

## DIGITALIZED MEMORY, FORGETTING AND THE LOSS OF SOCIAL MEMORY\*

Dilek Özhan KOÇAK\*\*  
Orhan Kemal KOÇAK

*Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things.*  
Cicero

### ABSTRACT

*A group can be sure about its identity by remembering its history and refreshing the “figures of memory” in its mind. These social identities become the objects of non-daily ritual communication. Rituals and ceremonies with their regular repetitions help in transmitting and transferring the information which protect the identities; thus they undertake in reproducing the cultural identities. Rituals guarantee the temporal and spatial togetherness of a group.*

*Although digital media technologies provide in storing the experiences and the events cheaply and easily, “datas”, which are detached and disconnected from each other and lack of temporality and spatality (lack of monuments and memorable), they remain insufficient in providing or maintaining social memory and identity. In addition, taking into account that in order to remember something one must inevitably forget, it won't be wrong to assert that social memory corresponds to elimination and generalization. However, who decides the elimination of all these datas in digital world and how this elimination is done or will be done?*

*Time and memory disappear with digital culture as a kind of irrational overage. Forgetfulness is managed by an unshakable idea of progress. As Adorno and Horkheimer mentioned “all reification is a forgetting”. Since the past is forgotten, present can prevail without objection. The only way to overcome with it is to remember.*

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\*\* Dr., Marmara Üniversitesi, Radyo, Televizyon ve Sinema Bölümü ([dilekkocak@marmara.edu.tr](mailto:dilekkocak@marmara.edu.tr); [dozhan@yahoo.com](mailto:dozhan@yahoo.com))

\*\*\* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Beykent Üniversitesi, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü ([orhank@beykent.edu.tr](mailto:orhank@beykent.edu.tr); [orhankemalkocak@gmail.com](mailto:orhankemalkocak@gmail.com))

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### ÖZET

#### **DİJİTALLEŞEN BELLEK, UNUTMA VE TOPLUMSAL BELLEĞİN YİTİMİ**

*Bir grup tarihini hatırlayarak, kökenine ait hatırlama figürlerini belleğinde canlandırarak kimliğinden emin olur. Bu toplumsal kimlikler gündelik olmayan törensel iletişimin nesnesini oluştururlar. Bayramlar ve ritüeller, düzenli tekrarları ile kimliği koruyan bilginin iletilmesi ve devredilmesini, böylece kültürel kimliğin yeniden üretimini üstlenirler. Ritüel, grubun zamansal ve mekânsal birlikteliğini garanti eder.*

*Dijital medya teknolojileri olayların ve deneyimlerin kolayca ve ucuza depolanması olanağı sunsa da, veriler birbirlerinden kopuk ve bağlantısız ve zamansallık ve mekânsallıktan yoksun olmalarıyla (anıtlar ve kalıcı şeylerden yoksunluk) toplumsal belleğin ve kimliğin devamını sağlamakta ya da muhafaza etmekte yetersiz kalırlar. Bunun yanı sıra hatırlamak için unutmamanın şart olduğu göz önüne alındığında, toplumsal hafızanın aynı zamanda ayıklamak ve genelleştirmeye karşılık geldiğini söylemek yanlış olmaz. Peki, bunca verinin bir arada bulunduğu dijital dünyada bu elemeye kim karar verecek ve bu eleme nasıl yapılmakta ya da yapılacaktır?*

*Dijital kültürle birlikte zaman ve bellek bir çeşit akıldışı fazlalık olarak yok olmaktadır. Unutkanlık sarsılmaz bir ilerleme inancı tarafından yönetilmektedir. Adorno ve Horkheimer'in ifadesiyle aslında "bütün şeyleşme, bir unutmadır". Geçmiş unutulduğu için itirazla karşılaşılmasızın hükmü sürer. Bunu aşmak ancak hatırlamakla mümkündür.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Toplumsal Bellek, Toplumsal Kimlik, Dijital Medya, Zamansallık, Mekânsallık, Unutma.*

