur to make a photo of the sunset look like a glossy advertisement for a hotel resort. Of course, one could insist that filters might be free in the sense of accessibility, but that certain habitual dispositions privilege some individuals and groups over others – which is not the concern of this dissertation. Whether filters are democratic or not, a prevailing assumption is that they and their use generally tend to enhance and *add* something to the photo image, namely an *aesthetic quality*.

Filters are visual resources for communication

Let us continue examining research strategies that usually assume that the use of filters adds something to the photo image. For example, some scholars argue that choosing styles, techniques, and filters requires that some element of social and cultural meaning be articulated (Manovich 2016; Zhao and Zappavigna 2017). The automated adjustment of colours and shades, such as enhancing pink tones, making a photograph black and white, or adding different face stickers, is conceived of as a set of visual resources through which media users articulate and produce particular social and cultural meanings. From this perspective, the wide array of filters are visual resources that help establish the meaning of the photo image and what the individual intends to express. A typical assumption is that '[t]echnological filters allow us to express ourselves in certain ways but not in others. We can apply certain filters to an image we post to Instagram but not others' (Walker Rettberg 2014:23). The Instagram filtering of images is a visual resource through which social and cultural meaning is produced and continuously negotiated. Media scholar Nadav

Hochman shows a similar conception of filters in his study on Instagram users' engagement with the work of anonymous street artist Banksy. Hochman argues that '[b]y adding a filter, or photographing an artwork from a particular angle, or posing with an artwork, or interacting with it in some unexpected ways, people add their own meanings to the artist's works' (Hochman 2016:379). With this emphasis on Instagram's position in creating, defining, and developing the emerging visual culture of 21st-century media society, Manovich writes:

(...) in my view, photography today—and Instagram platform in particular—gives young people at least as much power in crafting unique identities as music. And in comparison to writing music, Instagram is much easier to use. To establish a visual style, chose particular subjects and compositions for your photos and use Instagram or VSCO app to apply the consistent edits, filters, and presets to all of them. Between different subjects, compositions, color palettes, contrast levels, and other adjustments and filters, the number of distinct styles that can be created is very large. (Manovich 2016:90).

Manovich's positive valuation of Instagram derives from what he argues is its ability to give young people the 'power' to craft 'unique identities'. This power arises because Instagram provides the infrastructure to establish a visual identity by giving the individual user the mechanism and ability to 'establish a visual style, chose particular subjects and compositions for your photos'. Because one can craft identity and play with different visual resources, as Manovich argues, the filter and other visual resources provided by Instagram and third-party apps are put within the narrative of self-expression, communication, and meaning. In other words, filters are first of all conceived of as adding something to the image (and thus something to the individual), as the individual and social practice of choosing and selecting filters is tied up in the meaning-making process of the image and in the user's visual

identity. Any modifications of the photo image through filters and face stickers tends to be conceptualized as resources the individual can mobilize to communicate and express itself. Meaning is communicated and expressed through the styles, techniques, and filters chosen by the user. From this perspective, the individual media user's accumulation of photo images, choice of people to follow and what and when to like, post, and comment on can be viewed as part of a self-presentation and self-branding carefully managed through a deliberate and continuous curating of the parts of everyday life to share and how to share them.

The discourse of Instagram itself

Speaking in the terms of self-expression, meaning and communication, is remarkably close to how Instagram presents itself and explains its purpose. These are a few examples:

Over the past year, Instagram Stories has become a key part of how you express yourself — but there hasn't been an easy way to keep your stories around for more than 24 hours. Now you can more fully express your identity by grouping stories you've shared into highlights and featuring them on your profile. (Instagram 2017d).

Today, we're rolling out a fun way to express how you're feeling with weather-inspired face filters. Now, you can share your emotions through a happy sun, a sad raincloud, an angry thunderstorm or a laid-back sun. (Instagram 2017b).

If one is to believe Instagram, weather-inspired filters are a tool with which users can express themselves, how they are feeling in or about a particular situation. 'Turn any photo or video into a visual expression of kindness by using the new heart-shape sticker collection' (Instagram 2017e). A heart-shaped sticker shows kindness, a sad raincloud may express unhappiness, and so forth: 'Face-filters, text styles and stickers help turn casual moments into experiences you can't wait to share [...] or

add a cloud of hearts and Pomeranians to fluff up your photo’ (Instagram 2018e). With the sad raincloud, a heart-shaped sticker, the Mayfair or the Amaro filter at their disposal, Instagram users can use a photo to add meaning to a particular moment that they then express and communicate with a simple touch on the smartphone. ‘Instagram has always been a place for self-expression, and now there are even more ways to express yourself and your interests’ (Instagram 2018b). The above excerpts are taken from Instagram’s official blog, where it announces updates and introduces new features and functions. ‘Story Highlights lets you show all the sides of your personality, and you can make highlights out of anything you’ve shared to your story in the past’ (Instagram 2017d).

The filter, understood as a visual resource, a social and cultural practice of meaning making, a means of communication, a technical feature, and so forth, operates within an analytical perspective of what we might call *addition*. One could thus analyse the various filters and filter functions by focusing on these qualities. Yet, the underlying logic here, which dominates contemporary approaches to and conceptions of filters, tends to overlook that in all this image filtering something is also removed and subtracted. This is the perspective from which I suggest one can speak of filters as a consumptive logic that organizes lived experience as consumable objects. Thus, instead of proceeding on the assumption that filters *add* something to the photo image, I want to question this basic assumption. What if contrary to the above logic *filters remove something from rather than add something to the photo image*. In other words, contrary to the intentions built into the platform, to how Instagram imagines its users, and to the assumption dominating cultural and social research, I now advance the hypothesis that the filter removes something from the photo image, and that through this removal one can understand how individual and social experiences are reproduced, brought into circulation, and consumed in the process by which they are tertiarized. It is through subtraction that experiences become exchangeable to each other, and it is at this level one can thus understand

Instagram's personalizing function as something that integrates so many different photo images. Exploring the logic and existing conceptions of the filter through the analytical gaze of addition/subtraction changes the very terms of the investigation, thus enabling in a consumption context one to speak of and interrogate the filter beyond questions concerning the social and cultural usage and meaning, visual aesthetics, self-expression, and branding that dominate contemporary research on Instagram and its filters.

Instagram filters as perceptual filters

I began the chapter by relating my fascination with the way such a variety of images without any apparent contradictions appear at least somewhat peacefully to co-exist on Instagram, a fascination that also remains an empirical one. I have made the filter and the filter function my starting points, leaving aside other organizing aspects of the platform, such as the profile function and hashtags. My observations on Instagram and a critical discussion with contemporary research on filters have brought me to the following understanding of the filter: I consider filters and the filter function not solely as a technical tool with which the user modifies a photo image, but also as a perceptual filter. The constitutive role of media technologies within the flow of human attention, as argued by Stiegler, does not oppose the human time of 'time-consciousness' and that of technology. Put differently, the way in which a platform organizes lived experiences technologically (as a system of tertiary memory) becomes (along with other aspects) constitutive of the temporal unfolding of future experiences. This is the feedback loop between primary and tertiary retentions. Through such a prism, I consider the filter to affect not only the 'image-object', in this case the singular photograph, but generally also contemporary platform users' 'mental image' production (Derrida and Stiegler 2002:147). As such, although adding a filter to a photo image entails a process that,

in a linear time sense, happens after the image is taken²³, one must phenomenologically conceive of the filter as operating prior to and within the temporal unfolding of 21st-century media users' experiences. In this sense, Instagram filters understood to personalize memory cannot be confined to being technological tools but must be said to operate as *perceptual filters*. I argue, that this integration of filters' everydayness into the temporal unfolding of millions of users is what turns image filters into perceptual filters and thus separates the filter function from earlier forms of digital filtering. One might say that at the stage when the technical modulation of images is integrated into the everydayness of taking, uploading, and sharing images, the filtering of images becomes a filter function.

While I, along with Stiegler, can advance an understanding of the filter as having to do with experiences, I would, however, now like to turn to my exploration of the filter as an organizational logic through which lived experiences are reproduced and consumed on Instagram. As suggested, I do not proceed with the analysis by pointing to similarities and differences between various filters or between the use of filters and genres of photos (casual, professional, design) (Manovich, 2016), places (home, work, city, outdoors), or time (morning, afternoon, night). I am aiming to distance myself from any assumption that the filter organizes images by adding something to them. Instead, I am suggesting a line of analysis that explores the organizing aspect of the filter function not from the vantage point of addition but of subtraction. To further elaborate on such a notion of the filter and to proceed with an analysis of how these personalizing functions have an integrative dimension, I turn to Baudrillard's analysis of advertising and in general to his theory of consumption.

²³ There are also filters that are 'live' and viewed directly on the smartphone screen before the image is taken.

6.3. Advertising and Instagram filters: An organizational logic of subtraction

Baudrillard is particularly relevant when one advances the notion of Instagram filters as removing something from the photo image, for this is the basis of his conception of advertisement. Moreover, as I have argued, his work on and theorization of consumption generally shows an attentiveness to how objects circulate and to the organizational condition of their proliferation.

Advertising: The disappearance of use value

Advertising, Baudrillard argues, ‘achieves the marvellous feat of consuming a substantial budget with the sole aim not of adding to the use-value of objects, but of *subtracting value from them (...)*’ (Baudrillard 1998:46). To fully grasp what is at stake here, one needs to place Baudrillard’s analysis of advertisements and consumer goods in the context of his theory of value (Baudrillard 1981), as presented in Part I.

As covered, Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1981:123–29) outlines four types of values that describe how objects circulate and are exchanged according to different logics: 1) the logic of the symbolic governed by a principle of *ambivalence*; 2) the functional logic of use-value governed by the principle of *utility*; 3) the economic logic of exchange-value governed by the principle of *equivalence*; and 4) the differential logic of sign-value governed by the principle of *difference* (Baudrillard 1981:66). Objects circulate according to these logics, thus constituting different relations to objects. In the modern consumer society, objects are organized and circulate according to their sign-value and therefore to the principle of differentiation, and this organization defines the *consumptive* relation to objects. This differs from objects as symbols of a specific relationship: ‘the object-become-sign no longer gathers its meaning in the concrete relationship between two people. It assumes its meaning in its differential relation to other signs’ (Baudrillard 1981:66). In the consumer society, objects receive their meaning and function less

in relation to a specific use, and they decreasingly symbolize and personify human relationships, instead constituting a differential order of signification in which people strive for social meaning and prestige through the accumulation of sign-objects.

In the consumer society, objects decreasingly attain meaning and value from a referential plane of need and utility and the functional logic of use-value, and increasingly attain meaning within the sphere of the differential logic sign-value. This is how one should understand that the consumption of objects is ‘established upon a relegation of their use-value’ (Baudrillard 1998:91). Advertising, according to Baudrillard, is the perfect example of this transition between two logics of value: use-value is removed from the object (functional logic), which is instead infused with a sign-value governed by the logic of differentiation. My intention here is neither to adopt Baudrillard’s structural and semiologically inspired method of analysis, nor to speak of photo images as signs that circulate. Rather, I want to highlight and expand Baudrillard’s understanding of how objects circulate, for the explicit purpose of understanding Instagram filters and more broadly social media consumption. With advertising, Baudrillard highlights a central organizational condition required for consumer goods to proliferate and circulate: to circulate within a community of objects, that is, to be bought, possessed, and consumed, an object must first have something subtracted from rather than added to it. This is the disappearance of use-value in favour of sign-value. Importantly, this reorganization of objects according to the differential logic of sign-value can be said to be an organizational condition for the ‘ever-accelerating processing of generations of products, appliances and gadgets’ (Baudrillard 2005:1). In other words, the profusion and proliferation of objects are organized around a process of subtracting, and advertising as a medium substantially contributes to this process. I suggest that filters are like advertising.

Filters of subtraction

I will now take this idea of an underlying subtraction process as the condition under which objects proliferate and circulate, and introduce it into my analysis of the filter function and the proliferation of memory objects. The filter, so to speak, organizes lived experiences into technological memory by way of subtracting. One might even say that the only reason so many photo images can exist peacefully side-by-side is only because something is removed from them. Thus, the organizational condition under which photo images can proliferate on Instagram is subtraction. If filters, like advertising, remove something from the object, then what are they removing? To further expand on how filters organize lived experiences as consumable objects by way of subtraction, I now turn to Roland Barthes's analysis of photography in his famous book *Camera Lucida* (1981). According to Barthes, photography creates a certain intentionality towards what is in the photograph: although the photograph shows something no longer there, it is nevertheless experienced as something that has been there. This effect is what Barthes calls the 'that-has-been' of the photograph, its 'noeme' (Barthes 1981:76–78). This phenomenological effect is not produced by written language or painting because it derives from the technical synthesis of the camera, the instant print of light on paper. Each photograph carries with it a certitude that separates the photo image from images in general. It is this temporal conjunction of past and reality (that-has-been) in the photo image – carried along as a temporal trace – that constitutes the specific temporality of the photo image across different genres of photographs and different photographic practices. I argue that one is to understand the filter and the filtering of photo images in the context of what Barthes calls the 'that-has-been'.

Let us recall what Baudrillard said about the circulation of objects in consumer society: for an object to become an object of consumption, it needs to be liberated from itself as an object experienced in relation to a plane of use, need, and functionality. This does not mean that objects are not used or that they do not have

a function. However, neither their use nor their function makes them objects of consumption. Here, I would like to propose an organizational affinity between the circulation of objects within a system of objects and the circulation of photo images (tertiary retention) within Instagram's system of memory. In other words, what Baudrillard said about the consumer object is also becoming true of the social media image. To become an object of consumption, to enter into endless social media consumption and circulation, the photo image must first be liberated from itself as an image of something *in time*, the that-has-been. It is in this sense that one can grasp the organizational principle of the filter function as being subtraction. Filters in their many variations do not first and foremost add something to the image; they remove from the photo its relation to itself as an image of something *in time*. What is *consumed* through this filtering is less a singular content, a concrete lived moment, than it is this organizing principle of subtraction that itself is consumed.

This brings one a bit closer to understanding what characterizes Instagram as an organizational site of consumption of lived experiences. Baudrillard's notion of consumption conveys that what is consumed is never a singular object or content but rather a principle of organization, namely *difference*. In this context, particular contents or specific images representing something lived and experienced are not just what are consumed through Instagram and the filtering of images. What defines consumption is not the consuming of the photo as a singular lived moment, or a particular style, feeling, or mood that visually frames the moment. Neither does an organizational logic based on difference, as Baudrillard argues is the case with consumer goods, (partly) define Instagram as an organized site of production and consumption of memory. What defines it is a logic organized around a principle of *indifference*.²⁴ Let me be clear; I am not suggesting that people

²⁴ This analysis extends Roland Barthes's comments about how an indifference towards the 'that-has-been' emerges in the everyday flux of images, and Baudrillard speaks about a destruction of the image

do not care about what they photograph, upload, and share, nor that there is no engagement with photo image content. I can say nothing about that. Rather, with this analysis of filters, I am trying to describe the process whereby the medium Instagram – its features and functions – organizes individual and social experiences into consumable objects – not as sign objects but as memory objects – by way of making them exchangeable with each other through different personalizing functions. I further suggest that the filter does this by removing time from the photo image. What is consumed through the filtering of images on Instagram is an indifference – the levelling out – of the photo image as a carrier of something in time. Indeed, precisely this organizational process, and not the time the photo image makes present, is the object of consumption. This makes it clear that the essential aspect of the filter (conceived of at the level of consumption) is not a particular use, style, or visual aesthetic but the way in which the filter organizes lived experiences as consumable objects through a process of removing *time* from the photo image.

