

REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY, 2012/4: 17–33.

Sensations, Evergreens in the Media and Social Memory¹

Watergate Scandal, 9/11 and Others as Places and Milieus of Remembering

Nikos FOKAS - Ákos KOPPER

fokasznikosz@tatk.elte.hu, akoskopper@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This paper offers a longitudinal analysis of media dynamics and aims to capture the media as the vehicle of collective memory in modern societies. Associating the media with memory, however, sounds paradoxical, given that the media is usually associated with novelty and actuality. We argue that parallel to its topicality, the media also creates communities of remembering in modern societies. Hence, we suggest that what Pierre Nora called milieus of memory are not lost in modernity, but merely moved from the realm of interpersonal interactions to the space of the mediated reality of the media. Furthermore, we argue that these milieus of memory frequently evolve into what Nora called places of memory.

KEYWORDS: Social memory, media dynamics, places of memory, milieus of memory, Watergate scandal, 9/11

Introduction

The aim of our study is to scrutinize the role of the media in the formation of the identity of modern societies by providing a vehicle for maintaining social/collective memory. We try to understand the paradox that although the media is generally perceived to be obsessed with topicality, and focus on the present, nevertheless, while focusing on the ‘here and now’, at the same time it plays a crucial role as a vehicle of memory in modern societies. We conclude that the media has a *dual time referent*. On the level of its conscious agents – journalists, publishers, etc. – the media tries to grasp novelty, the topicality and thereby it tends to be forgetful and rarely remembers beyond a few weeks or a few months. As Zygmunt Bauman pointed out, the most important item of information about the news is its perishability (Bauman 2000: 155). At the same time, however, if the media is looked at from the system level, and approached as a subsystem of society, it can be shown that the daily novelties of the news are immersed in the permanent *news-flow* through which the media takes part in the maintenance and the forming of social

¹ The research was supported by OTKA (grant number: K73033) and also by JSPS (KAKENHI Grant Number 23-01794)

memory. The aim of our article is to elucidate this aspect of the working of the media and to capture how the media (journals, TV, internet news sources) contributes to the ***creation of continuity between past and present*** in modern societies.

The question to scrutinize the relationship between media, social memory and social identity is rooted in an approach which neither focuses on the actions and behaviour of individual journalists, publishing houses nor on the one time representations of events, but tries to grasp how topics evolve in the long term, appear in the media and gradually disappear. Metaphorically speaking, we can say that we regard topics as if they were in 'competition to get into media' with some topics to have a short life-span while others to keep on recurring in the media even after decades. Our object of analysis is the sum of all the articles published on a topic by a journal (or several journals or other media outlets) and thereby we try to capture the dynamics of the evolution of topics through a threefold typology, identifying different life-cycles how topics enter and fade from the media. Our analysis relies in its methodology - on a by now extensive literature - on the diffusion of innovation (Tsoularis et al. 2002; Jang et al. 2005), which methodology is, however, not yet prevalent in studies of the media.

The empirical materials we use are predominantly the media representations of the *Watergate scandal* and the *terrorist attack against the Twin Towers*. We chose these topics because we can assume that our readers are familiar with the general context, allowing us to save space by not having to discuss their backgrounds in detail.²

Vehicles and Modes of Remembering

It is our memories that make us into who we are as our identity is rooted in our memories, and without our memories we turn into nothing (Buñuel). As much as this is true of individuals it is also true of communities. It is memory that creates the link between the past and the present and enables members of the community to identify who they are.

In pre-modern societies memories were transmitted predominantly through personal interaction rooted in tradition. As the past was transmitted as a live experience from generation to generation the documentation and the actualization of the past were not separated. Remembering took place through the handing down of customs, routines and interpretations of the world from the older generation to the younger. Thereby, remembering was essentially the repetition of the past, the confirming of the identity of the community through a shared experience. What mattered was remembered without actually making an effort to remember, while everything else was forgotten. The Greek word for truth suggests this link between what mat-

² In our study we focus on journals – such as the New York Times or the Washington Post – nevertheless we believe that the gist of our argument is generally valid to other types of media as well and the methods we propose are also applicable with some reasonable modifications.

ters, what is remembered and what is considered to be the truth. In Greek, *aletheia* (truth) consists of the word *lethe* (forgotten) and the 'a' prefix for negation.

Contrary to such traditional societies, in modernity a community's relation to its past has radically changed, to the extent that Pierre Nora asserts that, in fact, modernity understands something very different by the word remembering than earlier ages did (Nora 1999). In modernity, the nation replaced the organic communities of traditional societies with its institutions, making the past not directly accessible but only through specialized institutions of remembering (Gyáni 2000). Thus, personal interaction as the vehicle of remembering became limited to the family because the function of taking care of the past was increasingly institutionalized.

