POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND THE PAST:

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGY IN CINEMATIC PORTRAYALS OF MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND THE PAST:
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GREGORY J. MCLEAN

Autobiographical memory is an elusive and ephemeral experience to try and articulate or analyze. It is dynamic, interpretive, and subject to influence. It is malleable and inevitably colored by the variety of beliefs and values held by individuals and which change over the course of a life. With these considerations in mind, is it possible that our own autobiographical memories are ideological? It doesn't seem a stretch to presume our autobiographical memories are imbued with and surrounded by ideas of racism, sexism, classism, patriarchy, privilege and other ideologies of power; topics like these may be encoded into our personal, interior memories and thus deserve to be scrutinized there. The problem is locating, assessing, and then analyzing ideology within the ephemeral, interiorized, and extremely subjective medium of personal memory. As an attempt to solve this problem, this study examines ideology in cinematic depictions of autobiographical memory.

By analyzing eleven films that include visual depictions of memory, it seems that autobiographical memory and ideology intersect in specific ways. 1. Such memories are not only composed of varying degrees of fact and fiction, but that they are also, in many

circumstances, ideological constructions. 2. Autobiographical memories can be ideological not only in the content of the memory but in how autobiographical memory is presumed to operate. 3. In these ways, memories are surrounded by and vulnerable to competing ideologies. It is my hope that this study allows for a continuing conversation about ideology in autobiographical memory as well as how ideologies are affected by perceptions about the nature of remembering, forgetting, and sharing memories.

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Dedication

To my family

To my mother, father, and brother

And most especially to Andrea and Nestah

Thank you for your love, patience, support, and joy

And to Ellison

Who arrived just in time

Chapter One

Cinematic Depictions of Ideology and Memory:

Introduction and Review of the Literature

Introduction

Our internal, personal, autobiographical memories are challenging to characterize. These abstractions of the past are malleable – every act of remembering is a reconstruction that melds past events to a present perspective – and yet we rely on them day-to-day as a source of relative stability with which to understand ourselves and the world around us. Autobiographical memories are a fundamental aspect of the "self," yet they are entwined with and influenced by a variety of factors such as personal experiences, media narratives, and the cultural forces surrounding us. In just these few simple ways, we can begin to see how memory is dynamic, evasive, and difficult to analyze as well as inevitably colored by the variety of beliefs and values held by every individual and which change over the course of a life. Trying to better understand how our autobiographical memories become imbued with beliefs and assumptions – particularly about power – is the main purpose of this thesis. The current chapter identifies assumptions and goals of this study as well as reviews the literature related to ideology, cinema, and memory.

When referring to autobiographical memory, of which there are many subdivisions, I am not talking about those mental resources which might be used to win a spelling bee or to recall formulas from high school physics classes or to understand the

best times of year to fish a particular location. What I am referring to throughout this thesis is what Henri Bergson called "pure memory:" those images, sensations, and corresponding personal meanings of one's past experiences which accumulate in an internal "bank" and can be later delved into (in Pigott, 2012, p. 180). So, for instance, in the opening paragraphs of his book, "Autobiographical Memory: An introduction," psychologist Martin Conway (1990) presents the following dilemma when attempting to define the parameters of his text, "I know the address of the house in which I currently live but I also have a vivid memory of the day we moved into that house. Are both these types of knowledge autobiographical memories?" (p. 1). While his book dives deep into the psychological causes and characteristics of this near-indefinable concept, in the context of this study on cinematic memory and ideology, the focus is on examples such as Dr. Conway's vivid memory of moving into his home and not to the mere recall of the factual data of his address.

Ideological Autobiographical Memories and Cinema

Susceptible to subjectivity, media influence, and undergoing constant transformations throughout our lives, it doesn't seem a stretch to presume our autobiographical memories are imbued with and surrounded by ideologies of power such as racism, sexism, classism, patriarchy, and other privileges. Such dynamics also emerge from and surround absence of memory – in what goes unwitnessed or what is encouraged to be forgotten. Also affected by such assumptions and prejudices are our attempts to externalize, preserve, and share our memories with others via technology. The results of such sharing are inevitably altered versions of memories that are themselves already unreliable impressions of the past.

Our personal, interior memories that we remember, forget, preserve, and transform make up the fairly continuous experiences of "being ourselves." As such, social power dynamics associated with topics like race, class, sex, gender, religion, and economic philosophies can be presumed to be encoded into our personal, interior memories and thus deserve to be scrutinized there. However, because personal memories are internal, subjective experiences, the assumptions and prejudices that reside there are elusive. The intent of this thesis is to understand how ideologies of power, like racism, classism, sexism, and so on, imbue and surround personal, interior memories by locating their elements in cinematic depictions of autobiographical memories.

In terms of this study, ideology refers to a set of beliefs and values that promotes the interests of an individual or group. From this perspective of advancing interests and agendas, asserting power – whether by physical force or by more subtle means – is an inherent trait of ideology and it is the characteristic most at the center of this thesis. The promotion of the preferred beliefs and values of one group over those of others is ubiquitous, and yet, in order for these biases to be perceived, promoted, resisted, or changed, one must examine the locations, contents, and forms of the entrenched power one is immersed in. This will be discussed at greater length later.

One area of human experience where such prejudices reside is the focus of this study: personal, interior, autobiographical memory. However, the nature of memory and ideology creates problems when it comes to locating, assessing, and then analyzing messages of dominance which, by definition, deny their own existence. This is made doubly difficult when they reside within the ephemeral, interiorized, and extremely subjective medium of personal memory. In this thesis, I will examine how entrenched

power uses and affects memory as a part of its hegemony by analyzing these dynamics in cinema. Using examples from several films, I will identify specific markers and tropes that provide some reflections and comparisons with ideologically-imbued memory in day-to-day life. I claim that by examining depictions of memory in cinema, we can get a clearer view of how ideology imbues our autobiographical memories

Throughout this thesis, I will explore three specific manifestations of *cinematic memory*. The first will be the creation – or not – of a memory of a witnessed event that can be recalled and the implications when those impressions of events go un-remembered due to some kind of amnesia. Witnessing an event and retaining some memory of what was experienced are necessary first steps to future acts of remembering. The second type of cinematic memory examined in this study will be visualizations of what would typically be private, interior, invisible acts of recall and reconstruction. Often, these depictions manifest via the cinematic device of *flashback* and resemble 'mini-movies' from the past taking place within the mind of the character remembering, but externalized by the camera so that the viewer can 'see' it (Turim, 1989, p. 5). The third manifestation of cinematic memory I will examine here refers not to a process as the previous examples do, but to material objects that are produced through attempts at preserving or altering memory using real and fictional "memory technologies." Painting, writing, architecture, photography, audio recording, and film are some of the actual technologies I am referring to that can be used for such purposes. Furthermore, fictional technologies and their power to alter human memory are sometimes the subject of the entire plot of a film. Examples in which acts of remembering, bouts of amnesia, or memory technology play a significant role can be found throughout film history: *Citizen Kane, Little Big Man, Spellbound,*

Memento, *Total Recall*, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* are just a few examples of how memory manifests on-screen as something remembered, something forgotten, or something preserved in technology.

For instance, in *Citizen Kane*, flashback sequences are used to depict the internal memories of various people who knew and worked with the man at the center of the film, Charles Foster Kane. The memories, which make up most of the film, tell the story of Kane's transformation from a child abandoned by his newly wealthy parents, into an idealistic young man involved in media and politics, and then into a wealthy, embittered hermit. In addition to the explicit, narrative purpose of telling the story of Kane, the memories also communicate certain beliefs and values that both reflect as well as critique the political power structures of the time. On one level, the flashbacks convey certain beliefs and values pertinent to the film itself – a morality tale about the corruptibility of humanity in the context of wealth, power, and political influence. However, there is also an implicit critique communicated via these memories pertaining to the sway media has over politics. In this way, the film is also a specific critique of the life and influences of media magnate, William Randolph Hearst. These memories-as-flashbacks also convey beliefs about the nature and form of remembering by virtue of giving visual form to what is normally an invisible, internal, ephemeral experience. What is conveyed via the form is an implication that memory is some sort of recording of the past – a recording that is accurate, accessible, and, with adequate effort, entirely reviewable – a movie in one's mind.

Assumptions, questions, and goals

The first assumption of this study is that the elements and influence of entrenched, hegemonic power are "everywhere"– even when one is immersed in dreams and fantasies believed to be of one's own creation, a point elaborated a great deal in the introduction to Slavoj Zizek's (1996) essay collection, "Mapping Ideology" (p. 17). Accepting Zizek's argument on this point, I claim that, just as ideologies of power permeate our personal dreams and fantasies, they also permeate our personal, interior memories. For example, in her article, "Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory," Kimberly Smith (2000) writes about the experience of nostalgia as an ideological construct directed by people who declare and define precisely what it is appropriate to inspire this sense of longing, the subject and timing of the longing and so on (p. 515). Another example of ideology in the realm of memory is presented by Theresa Bergman (2003) in her analysis of a California railroad museum orientation film that makes presumptions about the past that, combined with the museum's institutional authority, affects the collective memory of the area (p. 444). Just as inequalities of power are coded into nostalgia or reified through media authorized by particular institutions, I claim that the images and other sensory impressions that make up the banks from which we draw our respective autobiographical memories are also coded with entrenched power.

My second assumption is that memory is an elusive experience to articulate or analyze – it is largely internal and perhaps too immersive for even a remotely objective assessment. Memory is defined here as autobiographical memory, consisting of – to be brief – witnessing/experiencing an event, recalling a memory of the event, and preserving or otherwise sharing the memory of the event via technology. Since the personal

experience of interior, autobiographical memory is such a layered, ephemeral, and evasive phenomenon, how can it be examined? What are the coded elements in our interior banks of memory that articulate ideological impressions of relative political power?

My third assumption is that cinematic representations of what are typically interior human experiences can provide distance and exteriority so that one can analyze and derive some practical insight into how such concepts may operate in "real life." To examine abstract, interior, and subjective experiences like love or depression or dreams or memory, people have historically turned to arts that can visualize and even anthropomorphize these concepts; arts such as literature, theater, and cinema. I claim that personal, interior memory systems may be too ephemeral and fleeting to examine directly for ideological content, but that some comparisons can be made by examining cinematic depictions of memory. This is, in part, because cinema can create distance and exteriority when depicting typically interior experiences. For instance, in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema,* Slavoj Zizek (2006) demonstrates how cinema is a powerful medium for depicting some of the typically invisible dynamics involved in some of the psychological aspects of human experience. Zizek (2006) provides several examples of how cinema can provide some distance and exteriority to what are typically interior and personal experiences so that they may be compared and contrasted to so-called "real life." For example, he analyzes scenes that depict manifestations of concepts, such as Freudian constructions of personality in *Psycho* and the nature of interior fantasies of the minds in *The Birds*.

Based on these assumptions – that ideology is ubiquitous including in fantasies and memories; that personal, interior memory is difficult to locate and objectively examine; and that cinema can create distance and exteriority so that some typically interior experiences can be better understood – I claim that critically examining cinematic memory with the aim of locating the dialogues of power coded and communicated there will provide insight into how these pressures intersect with and influence private memory in so-called real life. To support my claim, I propose to examine the form and content of several examples of cinematic memory to find the elements there that articulate ideology. I will then use my findings to correlate these dynamics to events in the real world.

The first goal of this thesis is to understand cinematic memory as a vehicle for communicating and reifying messages of social power discrepancies such as those found between races, sexes, genders, classes and so on. The second goal of this study is to understand some of the ways by which the form of the cinematic memory – how it is visualized – communicates ideas about the nature of memory and the experiences tied to it. The third goal is to speculate about some of the real world implications of how ideologies of power imbue and surround personal memory. These goals lead to four research questions: 1. What explicit and implicit ideologies of power are being communicated through the content of cinematic memories? 2. What assumptions are communicated via the form? 3. Where do these ideologies of power reside in autobiographical memory? 4. What can these findings reveal about real life ideology and autobiographical memory?

In an effort to meet these goals and answer these questions, I will identify several films which use depictions of memory as a key component in their respective narratives. I

will analyze these examples of cinematic memory in order to identify how explicit and implicit messages of power have been coded into their content and form. I will look for elements which work in concert to articulate ideologies about the film in which the memory appears, the culture from which the film emerged, and the nature of memory itself. Using the findings from these examinations, I will speculate on some of the causes and consequences of how entrenched power structures are coded into the content and form of personal, interior memory in our day-to-day lives by connecting some of these observations to events in recent history.

Review of the Literature

Although several articles and books have been written about related topics such as cinematic depictions of interior memory, the ideological content of cinematic narratives, and ideological intersections with memory and history, my literature review found no research that used film analysis specifically as a means of better understanding the "real life" dynamics of ideology within and around our personal memories. In the following sections, however, I will review and discuss key ideas in the existing literature. I am situating this thesis across the subjects of ideological criticism, memory studies, and film analysis. While the literature about these three topics in independent form is vast, I will focus on and highlight some specific content from each area that is pertinent to this study.

Ideology and Power

In his essay, "Ideology: the Career of a Concept," Terrell Carver (2004) traces the etiology of the term to philosophies developed around the time of the French Revolution (p. 4). Throughout its history as a point of debate and research, the concept characteristically regarded overlaps between ideas and power – two key features of

politics. The philosophies behind the concept flourished and transformed in Western Europe throughout the 19th century, being revised and expanded by the likes of Napoleon Bonaparte as well as Marx and Engels (Carver, 2004, p. 5). Perhaps the most explicit connections between power and ideas comes from Marx who observed that ideologies and their adherents emerge from class struggles in divided societies because "the class which has the means of material production at its disposal consequently also controls the means of mental production." (Carver, 2004, p. 7). Marx identified that ideology is not only a structured set of ideas, but those ideas which provide the claims, excuses, and rationalizations that members of various classes assert to forward their own agendas.

Following in the footsteps of Marx and other political theorists, Terence Ball (2004) outlines four ways that ideology serves to provide individuals and groups with a means of explaining, evaluating, orienting, and programming political issues (p. 1). In the introduction to the collection, *Ideas and Ideology*, Ball (2004) describes the vectors, such as news media, education systems, and other institutional forces, through which people are provided the assumptions, beliefs, prejudices, and value judgements surrounding how political content is to be explained, evaluated, and so on. For Marx, Ball, and many ideological theorists between, ideology is directly connected with power.

Power can refer to a number of different aspects of life. Sillars and Gronbeck provide the following categories:

> **Political power**, the ability to influence thoughts, decisions, and actions of others through rule or statute, control over citizenship rights, or other power mechanisms that require others to grant you permission to act in their place or name.

> **Social power**, the ability to influence thoughts, decisions, and actions of others through social hierarchies such as kinship relationships, social or caste-type group relationships, ethnic markings, or gender relations.
>
> **Relational (interpersonal) power,** the ability to influence the thoughts, decisions, and actions of others through relations that have been negotiated between individuals, as in marriages, friendships, protection schemes, and the like. (p. 263)

It seems likely that one or more of these categories of power will play a role in how memory, ideology, and power overlap in each film example I analyze.

Not everyone includes power in their descriptions of ideology. When discussing critical methods, Sonja Foss (2009) describes ideology as merely concerning a particular set of beliefs and values of a culture or group and she does not correspond these ideas to power at all (p. 209). Foss advises critics to "look beyond the surface of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values and assumptions it suggests" (p. 209) – but makes no mention of the explicit and implicit power dynamics that inevitably co-exist with any groups beliefs and assumptions. It isn't until the topic of hegemony, calling it the privileging of one group's ideology over others, does power come solidly into the picture for Foss. Another theorist for whom ideology is not inherently power-driven, Malcolm Hamilton, synthesized more than two dozen elements of ideology gleaned from nearly 100 different sources to conceive the following summary: "An ideology is a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular

pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realize, pursue or maintain" (in Carver, 2004, p. 9).

Different theorists and philosophers have divergent ideas as to where and when power enters the picture of ideology. For some, it is a fundamental characteristic of the concept. For others, power is introduced as an additional element or else ideology is deployed in the service of power. This thesis is intended to identify some of the ways in which beliefs, values, and other assumptions about power are coded into our memories as well as how memory is used as a means of establishing or maintaining power in order to promote an agenda, so I will be writing from the perspective that ideology is inherently about power.

Scholars have also commented extensively on the elusive and abstract qualities of ideology in practice. For instance, Ronald Lee (2016) refers to "the quality of ideology denying itself" as a "central characteristic of the concept" (p. 219). Returning again to the history of the term, Carver (2004) claims it does not refer to a discrete, finite phenomenon; it isn't a template against which objects and ideas can be measured and tested; and that there is no recipe or formula for creating ideology (p. 9). It is a concept comprised of those forces that assert an agenda which frames what is to be discussed, questioned, assumed, and hypothesized about a group, society, or situation (Carver, 2004, p. 9). It is this elusiveness in day-to-day life – and, for this thesis, day-to-day memory – that I claim can be tempered by observing ideology in cinema. In this medium, of course, action can be frozen or reviewed, motivations traced, and inner thoughts and desires can be made audible or visual. Through analysis of cinematic depictions, the beliefs,

assumptions, values, and so on that are coded our day-to-day lives and, hence, our memories, can be more readily examined.

One particular theory on the topic of ideology that is most pertinent here is in Slavoj Zizek's (1996) introduction to "Mapping Ideology," a collection of essays on the topic. His claim is that ideology is ubiquitous and that we may "slide into" its influence "under the guise of stepping out of it" (Zizek, p. 17). He further elaborates on this concept as the narrator of Sophie Fiennes' (2012) documentary, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*. In it, Zizek describes how even in fantasies, dreams, and desires, people can be influenced by these dominant narratives of beliefs and values. This concept of ideology is that it operates at its purest and most effective in those moments when we believe we are not being influenced. I agree here with Zizek and I claim that autobiographical, personal, interior memories are among those moments in life when people may feel separate from ideology and yet still be immersed in it. This is especially the case when we forget the reconstructive nature of recall and believe our memories about our lived pasts to be a fairly objective, sensible record of fact.

Characteristics of memory

Memory is a deeply personal experience, whether among individuals or groups, and, as such, is difficult to characterize. Barbie Zelizer (1995), author of several texts about memory and media, writes that, "Remembering has many shapes, currencies, and valences each of which prompts a slew of questions" (p. 214). In her overview of memory studies, "Reading the Past against the Grain: the Shape of Memory Studies," Zelizer (1995) identifies several uses and characteristics of collective memory. One of her observations is that early 20th century memory studies perceived memory as an

"authentic, credible, recounting of events of the past" (p. 217) and the act of remembering as a finite one with a clear beginning and end. More recent memory scholarship views memory as narratives that are constantly evolving and transforming and the act of remembering as one that is ongoing and not a discrete act of recall happening in a single moment (Zelizer, 1995, p. 218). These divergent perspectives between the objectivity and subjectivity of remembering is an important aspect of this study.

Another characteristic of memory is that it manifests in a variety of forms ranging from the enduring and material to the fleetingly ephemeral. To begin with the material side of the spectrum, Barbie Zelizer (1995) writes that "One of the most marked characteristics of collective memory is that it has texture. Memory exists in the world . . . and so is embodied in different cultural forms" (p. 232). In the introduction to his book about memory and history in French culture, *Realms of Memory*, Pierre Nora (1996) speaks to the materiality of memory when he writes, "memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object" (p. 3). Nora describes "modern memory" to be essentially relying, "entirely on the specificity of the trace, the materiality of the vestige" (p. 9). Another author who writes about the material nature of memory is Susan Stewart. In her book, "On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection," she writes about a specific type of memory object, souvenirs, describing them as "traces of authentic experiences" (Stewart, 1993, p. 135). Souvenirs are tangible objects which are owned "out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the insatiable demands of nostalgia" (p. 135).

