

From the Will to Memory to the Right to Be Forgotten A Paradigm Shift in the Culture of Remembering*

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Abstract: The paper grapples with the cultural implications brought about by the “right to be forgotten” ruled by the European Court of Justice in May 2014. The main argument developed at length in this paper is that we are witnessing a momentous shift in the order of social memory, from an old-age paradigm of anamnesis characterized by a will to memory against the background set by a default of forgetting towards a paradigm of public amnesia characterized by a quest for privacy against an ever-expanding digital memory.

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The struggle for memory as a principle of the human condition

Pace Marx, the history of all hitherto existing society can be cast as the history of human struggle against oblivion. This mnemonic principle – the individual as well as collective struggle against oblivion – has been, until recently, the thrusting force behind people’s strive for remembrance. It is our argument that we are witnessing the advent of a prospective swift change in the traditional order of remembrance, from the age-old “will to memory” towards an amnesic regime founded upon the “right to be forgotten.” Sapping the old-age mnemonic principle (the immemorial will to memory along with the battle for posterity against oblivion) are the newly devised laws protecting the privacy rights of individuals against being swallowed, against their will, by the ever increasing all-encompassing digital archive. The upcoming momentous shift from a paradigm of anamnesis towards a culture of structural amnesia was already set in motion by the recently established “right to be forgotten” legislation in the European Union. In 2010, a Spanish citizen by the name of Mario Costeja González lodged to the national Data Protection Agency a complaint against the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia*, which in 1998 published in its printed edition an announcement regarding the forced sale of a property he owned arising from social security debts. Because a copy of the newspaper’s printed edition was in the meantime digitalized, querying his name in the Google search engine listed the link associating his name to the announcement, although the forced sale

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had already been concluded years before, making the information entirely irrelevant. Costeja requested the newspaper to remove his personal data from the archive. The same request was made of Google. The Spanish Court referred the case to the Court of Justice of the European Union, which eventually, in its ruling of May 13, 2014 stipulated “the right to be forgotten,” according to which individuals are entitled to request search engines to remove links containing personal information about them, if the information is inaccurate, inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive.¹ Although the European Court specified that the right to be forgotten is not absolute, depending on a case-to-case assessment, it nonetheless tipped the scale in favour of individual privacy. As of April 6, 2015, Google has received 236,214 requests and has evaluated for removal a total number of 856,378 URLs, out of which 41.4 % (300,765) were removed while 58.6 % (424,964) were not.² The numbers reveal that the movement grounded in the right to be forgotten is gaining traction, as the phenomenon is reaching critical mass. Based on these demographics, it is the premise of this study that this ruling has far wider consequences that exceed the juridical realm, heralding a swift change in the culture of memory.

A *caveat lector* should be in place. The study should not be taken as providing a prophetic insight into the mysterious workings of the future, as the author of these lines does not claim any oracular prowess for his part. With Karl Popper and Konrad Lorenz, and again *contra* Marx, we do believe that the future is open. Although predictable within a margin of error with the help of scientific analysis, the future is by no chance completely foreseeable. Science in general and social sciences in particular are in no way divinatory cognitive devices that can unravel the conundrum of the future. After the demise of the great teleological social philosophies of the last couple of centuries (Marxism, with its historical inevitability of Communism, being an emphatic example of the intellectual bankruptcy of historical prophecies), social sciences cannot afford to remain under the spell of prophetic divination. This being said, we should hastily add that our study does not fall under the rubric of theoretical foresight. We are only trying to make sense of the impact on the order of memory, made by the new legislation ruling the right to be forgotten and how it changes the consecrated workings of public remembering. If we dare step into the future with our analysis, it is by mapping the tendencies that occur and transform the established patterns, not by venturing prophecies of Tomorrow.

This study does not grapple with the legal entanglement created in the aftermath of the European Court of Justice’s rule of the right to be forgotten. There is already a growing plethora of journal pieces tackling the juridical conundrum posed by the collision between the right to be forgotten and the right to personal privacy on the one hand, and public interests and public memory on the other.³ Deliberately eluding

¹ Court of Justice of the European Union, “Press Release No 70/14,” Luxembourg, 13 May 2014, Judgment in Case C-131/12, Google Spain SL, Google Inc. v Agencia Española de Protección de Datos, Mario Costeja González, <http://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2014-05/cp140070en.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2015).

² Google Inc., *Transparency Report*, European Privacy Requests for Search Removals, April 6, 2015, <http://www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/europeprivacy/?hl=en> (accessed April 6, 2015).

³ Jeffrey Rosen, “The Right to Be Forgotten,” *Stanford Law Review online* 64 (2012), 88; Omer Tene and Jules Polonetsky, “Privacy in the Age of Big Data: A Time for Big Decisions,”

the legal imbroglio, the study deals with the cultural implications brought about in the order of memory by the ruling of the right to be forgotten.

The paradigm of cultural anamnesis – the will to memory

Although it probably haunted human mind from its first glimmerings of consciousness, the fear of death found one of its first explicit expressions in Aristotle's statement that death is "the most fearful of all things".⁴ But the universal fear of death – what we shall call as the *thanatic principle of human existence* – was the dreadful discovery of the 20th century. It was Sigmund Freud who posited that human life is played between the two basic instincts, *Eros* – the instinct of life, and *Thanatos* – the instinct of death. Another Viennese thinker, following Husserl's phenomenological tradition rather than Freud's psychoanalysis to set the groundwork for a *Phenomenology of the Social World*,⁵ considered the fear of death as the fundamental anxiety of human existence. "I know that I shall die and I fear to die." This basic experience Alfred Schütz called the *fundamental anxiety* – the primordial springhead of which all other experiences originate. "From the fundamental anxiety spring the many interrelated systems of hopes and fears, of wants and satisfactions, of chances and risks which incite man within the natural attitude to attempt the mastery of the world, to overcome obstacles, to draft projects, and to realize them."⁶ Following Schütz, we can argue that the master project humans draft and strive to realize is none other than the immortality project. While the psychoanalytic anthropologist Ernest Becker restated the thanatic principle in an emphatic fashion, by arguing that "the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity – activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man."⁷ But the most audacious step in this direction – indeed, bordering on recklessness – has been taken by Zygmunt Bauman, who makes the knowledge of death (along with its subsequent fear and terror) the prime and only fountain head of human culture. "There would probably be no culture," says Bauman, "were human unaware of their mortality."⁸ Sprang from the terror of death, "culture is an elaborate counter-mnemotechnic device to forget what they [i.e., humans] are aware of [i.e., the inevitability of their own mortality]."⁹

Stanford Law Review online 64 (2012), 63; Rolf H. Weber, "The Right to Be Forgotten: More than a Pandora's Box?," *Journal of Intellectual Property, Information Technology and E-Commerce Law* 2 (2011): 120–130; Jeff Ausloos, "The 'Right to be Forgotten'—Worth Remembering?," *Computer Law & Security Review* 28 (2012): 143–152.

⁴ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), III.6, 1115a, 49.

⁵ Alfred Schütz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Durham, NC: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

⁶ Alfred Schütz, "On Multiple Realities," in *Collected Papers: The Problem of Social Reality. Volume I* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962): 207–259, 228.

⁷ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), xi.

⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Just like there is a universal fear of death – invariant in its terrorizing capacity – but a plethora of cultural responses,¹⁰ we posit a similarly universal dread of oblivion. To the *thanatic principle* we counterpose a corresponding *mnemonic principle*. As much as people find it difficult, if not plainly impossible, to accept that biological death is the final destination of life, they equally cannot accept departing from this world without leaving a trace on the basis of which they would be remembered by their survivors. It is not an exaggeration to claim, as an axiom of anthropological philosophy, that humans are beings in need of remembering and being remembered. It is part of the human condition that people are both *agents of remembering* (i.e., beings endowed with the faculty of remembering things and people from the past) and strive towards becoming *subjects of remembrance* (i.e., beings endowed with the longing of being remembered by others in the future). Seen in this light, it does not appear as a far-fetched metaphorical rendition to say that in the aftermath of physical death, sinking into social oblivion comes as a second, memorial, death. These are the anthropological premises out of which we are drawing the sociological conclusion that human communities have been anamnestic cultures, i.e., communities of memory engaged in a relentless struggle to save their precious past from oblivion. Some of these anamnestic communities become so obsessed with memory that they turn into “memorial cultures,” or even, with a funeral twist, “mausoleum cultures,” such as ancient Egypt or imperial China of the Qing Dynasty. The Pharaohs’ pyramids and the Eastern Qing tombs stand as monumental material proofs and dazzling memorial sites of these mausoleum cultures. Until it was recently challenged by the right to be forgotten, the mnemonic principle of human existence stood at the heart of what we shall call the *anamnestic paradigm* of cultural existence. Its main drive was the “will to memory,” the quest for being remembered as a way of cheating physical death.

Extending the analogy, just as there is a variety of cultural ways of managing the terror of death (more precisely, the terror of the awareness of the inevitability of death), spanning from reactions as simple as fleeing from the sites of death, to intricate elaborations of (mostly religious) cognitive systems for dealing with the phenomenon of death and dying, there are also at least two main strategies of striving against forgetfulness. Both human beings and human societies expressed their perpetual struggle against oblivion along with their ceaseless quest for perfect mastery of their memory in two general ways: the practical and the symbolic modes, which, along with their internal ramifications, will become the focus of our attention.