Nora argues that modernity undermined the organic communities of remembering that provided the backdrop for what Nora called milieus of remembering [*milieux de mémoire*] and replaced them with what he calls places of remembering [*lieux de mémoire*]. These places of remembering are the points of reference in relation to which modern societies identify themselves – such as dates and places of heroic events, or figures of exceptional significance – and it is through these that communities can get in touch with their imagined past. These places of memory are places in the abstract sense as – although they can refer to actual places such as sites where major historical events took place – they can also refer to charismatic leaders of the people, or can be festivals, national holidays that offer the opportunity for members of the community to invoke their myths and interpretations about their imagined roots (Horváth 1999).

Nora asserts that in the modern age, media crowded out the intimacy of personally experiencing tradition with *the ephemeral film of current events* (Nora 1989: 7). This interpretation by Nora is typical as it suggests that the media tends to focus on the present, where media is seen to be driven by the constant need to have something new on the front page (Zelizer 2008: 379). There is always something to draw our attention. As Kundera summed it up in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*:

...The assassination of Allende quickly covered over the memory of the Russian invasion of Bohemia, the bloody massacre in Bangladesh caused Allende to be forgotten, the din of war in the Sinai Desert drowned out the groans of Bangladesh, the massacres in Cambodia caused the Sinai to be forgotten, and so on, and on and on, until everyone has completely forgotten everything (Kundera 1996 : 10).

In the modern world, obsessed with novelty, the media is perceived as the antithesis of tradition. This grasps, however, not merely how the media is seen from the outside, but it also corresponds to how agents of the media see their own role: to focus on novelty and to the here and now. We suggest, however, that the media has a **dual time** referent as it has a secondary function, which is not tied to the constant search for novelty, but which is characterized by continuity and the maintenance of the cohesion of society.

Having said this, we should not overlook that there are occasions when remembering is part of the conscious activity of the media when, for example, through regular special issues, special historical sections, or through choosing the person of the year/the decade/century the media is focusing on the past (Zelizer 2008: 384), joining the ethos of the age to document, to note, to seek one's roots (Nora 1999). We argue, however, that beyond this intentional aspect of focusing on the past the media is also involved in shaping the past and remembering in a more fundamental way. Namely, we contend that the media also acts as the vehicle of social memory not through individual items of news but through the *news-flow*. With our analysis of media dynamics below, we endeavour to show how the media works on the system level, and how it contributes to social remembering.

We should emphasize, however, that the question for us is not how communities remember, but how the media contributes to the **creation of continuity between past and present** and thereby contributes to the society to re-create, maintain itself and to make its present interpretable on the basis of its past. Thus, the question for us is to capture how the media acts as one of the archives of the modern world, where the archive not merely records, but contributes to the shaping of reality. As Derrida suggested: *archivization produces as much as it records the event*. (Derrida 1995: 17). We argue that although in the sense of relying on face-to-face interactions milieus of memory are indeed gone in modern societies; nevertheless, we suggest that milieus of memory can be recaptured in the mediated reality of the media. Furthermore, we suggest that these milieus of memory may gradually turn into the places of memory of modern societies.

Media Dynamics – Three Ideal Types

As the first step in our analysis, we introduce a three-fold typology capturing the life cycle how different topics evolve in the media. We distinguish between three types of dynamics, which are: *actualities*, *evergreens* and *sensations*. Below we introduce these in turn.

1. Actualities

Luhmann has argued that all sub-systems of the modern world rely on the operation to distinguish along a binary logic. Just as much science makes a distinction

between truth and untruth, economy between value and the lack of value, the currency of the media is news. For Luhmann, the operational logic of the media is based on making a distinction between **news** and **no-news** (Luhmann 2007). As the child of modernity, media reflects the relation of modern societies to time: on the impression that the world is always in flux and what is true today would be outdated by tomorrow. In case of the media this means – which is true for television, newspapers and also for the internet media – to look for novelty and share the news of the day with the audience before others would and before the audience would lose interest in the topic, thus before **news** would turn into **no-news**.

In accordance with Luhmann's above-mentioned argumentation, our first type of media dynamics is characterized by **topical actuality**. Here, a topic gradually gains momentum, becomes 'hot' before it would disappear from the media. In case the occurrence of an event is predictable – for example, an election, or an important centenary – the media is aware of it in advance, knowing that it would soon become topical. Hence, as the event approaches the media increasingly publishes reports relating to it; becoming most active around the date of the event; and, after the event, reports on the topic gradually disappear from the media.

If we measure the activity of the media with the quantity of articles published on a given topic on each day (week, month, etc.), we can depict the dynamic of how the media deals with the topic with the well known **bell-curve** (Fig. 1). Alternatively, we can use the cumulative number of articles published on the topic since a particular point of time. In this latter case, we can depict the dynamic of media with the curve that is typical in analyzing the diffusion of innovations, the so called **S-curve** (Fig. 2) (on the vertical scale are the number of articles and on the horizontal scale is time)³.

