The Fear of Forgetting

An analysis of memories as heritage in an era of post-truth.

Oda Marie Bårdsdatter
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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of memories as sources of information in the museum and in heritage research, discussing the advantages of using memories in research to broaden the understanding of our past, but also looking at the limitations of memories in terms of reliability due to their abstract nature. Minner.no is a website that encourages people to share their memories in order to gain a better understanding of our shared history and to document culture and society from the perspective of individuals. An analysis of this website is the starting point for a discussion of memories as heritage. In order to expand on the topic of authenticity and reliability of memories, the concept of post-truth and its implications on source criticism is a theme throughout the thesis. In a world where Donald Trump is president and alternative news is a concept, it is natural to ask how the museum is dealing with these challenging aspects of today's society. The thesis discusses topics such as truth, memory and narratives, using Lyotard's writings on the meta-narrative as theoretical framework, and frame analysis as a method of understanding how minner.no give meaning to their topic and how the submitters of memories are responding to the frames of the site. By approaching the question of reliability and authenticity by looking at both the psychological and the philosophical aspects of memory, I argue that memories can be advantageous to use in museums and heritage research if they are verifiable to a certain degree, and that they can be a fun element in the presentation of historical facts.
Acknowledgements

After embarking on my postgraduate degree in Museology and Cultural Heritage studies at the University of Oslo, I was overwhelmed with ideas and newfound topics of interest, so much that I found it extremely difficult settling on one area within the world of heritage. Specifically, the lectures given by Dr. Chris Whitehead ignited my interest in memory production, and I was lucky enough to have him as my supervisor whilst writing my master’s thesis. I want to first and foremost thank Dr. Whitehead for your inspiring lectures, your help and guidance throughout, and for your support and patience when I have gone through difficult periods of writing, I could not have done this without you.

A special thank you to my dad for sharing your knowledge with me, to my mum for our long conversations on the phone, and to my wonderful brothers Sindre, Vegard and Erlend for your interest in my thesis, your encouragement and IT-help. Thank you Sahra for always wanting to discuss politics, museums and art with me, and thank you Hilde, for taking the time to read and help me whilst traveling the world, you’re my biggest inspiration.

To my dear Daníel: thank you for your love and support throughout these years, making me laugh every single day, and letting me cry when I need to. Thank you for our discussions and for always inspiring me to think outside the box, not take the world so seriously all the time, and helping me be the best that I can be.

Oslo, May 2019

Oda Marie Bårdsdatter
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1 Introduction

Oxford Dictionaries settled on “post-truth” as the international word of the year in 2016. It is defined as “relating to, or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016, online). In the political discourse, “post-truth” is becoming more and more prevalent, and a distrust in politicians, confusion surrounding the reliability of information, knowledge and facts are recurring issue. Researched facts can seemingly become inferior in this culture, and a proclivity for a discourse appealing to emotions become more normalised, as well as appealing. Our digital culture and social media can result in echo chambers, and the factual accuracy of stories are of less importance as the number of shares and clicks are more profitable. (Glaser, 2016, online). The museum on the other hand, function as a public educator in many ways, and the narratives presented add up to an uncontested account of the past (Simine, 2013, p. 8). As a mediator of history and heritage, museums position themselves as a principal force over our memory and knowledge. And being an educational institution, they are liable for the narratives defined within the museum and how the audience respond to these narratives. Silke Arnold-de Simine writes in Mediating memory in the museum that “the museum as an institution has acquired the role of society’s memory” - a rather large assignment to take on. Evident in many museums, the use of audience participation has become more frequent, and objects on their own may not be a sufficient source to the past. Autobiographical narratives are useful in order to make the audience identify with, engage in, and experience, the recollection of the past. The term post-truth refers to the political discourse of today, and brings to mind in particular the political situation in the US and the UK. But the implications of the current political debates can also foster attention to how we define truths and knowledge in the museum. In an age of uncertainty, where media platforms and social media often grow into echo chambers, even providing us with false information and news, how do we approach the stories being told to us in the museum?

Minner.no (memories.no) is a collaboration between cultural institutions and private persons with the intention of documenting culture and society. Norsk Folkemuseum, Nordiska Museet and KulturIT are the developers and facilitators of this website. Individual stories, experiences and knowledge is the foundation of this site, predominantly to secure insight into memories about the past that are easily lost. What Minner.no is doing is establishing a shift from an object-based approach, to using exclusively oral stories as sources. The audience are themselves choosing what will be published online, or if they want their memories to be solely used for research\(^2 \) The institutions guarantee for the management of the project and that the contributions will be preserved for future use – it appears to be a kind of “memory bank”. This is a shift in ownership of the narrative, from the museum to the audience, and the focus is set on memory rather than traditional objects.

**Research questions**

The debate on “post truth” will be used as a framework and theme to answer the research question, which is:

- As we see a shift in the way museums collect information and present stories, how do we use memories for research and education in an adequate and reliable way?

“Post truth” is included as a theme in order to highlight the current issues regarding fake news, false research and political agendas. The museum and heritage sector are not distanced to this debate, specifically relating to replicas or “fakes”. In this thesis I want to draw further on the issues surrounding truth by analysing memories and memory production, and I will answer the research questions through an analysis of the website minner.no. In addition to the main research questions, a sub-question is added to create a broader discussion concerning the authenticity and reliability of memories. The sub-question is as follows:

- Is the authenticity of museums stories intensified or decreased with audience participation?

\(^2\) Minner.no (2018) [online].
New approaches to collecting

Michel Foucault wrote in ‘Of other spaces’ that ‘the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organising in this a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity’ (Foucault, 1986, p. 26).

It can appear as though museums, with their accumulation of things, or like Foucault states, accumulation of everything, has been a project to, knowingly or unknowingly, end up as a repository for the entire human existence and experience and that one eventually ends up with one grand narrative. Although museums still collect and preserve objects, different approaches to narratives have become increasingly common. In accordance with post-structuralist ideas, museums are, with audience participation, focusing on individual memory as a source of information, embracing a variety of viewpoints and experiences contrary to a singular “truth” about our existence and our past.

The Ashmolean Museum, founded in 1683, is generally considered the earliest museum in which public access was assembled, in addition to the opening of the Louvre Palace’s Grand Gallery in 1993. But museum history goes much further back, and has acquired a range of definitions after its beginnings. Peter Vergo writes in The New Museology that the Oxford English Dictionary records the museum as a “modern institution which might contribute to the advancement of learning”, and that it is not just an “antique institution dedicated to the study of the Muses”. This is in contrast to the year of 1683, when Elias Ashmole’s collection was referred to as a ‘Musaeum’ in the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society (Vergo, 1997, p. 7). ICOM updates its definition of the museum according to the situation and realities in the international museum community, but as of now it is defined as a ‘non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible

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heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment’ (ICOM, 2007, online).

It is certain that museums have for centuries collected objects, and as Vergo explain: “the original intention behind the establishment of museums was that they should remove artefacts from their current context of ownership and use, from their circulation in the world of private property, and insert them into a new environment which would provide them with different meaning” (Vergo, 1997, p.7).

Vergo points out a central element of the function of museum objects not often discussed, referring to them as “triggers”. In this perspective, the objects are our starting point, but trigger chains of ideas and images, and thus goes beyond its initial purpose – being a still object observed at a specific time. If objects are triggers, they can open up to additional connotations, atmospheres and ideas, creating individual responses to different objects. Vergo argues further that ‘the ‘knowledge’ that museums facilitate has the quality of fantasy because it is only possible via an imaginative process. The way the contents of the museum is presented influence what the visitors experience and learn. Therefore, it is important to understand the multiple taxonomies present in the museum (Vergo, 1997, p. 23). This argument explores the way in which the presentation of museum ‘knowledge’ (in this case in the form of objects) is only one part of the picture: museum visitors may have more power and responsibility as viewers in relation to the authenticity of the stories that objects and their stories project. The questions surrounding the credibility of the museum as a source of knowledge are of course important, but the imaginative processes of the viewers, their connotations or even previous knowledge, are all part of determining the conclusion of the chains of responses to museum ‘knowledge’. The museum is a facilitator, but the viewer is the receiver and thus have a certain control over their own experience.