### **Introduction: Social Memory**

Man remembers; one of the features that make man different from other livings is remembering. Paul Valery says that the intension of memory is to provide us something which is missing in our lives, "a required time necessary in organizing the reception of stimulus" (Paul Valery, *Analecta*, Paris, 1935: 264-265 in Benjamin, 1995: 183). However, many factors must come together in order to remember the past. For instance, the objects from the past memories which can be described as the "figures of memory" are the evidence of past. These objects are the helping resources in the construction of memory. Objects from the past are stored and retained as a proof that the past does not fade away, it still exists. By the agency of these objects man can make his/her existence permanent; he/she believes that time is not fleeting, it can be controlled. In addition to these objects, man should be a part of a group in the construction of memory and in

remembering the past. In other words, being a part of a group of people man can build a memory. As M. Halbwachs shows that collective memory is not a given but rather socially constructed notion: “It is of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past” (Cosser, 1992: 22).

So even the personal memories are formed through communication with others. So it can easily be acknowledged that memory is about communication and social interaction. For this reason, memory can be analyzed as a function of social life. “Memory enables us humans to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory” (Assmann, 2011: 15-16).

As individual memory, collective memory requires the support of a group limited by space and time (Halbwachs, 1950: 84). Because being able to perpetuate a fact on a groups' memory is merely possible if only it is experienced as real person, place and event. Individuals and events transmit a concept, moral or a symbol by taking a part in memory and they become an element of social considerations system. A phenomenon called “figures of memory” exists from the interaction between these concepts and experiences (Assmann, 2001: 41-42). Jan Assmann calls collective memory as “cultural memory” and thinks that in order to be able to acknowledge the collective memory as a memory, these symbolic forms must be preserved, circulated and re-embodied in society (2011: 17). He also believes that the role of external symbols becomes more important on the social level because groups who “do not have memory tend to make themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions.<sup>1</sup> This is what we call cultural memory” (2008: 111). These common symbols named “figures of memory” have some functions in expressing the general attitude, forms of existence, the features and the weaknesses of a group as well as in reproducing the past (Assmann, 2001: 43-44). As a matter of fact since the Renaissance “the western tradition of

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<sup>1</sup> Enzo Traverso believes that memory places today became as commercial good. He asserts that “memory obsession” in nowadays was the result of collapsing Walter Benjamin’s *Erfahrung*. Changing the historical areas into museums, “memory turism” is formed. On the other hand it is certainly originated in the *reification of past*; in other words, the past is aestheticized; thus it becomes a consumption good which can be used by turism, entertainment industry, especially cinema (see Traverso, 2009: 2 and 4).

memory has been founded upon an assumption that material objects, whether natura or artificial, can act as the analogues of human memory” (Forty, 2001: 2).

Collective memory is also indispensable in the construction of collective identity. Memory configures social identities by including them in a historical continuity and by giving them a meaning, in other words a context and an intension (Traverso, 2009: 4-5). The consciousness of social belonging called as social identity based on the participation of common knowledge and memory which is achieved with the use of common symbolic systems such as a common language. The significant things here are not the words, texts or sentences but dances, embroideries, clothings, tattoos, eating and drinking, monuments, pictures and geographies. In fact, everything that shows the participation might be the indicator. All this participation which is expressed by these icons called “culture”, or rather a “cultural system”. Social identity is shaped and reproduced by this cultural system. Cultural system is a kind of instrument that is based on a common identity and is maintained through the generations (Assmann, 2001: 139). Social remembering needs:

“(…) motives and occasions which are regulated by cultures of remembering; thus it can support the making of social identities over time. In order to systematize such occasions, societies have invented “remembering occasions” of different kinds, such as commemoration days, monuments, special places, or museums” (Schmidt, 2008: 196-197).