Not only can memory be represented by the material, it can also be a process one undergoes, such as an act of remembering or the urge and effort to preserve memory. Zelizer (1995) explores this aspect of memory as well. She explains, "Remembering is processual action by which people constantly transform the recollections that they produce. These transformations are not incidental but instead constitute collective memory's defining mark" (p. 218). Pierre Nora (1996) describes the "effort" to preserve memory as a memory process unto itself, claiming, "Society as a whole has acquired the religion of preservation and archivalization . . . a gigantic and breathtaking effort to store the material vestiges of what we cannot possibly remember" (1996, p. 3). Here Nora distinguishes the process of producing and preserving objects from the memory-imbued objects that result from that effort.

From this perspective, memory emerges from multiple processes made up of ongoing, dynamic rituals carried out by individuals and groups. For Nora, "memory is life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting . . . vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened" (p. 3). In these passages, Zelizer and Nora are contextualizing memory as anything but a reliable, objective record of the past. Martin Conway (1990) also stakes this claim on behalf of psychological research, writing, "autobiographical memories do not literally represent the details of an event; they are not like a film recording taken by the brain of an experience" (p. 2). Based on these descriptions of remembering – not as an accurate "recording by the brain," but as a process of

reconstruction that is in a state of permanent evolution – I claim that this arena of memory presents multiple opportunities to be colored with assumptions and prejudices.

In addition to having both material and processual forms, another vector for ideology in memory is its mutual influence with media. In his book, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, Michael Kammen (1991) examines the participation of television, film, and news media in individual and group acts of remembering in terms of United States history and national identity. In the last chapter of the book, "Disremembering the Past While Historicizing the Present," Kammen discusses how media and memory affect one another, claiming that, "the press, radio, television, and film have assumed (or achieved) an ever larger responsibility for explaining America" (p. 667). The chapter is, in part, an examination of how television and film media are used to authenticate, authorize, and make authoritative our individual and group memories as well as our perceived national identities. Kammen (1991) describes the situation, "For better and for worse, the media convey a fair amount of what passes for history and memory. In so doing they frequently mediate between people and historical events, sites, or situations" (p. 667). In this section of his writing, Kammen is showing that media can be a means of sharpening, authorizing, and distorting acts of remembering. He also demonstrates mutual influences between media and personal as well as collective memories.

These three points – that memory is sometimes perceived as objective recording and other circumstances as a reconstructed narrative; that memory can manifest in a variety of forms from the material to the ephemeral; and that memory and media are reciprocally influential – can each be an avenue for ideology to permeate our recollections of the past and are some of the areas I will be examining in the analysis.

Cinematic memory

Cinema is another wide-ranging topic that, like other arts, functions as both a reflection of society as well as a means of examining society. In this study, cinema is the medium of focus because of its close ties to memory (Radstone, 2000, p. 81). Dozens of films across the decades have been used to creatively explore the phenomenon of memory (Turim, 1989, p. 1). On screen, a memory can be presented visually as its own discrete scene in order to move a narrative forward, to develop a character, or to give clues about something that is concealed.

Cinema seems especially suited to depicting memory, not only because of its visual dimension, but also because it can provide distance and exteriority to what are typically interior and personal experiences (van Dijck, 2008, p. 84). Zizek demonstrates this principle with several examples in Sophie Fiennes' (2006) documentary series, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*. For instance, in his analysis of Hitchcock's *Psycho,* Zizek uses the film – and particularly the house where Norman Bates lives with his "mother" – as a visual metaphor of the Freudian theory of human personality. In the analysis, the upper floor corresponds to the superego, the main floor to the ego, and beneath it all, in the cellar, is the id. Norman Bates' behavior at each level of the house also corresponds with the documentary's description of multi-level personality. This is a compelling assessment of how film can be used to give visual references for what are typically interiorized, abstract experiences – a significant component of this thesis.

Other authors have noted correlations between the visual form of film and certain sensations of remembering that sometimes seem tantalizingly close to manifesting as 'a movie in the mind.' For instance, Susannah Radstone (2000) writes in her article,

"Screening Trauma: *Forrest Gump*, Film, and Memory," that cinema has "inextricable connections" to memory and that "the visuality of cinema shares much with memory's images of the past" (p. 81). Cinema has much to offer when it comes to exploring elusive and dynamic concepts like ideology and memory. In researching cinematic memory, I found much of the content written on the topic seemed to fit into three categories: flashback, amnesia, and memory technology.

Flashback. When it comes to cinematic representations of acts of remembering, the device that most springs to mind is the flashback. In her book, *Flashback in Film*, Maureen Turim (1989) follows a film historical trajectory, describing how flashbacks are used in film narratives across decades and cultures. She states that her study of flashback is, in part, "a means of considering the aesthetic history of film" (p. 1). She acknowledges in the book's opening chapter that "memory is one concept inscribed in flashback," but flashback as memory is not the primary concern of the text (Turim, 1989, p. 2). Instead she has developed, in her own words, a "multidimensional overview of the function of flashback" focusing on film history, film theory, and film analysis.

Russel Kilbourn's (2010) book *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* delivers a comparative analysis of the representations of memory in some mainstream Hollywood films and those in international art cinema. At the end of his book's introduction, Kilbourn lists four ways that film engages with memory: The first is as "specific formal-stylistic features" (p. 45) such as flashbacks. Second, there is memory as intertextuality, "in which cinema's own past (and ever-present present) constitutes an archive potentially accessible within or through any film" (p. 45). The third way is memory as a "cultural context within which

individual films signify as objects within a larger cultural matrix" (Kilbourn, 2010, p. 45). Last, he lists cinema itself as memory, referring to it as a "'meta-archive' . . . the totality of signs and meanings that make up a given culture" (Kilbourn, 2010, p. 45). It is this last item that Kilbourn claims is the goal of his book to understand.

In their essay, Harvey Greenberg and Krin Gabbard (1999) present examples of the intermingling between psychological and cinematic approaches to memory. Greenberg and Gabbard (1999) examine the cinematic history of memory depictions in relation to the predominant psychological theories on memory of the time. They discuss the function of flashbacks from various other perspectives such as the ideology of the creator, the influence of the studios and industry, and the objectivity or subjectivity of the memory being portrayed. Greenberg and Gabbard, as well as Turim and Kilbourn above, provide some basic concepts for interpreting cinematic flashbacks as a representation of remembering as well as the different levels from which dynamics of power are written into these depictions.

Cinematic amnesia. If one thinks of flashbacks when it comes to cinematic remembering, one may also think of amnesia as a particular cinematic device when it comes to forgetting. Barbie Zelizer (1995) references amnesia in her assessment of memory studies, observing that, of the many transformations memory can undergo, amnesia and forgetting are the most common (p. 220). Zelizer (1995) notes that beyond the transformative nature of forgetting, absent memories are as critical to an individual or group experience as intact memories are (p. 220). As such, this common "transformation of memory," which holds as much significance as remembering does, is a common

narrative device in cinema – although one that has little correspondence with medical research on the experience.

Sallie Baxendale (2004) summarizes some of the history of amnesia in film and concludes that, while popular as a narrative device, cinematic amnesia has little in common with medically observed causes, symptoms, and consequences of amnesia (p. 1480). She identifies three misconceptions of amnesia that she found in several patients and their families which she believes emerge from cinematic representations:

> 1. That post-traumatic amnesia is common after a head injury, and that it can result in a profound retrograde amnesia with the capacity for new learning left completely intact. 2. That a second head injury can "cure" amnesia. 3. That in many films, memories are rarely lost, they are merely "temporarily inaccessible" and able to be recovered in a variety of unlikely manners. (Baxendale, 2004, p. 1483)

Unlike flashbacks, cinematic amnesia seems less about exploring memory's absence and more about using the condition metaphorically as a convenient narrative device. Some of those narratives are about the use of amnesia for the sake of power and, however medically inaccurate, serve sociologically as a warning about the importance of witnessing and remembering.

Technology and memory in cinema. In her article, "Prosthetic Memory: *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall*," Alison Landsberg (1995) uses film analysis to elaborate on the potential for contemporary visual media to produce artificial, "prosthetic" memory in individuals and groups. Prosthetic memories are artificial memories in the mind that arise from exposure to visual media rather than from one's body participating in the original

experience to which the memory corresponds (Landsberg, 1995, p. 176). Landsberg describes such memories as if they were surprising appendages that emerge from an over-saturation of visual media and are able to fasten themselves into the minds of unwilling participants. She presents scenes from two films, *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall,* as examples depicting this phenomenon via metaphorical, "implantable" memories. She claims these films as visual and narrative metaphors of her idea of prosthetic memory and as foils for which to discuss the social and philosophical implications involved in our memories being somehow undetectably altered via media exposure. For Landsberg (1995), these two films "thematize prosthetic memory as an allegory for the power of the mass media to create experiences and to implant memories, the experience of which we have never lived" (p. 176).

Russell Kilbourn (2010) expands on Landsberg's ideas and uses her concepts and film analyses to reinforce some of his own thoughts about cinema and the "collapse" of organic, experiential memory into series of mediated images. Kilbourn (2010) writes of his belief that "real, human" memory has largely been supplanted by the ceaseless media surrounding many contemporary cultures around the globe at this time. He takes the position that the past has been "overwhelmed by its mediated representations" (p. 28). Kilbourn (2010) claims that a "radical folding of so-called authentic, original memory into its subsequent mediated reconstructions" (p. 28) has replaced conventional remembering, transforming the experience into a series of media-generated images each of which prompts memories of other images and so on. Landsberg and Kilbourn present ideas that investigate some of the overlaps between cinema and memory including

concerns that our memories may be unwillingly altered by cinematic imagery and other media interactions.

The above literature review captures a key portion of what has been written on these topics and the many ways they overlap. This thesis will address additional areas not yet addressed in the literature, including: What are the explicit and implicit ideologies of power being communicated through the content of cinematic memories? What ideologies are communicated via the form memory is given on screen? Where are these ideologies located in the "anatomy" of autobiographical memory? And, what insights about real life ideology and autobiographical memory can be inferred from these findings?

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature relevant to the intersections of ideology, cinema, and autobiographical memory. The next chapter will focus on a discussion of the method used to analyze ways in which popular films depict memory. Chapters three, four, and five will each analyze films related to the categories of witnessing and amnesia, recall and reconstruction, and sharing via technology, respectively. Finally, chapter six will discuss the results of the analyses and draw some conclusions about the research questions.

Chapter 2

Ideological Analysis of Memory:

Methodological Approach

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, memories are internal, ephemeral, dynamic, and subject to exaggerations and exclusions. This means that, as with so many other subjective aspects of human life, our best chance for insight is to turn to metaphorical representations. My argument is that cinema is the medium that provides the best and most robust depictions of memory. With that in mind, this thesis will ask the following four research questions: 1. What explicit and implicit ideologies of power are communicated through the content of cinematic memories? 2. What assumptions are communicated via the cinematic forms of memory? 3. Where do ideologies of power reside in autobiographical memory? 4. What can these findings reveal about real life intersections between ideologies of power and autobiographical memory?

To begin to address these four questions, I propose to analyze a representational set of films that use depictions of autobiographical memory systems either as a narrative device or as the subject of the plot. These analyses will be performed using techniques of ideological criticism and from the perspective of critical theory – that is to say, focusing on ideologies of power that emerge from matters of race, sex, gender, class, and so on. I will analyze several different film texts in order to locate the promoted ideas, beliefs, and values within these examples that are articulating ideology. I will look for these dynamics

of power and vulnerability in the content of these sequences as well as in the form the cinematic depictions of memory are given.

Ultimately, the goal of this analysis will be to connect the findings from the ideological critiques of the films to real world examples of the three types of power relationships described by Sillars and Gronbeck (2001): 1. Political power, the ability to influence via state or other corporate power mechanisms. 2. Social power, the ability to influence via social hierarchies. 3. Relational (interpersonal) power the ability to influence via interpersonal relationships (p. 263). To this end, the four research questions that are the focus of each film analysis will work together to provide insight, vocabulary, and references for assessing and discussing the causes and consequences of ideologically-tinted autobiographical memories.

Research Design

The research design for this study will be exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative. The criterion for selecting artifacts for analysis is that they are visual, cinematic representations of one of the three following categories: 1. witnessing, making, and erasing memories; 2. recollection and reconstruction of memories; and 3. externalizing and sharing memories. For each of these three areas a chapter will analyze representative films in terms of ideology and memory.

The research questions at the center of this thesis each serve a specific purpose. The first area to be analyzed in each chapter will be the explicit and implicit ideologies of power being communicated through the content of these cinematic memories. The analysis of the narrative content of the memory reveals what kind of ideology is being conveyed there. This will be a more or less straightforward ideological and critical

analysis of the narrative being depicted on screen by the memory sequence. This analysis of the content being shown in the memory will focus on manifestations of topics familiar to critical studies, such as racism, sexism, classism, and so forth. I will look for scenes of memory that include language, action, tone, and plot that communicate particular ideologies of power and then reinforce or challenge in some way. Such examples may be explicit, like a character using a racial slur, or it may be more implicit, like a person who clutches their belongings more tightly when a "gangster" or "punk" gets on the elevator with them. So, for instance, in *Rosemary's Baby*, there are several scenes in which Rosemary's husband – the aptly-named "Guy" – "forbids" Rosemary to act in one way or another, stating that he is her husband and "won't allow it." Such instances are verbal, explicit examples of sexist, religious, and authoritarian ideologies that represent one party exerting power over another. However, the plot of *Rosemary's Baby*, in which a cult drugs, rapes, and impregnates Rosemary in order to fulfill a religious prophecy, has implicit ideas about women's rights to physical autonomy and their available medical choices; topics of great political significance when the film was produced and, of course, these topics continue to resonate today. In this way, not all ideologies found in these examples will be verbal, visual, or even explicit. Some ideologies of power will emerge from the actions, conflicts, and resolutions that make up the plots as well as how the many other cinematic elements are contextualized.

Next I will examine what assumptions are communicated via the form memory is given on screen. There are certain assumptions and beliefs about how people remember, forget, and transform their autobiographical memories that are implied in these cinematic depictions. This portion of the analysis focuses on the form and "anatomy" of memory

and how these cinematic renderings correspond with research in memory studies. By analyzing the form that memory is given on screen there can be traits that reinforce or undermine those ideologies. For example, two films to be discussed in chapter four, *Little Big Man* and *Titanic*, present memory as if it were a "picture perfect" recording in the mind. Other films in that chapter present memory as a fusion of fact and fiction with the rememberer actively transforming the memory as it is recalled. Of course, the form of memory is not an either/or proposition, rather I am looking at the implications of the form in respect to ideologies of power.

From these two questions, what ideologies of power reside in the content and what in the form, the third aspect of analysis follows: in what ways do the content and form work together to articulate ideology? For instance, we know the narrative content of the memory is likely to contain ideological elements, but what about the implications of presuming memory is essentially a recording as opposed to an interpretation? For one, the ideology found there is a matter of course and a presumed "fact of nature" whereas for the other, the ideology is more apparently that of the rememberer's and not necessarily a depiction of "reality." I will analyze the examples to find other such areas of memory which convey, reinforce, or otherwise contextualize ideologies of power.

Finally, I will provide some concrete examples of how some of these dynamics between ideologies of power and cinematic memory can affect real life events. To do this, I will use the components just described and apply them to real life events involving ideology and autobiographical memory. This fourth section of each analysis chapter will attempt to provide social and rhetorical examples of contemporary events that serve as a practical demonstration of the findings. That is to say, how ideological narratives in the

content of memory can be reinforced by assumptions about the very nature of experiencing memory. For example, *Citizen Kane* presents memory as a seeming accurate recording of the past delivered from the rememberer. In such a context, the ideologies, along with the action contained in the memory, are cast as a part of how it "really was." This means the ideological content of memory is reinforced by a presentation of memory as fact. So, to apply the above ideas, take the case of Fidel Castro's death. In the news, there are many interviews with people who lived in Cuba during his revolution and after. As with many ideologues, opinions of Castro ranged from that of a great hero to a greedy, vengeful dictator. If one is listening to an interview with a Cuban citizen or ex-pat, and one believes this person's memory to be, essentially, factual, then the ideologies contained there become another part of the "facts" of the story and are less likely to be challenged. Someone who believes memory to be a confluence of fact and fiction may be more interested in parsing the historical facts of the interview from the ideologies the rememberer is personally espousing.

Selecting artifacts and organizing the analysis chapters

There are dozens of films from which to choose that have themes that include memory. In order to help choose examples that are relevant to the study, some criteria must be established. The criteria I am using here are simple: the examples must be well-known, widely-viewed films and they must include a visual, cinematic depiction of memory. In this section, I will describe which films will be reviewed and analyzed as well as how the film examples will be organized into chapters about amnesia, flashback, and technology.

First and foremost, if this study is to help develop a more general understanding of autobiographical memory – itself a very specific phenomenon – then the cinematic examples I choose ought to be able to be generally understood by large numbers of diverse people. The artifacts to be analyzed in this thesis will all contain scenes or plots from Hollywood-made, feature-length, popular films. Such examples allow for several kinds of accessibility. First, the content itself is reasonably accessible. The themes, plots, and conflicts of these films are geared toward and have been generally well-received by wide audiences. This is a characteristic I can only measure in terms of gross box-office ticket sales which I sourced from IMDB.com. Hollywood films are also accessible due to their distribution models. Such films are relatively simple to find and are available world-wide. Finally, many popular Hollywood films are closed-captioned for the hearing impaired and some have visual description tracks for the vision-impaired, expanding the potential audience even further.

The next consideration for choosing cinematic examples for this study is that they correspond to one of these three aspects of autobiographical memory: 1. making memories and amnesia, 2. recalling events from memory, and 3. exteriorizing or sharing memories via technology. These categories don't emerge from any specific philosophical or scientific paradigm, but are based on the literature review I conducted and my own personal experiences of how autobiographical memories are created and shared. To create an autobiographical memory, one first has to experience or witness an event. During this experience, certain sensory impressions of the event are encoded into our "memory banks." When we wish to reminisce about or share these memories, we draw from these banks and use the impressions there to re-construct a narrative of the event. Since such

memories are personal and interior, they can only be externalized and shared with others via some kind of technology, such as painting, language, poetry, print, film, or audio/video recordings. While this outline isn't necessarily grounded in science or philosophy, it seems a reasonable and fair assessment of the general workings of the process for the purposes of developing a methodology for investigation.

Based on the above considerations, the first analysis chapter, chapter three, will be about cinematic acts of witnessing, making, and erasing memories. These films are *Overboard*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Men in Black.* The reason for choosing these films over others is not only because they include amnesia as a part of their plots, but because they feature one or more people intentionally inducing or opportunistically taking advantage of amnesia for the sake of attaining or maintaining power. For instance, Roman Polanski's 1968 film, *Rosemary's Baby* (gross ticket sales: $33,395,426), and Barry Sonnenfeld's 1997 film, *Men in Black* (gross ticket sales: over $250 million in the USA and $326 million worldwide). Both films tell stories in which amnesia is intentionally used as a device for establishing a power differential between parties. These movies depict amnesia as a means of establishing control over others in order to advance a group's agenda.

In *Rosemary's Baby*, Rosemary Woodhouse is drugged with the intent of rendering her unable to remember being raped and impregnated during a religious ceremony. Rosemary's drug-induced amnesia about the events surrounding the conception of her child – an event the audience, her husband, and a conspiracy of "Satanists" have witnessed and can remember – makes her vulnerable and unaware that she is surrounded by dangerous people who intend to do her harm. The resulting power

differential between Rosemary and the cult due to the amnesia is the primary source of suspense in the film.

Men in Black is another example of a film where induced amnesia is used as tool of control, this time by a powerful organization in contact with interplanetary aliens. The film is about an agency that has appointed itself ambassadors and protectors of earth's civilizations from a variety of extra-terrestrial visitors. The agents (men dressed in black suits) use a device called a neurolyzer to precisely erase particular memories of witnessed events from the public they claim to protect. To maintain their powerful secrets about extra-terrestrial civilizations, advanced technology, and intergalactic dangers to the planet, the Men in Black operate as self-appointed memory police. They claim that those who aren't in their agency can't handle the facts about extra-terrestrial life visiting earth and any non-agents who witness any of these secrets must have their memories of the evidence promptly erased.