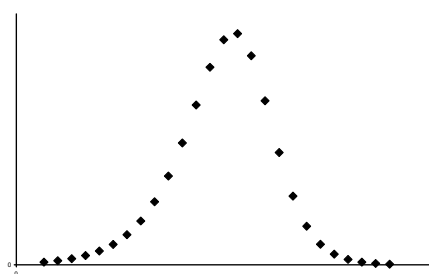


Figure 1. – BELL-CURVE

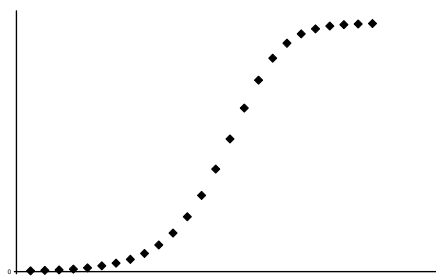


Figure 2. - S-CURVE

The S-curve starts off with a low value, starts to grow slowly, then accelerates, reaching a phase of intense growth after which it slows down and reaches a

³ The two curves show the same. The difference is only that the bell-curve is better to represent the changes of the number of articles day by day, whereas the S-curve depicts better the process as a whole – i.e., it is better to capture dynamics throughout time.

point of saturation as the line becomes horizontal. These curves are well known in the literature on diffusion, for example, in studies on the spread of new technologies (Griliches 1957, David 2003), innovation waves (Grübler et al. 1999) but they are also used, for example, to capture the dynamics how children learn new words of a language as they grow (Modis 1992). Similarly, we use the S-curve to capture how a topic turns from *news* to *no-news*.⁴

Below is a figure, first on the number of articles published in *The New York Times*, marking the fifth anniversary of the attack against the *Twin Towers* (Fig. 3), while the second graph shows the number of articles in a Hungarian daily – *Népszabadság* – before and after the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Revolution (Fig. 4). Looking at these figures, we can see that as the date of the anniversary approached the number of reports increased on the topic, while after the date of the anniversary the number of reports started to decrease, reaching a saturation point.

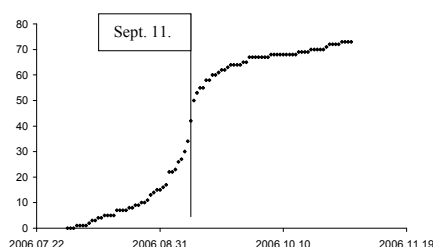


Figure 3. “Twin Towers”,
New York Times

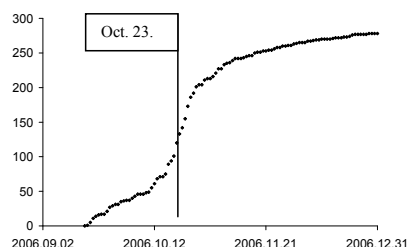


Figure 4. „1956”, Hungarian daily,
Népszabadság

We can see the life cycle of the topic, how news turns into no-news. The time required for this we identify as the “first order” *time-horizon* of the media, the period after which the topic loses the attention of the media. We tentatively suggest – on the basis of the topics we analyzed – that typically this life cycle is usually no longer than a few weeks and only very exceptionally exceeds three months.

2. *Evergreens*

Second, we identify what we call *evergreens*. By *evergreens* we mean topics with constant presence in the media. Some of the *evergreens* are topics of permanent yet of not too intense public interest (like the daily weather report, or what has happened in the daily life of the royal family), while others play the role of interpreting, contextualizing novelties.

⁴ The picture we paint here is idealized as we recognize that it is not only the number of articles, but also their length or their place within a journal that matters. Also in case of a comprehensive case study it should be analyzed if the dynamics is the result of an exogenous factor – i.e. the unfolding of an event – or endogenous factor had also played an important role – i.e. the writing of one article led to the writing of another. We believe, however, that we can put these issues here aside as they do not alter the gist of our argument.

There is a thread of theorizing about the media, which emphasizes the ritualistic operation of the media, highlighting the role of repetitive elements such as the news that comes on every evening at 7 o'clock, daily tragedy, but also regular topics – such as reports on the performance of the economy, or information about healthy living. Through this ritual activity, with the repetition of topics, the media takes part in the creation of *meaning and significance*; it contributes to imposing an order on the world (Carey 1998: 331, 314). Such topics, with constant presence in the media, can be captured by a linear line indicating a constant, though never too intensive growth in the number of articles on the topic. A *linear* graph spanning several years suggests that during the analyzed period the number of new articles on a specific subject was always the same within a given time frame. That is to say, this type of dynamics is not related to some concrete current event, and in this respect the topic may be considered timeless. For this reason, henceforth we shall call these 'evergreens'.

Topics within this category may differ greatly, nevertheless from a phenomenological perspective news about "Prince Charles" – or articles about the "Watergate Scandal" – can be both subsumed under this category.

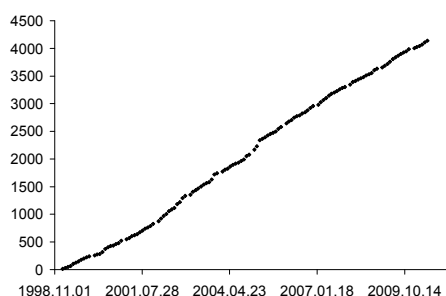


Figure 5. A "Prince Charles", *Guardian* monthly: 02.1999. – 07.2010.