The museum itself, as a collector, is in many ways a “memory bank”. One that accumulates objects and stories for display to promote knowledge and curiosity, and also one that protects and preserves heritage. The classification of different types of heritage, namely tangible and intangible, has accentuated the role that intangible heritage has in promoting knowledge, and has highlighted the resources of communities and amount of knowledge that is passed down
from generations (UNESCO, 2018, online). Personal stories and our memory of the past are intangible, but can also be mirrored in objects that are attached to for example a certain story, an era or a site. One can argue that objects in many ways have more credibility as sources of information because of their physical manifestation of history. They are a direct evidence of something (unless its unknowingly a replica or a fake). Stories and memories are different: they can be manipulated, exaggerated, or be based on myths or false information, even false memory. As UNESCO states, intangible heritage can be fragile, but is nonetheless important for the historical narrative. It is the fragility of memory as a source that is important to address when museums are collecting and presenting them to an audience. The issues in regards to this will be analysed further in the upcoming chapters.

Post-truth: a short overview

Writer Roger Scruton argues in an article in The Spectator that politicians have always lied and deceived, but that the manufacture of falsehood has changed over time since the machinery has become more sophisticated (Scruton, 2017, online). The machinery Scruton mentions is the internet, social media, PR companies and new technology, although sophisticated might be a word too excessive to describe anonymous commentators on social media. Scruton has a point when arguing that social media has damaged the practice of rational argument, but is undermining false information and its power when stating that “only deluded academics and Donald Trump see no distinction between fact and fabrication” (Scruton, 2017, online). The issue with post-truth is that misleading information on a variety of subjects are argued despite it being widely disproven or discredited. The big difference between post-truth and propaganda is that it happens whilst a rebuking source is present, continuously proving the information wrong, albeit often it continues to exist both in political discourse and especially on social media and other news platforms. The election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 is an apparent warning sign of the dangers of false information, and the term post-truth was heavily used to describe his presidential campaign. But a general distrust in science, as is evident in global warming issues, are also present, although there is no clear evidence for people being more prone to believing in conspiracy theories or having a

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4 UNESCO (2018) [online].
distrust in science now than before. Maybe Scruton’s faith in people is rooted in reality, but it does not diminish the fact that the internet has brought false information to a larger audience, and that participation in spreading the information, through clickbaits, spreading rumours or even the circulation of conspiracy theories, is of a bigger scope now than before.

Authenticity is a central topic in museology and heritage research; this sector, and particularly museums as an exhibition platform, are facing new and intricate dilemmas surrounding in particular 3D printing and the use of copies. For example, the project “The Museum: A Culture of Copies”, an interdisciplinary humanities project, addresses questions related to the practice of copying, digitization and authenticity in the museum. In the project description it is stated that “The paradox is obvious: museums are commonly described as storehouses of the real, authentic, material object, but are now eagerly embracing the new copying technologies.” But the projects hypothesis is that the museum never has been primarily a storehouse for the authentic, the original and the real material object, but rather has been a space for numerous representations and has created “the real” through various copying practices. Evidently, discussions about authenticity in a range of different practices within the museum is pervasive. And some of the discussions might even be of greater significance now than ever.

**t Audience participation in the museum**

Audience participation in museums have increasingly become more common, and is often used as a supplement to the collection and exhibitions, or even as the main focus point of exhibitions or other projects. In the case of Minner.no, the audience participation is meant to function as a way of securing memories, or knowledge, that could easily be lost. These memories do not have physical “evidence” attached to them. Ross Wilson writes that “The museum as a symbol, as the repository of a nation’s history and knowledge, provides alternative voices with a forum where they can be heard. Incorporating alternative histories also allows a greater sense of dialogue within society” (Wilson, 2010, p. 174), and further that “As Foucault observed, the notion of expert knowledge and expertise is vital to

maintaining the structures of governmentality. Expert and specialist positions possess a social value which legitimate the formation of structures and systems through which citizens can be managed and controlled” (Wilson, 2010, p. 175). Bruno Latour argues that the alternative sources’ knowledge, meaning community responses, “decontextualizes ‘expert’ and ‘specialist’ knowledge as it signifies issues of agency, lived experience, conscientiousness and significance over formalisation, providing a system of democracy within the museum space” (Wilson, 2010, p. 176). Museums have previously acted as a means of installing ‘correct’ values and norms within society, and is thus a tool of social control, Wilson argues (Wilson, 2010, p. 168), and the shift in power, from the museum as the “expert” to communities themselves being the experts, signifies a change in ownership of the narratives presented in museums.
2 Theory

Memory politics

What is memory? And what does it mean to remember? Questions surrounding memory are old and many, and the accounts are diverse. Aristotle’s On Memory - De memoria et reminiscencia, one of the treatises in Parva Naturalia, argues that all memory implies that time has passed, because to remember the future is impossible, and a memory of the present in the present cannot exist. To remember, according to Aristotle, is “an activity which will not be immanent until the original experience has undergone a lapse of time”, and that “the moment of the original experience and the moment of the memory of it are never identical” (Hermann and Chaffin, 2012, p. 67).

Memory is the maintenance of information about the past which enables us to function in the present. It is at its core also a gateway to a shared history: what is written down, archived and preserved are in a way or another the results of memory. But there is also a certain unreliability connected to memory, as it can be selective, manipulated (consciously or unconsciously) or contain distortions in consequence of experiences, trauma, agency or other factors. Marcel Proust famously wrote about memory, specifically memories of childhood, in his novel ‘In Search of Lost Time’. Here the notion of mémoire involontaire - ‘involuntarily memory’ is present - unconscious recollections of the past gained from reminders in everyday life7. Another aspect of this is the notion of false memory. Chris Whitehead mention that the past is always accessed from the present, and that present conditions determine our perceptions of that past (Whitehead, 2016, p. 7). This means that when one relies purely on people’s memory as a recollection of the past, and further use it as a kind of ‘evidence’ of our history (or as a supplement), there is a variety of issues appearing: what role does the museum has as a mediator of history and educator when the recollections come from a rather anonymous audience who could potentially be exaggerating, underestimating or experiencing false memory? How do we filter these memories and understand them as objective “truths” about history, or at the very least, that they are somewhat accurate and verifiable? Memories

7 Proust, M. (1913–1927) In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 7 Time Regained
can be anecdotal, and run the risk of being burdened with emotions. Is it just an *interesting* layer and supplement to the museums’ already research- and knowledge-based stories? The main question is what audience participation through recollections of memories is doing to the historical narrative in the museum, and what it is doing to the museum as a trustworthy source of historical information. This is a relevant and important question in an age where post-truth seemingly has become prevalent, and the line between facts and emotions often can be blurred. We now see an important shift in narratives and authority; audience participation in storytelling is becoming more frequent.

In the 1950s, a project with the aim of collecting labour memories began at Norsk Folkemuseum (Norwegian Folk Museum), written about in Inge Eidsvåg’s book *Minnene Ser oss - The Memory see us*. The project was led by Edvard Bull and resulted in his doctoral thesis *Arbeidermiljø under det industrielle gjennombrudd* (Labour community during the industrial revolution). The project was criticised by professor Andreas Holmsen for being of little value as a foundation for generalisation. Professor Knut Mykland also criticised the project for not emphasising the unreliability and arbitrary nature of memories, as well as being concerned with the gap in time between the experiences (memories) and the time of the narration. Bull’s response to the criticism was to point out the advantages of using memories, as a supplement, or even to correct other sources. Bull argued that the perception of the labourers themselves were just as important as historical facts as the real event itself - setting memories side by side with other material could determine the credibility of the memories. Eidsvåg points out that “that facts force us to see reality as it was, even if it is painful”, and that difficult experiences can be contemplated with a greater calm when one is more distanced to the experience. Eidsvåg writes that “where history has been told or written, the history has also been used - or abused (Eidsvåg, 2010, p. 178). Edvard Bull stated that “regular people” and “silent” groups can also tell their stories and given a voice through using memories as a source, in addition to giving the historian an opportunity to get in touch with the people he is writing about and produce new sources (Eidsvåg, 2010, p. 176).