1. The *practical mode* consisted in strivings for improving the blessed but fickle and unreliable faculty of remembering, individual as well as collective. Either individually or collectively, people have always aspired to perfect their mnemonic capacities and to gain mastery over memory.

1.1. At the *individual level*, the practical mode of saving time from oblivion aimed at perfecting the specious human faculty to remember by various “arts of memory.” It

¹⁰ Calvin Conzelus Moore and John B. Williamson, “The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response,” in *Handbook of Death and Dying*, ed. Clifton D. Bryant (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 3–13.

was the Greeks who came up with a promise to fulfil humankind's perennial dream for a perfect memory with the invention, by the poet Simonides of Ceos, in the 5th century B.C., of an ingenious system of remembering. Simonides's mnemotechnics originated in the need of oral societies, foreign to writing and literacy, to enhance memory in the lack of other mnemonic technologies such as writing so as to rescue knowledge from the grasp of oblivion. It worked by anchoring knowledge in familiar or imagined spaces, such as houses or palaces, in whose chambers the memory was to be carefully organized and tagged with symbolic reminders. Respecting the principles of mnemotechnics would allow one to use his memory as a vast but highly structured depository of knowledge to be readily available to him as he was visiting, with the eye of his mind, the treasure house of memory, the palace of his remembrances.¹¹ From a mnemotechnical device used in oral cultures to enhance remembering without any external crutches for memory (such as writing), Simonides's invention was taken over by the Roman world, where it was further developed, its principles were codified in authoritative textbooks such as the anonymous tract on memory *Rhetorica ad Herennium*¹² (written around 82 B.C.), and transformed by respectable rhetors such as Cicero and Quintilian into a revered *ars memoriae*. From the Roman world, itself the inheritor of the Greek legacy, the art of memory transited, through the work of Augustine, to the theological culture of mediaeval scholasticism. It continued to grasp the imagination of Western thinkers, mesmerized as they were by its promise to master the faltering faculty of memory, until the advent of print in the 16th century, which brought about a new technological regime of remembering based on printed books as celluloid sites of memory, rendered the venerable art of memory practically obsolete. It is suggestive to note down that, with the shift from a predominantly oral culture towards a culture of (hand)writing – from an auricular culture of oral communication to a chirographic culture of hand-written exchanges – a parallel shift has occurred from the *ars memoriae* to *ars dictaminis*, the art of writing letters. The old oral Ciceronian rhetoric of which the classical art of memory has been an integral part has given way to the Bolognese hand-written *Rhetorica Novissima*.¹³ But until its demise in the 17th century, *ars memorandi* will be further developed by Giulio Camillo and Giordano

¹¹ Using a gender neutral language in discussions about the ancient Greek world – as it should be the case if we were discussing about contemporary topics and phenomena – turns out to be inappropriate. The reason for this is historical accuracy. It would be highly anachronistic to use gender neutrality for an androcentric culture such as that of ancient Greek city-states, where women were not receiving public education as they were excluded from the public affairs of politics and relegated to the private space of the household. It is safe to assume that in this manly dominated civilization, women were not practitioners of the art of memory.

¹² *Ad C. Herennium de Ratione Dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)* with an English translation by Harry Caplan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964). The book's highly authoritative status lay in its being for a long time wrongly attributed to Cicero. Including Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas – who incorporated the ancient art of memory in the theological tradition by emphasizing the crucial role of *memoria*, along “understanding” and “foresight,” in the cardinal virtue of *Prudence* – wrote of *Ad Herennium* as Tullius's *Second Rhetoric* – the first being Cicero's *De Inventione*.

¹³ Frances Yates, *Selected Works. Volume III. The Art of Memory* (1966, New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 57.

Bruno. Camillo's famous "theatre of memory" was a wooden construction built according to the blueprint of the Vitruvian model of the classical theatre. Instead of a public, the seats were given to images, underneath there were filing cabinets containing written texts, by looking at which the rhetor would be able to articulate skilful discourses on whatever topic. It made such a stir in the times that one contemporary reported in disbelief to Erasmus that Camillo's theatre of memory was designed with the purpose of enabling "whoever is admitted as spectator [...] to discourse on any subject no less fluently than Cicero."¹⁴ The tradition was enriched by Giordano Bruno, its most occult practitioner, in whose person the art of memory intertwined with the Hermetic tradition. "If Simonides was the inventor of the art of memory, and 'Tullius' [Cicero] its teacher, Thomas Aquinas became something like its patron saint," sounds the conclusion of Frances Yates.¹⁵ To extend the analogy, it can be said that Giulio Camillo with his "theatre of memory" was its ingenious architect, while Giordano Bruno with his mystical treatises was the hermetic "Magus of Memory."¹⁶ It seems that the art of memory entered the flames of history along with its hermetic master, only to be reborn from its own ashes, in the works of Gottfried Leibniz. The two millennia old tradition of the art of memory finally succumbed under the growing tide of the scientific method.

1.2. At the *collective level*, the practical mode of rescuing the past from the perils of oblivion found its expression in the quest for improving the social memory's storing capacity, by increasing the community's powers of preserving the past. This was done in two different ways.

1.2.1. First, it was driven by the development of "technologies of memory" – such as writing, printing, mass mediated communication, and finally, the World Wide Web – which freed thought and memory from its imprisonment in the cerebral technology of the brain, whose storing capacity was overstrained soon after the invention of writing. The invention of writing was not only a major cognitive revolution, triggering a radical restructuring of the consciousness,¹⁷ but it also unleashed a cultural revolution described by Georg Simmel in the terms of a "tragedy of culture," by which the German thinker described the radical asymmetry created in the relationship between the human subject and its objectivized culture.¹⁸ The former, although the creator of the latter, cannot cope with the fast-pace development of objective culture, whose extraordinary rhythm of proliferation, speeded-up by innovative technologies of memory, makes it impossible for the human mind to reabsorb it within her own subjective culture. With the invention of writing, objective (i.e., externalized) culture greatly outgrows the cognitive power of the human mind. Simmel calls it the "tragedy of culture," but it is more a tragedy of the human memory, which, biologically limited as it is, cannot keep pace with the exponentially growing volume of objective culture. Already Plato, noticing the steady accumulation of the objectivized, material culture

¹⁴ Ibid., 131–132.

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶ Ibid., 307.

¹⁷ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 77.

¹⁸ Georg Simmel, "On the Concept and the Tragedy of Culture," in *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays* (1911, New York: Teachers' College Press, 1968), 27–46, 43.

set in motion by the introduction of writing, viciously condemned the new cultural technology of writing for its damaging effects on the powers of human memory. In his dialogue with *Phaedrus*,¹⁹ Plato's Socrates blasted writing as an inhuman, alien technology that, although presented as a "potion for memory and for wisdom," it would in fact "introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it". It is not "a potion for remembering, but for reminding". Externalizing the mind into artificial memory, writing is actually weakening the power of remembrance. Despite Plato's lamentations over the harmful effect of writing on the human faculty of remembering, the new technology has had tremendous effects on enlarging collective memory of human societies, now able to keep textual records of their past.

About the history and power of writing, Henri-Jean Martin wrote a book praised by the *Annalist* Pierre Chaunu as "one of the greatest history books ever written."²⁰ The encomiastic appraisal is not just the outcome of collegial courtesy. Martin takes the reader through the fascinating (hi)story of writing, tracing not only its appearance and evolution, but also highlighting how writing – as an "orthotic device for the brain"²¹ – has shaped human mind and profoundly changed human society. It was the pragmatic need to remember that prompted in the direction that eventually leads to the invention of writing as a new technology of memory. In societies such as the Sumerian and Akkadian ones, writing developed "above all in response to the new needs of an essentially economic sort and in an epoch in which increased wealth, the concentration of wealth, and accelerated exchanges made it necessary to keep accounts."²² But this practical, economic incentive was not enough. What was needed was a coherent societal matrix, a proper form of collective life conducive to the appearance of writing. Scholars, including Martin, have long been arguing that there are some social, economic, cultural, and political pre-requisites for the technology of writing to make its way into collective life. Based on historical case studies of cultures and societies located predominantly in the Near East, scholars have been able to link writing to a series of other structural elements (such as fixed residence, agrarianism, political centralization, central administration, etc.). Thanks to the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS) database, it is now possible to test this theoretical model against empirical reality at a cross-cultural level. SCCS comprises codified data (variables) for a collection of 186 pre-industrial cultures from around the world, compiled from the works of the anthropologists and ethnographers who have painstakingly described different parts of these societies' cultural systems and social organization. In an effort to measure the cultural complexity of different – indeed, idiographic – cultures, George P. Murdock and Caterina Provost have compiled for this purpose ten scales of five points each. These are: *Scale 1. Writing and Records*, ranging from 0 to 4, where 0 signifies that "writing, records, and mnemonic devices in any form are lacking or unreported," while 4 means that "the society has an indigenous

¹⁹ Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Complete works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), Stephanus numbers 274–278.