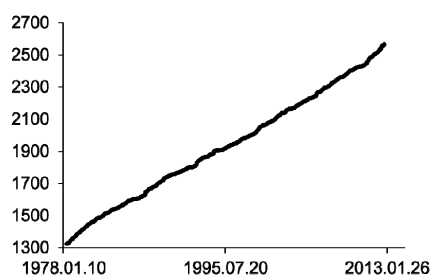


Figure 6. "Watergate scandal" *Washington Post*, articles daily: 01.05. 1978 –22.10.2012

3. Sensations

Finally, we contend that there are topics that immediately grab our attention. Everybody talks about them; the number of reports on them reaches extreme numbers. These topics seem to come out of the blue. Coverage is intense and they occupy considerable space in the media. The graph of the cumulated number of articles on these topics shows a sudden burst and then a levelling off. Below, we offer two examples of such dynamics: Reports about *Guernica* in *The New York Times* (1937) and reports about the 'Watergate scandal' in *The Washington Post* (1973–74). Figs. 7 and 8.

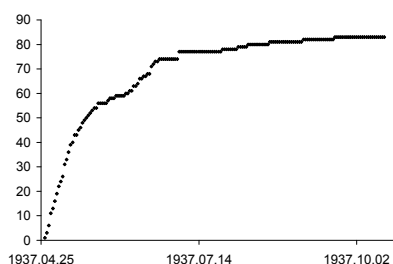


Figure 7. Guernica, *New York Times* daily: 03.04.1937.–16.10.1937.



Figure 8. "Watergate Scandal", *Washington Post* daily: 01.05.1973. –31.12.1974.

We believe that what makes these topics special and why they play a significant role in the collective memory of societies is the intensive emotions they evoke in the audience. This is the topic to which we turn our attention below.

Sensations I - The Milieus, Of Memory

Sensations are unexpected, special, shocking, or scandalous. Yet what is most important to note is that they invoke intense emotions. Psychological studies of memory and emotions suggest that emotional involvement creates arousal, and provides for imprinting in memory (Kensinger 2004; Cahill and McGaugh 1995). Sensations are collective experiences of the community that keep the whole community in a state of excitement, people talk about them on the street. Everybody has to have an opinion about them. Thus, sensations – even if only momentarily – weld the audience together. Thereby, we believe, a community of attention is created, bringing people together in a shared experience, similar to those in the case of Nora's *milieus of memory*.

We suggested in the previous section that sensations can be identified by the sudden surge in the number of articles on the topic. In the case of the attack against the *World Trade Center*, for example, we can identify two such moments. The first occurred at the time of an attempted attack in 1993 (Fig. 9), and the second after the September 11, 2001, attack. While in the first case the increase was relatively moderate, in 2001 it was over 10,000 articles in just a short time (Fig. 10).⁵ As we can see from the graphs, the topic of World Trade Center was an *evergreen* before these events, but it was at the time of the attacks that 'World Trade Center' entered centre stage of the media and public interest and it is this event that we immediately recall when WTC is mentioned. In Fig. 10, the small grey box indicates the 1993 event, which is depicted on Fig. 9 separately (to get Fig. 9 we need to zoom in on Fig. 10). This clearly shows that what matters is not only the absolute increase

⁵ This 10,000 includes all articles and comments in the New York Times that mention the World Trade Center

in the number of articles, but the form of dynamic, which is much the same in case of Figs. 9 and 10.

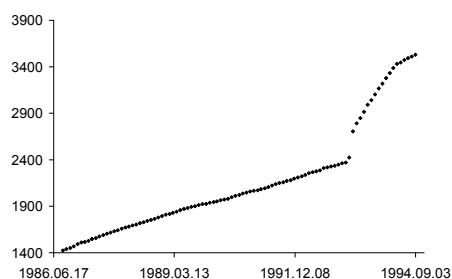


Figure 9. World Trade Center, in The *New York Times* between 01.09.1986.–01.09.1994. monthly data. The 'jump' on the graph is at the attempted attack in 1993.

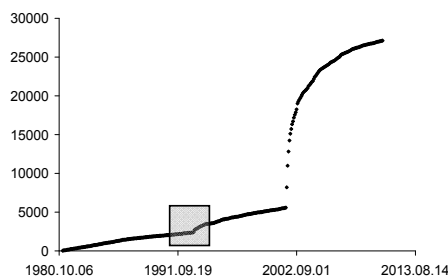


Figure 10. World Trade Center in *New York Times* monthly data between, 01.01. 1981. –01.07.2010. The grey area is Fig. 10 within Fig. 11. The 'jump' on the graph is at 9/11.