In the context of memory consumption and Instagram as a system for reproducing everyday experiences, I suggest that, although one might say that these personalizing functions integrate diverse experiences through a process of differentiation – as in the consumption of objects as signs – this notion of filters instead enables one to see this ability to personalize, to adjust, and to express through a diverse set of features and functions as integrating the time of an image through a process of in-differentiation – of levelling that time out. Singular lived experiences are exchanged for each other not *only* through a logic of differentiation, but rather also exchanged for each other in a shared absence of time.

in its contemporary digital variant (Barthes 1981:76–78; Baudrillard 2013b). Here, I emphasize indifference as a levelling out of the of time of the photo image and as an organizing principle through which not only photo images are brought into circulation and are exchanged for each other but also something that organizes human attention as such.

Conclusion

Conceived of as a system of memory, the organizational powers of Instagram derive from the process of organizing the relation between primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions. For example, the algorithmical selection and filtering of certain tertiary retentions effects the future selection of primary retentions within the individual. The algorithm and data structure of platforms relate content to each other and, perhaps more significantly, this structure is a way in which content is filtered and related to profiles through, for example, recommendation systems (Chun 2016; Hui 2016). This means that individual anticipation arises on more than the *basis of* how experiences are technologically organized, for some organizational effects derive from platforms' *anticipating on behalf of the individual*, which, in the words of media theorist Yuk Hui, can be understood as tertiary protention (Hui 2016) and is part of what is described as 'automated personalization' (Dijck 2013). Let us then for a moment dwell on the distinction between 'organic content items' and 'sponsored content items', a distinction based on whether payment from a third-party is or is not part of how the content is circulated and distributed (Justia Patents 2015). In other words, something – a content– belongs to the order of the 'organic' in so far as the presentation of the content to an individual user is not the result of third-party payment. Something is 'sponsored' if the circulation and presentation of a content is the result of third-party payment (i.e., someone pays to circulate their content widely). 'Organic', then, does not refer to the content as such, as the same content – the same image – can be both organic and sponsored depending on the means by which it has been distributed. Perhaps, contrary to what one might think, an organic story, image, or video can also promote a certain product, brand, or person without falling into the category of the sponsored. That is in some sense what is referred to and described by Instagram as 'organic branded content'. From Instagram.com:

Branded content is an evolving ecosystem. As we've worked to build the right tools for both businesses and creators involved in branded content deals, one of the biggest requests we received from brands was the ability to incorporate branded content posts into their advertising strategies. Now, advertisers have the ability to promote creators' organic branded content posts as feed and stories ads. (Instagram 2019b).

(...) we're inviting businesses to promote creators' organic branded content posts as feed or Stories ads on Instagram. Businesses will now be able to scale these posts beyond a creator's audience, target specific audiences and measure performance using the tools in our ads platform. Additionally, creators will also be able to promote their own posts to reach a wider audience. (Instagram 2020b).

Content is 'organically branded' if a creator is paid or sponsored to brand a product or a business and then posts it organically. Moreover, as the above indicates, it is possible to boost the reach of such 'organic branded content' through payment, which would then amount to the category *organic-branded-sponsored-content*? This attempt to describe and pin down Instagram's categories reveals that delineating what does and does not belong to the order of the commercial can be difficult.

I have related social media consumption to a broader organizational and circulatory process of consuming individual and social experience as tertiary retention, but social media consumption is not to be confined to the engagement with online platforms or online content (organic or sponsored). In light of the analysis of Instagram filters, I would like to recall two things from Part I. First, the notion of consumption is a code and a form of directedness that structures one's relations to and experience of the world. Second, social media platforms do not simply store or archive lived experiences but co-produce the temporal experience

of the individual, for the selection, filtering, and organizing of tertiary retention impacts the future selection of primary retentions. Social media platforms retain lived experiences, thus making them also protentional devices, because the process of tertiarizing and reproducing everyday experiences effects human anticipation and projection, understood as the structuring of the possibility for the future to be brought into the present. This distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions becomes an effective way to conceptualize the experiential impact and constitutive role of digital platforms in temporal experience. Using this conception, I have addressed the question of personalization and explored how Instagram as a system of memory consisting of various features and functions through which individual experiences in their reproduction are organized and consumed as memory objects.

In this chapter, I have expanded my analysis of how the self circulates as tertiary memory and how individual and social experiences are transformed into objects of consumption. To this end, I focused on Instagram filters as a particular and important organizational logic – a logic with two aspects. Contrary to existing conceptions of and approaches to filters, I argued that the organizational logic of filters primarily entails not what they add to photo images but rather what they remove. I further argued that it is in this process of removal that one finds the particular way in which Instagram filters organize and bring a diversity of lived experiences into circulation. Analysed at the level of consumption, Instagram filters organize photo images by a principle of subtraction, for which reason what is consumed in and through these filters is not only the time made present, communicated, and so forth, but also the levelling out of the different times of the photo image. Second, I have suggested a conception of filters, face stickers, and so forth as perpetual filters that operate within perception itself and effect the production of not only the ‘image object’ but also the ‘mental image’ (Derrida and Stiegler 2002:147). Thus, filters integrate singular lived experiences into Instagram

by making them exchangeable for each other within the very field of perception itself. In this context personalization through filters, etc., is an integrative logic through which the very principle of technical exteriorization and a personalized Now increasingly levels out and in-differentiates between singular lived experiences. This argument is not made from the vantage point of some ideal, non-mediated Now – that some pure lived experience is lost. The argument is rather that lived and social life and experiences increasingly conform to and are organized in relation to their attaining a potential tertiary form. As the following passage suggests, even if one has just some random thoughts, these too can be exteriorized.

Today, we're introducing 'Type' (...), a new way to share anything that is on your mind with creative text styles and backgrounds – no photo or video required. Now, you can turn your most random thoughts into something colourful and expressive. (Instagram 2018d)

Individual and social life is organized, structured, and imagined in relation to a principle of self as memory circulated not solely as a function of memorization or communication but also because it is *reproducibility itself that has come to make experiences personal and unique*.

If one relates social media consumption to the tertiary production and circulation of individual and social experiences, arguing that this impacts temporal experience beyond online space, then social media consumption involves how the present lived Now is anticipated and consumed. Social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption are not to be confined to an 'online' consumption and organization of content but must also encompass how the present Now is produced and consumed as something tertiary. I would like, then, more broadly to speak about social media consumption and platform as organizing a new type of consumption. Strangely enough, one might say that in this process where everyday life situations are consumed and produced as technological memory

through filtering processes, the Instagram platform becomes a kind of advertisement for individual and social life. This is not to imply that the aesthetics of Instagram images resemble those of 'real' advertising, which would only concern the similarity between the photographic styles and techniques of Instagram images – what Manovich defines as 'Instagramism' (Manovich 2016:73) – and the mainstream aesthetics of so-called real commercials. Neither do I speak of advertising in the sense that Instagram images and profiles are used as a window to promote consumer goods, brands, organizations, and individuals, although they are used precisely as such on a massive scale.²⁵ Rather, with Instagram each photo image promotes a certain directedness towards the present. I therefore suggest that social media consumption is not just the consumption of data, messages, or images on social media platforms, nor is it the use of technological services (to retrieve information, to communicate, etc.) or a new computational organization of the relation between consumers and consumer goods. Social media consumption involves a certain reorganization of time and human attention beyond the interaction with screens and devices. Instead, such consumption is to be understood as involving human anticipation, seen as a relationship and directedness to the world. In the present context of Instagram and Instagram filters, I suggest that social media consumption involves what has been described as a general exchange between lived experiences, which is to say that it involves the potentiality for anything to become a memory object, and in fact that the present lived Now is always already consumed and produced as a photo image. Through these personalizing functions a diversity of experiences becomes exchangeable for each other within the system of memory. The personalization of memory means that any Now, any present lived experience, becomes exchangeable with any other Now, not through the principle of difference

²⁵ As of 2017 there were 25 million business on Instagram (Instagram 2017a). The number is likely to be substantially higher today.

but in the shared resemblance and homogenizing effect of technical exteriorization itself.

Chapter 7. The Selfie

Gustav Klimt's painting *The Kiss* hangs in the Upper Belvedere Museum of Vienna. When visiting the museum some years ago, I noticed that the room exhibiting the popular work had a sign inviting viewers into another room. The sign said 'KISS selfie point'. The room contained a replica standing on the floor so that visitors could take a selfie with the (copy of the) painting. I wondered whether the purpose of these measures was to protect the original painting from the damaging effects of smartphone flashes or to prevent the daily crowd of selfie sticks from disturbing the experience of the original painting – or, as the sign indicated, to invite people to engage with the painting by taking a selfie and circulating it on social media platforms. The selfie room shows, perhaps, that the collective phenomenon of technical exteriorization creates new challenges for cultural institutions. In any case, the 'KISS selfie point' displays a somewhat fascinating distribution and experience of original painting and its copy, but it also reveals something about how the nature of being in and relation to the world is being configured through social media platforms.

The selfie is perhaps Instagram's photo image *par excellence*. Within 20th-century philosophy, images have in their various forms been considered to be 'the visual key to an understanding of all forms of relationality with the world and with others' (Khalip and Mitchell 2011:2). The stakes are thus high in a visual genre and cultural phenomenon such as the selfie.²⁶ One might say that in its profound visual manifestation of the face, the selfie attains an almost emblematic status as a kind of quasi-ambassador for the circulation of self as tertiary retention thus far described in the context of social media consumption. The selfie is both a

²⁶ The selfie is often defined as a self-portrait taken with a smartphone camera and distributed through social media platforms. In 2013 the Oxford Dictionaries made Selfie The Word of the Year (Peraica 2017:7–8; Tifentale and Manovich 2015).

photographic object and a social practice and gesture (Senft and Baym 2015). It is an object that circulates and is produced through the response it receives from its recipients, and an object that is distributed, tracked, and monetized as it travels through different social media platforms (ibid). As a social gesture and practice, the selfie can be a way of transmitting a message and affirming a belonging to a community. As a phenomenon of visual self-presentation, the selfie has variously been explored in an art-historical perspective and in relation to the history of photography (Belden-Adams 2018; Peraica 2017; Tifentale and Manovich 2018). The selfie genre includes not only the photo images people take of their own face – by some referred to as a ‘presented selfie’ (Zhao and Zappavigna 2017:1745) – but is a broader genre of photo images that includes several variants. Apart from the classical presented selfie, Instagram also has the popular ‘mirror selfie’ and a genre of images showing parts of the photographer’s body (for example, a leg, that is a ‘legfie’) but not the face, a genre Lev Manovich calls ‘anti-selfies’ (Tifentale and Manovich 2018:169).

For obvious reasons, the selfie phenomenon has raised questions of narcissism and self-consumption, yet any discourse on the selfie based on a narcissism hypothesis will only capture a fraction of the phenomenon (Murray 2020). Narcissus did not need to stabilize his own image through technical exteriorization, the natural reflection of the water was sufficient (Peraica 2017:47). In the aestheticizing of the body and the staging before the camera of the selfie lies a certain degree of that general fascination that emerges from (re)producing and consuming one’s own image – that ‘magic’ of reproduction that in the individual makes ‘something fundamental vacillate’, as Baudrillard writes (Baudrillard 1983:153). Nevertheless, the selfie phenomenon involves playing with positions and gazes, playing between being a subject and an object, kinds of play that require a more nuanced reading than any presuming that an individual that dwells in and consumes its own image. Indeed, it can be hard to determine who is looking at whom

in a selfie and therefore also how the self and body are configured as an object of consumption in this particular tertiary form and mnemotechnical reproduction. What is at stake in the selfie genre and phenomenon, I suggest in this chapter, is neither the mere narcissistic investment in one's own image or in one's own body, nor the simple matter of self-representation and communication. In the present context of this dissertation, the selfie is approached not as an object that transmits a specific message or as a question of self-representation, or even as an act of communication. Rather, I am interested in how the self becomes an object of consumption in the distinct organizing of object, subject, and the (experiential) position of the viewer. I take the two types of selfies, the presented and the mirror selfie, as two figures where the self is brought into circulation and organized as technological memory on Instagram in two different ways.²⁷

Having established these two figures of the selfie as my point of departure, I would like to return to the argument made earlier about consumption: because the vantage point from which the selfie is considered as a phenomenon of consumption, the interest is not in a singular lived moment as the object of consumption. Neither is a particular self or face consumed on Instagram the primary interest, but rather the very way the individual is being organized through these two figures of the selfie. Let me elaborate on this in the following.

7.1 The presented selfie: three analytical trajectories

The eyes of the person holding the camera are fixed on the camera, a stiff gaze meets its photographic lens. The person has decided to inflict the lens not only upon some other, the world, but also upon itself. With the length of an arm, the individual is doubled. Only a moment before directing the eyes at the camera, this person was perhaps focusing on the smartphone screen displaying the picture about to be taken

²⁷ These two types of selfies do not exhaust all variants of selfies but do represent two of the more popular selfies.

‘live’. Before performing the materialization – the act of capturing the image – one can see oneself and one’s potential double. In that instant, the screen has been a kind of mirror in which the person holding the camera appears within the horizon of its own projection just before its technical exteriorization. Yet, a profound difference exists between the ‘live’ mirror image on the smartphone screen and the image reflected in a mirror: unlike with the reflected image of the mirror, one cannot catch one’s own eyes with the image visible on the smartphone screen. The ‘live’ reproduction of the screen and the camera induces a delay in which eye contact becomes impossible.²⁸ I believe this impossibility of having eye contact is not without significance, for it introduces another kind of gaze than that of the mirror and therefore also a question. What is the person in the selfie looking at? The person is looking at the camera and yet not just at it. Directing one’s gaze towards the camera creates a spot outside the image, a spot that every viewer necessarily comes to occupy as one looks at a selfie image. Perhaps, this invisible spot resembles that created by Spanish painter Diego Velázquez in *Las Meninas* (1656), in which the viewer of the painting is momentarily at its centre, but by the same token is denied the place of the viewer as such.²⁹ I will return to this painting, but for now suffice it to say that this chapter’s interest is in this spot, in this outside place that the individual is looking at and from which the face and the self become an object of consumption.

The selfie: beyond questions of self-representation

Being an image where the photographic lens is directed primarily at the photographer, is the selfie then a self-portrait of the kind found throughout the

²⁸ We also know this from Skype conversations. Either one chooses to look directly into the camera and thereby cannot see the other person, or one looks at the screen on which the other is projected, which inevitably draw one’s eyes from the camera. One can look the other in the eyes, but it is not possible to look each other in the eyes.

²⁹ As famously analysed by Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1974). In the painting, there is a mirror that shows that this outside spot is occupied by King Philip IV and his wife, Mariana.

history of art? Obviously, the selfie genre is being discussed and analysed in relation to a broader genre of self-portraits and self-representation (Peraica 2017; Tifentale and Manovich 2018). Differences and similarities between self-portraits and the selfie include the technical difference between the digital smartphone camera and analogue photography as well as the historical differences in motivations and intentions, and such differences and similarities have formed the basis for exploring the selfie as a contemporary visual phenomenon. Lev Manovich problematizes a mere conception and view of the painted self-portrait as a historical precursor to the selfie image in his work on the selfie and social media photography. Manovich and Alise Tifentale emphasize differences rather than similarities between the painted self-portrait and the selfie. They write:

(...) many so-called selfies are not self-portraits in traditional art-historical sense. They do not show *a person isolated from their environment*, as both self-portraits and portraits often did historically (think, e.g., of self-portraits by Rembrandt and van Gogh). Instead, they are *records of places, events, activities, experiences, and situations that include the photo's author*. (Tifentale and Manovich 2018:180).