As Bull’s critics suggested, using memories can be unreliable in many ways, and can particularly lead to dilemmas in an educational setting which is the museum. Memories, if one defines it as intangible heritage, - where knowledge, traditions and culture is transmitted from
one generation to the next (UNESCO, 2018, online), pose dilemmas if used alone in an educational setting. In the next paragraph, the concept of memory from a psychological perspective is briefly presented to aid in the understanding of how they can be advantageous, or disadvantageous, how they can be influenced and their liability.

Psychologist Elizabeth Loftus describes how there are social demands on remembering. Social demands on remembering can happen in everyday life, at work, at university and in settings such as a study being conducted, as well as in criminal justice cases. Oral stories have always been fundamental for history to be preserved, and thus puts pressure on the individual or a community to remember details about events or experiences. For example, memoirs have been a candid and direct source of information about the past. But in other circumstances other than memoirs and direct sources, there are often many links when passing down information, hence the uncertainties in regards to the transmission of memories, - all the way to the end-audience.

Loftus writes that during a study, researchers can wield pressure onto participants in order to come up with memories. Memory construction by imagining events can be encouraged if people find it difficult to remember. And “individuals can be encouraged not to think about whether their constructions are real or not” (Loftus, 1997, p. 75). Loftus argues that when these external factors are present, the creation of false memories are most likely to occur. Hypnosis can be used to distort, change and falsify memories, and even without hypnosis, there are procedures that can lead people to construct detailed false memories. By combining actual memories with suggestions received from someone else, false memories can be constructed, and “during the process, individuals may forget the source of the information (Loftus, 1997, p. 75). Psychologist Loftus describes this as a classic example of “source confusion”, meaning that the content and the source become dissociated (Loftus, 1997, p. 75). Museum and heritage research are not related to interrogations, criminal cases and certainly not hypnosis, but it is significant to point out the factors that might distort memories, also in a museum and heritage setting. It is often said that one remembers the sunny days of the past better than the rainy ones. It is common to have certain vivid memories, and other memories in which are more faded, or even gone. Sometimes one adds false information to the memory, such as two events being confused, or an entirely false memory, such as being told a story
over and over again until it feels as if one has experienced it oneself. Some memories are retrieved through a reminder or an experience in everyday life, and as Sigmund Freud’s work on trauma suggests, some memories are repressed. An atmosphere or an event, whether it is through seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, or even just a sensation, could bring back recollections from the past, like the instance of the Madeleine cake Proust addresses in his “In Search of Lost time”.

Cultural heritage in the form of material objects, artifacts and documents, play a special role in human communication, Kenneth E. Foote argues in To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture that “unlike verbal and nonverbal action, which is ephemeral and disappears as it occurs, the physical durability of objects, artifacts and documents allows them to be passed from person to person and from place to place over long periods of time” and can “be used to transmit information beyond the bounds of interpersonal contact” (Foote, 1990, p. 378-92). Physical durability is indeed a valid argument in terms of a more dependable source of information, which verbal information does not possess, - it is to a greater extent more “ephemeral”. But as Foote continues to argue, documents and artifacts are not the only resources for meeting the needs of human communication - oral and ritual traditions can also serve a similar function (Foote, 1990, p. 378-92). As Edvard Bull argued during his project on the labour community that memories can be used to correct other sources, and other material can determine the credibility of the memories. In this regard, memories work together with the physical documents and artefacts to create a more complete, although not total, historical narrative. Collective memory can also be viewed in these terms, as a way to determine the credibility of our memories through shared experiences. The sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwach (1877-1945) is credited to have coined the term collective memory, and writes extensively on the subject in his book La Mémoire collective - The Collective Memory. Here he writes that:

“If what we currently see fits into the framework of our old memories, the converse is also true, for these memories adapt to the mass of present perceptions. It is as if we were comparing the testimony of several witnesses. In spite of discrepancies, they agree on the essentials that permit us to reconstruct a body of remembrances that we recognize. Our
confidence in the accuracy of our impression increases, of course, if it can be supported by others’ remembrances also. It is as if the very same experience were relived by several persons instead of only one” (Halbwach, 1925, p. 22)

Collective memory refers to shared ideas, beliefs and practices in a society. Memory in the aspect of human communication is a resource, and particularly collective memory produce a sense of social solidarity and community. It is a collective act to maintain records of the past, Kenneth E. Foote argues (Foote, 1990, p. 378-92). Many historical events, particular painful and sorrowful events that affected society on a deeper level have been given the aphorism “Never forget”. The Holocaust is a distinctive atrocious event that changed many aspects of the world in the 20th century, and have been widely commemorated through memorials, designated museums and exhibitions, as well as being written about extensively, and taught in most schools. To “never forget” is a collective effort, similar to Halbawachs’ argument on remembering being a collective effort. Not forgetting The Holocaust has many reasonings. Informing and remembering is an action to make it less likely to happen again. In addition, Holocaust denial exists, and other Genocide denials such as Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide9 and the Rwandan Genocide10, amongst others. In more recent times, the same aphorism “Never forget” has been used in the aftermath of 9/11, the terrorist attack in the US in 2001, as a way of reminding ourselves about what happened on that particular day, and its’ dire consequences. Although it is not used in particular about the labour movement and women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s, there is still a significant notion of reminding people of the past concerning the acquired rights of women and working people, and how the structures of society used to be. All of these are examples of collective memories of historical events, and how the memories, and thus knowledge about the past, is used as a tool to create a sense of community and solidarity, as well as changes.

Censorship of historical events and atrociousness is an effort to prevent memories from being maintained and carried on. Censorship of information is more difficult in a democracy, and in a digital age, information and knowledge is more readily available and easier to obtain. At the

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10 BBC (2019) Rwanda genocide: Nation marks 25 years since mass slaughter [online] https://bbc.in/2uW4w8t
same time, it is not so much censorship that is the problem in contemporary western society, it is the “alternative” information provided. Information that is presented in a manner which makes us sceptical of news, science and other factual material about the state of our world. In an age where education is on the rise\textsuperscript{11}, the increase of false information and “post-truth” is a peculiar phenomenon. In the case of censorship or editing the past to correspond with individuals’ ideas about reality, memories can be both a part of the alternative information, in terms of their ephemeral nature, and a correctional and important validation of events. By remembering history collectively, it can test the accuracy of our memories, but false information can also tamper with our malleable memories of events and beliefs, like psychologist Loftus mention. The fragility of memories is certain, but it does not diminish their importance, particularly in the framework of heritage.

“Never forget” conveys the impression that difficult heritage and gloomy events are predominant when commemorating. This might be a result of the aftermath of World War II, amongst other things, and Germany’s collective subsequent guilt. Sharon MacDonald explains that “It is Germany, however, that has undoubtedly taken a lead in addressing its uncomfortable past - publicly acknowledging its atrocities in World War II (MacDonald, p. 11). \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung} was a result of Germany’s guilt after the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, and is an effort of remedying and learning from the past\textsuperscript{12}. The public debates with reference to “Never forget” is similar to \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung} in terms of memory politics. The contingency of forgetting was, and is, a risk with regards to repetition of events. An apprehension of learning from the past, one might argue, is clearer to individuals and society in the close aftermath of an event, but its relevance could diminish over time. The idea that if one did not process and work through the difficult past it could cause greater damage, is the result of the increasing popularisation of psychoanalysis in the time after World War II, originating from Freud’s theories (MacDonald, 2016, p. 15) On the other hand, Sharon MacDonald uses Britain as an example of positive self-representation after World War II, where the nation stood up against Nazism and where people stood together against evil as a community (Sharon MacDonald, 2016, p. 7). This is also exemplified in The Imperial War museums exhibitions and texts, in particular the features on Winston Churchill\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Statistics Norway (2019) \textit{Students in higher education} [online] \url{https://bit.ly/2JOl63V}
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung}; german word describing the struggle to overcome the past post World War II
\textsuperscript{13} Taylor, J (2018) \textit{How Churchill led Britain to Victory in the Second World War}, Imperial War Museums
Lyotard’s meta-narrative

The concept of “truth” is eminently paradoxical and often subjective. It has extensive literature surrounding it, and is admittedly an arduous subject. The purpose of this thesis is not to make assumptions about whether memories, stories and their narratives are true, but to consider their reliability. Nonetheless, I will give an abbreviated explanation of some of the interpretations of truth, and the differences between subjectivity and objectivity in relation to memories. Moreover, I will describe the meta-narrative, in which is central to the theoretical framework of this thesis.