Chapter four will be about cinematic depictions of recall and reconstruction. By this I mean the imagery and other sensory impressions of a witnessed event that are encoded into one's mind and from which can later be drawn from in order to re-construct a narrative. For this chapter, I chose several films that contain acts of recall depicted as flashbacks and which represent the notions that memory is sometimes depicted as an objective recording and sometimes as a subjective reconstruction. For instance, the examples of the many films that use objective flashback as a narrative device to depict memories as literal, linear, and "accurate" portrayals of the past, are Arthur Penn's 1970 film, *Little Big Man* (gross ticket sales: $31,559,562), and James Cameron's 1997 film, *Titanic* (gross ticket sales: $600 million in the USA and over $1 billion worldwide). Both

films feature lead characters who, while being interviewed, have their memories of past events depicted on screen in full detail and as if they were unfolding in the present. In *Little Big Man*, the flashback is contextualized by a frame story of a historian who makes an audio-recording of an oral history delivered by 121-year old Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman) about his time living with the Cheyenne Indians in the late 19th century. As Crabb tells his stories leading up to and including the battle of "Little Big Horn," the film presents his memories to the audience in the form of an extended flashback that comprises nearly the entire run time of the film.

A similar dynamic occurs in James Cameron's 1997 film, *Titanic*. The frame story features treasure hunters who are searching the wreck of the famed ship and who want to learn the history of a particularly valuable necklace dubbed "The Heart of the Ocean." They locate someone who may know about the jewel; a survivor of the Titanic disaster. As this survivor begins her story about the necklace and her time on the ship, the film fades into a flashback and the audience witnesses the memories first-hand. I chose these two films because they are examples of what I call objective flashbacks. That is to say, that the memories being depicted are portrayed as if they are re-plays of past actions rather than as narratives subjectively transformed by the individual doing the remembering.

Several films in chapter four do present memory as the subjective, transformative phenomenon described by Zelizer (1995), Turim (1989), Kammen (2010), Conway (1990) and others in the literature review. The first is Oliver Stone's 1994 film, *Natural Born Killers* (gross ticket sales: $50,282,766), which I chose because it features a flashback stylized by the director as a montage of short vignettes, each of which are

presented in a different visual style representative of late 20th century American cable-television programming. This stylization of memory reflects autobiographical memory influenced by television media. The second film, David Lynch's 2001 film, *Mulholland Drive* (gross ticket sales are only $7 million in the USA and $20 million worldwide, but the film's popularity as a cult classic has exploded since its theatrical release), tells a story of an actor's failed attempt at movie stardom. The story takes place almost entirely in the form of a dream-altered-version of the hopeful actor's personal autobiographical memory of her Hollywood experience thus far. Similar to the television-style montage flashback in *Natural Born Killers* which implies an influence of that medium on the rememberer, the delusional dream-memory in *Mullholland Drive* also reflects a relationship between media and memory – in this case the style evokes the glamorous heyday of film, roughly the 1940s-1960s. I chose these two examples of cinematic memories stylized as Hollywood and television productions as examples not only of subjective memory depictions, but also as elaboration of Kammen's descriptions of how media content can influence the content of memory. In these films, it is not only the content of media, but the style – its form – that is influencing these characters' memories.

The final example of a film depicting subjective remembering is Rob Reiner's 1986 film, *Stand by Me* (gross ticket sales: over $57 million). This film has an extended flashback similar to those in *Little Big Man* and *Titanic*. Yet *Stand by Me* is also an example of subjectivity like the flashbacks in *Natural Born Killers* and *Mulholland Drive*. Reiner blends some aspects of the idea of objective remembering with those of subjective, interpretive remembering in order to achieve a sensation that memory is made up of both recollections and reconstructions. I chose this film because it is a more subtle

expression of the idea that, while memories may seem at times like they are objective recordings, they are actually being influenced by us as we remember them.

Chapter five will be about externalizing and sharing memories via technology. This chapter features films that depict memory as something rendered external and able to be shared with others through a technology, whether real or fictional. These films also present memory as an arena where ideological tensions between the human and the technological can be enacted. This second idea is demonstrated by explicit anxiety about a future where hegemonic power structures manipulate memory after some powerful technology renders it into a commodity. *Robocop*, *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* are the four films for analysis in this chapter. These films' plots are an offshoot of the long-discussed struggle between humanity and technology and they depict memory – rather than, for instance, the body, or society – as an arena where the tensions between the human and the technological can be enacted.

Like *Men in Black*, these films feature fictional technologies aimed at altering memory, but here the concept is pressed further so that memory becomes a commodity able to be bought, sold, and transformed – voluntarily or otherwise. I chose these four films because they represent another confluence of memory and ideology, this time in the form of technology and commodification. In each of these films, fictitious technology able to locate, erase, implant, or alter an individual's personal, interior memories, is used to further an agenda. So there is explicit ideology that directly relates to the plot in addition to the implicit ideologies of the filmmakers; critiques of the power of entrenched agencies to corrupt "authentic" memory via technology.

Paul Verhoeven's 1987 film, *Robocop* (gross ticket sales: over $54 million with another $24 million from rentals in the ensuing years) is a story about a police officer who is murdered during a drug raid. His body is recovered and sold to a company called Omnicorp which transforms him into a cyborg called Robocop. Despite having his memory "wiped" during his creation, memories of his human past start to return shortly after he begins working with the public as a police officer. I selected this film because the movie's plot focuses on this cyborg searching for and reclaiming the memories of his formerly-human life in order to also reclaim his human identity.

Ridley Scott's 1982 film, *Blade Runner* (gross ticket sales: over $40 million), also has a plot in which the main tensions have to do with the intersection between human and technological memory. Based on Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" the story takes place in a universe where humanity has been infiltrated by androids that are perfect physical replicas of human beings. The androids cannot be distinguished by testing or examining the body; they can only be identified by their absence of memory and empathy. The newest androids in this conflict have been programmed with false memories and provided with photographs to make these implanted memories seem more real and more difficult than ever to detect. I chose this film because of its focus on the dwindling differences between distinguishes humanity from our technological creations.

The final two films depict imaginary technologies capable of transforming memory into a medium unto itself – either to be implanted or erased – and thus technologically dissolves any remaining distance between memory and media used to share or preserve it. When memory itself is a medium that can be copied, implanted or

erased, it can be commodified. For example, in the fictional universe of Paul Verhoeven's 1990 film, *Total Recall* (gross ticket sales: over $117 million in the USA and over $140 million worldwide), there is technology that can implant memories as discrete, finite experiences and so customers can pay to have others' memories, usually of a vacation, implanted into their brains. The film is based on another Philip K. Dick story, this one titled, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale." The film is an interplanetary adventure about a man who struggles to understand his own identity in a universe where memory is a medium unto itself and a commodity easily erased, fabricated, and implanted by technology. The Rekall Corporation sells implantable memories of exciting, off-planet vacations that require no bodily travel by the purchaser. However, the mysterious "Agency" – an organization charged with fighting a rebellion on Mars – also uses memory implants, but do so in order to overwrite and fabricate entire identities as a means of deep cover for undercover agents. This film is a part of the analysis because, in this universe, memories are a commodity to be bought, sold, implanted, and deleted on demand. As a result, one's memories are no longer a reliable source of identity.

The final example of cinematic memory in this chapter, Michel Gondry's 2004 film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (gross ticket sales: $34 million in the USA and over $73 million worldwide), depicts a fictional technology that treats memories as if they were something like computer files and able to be "deleted." The story is about a couple who, after a difficult ending to a turbulent relationship, decide to erase one another from their respective minds and memories. The film follows Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) into his subconscious where we join him on a journey through his own memories as well as the costs and consequences of being able to erase painful past moments from

one's mind. I chose this film for its use of memory-erasing technology as a self-induced pain reliever as well as for its profound visual expressions of memory both as a string of discrete, chronological events and as a continuous, non-chronological, dynamic space where present intersects with the past.

This chapter explained the methodological approach and briefly identified the films to be analyzed. The next three chapters will describe these films in more detail. In them I will analyze the form and content of cinematic depictions of memory looking for elements that articulate ideology. The final chapter, chapter six, will discuss and summarize the findings from the analysis chapters. It will include limitations of this study, unanticipated results, and ideas for future research.

Chapter 3:

Witnessing, amnesia, and power

Introduction

Allow me to make an obvious point: an event must be witnessed in some capacity in order for a person to later recall some of the details of that event. The reason to begin with this idea is to establish a basis with which the complex, personal, and internal autobiographical memory system may be examined for ideologies of power. In order to complicate this simple observation – and to illustrate the point via contrast – the focus of this chapter will be on amnesia, the inability to recall events that one has witnessed. By focusing on memory's absence, I intend to emphasize the importance of not only witnessing and creating memories but retaining those memories so that they may someday be recalled (the subject of chapter four) and shared with others (the subject of chapter five).

In his book, *Memory and Amnesia: An Introduction*, Alan Parkin (1987) explains there are two types of amnesia. The first is retrograde amnesia – the loss of once-established memories (p. 65). The second category of amnesia Parkin describes is anterograde amnesia, the condition where one is unable to create memories of one or more events (p. 65). This chapter analyzes cinematic depictions of amnesia, focusing largely on examples where the condition is intentionally induced for the sake of power.

Amnesia in cinema

Amnesia appears as a narrative device in a variety of films. For instance, the condition may be used to initiate a mystery, provide a protagonist with a disadvantage to

overcome, create comedic tension, or to create a tone of dread and suspense. The films in this chapter – *Overboard, Men in Black, Memento, 50 First Dates, Rosemary's Baby*, and *The Hangover* – are examples of some of the many films that use both categories of amnesia as a plot device.

In cinema, losing some or all of one's past to retrograde amnesia is often depicted as being brought on by injury or trauma. For instance, Garry Marshall's 1987 film *Overboard* stars Goldie Hawn as a wealthy socialite who falls off her yacht, hits her head, and loses her entire personal past and identity. Another example is the 2002 film, *The Bourne Identity*, starring Matt Damon as Jason Bourne, in which a CIA assassin loses his sense of identity after he drowns and suffers retrograde amnesia. Barry Sonnenfeld's 1997 movie, *Men in Black*, uses retrograde amnesia induced with a technological device that can alter neural connections in the brain to precisely erase potential memories of top secret events from anyone who witnesses them.

The inability to create a memory of an event also shows up in several films. As with cinematic depictions of retrograde amnesia, it may be an injury or trauma that causes the condition of anterograde amnesia, but drugs and alcohol are also common tropes. Christopher Nolan's 2000 film, *Memento* is a murder mystery starring Guy Pearce as a brain-injured widower unable to create new memories since experiencing an assault at home. A similar condition is found in Drew Barrymore's character Lucy Whitmore in Peter Segal's 2004 comedy, *50 First Dates*. Lucy has survived a car accident, but her injuries have left her unable to make any new memories. Every morning she wakes up thinking it is the day before her car accident. Everything that happens during the day is forgotten at night, "resetting" her memory to the day prior to the crash. Two more

examples, Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby* and Todd Phillips' 2012 comedy *The Hangover*, each use drug-induced anterograde amnesia to fuel suspenseful or comedic tensions in their respective stories.

Amnesia can't be visualized simply and directly on-screen like acts of reminiscing and sharing can. Amnesia represents the absence of memory and cinematic visualizations of the condition focus on the various circumstances that surround the victim's condition more so than the content of the missing memories. The filmmaker may depict the specific type of amnesia the victim experiences in the story – retrograde (loss of memory) or anterograde (inability to create memory) – as well as the means by which the condition came about. Another element at the director's disposal is whether or not to depict the events that would have been represented by the absentee memories. For instance, the two films I examine in-depth in this chapter, *Rosemary's Baby* and *Men in Black*, show soon-to-be amnesiacs witnessing soon-to-be-forgotten events and then – through injury or other methods – the memory of the event is subsequently erased from the character concerned. Of course, some other characters in the story are able to remember details that the amnesiac cannot. This can produce a variety of effects ranging from tragic to comedic to suspenseful. Other amnesia films, such as *The Hangover* or *The Bourne Identity*, don't show the events that have gone missing or unremembered. Instead, these stories take the audience on a journey of discovery along with the amnesiac protagonist, filling in the gaps of information through dialogue and actions.

In some stories, the role of amnesia to the narrative is broader and provides additional dimensions with which to visualize the condition. In the films analyzed in this chapter, amnesia is used as a means of attaining power. The amnesia is either

opportunistically exploited or intentionally induced in order to serve an agenda. Since these examples of amnesia regard power, it is here where ideology enters the picture. Films that use the absence of memories as a vulnerability to be exploited include ideological motives for inducing the amnesia, the method of doing so, and the consequences for the amnesiac victims.

Amnesia as a cinematic device for telling stories about power

In the 1987 Garry Marshall film, *Overboard*, Goldie Hawn plays the wealthy and demanding Joanna Stayton. Stayton hires local carpenter Dean Proffitt, played by Kurt Russell, to do some work on her yacht. After several days of work, the two argue about the materials he is using. The fight reaches a climax when she pushes him off the boat and into the water. Later that night, Stayton too falls overboard. She is rescued, and taken to the local hospital. When Dean later sees Joanna on the news, injured and suffering from amnesia, he comes up with a plan for revenge. He goes to the hospital and claims she is his wife and the mother of his four young children. The authorities, despite her condition and against her wishes, hand Joanna over to Proffitt. Once at the Proffitt household, Joanna is deceived into believing she is the wife and mother of this family. She cleans, cooks, and cares for them believing they are her actual husband and children. Eventually the truth comes out, Dean and Joanna fall in love despite it all, and they become one big (wealthy) family. Apart from the comic plot, the film reveals a narrative that plays on the power dynamics employed in Joanna's abuse of Dean and his subsequent reversal as he takes advantage of her amnesia.

Many films tell stories about power and most feature some means of establishing the relative positions of the powerful and the vulnerable. Technological superiority,

wealth and influence, physical dominance, and emotional manipulation are just a few means of creating a power differential between parties. In some films, that tool is amnesia. As seen in *Overboard*, Dean Proffitt gets his revenge – and a new love interest – by taking advantage of Joanna Stayton's vulnerability that results from her amnesia. Throughout the film, and beyond the amnesia, the dynamics between Stayton and Proffitt involve several blatant abuses of power. Stayton wields her wealth and status to abuse Proffitt financially and then again as a shield when she attacks him physically. Proffitt responds by abusing Stayton's amnesia in order to take her captive. Similar power dynamics with amnesia as the differentiating factor between the powerful and the vulnerable can be found in several other films.

One thing to consider in these films is whether or not the person taking advantage of the amnesiac is doing so opportunistically or if the condition is being induced with an agenda in mind. In *Overboard, Memento*, and *50 First Dates*, each of the amnesiac characters has their lives interfered with and manipulated by others after they are afflicted. The victims' exploiters are not responsible for causing the amnesia and they are "merely" opportunistic in their abuse.

In *Rosemary's Baby* and *Men in Black,* the abuse that follows the amnesia is not opportunistic. Here there are characters with agendas who intentionally induce amnesia in others in order to attain or maintain control over the victims. In these cases, the means of inducing the amnesia as well as the motivation for doing so are ideological. For example, motivated by a failed attempt to birth the "son of Satan," the villains of *Rosemary's Baby* concoct an herbal, psychoactive "witch's brew" that causes hallucinations and blackouts in order to induce amnesia in their next victim, Rosemary. The protagonists of *Men in*

Black use advanced technology acquired from extra-terrestrials to erase and replace memory. The Men in Black agency is already incredibly powerful, albeit secret, when the film begins and their motivation for intentionally inducing retrograde amnesia is a desire to maintain that powerful status.

There are also ideological consequences for the victimized parties. For Rosemary Woodhouse, they incude patriarchal violations of her body and her reproductive rights. In *Men in Black*, one of the consequences of the agency being able to erase anyone's memory at any time is an authoritarian relationship between the Men in Black agency and the public it claims to protect. The remainder of this chapter will focus on these two films to examine some of the specific details and circumstances surrounding ideology, amnesia and power. Each film will be examined using the organizing structure of motive, method, and consequences.

Rosemary's Baby

Roman Polanski's 1968 film, *Rosemary's Baby*, is set in 1965 in an apartment building in downtown Manhattan, New York. Guy and Rosemary Woodhouse are a young couple played by John Cassavetes and Mia Farrow. They move into one of the apartments and soon become friends with their neighbors, Minnie and Roman Castavet, played by Ruth Gordon and Sidney Blackmer. Although not revealed until later in the film, Minnie and Roman are leaders of a witches' coven. The Castavets devise a plan to use Rosemary as a vessel to give birth to a child of Satan after a previous failed attempt with a different young woman. The Castavets conspire with Guy and offer to promote his acting career in exchange for subduing Rosemary for their plan. With Guy's help, the Castavets drug Rosemary into semi-consciousness and while under the influence of this

drug, she is raped and impregnated. Under the influence of the drug, memories of the night are never formed in her mind and so she does not know what happened. Because of Rosemary's amnesia, Guy, Minnie, and Roman are able to stay near to observe and manipulate Rosemary throughout her ensuing pregnancy.

While there are a few supernatural aspects of the story which may be frightening to some, the real tension and suspense in *Rosemary's Baby* emerges from the fact that every significant character – as well as the viewing audience – is able to remember an event that Rosemary cannot. There is a conspiracy surrounding her, yet she cannot remember and so cannot protect herself against it. Rosemary's amnesia becomes a means of control for her antagonists mainly because Rosemary does not remember the event that establishes them as her antagonists. The amnesia keeps her unaware that she is surrounded by people who conspired to have her drugged and raped and who intend to steal her child.

As mentioned earlier, since the content of the memory is not available for recall, I claim that ideology lies in the dynamics that surround cinematic amnesia – specifically the motives, methods, and consequences. The motive for the Castavets to induce amnesia in Rosemary is summed up in three different scenes about a character named Theresa Gionofrio, played by Victoria Vetry. Theresa plays a brief but important role in the film as the pre-cursor and motivation for the conspiracy against Rosemary. The first of the three scenes takes place shortly after the Woodhouses move in to their apartment in the Bramford. Rosemary is in the laundromat and meets Theresa, who introduces herself as a boarder who lives with Minnie and Roman. Their conversation is short and friendly; Theresa mentions how nice the Castavets are and Rosemary tells her that she and Guy

live in the adjacent apartment. During their talk, Theresa shows Rosemary a strange-looking pendant that was given to her by Minnie Castavet. Later in the film, the same pendant will be given to Rosemary after she is marked as the next target. Theresa departs and the scene ends.

The second scene pertaining to Theresa happens after the Woodhouses spend a night out on the town together. They arrive back at the Bramford to a scene of tragedy: The Castavets' boarder, Theresa, has leapt to her death. As Rosemary and Guy approach, they see the young woman's body on the sidewalk in a puddle of blood and with the "good luck charm" still around her neck. There are police, emergency vehicles, flashing red lights, and a group of stunned onlookers milling about the area. It is against the tragic backdrop of Theresa's suicide that the Woodhouses meet the Castavets for the first time. What is significant about Theresa's suicide, beyond providing a particular atmosphere in which to meet the Castavets, is that the act precipitates the conspiracy against Rosemary's body and memory.

Theresa's suicide as the motive for inducing amnesia is conclusively seen by looking at the third "Theresa scene" in which Rosemary goes to sleep and has a strange, symbolic dream. This dream, if examined closely, reveals why the Castavets will keep their next potential mother in the dark about the nature of her pregnancy and the goals of the coven. Theresa took her own life because she knew too much about the coven's intent; a mistake the Castavets won't repeat.