The “social process of remembering requires a bodily practice of commemoration, often in the form of ritualized performances” as Paul Connerton (1989) and J. C. Wright (2006) argued. Historical associations and knowledge are renewed by “place-bound rituals and cultural artifacts”. Monuments, statues and symbolic landscapes act as mnemonic devices and as storage vessels of cultural identity (Meusburger and et al., 2011: 8)

Rituals are based on repetition. Repetition is a form of preservation of memory. Through repetition, the knowledge which protect the identity of a group can be reproduced and can be transferred to the next generation. “Human life and social institutions are thereby rescued from just passing away, decaying and vanishing; they are integrated into natural cycles of regeneration” (Assmann, 2011: 23-24). Since rituals are not spontaneous rather actualized and formed with a definite will, they cannot transform or change spontaneously; nevertheless they are open to changes only in narrow fields. Many ceremonies such as birth,

puberty, marriage show the beginning and the end. Accordingly, space and time for rituals is apparent; they have certain boundaries in time and space (Connerton, 1999: 71-72).

## **1. Transformation of Time and Space and Transformation of Social Memory**

We mentioned that collective memory is about a group which is limited by time and space; rituals guarantee the spatial and temporal togetherness of a group and the production and circulation of the knowledge that protects the identity of a group. We also mentioned that social identity is not related with daily communication but rather glorified and formed communication as rituals. “Figures of memory”, having a kind of function in reproducing the past, are crucial in formation of social memory and consequently in the construction of social identity. They want to be embodied in a specific place and updated in a specific time, ie. through not in geographical or historical sense, they always need a concrete space and time. For instance holidays represent a common time. Memories in the same way based on common space. So memory needs a specific place. Space, in the culture of remembrance, has a significant role in strengthening the social and cultural memory. For instance, Indians in Australia, ensure the identity of their group once again going to the certain places where the memories of their ancestors’ souls exist. These kind of places are the topographical texts and mnemotops of cultural memory; they are the places of memory (Assmann, 2001: 60, 142-143, 42-43, 62-63).

The above-mentioned requirements, which are indispensable in the construction of social memory and social identity, are transformed and still being transformed along with new technologies whereby our daily lives, habits, interests, ways of thinking and the arena which our thought develop; to sum up all our life remarkably changed (Kitchin, 1998: 2). In two decades between mid 1970s and mid 1990s new technologies spreaded at immense speed throughout the world. Connerton reminds that while large segments of world’s population such as the American inner cities, in French banlieues, in African shanty towns, in deprived rural areas of India remain cut off from these innovations, the dominant groups across the world had become interlinked by the end of the millennium in a new technological system that had begun to form only in the 1970s (2008: 64).

“At the beginning of the new millennium, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are reconfiguring space–time relations, radically

restructuring the materiality and spatiality of space and the relationship between people and place. Moreover, the conceptual space they support, cyberspace, is extending social interaction through the provision of new media that are increasingly reliant on spatial metaphors to enhance their operation. The combined power of ICTs and cyberspace is changing the way we live our lives, in the same way that the telephone, car and television did in the twentieth century (...) it seems certain that the combination of ICTs and cyberspace will become one of the most significant evolutionary developments of the twenty-first century” (Kitchin and Dodge, 2001: ix).

Such as in 19th century photography’s revolutionary impact on the development of modern society and culture, the computerization as a whole in contemporary world is shaping the culture; “computerized society” is noticed (Castells, 2000). For Lev Manovich we are in the middle of a new media revolution today, “the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution and communication.” Comparing with printing press and photography “computer media revolution affects all the stages of communication including acquisition, manipulating, storage and distribution; it also affects all types of media -text, still images, moving images, sound, and spatial constructions” (The Language of New Media: 43).

“Since new media is created on computers, distributed via computers, stored and archived on computers, the logic of a computer can be expected to significant influence on the traditional cultural logic of media” (Manovich, The Language of New Media: 63-64).