British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote about correspondence theory in “What is truth?”, which is, by and large, a theory which proposes that “truth” corresponds with reality. For example, a “true statement”, is one in which a belief or a thought is in accord with the circumstances. Russell mentions three requisites for truth: 1) our theory of truth must be such as to admit of its opposite, falsehood, 2) truth and falsehood are properties of belief and 3) truth or falsehood of a belief always depends upon something which lies outside the belief itself (Archie and Archie, 2016, p. 3-4). The surroundings, or more precisely, the physical world and its phenomenon’s, is thus the precursor for understanding what truth is or can be, according to Russell, similar to Erving Goffman’s theory on framing. Defining facts and “truths” in memories are almost impossible, with the exception of shared experiences, as Halbwach explained. This will be examined further in the analysis chapter.

French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote about the postmodern condition in La Condition Postmoderne (1979), where he described the idea of a meta-narrative as a concept where small stories and truths about the world are gathered in one comprehensive story, - a story that is supposed to eventually bring us forward. Postmodernism generally rule out the idea of a universal truth, and Lyotard attacked in particular the two narratives of Christian redemption and Marxist Utopia - both based on a meta-narrative (Butler, 2002, p. 13).

There is arguably a wish to fill in “gaps” in history research, in museums and other collections, and this might one of the many reasons why audience participation is more

frequently used. Although filling in these gaps are of great use in order to understand our past, a total narrative is impossible. Although criticised, *Histoire des mentalités - The history of mentalities*, also indicates an interest in understanding the past. *The history of mentalities* is an intellectual approach to history considering the “attitudes of ordinary people toward everyday life” (Hutton, 1981, p. 237). Similar to the concept of a meta-narrative, its aim is to understand our history on a level of past attitudes and even thoughts. It is this conception of a “total story” that Lyotard disagrees with, and instead argues in favour of smaller narratives which competes with one another, in contrast to the meta-narrative. Lyotard’s dismissal of a meta-narrative is thus the framework for the analysis of minner.no.
3 Methodology and data

About Minner.no

Minner.no invites people to share stories in order to document phenomena and happenings in society. Journalists, researchers and others who are interested can partake in this project as a way of understanding their own life, their story and living conditions (Minner.no, 2018, online). Everyone can participate with stories, photos and films. As a submitter of a memory, you have the option to have your content published on the website, or if it should strictly be used for research. Your text can in its entirety be administered by you. The content of each project is preserved by what they call a “lasting cultural institution”, and a named project manager has the editorial responsibility for each project. The website is partly user-driven in the sense that its entire content is created by its visitors. Minner.no introduces their website and project by explaining that it gathers “experiences, knowledge and memories from all of Norway”, and advertises with the sentences:

- Put your memories in the bank!
- Become a part of history
- Pass on your experiences
- Help researchers understand

Under “memory collections” there are subcategories of different types of topics where people can submit their memories. Minner.no states that their website is under development. There is a total of 461 memories published on the website per 29.05.2019, and the distribution of answers on each subcategory looks like this:

- Childhood games: 95 submissions
- Memories from the Olympics in 1994: 40 submissions
- Climate change and the future: 58 submissions
- Where do you come from?: 11 submissions
- Storytelling radio: 0 submissions
- Young in the mountains 2018: 35 submissions
- Food during holidays and festivities (1953): 60 submissions
- Cabin stories: 61 submissions
- Christmas carols: 12 submissions
- Halloween in Norway: 48 submissions
- Memoirs - life stories: 11 submissions
- Varia - storytelling: 28 submissions
- Stories from The Norwegian Trekking Association: 2 submissions

**How to submit a memory**

By clicking on “submit memory” the contributor is taken to an online submission form which each has an estimated time of how long it takes to fill out. The contributor can write as much or as little as they want themselves, but detailed explanations are encouraged throughout the submission form. The form is structured to guide the contributor. A range of details about specific things about your memory of the chosen subcategory are asked for in the form, and is thus actively seeking the submitters to *remember*. Both negatives and positives are encouraged by the website, with questions such as “did you have any uncomfortable experiences? Or did things happen that were in particular funny?”.

**Data**

The data is collected from the website minner.no, and I will be using 3 of the total 13 categories/projects presented on the page: “Childhood games”, “Memories from the Olympics in 1994” and “Where are you from?”. The choice of categories is made from both the assumption that two of the categories are topics familiar to a larger part of the population not depending on age and nationality (Childhood play and Where are you from?). And the third, Olympics in 1994, on the basis that it is considered a collective memory, perhaps stretching outside of Norway. Memories of the Olympics also offers insight on a more specific event that many people share a memory of. Furthermore, by leaving out some of the categories it makes room for a more thorough understanding of the selected ones. The submissions in the 3 categories is in total 146, meaning it is a large data material. To be able to use the material in a meaningful way, finding parallels and contrasts in the categories, as well as significant
problems and elements that have been left out, has been the main approach to the data, as opposed to doing a full textual analysis of every single memory submission. There is a big difference in the length of the texts submitted, how they are written and what people have chosen to include. Particularly the category of “Childhood games” has many contributions, and the topic will be discussed, rather than a description and analysis of every single text - a decision based upon the limitations of space. The categories and its content are not of secondary importance, but gives insight into what people remember and what they chose to write, and allows for a larger discussion on memory politics. However, the premise of the thesis is the intention of the project, its way of collecting and the ambitions of further use of the data they themselves collect. In order to answer the research questions, it is fundamental to approach the framework of the website.

Translation

Minner.no is a website with all text in Norwegian, and as a disclaimer I want to inform the reader that texts are translated to English by myself. I will not be specifying in the text that it has been translated by me, but it can be observed by looking at the title of books and articles which have been written down in the original language in the text. In addition to this, a portion of the literature and citations are also from Norwegian authors where no translation has been available, thus it has been translated with my best efforts in order to keep the original meaning.

Dilemmas and possible shortcomings

As already mentioned, the topic of memory is complex. Studies of memory can be approached from many angles, and I have chosen to include both a psychological explanation of the phenomena as well as a philosophical outline, in addition to the cultural perspective which is the main context of the thesis. Because of the complexity of this subject, choosing a suitable case study was both difficult and easy at the same time; there was few projects large enough to create any foundation for analysis, but the comprehensiveness of the topic of memory also gave me freedom to choose from a variety of angles, until I settled on memories
used for research and education within the cultural context of “truth” in contemporary society. A lot of thought has gone into the choice of a suitable methodology, and to be able to examine the reliability of memories in the chosen context, frame analysis proved to be the best approach as it gives the perspective of the audience first, and furthermore what the audience might be neglecting themselves in the framework of the website. As authenticity and truth is a core discussion, leaving out the project’s creators and researchers was essential in order to let the site and its execution speak on its own.