This argument is grounded in a computational content analysis of thousands of Instagram selfies (ibid). The analysis demonstrates that the selfie image does not principally show an isolated individual that has exteriorized her face visually, but rather depicts a moment where the individual is in a specific place doing a specific activity, and more broadly is part of a social situation. Tempting as it may be to consider the selfie within a broader genre of self-portraits, Manovich and Tifentale carefully suggest otherwise, or at least disqualify a given relation between the selfie and the painted self-portrait. They write:

Accordingly, the implications of particular technologies, such as smartphone cameras and online image-sharing platforms, are exactly what

makes selfies substantially different from its earlier precursors. Selfie is not only a photographic image that we recognize as a self-portrait and which bears a formal resemblance to numerous canonical photographic self-portraits from the 19th and 20th centuries. Instead, selfie is a product of a networked camera. (Tifentale and Manovich 2015:118).

The ‘implications of particular technologies’ that give the selfie its historical particularity is the ‘instantaneous distribution via Instagram or similar social networks (...) as well as the related metadata [i.e., geo-tags, hashtags, likes, and comments]’ (ibid). This networked character of the Instagram selfie, Tifentale and Manovich argue, means that it is not an image ‘made for maker’s own personal consumption and contemplation’ but is a way for individuals to ‘construct their identities and simultaneously express their belonging to a certain community’ (ibid). Thus, the selfie is less to be seen as a self-portrait in which the individual says look at me, as the greater intention is to say look at my perspective (Zhao and Zappavigna 2017:1737). Thus, this analytical discourse on the selfie considers the primary semantics of the selfie photo to be an invitation into situations, activities, and perspectives rather than into individuals isolated from the world and their environment.

No matter how far or close one relates the selfie to the family of self-portraits – should it not be taken for what it inevitably is? Something that entails an equal distribution – something available to everyone, not only the artist – of visual self-making and self-representation and therefore, as Manovich argues, something that has democratic potential? Compared to the painted self-portrait and analogue photography, which require a set of skills, knowledge, and, not least, time to produce them, this portraiture process has more or less been automatized when it comes to the smartphone-produced Instagram selfie, an automatization effected by smartphone technology and the instant distribution afforded by social media platforms like Instagram. Take, for example, the amount of time, effort, and practice

put into painting a canvas or carving stone or wood, a transformative process through which the image of oneself slowly emerges through one's own hands. The smartphone selfie indeed seems to have dramatically minimized this effort. From this perspective, the selfie can be celebrated as an equal distribution of the possibility to visually materialize one's own image outside oneself, thus overcoming the disposition and privilege previously enjoyed by the artist – namely to turn oneself into a visual object with one's own hand. When, for example, a self-portrait is painted or a sculpture carved, a temporal delay occurs between that of being a (creating) subject and an (artistic) object. In this process it takes time to become an object of one's own practice, to materialize – indeed, to tertiarize – one's own face outside oneself, for one continuously oscillates between being an object and a subject. As Ana Peraica points out the selfie is an image that emerges without a temporal gap between the recording and the seeing of oneself, as the technical reproducibility of the camera and the mobility of the smartphone allow for a minimal time delay between the two positions (Peraica 2017:55). In the selfie there is a temporal conjunction of the subject and the object position, a simultaneity in time not present in other forms of self-portraits. Scholars also point out the new means of distribution (ibid, 88). This all opens up for an analysis less occupied with how much and to what degree the creator – or author – of the photograph fills up the space of the photo image, with or whether the semantics of the image is more about looking at 'my perspective' than about looking at 'me'. Thus, I suggest another perspective be explored instead of or, at least, as a complement to Manovich's argument that the selfie and the self-portrait differ because of the authors' varied positions in these images, of the meta-data, and of the instantaneous distribution of the selfie-image. Specifically, I propose an exploration from the perspective of the temporal collapse between the individual's being a subject (the taker of the photograph) and an object (in the photograph). I further suggest an examination of how this simultaneity involves the creation of an outside position –

the invisible spot – towards which the individual is directed and which is a defining trait of the presented selfie.

Hence, I propose that what characterizes the selfie from the perspective of consumption developed in the previous pages is not that it is an example of the exteriorization of a particular individual or subject, in this case the author of the photograph. The selfie involves more than an act of exteriorizing an individual or social self that produces a class of photo images centred to different degrees on the photographer herself. The concept of consumption is on another register that pushes the analysis beyond one concerning an individual's turning lived experiences and social situations into technological memory as a more or less intentional effort of communication. Rather, what we are witnessing with the selfie, I suggest, is how it involves a specific gaze, a relation that stems from the positioning of the author as being both a subject/author and an object without any temporal gap. In terms of the exteriorization of lived experiences, what is exteriorized, brought into circulation, and consumed in the selfie is a certain relation, a gaze arising from the way the lens inflicts itself not upon the world but upon the subject itself. This displays a particular self-relation and the relation of this self to the others and the world around it. In the presented selfie, the individual is mirror and exteriorized in relation to a spot that cannot be seen but that is upheld by the author's self-infliction of the photographic lens. Ana Peraica writes:

(...) the author of a selfie holds a realistic cast of an arm that anticipates the viewer, symbolically dragging him inside the scene. The selfie produced is trans-personal, as the hand does not define a viewer more accurately, but there are constantly new visitors who are dragged into the scene. No more laying out a personal space, of the photographer, but a space of the person other than the author, present as an object put in the front, the arm suggests a mystic presence behind the picture, an invisible companion in whose place viewers find themselves, becoming at the same

time photographers. (Peraica 2017:42).

The author is organized in relation to the ‘mystic presence’ of an outside other produced by and emerging from the length of the author’s arm.

One can follow several analytical trajectories in the exposition of how the self and the body in the presented selfie are organized in relation to this invisible and external position. I suggest that three potential analytical trajectories be included in the method used to investigate the selfie. In this dissertation, I unfold these trajectories as hypotheses from which one can begin to analyse the invisible spot created in the presented selfie.³⁰ I will sketch out the first two and pursue the third in more depth, as this third one can be considered the dissertation’s contribution to the field.

Hypothesis 1: The selfie and the ‘camera eye’

The first hypothesis considers a significant aspect of the selfie to be how the individual poses in front of a medium (Instagram) and a technology (the smartphone camera), suggesting that what is at stake in this posing is a particular way of coming into being through the gaze of the audience. This analytical trajectory builds on – and pays tribute to – early 20th-century theorizations on how media technologies (photography, television, the mechanical reproduction of art, etc.) affect human subjectivity and sociality. As such, this approach includes the somewhat obvious observation that besides the individual in the selfie photo who stages and poses for itself there is as well the Instagram platform and the audience it mobilizes. In the selfie, the individual looks at and stages himself in relation to the anticipated effects on his viewers, in this instance his Instagram followers. In the presented selfie, the individual is not searching for him own eyes but wants to transcend them, thus

³⁰ Hypothesis not in the sense of being subject to testing, verification or falsification but as outlined in Chapter 4 as the unfolding of theoretical hypothesis as a method of inquiry into the selfie phenomenon.

primarily staging for the view of others. We could understand the selfie as a kind of conclusion to and the realization of what Lewis Mumford had already foreseen as he described the effects of photography and the camera on human behaviour and sense perception in 1934.

Alone, he still thinks of himself as a public character, *being watched*: and to a greater or less degree everyone, from the crone in a remote hamlet to the political dictator (...) is in the same position. This constant sense of a public world would seem in part, at least, to be the result of the camera and the camera-eye that developed with it. If the eye be absent in reality, one improvises it wryly with a fragment of one's consciousness. (Mumford 1963:243).

Mumford argues that the mirror and the camera produce two different attentions: the mirror produces a subject of 'self-examination', whereas the camera introduces the public gaze into one's own image through the precision of its technical exteriorization and the material lightness by which the photo image can circulate (ibid, 243-244). Walter Benjamin makes a somewhat similar comparison between the image of the mirror and the gaze of the camera, emphasizing a continuity as well as a break, in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1992) from 1936.

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, (...) is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Before the public. (Benjamin 1992:224).

Today it is no longer necessary to improvise the camera eye, as the camera is no longer absent: it is on the street, in our pocket, and in the pockets of our fellow

citizens. What is important in Benjamin's analytical perspective (as for Baudrillard and Stiegler), is that *reproduction* – first that of the technical reproduction of the camera and then that of Instagram – comes before and organizes the human relations and attention. Because human aesthetics is constructed through the exterior milieu of objects and technology, the production of experiences is always already a reproduction – it is, in other words, organized.

The first trajectory, then, considers the selfie phenomenon in relation to the history of the camera's technical reproduction, where the subject is organized by and produced through the internalization of an external gaze. Although the selfie image is the individual capturing herself from the outside, it simply mirrors an internalized way of constantly *seeing* oneself through the gaze of others, a gaze that in this case is transported by the medium Instagram. The selfie phenomenon is the fulfilment of the camera eye that Mumford and Benjamin described, albeit not in the Orwellian version of total surveillance but perhaps more to be explored in line with a Foucauldian understanding of micro-politics involving disciplinary mechanism and self-technologies. This perspective is important, as it draws attention to the logics and specific ways in which technological reproduction, especially through the smartphone camera and social media platforms, is embedded in, distributes, and (re)produces specific subjects, attentions, and experiences. The strength of this analytical framework is its emphasis on how contemporary forms of subjectivity involve the internalization of an external gaze, and today social media platforms and their related industries, such as those involving culture, construct, mediate, and organize generic models in profoundly new ways.

The analysis could also emphasize the selfie genre as a means of democratization, emancipation, and empowerment. People have been set free to experiment with whose gaze they want to create themselves in and through. They are no longer limited by their local milieu, their class, traditions, or family, but can create themselves in digital networks transgressing such older boundaries and ways

of organizing relations. However, a critical perspective would highlight that individuals more or less conform to the standardized models and genres – such as tertiary retentions – continuously upheld and distributed in a complex relation between users, peers, and the social, economic, and technological logics of platforms, which ultimately standardize primary and secondary retentions. Whereas the consumer society produced ‘ready-made signs’ – an industrial production of differences fresh from the assembly line (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 110) – the selfie is an example of ready-made *memory* and ready-made *experiences* that are a standardized way of experiencing and anticipating oneself and others. For example, *The Kiss* selfie point creates just such a standardized experience of the painting as something with which to take a selfie. As such, for the purposes of analysis, how the individual’s attention and sense of self are produced and configured through the selfie should be understood as a tertiary form of reproducing and exteriorizing oneself on Instagram.

Hypothesis 2: Technology as the Other

The first analytical trajectory considers the audience’s external gaze and standardized models of exteriorization to produce a certain consumer attention. The second analytical trajectory, however, suggests that in the presented selfie, the subject mirrors itself not in the gaze of others, but rather in the vision of technology or the medium itself. Jacques Lacan introduces the concept of the mirror-stage as to explain a process whereby the subject returns to itself through the gaze of an outside other (Peraica 2017:25). As such, the subject is established and constituted as a subject through an outside. In this language, we could say that if the first hypothesis considered media and technology to be that which made the ‘other’ present (the public in Mumford and Benjamin, the institution/guard in Foucault’s panopticon), then the second hypothesis takes the selfie as an example of technology itself having become a kind of outside gaze through which the subject returns to itself. This

trajectory is based on conceptualizations of technology as having inherent mediating and organizational effects. In contrast to Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 focuses attention not only on platforms as a technology of mediating human gazes and relations, but also on technology as having a more or less inherent gaze that itself forges the very being of human subjects. The second hypothesis thus starts from the proposition that the subject cannot constitute itself. From this perspective, the selfie phenomenon should be understood as a particular and contemporary phenomenon of self being circulated as technological memory through the social media platform. Our profound culture of Promethean exteriorization shows that technology and media are increasingly becoming a kind of ‘other’. One could argue that we see this tendency in, for example, quantified-self movements where people experience and come to know themselves through the tertiary discretization and exteriorization of the body and its environment, something that is enabled in profound new ways with digital technology. The 21st-century subject is mirrored in and constituted as a subject not primarily by what technology and media transfer (a content, an audience) but in the operations of technology and media themselves – a ‘self-knowledge through numbers’.³¹ The operation of media and technology itself is what truly fascinate us; it makes us both powerful and powerless, it distorts the ‘I’ but it is also what constitutes it. Technology is a ‘pharmakon’, as Stiegler states – both poison and remedy (Stiegler 2011a:27). The operation of digital media and technology itself interpellate the subject, which comes to know itself in the mirror of the tertiarizing functions of technology. For better or worse, the selfie phenomenon should be seen in light of this general media condition. The pursuit of others’ social recognition through the standardized forms of reproducing and showing oneself on Instagram – for example, through the selfie – remains secondary to these operations. In the selfie, the individual looks into the rational and instrumental gaze of the

³¹ <https://quantifiedself.com/>. Accessed on October 20th, 2020.

digital technology through which he increasingly comes to experience and constitute himself. Thus, the spot that the individual looks at in the presented selfie and which remains invisible is that of the gaze and operations of media and technology themselves, and the configuration of the self and the face as an object of consumption is essentially related to these operations.

One could perhaps speak of narcissism in this context, though not the *primary* narcissism of self-love as a precondition for the individual to sustain itself and for erotic love, or the *secondary* narcissism of a pathological character³², but a *tertiary* narcissism in which the tertiarizing of one's own image is a permanent practice of self-sustainment, a kind of technologically mediated mirror-stage in which the subject returns and experiences itself through the gaze of media and technology.

Clearly, a contemporary fascination with technology and media exists at both an individual and a societal level. This fascination is an effect of its perpetual ability to expand and of technology's having become a mirror through which the individual comes to experience itself. The selfie and the tertiary accumulation of oneself simply reflect this condition of the 21st-century subject and why it imposes the gaze of technology and media upon itself. A significant and popular variant of the selfie, the mirror selfie, lends some credence to this hypothesis. In the mirror selfie, one is taking a photograph of oneself through and in a mirror. Here the mirror, the smartphone camera, and the individual – both as a subject (the photograph taker) and as an object (in the photograph) – are simultaneously present in the final image. As such, what does the mirror selfie tell us about the 21st-century subject and the role of technology? It literally tells us that when the 21st-century subject goes into the mirror, the first things it encounters are media and technology, as the camera is

³² A distinction made by Sigmund Freud see (Peraica 2017:48–49).

an integral part of the mirror photo. Strictly speaking, the mirror selfie shows that technology and media have become a kind of other.

Hypothesis 3: The hypothesis of disappearance

The third hypothesis proceeds not by attending to how the subject in the presented selfie is *produced* – an analytical trajectory pursued in the two previous hypotheses – but rather accentuates an analytical perspective on the presented selfie as one in which the subject *disappears*. This perspective shifts the focus away from how the subject is produced either through technology and media as its Other (Hypothesis 2) or through the gaze of social others mediated by the medium and its social use (Hypothesis 1). In fact, what these analytical trajectories tend to miss is that beyond the celebration of the individual and the self – its production – the selfie phenomenon entails a process moving towards a form of disappearance of the individual subject. This is the basis of the third hypothesis, which makes it a trajectory that does not explore and consider the presented selfie and the subtle play of gazes at stake primarily from the perspective of production (of subjectivity, of meaning, of identity, of power, etc.). Disappearance as an analytical trajectory is inspired by Baudrillard, who theorizes the present as one of the disappearance of the social, the image, reality, the subject, etc. (Baudrillard 1993b:18, 2009a:27, 2012:26).³³ In such a trajectory lies a suggested alternative to the attention given to *production* within dominating theories of subjectivity and approaches to technology and media as self-technologies. However, the analytical perspective of disappearance is not a complete diversion from the other two trajectories, but this third trajectory directs the attention not only at how the selfie holds/implies a celebration and production of an individual, of a subject, but also to how the

³³ In this analysis of the selfie, this is articulated in relation to the conceptual frame of consumption developed in Part I.

organization of subject and object, viewer and viewed create an effect of the individual subject's disappearance. A key concept in this analysis is the 'Archimedean point' (Arendt 1998:262). I will argue that the invisible spot at which the self portrayed in the selfie is looking is, in fact, neither its social others or the technology itself but the 'Archimedean point'. Allow me to elaborate on this argument.