²⁰ Pierre Chaunu, "Foreword," in Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), xiv.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13.

system of true writing and possesses records of at least modest significance.”²³ *Scale 2. Fixity of Residence*, ranging from fully nomadic life (0) to a pattern of permanent and sedentary settlements (4). *Scale 3. Agriculture*, by which societies were coded with values ranging from 0, where agriculture is not practiced, to 4, in those cases where agriculture is the main contributor to the society’s food supply and it is employed with intensive techniques (irrigation, ploughing, artificial fertilization). *Scale 4. Urbanization*, measured by the average population of local communities, ranging from 0 where it is less than 100 people to 4 where it is more than 1.000. *Scale 5. Technological Specialization*, in terms of which the value 0 was designated to societies in which the complexity and specialization of technological crafts were minimal (such as those where metalworking, loom weaving, and pottery making were absent), while with 4 were scored societies which possessed all of these technologies and crafts, along with an advanced division of labour among specialists. *Scale 6. Land Transport*, ranging from societies in which goods and materials are transported on land exclusively by human carriers (0), to societies which possess motorized land transport (4). *Scale 7. Money*, according to which societies were classified along a continuum ranging from 0, in cases of societies practicing barter economy without any recognized medium of exchange, to 4, in cases of societies using paper money economies. *Scale 8. Density of Population*, ranging from scarcely populated societies with less than one person per square mile (0) to densely populated societies with more than 100 persons per square mile. *Scale 9. Level of Political Integration*, ranging from stateless, politically de-centralized societies (0) to highly structured state societies with centralized administration and multiple administrative layers (4). Finally, *Scale 10. Social Stratification*, ranging from essentially egalitarian, classless societies (0) to societies presenting complex patterns of social stratification with three or more distinct strata. The correlation matrix reveals the high degree of interdependence of all these ten different, but highly entangled, phenomena. “Writing and Records” is highly correlated with all the other variables, suggesting that in order for the cultural technology of writing to appear in a social community, that community needs to be socially, politically, and economically “fit” for receiving it. To be sure, correlation does not allow for making causal inferences, but the tight correlations between these phenomena allow us to conclude that writing and recordkeeping appear in a specific societal nexus, i.e., in an urbanized agrarian society practicing intense forms of land use, which has an articulated land transportation system supporting business transactions within a money economy, within a politically integrated society, whose dense population is nonetheless highly stratified in terms of social status and economic wealth.

²³ George P. Murdock and Caterina Provost, “Measurement of Cultural Complexity,” *Ethnology* 12 (1973): 379–392, 379.

Table 1. The correlation matrix between the ten scales in 186 societies

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Writing and Records	1								
(2) Fixity of Residence	.247*	1							
(3) Agriculture	.343*	.782*	1						
(4) Urbanization	.422*	.450*	.509*	1					
(5) Technological Specialization	.490*	.406*	.548*	.435*	1				
(6) Land Transport	.627*	.076	.233*	.397*	.469*	1			
(7) Money	.530*	.412*	.356*	.375*	.417*	.409*	1		
(8) Density of Population	.362*	.707*	.638*	.560*	.468*	.211*	.557*	1	
(9) Political Integration	.575*	.415*	.512*	.481*	.568*	.421*	.527*	.570*	1
(10) Social Stratification	.621*	.437*	.433*	.489*	.579*	.475*	.470*	.500*	.719*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: personal calculations based on Standard Cross-Cultural Sample database

As it is explicit in the variable's name, "Writing and Records," a technology of memory – writing – goes hand in hand with a systematic practice of memory – recordkeeping – and with a full-blown institution of memory – the archive. This is revealed by data drawn from the same SCCS database, which shows that once a culture has adopted writing, it tends to keep written records that will add to that society's stockpile of mnemonic devices and non-written records.

Table 2. Writing and recordkeeping in 186 societies

Type of mnemonic technology	Frequency	Percent (%)
Oral tradition	73	39.2
Mnemonic devices	49	26.3
Non-written records	21	11.3
True writing but no written records	12	6.5
True writing with written records	31	16.7
Total	186	100

Source: Standard Cross-Cultural Sample database

The results show that out of the 186 societies indexed by the SCCS database, 143 (76.9%) are either non-literate or proto-literate, meaning that they do not possess "true writing," i.e., a phonetic system of writing. Foreign to the cultural technology of writing, these societies resort to oral, artefactual, or pictorial means to preserve their knowledge. The rest of 43 cultures are literate societies, out of which 12 possess writing but have not accumulated significant written records. This would have been a counter-evidence to our already defended idea that recordkeeping tends to follow writing, had it not been for the other 31 societies that have developed archives so as to store their knowledge in written records. And thus we arrive at the second way of the practical mode societies use to conserve their memories – the institutions of memory.

1.2.2. The invention of technologies of memories sets the ground for developing "institutions of memory," such as the archive, the library, the museum, and other

cultural institutions whose purpose is to save and conserve the past from being effaced from the public consciousness either materially or the knowledge of it. Societies can never become “Funesian communities” – the collective personification of Jorge Luis Borges’s Funes the Memorious, the man whose prodigious memory was like “a garbage heap,” retaining everything without an effort, without applying any filter of selection – but they have always tried to remember their past. Their urge to memorize is explainable by the practical, indeed survival, value of culture – culture being understood here from a pragmatic angle, not only as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols [...] by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life,”²⁴ but also as system of distinctive means by which human communities manage to successfully adapt to their environment (natural and social alike). The patterns of meaning and symbols making up the cultural systems are nonetheless tools used for regulating the society’s relationship with the natural environment, its relationship with Otherness (other human societies), and also its internal structure of relations (self-regulation). Cultures are thus *adaptive mechanisms* that have a group survival value, while collective remembering is instrumental in accomplishing its goal. An invariant feature – indeed, an anthropological constant – that has characterized human societies across cultural lines, geographical boundaries, and historical times, says Adrian Cunningham, has been “an instinct for collective cultural self-preservation.”²⁵ Since time immemorial, people fought to somehow save their cultural heritage from obliteration. While this instinct took many forms, ranging from passing knowledge from one generation to the other by storytelling, rituals, dance, music, and art – all of them performative institutions of memory –, it has found its most efficient institutional embodiment in the archive. In 1963, the Italian archaeologist Paolo Matthiae accomplished the feat of dating the “time immemorial”. He has discovered the ancient Syrian city of Ebla, and with it, the now famous Ebla archive – more than 20.000 clay tablets written in Sumerian cuneiform – dating back 4.500 years. Mistaken by many specialists as “the world’s oldest library,”²⁶ the Eblaite clay tablets are in fact the world’s oldest archive, since its informational content was made up of four classes of data, concerning i) the state’s internal and external affairs (administration of the city, organization of the state, diplomatic relationships with other city-states), ii) agricultural business, iii) trade records, and, only a feeble part concerned iv) written materials on education and science, and still fewer literary texts.²⁷ Given the four and a half millennia of certified existence, it should come as no surprise that archivists praise

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87–125, 89.

²⁵ Adrian Cunningham, “Archival institutions,” in *Archives. Recordkeeping in Society*, eds. Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, 1995), 21–50, 21.

²⁶ Hans H. Wellisch, “Ebla: The World’s Oldest Library,” *The Journal of Library History* (1974-1987), 16 (1981), 488–500.

²⁷ Tomas Lidman, *Libraries and Archives. A Comparative Study* (Oxford Cambridge New Delhi: Chandos Publishing, 2012), 8–9.

themselves as being “the second oldest” profession in human history.²⁸ And the first respectable one, we should hastily add.

Since this first known archival institutionalization of memory, which gave an enduring institutional form to human societies’ instinct for collective cultural self-preservation, or, to put it differently, to their “impulse to save” their cultural legacies,²⁹ the archive has become a permanent solution to the problem of forgetfulness. From the presumably first Eblaite archive four and a half millennia ago until present day, archival records have never ceased to accumulate. An unbroken tradition of archiving the present to form the collective memory of the future connects the *archival inaugural* of Ebla to the present digital archives. The media and formats used to store data in the archive have passed through successive material revolutions – from the Eblaite and Babylonian clay tablets, to the Egyptian papyri and the Greek and Roman wood blocks and parchments, to paper, punch cards, and computer servers – but the archival solution to the problem of oblivion remained essentially the same.³⁰ Archives have been kept by all human civilizations throughout history, but not only as heritage institutions, as they have also functioned as institutions of political power. It should not be forgotten, as Jacques Derrida is so keen to remind us, that the institution of the archive is a political power house. Power is engrained not only in its social functioning, as we shall shortly detail, but is written deep into its etymology. *Arkheion* – the Greek word for the storehouse where the official records of the state are being kept – does not yet explicitly reveal its power substance. But if we dig deeper, if we uncover its basic etymological strata, we come across *arkhē*, meaning power, authority, itself rooted in *arkhō* – to command, to rule. “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory,” says Derrida.³¹ This is not the only reckless claim coming from the French master of deconstruction, in whose repertoire of controversial assertions the notoriously celebrated and simultaneously contested assertion that “there is nothing outside text” (*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*) ranks supreme. In comparison to the *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* sentence, the claim that there is no political power without the archive, although an extravagant claim itself, seems to be closer to reality. All the more so as the first archive, discovered at Ebla by the Italian archaeologist Paolo Matthiae, has been identified as dating from 2.500 B.C., thus being more than 4.500 years old. Even with this venerable age of the archival institution as an appendix of political power, it is still a very plausible hypothesis that political power predates the archive. Derrida’s statement, although forcefully revealing the power-connection between political domination and the archive, must be taken with sceptical reservations, as it is historically inaccurate. Political power is possible without the archive – as it is clearly the case in oral societies – so that the archive is not the institutional fountainhead of political power. It is just the other way around. To consolidate their power, political elites founded archives as tools of domination through knowledge. The archive is therefore the paradigmatic power/knowledge institution of memory. The power stakes

²⁸ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19, 2.