The scene begins with a close-up of Rosemary. The camera hovers over her face and then drifts up the white and yellow flower patterned wallpaper that covers the partition between the Woodhouse's apartment and that of the Castavets'. The image of

Theresa's bloodied body on the front sidewalk fades into view, superimposed over the wallpaper. The scene changes and there is a nun who seems to be mouthing gibberish, but out of her mouth comes the distinctive voice of Minnie Castavet, "sometimes I wonder how come you're the leader of anything." Bits of Minnie's words seem to be trickling through the partition and into Rosemary's dream. "If you'd listened to me we wouldn't have to do this and we'd be all ready to go now instead of having to start over from scratch," Minnie laments, "I told you not to tell her in advance. I told you she wouldn't be open-minded." I interpret Minnie's words to mean that Theresa was to be the mother to give birth to "Satan's son" and Roman was too transparent with Theresa about that fact. Theresa, learning the details of what she was involved with, killed herself rather than go through with it. This precipitates in the Castavets the idea to induce amnesia in order to fulfill their agenda.

These comments by Minnie are a part of an actual conversation that Rosemary is hearing through the wall as she sleeps and it reveals the motivation for what will eventually be the decision to drug the coven's next victim into unconsciousness. Minnie is complaining to Roman about his being too blunt with Theresa and their plans of conceiving a child through her with Satan, implying Theresa jumped to her death rather than fulfill this role. Off-camera, but revealed later in the film, Minnie and Roman decide to make sure their next victim does not know the nature of the child she is carrying – this is the motivation for the amnesia. The Castavets fixate on Rosemary and then conspire with Guy to deliver a chocolate mousse laced with a strong drug to her. The drug is the method of inducing anterograde amnesia.

The drug is delivered to Rosemary after the Woodhouses decide together to have a baby. Guy arranges a romantic dinner alone at home for a "baby-making night." Their dinner is briefly interrupted by Minnie delivering chocolate mousse for dessert. As they eat the mousse, Rosemary says she tastes a bitter flavor with the chocolate and that she doesn't want to finish it because of the taste. Guy quickly gets agitated and insists she eat more despite her objections. When Guy steps out of the room for a moment, Rosemary dumps most of the mousse into a napkin. Guy returns moments later and Rosemary pretends to have eaten it all, asking sarcastically, "There, daddy, do I get a gold star?"

This scene serves two purposes. The drug is delivered to Rosemary via the mousse, though she doesn't consume it all, which sets the stage for the following scene in which Rosemary slips in and out of consciousness rather than passing completely out. Because she is not completely unconscious, the viewer can witness some of the ceremony that follows. Although Rosemary does not eat the entire drug dose, what she does ingest is strong enough to cause hallucinations, periodic unconsciousness, and temporary inhibition of her ability to create and retain a memory of the night's events. The chocolate mousse scene is also one of our first glimpses of Guy's paternalistic behavior toward Rosemary; behavior which will manifest as much more severe examples of misogyny later in the film.

Shortly after she eats the mousse, the drug takes hold and Rosemary falls asleep, however, as mentioned, the dose was incomplete so she does not stay unconscious. Polanski uses this fact to alternate between depicting Rosemary's semi-conscious, hallucinatory state and the actual actions of the coven during their ritual. This dual perspective has, for the purposes of this chapter, two main functions. One is to depict the

events that Rosemary will forget thus setting up the suspense between her and Guy and the rest of the coven that will be the hallmark of the film. The other purpose is to depict the hallucinatory experience Rosemary is undergoing which is pre-empting her ability to create a memory of the night permitting the audience to "see" the cause of the amnesia.

During the ceremony, as the coven sings and performs its rituals, Guy is worried that Rosemary will remember and he tells Minnie that Rosemary is "awake…she sees." Minnie replies, "She don't see. As long as she ate the [mousse] she can't see or hear. She's like dead. Now sing." Minnie is correct. With the exception of a few flashes of the rape scene when she wakes the next morning and a few other tidbits at the end of the film when she learns the truth, Rosemary's drug-induced, anterograde amnesia is essentially complete. Through the three scenes I described about Theresa Ginofrio as well as the hallucinatory, ceremonial rape scene, Polanski shows the viewer the motivation for inducing anterograde amnesia in Rosemary as well as the means of doing so. The last point of this discussion are the consequences of Rosemary's amnesia, a topic that provides the most in-depth and interesting visualization of the condition she is suffering from – manifesting as a loss of autonomy, specifically in regard to her body and reproductive choices.

Much has been written about the feminist and reproductive rights commentary that can be found in *Rosemary's Baby*. For instance, in her article about the fetus as a liminal entity, Karyn Valerius (2005) calls *Rosemary's Baby* "a story of violence, deceit, and misappropriation of a woman's body by people she trusts" (p. 116). In an analysis of the film from the perspective of "terror management theory" – a theory about the role of the fear of death in human endeavors – Daniel Sullivan and his co-authors (2009) are

"horrified by the way in which Rosemary's persona is stifled by the patriarchal, old world order of the coven" (p. 193). W. Scott Poole (2013), in his *Huffington Post* review, "Rosemary's baby and the politics of women's bodies," calls it a "darkly subversive film about women's health and feminism . . . she systematically loses control over her own body and her own choices." These feminist critiques of the infringements upon both Rosemary's autonomy as well as her reproductive rights summarize the consequences she endures due to her amnesia.

The violations of Rosemary's autonomy beyond the rape and after the induced amnesia are consequences that she suffers, in part, because of the amnesia. Though all that she endures during the film is inflicted upon her by others, it is the amnesia draped over her that keeps her from realizing what her husband and the Castavets are doing to her until too late. She is smart, energetic, competent, and has resources who can help her, but the amnesia keeps her from knowing for certain and taking definitive action. The condition she suffers from is pervasive, lurking around her all the time and obscuring her view of the danger she is in.

In *Rosemary's Baby,* director Roman Polanski depicts several dynamics surrounding Rosemary's anterograde amnesia in order to help visualize the condition. First, the motivation for the Castavets' preventing Rosemary from remembering the conception of her child emerges in part from a desire to strip the persona of Rosemary away from her reproductive system. They need a woman to carry "Satan's" baby to term – and without doing anything rash like Theresa Ginofrio did when she learned of the cult's agenda. Second, the method the Castavets use to induce amnesia is a psychoactive, herbal drug that sends Rosemary into near-unconsciousness so that she does not form a

memory of the baby's conception. Last, the consequences of Rosemary's amnesia include her being systematically deprived of reproductive health choices at every stage of her pregnancy by her husband, the Castavets, and her doctors.

Men in Black

In *Rosemary's Baby,* Roman Polanski focuses on depicting the motivation and method of a group of people intentionally inducing amnesia in a young woman and the consequences she endures as a result of the amnesia. In *Men in Black*, Barry Sonnenfeld also deals with the motive, method, and consequences of intentional amnesia, but on a much larger scale. In the film, the Men in Black – named for the black, tailored suits that they all wear – is an ultra-secret organization that works to conceal the fact that Earth has become a home for extra-terrestrial political refugees. Two agents, Tommy Lee Jones as "Kay" and his newly recruited partner, "Jay," played by Will Smith, learn that an alien terrorist has arrived on Earth in search of a source of near-endless energy. This source of energy, which contains an entire galaxy concentrated into a small jewel, must be retrieved or the Earth will be destroyed. The agents follow a series of clues to hunt down the rogue alien, find the shrunken galaxy, and save the planet from annihilation.

Rather than a drug that causes blackouts and pre-empts memory, the Men in Black use advanced, "alien" technology to induce retrograde amnesia in a very discrete and precise way. The "neurolyzer" acts as a means of erasing established memories based on increments of time: seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years. In a flash of red light, everything that happened from the present back to the prescribed time setting is erased from whomever the weapon is aimed at. Not only does the device erase memory, it leaves the amnesiac in a fictitious hypnotic state that allows the Men in Black agent to replace

the erased memory with an artificial one merely by telling a story. It is an especially useful tool considering the over-the-top nature of the rest of their weaponry, communication systems, and transportation.

After seeing it used a few different times, Jay asks when he will get his own neurolyzer. Kay responds, "When you grow up." Even though Kay provides Jay all manner of devastating weaponry early and often, he holds the neurolyzer back, believing it to require a greater sense of responsibility; this seems to imply that the neurolyzer is their most powerful weapon. However, despite this implication of the neurolyzer requiring more maturity and experience than other weapons, when Kay does use it, he does so with a casual disregard for whoever is having their memories altered by him.

In one scene Jay recognizes a lack of empathy in Kay when it comes to erasing and replacing memories. Kay seems very casual about both the act of erasing as well as the meager details he provides as a replacement memory. For example, the two are investigating an alien crash site on a rural farm and conclude they need to wipe away the memory of a woman, Beatrice, who saw an alien wearing her husband's skin "like a suit." While speaking to her, Kay and Jay realize her husband was neglectful of her and possibly abusive. After they get the information they need from her and Kay erases her memory of seeing her deceased husband, Kay replaces her now-absent memory with a nonsensical story about weather balloons, swamp gas, and "refracted light from the planet Venus." Jay cuts him off asking, "That weak-ass story is the best you can come up with?" At this prompting by Jay, the two improvise a more empathetic story that is more emotionally beneficial to Beatrice in light of how they suspect her husband treated her. In this scene and similar ones where the two have to erase and replace memory, Sonnenfeld

places a great deal of emphasis on the choices, implications, and moral hazards involved in using the neurolyzer as a means of inducing retrograde amnesia. Examining the moral implications of their method within the film adds depth to the act of inducing amnesia.

The agency's motivation to eradicate memory operates on a global scale and is more convoluted and subversive than the Castavets' in *Rosemary's Baby*. The Men in Black organization acquires and maintains their power by secretly monopolizing the need to conceal, track, and sometimes exploit extraterrestrial refugees on Earth. They claim to be protecting the general population of Earth from a panic that would follow if the extent to which extra-terrestrial entities are living and interacting with humanity became known. So, they operate on a global scale and alter memory "for the greater good." However, Kay's attitude toward people who aren't a part of the organization is one of contempt and that complicates this attitude, revealing a second, more cynical motivation.

This ulterior motive emerges most directly when, at the end of Jay's recruitment, Jay and Kay take a break on a city park bench. Jay asks why their agency keeps their interplanetary dealings to themselves, "Why the big secret? People are smart, they can handle it." Kay replies, unmoved by Jay's sentimental confidence in others, "A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals and you know it." Kay's low regard for humans emerges again later in the movie when he mentions with amusement that "human thought is so primitive that it is looked upon as an infectious disease in some of the better galaxies." This scene – as well as Kay's long disregard for the quality and emotional implications of the stories he has replaced erased memories with through the years before meeting Jay – demonstrates the secondary motive of inducing amnesia: contempt for the very people they claim to be protecting.

The consequences of the Men in Black agency's abuse of power – and especially the power to erase memory – are authoritarian in nature. Again, this particular dynamic, the consequences to the victims, is the most compelling when it comes to visualizing what surrounds the amnesia being induced in the film. The implications of the Men in Black intentionally inducing amnesia in others as heroes and under the pretext of "for the greater good" goes beyond merely authoritarian consequences for the fictional universe of the film. While watching the film, if one is sensitive to the ideology contained there, the audience is challenged to question its tolerance for exchanging liberty for security. Many of the authoritarian traits of the Men in Black and the implications of their inducing amnesia are summed up well in the first part of the movie. I will use this scene to describe the authoritarianism used by the agency within the film and then I will address the implications of the viewers' reaction to the "heroes."

In the opening scene, a van is transporting migrants somewhere along the US-Mexico border. The van is stopped by a U.S. Border Patrol blockade and everyone in the van is asked to step out and line up. Suddenly an unmarked, high-performance car pulls up alongside the group. The car is deftly parked and two men in dark suits emerge from the vehicle. They are Kay, played by Tommy Lee Jones, and his partner Dee played by the late Richard Hamilton.[1] Kay announces – without context or cause, but with unflinching authority – "We'll take it from here." The Border Patrol agents ask who they are to which Kay blandly lies, "INS Division 6." Kay doesn't bother to show identification of any kind to back up his statement as he brushes past the border agents towards the detainees. One border agent states he has never heard of Division 6 to which

[1] The Men in Black code names are all phonetic spellings of single letter initials, such as K, D, and J.

Kay turns and sarcastically asks, “Really?” In a matter of moments, Kay and Dee have arrived, taken over, and will soon demand respect to the point of threat. When things get too complicated and their deception begins to fail, they will deploy their memory eradication technology as a final trump of power in the situation.

Kay and Dee take one of the arrested immigrants aside and away from the view of the Border Patrol agents. After concluding that there is no “INS Division 6,” one of the border agents sneaks over. He gasps in shock when he sees that Kay and Dee are interviewing what appears to be a large, blue, flippered extra-terrestrial with four arms. Kay and Dee hear the agent and look up; the alien, sensing opportunity, shoves Dee to the ground and then sprints toward the shocked border agent who screams in terror. From the ground, Dee fumbles with a strange looking gun. Kay, seeing his partner struggling, draws a similar weapon of his own. Kay shoots the alien who explodes into blue slime. The other border patrol agents hear the commotion and come rushing over and see the fallout from the confrontation.

The border patrol people want to know what happened so they approach to investigate and Kay lets them gather around him. Kay holds up a long, metal, capsule-shaped device he tells them is a “neurolyzer” – “a gift from some friends from out of town.” Kay explains that the red light atop the device will “isolate the electronic impulses in your brains, specifically the ones for memory.” He adjusts various dials on the device labeled minutes, hours, weeks, and years and presses a button. Red light flashes into the eyes of the Border Patrol agents and leaves them catatonic. Kay then recites a flimsy story as the border agents come out of the trance, “You’re lucky to be alive after a blast like that . . . underground gas veins . . . you fellas need to exercise a lot more caution

discharging your firearms." The neurolyzer has done its work and the border agents have completely forgotten they saw blue, slimy extra-terrestrial entrails in the desert and believe Kay's story about an underground gas explosion instead.

After the border agents depart, Kay walks over to his partner Dee who looks dejected. The alien fugitive nearly escaped from the Men in Black because Dee was unable to react quickly enough. The downcast agent tells his partner that he no longer feels physically capable to perform effectively for the Men in Black. Kay nods and he pulls out the neurolyzer. Dee laments that he will "miss the chase" to which Kay replies, "No, Dee, you won't." Kay sets the chronological controls on the neurolyzer, pushes the button, and, in a flash of red light, erases his now-retired partner's entire memory of his time with this secretive organization.

This scene summarizes the means to power the Men in Black employ in terms of both rhetoric and weaponry. Kay's words and attitude are an authoritative dismissal of the border agents' power as well as a declaration of his own power. It is as if there is an unquestionable hierarchy between the Men in Black and the Border Patrol, but a hierarchy the border agents do not know exists. This scene also introduces the audience to the power of the neurolyzer, which enables its user to erase and replace specific memory events. After the Men in Black have imposed their idea of order onto the border agents, they will erase any trace of their own involvement – including from the border agents' own memories.

Furthermore, while the Border Patrol may be a controversial agency for many reasons, it does, hypothetically at least, emerge from democratic processes. The Men in Black agency is merely authoritarian. They rely entirely on memory eradication as well

as violence and deception – entertaining though it may be – to establish and maintain their powerful, self-appointed role. The Men in Black will, later in the film, admit that they do not answer to any military, civilian, or corporate power and that they operate fully independently. Their financing comes from reverse engineering and patenting of advanced technologies and so, conclusively, this organization has created and maintains its own power structure within the universe of the film without the consent or funding of any other group of people. The group possesses an almost dictatorial level of power over the population of the earth – yet they are portrayed as the heroes of the film.

Unlike *Rosemary's Baby* and Polanski's unequivocal portrayal of those who abuse Rosemary as villainous, Barry Sonnenfeld uses comedy, wit, and style to gloss over the abuses of power committed by the "heroes" of *Men in Black*. The narrative is, obviously, about the agency and film encourages the viewer to root for them, but should we? The entire film seems to be a subversive, ironic critique of power in which the protagonists embody authoritarianism and the urge to sacrifice liberty for security. The plot, directing, and acting encourage the audience to identify with the oppressive elements of the agency's actions and beliefs. Furthermore, Sonnenfeld reinforces the agency's low opinions of humans – and tempts the audience to join them in their scorn – by depicting most of the minor characters that are subjected to the memory-altering procedure as slightly stupid, provincial, and goofy.

In *Men in Black*, amnesia is a convenient plot device and a not-so-subtle warning about transparency and secrecy among the powerful. Can the audience see through the smart, sleek authoritarian abuses of the Men in Black who are played by Hollywood-handsome, A-list actors? Will the audience push back against the film's pro-agency

propaganda and defend the annoying and unappealing victims from having their memories erased and replaced with whatever doggerel an agent can be bothered to mumble at them? It is in these ways that the authoritarian consequences of inducing amnesia in this film spills into the viewer experience.

In *Men in Black* there is again the use of motivation, method, and consequences as a way of visualizing amnesia. There seem to be two motives for the Men in Black agency to induce amnesia in their subjects. The first is what is explained to Jay during his recruitment, that the Men in Black fulfill the self-appointed role of protecting the human population from panic due to intergalactic realities by wiping inconvenient memories. Secondly, based on Kay's scornful opinions of humans that emerge throughout the movie as well as his lax, uncreative anecdotes with which he replaces his victims' memories reveal what I believe to be the Men in Black agency's actual motivation – the maintenance of their considerable wealth, power, and influence. The method employed by the agents to induce amnesia is an extra-terrestrial technology called the neurolyzer. This device allows the user to instantly erase and replace memories over a proscribed time period. The device itself as well as its signature red flash are used as a visual cue that a person is about to be afflicted with retrograde amnesia and have their memory replaced. Finally, the consequences of the induced amnesia in its victims is an authoritarian exchange of liberty – in the form of the freedom to create and retain one's own memories – for security against a threat that the public does not know exists. And this exchange is performed against their will by a party, the Men in Black, who the victims, again, do not know exists because the organization thinks the public "can't handle the truth." This is using amnesia as a tool in an authoritarian exchange and it is not

just contained within the narrative of the film. The ideology behind the action subversively spills over to the audience who may find themselves rooting for the authoritarian "heroes."

Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed two films, *Rosemary's Baby* and *Men in Black,* specifically their depictions of cinematic amnesia and ideologies of power that surround the condition. While analyzing these films, and assessing several others, I found amnesia being used as a tool to assert power over others. Furthermore, for such exploitations of the absence of memory, ideologies of power resided not in the content – which is, of course missing – but rather in the motives, methods, and consequences involved in managing to erase or suppress the memories. The next chapter will analyze several films that depict the act of remembering as flashbacks which are ideological in their contents as well as in their forms.

Chapter 4:

Ideology, Memory, and Flashbacks

Introduction

If one has witnessed an event, that event was emotionally resonant enough to forge memories, and those memories are retained, then one can later draw on those impressions and meanings in order to internally reminisce about the past (Conway, 1990, p. 104). This chapter deals with that aspect of memory involving internal acts of recall, retrospection, and narrative building. The examples here fall into what I believe most people would understand as "remembering." These films feature cinematic flashbacks used to depict individual autobiographical memories.

As mentioned in the literature review, one significant split in how academic writing contextualizes the experiences of internal autobiographical memory involves the accuracy and precision of details being remembered. In the 19th century and the early years of psychology, Freud and his cohorts believed autobiographical memory to be a complete record stored somewhere in the mind that can be accessed fully with due diligence. 20th century psychologists found this type of memory to be one of interpretation, interaction, and transformation. They found that people's memories are closer to constructed narratives than accurate recordings stored in the mind. This divergence between observing memory as an objective or subjective experience is a major focus of this chapter.