7.2 The presented selfie: the disappearance of the subject

In the presented selfie, the author of the photo image remains hidden. The photo image provides no certainty that the author taking the photo is also the person in the image. Although this identity is the definition of a selfie, the image itself does not affirm this. Unlike with the presented selfie, about which one can only assume this identity, the mirror selfie where the reflection of the mirror together with the reproduction of the camera instantly verify the identity of the photograph's author and the person visibly holding the camera. Yet, this subject imposing upon itself the length of its own arm seems to give the face and the body a posture that suggests this identity. Sometimes this is confirmed by the fact that some of the arm becomes visible within the photo image itself. What I find significant about this type of selfie is that the face of the individual in the image seems to have an expression revealing that the image is not an outcome posing before the camera in a traditional sense, but of imposing the photographic lens upon the self. The lens imposes on the individual a certain kind of gaze, a gaze from and upon the author that nonetheless seems to come from the outside. This is, I suggest, not simply that of an individual that 'poses' before the camera in a process of becoming an object, as Barthes speaks of, and before him Mumford (Mumford 1963:243). Although an act performed by the individual itself, the selfie is more a gesture of *being imposed upon*, of the individual's enforcing an outside gaze upon itself. The lens seems to technically and aesthetically impose a specific body position and a certain way of looking, a certain

set of eyes. In other words, the selfie can be described as the event of an individual's being imposed upon by rather than posing for the camera eye, which represents a gaze from the outside. As this outside is constituted not only by other people (a photographer or the audience of the final image) but also by the individual turning this gaze upon himself, the individual is organized neither strictly as an object nor as a subject.

Thus, one might contend that the presented selfie is an image and a positioning of the individual that emerge in a play between an author that is visible and present as well as invisible and absent, and that the presented selfie emerges through this (non-)presence of an author. Similar to the effect Diego Velázquez achieved in his painting *Las Meninas* (1656), the selfie opens up a space and a position for the viewer of the image to – more or less willingly – occupy the role of author (that is, the photographer who the person in the image is looking at through the lens) and to be the one seemingly imposing the photographic gaze on the subject matter (the portrayed individual) and thereby turning it into an object.³⁴ The invisible spot or, as Peraica formulates it, 'mystic presence' of a viewer (who may or may not be the author) produces within the image a continuous exchange between a sense of presence and absence of an author. Again, the question emerges: what is this person in the picture looking at, as her eyes centre in on the smartphone camera? And what are we as viewers looking at – what are we actually *consuming* – a face, a situation, a gaze? To analyse the presented selfie and the gaze that is produced within it, and thus to analyse how the subject is organized by this external position of the viewer, whose relation to the portrayed person is both intimate and distant, I will now turn to

³⁴ In some selfies the person looks directly into the camera, while in others the face looks away from it, the gaze fixed not on the camera but something beyond. It is as if, in the first instance the eyes, although looking directly into the camera, is in search for something beyond it, as if attempting to transcend the camera gaze and that of the present situation it supposedly mediates.

Hannah Arendt's analysis of the 'Archimedean point', undertaken in the final chapter of *The Human Condition* [1958] (1998).

The 'Archimedean point' and The Blue Marble

The Archimedean point, Arendt argues, is the vision of obtaining a universal viewpoint outside of Earth (Arendt 1998:262). It is the notion of a universal standpoint from which a kind of total visibility is imagined. Arendt focuses on the genesis of this mental and scientific extra-terrestrial point of observation and the consequences that follow from it in the final chapter of *The Human Condition* (1998), originally published in 1958. However, within the first few pages of the book, Arendt already addresses her concern with the human urge to strive for an extra-terrestrial viewpoint, discussing the public response to the Soviet satellite launched in 1957 (Arendt 1998:1–4). Such an external view on Earth – the vision of an Archimedean point – Arendt argues, is a mental and scientific construction that has shaped humankind's actions on and relation to Earth long before it became possible to leave its atmosphere.

Without actually standing where Archimedes wished to stand, still bound to the earth through the human condition, we have found a way to act on the earth and within terrestrial nature as though we dispose of it from outside, from the Archimedean point. (Arendt 1998:262)

Fourteen years after *The Human Condition* was published, the crew of Apollo 17 took one of the most iconic images of Earth: *The Blue Marble*, a photograph taken 29,000 kilometres from Earth and in which the whole planet is visible, or at least the part reflected by the sun. With *The Blue Marble* the Archimedean point is no longer merely a product of human abstraction and imagination manifested in the modern scientific worldview, but has essentially become an actual physical position obtained in outer space. Earth is observed from a *universal* standpoint. As I have

pointed out earlier, the selfie has been approached from a perspective of the history and tradition of self-portraits (painting, photography).



The Blue Marble. Apollo 17, 1972

I would like to complement this approach by suggesting that this image of Earth – *The Blue Marble* – offers an alternative genesis of the gaze entailed in the selfie and the effect it produces. *The Blue Marble*, I suggest, is the first selfie. *The Blue Marble* is humankind, humankind taking an image of itself – a planetary selfie – *the ultimate selfie*. Returning, then, to Arendt, one sees that the presented selfie appears to be an individual producing the Archimedean point in the physical gesture of imposing

upon itself the length of its own arm. The selfie is a gestural positioning in which the subject, as it looks into the lens, is looking into the *universe* mirroring itself in the gaze of Archimedes. In the moment of capture, the individual is not looking at herself, but is looking into the photographic lens that sees her from the outside. This outside is not constituted by a specific other, but an outside that can be described as both constituted by and distanced/detached from herself. In the planetary selfie – and, I believe, in the presented selfie – one finds a kind of tertiary vision, a gaze that produces neither strictly an object nor a subject.

For Arendt, the problem with such a viewpoint and vision of Earth is the alienating effects it produces, as the human being is alienated from the earthly environment that (still) conditions its existence (Arendt 1998:264). However, although the invention of the Archimedean point and the extra-terrestrial viewpoint have alienating effects of interest, the selfie is not to be thought of here as a miniature example and completion of a greater process of alienation. Indeed, a greater focus of interest is Arendt's attention to the two-fold process involved in inventing the Archimedean viewpoint and to the effect that comes with such a universal viewpoint. Arendt writes:

The point, in our context, is that both despair and triumph are inherent in the same event. If we wish to put this into historical perspective, it is as if Galileo's discovery proved in demonstrable fact that both the worst and the most presumptuous hope of human speculation, the ancient fear that our senses, our very organs for the reception of reality, might betray us, and the Archimedean wish for a point outside the earth from which to unhinge the world, could only come true together, as though the wish would be granted only provided that we lost reality and the fear was to be consummated only if compensated by the acquisition of supramundane powers. (Arendt 1998:262).

According to Arendt, an intertwined process and effect are involved in the coming to and view of Earth from a universal and Archimedean position. With the mental abstraction of and distancing from Earth comes, on the one hand, mastery and power, and, on the other hand, a doubt and lost sense reality, for Earth is displaced as a reference point for human action and this ‘universal’ standpoint takes its stead. The invention of the Archimedean point glorifies the human being as what must be a universal being, because it can take a universal standpoint, but this invention also undermines the human being and its earthly environment as a reference point and place of belonging (ibid, 270).

Arendt points out that when Earth is experienced as if we had come from a position outside of Earth, this idea of total visibility, this tertiary vision, creates an effect of *disappearance*. Earth does not disappear in the sense that it vanishes, but that, in the process by which we grasp it from a universal standpoint, it ceases to be the reference point for human experience and thinking. Such a form of Earth’s disappearance is linked to the realization of its total visibility. In other words, the mental abstraction and configuration of a total visible Earth involved in the ability to come ‘from a point outside the Earth’ also displaces Earth as the horizon for human experience and actions – from which the alienating effects arise. Involved in this relation between the visibility of Earth – given a new dimension with *The Blue Marble* – and (its) disappearance is not the vanishing of the earth understood as walking out of a room. What is involved is its disappearance as a reference point for human action and thinking – and then its re-emergence as something new: the Earth as a resource, as Heidegger would say.

In the essay *On Disappearance* (2009), Baudrillard pursues Arendt’s analysis of the modern scientific worldview and the invention of the Archimedean point. He writes: ‘[t]his is the moment when human beings, while setting about analysing and transforming the world, take their leave of it, while at the same time lending it the force of reality’ (Baudrillard 2009b:24), and further argues that the

modern concept of 'reality' is a metaphysical principle that necessarily involves a perspective on the world in which the human being is absent. Reality emerges as a concept and idea when human beings no longer consider themselves to be part of the world. Therefore, when reality is invented, which for Baudrillard begins more or less with the Archimedean [view]point, human beings 'take their leave' from the world. This is, he contends, the moment when human beings begin to produce their own disappearance, a process that, according to Baudrillard, is accentuated by and at the core of technology (Baudrillard 2009b:25). 'It's a question of disappearance, not exhaustion, extinction or extermination,' Baudrillard writes (ibid, 24). The vision of a world and a society that is technologically and rationally organized and operational is also a vision of a society where human beings are increasingly rendered useless. This, Baudrillard argues, is to be understood as a process of disappearance. He theorizes a form or mode of disappearance that does not entail a physical or biological process of extinction but is related to the human being's becoming surpassed as a reference point for action and thinking. The first form of disappearance is the common conception. I walk out the door, I remove this object from the room, and so forth. Things disappear because they are out of sight; they vanish or die like an organism. Now, the other form of disappearance derives not from the absence of appearance and failure of presence but is an 'operational disappearance', as the human being is short-circuited by the operations of technology (Butler et al. 2009:37). Like Arendt, Baudrillard sees disappearance as linked to the realization of total visibility that characterizes the vision of technology. I will now pursue what this conception of technology and disappearance bring to an analysis of the presented selfie.

The selfie: Excess of exteriorization

By introducing the Archimedean point and *The Blue Marble*, I have led the inquiry into a question of disappearance. This might seem like a somewhat counter-intuitive

move, as the subject matter of this analysis – the selfie-image – obviously seems to be about producing the exact opposite, namely the appearance of a self. Nonetheless, I will now link the thematization of disappearance to the conceptualization of social media platforms as technologies of exteriorization, and to the particular form of tertiarizing involved in the presented selfie. Following Arendt's and Baudrillard's thinking, one can read Stiegler's conceptualization of technology as being pharmacological. For Stiegler, technology is pharmacological because it is both a poison and remedy (Stiegler 2010a:42–43).³⁵ Technology, or technics, is a remedy because technology is the very condition for human existence and culture. However, technology is also poison. It holds a potential destructiveness, exemplified, as Stiegler and others argue, in the contemporary techno-economic complex of the programming industries, social media platforms, and the consumerist model (ibid, 43-44). If, as Stiegler tells us, 'technics', understood as a process of exteriorization and materialization of lived experiences, is at the very origin of human becoming, if it is what makes a human world and the human being appear as such (as unfolded in Chapter 2), then one might suggest that technological exteriorization by virtue of its pharmacological nature – poison and remedy – also has the potential to make the human and the world disappear. If 'technics is the invention of the human' and is what has marked the human's appearance on the world stage, understood as the history of material inscription of lived experiences through processes of exteriorization, then I suggest, however, that this equally means that, to Stiegler, disappearance is an originary condition within the technical becoming of human existence. With this I am not merely suggesting that for something to appear (an experience, an event etc.) something (else) must disappear, in the sense that human attention is always already organized qua its originary technicity. This is what has

³⁵ Stiegler writes: 'Like every technique and every mnemotechnique, cultural and cognitive technologies are pharmaka: at once poisons and remedies' (Stiegler 2011a:32).

been conceptualized in the present context as a question of how platforms structure human attention through an organization of primary, secondary, and tertiary retention. It is not that forgetting is part of the structure of remembering, which is an inherent part of the technological grammatization process. In Stiegler's argument for an originary technical mode of life, I contend that - although this is not explicitly stated by Stiegler himself - lies the theme of disappearance. This reading of Stiegler might provide an apt way of reading his diagnosis of the present consumer society as one of 'symbolic misery' and 'disorientation' (Stiegler 2009, 2014a): Stiegler's diagnosis of contemporary society can be said to describe a process of the individual's disappearance in the sense that the contemporary techno-economic system of capitalism organized around consumption short-circuits processes of social and individual forms of individuation.

For Arendt and Stiegler disappearance is linked to a technical system of abstraction and calculation that creates conditions of disindividuation and alienation. Baudrillard's thematization of disappearance, however, goes beyond that of the individual being circumvented by an abstract system of technology. According to Baudrillard, human beings are in a condition where everything remains and nothing disappears. Simply put, more and more of everything is being produced, and such excess actually entails a form of disappearance. Baudrillard's conceptualization of disappearance is, in other words, about what disappears when nothing really disappears (Butler et al. 2009:30). This kind of disappearance comes from the absence of disappearance, as things disappear through excess and proliferation (ibid, 33). The condition of excess and proliferation effects the very dialectic between *appearance* and *disappearance*. Not only through lack but also through excess, the question of disappearance emerges as an effect of the absence of disappearance. In Stiegler's and Baudrillard's terms, one can say that the human is the being whose experience does not disappear (through, and due to, technics)

and by that very fact ends up producing its own disappearance – an excess of technics and ceasing to be the reference point of action.

By reading Stiegler and Baudrillard through Arendt's definition of the Archimedean point, one gains a perspective on the effect of the gaze produced in the selfie: the selfie is more than a mere mode of appearance. The selfie is not simply a mode of appearance involving an individual subject's profound manifestation through the visual display of the face, but is also an excess of such manifestation, an excess of visibility, which provokes the question of disappearance. Within this perspective one can consider the selfie as a gesture in which the subject upholds the Archimedean point with the length of an arm. The individual mirrors and exteriorizes itself in the gaze of a universal position that is self-imposed. This is the gaze at the heart of the selfie, and I suggest that the effect of this Archimedean point of total visibility is – by way of excess – transformed into a question of the opposite. If I return to the attempts to define the selfie in the beginning of the chapter, the selfie was partly defined as a phenomenon where the author of and the person in the photo image are identical. Analysing the author position within the selfie, I argued that the author appears within the photo image yet remains profoundly absent. This presence yet absence of an author in the presented selfie image is, I contend, equally a (non-)presence of *a* subject within the photo image. I propose that what is being consumed, in the presented selfie, is an image without a subject or an object, an image without anybody looking, because the image is itself a look, a total gaze. What is consumed in this selfie genre is thus not simply an individual face but also a gaze in which it appears and disappears through this total visible form. The presented selfie is a gaze in which the individual disappears in an excess of tertiary exteriorization. The visual organization of the face, the temporal simultaneity of recording, posing, and distribution, and, not to forget, the selfie as a global and standardized form of exteriorization and circulation of self, all mean that the processes of appearance and disappearance are simultaneously at work within the

image. Indeed, this is what lies at the heart of the fascination with the selfie and perhaps what has made it a global phenomenon: the profound manifestation and appearance of an individual subject *and* the simultaneous sense of the disappearance of this subject within that very form of appearance. The selfie as a particular tertiarizing of the self, as a way in which the individual is organized and turned into an object for others' consumption, plays with this double process. This is why, when looking at a presented selfie, one constantly oscillates between these two modes of interpretation. Thus, in the selfie the individual is made visible and present through technological exteriorization and the circulation of self as technological memory. Paradoxical though it may sound, however, there is *a bringing forth – a production – and consumption of the disappearance of the subject*. What is consumed in this tertiarizing process is the effect of a gaze in which the subject constantly disappears and appears in this excess of self-exteriorization. What is brought into circulation in the presented selfie is a principle of self-exteriorization, a generic form in which we consume first of all a gaze, a relationship that plays on the disappearance of the individual subject through its appearance. In this sense, the selfie is a gaze in which the subject constantly appears and disappears, and what is enjoyed and consumed is the total discrepancy between the celebration of the self, of the individual, and its total absence and disappearance in the very act of tertiarizing.