²⁹ James M. O’Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990), 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4, s.n. 1.

embedded in the archive from its very institutional inception millennia ago were all the more revealed with the advent of the modern state. Archives existed, of course, before the 16th century, but they were rudimentary and scattered collections of royal records. It was not until the Renaissance, with its process of state centralization, that the archive was re-established as a modern institution of power/knowledge. The forces that led to this outcome were derived from the centralizing states' need to form a central structure of administrating the population, in order to better raise taxes and control their subjects. The first central state archive was established in 1543 by the orders of Charles of Spain. Other European monarchies followed suit. France established its national archives by royal decree in 1569, Sweden in 1618, and Denmark in 1665.³² The construction of central state archives that started in the 16th century can be perceived as an integral part of the new politics of "governmentality," by which Western European states perfected the administrative art of governing population. One lasting effect of the French Revolution was to turn central state archives into National Archives. In the Age of Nationalism, whose overture was the French Revolution of 1789, further amplified by the Romantic movement, it has become a national imperative to preserve the nation's past. While the old scattered records of the *Ancient regime* documenting the old privileges, properties, and social relations were destroyed in the midst of the revolutionary thrust to break away from the monarchic past, the new Republican power founded its own National Archive as soon as 1794 to form the basis of a new republican order of memory. Like in so many other aspects, the French Revolution undeniably marked a milestone in the entangled relationship between political power, civil society, and the institution of the archive. Its effects were threefold: first, it introduced the notion of centralized national archives, epitomized in the project of the *Archives nationales*. Created in the midst of the revolutionary turmoil (August 7, 1790), it was definitively established as the central unified state-archives by the Law of 7 Messidor Year II (June 25, 1794) – according to the new revolutionary calendar and chronology, which set its chronogenetic year I in 1789. Until this unification act, pre-revolutionary archives were characterized by a high degree of decentralization, as they were scattered in multiple depository places. For instance, in 1770 only in Paris there were 405 archival repositories. Besides the capital, in the whole of France there were about 5.700 archives (out of which 1.780 were seigneurial archives, while 1.700 were monastic repositories). The census that gathered these data may have omitted many other private and religious archives, which makes it probable, according to the 19th century historian Jean-Marie-Joseph-Arthur Giry, that "without exaggeration, [we can] place at over 10.000 the number of archives in France at the end of the Ancient Régime."³³ The establishment of the national archives as the unified recordkeeping institution was only one of the great feats of the Revolution regarding the archives. The second came as a change of heart, as the now republican state realized and fully assumed the responsibility for taking care and preserving for present use and posterity

³² Lidman, *Libraries and Archives*, 22–26.

³³ Judith M. Panitch, "Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution," in *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, ed. Randall C. Jimerson (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000), 101–122, 110, s.n. 32.

the documentary heritage of the past.³⁴ But this sensibility towards the past along with its accompanying sense of responsibility for conserving built up slowly in the revolutionary consciousness. It first erupted by unleashing a furious will to destroy the legacy of the old French monarchy. The destructive frenzy reached its peak by 1793, until when the infuriated masses, along with more systematically organized state actions, stormed into the records and tore them apart as legal remnants of the hated feudal social organization. Bonfires were lit across the country, confining to the flames the records bearing “the stamp of servitude.”³⁵ But after this archival purge symbolically purified and set the republican present free from the hated old regime of monarchic servitude, the conservative instinct of cultural preservation kicked in. The destructive rage of revolutionary vandalism that originally prevailed eventually exhausted its thrust, and gave way to a conservative stance towards the past. As the historian Michel Delon has aptly said, “The Revolution is contained entirely in this alternation between brutal elimination of the past and its sublimation as testament.”³⁶ If this is a just synthetic appraisal of the French Revolution in its entirety, it is all the more correct when applying specifically to its relationship to the past mediated by the institution of the archives. This radical transition from brutal elimination of the past to its sublimation as testament was facilitated by a similarly radical *semantic shift* in the public understanding of the archive. The pre-revolutionary understanding of the archive can be grasped by reading the entry on “archives” in Diderot and d’Alembert’s famous *Encyclopédie* (1751–72), the pinnacle of enlightened thought: “Archives is the term used for those old titles or charters which contain the rights, pretensions, privileges, and prerogatives of a house, a town, or a kingdom.”³⁷ It was based on this legalistic definition of the archives as the depository of aristocratic privileges that a public hatred erupted during the first years of the Revolution as an expression of the revolutionary vandalism wanting to break free from the past. The semantic shift involved the transition from the understanding of archives as the “statutes of tyrants” and as documentary monuments of people’s servitude, to understanding the archives of the nation as documenting the civil rights and preserving the memory of the Revolution. The third major consequential effect the French Revolution has had on the archival institution was its opening up to the public. The principle of public access to the national archive was ruled by Article 37 of the Messidor decree (Law of 7 Messidor, year II), which stipulated that “Every citizen may demand in all the depositories, on the established days and times, communication of the pieces that they contain,” free of charge but with the appropriate surveillance precautions.³⁸ For the first time in archival history, archives were opened to the public. Citizens of the

³⁴ Ernst Posner, “Some Aspects of Archival Development since the French Revolution,” *The American Archivist* 3 (1940): 159–172, 161.

³⁵ Panitch, “Liberty, Equality, Posterity?,” 113.

³⁶ C.f. *Ibid.*, 102–103.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁸ Krzysztof Pomian, “The Archives: From the *Trésor des Chartes* to the CARAN,” in *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Volume 4: *Histoires and Memories*, eds. Pierre Nora and David P. Jordan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 27–100, 48. A much more lapidary translation is provided by Posner, “Some aspects of archival development,” 162.

republic could now have access to the records three days a week, 9 hours per day – from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M., and from 5 P.M. to 9 P.M. respectively.³⁹

The tides of nationalism that later overflowed with the coming of Romanticism were first raised by the Napoleonic conquest of Europe in which a significant role was played by the Napoleonic sack of European state archives. Huge quantities of records (along with art collections) were taken from all over Europe to the newly constructed archives building in Paris, in order to give material concreteness to the utopian dream of centralizing not all the records of the country (a task already underway since the Revolution) but all the records of the continent. This sack of state archives contributed to the formation of the nationalist reaction throughout Europe, greatly fuelled by Romanticism which thought of the archives as treasure houses of collective memory of nations. They needed to be protected from acts of vandalism similar to the Napoleonic sack since, as sources of historical memory, archives are the fountainhead of national identity. The glorification of a monumental national past that started with the romantic historiography could not have been achieved without the textual bricks deposited in the archival masonry. The monumental past of the nation could not have been written without the documentary monuments of the archives. It was against this political and cultural background – Napoleonic conquest of Europe, rising tides of nationalism, new romantic sensibilities – that more and more public records suddenly “acquired the dignity of national monuments.”⁴⁰ The French model of the National Archives was soon adopted throughout Europe, as other states started to establish their own similar institutions of memory. Realizing the identity potential of the archives, European states founded similar institutions, directly inspired by the French blueprint: Finland in 1816, Norway one year later in 1817, Belgium, England and the Netherlands during the 1830s. Since then, the archive has become a crucial and all-important institution of national memory, as it is now inconceivable to imagine a successful political project of nation-state building without being rooted in the institutional backbone of the archive.

With the rise of totalitarian regimes, the twentieth century has shown once again the intrinsic link connecting political power and the archive. One of the main institutional pillars and efficient means of social and political domination was the Secret Police, which compiled vast quantities of records as an output of their surveillance of the population. The huge materials forming the archives of the former Secret Police inherited by the post-totalitarian states in the aftermath of the 1989 revolutions are still posing a great challenge to the political power-holders of today, who are reluctant, as in the case of Romania, to open up the secret archives of the *Securitate*.

The mnemonic infrastructure made up of heritage institutions set up to preserve the memory of the past came into being once the library, and, much later, the museum joined the archive, which has always been the central institution of memory. The library, as an institution of preserving knowledge, came into being not earlier than 1.000 B.C., when the great “scribalization of wisdom” occurred as oral traditions that have survived from time immemorial by being transmitted from generation to

³⁹ Panitch, 111.