We suggest that a sensational topic 'socializes', creates the environment for remembering, provides the context for cognitive schemes of society to get reinforced and spreads certain interpretations of the world among members of the community. We believe that the analogy here is strong between Pierre Nora's *milieux de memoire* and sensations as in the case of both remembering takes place as an organic process. Remembering is not the product of conscious activity but the result of an intense emotional involvement. Thus, we believe that the terrorist attack on the *World Trade Center* was such an instance that brought Americans and the world together, many to remember where they were, what they were doing at the time of the incident. It is in a way like in societies of old, when members of a society shared an experience and activated their shared identity. In modernity, however, it is through the media that news reaches members of society, through the TV screen, through the picture on the front page of *The New York Times*.

While in case of the *World Trade Center*, the sensation did indeed come out of the blue, on other occasions the ground was 'prepared' for the sensation. Thus, the first story on Watergate appeared in *The Washington Post* on July 18, 1972, under the title: *Five Held in Plot to Bug Democratic Offices Here*. Following this, the case was discussed for months under titles such as *Watergate bug*, or *Watergate burglary*, before it was called the *Watergate scandal*. It was only in 1973, when already the President's closest aids were implicated, and when in July 1973 it was discovered that the White House recorded Nixon's conversations in the Oval Office that *Watergate* turned into a full blown sensation, as the dynamic shows (see Fig. 11) In the figure we can also see that topics under the name *Watergate bug* – and *Watergate burglary* – were preparing the terrain for the *Watergate scandal* (bold line in the graph).

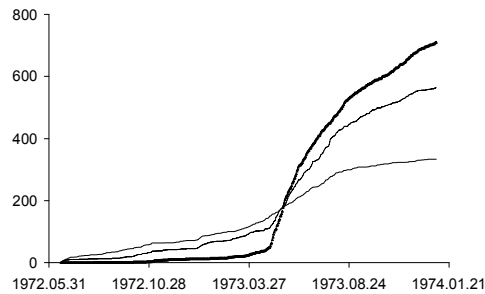


Figure 11. *Watergate Bug* – solid line;
Watergate burglary – dotted line;
Watergate Scandal – bold line.
 Articles in the *Washington Post* daily.
 15.06.1972.–02.01.1974.

Sensations, paradoxically, very rarely present something completely new, something which is close to the unimaginable, and something that would have no antecedent. The examples of *Watergate* and the terrorist attack on *the Twin Towers* offer an opportunity to spell out two ways through which sensations are 'linked up' with the past.

Although *Watergate* was a watershed event concerning trust in U.S. politicians, nevertheless, one should recognize that by the time of *Watergate* there was a mounting disenchantment in the U.S. concerning politics. Already before *Watergate* a general distrust could be witnessed and starting in 1964 there was – as Lipset and Schneider noted – “a virtual explosion in anti-governmental feeling” (Lipset and Schneider 1983: 382). Nevertheless, this general disenchantment had yet to erode trust in the politicians' honesty, being only scepticism about the system. As Lipset and Schneider argue what happened at the time of *Watergate* was that distrust about politicians caught up with the general scepticism about politics. Thus, by 1974, trust in politicians plummeted and by then 45% of the American people believed that there were quite a few crooks in government; a stunning rise from 29% in 1964 (Lipset and Schneider 1983: 381). The point is that *Watergate* in a sense just reinforced the general mood and scepticism about American politics.

A link to the past can also be grasped in the case of the attack on the *World Trade Center*, although here a different mechanism is at play. In this case, the attack on the Twin Towers is clearly something unprecedented in U.S. history, only comparable to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Faced with such a novelty, however, the media – as everybody else – was puzzled how to interpret the event. The first step was to name the event and by this name to offer a frame of interpretation. In the case of the attack against the Twin Towers we can note that among the first reports, there were over a hundred which identified the event as the '*day of terror*'.

Searching *The New York Times* for the same phrase – as we did – we find that a month before the incident there was a terrorist attack in Jerusalem, which was also assigned the same phrase, i.e. *the day of terror*. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that journalists took this metaphor – as it was still fresh in their memory – and applied it to the attack on the World Trade Center. Figure 12 shows the number of articles in *The New York Times* using the phrase *day of terror*.

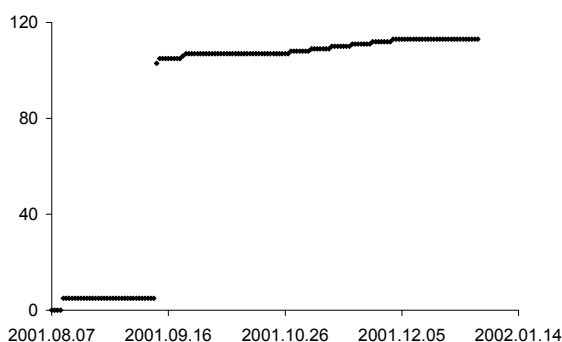


Figure 12. *Day of Terror*, in *The New York Times*. Of all articles between 1981 and 2010 139 contained the term *day of terror* with 98 on the same day.

The phrase *day of terror* did not stick, however, as it probably did not offer an appropriate reference point, an adequate framing of the attack against the Twin Towers. (We will return to the attack on the Twin Towers in the following section and will show that the term *World Trade Center* did not stick either as it was gradually displaced by “9/11”).