Consequently Manovich expects that the computer layer will affect the cultural layer. The process of transformation of spaces was made possible by computer technologies in the 1990s “virtual spaces”. Virtual space that has existed in parallel with our world made physical space useless. Graphic browsers for the www made cyberspace a reality for millions of users. Dot.coms were another virtual phenomenon during the second part of 1990s. By the end of decade, “daily dose of cyberspace became a normal aspect of daily existence” (Manovich, 2002: 75-76). Physical space is filled with electronic and visual information in the 2000s. From more realistic games to new 3-D technologies, network technologies entered our physical spaces more actively (Manovich, 2002: 76). Cyberspace become an imagined space in which new worlds and identities might be built. “In fact cyberspace is all this and more; it is hardware and software, and it is images and ideas-the two are inseparable”. Since it cannot be separated from its cultural

context, cyberspace is always cyberculture. Because internet and its related technologies impact on our everyday life in many different ways (Bell, 2001: 7-8). In this case, it would not be exaggeration to say that new media caused a transformation in the traditional concept of time and space, thus in the perception of reality. Some thoughts even claim that new media and communication technologies disconnect us from reality, instead it creates a virtual reality (Bell, 2001: 77).

Cyberspace provided us the representation of reality, a copy of original. Now, "simulacra" took the place of reality (Baudrillard, 1998: 11). Some ICTs, such as Virtual Reality, aims to make real and virtual indistinguishable. Television, photographs, cyberspace are so integrated into our lives that they became our "real space": "Consequently, our memories are now more frequently based on recollections of photos, videos, news footage, and television images, rather than on actual experiences." ICTs, cyberspace and cultural globalization, which are creating a "placeless world", are transforming the real world and the relationship between people and places (Kitchin and Dodge, 2001: 21, 15-16).

Technological innovations that have a dominant effect in transforming every aspect of society, are transforming the traditional production tools, factors and the areas of social memory: "Digital technology, interactive media and information systems have greatly changed the facets of memory practices in our time' and 'as a result today's memory is composed of bits and pieces" (Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2000: 219, in Mitsztal, 2003: 24).

The emergence of modernity has already rendered time invisible in social space. Our time which was the most essential part of our lived experiences is not visible in the real world and cannot be constructed any more. It is consumed and exhausted (Lefebvre, 1991: 95-96). As we mentioned that the sine qua non of the construction of social memory was a physical space, time and a group. However today placeless and timeless world, in other worlds virtual space and rather than a group, a global world are mentioned. Technology being an integral part of modern life established its existence on temporality. It reproduces everyday memory rather than social memory. Social memory can no longer be produced due to the transformation of the factors that is essential in the process of production of social memory.

“A library, a museum, in fact, any large collection of cultural data are being substituted by a computer database. At the same time, a computer database becomes a new metaphor which we use to conceptualize individual and collective cultural memory, a collection of documents or objects, and other phenomena and experiences” (Manovich, *The Language of New Media*: 191).

The transformation on ICTs also led to a transformation in the perception of time. Accordingly, social memory cannot maintain its preservation or continuation in traditional ways anymore. For instance, in commemorative rituals, it is believed that time intervals in calendar are the same. Hence each periodic festival or ritual seems like the same one in the previous year or five hundred years, the participants find themselves always as if in the same time. In the nature of ritualistic time there is an unlimited number of repetition. Thus rituals seem to make the moment permanent (Connerton, 1990: 105, 110-111). Man feels like she/he can control time and space with his/her volition. However ICTs override the will of people over time and space.

## **2. Remembering Means Forgetting, Memory Means Elimination**

Without memory we cannot maintain our lives. We lose our identity when we have a strong impact on our head or the memory regions on our head are damaged. Since the old man who told stories to the communities about the heroism of his ancestors, people try to protect their memories for similar reasons. Protecting the identity of a community depends on the stories that is told by old man (Eco, 2000: 213-214).