Visualizing Remembering: Memory, Flashback and Point of View

In her book, *Flashbacks in Film* – an examination of the functions and forms of flashbacks through cinematic history – Maureen Turim (1989) describes the cinematic flashback as a temporal disruption of the present tense of a film in order to provide details of events from the narrative past (p. 2). In many films, flashbacks serve strictly as a narrative device elaborating on the story, plot, or characters. Turim (1989) remarks that most flashbacks function in this "traditional" fashion. They serve only to deliver information about the larger narrative and do not creatively visualize memory as a dynamic phenomenon (p. 1). However, in some cases, flashbacks will, in addition to their storytelling roles, be used to visualize something of the act of remembering. Such flashbacks will be contextualized as a character recalling or reminiscing. This chapter is an analysis of flashback as a cinematic technique for storytelling as well as a means for visualizing memory. Specifically, I will examine several films containing flashbacks in order to look at cinematic depictions of autobiographical memory and remembering.

Many cinematic flashbacks are presented as an objective replay of action or events that took place prior to the narrative present and are delivered from the third person perspective of an omniscient storyteller. In his contribution to the collection, *Violating Time: History, Memory, and Nostalgia in Cinema,* Michael Pigott (2012) describes such flashbacks as "unalterable, distant 'visions of the past'" (p. 177). He makes this observation in contrast to depictions of interpretive, subjective memory that, rather than functioning as "unaltered" and "distant" visions, serve also to explore the experience of remembering as one that is alterable, immersive, and deeply personal.

Third person objective flashback

Films such as Francis Ford Coppola's 1974 film *The Godfather Part II* and Quentin Tarantino's 1992 film *Reservoir Dogs* contain examples of this type of third person "traditional" flashback delivered objectively from an omniscient storyteller. Both films feature sequences that, though they are about particular characters' pasts, are not representative of the act of remembering by any character in the film and are not memories. These flashbacks serve their respective narratives exclusively as scenes of past action.

For instance, in *The Godfather Part II*, there are several flashbacks that tell the story of the life and ascendancy of Vito Corleone beginning with his immigration to America as an orphan and then some of the key events that led to his becoming the head of a powerful crime syndicate. These sequences are thematically entwined with a second story about the succession to power of Vito's son, Michael Corleone, which happens in the film's narrative present. The flashbacks of Vito's life are not a matter of the character reminiscing internally, or writing a book, or telling stories to others at a party. They are strictly information about the past delivered from the storyteller. They represent a "vision of the past" and not an act of remembering.

The same dynamic appears in *Reservoir Dogs* in the form of a series of disembodied mini-stories interspersed throughout the main plot and shared from the storyteller's third person, omniscient point of view. These scenes elaborate on the pasts of each member of a strictly organized heist and, like the flashbacks in *The Godfather Part II*, are not remembrances. The scenes may be about the various characters' pasts, but the sequences do not emerge from memories. In both of these films, the flashback

sequences are delivered from the storyteller who is presenting objective information and not, as will be the case in the upcoming examples, a representation of a character remembering.

First person objective flashback

Even when flashbacks are explicitly connected to a character's memories and the flashbacks are being delivered from that character's point of view, the depiction may still function as an omniscient, objective sequence and lack any indication of participation by the rememberer. These first person objective flashbacks are contextualized within a film as a character remembering, but the presentation is much more akin to a third person omniscient flashback delivered from the storyteller. These flashbacks resemble the third person objective type because they show a memory as a direct delivery of information and not as an interpretation of an event by a rememberer. That is to say, they are depicted as accurate recordings of the past that can be replayed in the mind. Other than the contextualization that a flashback is emerging from a character's memory, there are effectively no distinctions between such first and third person objective, omniscient depictions of the past.

Two examples of films that use first person, objective flashbacks as memory are the 1970 film *Little Big Man* directed by Arthur Penn and James Cameron's 1997 movie, *Titanic*. Both films spend the majority of their running time depicting autobiographical flashbacks narrated by characters who, in their respective films, are interviewed about their accounts of particular historical events. *Little Big Man* begins with 121 year-old Jack Crabb, played by Dustin Hoffman, introducing himself to an historian played by William Hickey. Armed with a reel-to-reel audio recorder, the historian hopes to collect

an oral history from Crabb of his years living with the Cheyenne Indian tribe over 100 years ago on the western American frontier.

Little Big Man

As the dialogue transitions from Crabb introducing himself to the recounting his life, the scene fades from Crabb's face to a scene from his childhood set 111 years ago when Crabb was 10 years old. The flashback goes on to make up nearly the entire content of the movie and is depicted as a seemingly perfect imitation of past action. The memory, and the real story of the film, begins shortly after his family, frontier settlers, are all killed when their stagecoach is ambushed. Left for dead by the assailants, Crabb ends up being found and adopted by a tribe of Cheyenne Indians with whom he lives for several years, making a name for himself among them. As he becomes an adult, Crabb vacillates back and forth between being a natural born member of the white, Christian frontier families that are settling the west as well as an adopted and revered member of the Cheyenne tribe. These two populations are in bitter enmity with one another. The general gist of the film in terms of ideology is that the white frontier-folk and the U.S. Army are corrupt, inept, murderous and generally of inferior moral character when compared to Crabb's adopted tribe. The Cheyenne on the other hand are portrayed largely as noble, egalitarian, and living in Edenic harmony with the harsh but bountiful wilderness. So the ideology here involves the implications and simplifications of how these populations are depicted, particularly since Crabb's memory is being presented as accurate and authoritative.

121 year-old Crabb does a voice-over narration throughout, establishing that this is his memory narrative to twist and enhance as he pleases, but there are no visual or narrative cues that he has done so. Tall tales are mentioned very early in the film by the

historian, and so perhaps some of Crabb's sexual, sharpshooting, and historical highlights in his memory are somewhat "tall." Nonetheless, the visual style of the flashback – unlike upcoming examples from *Natural Born Killers, Mullholland Drive,* and *Stand By Me* – is unremarkable in terms of depicting interpretive qualities of memory. Other than its context of being Crabb's memory, it is presented almost no differently from the third person flashback examples found in *Reservoir Dogs* and *The Godfather Part II.* In this way, memory is implied to be a sort of recording in the mind that can be viewed and articulated.

Titanic

Titanic follows a near-identical story structure to *Little Big Man.* In this film, it is 1996 and treasure hunters are looking for a particularly valuable necklace that supposedly went down with the ship in 1912. Their hunt leads them to Rose DeWitt (Gloria Stuart), a survivor of the disaster for which the film is named. The treasure hunters interview DeWitt hoping to learn more. Like Jack Crabb in *Little Big Man,* Rose DeWitt begins to tell her story, the camera lingers on her face, and then fades into the flashback. Also like *Little Big Man*, the flashback is as if another movie has been set in the same world, but in the past. Again, aside from context, it does not seem like a memory as much as a playback of a recording.

The story that emerges from Rose's memories is that of a young woman born into a wealthy, English aristocratic family who books a cabin on the new, enormous, "unsinkable" ship, *RMS Titanic*. Demonstrated by her open passions for cigarettes and women's suffrage and her family's resistance to same, Rose is ideologically contextualized as a 20th century woman – and an early feminist. She stands in contrast to

her wealthy family and arranged betrothed who seem to be largely motivated by 19th century values. Though spirited, independent, wealthy, romantic, and young, Rose is beset by ennui and on the verge of depression about the stiffness of her family and the cold, calculating, money-obsessed personality of her soon-to-be husband.

Once on the ship with her family and fiancée, Rose meets Jack Dawson, a smart, handsome, charming young man played by Leonardo DiCaprio. Jack, who is too poor to afford a ticket on the ship, won passage for himself using his wits in a card game. The two have a passionate, adventurous love affair that culminates in Rose deciding to break off her engagement and stay with Jack when they all arrive in New York. Shortly after, the ship hits an iceberg and begins to sink. At the end, Jack saves Rose's life by helping her onto a piece of flotsam. Jack dies of hypothermia shortly after. The film, most of which is Rose's memory, is an explicit feminist critique of some aspects of patriarchy. It also is a commentary on the discrepancies between the experiences of the rich and poor in an emergency or disaster.

As with *Little Big Man, Titanic* presents memory as an authoritative record with little or no acknowledgement of how memory is so often transformed by the rememberer. Despite Rose Dewitt and Jack Crabb both telling their stories spontaneously and without any personal or historical records from which to refer, both films depict their respective remembrances as if they were mere imitations of real observed events. The viewer is essentially transported back in time and permitted to observe the action directly. There aren't any significant cues to the viewer that these characters are participating in an interpretive act.

First person subjective flashback

Depicting memory in a film can be a creative opportunity for filmmakers because the act of remembering is itself an interpretive act and the narratives that emerge are generally understood to be a blend of fact and fiction. In their article, "Tricks of Memory," Henry Roediger and Kathleen McDermott (2000) describe memory experiments they conducted involving asking participants to memorize lists of words that were associated with a particular word which was not included in the list. For example, a list might include the words, *bed, rest, night,* and *pillow* referring to the word *sleep* (but not including *sleep).* The results were that the excluded, associated word was often included with the list of memorized words implying that an inference became what was believed by the rememberer to be a factual part of a memory (p. 127). While these researchers admit that word lists are unlike the multi-sensory experiences that are committed to autobiographical memories, it is known that humans do make inferences about their day-to-day lives and so – as implied by the word list experiment – are likely to make some of those inferences a part of their memories.

Another experiment demonstrating the flexibility of memory was conducted by Andrea Smorti (2011). As described in his article, "Autobiographical Memory and Autobiographical Narrative: What is the Relationship?" the experiment was arranged as an "autobiographical laboratory consist[ing] of 'narrating-transcribing-reading-narrating.'" Participants were asked to tell their autobiographical narratives to interviewers who then transcribed the oral histories into manuscripts. Later the participants were invited back to read the transcripts and then to participate in another oral history interview. Smorti (2011) explains, "reading the narrative

memories…permitted the narrator to assume new stances towards what has been produced orally during each session. This procedure encouraged new narratives and new memory constructions" (2011, p. 309). This process was repeated several times and Smorti (2011) concluded, "autobiography in its double sides – that of memory and that of narrative – is a process of continuous construction" (p. 309). In other words, memories and the narratives interpreted from them transform over time and over the course of repeated tellings to different audiences. Immediately, one can see here the potential for ideology both to infiltrate as well as transform autobiographical memories of our experiences.

In first person subjective depictions, there is more than just a contextualization that a flashback sequence represents a glimpse into a character's memory. There are visual cues that memory has become a part of an interpretive act. With the remainder of the chapter I will provide detailed examples of films that, rather than depict memory in a straightforward, objective fashion, visually communicate this blending of fact and fiction. David Lynch's 2001 film *Mulholland Drive* features a delusional fantasy that is actually a radical translation of an autobiographical memory. In Oliver Stone's 1994 film *Natural Born Killers,* the act of remembering, for one character, takes on the form of "channel surfing" across various genres of television programming and with herself and her boyfriend as the leads in every show. And in Rob Reiner's 1986 movie, *Stand by Me,* what seems to be a spontaneous act of remembering is revealed to be a memoir. Each film provides examples of flashbacks that contrast the omniscient, objective depictions in *Little Big Man* and *Titanic.*

To elaborate on the subjective nature of remembering, let's return to the film *Reservoir Dogs* and look at an aspect of the film that regards the blending of memory and storytelling. Tim Roth's character "Mr. Orange" is an undercover police officer trying to infiltrate a jewelry heist. He needs to master the ability to tell a convincing, fictional autobiographical narrative about an event from his past. To help him with his task, Mr. Orange is instructed by a more experienced agent about how to construct such autobiographical narratives from a mix of memory and fiction. Orange has to practice his story extensively because the delivery of his well-rehearsed anecdote being "natural as hell" is essential to his being trusted by the gang.

Orange is told he has to relay the "facts" of the memory – real or otherwise – while translating them into a relatable, entertaining, and believable story**.** During this training, his coach gives Mr. Orange a script of "an amusing anecdote about a drug deal." Orange wags the stapled pages at his friend, "I gotta memorize all this?" he cries, "That's over four fuckin pages, man!" His coach is calm, "Think about it like it's a joke, alright? You memorize what's important the rest you make your own, alright? You can tell a joke, can't ya?" Orange recites and rehearses this blend of memory and fiction over and over in preparation for his meeting with the gang and he gets more and more convincing as he rehearses. When the time comes to deliver his anecdote to the gang, he does so naturally and convincingly. The criminals, while laughing and enjoying his performance, ask Orange questions about various tiny details of the story. Since the story is blended with his own memories, Orange has no problem answering them.

In this scene, Mr. Orange and his coach know it is good practice to blend fiction with memory in order for the fiction to take on a semblance of truth; it is the inverse of

embellishing one's own life stories with fiction. The gang seems to know this aspect of memory and storytelling as well and, since Orange is a new recruit, they know he may be lying about his past. The gangsters pay attention to and inquire about the minutiae of the story as it is being told as if to find holes that may reveal the act. This dynamic between Orange's performance and the gang's scrutiny of his past is an example of understanding of memory is a blend of fact and fiction. Memories are to be assessed and not necessarily trusted.

Another example of this dynamic happens in Bryan Singer's 1995 film, *The Usual Suspects*. Kevin Spacey plays "Verbal" Kint, a murderer who, while being interrogated as a witness to a crime, improvises a fictional autobiographical narrative so convincingly that the police who have him in custody blame a different person and let Kint go. As the police interrogate him, Kint produces answers based on a narrative he creates in his mind that is a blend of his own real past and fictional names and places inspired by objects in the police office. Again, it is a character's ability to weave together a story made up of memories and fiction that is at the core of the plot.

In both films, different parties – the criminal gang in *Reservoir Dogs* and the police in *The Usual Suspects* – press the storytellers for details as they try to determine to what extent the story is memory and to what extent it is fiction. In the next section, that versatile nature of memory is used in a context other than purposefully deceiving others. In *Natural Born Killers*, for instance, Oliver Stone makes the blend of fact and fiction apparent with a visual presentation of a flashback sequence that looks like someone flipping channels on late 20th century cable television with the lead characters on every channel being the people in the memory. David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* seems for the

first two hours to be a straightforward, though occasionally bizarre, narrative about a young actor pursuing her dream of becoming a Hollywood star. In the last thirty minutes of the film, Lynch reveals that what had come before was a delusional dream based on reconfigured autobiographical memories of actual events. The last film in this chapter, Rob Reiner's *Stand by Me*, depicts a story that includes an extended flashback that seems at first to be in the objective style of *Little Big Man* and *Titanic*. Clues throughout the flashback as well as the closing scene reveal the story is actually a partially fictional memoir and not a spontaneous nostalgia.

Natural Born Killers

Natural Born Killers is a 1994 film directed by Oliver Stone. In it, a young married couple, Woody Harrelson as Mickey Knox and Juliette Lewis as Mallory Knox, travel the country on a murderous rampage after Mickey helps Mallory escape her incestuous father and abuse-enabling mother. The flashback example happens near the beginning of the film and shows the audience the abusive household Mallory emerges from and how Mickey helped her murder her parents and run away. Mickey and Mallory are in the desert tripping on mushrooms. They confess love for one another and the camera zooms in on Mallory's face. She tells Mickey, "I've loved you since the day we met" and the scene fades to flashback. Stone uses this stylized flashback to represent Mallory's personal, autobiographical narratives about her memories of abuse and incest and her subsequent rescue by Mickey.

This flashback sequence begins with a title graphic: "I Love Mallory," which mimics the opening graphic of an *I Love Lucy* episode. The scene that follows is a disturbing, garish mockery of the clichés of a "wholesome" 1960s style sitcom –

complete with a recorded laugh track. Mallory's father, played by Rodney Dangerfield, makes incestuous overtures toward her while the mother, Edie McClurg, tries to ignore the obvious abuse in their home. The sequence ends with Mickey stealing the family car and driving off with Mallory. Mallory's family calls the police and the credits roll on this mini-drama.

Other moments from their journey are shown in a montage of imitation television programming as if the viewer is surfing quickly across 1990s era cable channels. Mallory visits Mickey, who is in a desert prison for stealing the car. She weeps while she tells him her father is still abusing her. At the end of their visit, he swears to save her. Mallory leaves, and the scene cuts to Mickey in the prison yard working with other prisoners and officers to try and temper some wild horses.

The scenes at the prison are edited so that when Mickey is in prison or out in the yard without any chance for escape, the scene is black and white with a scratchy film quality to them. One day there is a tornado and the land, sun, and sky are all suddenly in color – a reference to *the Wizard of Oz* – and Mickey makes a daring escape that ends with him riding off on a horse toward the tornado in full color. The scene cuts and, having made his escape, Mickey is depicted now as a hyper-muscular, animated superhero rushing across an unknown landscape to rescue Mallory from her family. These last two sequences – the escape from prison and his racing back to find her – are included in Mallory's memory, but she was not there to witness them herself. These may be thought of as Mallory's fantasy-memories of Mickey's escape based, perhaps, on stories he told her. They are not memories of witnessed events, but they are woven into her memory narrative as a part of their story together.

Mickey arrives at Mallory's house where they confront and kill both of Mallory's parents. The father is killed for being a rapist and the mother for not protecting Mallory from the incestuous father. Eventually, Mickey and Mallory are bouncing along in an obviously artificial convertible car surrounded by fog machines, lights, and fans that make it appear – intentionally unconvincingly – that they are driving off together. The flashback ends with the two back in the film's narrative present and standing on a bridge after having pulled over in their real convertible car.

The style of delivery of this flashback sequence not only serves as a visual depiction of reconfigured autobiographical memories, it also serves to introduce some themes of the film. For instance, the themes of the influence of television on the minds of young people, the corruption lurking in the hearts of some "wholesome" American nuclear families, and the use of violence as a means of expression and self-liberation are all squeezed into this sequence and then each are unpacked during the course of the movie. Stone uses this memory to serve multiple roles in this story: it provides background on the characters, it presents some of the underlying motives for the pair's murderous road trip, and it introduces some of the themes to be explored in the film.

Mulholland Drive

Another cinematic depiction of transformed autobiographical memory is David Lynch's 2001 film, *Mulholland Drive*. The film is about a young actor, Diane Selwyn portrayed by Naomi Watts, who wins a jitterbug dance competition in her small home town of Deep River, Ontario and decides to set off to Hollywood to become an actor. She arrives, auditions, but does not have any success. During one audition she meets Camilla Rhodes – played by Laura Harring. Though Camilla gets chosen for the part over Diane

and Diane is very jealous, the two develop a romantic relationship. During their relationship and on a new film set, Diane discovers that Camilla is sleeping with the director, Adam Kesher played by Justin Theroux, and the two women break up. An unspecified amount of time later, Camilla invites Diane to a party, where Adam Kesher and Camilla announce they are engaged. In a fit of jealousy, Diane hires a murderer to kill Camilla. The night the killing is to take place, Diane goes to sleep and she has a delusional dream based on the memories of her time in Hollywood so far. When she awakes, there is a blue key on her coffee table – the agreed upon signal from the assassin that Camilla is dead. Upon learning about Camilla and, from a neighbor that detectives are searching for her, Diane descends into a psychotic episode and kills herself. This summary of the film is based on the scenes that occur in the last thirty minutes of the film. Before these scenes occur, there is a mysterious two hour dream-memory that is an extended abstraction of Diane's recent autobiographical memories. I will explore this dream-memory more closely as an example of a distorted memory.

The film opens abruptly – after producer and director credits, but without a title graphic – with a high energy dance montage which fades into a view of someone looking down on an unoccupied bed with red sheets and pillows on it. The person from whose perspective the camera is looking is not shown, but one can infer by the end of the film that this is Diane Selwyn going to sleep. With the viewer still looking through the "eyes" of this yet-unknown character, the camera tips and falls toward the pillow on the bed. The pillow fills the screen and the screen fades to black. Out of the black emerges a street sign reading "Mulholland Drive" and actor credits of the film begin to roll.