⁴⁰ Posner, 166.

generation by word of mouth started to be written down.⁴¹ The establishment of the library is part and parcel of this process of textualizing oral traditions that was made possible by what Merlin Donald has called the “exographic revolution” unleashed by the invention of writing.⁴² Just like its twin-institution of memory – the archive – the library has continually existed throughout human history, but only after the print revolution and the religious Reform of the 15th and 16th centuries did it start to pose a thorny problem for political authority. Until these momentous events, given the feeble percent of the literate population and the consequent small amount of written texts, libraries could be easily controlled by the authorities of the day. But with the bibliographical explosion brought about by Gutenberg’s invention, combined with the Reform’s struggle to literate people so as to read the Bible themselves, books became a dangerous thing. It is against this background that state powers introduced the institution of “legal deposit,” a measure that set the foundation for the future establishment of national libraries. The first legal deposit law was issued in France, in 1537, when Francis I ruled that one copy of every book published throughout the kingdom should be submitted to the Royal Library in order to receive legal authorization. Although the memory function was not absent – the law justifies its introduction by its intention to preserve for posterity the written memory of the nation – it has to be conceded that the *ratio prima* for its ruling was nonetheless the state’s efforts to control the flow of ideas.⁴³ The legal deposit law was soon copied by states throughout Europe, with the Habsburg monarchy first introducing it tentatively in 1579, only to definitively issue it in 1624. England (1662), Spain (1712), Poland (1747), Portugal (1796) and the Netherlands (1798) followed suit, establishing their national libraries upon the basis of the legal deposit law. It was in these newly established national libraries that the entire written memory of the nations would be stored and protected from the damages of time. Seen in this light as a form of censorship, legal deposit sheds light on the way in which political power made its way in the heart of the institution of the library, just as it did with the archive. But unlike the archive, which has only recently become the subject of democratic reform, as the archive was called upon to transform itself from a state-apparatus devised to perpetuate the power of the rulers into an accountable institution of democratic government, the library’s link to power was contested as early as the age of enlightenment. So libraries have an ambiguous relationship with power, as they have a dual nature: at the same time when states were tightening their control over knowledge by ruling the legal deposit law, the ideology of Enlightenment gave public libraries unprecedented importance in its project of human emancipation. Within the enlightenment’s philosophy of salvation through knowledge – an opposite of the religious soteriology of salvation through belief – libraries were seen as cognitive temples and were placed, accordingly, in the centrepiece of the emancipatory endeavours. It was during the age

⁴¹ Karel van der Toorn, “Why Wisdom Became a Secret: On Wisdom as a Written Genre,” in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 21–29, 26; Lidman, *Libraries and Archives*, 7, 18.

⁴² Merlin Donald, “The Exographic Revolution: Neuropsychological Sequelae,” in *Cognitive Life of Things: Recasting the Boundaries of the Mind*, eds. Colin Renfrew and Lambros Malafouris (Cambridge: McDonald Institute Monographs, 2010), 71–79.

⁴³ Lidman, *Libraries and Archives*, 26–27.

of enlightenment that *les philosophes* imagined the library as a perfect cognitive *heterotopia*, as an institution containing the entire knowledge of humanity. Heterotopias, as Michel Foucault defined them, are spaces in which fragments that can be found within the outside culture are brought together, where they are simultaneously displayed, but just as they are jointly represented, they “are at one and the same time [...] challenged and overturned.”⁴⁴

The museum, the third and latest addition to form the institutional triptych of modernity’s mnemonic infrastructure, shares many of its features with the archive and the library. Including, to be sure, their intrinsic links to political power. In the museum’s case, etymology leads our enquiry on a wrong track, as it is semantically misleading, since it can wrongly suggest that the museum is an ancient institution of memory. The Greek *mouseion* means the “seat of the Muses” and it designated the place of contemplation where scholars were gathering together to conduct their intellectual businesses under the protection of the Muses. It is in this sense, as an institution of contemplation, that the Mouseion at Alexandria – which contained the notorious Library of Alexandria – has functioned from the 3rd century B.C. until its final destruction sometime during the 4th century A.D. Another heterotopical project, just like the archive and the library, the public museum appeared in the late 18th century out of the “cabinets of curiosities” of the previous ages. The first to open its doors to the public – to a narrowly defined notion of public, we should mention, limited to the upper classes – was the Ashmolean Museum set up in Oxford (1683) to house the cabinet of curiosities the University recently received from Elias Ashmole. In 1743, Vatican authorities opened its art and archaeological collections to the public by setting up the Capitoline Museums. Soon to follow were the British Museum (1753) and, shortly after the French Revolution, the *Musée du Louvre* (1792). The sparks that would ignite the still ongoing “museum revolution” were produced in the 18th century,⁴⁵ when private collections turned into public exhibitions. With the spread of the European model based on these *museal inaugurals* all across the world, 19th century was the century of the museum. It was during the long nineteenth century that the world experienced “the first museum boom,” as the museum building has been integrated as a crucial part of the process of state-building and national identity formation.⁴⁶ Along with the archive and the library, the public museum was the expression of what could be called, according to Foucault, as modernity’s *heterotopian* cognitive ambition, that is to say, “the idea of accumulating everything, [...] of creating a sort of universal archive, the desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place, and yet a place that is outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years, according to a plan of almost perpetual and unlimited accumulation within an irremovable place.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 330–336, 332.

⁴⁵ Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson, eds., *Museum Revolutions. How Museums Change and Are Changed* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Lewis, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “history of museums”, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/398827/history-of-museums> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁴⁷ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 334–335.

What particularizes the museum from its institutional counterparts with whom it shares the memory function of conserving the past is its *exhibiting function*, that of publicly displaying the past. It is in this context that we can speak of the politics of museological display, as history museums have always been, until the coming of postmodern times, the showcase of the nation-state's glorious past.

Taking a preliminary stock of our argument up to this point, we have advanced the idea that just as the terror of death is a – if not *the* – fundamental anxiety of human condition, we can plead the case for the existence of a terror of oblivion ingrained both in the human psyche and in the collective culture. Human existence through history – which we read as being a history of individual and collective struggle against oblivion – expresses a continual craving for remembering and being remembered. We have detailed how this ardent “will for memory” manifested itself in (1) the *practical mode* of taming oblivion and gaining mastery over memory as occurring both at (1.1.) the *individual level* through the means of the classical art of memory, and at (1.2.) the *collective level*, either through the development of (1.2.1.) *technologies of memory* such as writing, print, and the internet, or through establishing (1.2.2.) *institutions of memory* such as the archive, the library, and the museum. It is now the right time to move on to the second mode of the human quest of surviving oblivion, (2) the *symbolic one*.

2. The *symbolic mode* of struggling against oblivion takes the form of the quest for memorial eternity guaranteed by the achievement of *symbolic immortality*. Robert Jay Lifton, to which the credits for coining the term must be given, insightfully perceived “the human aspiration to live forever” as a fundamental longing of humankind.⁴⁸ Along with fellow Eric Olson, Lifton has distinguished between five modes by which people have denied the finality of death and could thus gain a sense of symbolic immortality. First, death can be transcended through *biological immortality*, simply by procreating and continue to live through one's offsprings. As Lifton and Olson rightly point out, this bid for immortality through children is never purely biological, this being the reason why it should be better named as “biosocial immortality,” as in most societies paternity is often a social affair, where social fatherhood can be more important than the biological one. The second way in which people can achieve a sense of symbolic eternity is the *creative mode*. By crafting works of art, devising scientific theories, writing books and other creative activities of this sort, their authors can survive death through (and in) their creations. The third mode of symbolic eternity is the *theological immortality*, the religiously promised afterlife as a reward of living a good life. An anthropological survey of cultures revealed that 98% of the cultures indexed by the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS) have a conception of afterlife.⁴⁹ SCCS contains anthropological data on a sample of 186 cultures from all across the world, organized on coded variables that allow for statistical analysis. Only in 2% of the cultures for which there is available data, there is no notion of afterlife. The other 98

⁴⁸ Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson, “Symbolic Immortality,” in *Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, ed. Antonius C.G.M. Robben (Oxford: Blackwell): 32–39, 32.

⁴⁹ Brooks B. Hull and Frederik Bold, “Hell, Religion and Cultural Change,” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics (JITE)*, 150 (1994): 447–464. The subsequent percentages are taken from Hull and Bold's paper.

percent of them vary in terms of the complexity of the afterlife. 18% of the cultures have what could be called as an *egalitarian static post-mortem monist* conception of the afterlife, as they believe afterlife to be simple, tantamount to sleep, and the same for everyone. 30% of them have a more sensuous variant of the previous one, since they believe that afterlife comes in a single form, either as pleasant or an unpleasant one, the same for everyone. It could be named as the *egalitarian sensual monist* conception of afterlife. 29% of the cultures forming the sample could be described as expressing a *symmetrical egalitarian post-mortem dualism*, as they imagine the afterlife to have two alternatives – such as heaven and hell – or perhaps even conceive of a triadistic model of the afterlife – heaven and hell buffered by the interstitial space of the purgatory. The remaining 21% have a rather complex idea of the afterlife, with more than two final destinations to be reached by passing through multiple stages. Their high degree of conceptual complexity makes them worthy of bearing the name of *inegalitarian* or *stratified post-mortem pluralism*, as people are getting personalized rewards or punishments in their afterlife so as to correspond to their worldly behaviours. What can be concluded from this data is not only that the belief in the afterlife is a cultural (quasi)universal but also that in fifty percent (50%) of the cultures included in the SCCS a somewhat elaborate degree of conceptual refinement can be observed. Our own inquiry in the Human Area Files database revealed that out of the 290 pre-industrial cultures from all over the world, 270 (93%) have eschatological doctrines, i.e., conceptions of the survival (and possible career) of the soul after death; notions about ghosts, spectres, apparitions, and phantoms; duration of afterlife; belief in immortality; ideas of transmigration and reincarnation; conception of the survival of the body (e.g., resurrection).⁵⁰ If we narrow the scope of our analysis, but give it more methodological rigor, by using the Probability Sample Files (PSF), 58 cultures out of 60 (97%) have some sorts of eschatological beliefs.⁵¹ These results are fully consistent with Hull and Bold's findings. The fourth mode of transcending death is achieved through continuity with *nature*. If theological immortality conquers death by spiritual survival, *natural immortality* promises material survival, but accomplished by the disintegration of the flesh in the eternally enduring nature. It is captured in the biblical saying, "for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis, 3, 19). Lifton and Olson mention a fifth mode of symbolic immortality which they call as *experiential transcendence*. In contrast to all the previous modes, this one is a lived subjective experience of transcending time. While all other modes are promising immortality as a future outcome (through children, in the afterlife, through reuniting with nature), this mode is achieving symbolic immortality in the present – *hic et nunc* – by arresting the passing of time. Its archetypical expression is the ecstatic experience facilitated by a range of catalysts such as dance and music, war and sport, artistic creation or intellectual contemplation, orgiastic love or even childbirth, drugs and alcohol.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Human Area Files*, eHRAF World Cultures online database, Eschatology, Subject description, OCM code 775.