**Frame analysis**

As the main source of information is a website, the use of frame analysis has been applied as a method, and I will in this paragraph give a brief explanation of the method and premise for the use of it in this thesis. In essence, frames are the structures which gives meaning to a topic, and grants people the ability to make sense of reality; it is concerned with how something is presented. According to the sociologist Todd Gitlin, frames are “patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6-7). Frames are very influential, and lead people to make choices and create opinions about the information they receive. In particular, frame analysis is useful when analysing news and media coverage, but is widely used in other fields as well. The sociologist Erving Goffman is credited for coining the term in his book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Frame analysis is useful because an audience, according to Goffman, is unlikely to recognise the framework themselves (Goffman, 1986, p. 21), meaning that an insight into minner.no’s structure, aim and educational efforts could become more palpable, and offers the opportunity to interpret the information the audience consumes. Although frames can be a powerful tool in political science where agendas are prevalent, many people who construct frames (including journalists) are not aware of the frame they themselves are creating, and have no agendas or an intent to control. Frame analysis also allows for bringing into question what the frame excludes. An important aspect of memory politics is the content that is left out, as that will count towards the outcome, or conclusion, of a story. Further, it can influence our collective memory and identity in the future when the memories are collected, processed, and presented as heritage.
Goffman uses two categories of framing: social and natural. Natural framing is unguided and has no agency, and no negative or positive sanctions are involved. Goffman uses the state of the weather given in a report as an example of natural framing - there are no social forces to the causation\textsuperscript{14}. Social framing is built on natural frameworks, but consists of an intelligence, or a live agency, in the form of people. The frame subjects the audience to standards, and influences how we view and understand things. The frame in this thesis is the website, a live agency, in addition to the frame the contributors create involving their own agency. Professor Jim A. Kuypers has written extensively about frame analysis and states that:

“Frames are central organizing ideas within a narrative account of an issue or event; they provide the interpretive cues for otherwise neutral facts. Framing is, however, a normal part of the communication process. We need ways to negotiate the massive amounts of information that comes to us every day” (Kuypers, 2009, p. 182).

What is important to identify is: 1) language choices of both the creators and the contributor, 2) the visuals, and 3) the website’s agenda and possible neutrality on the subject. This enables contextualisation of the websites’ frames.

There are some problems concerning frame analysis, in particular finding frames that might not exist. Relevance of the frames are also of importance, and a careful selection must be made in order to not use excessive examples. Kuypers’ advice is not to assume that any particular frame is operating and then go look for it (Kuypers, 2009, p. 198), meaning that although one can identify frames in most of the things we are able to interpret, setting limitations is essential. “Frames are so powerful because they induce us to filter our perceptions of the world in particular ways, essentially making some aspects of our multi-dimensional reality more noticeable than other aspects. They operate by making some information more salient than other information”, Kuypers explains, and continues: “We rarely notice this process, especially the omission of information, because our public attention is highly selective; we too often rely upon and accept information that is easily

accessible” (Kuypers, 2009, p. 181). The last part of this citation, that we accept information that is readily accessible, is a focal point for the analysis of memories in an era of post truth; not understanding the frameworks can cripple us in our search for information. The judgement and awareness of the reader can be just as central as the judgement the provider of information uses when framing a story - intentional or unintentionally. In a world that appears burdened with masses of information, clickbaits and fake news, accessibility and effortlessness can sometimes triumph source criticism. The cues that frames can give in order to interpret a text that is seemingly neutral, can give us great insight into our own awareness of what we normally would be unaware of when digesting information.

Agenda-setting is when the focus is directed at some issues and not others, for example in the press. Kuypers argues that “following the logic of agenda-setting theory, we can say that the press shape what the public “perceives” as “political reality”. Moreover, the press also shapes how political elites understand what voters and opinion leaders are thinking about” (Kuypers, 2009, p. 183). In the context of minner.no, agenda-setting can be the focus on certain aspects of heritage and ignoring others, shaping our perception of reality and national and cultural identity. Looking at agenda-settings does not equal a distrust in the frameworks we surround ourselves with, but can be used to make more informed decisions. As mentioned, not all frames have agendas, but they are nonetheless frames which shape our perception.
4 Analysis

The analysis is divided into three sections. First, an analysis of the visual and textual content and frameworks of the website will be conducted. Secondly, a brief analysis of the three memory categories and their content, providing some general information on the participants. And lastly, I will examine the reliability of memory as heritage seen in the light of this particular website and its frameworks and aims. The analysis will also take into account the concept of post-truth throughout as a theme.

Collecting memories online

By naming the website Minner.no, it implies that the recollections are coming directly from the source itself, the people who have lived and experienced their own memories. They are not collected and curated by the museums itself in its traditional sense. It is individual memories, but together they have the potential to evolve into collective memories as it is shared with the public. By categorising the memories, an intention of finding mutuality in the stories is apparent, and the reappearing themes of well-known elements of Norwegian culture creates a natural starting-point for mutual experiences. The website itself has a minimalist design and has few links to different pages in its menu. The elements of nostalgic visuals are prominent, such as scrapbook-style pictures and writings, old photographs in black and white and images of diaries. The sentiment anticipates a time travel of some sorts, preparing the visitor for nostalgia, both intellectually and emotionally; on this website you can learn new things, and also reminisce about your own story. The subcategories have thumbnails indicating the topics of each “memory collection”, and a majority of the pictures on the thumbnails have a strong implication of Norwegian romanticism, in particular photographs of nature, but also Christmas traditions that is relatable for persons who are familiar with Norwegian culture. Minner.no emphasises that if you contribute, you will “become a part of history” and that you can pass on to scientists and readers what you have experienced. This is appealing and brings attention to how personal stories are an important part of a nation, society or cultures’ shared story, having a collective memory. It also adds a dimension to the traditional museum culture of collecting objects, which is now expanded and the peoples’ stories about objects or themes are added to create a
more comprehensive narrative of our lives within a nation. Or more precisely, in this instance it is the only source of knowledge. Norwegian culture is undoubtedly a marked choice of material to focus on, but it also calls for attention that it is within a predefined setting, meaning that there are mostly defined categories and that the submission form includes many leading questions, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Although information in the form of text provided by the creators is limited, the focal point is the matter of authority. By stating that researchers and journalists can take part in how people understand their own lives, people are given a voice and are now the experts - which they indeed are when it comes to their own experiences. But the shift in who teaches who, and who is providing knowledge to the other is conspicuous, and in tune with Ross Wilson’s argument that incorporating alternative stories can create dialogue within society, and that instead of the museum providing “correct” values, community responses creates more democracy. Little information is provided on who is going to use the material, and how. What we can gain is that 11 museums/consolidated museums in Norway are participants in the project, in addition to Norsk Folkemuseum, and Nordiska Museet in Sweden. Each project has a contact person affiliated with one of the museums on the list, but the lack of information on how exactly the data is going to be used in the future diminishes the sense of ownership that the website grants its contributors.

The text and nostalgic visuals provided can be understood as what Peter Vergo explained as “triggers”, but instead of objects being the triggers, it is the framework of the website that starts the process of remembering. - or more poetically, it can be compared to Proust’s account of the Madeleine cake. Triggers result in individual responses, but familiarity of the elements that cause us to remember can also result in similar responses in a large group of people - the frame resonates with reality; the Olympics in 1994, childhood experiences and where one is from are all relevant and relatable for adults who can read Norwegian. At the same time as minner.no embraces different viewpoints and stories, it also guides its contributors and audience into a narrative of what encompasses life in Norway specifically.
Contributions to the “memory bank

Where are you from?

“Oral history is a time witness from our own time. What we collect can become material used in both research an art, but the stories about the lived life is also a cultural expression and cultural heritage in itself” (Minner.no, 2018, online). This is part of the introduction to the category “Where are you from?”. The project was mainly established in order to conduct short interviews as a part of a course for people who are collecting oral stories for minner.no. Similar to the other categories, audio and video is provided for most of the contributions. Each of the interviews lasts between approximately 2 and 3 minutes. The image representing this category is a postcard from a country road in Surnadal, Norway (Figure 1). The postcard, similarly to other images on minner.no, is of a typical Norwegian landscape; a wooden house, a field, pine trees and mountains. It is recognisable for many, and the black and white image tells us it is of a certain age. Looking at the car present, it is likely from the 1930s or 1940s, and one can assume it is recognisable and familiar to people who lived during this time period.