However memory doesn't mean to remember everything. When we are thinking about memory, simultaneously we should think about forgetting.<sup>2</sup> The dynamics of individual memory depends on the perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting. To be able to remember something, primarily we must forget other things. Similar dynamics work on the level of cultural memory: “As in the head of the individual, also in the communication of society much must be continuously forgotten to make place for new information, new challenges, and new ideas to face the present and future” (Aleida Assmann, 2008: 97). *Alexander*

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<sup>2</sup> E. Renan thinks that forgetting is a good manner. Because for him, in the construction of nation, forgetting is the beginning. He says that the basis of a nation consists of common things which bring all individuals together and forgetting a lot of things all together. None of French citizen know that if he/she from Burgonde, Alain, Taifale or Visigoth; each French citizen must have been forgotten Saint-Berthelemy and the slaughter of South in 3rd century (Renan, 1946: 105).



Luria in his book *Mnemonic, The Russian Psychologist*, writes about a man whose extraordinary talent is to remember everything he wants. Taking advantage of his memory, the man becomes professional mnemonist. However the problem is that he must learn how to forget the unwanted memories or the memories no longer needed to be remembered (Forty, 2001: 1). A similar character becomes one of the protagonists of J. L. Borges's stories. Borges in *Funes The Memorious* writes about how much memory is about forgetting. Funes is a man forgets never and nothing. His memories are more than all the people's memories since the world become the world. His memories are just like a garbage. However to remember everything is equal to think about nothing. Because thinking means generalizing and abstracting. For this reason, the world of Funes consists of merely the immediate details (Borges, 1994: 116-117 and 119). Considering these samples, we can assert that the function of social or cultural memory doesn't mean to preserve everything; it is about elimination and generalization. In fact, both cultures and societies behave in similar ways. For instance, it would be crazy if everything was written in a Roman history book what Julius Ceasar did before going to Senate in the day he was killed (Eco, 2000: 213-215).

Extreme information is one of the most leading reasons of forgetting. It is impossible to remember everyone's name we meet in a party. If and only we repeat we can remember their names. However in relation to computer and web today, we don't have any rule neither selecting the information nor forgetting which are not worth remembering anymore (Eco, 2000: 216).

“Indeed, if after the death of God (Nietzsche), the end of Grand Narratives of Enlightenment (Lyotard) and the arrival of the Web (Tim Berners-Lee) the world appears to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records. (...) As a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. (...) After the novel, and subsequently cinema privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduces its correlate - database. Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't have beginning or end; in fact, they don't have any development, thematically, formally... Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other” (Manovich, *The Language of New Media*: 194-195 and 199).

However for an individual it is impossible to remember something which has totally different structure than classical narrative structure and does not have any connection between events or information and does not have a unity. Today, internet or www resembles a giant Funes with these mentioned characteristics.

The process of elimination was done by a community, textbooks and the encyclopedias up till now. But today through web, all the information and news even the most irrelevant ones is in our hands. The question in computerized society is that by whom the elimination process will be done. Without elimination, this gigantic brain is equal to a gigantic nothing. (Eco, 2000: 215)

Before there were exclusive choices such as Catholic, Marxist, conservative, etc. The Bible, The Encyclopedia of Diderot, Capital, Course in General Linguistics were the underlying texts. It was foreseen that how information will be selected and eliminated. Now everyone is completely unique and unpredictably has their own choices. 6 billion people in the world means 6 billion ideological selection. As a result, without a mediation of a group, there is a potentiality of existing a society which is constructed by individual identities that does not have a connection between themselves. Umberto Eco says that he could not know whether this kind of society works or not (Eco, 2000: 217). How can it be possible to reproduce a social memory in a world which was fragmented up to each individual and without having common language, religion, race, ritual and “figures of memory” and memory places or common ideology?

### **3. How Will Memory Accumulate in a Digitized World?**

Rituals and texts were the solutions for making the transient permanent and as a result in establishing continuity. Rituals secure the transient by iteration and text by duration (Assmann, 2011: 24). Well then today, does digital media has a solution in making transient permanent just as rituals and texts? How information that flows in digital world can be made permanent?

In the process of the transition from ritual to textual continuity, cultural memory has completely been reorganized. In the transition from ethnically and culturally determined religions of the ancient world to the new type of transcultural and transnational world religions, identity has been reconstructed (Assmann, 2011: 24-25). In the process of the transition from ritual continuity to textual continuity, memory must have been reregularized. Now in the transition

from textual continuity to digital continuity, cultural memory must be reregularized. But how? Today which kind of instruments can maintain cultural memory?