⁵¹ Probability Sample Files is a representative stratified random sample of 60 cultures selected from the universe of 290 cases indexed by the Human Files Area database.

⁵² Lifton and Olson, "Symbolic Immortality," 37.

Although there are many modes of achieving a sense of symbolic immortality, not all of them guarantee what we will call *memorial eternity*. Biological immortality through passing your genes to your children can ensure memorial eternity only if it is accompanied by a cult of ancestors, and only in those societies where biological mother– and fatherhood are coterminal with socially designated parenthood. Theological immortality with its transcendence of death in the afterlife ensures memorial eternity only to the saints and martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Christ. For “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,”⁵³ and it is only they that the mnemonic community of faith and practice which is the Church will remember in its liturgical commemorations. As for the fourth and fifth modes – “return to the dust” to reunite with nature and the illusion of present immortality obtained through the means of experiential transcendence – they provide no guarantee what so ever for achieving memorial eternity. It is only the *creative mode* of symbolic immortality that is directly and intrinsically connected to memory, as the authors of the valued creations (artistic, literary, scientific, etc.) survived not only through their artefacts, but also in the collective memory. We propose, as a more inclusive category containing Lifton and Olson’s creative mode, the *heroic road to symbolic immortality*. We posit heroism – of which the creative type is only a subspecies – to be the memorial mode of symbolic immortality. What we are thus proposing is the outlines of a theory of heroism as the gateway to eternal immortality in the collective memory, be it either the national memory in the case of military and political heroes, the cultural memory in the case of artistic and intellectual heroes, or the religious memory in the case of martyred heroes.

Ernest Becker’s reflection on death and humans’ reactions to overcome death set out the framework on which the “terror management theory” (TMT) has been erected. The central theoretical premise of TMT is that the awareness of death and the fear that comes along with the consciousness of its inevitability are fundamental to human existence. “This awareness of the inevitability of death in an animal instinctively programmed for self-preservation and continued existence created the potential for paralyzing terror, a problem that needed to be resolved if our species was to remain a viable contender for survival on a planet fraught with danger,” say TMT’s advocates.⁵⁴ Humans solved this dreadful problem posed by the terror of death by creating culture, i.e., a world of meaning whose crucial role was to assuage the fundamental anxiety deep-seated in the human psyche by the inevitability of mortality. Cultural worldviews are thus “anxiety buffers” devised to alleviate the terror of death by creating a world of meaning imbued with standards of value whose observance promises the transcendence of death – either by conferring literal immortality through afterlife, or by providing symbolic immortality achieved through the survival of the self in larger-than-the-self-entities such as the tribe or the nation or in their collective memory. Becker himself has argued compellingly that societies provide “cultural hero systems” that promote within their members ideals of heroic feats (which, *in extremis*,

⁵³ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, Chapter L.13, <http://www.tertullian.org/works/apologeticum.htm> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁵⁴ Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, “Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinement,” *Advances in Social Psychology* 29 (1997): 61–139, 64.

can take the form of heroic martyrdom) as a strategy that allows them, individually as well as a collective entity, to conquer death and to achieve symbolic immortality. Individually, the heroic life (and death) is also a path to redemption, enabling the hero to secure his or her memorial eternity in the group's collective memory. Each society, irrespective of its particularity, is structurally "a symbolic system of action, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behaviour, designed to serve as a vehicle for earthly heroism," argues Becker.⁵⁵ Every society is thus a cultural hero-system disseminating a culture of earthly heroism for its members as ways of overcoming not only the terror of the meaninglessness of life, but also the terror of the meaninglessness of death and, supremely important for our argument, of gaining a sense of symbolic immortality by inscribing their selves, through heroic feats, in the collective memory. The problem with this heroic route for memorial salvation is that the recognition of the heroic status is an extremely selective affair. Every member of society is urged to be a hero, but only an extreme minority can ever receive heroic recognition along with memorial eternity. As we shall point out in the succeeding section, heroic memory is a hieratic form of remembering. Only a handful of heroes can be remembered in the historical memory, making heroism a highly inefficient strategy for achieving memorial eternity.

Hieratic and demotic forms of remembering – the canon and the archive

Heroic action propels its subject into one of the three types of canonical memory: religious, national (political and/or military memory of the ethnic group), or cultural. Religious, national, and cultural memories can be conceived of as forming *the triptych of canonical memory*. Either as a martyr of the Church, as a soldier dying on the altar of the country, or as an artist or intellectual dedicating his/her entire life to a cultural cause – the subject of heroic action gains his/her symbolic afterlife and memorial eternity in the canonical memory of his/her survivors. Despite the differences that particularize religious memory from national and cultural memories, they share nonetheless a fundamental common denominator. They are all *canonical memory systems*, whose most characteristic features are their supremely elitist nature along with their extremely exclusivist and selective criteria of inclusion. These features determine the class of objects deemed worthy of remembering (be them prophets and saints, military heroes and political visionaries, or artistic masters and intellectual prodigies) to be strictly limited. It lies within the nature of the heroic act – i.e., its exceptional character when judged against the ordinary or average norms of everyday life – that all symbolic afterlives achieved by way of heroism belong to the canonical type of collective memory. Not only religious memory but national and cultural memories as well are hieratic memories *par excellence*, surrounded by an aura of sacredness that keeps them apart from the rest of the mundane objects that go unremembered. Their selectivity and exclusivity are built-in features of canonical memories. When canonical memory, regularly restricted to heroic elites, happens to relax its criteria of inclusion and open its doors to the masses, it includes them but deprives them of their personal and nominal identities. Such is the case with the Cult of the Unknown Soldier – a demotic element inserted in the hieratic memory of the elected few to be remembered.

⁵⁵ Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 4.

Since time immemorial, political (and starting with the 19th century national) memory has been largely synonymous with dynastic memory – a Carlylesque memory of the Great Men of History, in whose selective company access was granted only to a handful of ordinary people (without aristocratic pedigree and blue blood running through their veins) who conquered their spot in the political memory with their extraordinarily heroic feats of arms (e.g., The Maid of Orléans – Joan of Arc). Demotic national memory – as epitomized in the Cult of the Unknown Soldier – is by definition anonymous memory. The narrowness of the canonical memory can be explained by pointing out both the extraordinary nature of the heroic act, which by this very feature limits the candidates to be included into the canonical memory, and the inherent limits of human capacities of ritual remembering.

The “canonicity” of the canonical memory explains its fundamentally dual nature: on the one hand, it is precisely the secret behind its success, but on the other hand, it is precisely its extremely elitist criteria of inclusion that fail to do general justice to humans’ universal fear of being forgotten. Remembering a canon of martyrs (be them for Christ, the Homeland, or for Knowledge) through rituals of commemoration such as the cult of saints in the Catholic Church ensures the cultural persistence and generational transmission of those few memory-objects through time, but it also leaves aside great many other non-canonized persons. The archive, by contrast, is a demotic, all-inclusive institution of memory. In sharp contradistinction to the canonical types of memory, the archive is indiscriminately welcoming. Despite this all-inclusiveness and openness, the archive is nonetheless paradoxically “forgetful”. With a metaphorical license, archives can be seen, in a necropolis light, as the graveyards of memory, the burial sites of textualized remembrances. Resurrection is possible, but it will need a miracle to happen. Most often, the miracle embodies the flesh of a historian. Working as an archive gravedigger, the historian can bring people to life from the burial of the past. We have here the “Lazarus effect” of the historical research, symbolically rising from the dead long forgotten people. Paradigmatic in this regard is the case of Menocchio, the 16th century miller trialled, imprisoned, and eventually burned at the stake by the Inquisition for his heretical beliefs, who was the hero of Carlo Ginzburg’s masterful book, *The Cheese and the Worms*.⁵⁶ Physically blasted by the flames of the Church, he was nonetheless symbolically placed in the textual coffin of the Inquisition’s records, as his beliefs – however distorted by the inquisitorial procedures of interrogation – were saved from oblivion in the shelter of the archive. People live in memory, but they do not live in archives. Living memory – the canon – is kept alive precisely by continual remembering practices, be they pragmatic usage such as it happens in cases of *argumentum ab auctoritate*, or pious reverence as it is the case with the worship of the classics. Whereas the archive is the locus of dead memory, still memory, virtually saveable from the irreclaimable effect of oblivion, but *mummified memory*, pending for a miraculous rising to post-corporal life. But we should add hastily to polish this funeral metaphor that by “mummified memory” with which we are describing archival memory we are referring to the plaster bodies of Pompeii (mummified by accident), rather than to the deliberately embalmed