Figure 1. Photo: Nordmøre Museums fotosamlinger

Placing the contributions within the context of minner.no - becoming a part of history, there are certain elements that are worth noting about the frame of these interviews. A large portion of the participants are involved in museum activities. Some are working in museums; others are involved in heritage projects or participants in history groups. Considering the interviews as a historical record, one can argue that it becomes biased, but is at the same time valuable if one assumes that the participants are more acquainted with history and cultural heritage. 3 out of 11 participants are female, and the median age is 78 years old, with the youngest being 44
and the oldest 87 years old. Audience participation is a deceptive term to use in this particular category of memories, as many of the participants are involved in the heritage sector. But the personal approach, people’s birth place and identity connected to this particular place, also makes them impartial. Taken into consideration that the project is not yet closed, the number of participants, their gender, age and professional background might change the data later on. Regardless, it is worth noting that the high age of the participants and imbalance in gender representation present in this group causes issues concerning the reliability of the data being “time witnesses”.

The authenticity of the stories being told from memory in the interviews are amplified with image and sound, regardless of the interviewer being present asking questions. With sound, dialects can be identified, increasing the feeling of authenticity, and creating a better fundament for the contributions being used as time-witnesses in the future. Considering the number of participants and the imbalances in the representation, the distribution of people from north to south is commendable. But on the contrary, it creates less mutuality as none of them shares the same place of birth.

“The question is easy to ask, but maybe not that easy to answer? And the topic can include many things - local culture, identity, family- and migration stories, social stigma and bursting pride” (Minner.no, 2018, online). As psychologist Elizabeth Loftus explained, social demands on remembering with the additional pressure on participants of a study to remember, can meddle with people’s memories. The interpretation of the question “where are you from?” can also differ, as minner.no suggests; it can evoke memories of identity, family and pride, instead of, or in addition to, a place or a city.

As the participants are asked where they are from, and the prevalent answer is physical place, the memories of this is to a large degree verifiable. This also counts for their age, education and other details in which can be verified by external sources. False memory in these circumstances are not applicable.
Childhood games

“Most of us have memories of games we used to play when we were younger. Memories such as these might seem trivial, but can give great insights into the story of childhoods”.

(Minner.no, 2018, online). Out of the 95 contributions, 33 are male and 48 are female of the people who have submitted their gender. This number is used without the consideration that participants might have submitted more than one memory. The median age is 66, with the oldest being 95 and the youngest 22 years old. The image representing this category is a collage consisting of four photographs of children in motion: 3 in black and white and 1 in colour. Looking at the way the children are dressed, it is likely photographs from somewhere around the 1930s up until the 1970s. The photos illustrate the category substantially, and creates a starting point for a distinct narrative. It is unknown where the pictures are taken, but by the looks of the children they are from a Western country, and likely from Norway.

![Figure 2. Photo: minner.no](image)

Childhood games are relatable to most people, and this is apparent in the number of contributions. We have all had a childhood in one way or another, it is something we have in common, and our experiences can be similar if we are of the same age, gender or are from the same place, but can differ within the same groups and in terms of social and economic status, religious background and so forth. Both the mutuality in and the uniqueness of these memories can give important information about the past. Although many childhood games can be verified through objects, many are only present in oral stories.

“This games are local and have only existed in a particular place at a particular time.”
Games can be dependent on trends, inspired by books, movies or computer games. On the other hand, quality games are often spread throughout society”. (Minner.no, 2018, online). Memories of games we used to play can be faint or distinct, and the interviewer in the videos is asking questions to get the thought process started. When Edvard Bull stated that memories can be a supplement, or even correction, to other sources of historical information, childhood games and the memories attached is an excellent example of this. Not only does the participants have ownership of these stories, but they also have first-hand experience in using specific objects or singing certain songs which can be tested and verified. As minner.no focuses on personal memories within a larger frame of cultural phenomenon, the emotional aspect is of relevance for the outcome of the interviews. Childhood memories can provoke a range of different emotions, which can lead to source confusion or even false memories - the distance in time can also confuse the participants. On the other hand, the mutuality of the stories tests the accuracy, as well as other documentation available to confirm that said games exists, or existed.

Memories from the Olympics in 1994

“Anniversaries are a fitting occasion to reminisce about the past and what one has been a part of. Memories of the Olympics are surfacing for many people these days. For that reason, The Norwegian Olympic Museum wants to collect memories and prior happenings of the Olympics from individuals. Regardless of your function during the Olympics, whether you were close to it or just watched it from a distance on the TV: We want to hear your personal memories of the Winter Olympics in 1994!” (Minner.no, 2018, online)

25 years have passed since the Winter Olympics was arranged in Lillehammer, Norway. Minner.no functions as a mediator of these memories and is interested in documenting the event for future use, creating a better picture of the experiences people had during the event. There are 40 participants in this study, and it is noted that 7 more contributions will be used for research. Of the people that have submitted their gender 14 are male and 18 are female. The median age is approximately 56.5 years, not taken into consideration that some might have submitted more than one memory and that one participant did not submit their age. The image representing this category is a collage consisting of six photographs in colour from the Olympics. Four of the images show the audience in different settings, mostly capturing young
people. One is of a cross country skier, and the last one shows the Crown Prince of Norway, Haakon Magnus holding the Olympic torch. The use of photos including the Norwegian flag, traditional winter clothing and the Crown Prince, creates a frame for drawing attention and triggering memories of patriotism, community and familiarity - the elements are relatable to Norwegians, and can potentially generate emotions of pride and nostalgia, as well as shame and exclusion.

Figure 3. Photo: minner.no

Considering the median age, a lot of the contributors were in their 20s and 30s during the Olympics; an unsurprising and expected find both because it is easier to recollect events experienced as an adult, and because it is more likely to have been engaged in the festivities.

“No one has gathered the many incidents, happenings and curiosities stored in people’s’ memory thus far” (Minner.no, 2018, online), minner.no claims on their website, creating an opportunity for people to feel that their memories, even small and seemingly insignificant, is of importance too. The difference between this category and the previous categories mentioned, is that it is one specific event and a narrow timeframe. It is asking an audience to remember the exact same time in history. Journalist in the Norwegian newspaper Morgenbladet, Simen Sætre, wrote an article called “The Big Lie” (“Den Store Løgnen) on February 2nd 2014. 20 years had passed since the winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, and as Sætre is from Lillehammer and was present in the city during the Olympics, he voices his opinion and experience of the event, - in a slightly different tone than the nostalgic fashion it is often portrayed in. The nation was, and is, divided on the topic of hosting such an event, but the main point Sætre is making is how we remember the past, and in this case, how we
remember Norway in 1994. The collective memory of the Norwegian people seem to have settled on the Olympics being a success, whilst the truth is that many aspects of the Olympics were difficult, and some of the memories presented as our shared history are in fact not true - in particular for the inhabitants of Lillehammer, according to Sætre (Sætre, 2014, Morgenbladet). Minner.no does not make any suggestions that the memories have to contain entirely positive elements of the event, but the framework suggests a celebratory character of the recollection.

**Absences and agendas: Defining Norwegian heritage**

A stream of more or less uncensored information organised thematically makes the process of determining the reliability of the memories challenging. Approaching the data from the hypothesis that the content will be used as it is with minor processing in the future, the reliability can be examined from the viewpoint of verifiability, the possible agendas found in the framework, and looking at the neutrality aspects of both the managers of the content and the contributors. According to Lyotard, a total comprehension of history and where we are headed as a society is inconceivable. Memories as a psychological and philosophical concept makes a good argument in favour of Lyotard’s views; evident in the participants different memories of similar situations, a variety of narratives are created which in turn does not conclude in a singular truth. The master idea, - the completion of the narrative, is not present in the recollections on minner.no. And although not exactly chaotic, it is regardless a project made up of petits récits - smaller and local narratives. Bertrand Russell argued that “truth” corresponds with reality, and by and large, the narratives at minner.no is rooted in verifiable events. The possibility of the information being contrived or illusive because of psychological and emotional influence is substantial, but a natural occurrence for the people encouraged to recollect that has to be taken into consideration by the project managers themselves.