Bob Waggoner's article *Information Age Losing Memory- Items on Outdated Systems Might Be Impossible to Retrieve* written in 1999 –try to find a way to protect datas forever. The article claims that the vast amounts of data such as financial records, pictures, video and e-mail are being stored, however they all are in danger. Considering that the technology speeds ahead, it leaves old machines behind (1999).

“Data stored on a computer today might be just as useless as music stored on a 1970s eight-track tape (...) Depending on how they made, 3 ½-inch floppy disks can start to deteriorate in 18 months. Iomega, which makes high-capacity disks and drives, warranties its Zip drives for only five years, although they can last longer. CD-ROMs can last from five to 50 years, depending on the quality of the disk and how it's stored. That's a good length of time, but if you want to hand down a disk to your kids, you'd better back it up every few years - or print out the contents. Places like the National Archives, whose mission is to preserve records forever, use high-quality reel-to-reel magnetic tapes, which have a life of 10 to 40 years. They recopy their tapes every 10 years and test them every so often to make sure the data is still intact” (Waggoner, 1999).

Director of Smithsonian Institution's division of Information Technology and Society says that people often call them whether they have a service that reads old disk. He says they don't. Besides obsolete technology doesn't just lose a piece of information-it loses all of it. Manager of archival services in the National Archive's electronic and special media records services division Thomas Brown says, “It's not losing a block of data, it's losing the entire database” (Waggoner, 1999).

At the end of the article it is suggested that the best way to preserve a document is to use previous, old methods. Printing the photos – preferably black-and-white, which last longer than color; printouts on good paper might provide our best records (Waggoner, 1999).

Umberto Eco also search the answer how information flows in digital world can be made permanent. He thinks that one day man will manage to

administer a standard memory in an accessible format, an encyclopaedia of all encyclopaedias notwithstanding Web. So how this can be made permanent for future generations? According to Eco, it is not possible to preserve it in the form of a book; because in 19th century the production of paper made by cloth has come to an end and in the process of the production of a paper wood, cellulose is used. This process has brought the problem of acid factor. In other words, an old text which was printed in 15th century maintain its freshness as if it is printed just a moment ago. The books published today have 70 years lifetime. In this case, how the information primarily in bookstores can be saved beyond the information on internet? Micro-film method might be very expensive considering millions of books in libraries. Since it requires a page to page work, chemical saving method as a solution is expensive, consequently it is dysfunctional. The third solution is scanning and transferring to magnetic medium. However it is uncertain that magnetic medium will last forever. U. Eco claims that even in the case of a decision of the applications of these methods, it is impossible to apply them to all the books in the world. Let's suppose that it is decided to be chosen some of them among all books, who will decide which one will go, which one will stay? However previously, the extracting of memory in real sense followed the rhythm of seasons and generations; society as a whole has discussed what should be protected and ultimately the decision was made by the society again (Eco, 2000: 215).

Today, in a new world that effect the development of new ideas and ways of life, there are some ideas who believes that memory and remembrance will and must develop appropriate to this brand new world. For instance, Siegfried J. Schmidt criticizes Aleida Assmann who claims that internet will lead to a total complete loss of memory and remembrance. He claims that Assmann overlooks that "the media development has not only produced technical, legal and economic problems with the storage and use of media offers for remembrance but also openen up completely new types of archives and possibilities for constituting and using them". According to him,

"(...) backward-oriented historians do not realize that there is no longer such a thing as "the memory" and "the remembrance" of "the society". Instead memories and remembrances in different fuctional systems as well as in the different actors have developed which follow different rules, react on different occasions and apply different routines and strategies while creating their past in their presence. In addition, post-modern conditions of experiencing and narrating allow for decontextualizing and sampling narrations of remembering which

therefore extricate themselves from specific normative and emotional claims for the authenticity of such narrations” (2008: 199).