7.3 Mirror selfie: Meta-exteriorization

The mirror selfie is a photo image where the author takes an image in the mirror and is thereby depicted alongside the smartphone – in other words, an image *of* and *by* the author taking a picture of himself (taking a picture) in the mirror. The fascinating aspect of the mirror selfie – and perhaps why it is a popular way of visually reproducing and circulating oneself – is the simultaneity of two forms of reproduction: the reflection of the individual in the mirror and the instant mnemotechnical reproduction of the smartphone camera, or more precisely the

simultaneity of a reflection (mirror) and a tertiary reproduction (photo). The mirror and the camera each have their doubling function, but above all they render each other visible within the photo image. The mirror reflects the photographic lens of the smartphone, and through that the smartphone itself enters the photo image. Then, in returning the projection of the photographic lens upon itself, the mirror is simultaneously reproduced within that projection.

In the mirror selfie, the subject – the author – emerges, so to speak, in the conjunction of these two forms of reproduction. The visual effect of this redoubling game instantly verifies the identity of the photo image author with the person in the photo image. With the presented selfie, this identity remains elusive and outside the viewer's visual field but is nonetheless anticipated and what defines the image as a selfie. In the mirror selfie, this certainty is achieved as an effect of the mirror closing off the space, thereby directing the author back at himself, making him appear within the horizon of his own projection and that of the photographic lens. The reflected image of a mirror, as Walter Benjamin points out, does not materialize beyond the immediate present. The mirror as a technology of reproduction closes off not only the space but also any circulatory process beyond itself. As the subject moves away from the mirror, its double disappears, so to speak. Thus, the mirror produces an 'intimacy' in the room as it turns the room and the individual upon itself, thus closing off rather than opening up (Baudrillard 2005:21). The closing off and intimacy produced by the mirror is reproduced by and within the technical reproduction of the smartphone camera and the Instagram platform that opens up this closed off space by exteriorizing it and thus making it accessible to endless circulation. Writing about this difference between the mirror and the camera, Mumford states that 'whereas (...) one conversed with the mirror and produced the biographical portrait and the introspective biography (...) one poses for the camera, or still more, one acts for the motion picture' (Mumford 1963:243). By redirecting the attention of the individual back at itself, the mirror organizes an

introspective process whereby the individual becomes the object of a ‘self-examination’ process, while the opposite effect occurs with the camera’s producing a ‘self-exposure’ instead (ibid, 243-244). The mirror and the camera produce two different attentions that co-exist, even work together, in the mirror selfie.

One should not underestimate the fact that the mirror smoothly enables the individual to emerge *in toto*. Contrary to the presented selfie, which is always limited by the length of an arm or a stick to which the smartphone is attached, in the mirror selfie the arm becomes essentially irrelevant. The arm ceases to induce the distance between the individual as an object and the individual as an author. The distance between arm/face is replaced by the distance of the mirror and the camera that now defines how and to what extent the individual appears with the horizon of its own projection. The detour through the mirror means that the distance between the recording device and the posing body collapses not only temporally but also spatially, for the technical exteriorization of oneself does not necessarily involve a distance to the photographic lens – it can indeed be kept very close to the body. The very distance to the arm is integrated into and displayed within the photo image, thus eliminating the ‘mystic presence’ of the viewer. As such, one might say that the distance of Archimedes (upheld by the arm) is itself enfolded into the photo image.

Las Meninas revisited

It is time to properly introduce the painting *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez, a popular object for analysing perspective and visibility (Peraica 2017:37). This image enables a deeper analysis of the perspectives at play in the mirror selfie. One of the most famous analyses of the painting is the one done by Michel Foucault in

The Order of Things (1974), which I roughly follow as I describe the painting (Foucault 1974:3–16).³⁶

Velázquez has placed himself within the painting. He stands in front of a canvas just about to start painting or having just finished. We do not know because we can only see the back of the canvas. The painter in the painting, that is, Velázquez himself, is fixing his gaze on something outside the painting, something in the position we as viewers of the painting hold, thus creating the effect of an invisible spot. The painting itself shows a room in which we find several figures other than Velázquez. In the middle of the painting, at the back of the room, hangs a mirror in which we see a reflection of two figures that are not part of the room itself but who enter the painting through the mirror reflection. The mirror probably reveals what Velázquez is painting – two figures – and thus what is depicted on the painting canvas. As such, the mirror also reveals the invisible spot we as viewers for a moment hold and to which Velázquez and the others figures in the painting are directing their attention. By redoubling and opening up the room beyond the painting, the mirror reflection directs the room back to its centre, enabling us to see what is probably on the canvas and the invisible spot around which the attention of the people in the room is organized. Had it not been for the mirror reflection, the position outside the painting that we as viewers momentarily occupy would not have been disclosed. The mirror reflection draws this outside of the painting into the painting, and it is this invisible spot outside the painting that spot, a game of representation and an endless exchange begin between inside and outside, visible and invisible, the viewer and the viewed.

³⁶ The following descriptions of Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* is based on Foucault's analysis of the painting in *The Order of Things* (1974).



Las Meninas. Diego Velázquez (1656)

In the mirror selfie, the smartphone screen is sometimes the author's centre of attention, because she is looking at the image on the screen that is showing the mirror's reflection of the author to herself. Sometimes the author looks into the mirror, producing a sense of eye contact with an imagined viewer. As with Velázquez's canvas, the smartphone screen appears to be out of the viewer's sight/outside the viewer's reach. We can see that the author is looking at the smartphone screen, but cannot see what she sees. Yet, the image produced on the smartphone screen – reproducing the image of the mirror – and the image we can see (on our own screen) are identical. The rear side of the smartphone also appears on the front side of it, so to speak. Moreover, if nothing behind or in front of the mirror enters the photo image, then the three images of the screen, the mirror, and the photo image are almost identical. The image on the screen, the reflection in the mirror, and the photo image we as viewers are looking at starts a play of identical reproduction – a game of resemblance in which the subject appears as a kind of accidental element in a game of reflection and reproduction.

Whereas in *Las Meninas* the point of visibility, the point to which the main figures are directing their gaze, remains outside the painting itself and can only be seen through another representation (the mirror), in the mirror selfie this is cancelled out. Although the individual in such a selfie is reflected in the mirror, this reflection no longer takes the form of a representation but is rather a form of resemblance between screen image, mirror image, and photo image. The photo image shows both the front and the back of the smartphone, or more precisely it obscures the difference between front and back. If what organized the figures in *Las Meninas* as well as the presented selfie was something outside the painting, then in the mirror selfie the absence of an outside and a sameness between inside and outside, visible and invisible, organize the attention. The image on the smartphone screen appears both visible and invisible. Even if the person in the mirror selfie is not looking at the smartphone screen or the mirror but at something outside the visual field of the photo image,

there is a trinity of resemblance that is difficult to escape. The gaze of the subject produces no relevance whatsoever, as the subject is immediately pulled back into the simultaneity of the mirror and the screen. It is the vantage point of visibility itself that is forced into the image, a point that is not that of viewer or an author. At the centre of the mirror selfie, we find not the subject but the point of exteriorization itself, for the mirror cast not only the subject back at itself but also the smartphone and the vantage point of exteriorization. *What emerges in the mirror selfie is the vantage point of exteriorization itself.*

Meta-exteriorization and meta-consumption

If the vantage point of exteriorization is what emerges in the mirror selfie, one can perhaps speak of a *meta-exteriorization* in the same way as Baudrillard spoke of ‘meta-consumption’ (Baudrillard 1998:90-91/193). In Baudrillard’s writing meta-consumption refers to anti-consumption and advertising. In the consumer society, as Baudrillard describes it, anti-consumption – a refusal to enter into the sphere of consumption – becomes in itself a sign and form of social distinction within the system of consumption. In other words, in refusing to consume, to buy, and to possess objects, one neither subverts nor transgresses the code of difference that organizes the system of objects and consumption, as the refusal in itself becomes a sign of social status and prestige. Thus, anti-consumption manifests itself as a truly modern phenomenon of consumption (ibid, 90-91). The second, and in this context more relevant, form of meta-consumption is advertising. According to Baudrillard, advertising is both a discourse on objects (the subtraction of use value in favour of sign value) and an object of consumption itself (Baudrillard 2005:178). Advertising involves a kind of meta-consumption, for the object of consumption in advertising is consumption itself.

In prolongation of this second conception of meta-consumption, I suggest, that the mirror selfie is a kind of meta-exteriorization in the sense that the

process of exteriorization itself is exteriorized, an exteriorization that the mirror and the camera make possible. Contrary to the presented selfie where the subject/object distinction collapses in time, in the mirror selfie the tertiarizing of the self collapses into a kind of meta-exteriorization. In this instance, the subject does not disappear in an excess of its own visibility, as it is not a game of appearance and disappearance. Rather, the process of exteriorization itself becomes a central part of the act of exteriorization. One takes a picture of the act of taking a picture of oneself. What stands out in the mirror selfie is a subject that exteriorizes technical exteriorization. As such, what is exhibited in the mirror selfie is the principle of exteriorization itself: an exteriorization of exteriorization. The object of consumption in the mirror selfie is not only a principle of self-circulation but also a kind of circulation of exteriorization itself – a kind of meta-exteriorization in which the system is on display and consumed in a single image, in a single gesture. This makes the mirror selfie not only a form of exteriorization of the mirror image of the subject, but also an exteriorization of the process of exteriorization itself. Properly speaking, *what is consumed in the mirror selfie is the logic driving the system itself.*

Conclusion

Let us then for a moment go beyond the analysis and hypothesis of disappearance that has already been unfolded and return to the Upper Belvedere Museum and the ‘KISS selfie point’, suggesting we here find something of what is at stake in the selfie phenomenon. Whether the true work of art here is the original *The Kiss* or if it is the phenomenon playing out in room next to it – at the ‘KISS selfie point’ - is difficult to determine. As we know, earlier technologies of reproduction raised questions, for example about how works of art were being affected by their mechanical reproduced, or whether mechanical reproductions were works of art (i.e. Walter Benjamin). However, what I take to be an essential aspect of the ‘KISS selfie point’ is not that the painting is split in two, and how the original work of art is

affected by the replica standing in the room next to it. It is not primarily a phenomenon where the central relation is played out between an original painting and its reproduction, because, I suggest, the main character in the image will be the selfie-author. The replica of the painting does not point back to an absent original. On the contrary, in this triangle of the original-copy-self(ie) the latter effaces the original painting as reference point and - I dare to suggest - what happens is that the individual in the selfie (with the copy of *The Kiss*) takes the position of the original - and the replica. As with graffiti tag-names (those quickly drawn signatures that graffiti artists spread across the surfaces of 'their' urban territories)³⁷ there is an absence of the difference between copy and original. By means of the wall the tag-name is an inscription that foremost refers to the replication of itself as a tag-name. All tags are originals even though they are copies of one another. It is replication in itself that the graffiti tag refers to. Could the selfie, then, be understood as a kind of virtual graffiti, a sort of digital equivalent to the tag on the wall? It is possible to suggest, yet this remains purely speculative, that similarly to the tag-name the selfie refers foremost to its own replication and thereby a replication of a subject in its striving to exist. However, this remains a trajectory to be further pursued.

In this chapter I have proposed that, besides issues of self-expression, communication, and narcissism, the selfie is as much a phenomenon involving the disappearance of an individual subject as it is the manifestation of one. In its standardized and globally predominant form, the selfie is a profound manifestation of an individual, of a face, but it is simultaneously a form that effects its disappearance. Indeed, the selfie both insists on *and* erases the individual subject. Thus, what is consumed in and through the presented selfie is as much the subject's disappearance as its appearance. Or, to be more precise, the oscillation between

³⁷ Baudrillard offers an interesting analyses of the graffiti-tag name as being a statement of existence (Baudrillard 2012), which the following analysis of the selfie takes its clue from.

these two poles is itself what is consumed. This is the trick of the selfie. The mirror selfie is a tertiarizing gesture in which, above all, there is a reference to oneself as an image. This gesture of tertiarizing through the mirror engenders a play with the act of turning oneself into object – an object of the photographic lens, an object in the mirror, an object to oneself on the screen, and an object to others. In that two-folded process of the mirror and the camera, the viewer is literally invited into the author's mirror image, a mirror image that already appears to be distributed, circulated, and technologically exteriorized. Thus, in the mirror selfie, the individual is organized around the principle of exteriorization itself, as this obtains the centre of the image. Nothing escapes this centre as a force of gravity; there is no outside to the image, there is only the mirror of exteriorization or exteriorization as a mirror.

Part III. Implications and reflections: Towards a conception of social media consumption

I have so far developed a conceptual framework with the aim of providing a conceptual frame through which to grasp the activities, features, and functions through which individual and social experiences proliferate, circulate, and are organized through multiple social media platforms. This implied a reconceptualization of consumption from being that of a system of sign objects to that of a system of memory objects. In this third and final part I point to the broader implications of the findings of Part I and II. Firstly, I specify the notion of social media consumption as a directedness and as a form of anticipation of the present by discussing media theoretical conception of the impact of new media platforms on human aesthetics. Secondly, I engage with the perspective on social media platforms as technologies of *prosumption* discussing where the ‘theory of consumption of memory’ leave us in relation to this thematisation of platforms. Thirdly, I consider the possibility and prospects of lifting the reconceptualization of consumption developed in Part I beyond that of social media platforms as I explore what this perspective might provide on what has been called the ‘Internet of Things’. This will be done in engagement with Shoshana Zuboff’s work on contemporary capitalism. Thus, this Part III returns us to the themes, theorisations, and conceptualisations of platforms discussed in Chapter 3, and which have informed and shaped the approach to and analysis of the Instagram platforms as an organizational technology of consumption.

Chapter 8. Platforms: human and technological anticipation

We have now initiated the notion of social media consumption as not merely that of consuming ‘digital content’ but also formulated it as broader questions of a continually tertiary organization of the present lived Now. Let us then consider this notion of social media consumption as involving a certain form of directedness in light of media theoretical discussions of how digital platforms impact and shapes human experience.

Platforms: From ‘tertiary retention’ to ‘tertiary protention’

With the concept of tertiary retention, developed in *Technics and Time 2 and 3*, Stiegler argues that the individual and collective projection into the future and making sense of the just-to-happen is a process that goes through and is constituted by the outer world of material inscription and the milieu of technological memory (going from the hammer to photographs to the radio and so forth). In *Technics and Time 1* this was pursued as a matter of the technological origin of the already-there of Dasein. In *Technics and Time 2 and 3* the constituting role of technological memory is pursued in relation to Husserl’s theory of time-consciousness, as a matter of how technological memory shapes and constitutes the temporal flow of consciousness. Contemporary media theoretical understandings of the impact of media platforms on human experience and human temporalisation, including Stiegler, emphasis that what is new about digital media technologies such as social media platforms are that these not simply mediate human experience. With new media platforms, it is no longer simply a question of human anticipation going through and being structured by a material milieu of objects (for example writing, photography or television). With algorithms and the ability of digital platforms to collect and calculate a large amount of data we enter a phase of technological organization where human anticipation is bypassed by the operation of media technologies. For Stiegler, new digital platforms instigate a form of temporal

organization were the work of anticipation is no longer that of a subject but thoroughly delegated to technical systems, that for example suggest, recommend, and profile content to users. A most used example of this form of technological anticipation are the recommendation systems that we for example find on social media platforms (Chun 2019; Hui 2016; Stiegler 2019). With recommendation systems the work of anticipation, the act of bringing the future into the present, is delegated from the subject to digital media platforms. Instagram for example suggest what potential users to follow and curate content to users based on variety of criteria. It is on the basis of such conception of contemporary media system that Stiegler theorises the (social media) consumer as an essentially disindividuated individual, where the work of selection no longer resides within the individual but in the profiling and recommendation systems of automated algorithms that structures potential content to be viewed and potential relations to be made (Stiegler 2019:29). In a patent application by Facebook (that owns Instagram) one aspect of this machinic anticipation is described thus:

These applications describe accessing content on a user's mobile device based on when the content was taken and/or saved to the user's mobile device and who was in them (e.g., determined based on facial recognition technology) within a discrete time period of a single day. For example, these applications describe a method in which social-networking system would access the user's content and suggest "moments" of content (e.g., photographs) to be shared with other users, the "moments" lasting between a couple of hours to a full day. In contrast, this application looks beyond these "moments" to determine whether a group of content associated with several days are part of a discrete event (e.g., a "trip," which may include multiple "moments"). (Justia Patents 2016).