**Agendas**

Kuypers explains of the agenda-setting function of the press that it affirms “that the press does strongly influence political decision-making; moreover, it clearly demonstrates that the media are especially influential in telling the general population what to think about” (Kuypers, 2009, p. 183). In this context, it is easy to question what the mass media’s role was
in the election of Donald Trump, or what they could have done different. Agendas are defined as a secret aim or reason for doing something, and particularly in journalism, it can be powerful\textsuperscript{15}. That is not to say that agendas are not used in other disciplines of communication. As Kuypers warned us, we sometimes find frames where they are not of particular importance in order to determine agendas in the framework. An audience is often unlikely to notice the frames, whether it is a website or a news article, and authors of such texts and articles are in many instances only using frames that seem familiar and natural to them without the intent to control or push agendas on the audience.

There are three main frames of minner.no present in all of the three categories that are of significance: the frame of Norwegian culture, the frame of nostalgia, and the frame of optimism. The frame of optimism, the celebratory ambience, causes issues in terms of authenticity as it can lead participants to focus on the past as something that was only blissful or sunny, when in fact the entire spectrum of emotions and atmosphere was present. In contrast to \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung} where the aim is to learn from the mistakes of the past in order to improve, past memories become useless in the context of progress and knowledge, on a personal level and for society, if the past is only of a celebratory character. Similar to social medias, such as Instagram or Facebook, where many people share snippets of their lives in the form of images and text and where displays of success are rampant, the memories become displays of happier days and romanticism. Although the psychological impact social media can have on people’s self-esteem and level of satisfaction in life has become well-known in recent years, the impact on our perception of the past in the future when accessing collections of mostly positive memories is unknown. If we do not document the true nature of our experiences, it does diminish our reliability as time-witnesses, and it is particularly debatable to use as educational material without contextualisation and other sources in which can support the recollections made.

Everyone can submit memories on minner.no from home, although some are arranged by project managers and take place face to face with an interviewer. Still it seems to attract a certain age group, people with a strong sense of belonging and affiliation with Norwegian heritage, and possibly even people from a specific socio-economic background. As previously

\textsuperscript{15} Cambridge Dictionary’s definition of the word agenda [online] \url{https://bit.ly/2AcZLLb}
mentioned, a focus on Norwegian culture is noticeably visible throughout the website, in the form of images and memory categories, and thus it is effective at attracting people who relates to this frame. This is both natural and necessary to regulate the income of data and maintain a perceivable subject matter. There is an agenda, but not in terms of controlling the content in the form of censorship, but to help participants evoke memories of something specific. The spotlight on Norwegian culture and what it encompasses; Olympics, flags, traditional clothing, small villages, dialects, winter games and summer games, is arguably pre-defined in the categories and questions asked, limiting the data to contain responses from a certain group of people. Other categories on the website that have not been mentioned or analysed in this thesis are “Cabin stories”, “Young in the mountains 2018” and “Christmas carols” amongst others. This confirms that for the creators, what is “typically Norwegian” is relatively indisputable. Whose heritage is it in the end? And is it even authentic? The culture the narrative presents to a future audience becomes inaccurate (not taking into consideration that other categories might be added later on). Without any categories for an “alternative” group of people who do not fit into the existing ones, people with a different cultural background, religions, upbringings and other factors that define your experience of reality, it becomes an echo-chamber for ideas of what constitutes for example a childhood in Norway.

“Don’t shoot, we’re from Norway!”

In the Norwegian film ‘Tatt av Kvinnen’ - ‘Gone with the Woman’, based on the author Erlend Loe’s novel with the same title, the main character played by Trond Fausa Aurvåg and his girlfriend, trespass on a property in rural France16. When the owner of the property becomes aware of the nuisance, he fires his rifle in the air to scare them off, resulting in Fausa Aurvåg’s character screaming: “don’t shoot, we’re from Norway”. Although this film and scene is insignificant to this thesis, it does point towards something peculiar about many Norwegians, I would argue: that Norwegians have a very clear perception of themselves as harmless and fundamentally good people, coming from a safe and blissful society, with a hint of entitlement present in the quote from the film. This idea is not totally fabricated, as Norway for many years have been amongst the safest and happiest places in the world according to research17.

16 Loe, Erlend. (2013) Tatt av Kvinnen, Cappelen Damm
But the reason why this film scene is interesting, is the concept of reinforcement of our perception of ourselves through storytelling. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Norwegians, but our “national identity” can be argued to be slightly one-dimensional, both in terms of how we view our personality and what “Norwegianness” is. This brings us back to the predefined categories of minner.no, heavy with symbolism of this so-called “Norwegianness”.

Norwegian heritage and culture are in many ways undefinable in the sense that contemporary society is culturally multi-layered and is influenced by a range of factors that exceeds the categories on minner.no. The only category of minner.no that reflects some diversity in the form of other cultural influences in Norway, is the category “Halloween”. This is also one of the categories not analysed in this thesis. Regardless of this category, a lingering sense of the website being mainly directed at people who have spent their entire life in Norway, and has led fairly “traditional” lives is still present. Defining heritage through individual memories can be tricky, and defining what is our shared heritage in contemporary society can be even harder. So, what are our shared memory of heritage? How is minner.no representing the memories “from all of Norway”? Rhiannon Mason and Zelda Baveystock write in *What role can digital heritage play in the re-imagining of national identities? England and its Icons* about the so called “Englishness” and the project ‘ICONS of England’. ‘ICONS of England’ was a resource for cultural heritage, but is no longer available online. Similar to minner.no, it provided content for scientists, students and other users, and also welcomes audience participation. Its purpose was to debate what the true icons of England were, creating a more comprehensive idea of “Englishness”. Controversial in many ways, ICONS of England had the potential of being a breeding ground for arguments, racism and nationalism. As Mason and Baveystock writes, the examination of a selection of so-called icons of Englishness from the site “illustrates some of the conflicting responses invoked by the process of defining Englishness” (Mason, and Baveystock, 2011, p.2), and that “the process of redefining Englishness is, we argue, an essential step in the diversification of public notions of national heritage and collective memory”. The writers also recognise that there are problems with this platform regarding how it can achieve an effective dialogue. Minner.no does not ask specifically for users to define “Norwegianness”, but is using fairly known elements for

[https://bit.ly/2Xg92eE](https://bit.ly/2Xg92eE)
Norwegian national romanticism as a starting point to contribute with memories. But minner.no does not focus on disagreements surrounding the topics - the memories stay as they without any disagreements. On the other hand, minner.no’s main cause is not to define “Norwegianness” as ‘ICONS of England’ aimed to do with “Englishness”.

Absences

How does the absence of elements affect the reliability of memories? And how do we define what is “absent”? Absences are what is left out, or not focused on, but that is central to the discussion regardless. In minner.no’s case the main question is who is absent? And who is not speaking?

The frame is both fixed (predefined categories and leading questions) and flexible (open to all kinds of submissions) at the same time, and is based solely on audience participation in order to collect data. As Chris Whitehead writes, community co-production helps “valorize non-professional and previously low-status cultural competences possessed by certain groups, such as forms of ‘local’ or ‘insider’ knowledge. Here museum professionals try to move away from being knowledge bearers to become instead cultural intermediaries between the museum and its new ‘experts’.” (Whitehead, 2016, p. 8). Opening up for all types of submissions within a fixed cultural frame makes it difficult for these previously “low status cultural competences” to share any useful experience as their experience and competence are not directly asked for. These groups can range from ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, to people from low-income families, immigrants, women, transsexuals and so forth. These groups of people could potentially give valuable information and powerful perspectives on their lived life had they been addressed.