However if we take these kinds of thoughts into consideration, thinking or even asking about memory is nonsense. Because according to these thoughts, memory has transformed along with the world, it has differentiated, formed suitable to computerized culture and finally it has digitized.

#### **4. Forgetting and Loss of Social Memory**

Although the subject of memory is always about individuals, every individual is dependent on the social frame that constructs their memory as Maurice Halbwachs theorize. This theory explains not only the remembrance but also forgetting. Accordingly, only if a person or a society can reconstruct their past in the framework they relate, otherwise they will forget everything else outside the framework of this relationship (Assmann, 2001: 40). It is claimed that today’s society has lost touch with past as it brought the “the death of time and distance, the growing pace of information process, increased mobility in all forms as well as fragmentation of identities and homogenization of culture”. Today’s global society is characterized by forgetting as we are overloaded with information and “the fluidity, rootlessness and speed with which images, messages and people travel lead to the growing loosening of the links between memory and identity and the legitimization of society by the future and forgetting as its means to achieve it” (Miztal, 2010: 35-36). Forgetting which is a normal adaptive strategy of a person in all circumstances becomes an essential defence policy in an information age (Miztal, 2010: 25-26). The culture of forgetting can threat democracy since it overlooks the rights to the truth about the past. Hence the pluralist democratic cosmopolitan society and increasing cultural interpenetration, cosmopolitan memory is mentioned. However we live in a world wherein a lot of factors are lacking that will make memory permanent (Miztal, 2010: 41). Forgetting appears to be one of the biggest problem of 20th century (Forty, 2001: 7).

We can make a connection from the loss of social memory to Walter Benjamin’s assumed distinction between *Erfahrung* (transferring experiences) and *Erlebnis* (experiences). *Erfahrung* continues naturally from one generation to another and constructs social groups and identities. However *Erlebnis* is “individualistic, weak, fugacious and temporal experience”. Benjamin in his work

*Passagen-Werk* admit that *Erlebnis* is the distinctive feature of modernity with “its rhythm and metamorphosis of city life, the electroshocks of mass society and kaleidoscopic chaos”; *Erlebnis* is the specific of modern society. *Erfahrung* is the typical feature of traditional society. Modernity is characterized by Benjamin as the collapsing of *Erfahrung* (Traverso, 2009: 3 and Benjamin, 1995: 183).

Forgetting and amnesia is also one of the most popular subjects in dystopic narratives. Totalitarian regimes of this kind of narratives, capture their citizens' mind by exterminating their memories first. What is more that people and books, which are a kind of vehicle of the the things of past, are destroyed. For instance *Fahrenheit 451* thematises the destruction of books by burning out them. George Orwell's novel *1984*, thematises not only the social amnesia, but also citizens' war in defending their memory (Connerton, 1999: 27-28). In addition, Yevgeni Zamyatin in *We*, Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* talk about the totalitarian states knowing that restricting the freedom is possible nothing but to keep the past under control. In these states, all the records and books were destroyed. The protagonists in each novel realize that they could obtain their freedom again by rescuing their past, by integrating the past with today (Jay, 1989: 387). For instance D-503 realize that he could be free again only if he reintegrate with nature; The Savage can understand the community in where he live with the help of Shakespeare; when Winston read the book of Goldstein about history, he finds out some emotions that he cannot give meanings before (Mills, 2000: 285).

Not only in fictions but also in our real history, the governments attempt to destroy the past in a variety of ways in order to dominate today. For instance the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar sees himself one of the greatest emperor of the world at that time, burns all the books out in Alexander Library where was the world's largest and richest library. If these books were not burned out, mankind could know more about his antiquity. The reason why the governments burn out the books both in fictions and in reality is the result of their desires of restarting the history by themselves. Adolf Hitler used the similar method when he burn out the books in the heart of Berlin. By doing this he aimed to eradicate all the historical accumulation from people's memory. Destroying past and starting history after Ford (A. F. 632) in *Brave New World* means revealing the same barbarism which were repeated in different stages of history (Özhan Koçak, 2003: 155).