This is where Diane Selwyn's dream-memory begins: with a limousine driving another yet-to-be identified character played by Laura Harring. While speeding through the Hollywood hills, the limousine gets in a terrible crash with another car. Harring's unnamed character survives and runs away from the scene of the accident before anyone sees her. After wandering the streets for some time, she finds shelter in an unlocked rental property and goes to sleep there. The following day, Betty Elms, a young, cheerful, small-town actor played by Naomi Watts – and who is Diane's doppelgänger in the dream – arrives in Hollywood to chase her dream of fame and fortune. She wants to pursue an acting career and has agreed to rent her aunt's unoccupied bungalow. Betty arrives and finds Laura Harring's character hiding there. After learning that the strange woman has amnesia and cannot remember who she is or what happened the night before, Betty offers the pseudonym "Rita" until they can discover her real identity.

Rita and Betty search for Rita's past and try to get Betty's acting career started. Betty goes to auditions and impresses, but mysterious conspiracies seem aligned against her and she doesn't get any significant roles. When not attending auditions, Betty and Rita perform some amateur detective work into the mystery of Rita's missing identity. As the two find clues to Rita's life, the story begins to take some, obviously "Lynchian," turns toward the bizarre. Some of these unsettling moments include a disfigured entity that lives behind a dumpster, a haunting performance that merges pre-recorded and live performances at a near-empty theater called "Club Silencio," and a mysterious blue box small enough to fit in a purse, but which will eventually swallow Rita whole.

While much can be made of the various departures into magical reality that happen in *Mulholland Drive*, the relevant point to this chapter – that the story of Betty

and Rita is actually a delusional retelling of Diane Selwyn's autobiographical memory – is best exemplified by the events at the "Club Silencio." This scene begins at the bungalow with Betty and Rita in bed together, sleeping. They wake in the middle of the night and seem compelled to go out to a show. They take a taxi across town to a nondescript club with a blue neon sign that quietly announces "Silencio." Inside the club, Rita and Betty are two of only a handful of people in the audience. On stage, the "Master of Ceremonies" (MC) for the night cries out "No hay banda! There is no band." As he does, music plays over the PA system. The MC repeats, "No hay banda!" as the music continues to play. The MC explains that though there is no band, but the music can be heard because the music is a recording. During a horn solo in the music, a live trumpet player steps through the curtain seemingly playing, however the player removes the horn from his lips and the music continues, proving the MC's point. The MC seems to be speaking directly to Betty and Rita telling them, "It's all recorded" and then shouting, articulating every word, "No! Hay! Banda! It is all a tape. Il n'y a pas d'orchestre (there is no band). It is an illusion."

In this scene, the director is telling us via the MC of this strange theatrical performance that what may seem real is an illusion; a playback of a recorded event. As Rita and Betty watch from the audience, Betty begins convulsing and crying in her seat as the awareness of what the MC is saying sinks in: this increasingly strange story that Betty thought was her real life with Rita is actually a dream made up of a recording – a memory. Lynch springs the switch shortly after when, back at the bungalow, Betty disappears and Rita opens the blue box and is transported inside of it. Both women now gone, the box falls to the floor.

Diane Selwyn awakes; it was she who fell asleep on the red pillows at the beginning of the film. Her awakening initiates the final sequence of *Mulholland Drive* during which the director reveals the nature of Selwyn's dream. Through a series of omniscient flashbacks, like those in *Reservoir Dogs* or *Godfather Part II,* the actual events that happened to Diane Selwyn when she chased her Hollywood dream are revealed: After a failed attempt at glamour and during an emotional downward spiral, amateur actress Diane Selwyn hired an assassin to murder her friend, ex-lover, and competitive fellow actress Camilla Rhodes. In the present, and after the murder has been committed, Selwyn's guilt for commissioning the murder and fear of her impending arrest – manifested as a hallucination of mocking, screaming, "grandparent-ly" tormentors – leads her to suicide.

The objective flashbacks at the finish of the film help the viewer to understand the extent that Diane Selwyn's internal narratives and rearranged memories during her dream have departed from the actual events of the past. Though these scenes do leave the viewer with a lot to think about in terms of connecting them to the two hour dream sequence preceding, these flashbacks are Lynch showing us what actually happened between Diane and Camilla. During these objective flashbacks – delivered from the storyteller and not directly connected to the act of Selwyn remembering as the two hour dream-memory was – the viewer learns that who was thought to be "Betty" is a part of an extensive delusion in the mind of Diane Selwyn. "Betty" was actually "Diane-as-Betty" and the story was not merely a Hollywood fantasy-gone-nightmare, but an extreme abstraction of a Selwyn's autobiographical memory. It was a narrative composed of characters and episodes from Diane's recent past leading up to her hiring an assassin to kill Camilla

Rhodes. The closing scenes reveal that in reality Diane Selwyn was being ignored and forgotten and her career never really got started. She has spiraled down into failure and despair and has committed murder. Her suicide ends this tale of "chasing the Hollywood dream."

Stand by Me

So far in this chapter, the examples of depictions of memory as a first person character flashback have seemed like two extremes of a spectrum. On one end is *Little Big Man* and *Titanic* which depict memory as if they were recordings of past action and do not visually explore any interpretive aspects of memory. In *Mulholland Drive* and *Natural Born Killers* there are flashbacks that are heavily symbolic, abstracted narratives. Rob Reiner's 1986 movie, *Stand by Me*, finds some middle ground on this spectrum by depicting flashback both as an essentially straightforward "vision of the past" and mixing that vision with a few abstracted, and sometimes altogether fictional, sequences that add to, elaborate upon, or otherwise enhance the story. Reiner can adopt these techniques because, while the film seems at first to be about a man reminiscing internally, the main extended flashback that tells the story of an influential journey with his friends is actually a visualization of an already externalized and edited memoir.

Stand by Me begins with Gordon LaChance – who is soon to be the narrator of the film and is played by Richard Dreyfuss – sitting in a truck parked on the side of a rural road. He glances down to a newspaper dated September 1985 – the narrative's present – and at a headline that announces the death of an attorney named Chris Chambers. While he reads, two young boys whizz past on bikes, racing past the truck, down the road, and into the forest. The newspaper article and the boys on their bikes seem to trigger the man

into reminiscing. He becomes a narrator of a flashback and his voice-over begins, "I was 12 going on 13 the first time I saw a dead human being. It happened in the summer of 1959 – a long time ago, but only if you measure in terms of years." The movie remains set in 1959 for most of the rest of the film and tells a simple, though emotionally dense, coming-of-age story with Wil Wheaton playing Gordon "Gordie" LaChance – the narrator's 12 years old self.

The flashback story begins with Gordie's friend, Vern Tessio, played by Jerry O'Connell, sharing some exciting news with Gordie and two other friends, Chris Chambers and Teddy Duchamp played by River Phoenix and Corey Feldman. Vern tells his friends about a conversation he overheard involving Vern's gangster brother and another gang member who were discussing that, while in the woods on a fishing trip, they had stumbled onto the body of a missing teenager from their town who is being sought by authorities and for whom there is a cash reward if found. Vern learns where his brother saw the body and Vern and his friends make arrangements to set off on a hiking trip to find it.

While on their trip, the four boys experience new levels of independence and share their middle school adventures with one another. The journey is alternately exciting and poignant, but the boys don't know that Vern's brother and the gang he belongs to are also on their way to find the body in order to collect the reward money. When the boys and the gang all arrive at the location of the body, everyone begins to shout and fight over who is going to claim the reward. Gordie ends the confrontation by threatening Ace and his gang with a gun that Chris Chambers had stolen from his father and brought along on the trip.

The opening scene with the narrator in the truck which then fades to action from 1959 seems, on first viewing, to imply that the flashback transitioned to at this point is a depiction of adult-Gordie experiencing a spontaneous act of remembering. However, it is made clear by the end that the story being visualized on-screen was a dramatization of a memoir that has already been written on a word processor. Clues that the main flashback memory is not a spontaneous act or remembering and that the narrator has used some creative flexibility to enhance the depiction of his memory as well as to clarify details of his story are placed throughout the film.

For instance, the narrator embeds flashbacks – memories that are delivered from the perspective of 12-year-old Gordie – of events that happened prior to the main 1959 flashback that makes up the majority of the film. These embedded flashbacks seem to depict a very specific type of remembering: an adult "remembering what it was like to remember" as a twelve year old. These brief flashbacks focus on Gordie's relationship with his older brother – John Cusack as Denny – who died in a car accident just a few months before the boys take their hike. Reiner also includes expository scenes as a part of the 1959 flashback that include events that the narrator would not have been present to witness. These scenes are of Ace Merrill and his gang as they go through their own search for the missing body. Had this been a depiction of a spontaneous "Proustian" memory experience rather than a carefully written narrative, the narrator would not have had any direct memories of these expository scenes with Ace and the gang to ponder. These fabricated scenes about Ace Merrill would be out of place in a moment of spontaneous reminiscing; they are included because they make storytelling sense.

The first example of a second flashback embedded into the main flashback of the story occurs soon after transitioning away from the present tense of the narrator in his truck and into the summer of 1959. When the narrator's 12 year-old self enters his now-deceased older brother Denny's room to get a canteen for the hiking trip, the scene abruptly cuts to an unspecified time even further in the recent past. The scene is a memory of Gordie and Denny alone in Denny's room. The two brothers clearly share a tight bond and the mood of their interaction is enhanced by being lit with idyllic, summer afternoon light. The two brothers joke and play around a bit and then Denny gives Gordie a *New York Yankees* baseball cap which Gordie cherishes.

Reiner uses lighting, music, and the brothers' warm interactions in this scene to imbue it with tones of peacefulness and love that reveal a close relationship between the two before Denny died. The scene ends when Gordie is suddenly jarred out of his memory and back to 1959 by his father asking if he found the canteen. His father brusquely escorts Gordie back out of Denny's room. This memory-within-a-memory of what it was like for Gordie to be 12 years old and reminiscing about his recently deceased brother during that fateful summer seems imbued with more "magic" and innocence compared to the 1959 flashback, mostly due to the lighting and the warm bond between the two brothers. This scene is an early clue that this story is not emerging as a spontaneous "walk down memory lane" but is something creative and sentimental. The scene between Gordie and Denny also helps establish the baseball cap as an item of sentimental value for Gordie as it will later become one of the points of conflict between Gordie and Ace Merrill.

The second embedded flashback happens when Gordie goes to buy food for the boys' journey. The grocer recognizes Gordie as Denny's brother and the grocer reminisces about when Denny played football. This triggers a memory for 12 year-old Gordie and the scene cuts to the brothers and their parents at the dinner table. In this flashback of a flashback, the LaChance family – brothers Gordie and Denny and their mother and father – are having dinner together. The table talk is almost exclusively focused on Denny's football playing and college choices. As they all discuss Denny's future, Gordie asks their father for the mashed potatoes, but the father ignores Gordie. Denny tries to draw the parents' interest to his younger brother, asking, "Pop, did you read the story that Gordie wrote? Gordie wrote a story. It's really good." Though neither parent replies to Denny's question, as the father goes back to talking about football with the mother, Denny leans in and tells Gordie, "I really did like it." Gordie is moved by his brother's gesture.

These two embedded flashbacks add richness to the relationship between Gordie and Denny which is embodied in the Yankees cap that Gordie treasures after Denny dies. This in turn sharpens the conflict with Ace Merrill who steals the hat from Gordie. Reiner uses lighting, music, and dialogue to communicate the particular emotional tones which dominate both scenes. There is warm lighting and warm interactions when Denny gives Gordie the hat and bluer, colder lighting for the scene when Gordie feels isolated from his parents. Both scenes serve as a depiction – and perhaps an oversimplification – of an adult remembering what it was like to be a child remembering. The lighting is noticeably distinct, reflecting emotional tones and making it clear that these flashbacks are set in yet

another time period, but, in terms of abstraction, the stylistic choices are much more subtle than those in *Mulholland Drive* or *Natural Born Killers.*

Another technique used in *Stand by Me* is the inclusion of several scenes that young Gordie was not present to have witnessed and for which adult Gordie would not have any memories. These are scenes that elaborate on the story of Ace Merrill and his gang. The narrator, as author of the memoir, has fabricated these scenes for the sake of smooth storytelling. For instance, shortly after Gordie and his friends begin their journey, the story cuts to Ace and his gang playing "mailbox baseball" – a game where they speed a car through neighborhoods and take turns swinging a baseball bat and trying to knock the mailboxes off of their posts. This scene is described as clearly and knowingly by the narrator as events he was actually present to witness were described and these scenes serve the story by beginning to establish that Ace and his friends are the antagonists.

The second fabricated scene shows Ace and the others cutting their gang logo into one another's shoulders with razor blades. They listen to songs on the radio and discuss going to see the same dead body that Gordie, Vern, and the others are on their way to find. Again, since Gordie and his friends were already deep in the woods, hiking to their destination, this scene could not be a part of Gordie's mind in terms of autobiographical memory. These scenes are not memories. They serve a storytelling purpose which is to set the stage for a conflict by placing both groups on a course to collide in a specific place. A third invented scene shows Ace's gang driving out to find the dead body. On the way, Ace drives recklessly and plays "chicken" with a lumber truck which he forces off the road, risking several lives in the process.

Stand By Me is another example of a story that is rooted in memory and includes a depiction of a memory, but it is a film which uses only a few interpretive, creative embellishments rather than the near-entirely symbolic style of *Mulholland Drive* and *Natural Born Killers* or the literal style with no indication of subjective influence on the part of the rememberer such as was the case in both *Little Big Man* and *Titanic.* For instance without the scenes that allow for considerable elaboration of Ace's character, the final confrontation –Gordie shooting Chris' stolen gun into the air and forcing Ace and his gang to leave by threatening to shoot them – may seem excessive or unjustified. The scenes that expand on Ace's dark, destructive character portray him as unlikeable and dangerous. Therefore, when he threatens Chris Chambers' life with a knife and Gordie fires a warning shot with a gun and then threatens to kill Ace, it is established that Ace "deserves" the level of intensity he receives from Gordie and that it is necessary because Ace is a dangerous individual. These fabricated scenes with Ace, that Gordie was not present to witness and which could not be part of his autobiographical memory, are a part of middle-aged Gordie's authorship. He is transforming his memory into a narrative with the intent of sharing it with an audience and, as the flashbacks analyzed earlier also were, his memoir is a blend of fact and fiction.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed five films which each feature visualizations of acts of remembering. Two films, *Little Big Man* and *Titanic*, presented memory as an essentially accurate, reviewable, "movie in the mind." The other three films, *Natural Born Killers, Mullholland Drive,* and *Stand by Me,* provided depictions of remembering that make visible and obvious that these memories are subjective, interpretive, and, in some way,

transformed. The memories depicted in these films all contained some kinds of ideologies of power. Those memories depicted as objective and accurate seemed to reinforce the ideologies contained there because they are presented in a presumed "always already" fashion. The subjective, interpretive depictions of memories seemed to defuse their contained ideologies somewhat and make them more attributable to the character doing the remembering. In Chapter 5, I will examine several films that depict how memory and technology work together to permit the externalizing and sharing of memories.

Chapter 5:

Sharing memories using technology

Introduction

It seems difficult to overestimate the importance of technology for retaining, revisiting, and sharing memories. This chapter's focus is sharing autobiographical memories; an act that can only be achieved by using technology. Language, writing, the printing press, audio recordings, film, and video recordings are just a few of the more obvious media technologies that are associated with memory. Throughout history, each of these technological advancements, in addition to transforming communication, has arguably revolutionized how people remember. Such media are, as Marshall McLuhan discusses in his 1964 book, *Understanding Media,* "[extensions] of our senses and of our nerves" (p. 4). Since our senses are a significant part of how information is recorded into our autobiographical memory systems, media that supplement these senses is what I am referring to in this chapter as memory technology.

Of course such media aren't necessary to experience memory, but many people do place high value on these manifestations and outputs of memory technology as indispensable supplements to their individual and group acts of remembering. For example, when there is a natural disaster in America and people lose items such as photo albums, video recordings, art, letters, and other mementos, there is often a great sense of loss and even mourning for these items. Such items are recordings of moments from the past that, in many cases, cannot be re-created when lost or destroyed. In this chapter,

memory technology will generally refer to these media that can be used to record, preserve, and, later, inspire the re-experiencing of memory. This chapter examines how ideology surrounds these kinds of cinematic depictions of memory technology as well as humans' relationships with memory technology.

Memory and technology in film

Photographs, videos, paintings, poems, and so on represent and sometimes authenticate memories. Many films use such media in their plots as a means of conveying memory. For instance, the 1984 Wim Wenders film, *Paris, Texas,* uses 8mm home movie filmstrips to trigger the memory of an introverted man and to initiate a journey with his son in order to reunite with his wife. To complicate the idea that such media can represent and inspire autobiographical memories and narratives, the films I chose for this chapter depict fictional extrapolations of memory technology. These fictional technologies are given a central role in the plot and used to examine certain aspects of humanity. For instance, in the four films analyzed in this chapter, the plots involve a person's autobiographical memories being at the center of a struggle between humanity and technology. Here, memory is an arena where that struggle is negotiated.

Stretching back into ancient history there have been stories that describe ethical dilemmas surrounding relationships between humanity and technology. Myths like the Greek Prometheus, the Hebrew "golem," and the Germanic *Faust* are early examples of this concept, accepting fire and complex magical systems like kabbalah or alchemy as the examples of technology in these cases. More modern literature, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau,* was written during the nineteenth century's Western, industrial explosion and explored overlaps and horizons of

science and nature as well as the notion of technology as an antagonist to humanity. Such tales continue to be told today in a variety of media, such as the BBC television series, *Black Mirror*[2].

The ethics and dynamics involved in the many relationships between humans and technology is, of course, also a theme explored in cinema. For instance, Charlie Chaplin's 1936 film, *Modern Times,* shows his iconic character, the Tramp, working in a factory where the workers interact so closely with the machines that their humanity is temporarily overcome and their movements begin to mimic the machines. This theme is exemplified when, after too many repetitive motions while working on an assembly line, the Tramp can no longer control his arms. Although he is no longer at his station, they continue to twist and flap as if he is still performing his work. In another scene, a man demonstrates an invention: a machine that can feed workers so that they needn't stop working in order to eat. This invention intends to feed people automatically, but it malfunctions in the face of the Tramp's unpredictable behavior. The machine is set to feed at very specific intervals and in a very specific motion, but the Tramp's mouth is rarely in the right position or open at the right time for the system to work. Another scene visually inverts the idea of a machine feeding people when Chaplin's entire body is ingested into the gears of an enormous machine. He emerges unscathed, but the warning that workers – specifically their bodies – may be being subsumed by technology is clear enough.

Another film with similar themes is Terry Gilliam's 1985 dystopian story *Brazil.* This film depicts a technocratic society drowning in its own bureaucracy and poorly

[2] *Black Mirror* Is a British television anthology that features stories about dysfunctional, dystopian relationships between humans and technology.

designed technology. A non-descript office worker, Jonathan Pryce as Sam Lowry, dreams of romance, adventure, and heroism in between his bland, gray, mechanized existence. During an HVAC repair, Sam learns there are revolutionaries who are chasing humanistic experiences and struggling against the dominant parties. Lowry joins them and he finally gets to experience some of the thrilling qualities of life by participating in the ongoing revolt and having a romance with one of the revolutionaries. The film ends when his complicity with the rebels eventually leads to his demise at the hands of state officials.

Brazil and *Modern Times* are two films that depict tensions and anxieties that emerge from the struggle between the organic and the mechanical. Both of these films – like the 19th century written texts of *Frankenstein* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* – depict these tensions as occurring in the realm of the human body. In the remaining movies discussed in this chapter, similar tensions are depicted and are fundamental to each respective plots, but these tensions are enacted instead in the realm of memory. In *Robocop* and *Blade Runner,* technology has already irreversibly subsumed humanity in terms of the physical body – *Robocop's* Alex Murphy's body can only be alive if merged with technology and, in *Blade Runner,* androids are such perfect replicas of human anatomy that they can only be detected by testing their empathic responses. In both films, the struggle between humanity and technology in the arena of the physical body has concluded in favor of technology, but the struggle continues in the arena of memory. Robocop tries to recover Murphy's memories and to regain some other aspects of his humanity. Those tasked with detecting androids in *Blade Runner* now have

technologically copied and implanted memories to contend with when trying to distinguish androids from humans.