Described in the above passage is how the platform by means of accessing an individual's device and content suggests what 'moments' to be shared with others

user. In this context media scholar Yuk Hui, building upon Stiegler's philosophy, argues that specific to contemporary digital technologies, this organization does not only constitute an environment of tertiary retention on which an individual comes to experience the present, but that systems of tertiary retentions have evolved into systems of tertiary *protentions* (Hui 2016:246). Whereas the concept of tertiary retentions points to the embeddedness of and co-constitutive relation between technology memory and human aesthetics, 'tertiary protention' highlights that contemporary digital media platforms through algorithmic processing of data anticipates *on behalf of* the human subject for example by suggesting potential moments to be shared; that is anticipation has moved from the individual to technological system such as social media platforms. The anticipatory capacity of digital media platforms comes from the ability of algorithms to synthesise large amounts of data (and as the passage above indicates, from the ability to access the content on people's mobile devices) that below the scope of the individual media users selects and filters content and thereby decide what digital objects to appear. For example, on Instagram or it can be recommendations of people to follower, on Amazon suggestions of books to buy, and on YouTube what video to be shown. Hui writes:

The organization of digital objects through the standardization of data structures and the invention of algorithms is not simply what has fashionably called the "organization of knowledge" but is also the organization of time. (...). The imagination based on the programming of intersubjectivity through interobjective relations is an attempt to enact this [relation between "I" and "We"], and it is no surprise to find that social norms are increasingly easily formed because of this programmability. That is to say, technological normativity is the source of social normativity. (Hui 2016:247).

The orientation and imagination of the individual not only goes through technological objects, but technology itself imagines, projection, and anticipate. In the context of social media consumption, this can be understood as the profiling and targeting of content to users through the calculation and synthesis of large amount of data aggregated in users' engagement with the platform. The organizational powers of social media platforms reside in the ability to filter and organise the proliferation of content and hence making-present certain content and create certain relations and not others. Before we expand on and insist on social media consumption as not only that of an algorithmic anticipation but that social media consumption also is involving human anticipation and is expressed in a certain directedness towards the present, we direct our attention to media theorist Mark B.N. Hansen's conceptualization of new digital media's impact on and organization of human experience. This is important as a mean to further explicate the argument of social media consumption as not only that of consuming content but involving a form of human directedness and anticipation.

Platforms: organizing the non-perceptual level of human experience

While Hui elaborates on Stiegler's schema of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions, Mark B.N. Hansen in *Feed-forward – On the futures of 21st century media* (2015) presents a media theoretical reading of Alfred North Whitehead as means to understand how human experience is shaped by contemporary digital technologies. Hansen argues that what characterises and defines 21st century digital media – Hansen's examples of these are micro-chips and micro-sensing devices and data networks such as social media platform – are that these can operate at a level that is not comprehensible or accessible for human faculties of perception, attention, and consciousness (Hansen 2015:4). With media platforms human experience is being organized by media systems that have access to a lower-level of human experience or to 'non-perceptual sensibility' such as biological and physical

processes. This lower-level is not accessible to human perception and consciousness but is so only indirectly through the intermediary of technology (Hansen 2015:17–20). According to Hansen, this challenges existing conceptions of how media technology impact and organise human experience. With 21st century media, Hansen argues, the relation between subject and object, between the technical artefact and human faculties can no longer be configured in terms of the extension of the body (McLuhan) nor as the exteriorisation of human knowledge (Stiegler) for the very reason that the machine sensing of smart-chips, micro-sensing devices, and algorithms along with their integration into networks of data such as social media platforms operate on a temporal scale below human perception, consciousness, and attention (Hansen 2015:73–76). Whereas the content of 20th century media such as Television and Radio correlated directly to human consciousness, the data processing of digital media operates below human sensing and only *indirectly* correlates to human attention (ibid). To put it in other words, the content of 21st century media (data) is not properly speaking a ‘mental content’ but is data about lower-level processes of non-perceptual sensibility that nevertheless is part of and shapes human experience. It only becomes a mental content through intermediary technologies, why neither the figure of extension or exteriorisation can account for the specificity of digital media technologies and their impact on temporal experience of present and future. According to Hansen, ‘new media’ therefore requires a re-conceptualization of subjectivity and temporal experience beyond Husserl’s theory of ‘time-consciousness’, as human experience of present and future is modulated by the processing of digital technologies that in no direct way correlate to a human time-consciousness:

we encounter a situation where technically modulated agencies will always already have activated microtemporal sensory affordances of the environments encompassing – and facilitating – our doings, well in advance of showing up, at a far higher level of organizations, as “contents” of our consciousness. (Hansen 2015:26–27).

Stiegler’s conception of technological objects and artefacts as the product of human exteriorisation, Hansen argues, ties his conception of technology to human consciousness – to the exteriorisation of a ‘mental’ or ‘lived’ content – which, according to Hansen, is exactly what does not characterise 21st century media technologies. This is, Hansen argues, Stiegler’s anthropocentric view of technology (i.e. technology is a product of human exteriorisation). Whereas Stiegler’s scheme of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions asserts that human temporalisation goes through exterior objects, Hansen argues that ‘[...] worldly temporalization happens beneath, if not in some sense *prior to*, the (temporal) experience of individual time-consciousness’ (Hansen 2015:26). Data (about experience) can as such not be experienced by a subject but is only accessible through the intermediary of digital technologies. This produces a temporal gap between machine sensing and human sensing that creates a temporal disjunction where human beings are constantly behind the data gathering process of digital technologies and media platform that nevertheless forms the basis on which human experience arise. This temporal gap and temporal disjunction, Hansen argues, entails that 21st century media not only have access to and knowledge of the environment that makes up human experience but that these devices can also analyse, act on, and modulate this data prior to human awareness and agency (Hansen 2015:140–42). Again, human temporalisation and experience of past, present, and future are modulated on processes that goes prior to the human capacity to select and filter primary retentions.

Indeed, Hansen provide an insight into how the temporality of contemporary media systems effects human temporalisation, however, a limitation to Hansen's analysis is as pointed out by Kathrine Hayles that Hansen 'gives almost no examples of media that operate in this way. The media he mentions—the sociometer, sound art, etc.—work through sensation and perception, not prior to them' (Hayles 2017:173). Despite this critique, there remains potential resources in Hansen's media theory in terms of understanding contemporary consumption in particular when what is exteriorised and brought into circulation are physical activities such as with sport where the content is data generated by GPS devices (for example the social medium Strava).

Whether we conceive contemporary social media platforms to *anticipate on behalf of the subject* or to construct a temporal regime that configures the human environment of action and agency prior to and without any corresponding relation to human faculties of perception, platforms as organizational technologies of consumption is not to be confined to algorithmic anticipation or to relations and synthesis of data creating a personalized environment. There is a phenomenological dimension to consumption and the evolving system of social media platforms that still pertains an attention to human faculties of perception. It is true, that the content that appears on an Instagram feed, including advertised content is among others a result of relations and calculation of data but the potential and anticipatory effect is also related to how these systems of memory organise content through a variety of functions visible to human faculties of perception. For example, the stream-like organization of content is a result of relations of data but the stream as I have analysed it is also a phenomenological object that partakes in shaping future experiences. What I argue for is that if we want to understand platforms as technology of organizing consumption, and social media platforms as one example of a platform, attention should not only focus on how these platforms by-pass or operate below human perception but analyse them as systems of memory that

organizes human process of exteriorisation and thus organise human experiences through a variety of features and functions. For example, and as I have shown, Instagram filters not only structures photo-images but are also perceptual filters through which lived experiences are organized in relation to each other in a way that cannot be reduced to or analysed as a relation of data. From this understanding of the temporal experiences of the present being configured through technologies of memory I argue that when we speak of social media consumption as a *consumption of memory* we are not simply implying an interaction with or consumption of content through a social media platform as is being a digital object on a screen. That is, following Baudrillard, '[t]o enter the cycle of consumption and fashion is not simply to surround oneself with objects and services as one pleases; it is to change one's being and directedness' (Baudrillard 1998:170). This leads us the following. I have suggest that social media consumption and what characterises social media platforms as technologies of organizing consumption are related not only to the engagement with a screen, to the consumption of content and how this has been organized by algorithms. These systems of memory also come to involve a directedness towards the present that shapes social activities and behaviour. In the present context of social media, this 'directedness' has been reconceptualised as *anticipation* grounded not in a system of object-signs but in a system of memory-objects. Social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption that involve a way of directing oneself towards oneself, to others and the world; it involves a certain form of anticipation and of bringing-forth the present. Social media consumption is not the passive consumption of content but the *general organization of the present towards tertiary exteriorisation and circulation*.

Chapter 9. The prosumption of memory

Having addressed platform consumption in relation to question of the temporal organization of the present we now return to the conception of social media platforms as organizational technologies of ‘prosumption’ in light of the reconceptualization of consumption from that of system of signs to that of a system of organizing process of tertiarizing. As outlined in Chapter 3 the notion of ‘prosumption’ is a dominant analytical approach in terms of grasping social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption. ‘Prosumption’ and the ‘prosumer’ are concepts that initially were introduced by Alvin Toffler in the 1980ties and emphasise the intertwinement of processes of production with those of consumption and vice versa (Fuchs 2014:111; Ritzer 2014:4). Since then prosumption has developed into an influential perspective on social media platforms resulting in particular attention to for example how existing distinctions between work and leisure are challenged and transformed by the social media platforms (see Fuchs, 2014). While there is a substantial literature discussing to what extent the use of social media platforms, the services and functions they provide, are to be understood as productive or unproductive labour and more generally how to understand the value creation process of such platforms (see for example Arvidsson & Colleoni, 2012; Comor, 2015) in the context of this dissertation the concern lies not with these discussions. Here we are rather interested in the notion of *consumption* that informs the use of prosumption as an analytical approach and what the ‘theory of consumption of memory’ might contribute to the further conception of social media platforms as organizing technologies of consumption.

What I will argue for is a notion of prosumption as not only that of a simultaneously process of creating content oneself and then consuming the images, experiences, and memory of other users but that features of liking, commenting etc. is a process where the act of technical exteriorisation is producing other users as tertiary memory; the others are, in other words, produced – come into being and are

constituted through these process, and that this itself is a part of social media consumption. In order to develop this perspective, we shall first scrutinize the conception of consumption that informs the analysis of social media platforms as technologies of prosumption.

Platforms and productive consumption

A central discussion within the literature of social media prosumption is how social media platforms and platforms in general are structured around making the use (i.e. ‘consumption’) of platforms productive. I argue, that in this literature, social media platforms are explored as productive in two senses of the term: Social media platforms are on the one hand understood as productive as there in the users’ use of these platforms is a production of content that is also the object of consumption (i.e. user-generated content). This perspective emphasises how the consumers’ use of these platforms generates content which is also the object of consumption. That is, the functional separation between producers and consumers of content characterising mass media has been blurred giving way for a conception of social media users as ‘prosumers’. The second understanding of consumption as productive is not opposed to the first but is formulated in economic terms. It suggests that the very use of the medium is a source of economic value creating for platform owners, why it has been argued that the use of social media is to be understood as unpaid labour (Fuchs 2014:111) or as ‘free-labour’ (Beverungen et al. 2015). Christian Fuchs, a proponent of this perspective, for example writes: ‘All hours spent online by users of Facebook, Google and comparable corporate social media constitute work time, in which data commodities are generated, and potential time for profit realized’ (Fuchs 2014:116). The use of platforms renders new aspects of social interaction and life productive through the gathering of information and data about people that comes from the digital traces left in the use of platforms. The use of social media platforms is also productive in this economic sense as time spend

on these platforms are available brain-time to which consumers can be exposed to advertisement. Here it is the brain-time of consumers and access to their ‘attentions’, that become a commodity that is sold to third-parties (Fuchs 2012). So, the consumption is productive in the sense that in the use of these platforms people participate, knowingly or not, in a process of economic value creation for someone else than themselves. In the context of social media, the concept of prosumption explicates how the use and services of platforms integrates the user into the production of services, economic value, and the medium itself.

The notion of consumption in theories of prosumption

Relevant to our discussion of platforms and platform consumption are sociologists George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson as they argue for and develop prosumption into a broader analytical frame for analysing social organization. They write:

Prosumption involves *both* production and consumption rather than focusing on either one (production) or the other (consumption). While prosumption has always been preeminent, a series of recent social changes, especially those associated with the Internet and Web 2.0 (briefly, the user-generated web, e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter), have given it even greater centrality. (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010:14).

Another significant voice in this discussion of social media prosumption is Fuchs that in continuation of Ritzer is pointing to how prosumption is not specific to social media platforms:

(...) in the realm of cultural consumption, unpaid labour has increasingly also become (just like wage-labour) commodity producing. The examples of fast food restaurants, IKEA furniture assembled at home and self-service gas stations show that prosumption (consumption that is productive and creating economic value and commodities) is not entirely new. (Fuchs

2014:111).

Prosumption is not confined to the organizational structuring of social media platforms. ATM machines, IKEA products assembled by the consumer, and self-checkout services are, according to Fuchs, other prime examples of contemporary prosumption activities as consumers in the use and purchase of things, objects, and technologies are participating in a process of producing the product that is consumed or performing services themselves (Fuchs 2014:111; Ritzer 2014:12). Ritzer's aim is to take the concept of prosumption beyond its economic roots and develop it into a general sociological frame that overcomes the opposition of production and consumption that, according to Ritzer, structures social theory and sociological analysis in general (Ritzer 2014:5). As a broader analytical perspective prosumption pays attention to the simultaneity of the processes of production and consumption within the organization of social life. Simultaneity, in this context does not, however, refer to a temporal simultaneity. Ritzer writes: 'I no longer think of prosumption as involving more-or-less simultaneous production and consumption. A prosumer can "produce" something at one point in time (e.g., a crop) and "consume" it at a much later point in time' (Ritzer 2014:22 note 1).