To sum up, we can say that even in the case of sensations, frequently the public can have the feeling of recognizing what they already know, or suspected; hence people can have the ‘*aha moment*’ – while at the same time the sensation adds something more to this already known quality of reality. In the case of the Watergate scandal, for example, although there was a mounting scepticism concerning politics in the U.S. by the time of the Watergate, nevertheless, few would have thought it possible for the President to be implicated in such an incident. Hence, people could say: *we knew such things happen, but THIS, we would not have ever thought!* Also, as the example of the Twin Towers revealed, when a sensation enters the media scene it is in search of a name, and frequently by the act of naming an event a link is created between the past and the present through frames of interpretation. Thus, even though sensations present novelties, these are in one way or another tied to what the community already ‘knows’, what is in the cognitive repertoire of the community. Niklas Luhmann has pointed out that *in order to recognize novelty we need familiar contexts* (Luhmann 2007: 28). The novelty of

the news must always be connected to what is already out there in order to make it comprehensible, while at the same time there is also something that creates the sensation, i.e. there must be something that is more, something that does not completely fit prevailing expectations and understanding of the world. We suggest that it is with these sensations upon sensations that society creates its *milieus of memory*, the shared feeling of togetherness, to have the same concerns and the same worries.

Yet here a caveat is needed. As modern societies are heterogeneous, not all sensations reach every stratum of the society the same way. Thus, milieus of remembering do not always involve the whole of society as some events may only trigger sensations and resonate in particular segments of the society and turn them into a community of remembering. For example, some topics may prove to be sensations for the intelligentsia while others for supporters of the extreme right. Nevertheless, the sum of all these communities – and their memory – is what comprises society's memory. Furthermore, it would be wrong to assume that everybody thinks the same about a topic. Quite the contrary! Topics, around which milieus of memory evolve, are frequently highly contentious issues.

Sensations II - The Places Of Memory

Despite their emotional impact, however, sensations tend to fade from the media as one sensation is followed by the next. Tentatively, we suggest that there is probably always a 'normal' amount of sensations at any given period of time in the media, i.e. there is a need, a demand for sensations, yet there cannot be a surfeit of sensations either. There should be just enough to provide for the emotional involvement of the audience in the concerns of the public, and, as a by-product, to create one after another the *milieus of memory* of modern societies.

Although sensations typically have only a short life span, not all sensations are swept away by the river of *Lethe* – the river of forgetting. Certain sensations – although not as sensations – remain within the public discourse and the media keeps on referring to them. In such cases, sensations are transformed into points of reference for the community that helping its members to identify themselves and interpret the world around them. Events such as landing on the moon or the marriage of Diana and Charles were such milestones of their age that were continuously referred to (Dayan and Katz 1994). Frequently, this takes place in a metaphorical sense and thus, the landing on the moon became a metaphor of humanity's technological and scientific progress, just as much a symbol of the competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. As such events do not simply refer to a particular event but become to signify a whole *problematique*, they in a sense become 'more' than themselves (Gyáni 2000: 82). Some sensations – once they get beyond the phase of extreme attention – may get transformed into

what Nora called the places of remembering (*lieux de mémoire*). We suggest that *Guernica*, *Watergate* or 9/11 are events that became such reference points of the modern age and carry a complexity of meanings and interpretations, the quintessence of a whole – perhaps contentious – problematique. In the words of Pierre Nora, they are capable of carrying *un maximum de sens dans le minimum de signs* (Nora, quoted by Erll and Rigney 2009).

In the case of *Watergate*, if we look at Fig. 8, we can see that at the beginning the graph is a typical sensation as it starts off with a steeply rising growing curve. Contrary to other examples of sensations, however, the graph does not turn horizontal and does not reach a 'saturation phase' – i.e., a point when there are no more articles published on the topic. Partly, the long life span of *Watergate* can be explained by the fact that it took a long time for the event to unfold and the significance of *Watergate* grew as more and more details surfaced. Nevertheless, even when the actual *Watergate* affair was over, its media presence did not end. Quite the contrary, in case of *Watergate* we can see in the graph that there are constant references to it even today (Fig. 13). In fact, the graph shows a steadily growing straight line, which, according to our phenomenological typology is characteristic of 'evergreens'. We can say therefore that the topic *Watergate Scandal* changed from a sensation into an *evergreen*.

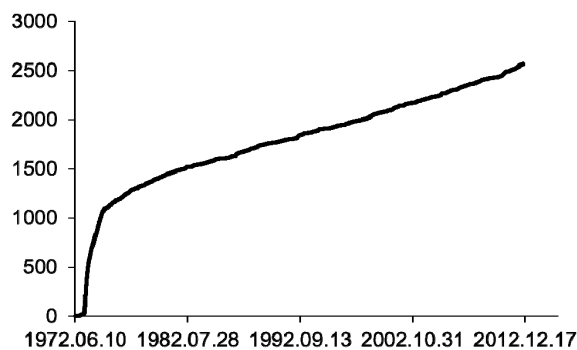


Figure 13. *Watergate Scandal* in
The Washington Post
 Daily number of articles, 15.06.1972. –22.10.2012.