Modern Times and *Brazil* feature physical and social topics of humanity being mimicked or subsumed by industry and technology. Whether it is Chaplin's body in the gears of the machine or the hyper-organized world of *Brazil*, where the technocracy surrounds, imprisons, and eventually consumes its own citizens, these two films explore tensions between the organic and the mechanical centered on the body. In Paul Verhoeven's 1987 film, *Robocop*, the body is, at the outset, also an arena for exploring the matter of technological infringement on humanity. However during the course of the film this struggle has to be abandoned as futile and the pursuit of the hero to reclaim his humanity is moved entirely into the sphere of memory. These films share an ideology: That humanity and technology have a net-antagonistic relationship; that technology is a threat rather than a defining trait of humanity.

Robocop

Robocop is a violent action-comedy set in a dystopian city where crime is rampant. OCP, a company that provides weaponry and other equipment for the military and police, is working on a project for a robotic police force. After a failed experiment with a fully robotic "officer," OCP executives pursue a different avenue – a human cyborg. In order to begin their development, the company wants to procure a near-deceased human police officer on whom to experiment. Their opportunity arrives when Alex J. Murphy, a policeman with an impeccable record and played by Peter Weller, is shot, mutilated, and nearly murdered by a gang of criminals. OCP, due to their close relationship with government, is permitted to purchase Murphy's body and they pull it

back from the brink of death by supplementing and replacing much of his anatomy with robotic technology. Murphy's body is alive, but, after they "wipe his memory," his identity is lost. He is programmed and transformed by OCP into "Robocop" – a humanoid, cyborg police officer with no memory of being a human. The film follows Robocop's slow departure away from being a strictly programmed machine and through a process of re-humanization. Robocop eventually succeeds in re-claiming the memories of his human body's former identity: Alex Murphy.

In *Robocop*, the relationship between the hero and memory technology is an antagonistic one. During Murphy's transformation into Robocop one of the engineers asks, "can he hear us?" and another engineer replies that it doesn't matter, "we're going to wipe his memory." This dialogue provides the audience with some information about the state of memory technology in this universe. OCP engineers have the ability to erase an individual's memories while retaining the brain's ability to rationalize, create new memories, and follow directives. Without his human-created episodic memories, Murphy's body is merely the skeletal and neurological framework for a robotic creature – which is what his creators at OCP intended. It is the emerging of Muphy's memory and identity that makes up the emotional core of the film.

The story of *Robocop* is about Murphy's relationship with his own, organic memory and those responsible for the technology that has erased it. There is no way for viewers to root for a re-humanization of Murphy's broken and mechanized body – it is beyond recovery in that regard. Instead, the plot leads the audience into hoping for the return of Murphy's human memories and identity. The end of the film exemplifies that this theme of "humanity struggling against technology" is centered on the arena of

memory rather than Murphy's irrevocably damaged body. After the CEO of the company thanks Robocop, he asks, "What's your name, son?" – a very human question and a term of endearment considering Robocop was treated as a product by his makers and had no name. Robocop replies, "Murphy" signifying the re-claiming of his identity. However, even though Murphy's identity has returned in terms of his memory and sense of self, the actions of his body are still governed by programs and parameters. His body will never recover fully its humanity. Murphy is still a cyborg and he cannot – even at the end of the film – override his prime directives. Only his memory and identity have been freed; his body is still hostage to the technology with which it has been merged.

There are a few different examples of real and fictional memory technology in *Robocop.* One example is that the main conflict of the story is resolved and the antagonist brought to justice because Robocop/Murphy reveals an unedited, recorded "video memory" of Robocop's interaction with the villain. Instead of what would likely have been an unsatisfying conclusion – perhaps Robocop bursts into the OCP board room and verbally accuses the villain of murder with no supporting evidence – the movie provides an acceptable and unquestioned conviction of guilt through the use of an unedited video recording that carries with it the implication of a witnessed reality. This application of real media technology is important because Robocop's directives prevent him from arresting an executive of the company that created him. Once the president of the company sees the recording of Dick Jones' murder confession, Dick is fired and Robocop is able to execute justice. The audience already knows the truth because they witnessed it along with the protagonist, but the narrative's arbiters of justice are able to be provided

evidence thanks to Robocop's ability to record and replay his first-person video memories.

In *Robocop,* episodic and procedural memory are depicted as two distinct phenomena. Episodic memories are shown on-screen when, after learning Alex Murphy's former address, Robocop slowly walks through the abandoned home and flashbacks from Murphy's life are intercut with the scene. These flashbacks are emotionally intense for Robocop and the shock of them jars some of Murphy's identity to return. When Robocop has flashes of Murphy's memory, they are also shown on screen from Murphy's first person point of view. These flashes of episodic memory are not actually the first to appear in the film. Prior to arriving at his former home, Robocop's body twirls his pistol like Murphy used to and Robocop has a flashback of Murphy's murder while his body is being re-charged.

The first hints that Murphy's memory was incompletely erased takes place at the shooting range. The movie showed us in an early scene that, prior to his transformation, Alex Murphy used to twirl his pistol like a television hero to impress his son. At the police shooting range, the camera lingers on Robocop twirling his pistol and holstering it when he finishes target practice. Despite his memory being wiped, Murphy's body "remembers" how to twirl the pistol. This example of procedural memory hints at Murphy's memory and identity lurking inside the cyborg body. A similar example of memory emerging through the body sets the stage for the next phase of the film and the return of Murphy.

During a recharge period, while he is in a "sleep" state, Robocop's vital sign readouts start to jump erratically. His body begins to convulse and twitch as it physically

mimes a re-enactment of Alex Murphy's murder. Images and brief scenes of Murphy's murder flash across the screen and, since his memory can be translated to video, the murderer's face can be seen on the attendant engineers' television monitors. The memory of the murder runs its course and Robocop takes his first autonomous action immediately after when he arises from his charging station and stalks off to search for Murphy's murderers even as his creators order him to stop. More flashes and memories come to him when he confronts a gang member robbing a gas station and realizes that the criminal is one of Murphy's killers. In the moment, the return of Alex Murphy's memories stuns Robocop and the criminal escapes. Now on a mission, Robocop begins his search for more information about Murphy so that he may regain his memories and identity.

Robocop is an example of a film that depicts tensions between humans and technology being enacted in the arena of memory rather than the body. Although there is obviously an organic/mechanical tension centered on Murphy's body as well as his memory, the body cannot be recovered; it is damaged beyond repair. The movie also features real and fictional memory technology as prominent aspects of the plot. Fictional memory-erasing technology sets the context for Murphy's journey to recover his identity and Robocop's ability to display his recorded memories as video for others to see is the resolution to one of the main conflicts in the story. The scenes depicting Robocop's reenactment of the murder as a procedural memory experience as well as the visualized memories of his family at home are examples of depicting procedural and episodic aspects of memory.

In *Robocop*, the plot is fairly straightforward: OCP erased Murphy's memories and Robocop goes on a mission to recover them. This mission permits Murphy to regain

his identity and synthesize with his new cyborg existence. In the remaining films, the authenticity of memory is called into question by fictional memory technologies that exist in each film's universe. In these films, the emphasis on memory in the plot, the extent to which memory and technology overlap, and the distinctions between episodic memory and procedural memory are all more pronounced.

Blade Runner

In the context of this chapter, *Robocop* is essentially about a private struggle. It depicts an antagonistic relationship between Murphy and the technology that was used to erase his memory. Murphy must overcome the effects of the memory-wipe in order to regain his identity, but there is no concern that he is recovering false memories or that his memories of Murphy actually belonged to someone else. In Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the antagonistic relationship between humanity and technology moves to the public sphere and memory becomes a technological commodity that can be copied from a human and programmed into an android.

The film follows Rick Deckard, played by Harrison Ford, who is a part of a police force concerned with identifying androids. One of their tools of identification is a conversation-based personality test – the "Voigt-Kampff" test – to measure the subject's empathic responses. Since the newest model androids come programmed with memories and are able to create new memories, the designers believe they may develop emotional responses that can defeat this empathy test. As was the case with Murphy in *Robocop*, the tensions between humanity and technology in *Blade Runner* are focused on memory rather than the body; in this case it is because the androids are such perfect physical

imitations that they can only be distinguished from a natural human through testing for a lack of empathic response.

Memory is more than a narrative device in *Blade Runner,* it is part of the plot, serving as a marker of humanity. This is made clear in the scene where Deckard reveals to Rachael that his tool for measuring empathic responses to distinguish androids from humans, the Voight-Kampff test, has classified her as an android. Deckard uses memory as evidence to prove the results. Rachael at first defends her humanity by showing him a picture of herself as a child with her mother – potential proof since androids only live a few years, are never children, and do not have mothers. Deckard doesn't bother to look at the picture. He and the audience know from an earlier scene describing the Nexus 6 model androids that fake pictures are provided to them in order to provide a veneer of reality to the implanted memories. Deckard asks Rachael if she remembers when, as a little girl, she watched a spider with an orange body and green legs lay an egg sac. At first she is surprised at his knowledge and then she finishes the story of the memory for him. She says the eggs hatched, "a hundred baby spiders came out," and they ate the mother spider. Deckard tells her that these episodes – and all of her "childhood memories" – are implants that have been copied from a human child and implanted into Rachael's mind.

This emotional connection to one's memories – real and implanted – emerges in the other android characters as well. For all of the Nexus 6 refugee androids, both their programmed and their own self-generated memories have significance. One of the androids, Leon, risks his life trying to retrieve his photographs while being hunted by Deckard and is visibly disappointed when they are taken by the police. Another example happens at the end of the film. Nearing his pre-programmed death, Rutger Hauer's Roy

Batty laments that his memories of "attack ships off the shoulder of Orion" and "C-beams glitter[ing] in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate" will be lost when he dies, "like tears in rain." These are some examples of the emotional foundations which the designers worried the implanted memories may grant these androids. The androids care about their memories which creates empathic responses that can defeat the Voigt-Kampff test, thus making androids even more indistinct from humans and more difficult to detect.

More than another example of memory as the arena where tensions between humanity and technology can be negotiated, *Blade Runner* is the first of the remaining examples in this chapter all of which portrays episodic, autobiographical memories as a technologically rendered commodity and a medium unto itself. Technology makes it possible for episodic memories to be treated as if they were discrete objects to be implanted, deleted, or otherwise altered. This commodified version of memory manifests as implanted vignettes of episodic memory that are reinforced with photographs and are difficult – perhaps impossible – to discern as artificial from the "inside" of one's own perspective. *Blade Runner's* depiction of memory as a commodity is rudimentary – the memories are some sort of implanted copies and are only applicable to androids. Both Paul Verhoeven's 1992 film, *Total Recall*, and the 2004 Michel Gondry movie, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* depict worlds where technology has refined the process of transforming memory into an exchangeable commodity. In these worlds, memory can be located, isolated, erased, implanted, or rewritten. Another difference in these films is that the relationship between the protagonists and their respective memory technologies is largely cooperative rather than hostile. Multiple characters in these films willingly undergo memory altering processes.

Total Recall

The film follows Arnold Schwarzenegger as Douglas Quaid, a construction worker leading what seems to be a mild, middle class life. Quaid begins to have dreams about visiting Mars, where there is an actual human colony. He claims to feel drawn there and he becomes more and more obsessed with the idea, though he feels he will never be able to afford it. One day he hears an advertisement for Rekall Incorporated, a company that sells memory implants including some that mimic the experience of having travelled to Mars. Much cheaper than an actual journey, Quaid quickly decides to go to Rekall and to experience his dream of interplanetary travel – if only second-hand.

Quaid has an orientation with the company president, purchases his experience, and heads to the implant room. He is strapped into a huge contraption, sedated, and the memory implanting begins. While undergoing the process, Quaid awakes and begins struggling against the scientists, yelling at them, "You've blown my cover!" and begins ranting about a revolution on Mars and his status as an undercover member of the Agency. The Rekall Inc. scientists recognize that Quaid has had his memory altered previously and that they have tapped into a hidden past involving a revolution and an organization known only as "the Agency." They sedate Quaid, re-bury the memories they had stumbled upon, and send him home.

On his way home Quaid is ambushed by a group of men whom Quaid thought were his friends and co-workers. They tell him they are from "the Agency" and that Quaid is an undercover spy. The group leader claims they now have to kill Quaid because he "blabbed about Mars." The men attack and this life-or-death situation triggers Quaid to fight back. Using martial arts and then taking a gun from one of his adversaries, Quaid

kills all four of the men. He marvels at his body's ability to fight and shoot because he does not remember having any such training. When Quaid arrives back at his home, his wife also attempts to kill him. He subdues her and she reveals that she too is an undercover agent; she tells him that everything he thinks about his life – including their marriage and his construction career – are memory implants.

Later that night, while in hiding, a stranger delivers a suitcase to him, claiming he is following orders from Quaid's past identity called "Hauser." It contains several useful items as well as a video message from Hauser, who looks exactly like Quaid. Hauser informs Quaid that "Quaid" is an implanted identity and that "Quaid" is really "Hauser." Quaid must come to Mars to complete his mission. With the money and supplies in the suitcase, Quaid sets off on a quest to learn more.

While on Mars, Quaid finds himself caught between a corporate dictator who controls the oxygen in the Martian atmosphere and a rebellion trying to activate their own oxygen generating technology. The rebels are irradiated mutants and their leader, Kuato is purported to have the ability to read others' minds and memories. Near the climax of the film, Kuato reads Quaid's mind and learns that Quaid has had multiple identities and was a part of the organization oppressing the mutants. Kuato reassures him that despite his past, "You are what you do. A man is defined by his actions, not his memory." Quaid moves on from wanting to learn about his past identities; he embraces his present and helps to activate the rebels' oxygen generators.

Total Recall is, in its action, an espionage film set on Mars, but the main theme and subject of the film is the unreliability of memory in terms of a sense of personal identity. Rekall Inc. exemplifies the ubiquity of memory altering technology in this

universe. The Rekall Company sells memories that require no direct, primary sensory experience by the purchaser – your body doesn't have to travel in order to remember the trip. They claim to sell, "the memory of a lifetime" and that their implanted memories are "as real as any memory in your head."

It is not clear if these are copies of others' experiences or if the memories are somehow fabricated. The commodified memories are "loaded" into the brain through an elaborate procedure requiring one to be strapped down in a sinister looking contraption. While Rekall sells a product which is a discrete addition to one's own memory bank, there is also memory technology being used by "the Agency" that can erase and replace memories so thoroughly that one's identity is changed. This lets the viewer know that in this film universe, memory implants are so thorough that one's identity cannot be reliably tied to their memories. This theme is later articulated by the preternatural Kuato when he tells Quaid that people are not their memories and that "You are what you do."

Procedural memory also appears in a small role in the film, but it is an important distinction for this chapter. When Quaid is attacked by his former friends and co-workers on his way home from Rekall Inc., his body responds with military hand-to-hand combat and shooting training. When he kills all four of his assailants, he looks at his hands and the gun he has taken from them in astonishment. The episodic memory of his life has been altered, but the procedural memory of his physical training has emerged and, in terms of the story, reveals something of Quaid's authentic self – he is a military-trained killer. This use of episodic memory as being potentially altered and procedural or "muscle" memory as being authentic is a dynamic that also appeared in *Robocop* and is

used again in the final film of this chapter, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, though in a slightly different form.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

In this 2004 movie directed by Michel Gondry, introverted Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) and impulsive Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet) form an "odd couple" who try and fail to make their relationship work. After they break up, Clementine goes to Lacuna Inc. – a company that sells a service that locates, isolates, and erases memories – to have her memories of their relationship eradicated. When he finds out later, Joel wants to retaliate and have the same procedure done for himself. He goes to the company and agrees to be drugged and have his memories of Clementine wiped out. While unconscious, and after the process has begun, Joel changes his mind and decides he wants to keep his memories of Clementine intact. He attempts to hide "her" – Winslet as a "Clementine avatar" that represents his memories of the real Clementine – in his childhood memories. Since she was not originally a part of these memories, these memories are not marked for deletion. Joel hopes he can preserve "her" as the process relentlessly eradicates his and Clementine's time together from his mind. Most of the film takes place in Joel's internal "memoryscape" as he tries to keep his memories of Clementine from being erased.

In another plotline, Lacuna employee Mary (Kirsten Dunst) has had an affair with the founder and inventor of the process, Dr. Howard Mierzwiak, (Tom Wilkinson). Sometime prior to the film's present, the affair was discovered by Dr. Mierzwiak's spouse and Mary consented to having the entire affair wiped from her memory. While Mary's memory alteration is not shown, she shares what turns out to be a significant side-

effect of the process – the emerging of emotional, "procedural" memories. At different times in the film, both Mary and Clementine experience an emotional return of their erased memories. Neither can understand why they have feelings for someone – Dr. Mierzwiak and Joel respectively – with whom they believe they have had no significant relationship. After discovering that one's memories can be somewhat reclaimed by listening to the recordings made by Lacuna prior to the erasing process, the movie ends with Mary stealing the company's records and intending, it is implied, to deliver them to all the clients who have undergone the procedure.

Far from being merely a device for a narrative as was the case with *Little Big Man* or *Reservoir* Dogs, memory is, to a large extent, the subject of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The plot itself is partly a meditation upon the nature of memory and the film visualizes contrasting ideas about how the phenomenon of memory manifests in our lives. Two of the main characters in the movie, Dr. Mierzwiak and his client Joel Barish, represent these different perspectives on the nature of memory. The doctor perceives memory to be discrete connections located in the brain that can be broken and erased through the technology involved in his process. From this perspective, memory is a discrete neurological commodity that can be erased for a price. This notion is challenged when Joel ingests Lacuna's prescription drug that renders him unconscious during the procedure. The viewing audience joins him on a tour of his internal, autobiographical memories. This interior space of memory is visualized as a holistic, interconnected landscape of memories through which Barish can observe, analyze, and move between memories. The memories are like life-sized, 3-dimensional, moving dioramas that allows

him to perceive sometimes excruciating details from his past; they are not, as with the chapter four films, merely a chronological series of flashbacks.

This distinction between dialectical poles used to describe memory is noted in Michael Pigott's (2012) article, "Manifesting a Mutant Past in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.*" He writes, "The memories that Joel journeys through form one continuous landscape of memory, rather than a series of isolated recollections" (p. 189). These contrasting dynamics between visualizing memory as discrete, breakable connections representing specific events and memory as an interconnected "landscape" of moments makes up the frame-work for telling the story of Clementine and Joel. And it is here where the "human v. technology" struggle emerges again. The visualization of this landscape throughout the tour of Joel's memories with him and as Lacuna's technological "eraser" plods on, relentlessly eradicating moments from his mind. At the same time, Joel is using his imagination and creativity to try and preserve his memories. In the end, he fails and all of his memories of Clementine are erased. His experience in the film is an example of a struggle happening between his humanity and an external, technological force and this struggle is taking place, literally, in the arena of memory.

As one might expect, there are plenty of conventional communication media like photographs, cassette recordings, and spoken memories are an important part of the story. But there are other, perhaps less obvious, examples of memory-imbued objects that are also important in the film. Drawings, a coffee mug, fabric, and hand-written journal entries are all examples of technology – however minor it may seem – with which characters can reinforce their memories. This point is made in the film as the technicians at Lacuna ask Joel to bring in all of his souvenirs of his relationship with Clementine.

With electrodes all over his head, the technicians ask Joel to tell the story behind each item so they can locate the corresponding memory in his brain for deleting. This scene demonstrates the act of having one's memory supported by the kinds of "memory technology" described earlier, but also that other seemingly-ordinary objects, like a coffee mug, can be imbued with meaning and support episodes of memory.