Considering this conception of prosumption as involving both production and consumption in the use of an object or a technology and in light of the notion social media platforms as technologies that organizes tertiary retention, it is then possible to envisage a perspective of the *prosumption of memory* as a means to capture how the use of social media platform is a simultaneous process of producing and consuming tertiary retentions (the 'positive' interpretation of this being that with social media platforms the individual is no longer subjected to consume the standardized tertiary retentions of the 'culture industries' e.g. mass-media television but are engaging in a collective and participatory process of

simultaneously being a producer and a consumer of cultural tertiary retentions.³⁸ The ‘negative’ interpretation being that of ‘audience commodity’ and the commodification of the means of socialisation that comes with the capitalist nature of these platforms – however, following Baudrillard’s theory of consumption neither capture the broader organizing effects of consumption). Before advancing on the idea of a presumption of memory it is, in light of the development of Baudrillard’s theory of consumption in Part I, pertinent to analyse *what notion of consumption is it that is at work within the concept of presumption?* For Christian Fuchs, social media consumption is framed as general question of the capitalist organization of time. Social media platforms render social communication and interaction productive and this exemplifies a general tendency whereby leisure- and non-productive time are turned into labour time, and, that this labouring of social media consumers is unpaid (Fuchs 2014:111-112/120). However, the interest is not here not that of commodification. In Ritzer’s development of presumption into a general analytical perspective presumption is theorised as a continuum between ‘presumption-as-production’ and ‘presumption-as-consumption’ (Ritzer 2014:10). There are never simply processes of production nor that of consumption, according to Ritzer, both processes operate on a continuum leaning either towards presumption-as-production or presumption-as-consumption

Specifically, the production-consumption binary prevents us from seeing the consumption (e.g. of raw materials, tools, labor time) that is inherent in production *and* the production that is intertwined with consumption (for

³⁸ The critique of mass-media for essentially separating the consumer and producer of cultural content and symbols is a critique we also find in media theorist Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s work on and critique of mass-media. He writes: ‘The technical distinction between receivers and transmitters reflects the social division of labor into producers and consumers, which in the consciousness industry becomes of a political importance’ (Enzensberger 1974:97). We also find this in Bernard Stiegler’s theory of media and technology as show in part I.

example, the (“work” e.g. shopping) involved in much consumption; the creation of the meaning of brands; producing an order on Amazon.com; creating a response after reading a blog, etc.). (Ritzer 2014:10).

Ritzer draws a historical parallel in his development of the concept of prosumption. Ritzer writes that ‘prosumption has always been preeminent’ and prosumption ‘are primal roles and processes’ that brings us closer to a pre-industrial form of organization because the separation of the consumer and producer that permeates and defines industrial organization is by contemporary technology such as social media (again) being blurred (ibid, 16). If contemporary technologies of prosumption inclines toward the structuring of producer and consumer in a manner that resembles a pre-industrial model of organization what notion of consumption and production is then extrapolated back in history? That is, if the advent of social media platforms involves an organization of the roles of producers and consumers in ways that bring us closer to prosumption, which was preeminent in pre-industrial societies, then this implies a certain notion of the consumer and consumption. Ritzer exemplifies the analytical frame of prosumption by drawing parallels to practices around traditional consumer goods and practices. For example, Ritzer describes self-service checkout in supermarkets as a recent form of prosumption because the task of scanning the grocery at the supermarket is no longer a service done by an employee, a worker, but is a service done by consumers themselves at checkout stands (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010:18). Yet, before the invention of the supermarket one didn’t collect groceries oneself either. Following this logic collecting products in the supermarket is a recent form of prosumption. Another example of prosumption is restaurants where consumers pick-up their food instead of being served at a table (ibid). Perhaps a new way of organizing the consumer, yet, if this is a form of prosumption one could also argue that pouring water oneself or using knife and fork at a restaurant is a form of prosumption. Ritzer’s argument is exactly that this is the case as process of production and consumption are always simultaneously present and the analytical

frame of prosumption is attentive to this simultaneity within any social activity. The concept of prosumption effectively captures an emerging trend among organisations and business'; the transferring of tasks and services to consumers (often with the help of digital technologies) and thereby enabling organisations to profit from individuals performing these tasks and services themselves. This then seems to bring us closer to the notion of consumption within prosumption. Ritzer writes:

For example, at the "production" end of the continuum [of prosumption] we can still find the traditional factory worker (although better thought of as a prosumer-as-producer), while a consumer in an elite boutique staffed by many salespeople is a traditional shopper (although even in this case more of a prosumer-as-consumer). (Ritzer 2014:11)

This description of prosumption as well as in the example given above Ritzer's framing of prosumption appears to construct and operate with ideal-types of production and consumption. Prosumption ascends in this case from a notion of consumption and the consumer as defined in its ideal-type as a passive enjoyment of services and goods (the spending of value) imagined in opposition to the active and paid producer (creation of value). Are we not inclined to say that the concept of prosumption understood as a continuum between prosumption-as-production and prosumption-as-consumption is a continuum that has as its outer poles the ideal-types of the passive consumer and the active producer? Does Ritzer in his attempt to overcome the binary opposition of consumption/production end up reinforcing this binary opposition as a continuum with the intended aim to draw to attention how the passive consumer becomes (and has always been) an active producer?

Although the notion of prosumption developed by Ritzer is sensitive to the simultaneity of the production and consumption in any social activity the example above also suggests an analytical limitation within this framework. If we by consumption instead focus on an organizational process through which objects

are brought into circulation and from which certain experiences and relationships emerges it is possible to explore social media prosumption as an engagement and consumption that exceeds beyond the configuration of the individual as both a producer and consumer of media content or/and value. And if we consider social media platforms to be systems of memory creating a new type of consumptive object then prosumption might be explored not from the perspective of a pre-industrial model of organizing the individual as both a producer and a consumer. In fact, *prosumption might just be a form of consumption*. That is, prosumption not only as the simultaneously process of production and consumption of value, of data commodities, of the medium or of tertiary retention, and not only as an emerging process of transferring services to the consumer; but prosumption as a way by which objects are organized and given to us as objects of consumption. So, we will reverse two conceptions that permeate the analytical lens of prosumption. Consumption tend to be reduced to a question of use and thereby tends to a focus on how this consumptive use is made productive (i.e. productive consumption) whereas less attention is to how processes of producing itself becomes an object of consumption. Before we expand on this in relation to social media platforms let us proceed by taking Ritzer's example of IKEA products that are assembled at home and analyse it through Baudrillard's notion of consumption as structured field of sign-objects.

Social media prosumption: the production of others as tertiary memory

In the case of IKEA objects the analytical perspective of prosumption might emphasise how the individual becomes a prosumer when it for example assembles a book-shelf – which is “normally” not the case with furniture – thereby producing the object (materially assembling the book-shelf) and generating profit (IKEA doesn't have to pay labour-time assembling it). Yet, this perspective can be extended if we go beyond the attention to how the relation to IKEA products configure the individual as both a material producer of the object and a consumer

purchasing and eventually using the object and instead attend to the relationship that emerges from this specific organization of the object.

Let us begin by stating the obvious fact that these IKEA products are objects that remain insufficient until they have received some degree of involvement on the part of the consumer. The use-value of an unassembled closet from the product line PAX is limited without the consumer having invested some kind of energy and time in assembling the product. In that sense, self-assemble products are objects to which some degree of physical effort of the consumer is required in order for them to perform their function. In other words, we are called upon as an acting subject. We might therefore say that a PAX closet and its equals are objects that are given to us *without the signs of human labour* (or what Marx called living-labour as opposed to the dead-labour of the machine).³⁹ We can of course imagine the assembled version of the PAX closet but foremost as we pick up the object in the IKEA warehouse it is given to us as an object where the dead-labour of the machine prevails over the living-labour of humans. Our imagination is pushed towards these objects as having been produced with no relation to living beings what so ever and instead appear as being pure products of machinic operations. The prevalence of the dead-labour of the machine opens up an imagined space for the consumer in which the completion of the object appears as an effect of the consumer herself. The potential combinations that the closet can form with other objects underscores and strengthens this feeling. The relationship to the object is organized around this minimal presence of the signs of living-labour, however, the picture of the complete object remains a part of the object itself. When the consumer begins assembling the product, the consumer enters into a relationship

³⁹ Being a sign of human labour because it does not relate to the material production process but to how this type of object is organized in relation to other objects and enters into a consumptive relation to the consumer.

with the object that is pre-determined (i.e. the assembling manual) and in entering this relationship the absence of human labour is removed through the activity of the consumer herself. So, we might say that living-labour enters into the relationship to the object as a sign to be produced by the consumer (whereas with objects that says 'hand-made' living-labour is a sign by which the object is consumed). From the absence of living-labour built into the relationship to these objects a sense of agency and creativity are granted to the consumer (although it might be experienced rather painfully). Although being a purely pre-structured relation and interaction a sense of craftsmanship arises in the process: by being the bearer of signs of living labour it is the consumer that brings objects to life. In this sense, these IKEA products involve prosumption not simply because consumers have to assemble the product themselves. It is not the material practice of assembling the product that makes the consumer a prosumer. It is because with the PAX closet the object is not only consumed as a sign but is an object that, so to speak, receives the signs of production from the consumer. What is consumed in this relationship to the object *is the signs of producing itself*. The activity of producing itself enters into the relationship with the object and is consumed as a sign within this pre-structured relation to the object. Perhaps, we should speak of presumptive practices not merely because the individual is both a consumer (i.e. purchaser and user of the object) and producer (materially assembling the product), but because production itself becomes a sign that is consumed in this relationship to the object.⁴⁰ Prosumption, then, means not only productive consumption of a material object, a commodity, of value etc. but that the process of production itself becomes a sign that is consumed and this does not resemble whatsoever the so-called pre-industrial organization of consumer and

⁴⁰ Baudrillard first theorised the sphere of consumption as being an extension of the sphere of production, while he later reversed it and said that the sphere of production (value, labour) has fallen into the sphere of consumption and semiological organization, as value and labour itself becomes signs that float losing any definite referent (Baudrillard 1993a:14).

producer as ‘prosumers’. The use of platforms offering “user-generated content” does not only consist in consuming this content, but in consuming the label in itself; “user-generated”.

This gives us the possibility to extent the implications of the notion of prosumption into the current context of social media platforms as organizational technologies of memory. Now, if we are to speak of a ‘prosumption of memory’ it is not simply because the use of social media platforms organizes the individual simultaneously as a producer and consumer of services because the use of the platform necessarily involves a production of data that also develops the services. Furthermore, we are not to speak of a prosumption of memory because the individual now is both a producer and consumer of content, having overcome the functional divide of production and consumption of media content. And finally, it is not because consumers’ activities have now become productive as their behaviour and experiences are monitored, collected, calculated, and sold as available brain-time to third-parties. It is rather because, through social media platforms, lived experiences are organized as something unfinished, as something to act on, work on, and bring into further circulation. In fact, all this lived life on Instagram also appears and are given to us as something that we must *bring to live*. All these filters, adjustments, and manipulations, all this customisation and personalization through which mnemotechnical objects proliferate and multiply; from all of this, the work of peers are needed to bring life to the de-temporalized archive of Nows of the platform and this is built into the organization and consumption of tertiary memory. If we so far have described a process by which the field of human experience and activities generally and on a rising curve is being organized towards process of exteriorisation and consumed as something tertiary, then we must see that there are constant efforts to be made by consumers to re-temporalize what has already been persevered and exteriorised. Perhaps more significantly, within this re-temporalisation there is not only a process where lived experiences of others are

consumed as technological memory but there emerges also a relationship to others as objects of tertiary production. The process of exteriorisation of self, for example: a like, comment, and so forth, equally also involves a production of others as memory. With social media platforms, *others are given as an object of tertiary production and this itself becomes a kind of consumption*. Process of production (of others as tertiary retention) itself becomes something that is consumed through these platforms. There is a consumption of the relationship in which others are an object of production and this might qualify as an initial definition of the *prosumption of memory*. It is therefore possible to suggest that platform prosumption is not simply productive consumption (of the medium, of value etc.) but also involves a process where this producing itself becomes something that is consumed. In that sense, prosumption is just another form of consumption, another way in which objects are organized as objects of consumption.

Chapter 10. Platform consumption beyond social media

In the two previous chapters, we have broadened the implications of Part I and II and expanded the conception of social media consumption as system of production and consumption of memory. In this chapter, we go beyond social media platforms. A question that emerges from this discourse on social media platforms as organizational technologies of the consumption of lived experiences as technological memory is: to what extent is this ‘consumption’ of human experiences and life to be confined to social media platforms? Are we with these platforms simply touching upon a broader tendency by which lived experiences are technologically exteriorised through a variety of technological objects and then fed back to the individual in a gigantic process of turning everyday situations, relations, and activities into objects of consumption? This is to be explored in relation to Shoshana Zuboff’s argument of a new organizational complex consisting of a capitalist logic of accumulation and rendering human experiences into data with the assistance of digital technologies; what she labels ‘surveillance capitalism’. This question is opened up here but foremost point to further research.

Surveillance Capitalism: rendering ‘human experience’ productive

According to Zuboff, the collection and gathering of information about online social activities, interactions, and communication are a defining aspect of how contemporary capitalism works and how a new techno-economic complex transforms and commodifies social life. In this particular historical variation of capitalism, the collection and monitoring, in the words of Zuboff, of ‘human experience’ evolves into a primary source of economic profit an argument also found in the work of Fuchs. This leads to an accumulation of extracting and rendering evermore aspects of human life into data: ‘In this new logic [of capitalist accumulation], *human experience is subjugated to surveillance capitalism’s market mechanisms and reborn as “behaviour”*’ (Zuboff 2019:100). As I pointed out in

Chapter 3, Zuboff pays scarce attention to how this rendering of ‘human experience’ productive in our age surveillance capitalism also implies a reconfiguration of relations to objects and processes of consumption. Despite its generalising ambition, how ‘human experience’, for example through social media platforms, becomes not only the general motif of a new logic of accumulation but, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, something that is organized, exchanged, and consumed in and through this process of valorisation and extraction remains outside the scope of Zuboff’s description of surveillance capitalism. Nevertheless, Zuboff’s account is, in relation to the attempt to expand the notion of ‘the consumption of memory’ beyond social media platforms relevant because she argues that this new logic of accumulating and rendering ‘human experience’ into data is not to be confined to online interactions and communication on platforms such as Facebook. It is a logic that is integrated into the very functioning and use of all kinds of objects. Zuboff writes:

(...) in July 2017 iRobot’s autonomous vacuum cleaner, Roomba, made headlines when the company’s CEO, Colin Angle, told Reuters about its data-based business strategy for the smart home, starting with a new revenue stream derived from selling floor plans of customers’ homes scraped from the machine’s new mapping capabilities. Angle indicated that iRobot could reach a deal to sell its maps to Google, Amazon, or Apple within the next two years. In preparation for this entry into surveillance competition, a camera, new sensors, and software had already been added to Roomba’s premier line, enabling new functions, including the ability to build a map while tracking its own location. (Zuboff 2019:235).

Each node in the network—the vacuum cleaner, the mattress, the thermostat—must play its part, beginning with the frictionless rendition of behavior, as the whole team of seething insistent “smart” things joins the

migration to surveillance revenues. (Zuboff 2019:240).

In Zuboff's description the autonomous performance of the vacuum cleaner Roomba is a rendering of 'human experience' into data, and, thus an example of how the logic of extracting and accumulating data about human experience expands into every corner of human life and thus well beyond the engagement with online platforms: '[these] ubiquitous apparatus is the means to the ubiquitous rendition of human experience' (ibid, 241). Although, as Zuboff writes, '[o]ne can easily choose not to purchase a Roomba', the Roomba and objects alike are 'merely emblematic of the immense project of rendition' in which human life and experience are transformed into data that is already developing into a 'network of coercion, in which mundane functions are ransomed for behavioral surplus.' (ibid, pp. 238-239). We find this logic of extracting and accumulating data about human life in the very functioning of everyday objects: Vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, heating, mattresses, and in general with the Internet of Things monitoring, collecting, and quantifying human experience are expanded into evermore types of everyday objects and becomes an integrated part of how these objects function. But why is this relevant to the expansion and exploration of 'the consumption of lived life as technological memory' beyond social media platforms? Let me draw out two things.