This change of dynamics is accompanied, however, by a change of rhetoric. Increasingly, articles that mentioned the *Watergate scandal* were not referring to the *Watergate scandal per se*, but used it as a reference point. As Schudson pointed out:

[Watergate became a] pre-emptive metaphor, a past, traumatic experience so compelling, it forces itself as the frame for understanding new experiences, even as it ensures a misunderstanding of new experiences

(Williams quoting Schudson 1998: 35)

Hence, *Watergate* became a defining reference point for interpreting American political life, frequently referred to in order to highlight the contentious relationship between media and politics, or to describe misdemeanour in high places (Lakoff 2000: 90). For example, in the 80s Watergate was referred to in connection to the question how the press reports on nuclear issues (*The Washington Post*, 9 June 1984). On other occasions, Watergate is referred to in order to put into context other political scandals: in the 1980s Watergate was invoked apropos of the *Iran-gate*, where the emphasis was mostly on the difference between the two 'gates'; (*The Washington Post*, 11 December 1986 and 22 February 1987). There were also references to Watergate in the case of recent scandals involving the Catholic Church, when it is asserted that the *scandal facing Catholics today looks a lot like the Watergate scandal that engulfed the United States in the early 1970s* (*The Washington Post*, 5 April 2010). Also the 'gate' suffix became the signifier of political scandals in general, not only in the U.S. but also globally. Thus weapon sales at the time of the presidency of Francois Mitterand were referred to as *Angolagate*, in 2006 *Le Figaro* wrote about *Watergrec* apropos a bugging incident in Greece, and after U.S. embassy cables were leaked in November 2010 the expression 'cablegate' was coined. Thus, Watergate offers a point of reference to interpret the world; it offers a firm basis for *memory to solidify itself* (Gyáni 2000: 82) and became a *place of memory* of modernity.

While the name under which the *Watergate scandal* became a place of memory offered itself outright, this was not the case with the attack against the Twin Towers. Although today the term 9/11 is widespread and a more or less accepted designation, at the beginning there were a variety of names, including, among others, names such as: *the day of terror*, *World Trade Center*, *Ground Zero* and also *Twin Tower* to identify the incident.

If we look at the number of articles containing *World Trade Center* and 9/11, we can see that although the number of articles containing *World Trade Center* is bigger than the number of articles referring to 9/11, nevertheless, it is the latter that seems to have become the term with which the incident is referred to as time passes (see Fig. 14). Right after the attack on the Twin Towers there was an extremely large number of articles referring to *the World Trade Center*, and thus it is reasonable to suggest that the 'attack' as a sensation was named "World Trade Center".

Although "9/11" as a point of reference has always been there, and as the graph shows, with constant intensity, it has always been like an *evergreen* – its role (that is, "9/11" as the name designating the attack) was marginal in the period right after the event. It was only after 2005 that the number of articles with "9/11" surpassed the number of articles containing the term "World Trade Center". (Fig. 15 *highlights this, with articles containing 9/11 surpassing the number of articles containing World Trade Center*). We interpret this by suggesting that at the end

it was the name 9/11 that 'stuck' and became the identifier of the attack, i.e., it is under the designation 9/11 that the attack on the Twin Towers turned into a *place of memory*.

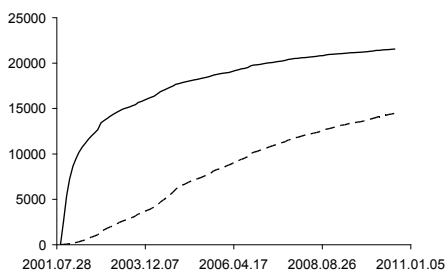


Figure 14.
solid line references to:
World Trade Center,
dotted line: references to 9/11
01.09.2001. –01.08.2010.

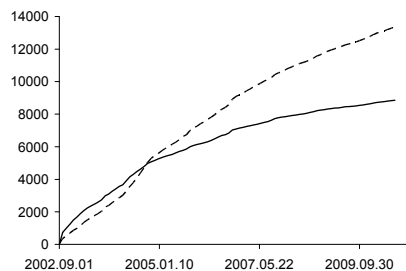


Figure 15.
solid line references to:
World Trade Center,
dotted line: references to 9/11
only after 01.09.2002.

To sum up, by referring to *Guernica*, or to *Watergate* or 9/11, events of the day are put into context and are interpreted on the basis of the past. These have become *places of memory* offering links to established historical narratives, through which the present is tied to the past, just as much as the historical narratives themselves are also reproduced (by referring to *Guernica* the bombing of Baghdad is interpreted and by the same gesture also the memory of *Guernica* is reinforced), and thereby the collective memory of the community is maintained. We suggest that it is here that the “second order” **time-horizon** of the media can be identified.