Memories and their reliability

The chapter “Memory politics” examined some of the dilemmas of memories, their fragility and weaknesses. Nevertheless, it is the heritage institution or museum that ultimately will administrate what they collect, and is thus the “memory bank”, as minner.no refers to. The
focus on the quantity of information, and maybe not quality? - is easy to be apprehensive about when contemplating the reliability of our sources. And in turn, if museums are not source critical, they could also lose their own reliability as an educational institution. The question is then how the data collected is going to be processed or filtered and how it is going to be presented to an audience, As minner.no uses raw and unedited material to a large degree (assuming it has not been censored or edited), and immediately presents it to an audience within certain frameworks (categories), the memories have likely not been tested or verified, and thus a fair amount of trust in participants is present. As a visitor and reader of the site, your own judgement is crucial. When Roger Scruton writes that “only deluded academics and Donald Trump see no distinction between fact and fabrication” (Scruton, 2017, The Spectator), it is easy to want to prove that one in fact can distinguish between fact and fabrication. This is not to say that false memories, source confusion or imagined experiences is the same as fabrication, but it also does not mean that memories are always factual. Minner.no is not liable for all memories, but for the ones they collect and use for research. A dialogue about the uses of the memories, their meaning, and of the positives and negatives of using memory collections, would be useful in particular for visitors of the site who might not have the time or tools to distinguish memory recollections from verified historical information.

Foucault’s mention of the “indefinite accumulation of time” in his Of Other Spaces, feels eerily close when browsing through the submissions at minner.no. The quantity of information, keeping in mind that it is likely to expand and cover more areas of our shared history, almost feels like it is going to expand until we have a total understanding of every aspect of lived life. This is modernity, Foucault argues, this “will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). Fact checking is almost impossible when it comes to certain memories such as a feeling or a smell, but as previously argued, others are verifiable through similarities in experiences or physical objects and documentation.

Going back to Halwbachs theory on the accuracy of memories, that in spite of differences in memories of the same event, agreeing on the essentials can construct recognisable recollections for all included, meaning we can be more confident in the accuracy. The
framework that minner.no has created in the form of categories allows for this to happen when the data is extracted and are processed for further use. Furthermore, as Edvard Bull argued in favour of his own project collecting memories, people’s own perception can be just as important as the historical facts.

On the topic of the judgement of visitors and Scrutons bold statement about deluded academics, Kuypers’ remarks on how our public attention is highly selective and Loftus’ explanation of the construction of detailed false memories, together form a different viewpoint of our judgement; both sender and receiver have the capacity to misjudge information.
5 Discussion

ICOMS's definition of a museum, presented in the chapter “New approaches to collecting”, includes enjoyment as one of the purposes of a museum, in addition to being an educational institution. This thesis has focused mainly on the use of memories, their reliability and shortcomings, and less on the joy of recollecting the past. Firstly, being a time-witness, providing unique information to established museums for future use, is exciting and fun for many to participate in. In a digital age, information can easily get lost, even in our own computers, so putting “your memories in the bank!” can also cause a feeling of security; memories are ephemeral and abstract until they are written down, and a “memory bank” can preserve your memories far into the future. Secondly, the expertise in this case are the contributors themselves. They have lived their own lives collecting memories from experiences; thus, they are a direct source, and forming a dialogue between the contributors and museums creates a dynamic which makes the museum an active participant in the transitions happening in the community. It proves the general move towards recognising the importance of personal history. The status of personal history and memory is elevated, and it is plausible to say that it could install a trust in the museum as a mediator of history, as taking part in projects creates a sense of ownership to the material.

Collecting memories from all over Norway might sound familiar to many. The nation-building in Norway during the 1800s, its focus on dialects, national romanticism in the form of poetry and literature, traditional clothing and building techniques amongst other things, also aimed for an understanding of the characteristics of Norway as a nation. Minner.no resembles this project in many ways, although on a smaller scale and in a different era.

Minner.no writes that “as historians we need the oral stories, without them the understanding of the past becomes sparse” (Minner.no, 2018, online). Supplementing with oral stories expands the narratives, and the consequence of ignoring memories as a source of knowledge is as simple as losing information. Things disappear in the masses of documentation, but physical objects are more durable as opposed to oral stories. One cannot underestimate the fragility of memories. Looking at memories in terms of the physiology of our brains, which depends on our genetics, health, age and mental state, and the fact that they are held within
groups of nerve cells which “fire as a group in response to a specific stimulus”\(^{18}\), they become more than just a banality. They are real and they are crucial to our existence. Just as memory has been central to our progress as human beings and as a society, exemplified through the aftermath of World War II earlier in this thesis, they can be central in our future as well. From a heritage perspective, it is not the use of memories and oral stories that is new, it is the introduction of them as being of similar importance as objects (Vergo, 1997, p. 2), and that they can be collected in a more efficient way through modern technology in databases.

Minner.no is a project that can potentially expand endlessly in regards to number of contributions and topics. The sentence “Pass on your experiences” on the website bring about reflections on future generations. Through recollecting memories now, when we are able to, we might help the people not yet born understand the past of the community that they might become a part of. This is a very democratic approach and an affirmation of the “memory bank” being long-standing. The dialogue between minner.no and its visitors and contributors are beneficial for heritage production, and makes the site both dynamic, as history is, and authentic. It would be interesting if Minner.no provided us with more information on the different projects (categories) and research, and how they are planning to use it in the future, so the dialogue continues even after the participants have submitted their memory. A kind of “storage” for the memories is beneficial on its own as a preservation technique for the documentation, but to let the memories “sit still”, like a dusty old archive, is not honouring the participants enough for providing minner.no with both personal information and giving their time to make sure future generations can learn from, and enjoy, memories and our past.

6 Concluding remarks

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the use of memories as sources of information, using the website minner.no as an example. New methods of collecting material for further research and new ways of presenting history to an audience calls for an analysis of how this is done and what it does to the authenticity of the stories being told. With the inclusion of audience participation, questions surrounding expertise and power relations becomes relevant to ask. As an educational institution, the museum has the role of being a mediator of the past, also our shared history, and depending solely on the audience to recollect events from their own memory is an admirable approach to collecting data intended for researchers and journalists. I have used three categories from the website as starting points for a further discussion on reliability, ownership of our history and issues surrounding authenticity, pointing out advantages and disadvantages of memories as sources. By using the concept of post-truth as backdrop for the discussion, I have intended to tie the information we receive from cultural institutions to a highly relevant topic that has been heavily debated in recent years. By doing this, I wanted to highlight the importance of source criticism even outside of the political debate and in the press. By using frame analysis as a method, I have been able to analyse the website and its aims through identifying its frameworks. This has given an understanding of how frames are powerful tools for agendas to be pushed, or how neutral facts can be interpreted. The framework has given meaning to the topic, and by examining how the topic is presented, it has provided information about what the contributors have chosen to share, and what they have chosen not to share. It has also given an idea of who might not have contributed and why that is, particularly highlighting the issues of national identity and “Norwegianness”, and how that identity might vary more than one realises, making it difficult to place oneself in a pre-defined narrative.

In this thesis I have asked the questions “How do we use memories for research and education in an adequate and reliable way?” in addition to the sub-question “Is the authenticity of museum stories intensified or decreased with audience participation?” to add depth and broaden the discussion. By using theories on narratives and truth, I have accounted for the reliability of memories as a psychological and philosophical concept, elaborating on its strengths and weaknesses as a source. The question of reliability has been answered to its possible extent, despite its complex nature, with the argument that individual judgement has
to be present in researcher, contributor and the audience combined, and that either a memory has to be verified through physical objects or concepts embedded in reality, or a confirmation through another source or a shared memory. The sub-question regarding audience participation has been answered with an approach to the museum as a story-teller that has access to objects, but not the personal and local experiences of the community, and that the dialogue between the museum and the audience can generate more authentic stories when memories are used as a supplement, - as long as there is an element of source criticism present.

Admittedly, the heaviness and complexity of the subject-matter of this thesis, seeing as memory is an abstract and untouchable concept, has been both frustrating at times, but also fun. The heavy theory I have come across, stretching far beyond my expertise, and even intellectual abilities, have given me new perspectives and knowledge that I hope to expand on at a later point, albeit after I have read all the seven volumes of *In Search of Lost Time*, and repressed the memories of the late night writing and too many cups of coffee.. I am very glad I did not give up on trying to understand the subject. Further research on audience participation in the form of memories could be beneficial for the heritage sector, especially from an interdisciplinary approach, as I see no reason why findings in psychology research should not be interesting for the humanities to expand on when figuring out ways to approach such data material; using each other as a mirror for correction and deeper understanding
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