⁵⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

bodies of the Pharaohs of Egypt – mummified by design. The latter belongs to the canon rather than to the archive, as “true mummification,” i.e., the complete treatment of eviscerating and embalming the body, which could be afforded only by the upper classes. Conversely, mummification by accident, as it happened in Pompeii, is a democratic process, resembling to the *modus operandi* of the archive. The contrast between the archive and the canon can be further sharpened by falling back upon yet another necropolis metaphor. Taking a step further on this metaphorical path, it could be argued that the canon is the site of *reliquiae*, revered with awe by a community of worshipers, while the archive is the graveyard. The archive is therefore “in-between” memory and oblivion, frozen as it is between resisting to putrefaction into oblivion and awaiting to be revered as halidom by the still living. Set against this metaphorical background, it should not come as a surprise that in his most cryptic novel, *All the Names*, José Saramago describes the Central Registry and the General Cemetery as twin institutions, as the former can be thought of as a confluent of the latter, at the same time as the latter is but an appendix of the former.⁵⁷ The repository not of bones and rotten flesh, but of people made out of paper and ink, the archive is the celluloid catacombs of humankind. “Paper cadavers,” as Kirsten Weld names the people catalogued in the state’s archives.⁵⁸

With the digitalization of memory, and especially with the advent of the ever-expanding virtual archive of the internet, a decisive technological shift has occurred in human endeavours to store its experiences. There are, of course, lines of continuity with the classical celluloid archive. Digital archives are, without a doubt, expanding to a level never before reached by the storing capacity of archival institutions. Eliminating the physical document by converting it in virtual file – or even recording it directly as such –, the spatial limitation of classical archives is thus overcome. But digital archives also bring ruptures. Among the most significant of these is the fact that people, while continuing to be registered and their actions recorded in digital and/or classical archival institutions by state agencies, can now make their own way into memory. Since the internet archive with its digital memory is an open-ended project continuously shaped not by officially sanctioned procedures of the classical archive (record creation, use, cataloguing, disposition, appraisal, etc.) but by a quasi-anarchic process as a result of unregulated interactions between users, ordinary individuals can now inscribe themselves into the digital memory through their online actions.

A paradigmatic shift in the culture of memory – the default of remembering and the right to be forgotten

We have argued so far that the will to memory and the struggle against oblivion is part and parcel of human condition. Building on this basic anthropological premise, we have detailed the means by which humans have tried to gain mastery over memory, be them practical modes (such as devising arts of memory and developing technologies and institutions of memory) or symbolic modes of ensuring an afterlife and thus memorial eternity in the community’s collective memory. We have shown that

⁵⁷ José Saramago, *All the Names* (London: Harvill, 1999).

⁵⁸ Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers. The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

although the canonical types of memory are the best ways of achieving this sense of symbolic immortality in the successors' remembrances, the entrance in these hieratic memory systems is conditioned by the mnemonic policy of heroic acts, which makes them highly selective. Therefore, canonical memory fails to redeem humanity from oblivion, but only the chosen few. The archive, a demotic institution of memory, promises to save from oblivion not only the heroes, but also the masses. While partially delivering this promise, we have shown that archives can also be seen as graveyards of memory. Digital memory, instead, can fulfil humankind's old dream of gaining perfect mastery over memory. Before the digital age of memory brought about by the internet revolution, humans have always struggled against the notorious shortage of space available to their remembrances (individual as well as collective). Storing everything in the mind or in the external memory-systems devised for capturing human experiences was a utopian aspiration. But with the coming of the digital age, it is now technologically possible. But here comes *the great paradox*: with the right to be forgotten ruled by the European Court of Justice, digital memory is being humanized. What we are witnessing is the *anthropomorphisation of digital memory*. The paradoxical nature of this process lies in the fact that digital memory – which is now technologically capable of storing virtually everything, of recording practically all human experiences, and of being a flawless and complete archive – is shaped by judicial policies to model the imperfect, fallible workings of human memory. Oblivion, which is a structural feature of the imperfect human memory, is introduced into the virtually perfect remembering system of the digital memory.

Once ruled by the European Court of Justice, the right to be forgotten has been established as the formal judicial framework for a new paradigm of public remembering in the digital age of memory. But this formal aspect is accompanied and was preceded by informal communication practices that are already exercising, in private exchanges, the right to be forgotten. Starting with 2011, a new class of communication apps and software made its way into the digital scene. Cries for reintroducing forgetting in the digital realm of quasi-perfect memory by ingraining an “expiration date” into digital information were already made by 2009, in books such as Viktor Mayer-Schönberger's *Delete* praising the vanishing virtue of forgetting in the advent of digital age.⁵⁹ Responding to calls to reset the balance between forgetting and remembering starkly disturbed in favour of the latter and simultaneously with users' increased needs to privacy and informational protection, the *ephemeral messaging movement* was launched by applications such as Snapchat, which introduced the notion of self-destructive messages – a very radical solution to Mayer-Schönberger's proposal of setting an expiration date to digital information. Users can send texts, photos, and video recordings which are programmed to be deleted by default seconds after they were viewed by their recipients. The “life expectancy”⁶⁰ set by the expiration date imprinted in the meta-information of the digital data is no longer than 1 to 10 seconds, making digital exchanges virtually as ephemeral as oral communication. Supremely important is that messages will be deleted not only from the users' storages, but also

⁵⁹ Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete. The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 171.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

from the company's servers. In the summer of 2014, Snapchat was said to have more than 100 million monthly active users, only to double its users half a year later, nearing 200 million snappers by January, 2015.⁶¹ Its usage numbers also grew exponentially. If in February 2013 60 million ephemeral messages were sent each day, by May 2014 the number reached 700 million.⁶² In parallel to the aforementioned anthropomorphisation of memory, what we are witnessing is also a *digital recreation of oral culture*, as ephemerality is reinstalled as the principle of digitally mediated oral communication. Writing – the great technological divider between orality and literacy – is not eliminated from interpersonal communication. But what gets removed is the fundamental characteristic of writing, that is to say, its objective, externalized, durability. The Horacean dictum of “*Verba volant*,” the principle of ephemerality so characteristic of oral cultures, echoes the new principle of ephemerality of orally simulated digitalized cultures, which is not anymore “*Scripta manent*,” but *Scripta volant*. Self-effacing texts, deleted by default – these are the new principles of textual communication starting to govern postmodern digitized society.

How can we make sense of these momentous shifts in the culture of memory? The legal “right to be forgotten,” along with the informal communication praxis of ephemeral messaging, signal the coming of a paradigmatic shift in the order of memory. It can be described as the transition from the will to public memory to the *private quest for public oblivion*. The driving force behind this swift shift is the ever-increasing societal capacity to remember which threatens to abolish any right to privacy that individuals might claim for themselves in the face of the rising tide of technological power to store ever more information on their preferences, actions, and identities. As shown compellingly by Mayer-Schönberger, one major consequence of the digital revolution consisted in toppling the venerable balance between memory and oblivion, between remembering and forgetting. For millennia, as we have shown in the first part of this paper, humans were at pains to secure their memories from oblivion, supporting extreme psychological, societal, and financial costs for this purpose. In the classical age of memory, remembering was an expensive and tedious effort, therefore people were obliged to resort to extremely selective criteria in choosing what to confine to the vaults of their memory. In this classical age of memory, forgetting was the norm while remembering was something exceptional, founding pre-digital societies on a “default of forgetting.”⁶³ This is no longer the case, as digital technology has changed the default of forgetting into a default of remembering. For the first time in human history, remembering is cheaper than forgetting, in both financial and

⁶¹ Douglas Macmillan and Evelyn M. Rusli, “Snapchat Is Said to Have More Than 100 Million Monthly Active Users,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug 26, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2014/08/26/snapchat-said-to-have-more-than-100-million-monthly-active-users> (accessed March 24, 2015); Alyson Shontell, “Snapchat Is A Lot Bigger Than People Realize And It Could Be Nearing 200 Million Active Users,” *Business Insider*, Jan 3, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/snapchats-monthly-active-users-may-be-nearing-200-million-2014-12> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁶² Alyson Shontell, “5 Months After Turning Down Billions, Snapchat’s Growth Is Still Exploding With 700 Million Photos Shared Per Day,” *Business Insider*, May 2, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/snapchat-growth-2014-5?IR=T> (accessed March 24, 2015).