Firstly, to what extent are the data that these objects collect an expression of 'human experience'? When a refrigerator monitors the "content" of a person's refrigerator in order for it to perform the function of ordering, ideally, more oat milk when one is low or when the Roomba robot vacuum cleaner scans and collects data about a room in order to perform its function of 'autonomous' cleaning; to what extent is this 'human experience' that is rendered into data? That is to what extent is this data an expression of 'human experience'? While Zuboff provides a detailed account of how this logic of extracting and rendering human experiences into data have been normalised as a new logic of accumulation, and how it has been

perfected by Facebook and Google, Zuboff does not specify what ‘human experience’ and ‘human nature’ exactly are beside being the latest natural resource (following land and nature’s raw material) that has been dispossessed and commodified by capitalism (Zuboff 2019:94). What Zuboff captures but does not conceptualize because of a rather restricted engagement with theories of technology and media is that with the Internet of Things we are witness to a process where objects are becoming mnemotechnical objects. That is, objects that contain not just general experience that are activated as they are used but as part of their function they retain specific lived experiences – and is still different from IKEA products. The car, the refrigerator, the vacuum cleaner, and even clothes are in a state of becoming mnemotechnical objects, that is, their very functioning depends on and consists in retaining and integrating within itself its own “experiencing” (monitoring and sensing) including of course the human use of the object. This relation between human experience and technologies of extracting and rendering human life into data I suggest is – similar to the case of social media platforms – a tertiarizing process. However, with the Roomba vacuum cleaner this experience is not related to the presence of a human subject or consciousness as it is exactly defined by being an ‘autonomous’ object performing its task without the presence of a subject. With the refrigerator and the vacuum cleaner there is a process of exteriorisation that is not directly related to the experience of an individual consciousness. To what extent it is possible, in these cases where it is the object and technology that “experiences”, speak of a technical exteriorisation and de-temporalisation of something lived and experienced, and can we speak of these objects not only as rendering human experiences productive but also as a tertiarizing process in which lived experiences are consumed, so to speak, through the object?

We touch here a problem related to the concept of technics as exteriorisation and the schema of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions as means to understand the impact of contemporary digital technology on human

experiences, a critique put forward by Hansen that we addressed in Chapter 8. In this case, the collection of data goes through technologies that works below (micro-sensors) and prior to human perception (the ‘temporal gap’ that comes with algorithms that collect and synthesise large amount of data unattainable for any individual consciousness). Despite the tertiarizing process and the data that are created are the outcome of processes that are not related to humans as it operates sometimes below or prior to human faculties of perception, attention, and consciousness in the end the data about the content of the refrigerator is an expression of something lived and very broadly of human life. But instead of simply speaking of ‘data’ the schema of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions, as well as the distinction between objects of storage (where there is an activation of a general experience and knowledge) and mnemotechnical objects (that contains and enables a reproduction of a specific experience), can further qualify how the relationships to these objects are essentially being organized around and consumed as the outcome of tertiarizing individual and social life. From this point of view, a second question emerges, one we however cannot fully answer here but only begin to outline as a starting point for further research on platform consumption: what relationships and experiences emerges from this built-in technical exteriority of the everyday objects, this becoming mnemotechnical of all objects and with it the tertiarizing of everyday actions, situations, and experiences? I will just briefly indicate how an analysis of this might involve.

Tertiarizing the home: the personalized refrigerator

The ‘Family Hub 4-Door-Flex’ refrigerator from Samsung ‘lets you manage your family’s calendars, play music on Spotify, share pictures and stay connected right on your refrigerator’. But it does more than that: ‘See inside your refrigerator from

anywhere, with 3 built-in cameras'.⁴¹ The refrigerator, the car, and the vacuum cleaner slowly metamorphoses from objects of storage into mnemotechnical objects containing in themselves specific lived experiences. Literally speaking, the Samsung refrigerator does not simple *store* your food it *memorises* it. The Samsung refrigerator can now 'read' what is in it, it can turn on the oven, you can order food through it, it provides access to multiple functions within the home, and it can itself be accessed 'from anywhere, with 3 built-in cameras'. Cooling and storing food seems almost as superfluous functions. These are objects that in their mere presence collect data about their host but they are also objects whose presence implies a range of objects. The refrigerator and the oven are unified as they in their functioning begin to speak to each other, relate to each other not as signs but in their formation of a coherent mnemotechnical system organized around processes of tertiarizing individual and social activities.

Samsung's Family Hub refrigerator for 2019 features platform updates that make it a true "home screen" for the entire family. New (...) software improvements make the Family Hub a communal, emotional and cultural experience in the kitchen.

What is put into and constitute these objects are relations: relations between objects, and, relations between an individual and its environment and this is all based on the tertiarizing capacities of the object. It is exactly in this capacity to contain you and to know you that we enter into a consumptive relationship with this object. If an object wanted to survive in the age of the consumer society it needed to transcend itself as an object experienced at the level of use and become a sign-object and thereby enter the sphere of endless consumption (Baudrillard). Today it also needs

⁴¹<https://www.samsung.com/us/home-appliances/refrigerators/4-door-flex/28-cu-ft-4-door-flex-with-21-5-in-connected-touch-screen-family-hub-refrigerator-rf28n9780sr-aa/>. Accessed on October 22nd, 2020.

to establish itself, in the words of Steinberg, as an ‘middle’. A refrigerator does not simply store food but establishes itself as an in-between; between the individual and the world of food (becoming a device for shopping, containing recipes, providing access to other objects etc.). A hypothesis would therefore be, and this would need to be further explored, that platformization involves the tertiarizing of even the smallest elements of something lived (as the content of the refrigerator) out of which an object establishes itself as an ‘in-between’. This tendency is related to the idea of a personalized object. As Zuboff points out, the tertiarizing processes of these objects are being promoted as a condition for the object to be adjusted and personalized to the consumer. The form of personalization that occurs with these smart objects are in fact only possible if the object produces an in-between otherwise there would be nothing to personalize. A personalized (mnemotechnical) object is an object that establishes a distance, or if you will, a relation based on data between you and other objects and it is that relation that is personalized. The invention of an in-between through the tertiarizing of lived experiences and the human environment is the condition for this type of personalization. Perhaps, and here we are speculating, the dream of a personalized environment that is imagined in these objects is therefore also in a sense a wish to be at a distance and more significantly to have this distance personalized to you, which is very well reflected in the ability to ‘see inside your refrigerator from anywhere’. To be able to see inside your refrigerator from anywhere at any time is first a construction of a relation to the object (the refrigerator), and thus the possibility of a distance to it that was not there before, and then an overcoming of this distance through personalization. The personalization and automatization of functions and relations to object that comes with this becoming mnemotechnical of everyday objects can hardly be reduced to a rudimentary wish to be present through one’s objects, to expand one’s capacity to act and intervene in the absence of one’s physical presence. Perhaps, what is imagined in these objects, what is projected into them is an expectation that *they*

know you because they contain you and even though this might imply a new form of distance this distance is at least personalized to you. Perhaps there is some kind of enjoyment in adjusting to the object, to the technology, and to change our behaviour and gestures in order for the object to perform its essential function of looking after us, to care for us, of knowing us, and to personalize our relations to others and the world from the outside (perhaps this reverberates the distance produced in the selfie).

What should be further explored is how this mnemotechnical becoming of objects implies a tertiarizing of human experience and how this process reconfigures and becomes part of how objects are organized and consumed and the experiences, practices, and relationships that emerges from this mnemotechnical ordering of human life.

Conclusion. Archiving the Future

We have now reached a place where it is - if only in a preliminary fashion - possible to suggest a definition of social media consumption and social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption.

It has, following Baudrillard, been suggested that to speak of consumption and a consumptive relation to objects one is not speaking about a relationship that is foremost defined at the level of a use, purchase, definite needs, or functions, but rather of consumption as a system that implies a broader organization of (digital) objects and involves processes of social organizing that structure experiences of oneself, others, and the world. From this definition of consumption it follows that our conceptualization of social media consumption is not to be limited to the use of specific services - be it of communicational, relational or informational origin – nor to confine social media consumption to a consumption of particular ‘online’ content. Social media consumption is not to be defined as a set of particular functions that platforms provide in order for individuals to fulfil their goals, and neither is social media consumption and social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption to be understood from a set of terms and premises that restrict and determine the particular use of platforms (terms of data and privacy, monitoring and valorisation of content etc.). Nor can it simply be said that what defines social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption is the productive organization of consumers (i.e. prosumption) that in one way or the other is said to commodify human experiences and existence. Should one then rather speak of social media consumption in relation to the fact that social media platforms such as Instagram today function as tools through which we search for, find, and are directed towards the purchase of consumer goods? That is, as a new kind of shopping platform? Can social media platforms be understood as organizing devices of consumption based on the fact that these platforms have evolved into essential market places for the branding, promotion, and purchase of

objects? Is it not the presence of millions of businesses and corporations on these social platforms that enable a delineation of something like a phenomenon that can be called social media consumption? Although being an important aspect of how the branding and promotion of objects – organically and sponsored – takes place today and is configured in and through social media platforms, what has been unfolded on the preceding pages has not been an exploration of how social media platforms organize and capitalise on the attentive and affective resources of users by redirecting them towards the purchase of material consumer goods. Rather, I have argued that the emergence of platforms requires a reconceptualization of consumption beyond that of traditional consumer goods being organized in a new way.

Beyond the observation and acknowledgement of the fact that the world of consumer goods and brands flourish ‘on’ social media platforms like Instagram, I have come to the following notion of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption: *What defines Instagram as an organizational technology of consumption is not only that the use of the platform directs human attention to something beyond it (consumer goods) or how the use involves a commodification of human communication, relations, and attention but is also that it is individual and social experiences themselves that are turned into a primary object of tertiary circulation, production, and consumption through processes of technical exteriorisation.* Thus, with the advent of social media platforms individual and social experiences themselves are generalised as a primary object of consumption as they are increasingly, and in a systematic fashion, being technologically exteriorised, organized, and brought into circulation on different platforms with the aid of multiple tertiary forms. In the context of Instagram - and perhaps this counts for social media platforms in general – an elevation of any individual and social experience to tertiary circulation is taking place, nothing being too small or big, no situation being too insignificant or too important to capture and

circulate, which means that these platforms attain an organizational force beyond that of being devices of communication, information, and commemoration. It is in prolongation of this conception of social media platforms and social media ‘content’ that I have proposed the concepts of ‘exteriorisation’ and ‘tertiary retention’ as a means through which to reconceptualize consumption, and suggested that social media platforms can be considered *systems* of the production and consumption of lived experiences as they are organized in the form of tertiary memory. That is, a reconceptualization of consumption from being a system operating as semiological organization to that of a system of the tertiary organization of human experiences and relations.

What defines the consumptive relation to social media ‘content’, highlighted with the notion of tertiary retention, are foremost the processes by which it is organized within a system of memory rather than the singular content that is transmitted or communicated: what is consumed within these system of memory is not foremost a singular content but how this is continuously being organized through different tertiary forms. In the case of Instagram, we saw that the temporal organization of ‘the stream’, ‘stories’, and ‘archive’, the aesthetic filters of Instagram, and the selfie-genre are prevailing tertiary forms through which individual and social experiences circulate and are organized as tertiary objects. Tertiary forms that are in a permanent state of transformation as the platforms mutate, and as trends emerge, peak, and dissolve.

Yet, people have always exteriorized themselves, circulated their experiences and thoughts with the aid of technology and media (tool-making, painting, writing, photography etc.). What then, if at all, qualifies this description of social media platforms as particular technologies of consumption in which it is individual and social experiences themselves that are consumed? It is here useful to return to Baudrillard and his attempt to define consumption:

From time immemorial people have bought, possessed, enjoyed and spent, but this does not mean they were ‘consuming’. (...). And if we are justified in using this term [consumption] to describe present-day society, it is not because we now eat more or better, not because we absorb more images and messages, and not because we have more appliances and gadgets at our disposal (...). It is defined, rather, by the organization of all these things into a signifying fabric: consumption is *the virtual totality of all objects and messages ready-constituted as a more or less coherent discourse*. (Baudrillard 2005:217–18).

Paraphrasing Baudrillard, we might say that since time immemorial people have technically exteriorised their experiences into tools, in writing, and so forth; this is, Stiegler argues, the very condition and possibility for cultural life as such (Stiegler 2011c:39). Hence, what justifies the argument of a generalization of individual and social experiences as a primary object of consumption is not only the by now profound easiness with which it is possible to send and receive photo images and videos through different mobile devices or that we increasingly communicate with the use of visual images and therefore in our everyday doings and activities absorb and are exposed to more and more media ‘content’. I am not simply speaking of social media platforms as organizational technologies of consumption because they afford the opportunity to send and receive images and videos. It is rather because with the smartphone and social media platform there is a systematic and technological integration of all potential moments and experiences into the order of the tertiary. If we are to speak of - borrowing a phrase from Stiegler - the becoming of a ‘true memory consumerism’ (Stiegler, 2009, p. 130), in the sense that individual and social experiences in the process by which it is technically preserved, exteriorised, and materialised takes the position of being a primary object of consumption, it is because technical exteriorisation and the process of tertiarizing has developed into a generalised horizon of anticipation and a primary

organizational force in the constitution of social reality. And if we are to say that individual and social experiences themselves are becoming an object of technological consumption it is because fundamental to the proliferation of digital content and to the *circulation of self as tertiary retention* is the systematic integration and organization of human experiences and anticipation towards technical exteriorisation. Exteriorisation not *only* as a function of remembering or communicating, but as an organizational force through which perceptions, activities, and relations are configured and organized. That is, with the social media platform individual and social life and experiences are brought into circulation with an unprecedented organizational force (social, cultural, and economic) and systematics. The exteriorization of the individual as technological memory is today a primary form of socialization; cultural production of commodities cannot simply rely on branding (sign-value) but increasingly on the integration of people's experiences into the production of the product (like, share, hashtags etc.). If one then is to consider the branding and promotion of consumer goods for example through Instagram as an aspect of social media consumption it is not because the process of searching for, finding, and buying products and goods are now organized through these platforms but rather because individual and social experiences provide an alibi for and become a tool for promoting and bringing material goods and brands into circulation. 'Likes', 'comments', 'hashtags', photo images: the circulation of self as tertiary retentions become a medium and a generalised form that bring objects into circulation. Through process of technical exteriorisation individual and social life becomes part of the circulation of objects as we are invited to like, share, and post.

The intention is not only to point to the commercial nature of such organization of human life, nor that with platforms human communication is at the verge of collapsing into a system of exchange-value. If we are to speak of human experiences becoming a primary object of consumption in themselves it is because every moment and situation is in a sense produced and consumed as a "moment" or

an “experience”, made for circulation. Everywhere individual and social life proliferate as “moments” and “experiences” not merely to be understood as the circulation of images, videos, and text, but “moments” as a generalised form of experiencing everyday situations. If, from the perspective of production, the particular organizational scripting of platforms is a process where human experience is ‘reborn as behaviour’ as Zuboff writes (Zuboff 2019:100), then from the particular conception of consumption developed in this dissertation, one might say that individual and social life is *reborn as moments*. Thus, whereas mass media consumption worked through the abstraction of the real into a succession of equivalent signs (Baudrillard 1998:122), which was central to the semiotic organization and integration of culture and capitalism, the notion of platforms as systems of memory offers a perspective on new forms of consumption as a thoroughly tertiary exteriorisation and organization of individual and social life. The talk of ‘personalized’ and ‘real experiences’ mirrors a situation in which the lived present attains meaning less as a definite moment, as something that happens and disappears, but increasingly in relation to processes of tertiarizing. Social media consumption is therefore not merely the activity of consuming ‘online’ content or how it is organized by a platform, but equally the general structuring and pre-configuration of human attention, practices, and social relations *towards processes of tertiarizing*. It is this very relation of tertiarizing that is continuously being consumed. At its most basic, social media consumption is a form of directedness that involves an organizing of activities, relations, and perceptions around a principle of exteriorisation; a code of technical exteriorisation, in which the organizing principle is not that of the abstraction and imposition of the sign, but rather the abstraction of the present lived life through the tertiary form. Perhaps, individual and social experiences will increasingly be made meaningful primarily through, and in relation to, processes of tertiarizing; a continuous *archiving of the future* if you like.

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