Also, such places of memory as *Watergate* are used to give significance to otherwise mediocre topics. It is very telling, for example, when it is mentioned in an article in *The Washington Post* that a certain meeting took place exactly in the same room where the *Watergate* hearings took place (*The Washington Post* 18 December 1986). Obviously, in this case *Watergate* adds little to interpret the event (it is simply the same location where an event took place); nevertheless, the mentioning of *Watergate* raises the attention of the audience towards the new topic by borrowing the attention that is always there when *Watergate* is mentioned, given the decisive role *Watergate* had played in U.S. politics. Thus, *places of memory* frequently evoke a touch of the emotional involvement and the attention of the public that used to be there when these events took place and provided modern societies with its *milieus of memory*.

Conclusion

In this paper we focused on the *news-flow* and offered, first, a methodology on how to create a typology of the dynamics of different topics in the media and we distinguished between: *actualities*, *evergreens* and *sensations*. Second, we argued that media lives in a *dual time*. We identified the 'first order' time horizon of the media in its operation to constantly seek for novelty and forget about the news of today; while we identified the 'second order' time horizon of the media by focusing on the way media reports on topics through time and contributes to creating continuity between the past and the present by creating both milieus and places of memory of modern mediated societies.

In order to capture places and milieus of memory in the media we focused on the special role of sensations. Sensations are special in the sense that they establish the *milieus of memory* under the modern conditions. At the same time, we also pointed out that the media also creates its points of reference through which communities can interpret their present on the basis of their past. We argued that these could be interpreted as *places of memory*. We suggested that these places of memory are frequently rooted in former sensations – and thereby in milieus of memory – of earlier times.

References

- Bauman, Z. (2000): *Liquid Modernity*, Polity.
- Cahill, L. - McGaugh, J. L. (1995): A novel demonstration of enhanced memory associated with emotional arousal. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 4/4, 410–421.
- Carey, J. W. (1997): Afterword: The Culture in Question, Eve Stryker
Munson and Catherine A. Warren eds.: *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, edited by Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- David, P.A. (2003): Zvi Griliches on Diffusion, Lags and Productivity Growth. *Connecting the Dots: Conference on R&D, Education and Productivity Held in Memory of Zvi Griliches (1930–1999)*, 25–27th, August.
- Dayan, D. and E. Katz (1994): *Media events: the live broadcasting of history*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1995): Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression, *Diacritics*, 25/2, 9–63.
- Erll, A. and Rigney, A. (2009): *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Griliches, Z. (1957): Hybrid Corn: An Exploration in the Economics of Technological Change. *Econometrica*, 25/4: October 501–522.
- Grübler, A., Nakicenovic, N. and Victor, D.G. (1999): Dynamics of Energy Technologies and Global Change. *Energy Policy*, 27/5: 247–280.
- Gyáni G. (2000): Kollektív emlékezet és nemzeti identitás; in.: Gyáni: *Emlékezés, emlékezet és a történelem elbeszélése*, Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest.

- Horváth Zs. (1999): Az eltűnt emlékezet nyomában, *Aetas*, 14/3 108-115.
- Jang, S-L. – Dai S-C. – Sung S. (2005): The pattern and externality effect of diffusion of mobile telecommunications: the case of OECD and Taiwan, *Information Economics and Policy* 17/1, 133–148.
- Kensinger, E. A. (2004): Remembering emotional experiences: The contribution of valence and arousal. *Reviews in the Neurosciences*, 15/4, 241–251
- Kundera, M. (1996): *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, United Kingdom, Faber and Faber.
- Lakoff R. T. (2000): *The Language War*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Lipset, S. M. and W. Schneider (1983): The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions, *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 98, No 3, Fall, 1983.
- Luhmann, N. (2007): *The Reality of the Mass Media*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Modis, Th. (1992): *Predictions: Society's Telltale Signature Reveals Past & Forecasts the Future*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Nora, Pierre (1989): Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire; *Representations*, 26/1, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, Spring.
- Williams Robert (1998) *Political scandals in the USA*, BAAS Paperbacks.
- Tsoularis A. – Wallas J. (2002): Analysis of logistic growth models, *Mathematical Biosciences* 179/1 21–55.
- The Washington Post* (1984) Press Coverage of Nuclear Issues Hit – By Marjorie Hyer, Washington Post Staff Writer, 9 June.
- The Washington Post* (1986) Iran Not a Watergate, Shultz Assures Allies – R. Jeffrey Smith, 11 December.
- The Washington Post* (1986) Rep. Hamilton Named to Head House Iran-Contras Inquiry; Nine Democrats, Six Republicans Appointed to Panel Edward Walsh; Helen Dewar Washington Post Staff Writers, 18 December.
- The Washington Post* (1987) Compared to Watergate – Philip Geyelin, 22 February.
- The Washington Post* (2010) Converting the pope – by Timothy Shriver, 5 April.
- Zelizer, B. (2008): Journalism's Memory Work, in: Cultural Memory Studies: eds: Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, *An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* Walter Gruyter, Berlin.