⁶³ Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete*, 13.

psychological terms. The technological cause and prerequisite of this dramatic turnabout was the force of *digitization*, which made *cheap storage*, *easy retrieval*, and *global reach* possible.⁶⁴ The outcome of this process was the making of a “transparent society”⁶⁵ endowed with a never-before power of remembering and saving public and private data in its digital memory stored in “server farms.” In parabolic terms, the transparent society brought about by the digital memory revolution is a Zamyatinesque transparency, as in his dystopian city of glass in which every movement and action is under permanent surveillance by the watchful eye of the authority.⁶⁶ Changing the terminology, but keeping the dystopian theme, it can be argued that the quasi-perfect and permanent digital memory transforms society into a *mnemonic chronotopial cyber panopticon*. By “mnemonic panopticism” – the first component of the term we are advancing – we refer to a society in which the societal capacity to remember through digital memory makes its subject behave as if everything they have ever done can be publicly remembered. Mnemonic panopticism is, without a doubt, a disciplinary mechanism, encouraging people to self-censorship and to think twice before taking action in the digital realm.⁶⁷ The term “chronotopial panopticon” is meant to express the fact that the all-encompassing digital memory is not only making information easily accessible to a global audience abolishing thus geographical constraints (i.e., spatial panopticon), but it also denies the temporal dimension by making information timely, however old and outdated. This mnemonic chronotopial panopticon is simultaneously and necessarily a “cyber panopticon,” since this degree of mnemonic surveillance spread across space and time could not have been possible without the technology of digital remembering. Needless to say, privacy has been swept away under the tidal wave of digitalization. Cries for limiting the invasion of individual privacy have been made since the late 19th century. Prompted by the increasing audacity of the mass media in invading “the sacred precincts of private and domestic life,” Boston lawyers Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis published in 1890 a highly influential paper in *Harvard Law Review*, claiming “the right to privacy.”⁶⁸ Lamenting over the immorality of the newspapers and journalists, accused of elevating trivial backyard gossip to “the dignity of print” and transforming gossip from “the resource of the idle and of the vicious” to a fully-fledged trade “pursued with industry as well as effrontery,”⁶⁹ Warren and Brandeis reacted by claiming legal informational protection of the individual against her potential privacy invaders. Each individual

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁵ David Brin, *The Transparent Society. Will Technology Force Us to Choose Between Privacy and Freedom?* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

⁶⁶ Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

⁶⁷ Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete*, 3-4 relates the case of Andrew Feldmar, a psychotherapist in his late sixties living in Vancouver, Canada, who in 2006 was barred the right to enter into the United States after a zealous border guard queried his name in a search engine and found an article published in 2001 in which Feldmar mentioned that he had taken LSD in the 1960s. Feldmar’s case is an eloquent expression of the “temporal panopticon” made possible by digital remembering.

⁶⁸ Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, “The Right to Privacy,” *Harvard Law Review* 4 (1890): 193–220.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 196.

should have the right to choose what parts of his/her “private life, habits, acts, and relations” are to be shared or not with others.⁷⁰ The real fright was not so much the age-old gossip, be it even given the dignity of print, so as the new technology allowing journalists to take “instantaneous photographs” and newspapers to circulate without authorization portraits of private persons. Eight decades later, it was not the impropriety of the newspapers but the governmental and corporative eagerness to gather personal data on its citizens and customers, made possible by newly available computer technology, that impelled Arthur R. Miller in 1971 to denounce “the assault on privacy.”⁷¹ Written at the dawn of the computer age, Miller’s book raised the alarm on the perils of state and private agencies stocking personal information in comprehensive databases to be used in administration and/or marketing. The legal scholar repeatedly warns against the danger posed by the “hypnotic attraction to electronic record-keeping” to which both public institutions and corporations have fallen prey, in the Western democratic tradition of individual autonomy.⁷² Today, yet another (cluster of) technological advancement(s) is prompting other struggles to prevent the continuous assault on privacy. The right to be forgotten must be situated in the genealogy of these reactions to technological advances threatening individual privacy (first by instant photographs, later by computers, and now by the technological nexus made up of the World Wide Web, the internet, social networking, search engines, and web crawlers).

In the classical age of memory, after passing through this world, the great majority of ordinary people left behind, besides genes (if they had children), properties (if they possessed any), and artefacts (if they made any), only their bones and excrements. Their names, if ever recorded at birth (or baptized), marriage, and death, survived their death only to remain buried in ecclesiastic and/or public archives. All these considerations highlight *the tragedy of human ontological precariousness sub specie aeternitatis*, along with its similarly tragic condition of *posteritous fragility* in the societal memory. But with the coming of the digital age of memory, almost everyone leaves a digital footprint. Not being part of the network society and not contributing to the digital memoryscape requires a highly demanding eremitic philosophy of life – a life of loneliness, social isolation, and quietism. It has become almost impossible in this digital network society to withdraw from the all-encompassing public memory sphere in the now already established digital age of memory. The will to memory continued to struggle against oblivion while society’s technological basis was running on a default of forgetting. Things are dramatically changing in the digital network society, where the ever-expanding public sphere of digital memory prompts individuals to withdraw from the public memory and retreat in their private spheres by invoking the right to be forgotten.

We have stated, in the opening statement of this paper, that the will to memory along with the struggle against oblivion is an anthropological principle of human condition. By the end of our analysis, we arrived at the conclusion that, in

⁷⁰ Ibid., 216.

⁷¹ Arthur R. Miller, *The Assault on Privacy: Computers, Data Banks, and Dossiers* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1971).

⁷² Ibid., 4.

contemporary postmodern societies, a paradoxical cultural matrix is coming into being in the guise of an orally-simulated digitally-mediated culture of communication. Against the background of an ever-expanding public sphere of memory with its irrepressible quest of archiving everything, individuals counteract by taking refuge in the private sphere and by claiming the right to be forgotten. Our conclusion seems to collide with our initial premises, since we have just asserted the contemporary quest of privacy and will to oblivion. This inconsistency allows us to revisit the question of human condition. It should be made clear from the very outset that we are far from claiming to give a solution to the *aporia of human condition*. What we are striving to do is a hermeneutic struggle to make sense of the nature of human condition in the light of our considerations regarding memory and forgetfulness. In a previous paper, we have argued for the technological conditioning of memory, proposing a soft and sober technological conditionalism – not determinism – of human memory, individual as well as collective.⁷³ Faithful to this initial theoretical commitment, we extend our argument so as to cover not only human memory, but human condition. Resting our argument on the theoretical framework set out in books such as Braden R. Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz's *The Techno-Human Condition* and Andy Clark's *Natural-Born Cyborgs*,⁷⁴ we advance a soft and sober technological conditionalism of the human spirit. Challenging the “post-human” hypothesis, i.e., the theory that the unprecedented development of technology that we are witnessing in our times is at odds with human nature throwing the individuals that are trapped within this technological nexus into a post-human condition, Clark argues compellingly that human nature is evolutionarily shaped so as to couple with material and cultural external environment in forming “human-technological symbionts.”⁷⁵ Human mind's proclivity of coupling to external systems (symbolic, social, cultural, technological etc.) along with its natural propensity to form distributed cognitive networks means nothing else but that humans have always been cyborgs. Since human nature itself (i.e., the biological makeup of human species, along with the neurological wiring of the brain and with the internal wiring of the mind) is technologically embedded, what follows is that human condition cannot be anything but technological. In this line of reasoning, the “post-human” condition cannot be reached by further tightening the symbiotic relationship between humanity and technology, but, paradoxically, by removing humans from their technological embedment. Against this background, it is now easy to understand why Allenby and Sarewitz claimed that human condition is “techno-human condition” to begin with. Both as a species and as individuals – so both phylogenetically and ontogenetically –, we are “part of a techno-induced evolutionary program that has been going on more or less since the origins of humankind – a program of continuing expansion of the human desire to understand, modify, and control its surroundings, its prospects, and its self,

⁷³ Mihai Stelian Rusu, “The Media-History of Memory. Mapping the Technological Regimes of Memory,” *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* 2 (2014): 291–326, 298.

⁷⁴ Braden R. Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011); Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs. Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 3.

and to couple to the technologies that surround us even more intimately.”⁷⁶ Marx’s notion of *homo faber* captures this intrinsic link between humans and technology. In fact, human history (both the anthropological history of human species and the social, political, cultural history of human societies) makes sense only by reading it in terms of technological developments. “The history of our species is a history of redesigning ourselves, of fuzzing the boundaries of our inner and outer worlds,” say Allenby and Sarewitz.⁷⁷ We can concur with them that the history of humankind has been the history of redesigning human condition, socio-culturally and technologically, by enhancing, among others, humans’ memory-systems in their historical struggle against oblivion. With the coming of the age of digital memory, characterized by the never-before possibility of storing virtually everything, we are witnessing yet another redesigning of human condition. Digital technology of memory has made humans victorious in their immemorial struggle against oblivion. It is precisely this technological feat that is responsible for the current uprising against comprehensive digital memory systems expressed by the quest for individual privacy and the right to be forgotten. What we have called “the mnemonic principle of human existence” – the striving for remembering the past along with the quest for memorial posterity in the survivors collective memory – was a hallmark of human condition until technological difficulties were overcome by the digital revolution which made quasi-perfect remembering virtually possible. The reaction against the total societal remembering now technologically possible reveals the technological nature of the human condition. To put it bluntly, the strive for public forgetfulness in the age of digital remembering shows that human condition (as expressed in human aspirations, values, and needs) is more or less a function of technological possibilities.

⁷⁶ Allenby and Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition*, 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.