The experiences of today are mostly based on the knowledge about past. We experience today, today's world in the contexts of the relations of casuality of

the past events and objects; in other words we experience today in the context of the events and objects of the past (Connerton, 1999: 9). However, modernization is a kind of technique that break ties with past without creating a future. Everything is in today, as restless, without imagination, without belief (Oktay, 1989: 144). Consequently, societies gradually remember less. Today is glorified as the best, the past is underestimated; forgetting is managed by an immovable belief of progress. Accordingly, subsequent is always better than the previous one (Jacoby, 1996: 25-26).

In this age there is no need to store memory. The common theme in almost all the mentioned dystopic narratives is the necessity of the alteration of everything that comes from the past, because “(...) every scrap that is left over from the past has to be changed or eliminated because an authentic piece of evidence has the power to crush the official version of the past on which the rulers base their power” (Aleida Assmann, 2008: 105). Thus, person who experience merely *today*, who lose connections with past and doesn't have a memory anymore will not questionize the past.

The continuity of the structures, “figures of memory”, rituals and texts that traces the social memory cannot be guaranteed today because of the developments in ICTs. These developments may cause today's societies become similar to the societies in dystopic narratives. Societies that doesn't have their own past cannot have connection with today, eventually they cannot understand or criticize today. Societies without memory means societies that doesn't think, questionize, criticize and have identity. Paul Connerton believes that he is not in doubt about that the governance, that will be installed on the memory of societies, will certainly constitute the conditions of the hierarchy of power. For instance, contemporarily having information techniques and regulating collective memory with data processing machines is not only related with the technical problems but also related directly with legitimacy, in other words, being a political problem it is about controlling and owning information (1999: 8).

Contemporarily, remembering, time and memory are being destroyed “as a kind of irrational excess”. According to Herbert Marcuse, the loss of memory caused modern world, that has lost different dimensions of reality, to become one-dimensional (Assmann, 2001: 87).

“One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations” (Marcuse, 2002: 16).

Remembering the past can give rise to dangerous ideas and established community gets anxious about devastating contents of memory. Remembering is a kind of a form that moves away us from the existing facts and breaks off the power of reality. Memory can lead to re-remembering the fears additionally the hopes in the past (Assmann, 2001: 87-88). However today the amnesia of societies corresponds to the loss of their mind. Because the cost of inability or unwillingness in not thinking about past is to be a nonthinking society (Jacoby, 1996: 29). As a result of social amnesia, memory is removed from people's mind by the social and economic dynamics of society. Reification in Marxism means an illusion that is produced objectively by the society. This social illusion protects status quo by introducing humanitarian and social relations of society as relations between things that is natural and cannot be changed. Social amnesia is a type of reification, the main form of reification or in general words (Jacoby, 1996: 29) “all reification is forgetting” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 191).

## **Conclusion**

As soon as changeovering to the written community, books replaced the traditional methods in making social memory permanent. However today, the future fate of books is suspected. Today's society which is installed by excessive information is characterized by forgetting and the individual's position is correspond to a passive position in the face of status quo. This kind of society reminds us the societies in dystopic narratives. The ability of using critical mind is solely possible to know past and experience today in the causal connections of context of past events and objects.

The revolutionary developments in ICTs caused a transformation in every field of life as well as in the relation between time and space. As a result of these developments, since the individuals face a lot of information that does not have connection amongst them, they lose the ability and the power in eliminating information and eventually they have a passive position.

We are exposed to an infinite data and information in today's computerized world. There are some thoughts that in today's world a different



kind of class distinction is being experienced which is not based on money but the ability in using critical mind and eliminating information (Eco, 2000: 216). Notwithstanding being a form of “temporal awareness memory is associated with traditional, nonindustrialized societies rather than with the globalized, mobile and deracinated world of today”, it seems that “the rise of a self-consciously postmodern, postcolonial, and multicultural society seems to have reanimated memory as a social, cultural, and political force” (Meusbürger and et al., 2011: 3).

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