The main fictitious memory technology in this film is embodied by Lacuna Inc., who sells the service of erasing unwanted memories. They are a very successful business; the office is always busy, and the receptionist, Mary, is often on the phone with clients making appointments and asking questions. She refers potential clients to coupon specials and sends out dozens of letters every day to the friends and families of those who have had memories deleted. In this world, people can, and many do, choose to erase any painful memories that they can afford to – and instantly forgetting painful memories becomes a privilege of disposable income rather than emotional work. The implications of having memories erased aren't only for those who undergo the procedure; there is also the risk of having one's time and relationship with another person erased from the other person's memory, as has happened to Joel Barish.

While the majority of the film takes place in Joel's mind and is focused on the nature of memory as discrete events or as a continuous landscape, both of these perceptions pertain specifically to episodic memory. However – initially unknown to him, his technicians, or his clients – Mierzwiak's technology is unable to reach the emotional components of memory and, for Clementine and Mary, the lingering emotional residues of their erased memories trigger various behavioral issues. It isn't until the details of the erased memories are restored by their listening to their respective audio

recordings of interviews conducted by Mierzwiak about why they chose to erase their memories, that they can understand what is happening to them. For instance, Mary has a reaction when Mierzwiak has to come to help his technicians because Joel is successfully evading the eradication of his memories. Mierzwiak has to improvise with his memory technology in order to find where Joel is hiding his memories of Clementine. As he regains control of the situation, Mary compliments him with an almost effusive sincerity, "Wow, that was beautiful to watch, Howard. Like a surgeon or a concert pianist or something." Mierzwiak and his technicians look on awkwardly because they all remember the affair Mary had with the doctor, but she does not.

Clementine too has similar experiences as she visits places she had been with Joel which throws her into emotional turmoil, but for reasons which she cannot remember; the episodes have been erased. The erased memories that re-emerge through emotional episodes in both Clementine and Mary represent their authentic pasts during which they had had relationships with Joel and Dr. Mierzwiak respectively and then had their memories wiped. The episodic memories that connected to these emotional-procedural memories have been erased, but the emotions they had experienced with their erased former partners remains and troubles them. As in *Robocop* and *Total Recall*, Gondry uses a fictional interpretation of procedural memory to represent authentic experiences as distinguished from potentially altered or erased episodic memories. However, Gondry's interpretation has the procedural memories emerging through the emotional body rather than the physical one.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed four films to understand how ideology intersects with technological sharing of autobiographical memories. The ideologies I found mostly involved anxieties surrounding technology being used to implant, delete, or otherwise edit autobiographical memories. This led to the identification of two subcategories of autobiographical memory, episodic and procedural memories. The cinematic depictions of these memory systems are used to characterize the anxious ideologies by establishing episodic memory as potentially technologically corrupt and untrustworthy and procedural memory as untouched by technology and thus representing an authentic experience. In the next chapter, I will summarize my findings from chapters three, four, and five as well as provide answers to the research questions.

Chapter 6

Constructing and Deconstructing Cinematic Memory:

Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This study set out to learn how ideologies of power operate in the realm of autobiographical memory. Due to the elusive and ephemeral nature of autobiographical memory, I turned to cinematic depictions to find examples for analysis in order to begin to understand how the dimensions of ideology and memory intersect. Three assumptions were identified upon which to base this study: 1. that ideology is ubiquitous including in fantasies and memories, 2. that personal, interior memory is difficult to locate and objectively examine, and 3. that cinema can create distance and exteriority so that some typically interior experiences can be better understood. These assumptions were appropriate to this thesis and none need to be significantly modified. Film examples were selected and then organized into chapters representing one of three operational aspects of autobiographical memory: witnessing and amnesia, recall and reconstructing memories of the past, and sharing memories with others.

There were three goals established in chapter one. The first goal was to understand cinematic memory as a vehicle for communicating and reifying messages of social power discrepancies such as those found between races, sexes, genders, classes and so on. The second goal was to understand some of the ways by which the form of the cinematic memory – how it is visualized – communicates ideas about the nature of

memory and the experiences tied to it. The third goal was to speculate about some of the real world implications of how ideologies of power imbue and surround personal memory. As will be elaborated upon below in the review of research questions and subsequent discussion, these goals were met.

The goals lead to four research which guided analysis of the selected examples of cinematic depictions of memory in film to identify and locate the ideologies of power that reside there.

1. What explicit and implicit ideologies of power are being communicated through the content of cinematic memories?
2. What assumptions are communicated via the cinematic forms of memory?
3. Where do ideologies of power reside in autobiographical memory?
4. What can these findings reveal about real life intersections between ideologies of power and autobiographical memory?

I applied these research questions to each of the three analysis chapters to develop my findings listed below. I will address research questions 1-3 for each chapter separately. I will postpone my ideas about the fourth question until the discussion section.

Review of the Research Questions

Witnessing and amnesia

The first analysis chapter was about cinematic depictions of making memories and subsequently losing them to amnesia. While the depiction of the causes and symptoms of amnesia do not correlate well with medical research (Baxendale, 2004), the films in chapter three show the potential for the absence of memory to be a tool for asserting power in service to ideology. For instance, In *Overboard, Memento*, and *50*

First Dates, each of the amnesiac characters is exploited opportunistically. The exploiters are not responsible for causing the amnesia. In *Rosemary's Baby* and *Men in Black,* characters with agendas intentionally induce amnesia in order to attain some level of control over the victims. My analysis of these latter two films is summarized in the following responses to the research questions.

1. What explicit and implicit ideologies are in the content of the memories? These two films features explicit ideologies familiar to critical studies. In *Rosemary's Baby* it is second wave feminism with much of Rosemary's trauma being focused on rape as well as assaults on her reproductive freedom and personal autonomy. For the second film, *Men in Black*, the titular agency operates with an ideology that is authoritarian in its beliefs and fascist in its practice.

2. What assumptions are made about the form and nature of memory/amnesia? What memory is and what it "looks" like can be difficult to articulate in any context. Cinematic depictions of memory therefore require a measure of creative problem solving to visualize the phenomenon on screen. Cinematically depicting amnesia presents further problems since it is the eradication or pre-empting of memory and represents a negation instead of a presence. Because one cannot directly depict the absence of a memory, there are a variety of components surrounding amnesia that a filmmaker can depict to make amnesia "visible" indirectly. Some of these components are the type of amnesia – anterograde or retrograde – that the victim is afflicted with, how the condition came about, and when or if to present the missing memory on screen for the viewer to see. These components can be depicted and doing so can help to visualize a condition that is the absence rather than the presence of memory.

Some films use amnesia in a more expanded context in the story. One such context is explored in the latter part of this chapter: amnesia as a means of acquiring or maintaining power. This specific use of amnesia in a narrative brings along additional dynamics that can help visualize a character's amnesia. These dynamics include whether the condition is opportunistically taken advantage of or is intentionally induced. Of the films discussed in this chapter, *Overboard, 50 First Dates* and *Memento* are examples of opportunistic victimization of amnesiacs because the amnesia happens independently of those who exploit it. *Rosemary's Baby* and *Men in Black* are examples of pre-meditated assaults on others' memories. The amnesia victims were targeted and had their amnesia intentionally induced for the sake of an agenda. In such films when the amnesia is intentionally induced, the motivations for committing the act, the method of inducing amnesia, and the consequences to the victim can be explored visually to provide further dimensions with which to outline the amnesia.

3. Where is ideology located? Of course there is ideology located in the content of the erased memory, particularly for Rosemary's forgotten rape. However, ideology in these examples can be seen more prominently in the components that surround amnesia and make it visible indirectly. It can be seen in the attackers' motives, their methods, and the ensuing consequences to the victims. For instance, in both *Rosemary's Baby* and *Men in Black* there are powerful groups intentionally impairing the memories of less powerful individuals and then asserting control over their amnesiac victims. In *Rosemary's Baby*, the leaders of a satanic cult, motivated by a prior failed attempt to birth "Satan's son" and enabled by patriarchal ideology, decide to be certain that the next victim of their scheme, Rosemary Woodhouse, doesn't remember the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy.

The cult's leaders secretly dose Rosemary with a drug that causes her to hallucinate and to partially lose consciousness – intentionally inducing anterograde amnesia. In *Men in Black*, a fictional technological device is used to erase the memories of undesirable witnesses to the secretive agency's work. The Men in Black agency is motivated on one level to protect humanity, but on a more subtle level they are motivated to maintain their hegemony of authoritarian philosophies backed by fascist activity.

The motive and method for inducing amnesia provides some insight to ideology in each film, but the consequences to the victims are what provide the most compelling visualizations of amnesia and power. For instance, Rosemary's condition is the source of constant tension throughout the film as she interacts with people who she cannot remember have committed horrible acts against her. The gap in her memory is a manifestation of the patriarchal ideology of the cult and her amnesia drives the suspense of the film.

The curtailing of liberty by the Men in Black is such that the victims have no idea about the aliens they have interacted with, the agency itself, or that their memories have been altered. The agency claims to protect humanity, and abuses personal, autobiographical memories to do so, with only the flimsy excuse that the public couldn't handle the knowledge without stupidly panicking. Therefore, the vast population of individuals who are not a part of the agency don't even know that they are making an exchange of liberty for security, so thorough are the Men in Black's tactics for inducing amnesia. As with any fascist ideology, the choice is made on their behalf and then enforced.

The audience, on the other hand, does know about the actions, philosophies, and values of the Men in Black, and that is the subversive, ideological element in the film. The viewer is a witness to the abuse of memory happening throughout the film as well as the motivations and agendas such behavior is serving. In this way, viewers are given an opportunity to see the heroes as fascist villains and in that way resist the authoritarian ideology the film seems to present in how it stylizes the agency and lead characters.

Recall and reconstruction

The films in chapter four all feature depictions of remembering. The analysis revealed some of the different ways in which autobiographical memories are thought to manifest, particularly their perceived objectivity or subjectivity. In these examples, ideologies reside not only in the narrative content of an autobiographical memory, but also in what I call the cinematic form or "mechanism" of memory. That is to say, how people perceive memory to manifest and operate can reinforce or diminish the corresponding ideologies of power in the content.

1. What explicit and implicit ideologies are in the content of the memories? In regard to the content of Jack Crabb's memory in *Little Big Man*, there is racism in the glorified depiction of the Cheyenne culture at that time. The cultural and racial "othering" that occurs here reveals a perceived moral superiority of what are often called "primitive" cultures when compared and contrasted with contemporary western civilization. Along with the glorification of indigenous culture, there is also a more implicit ideology that criticizes how white, frontier America treated the indigenous population. So while the white, frontier settlers are shown to slowly overcome the indigenous people by force, many of the white characters are cartoonish, buffoonish, and morally corrupt.

The content of Rose's memory in James Cameron's *Titanic* has certain classist ideologies at play. Explicitly, it may seem like of a feminist coming of age tale – a wealthy young woman from an oppressive, 19th century aristocratic English culture asserts her individuality and tries to pull free of the chains of propriety that constrain her spirit. Her rebellion culminates in a passionate love affair with a handsome, young, and – very important here – poor man. However, Slavoj Zizek (2011) has a different take. In the documentary, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, he claims the plot of *Titanic* can be criticized as a sort of class-based vampirism. From this Marxist standpoint, rather than a feminist arousal of a young woman, Rose is seen as a member of the wealthy class who, experiencing a bout of ennui, replenishes her spirit by – figuratively and literally – draining the life energy from a member of the lower classes. Whether one sees it as feminist, classist, or both, there is ideology in the reported content of Rose's autobiographical memories.

There are also explicit and implicit ideologies expressed in the memory flashbacks in *Natural Born Killers* and *Mullholland Drive*. These flashbacks not only explicitly mimic the styles found on cable television and in Golden Age Hollywood movies, but also are asserting an implicit ideology that is critical of the effects of these industries on the minds of young people and the lives of women. So for *Natural Born Killers*, the television montage style is both a commentary on the subjective nature of memory as well as a reflection of the ideology that television culture has a profound influence on the minds of those who grow up in it. In *Mullholland Drive*, the "Hollywood Dream" of a small-town talent arriving by bus and making it big through hard work is upended. As with *Natural Born Killers*, the style of the memory in *Mullholland Drive*

reflects this upended dream: it begins as a Hollywood glamour tale and descends into pure nightmare. However, within this framework is a deep reflection on how the illusion of the "dream" ruins people, especially women. In both Diane's delusional memories as well as in the objective flashbacks at the end, there are women disregarded for their talents and energy and who are instead rewarded for their sexuality and willingness to participate in patriarchal Hollywood. Those who don't make it are abused and eventually relegated to restaurant staff, prostitution, drug abuse, homelessness, and murder.

Stand by Me centers on four working-class and "working-poor" friends, all of whom deal with various forms of abuse and class segregation. The film depicts underprivileged children dealing with some very difficult matters of abuse and neglect from adults. Ideologies that are a part of the memories depicted in *Stand by Me* follow this theme of criticizing some of the power dynamics between adults and children. The film shows some of the damage and difficulties that young people endure from older generations while growing up.

2. What assumptions are made about the form and nature of memory/amnesia? Several of the films reviewed for this chapter use flashbacks that are contextualized as a depiction of memory and are being delivered from the first person perspective of a character in the story who is involved in an act of remembering. These first person character flashbacks are depicted stylistically on a spectrum from the very objective and literal to the very subjective and symbolic. On one end, *Little Big Man* and *Titanic* depict memory as though it were a recording of the past – as if memory is precisely imitative of the originating event. There is an authoritarian ideology there, I think, for those who strongly believe in the authenticity of their memories. For these types of people, the way

they remember it is the way it was. As such, one who believes this way can hardly imagine their memories as ideologically edited.

At the other end of the spectrum are extremely subjective flashbacks, such as those in *Natural Born Killers* and *Mulholland Drive*, which deliver information from the past as well as being a visual, aesthetic exploration of the nature of memory. In these examples, ideology is toned down somewhat and attributable to the character's own beliefs. The last film of this chapter, Rob Reiner's *Stand By Me*, is an example of a flashback that is between extreme objectivity and extreme abstractness and which brings a sense of "magical reality" to the story. These types of subjective, first person flashbacks are depictions of the idea that our autobiographical memories are narratives – blends of fact and fiction. The ideology in the notion of memory as an ongoing, interpretive, and dynamic act is, perhaps, a more liberal one: that autobiographical memories are a part of a dialogue between one's self and the world.

3. Where is the ideology located? In these film examples, ideology is located in the content of the memories, but are also reinforced by the relative authoritative implications of the form given them on screen. That is, to the extent that a flashback is rendered as objective, there seems to be an added layer of authority. This is because when memory is depicted as fact, the ideologies coded there become presumptions; as if what is depicted is the "natural state of affairs."

When memory is depicted as subjective, there is a diminishing effect on the presumptions that accompany ideology. Such memories demonstrate an awareness that the content and form of the memory has been interpreted and affected by the rememberer. Therefore, the beliefs, values, and assumptions found there can be attributed to the

rememberer's personality rather than to the default state of the world. In this way, ideological content in subjective memories are less authoritative and presumptuous than their objective counterparts.

Sharing and preserving memories with technology

Chapter five looked at films about sharing memories from the past using technology. Ideologies of power were most prominent in who owns or has access to the technological means of sharing memories and then widely distributing the resulting output. Adding to the potential avenues for ideology, such memorials can be edited, contextualized, withheld, or destroyed.

1. What explicit and implicit ideologies are in the content of the memories? While there are no substantive, explicit ideologies of race, sex, gender, class, and so on that come across as blatant as was seen in the previous two chapters, there is one overarching, implicit ideology that seems to encompass all four of the films in this chapter. It is that the imaginary, memory-altering devices at the center of these films seem to reflect anxieties about a progressive supplanting of organic, human memory by technology. Furthermore, rather than being able to supplement memory in remarkable and useful ways, these fictional technologies are all presented as sinister.

For instance, in *Robocop*, the director shows us – from the paralyzed and helpless first-person point of view of a near-dead Alex Murphy – a sneering OCP executive ordering Murphy's memory wiped. In *Blade Runner*, the condition of human memory being largely undifferentiated from android memory mimicry challenges the characters in the film, as well as the audience, to question their pre-conceived notions of what memory is. The entire tone of the film is dark and stifling with a sense of inevitability regarding

androids eventually becoming indistinguishable from humans. In *Total Recall*, Douglas Quaid is sedated and then strapped into a large, brain-invading contraption from which he awakens screaming and struggling after the scientists begin to tinker with his memories. And Joel Barish is paralyzed while in a drug-induced coma when he changes his mind and poignantly, mutely, tries to object to the erasing of his relationship with Clementine in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The anxieties being represented here are that one's memories may be erased by an outside party or that one's memories may actually be implants and not one's own or that one may find one's self purposefully erased from someone else's memories altogether.

2. What assumptions are made about the form and nature of memory/amnesia? Another observation of the depiction of memory in these four films is that they separate two specific aspects of autobiographical memory: episodic and procedural. In his 1990 book, *Autobiographical memory, an introduction,* Martin Conway writes that episodic memory refers to the collection of events and episodes that get experienced and then encoded as memories (p. 4). This is distinguished from other types of memory such as recalling facts – the capital of a nation, for instance – or procedural memory which involves performing an act with one's body, such as playing an instrument or riding a bike (Conway, 1990, p. 3). Episodic memory can be supported by a variety of memory technologies in order to provide details, though not necessarily accurate or objective details, of an episode from the past. Media such as print, photography, or audio/video recordings can be invaluable for supporting the episodic memory system, the re-constructing of memories, and reminiscing (Bell and Gemmell, 2009, p. 53).

The second type of autobiographical memory depicted in this chapter's films is procedural memory. Sometimes referred to as "muscle" or "motor memory," Conway describes procedural memory as that type which involves physical skills acquired over time (1990, p. 3). Examples of this kind of memory are martial arts, playing music, riding a bicycle, painting, dancing, knitting, and a variety of other sports, arts, and crafts. This type of memory involves neuromuscular coordination and is usually a result of many hours and years of practice.

Manifestations of procedural memory appear, with extensive poetic license of course, in each of the films in this chapter. In *Robocop*, it is a sign that the human identity of Alex Murphy still persists within his cyborg body; in *Blade Runner*, an android, Rachael, despite only being "alive" a few years and her abilities having been programmed, plays piano like a long-practiced master; in *Total Recall*, a man finds himself in a fight and is shocked that his body already "knows" how to defend and kill; and in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, remnants left behind from a memory erasing technology results in unresolved emotions that arise uncontrollably. Procedural memory is used in these films as a narrative device to represent the "authentic" memories and experiences of the body independent of an individual's episodic memories having been altered or erased.

For instance, Schwarzenegger's character, Quaid, in *Total Recall* pays to have a memory of a trip to Mars implanted into his brain. The scientists at Rekall Inc. prepare Quaid's fictional vacation, sedate him, and strap him into a chair to perform the implant. While Quaid paid to have an artificial vacation implanted into his brain as an episodic memory, there is no mention of inserting skills into muscles and so when he gets in a

fight shortly after his memory implant and he uses military martial arts training as self-defense, Quaid is shocked at his abilities. It is later learned that it was a past identity who had had military training and that, although the episodic memories of the training has been covered up, Quaid's body still "remembers" how to fight. Even though his episodic memory is altered, implanted, and erased many times in the film, his martial arts training reveals a hint at the authentic experiences of Quaid's body independent of the episodic memories in his mind. He was a soldier trained to fight and his body retains those reflexes. The film depicts episodic memory in general – whether as actual events erased or as fictional events implanted – as untrustworthy due to its potential for being influenced by technology. In contrast, the procedural memories that are acted out through Quaid's body represent actual events.

In *Robocop* there is a similar distinction made between these two types of memory. The company, OCP, has wiped Alex Murphy's episodic memories, but his body "remembers" the horrific murder it suffered. While "asleep", Robocop's body re-enacts the murder of Alex Murphy. In doing so, this poetic "muscle memory" initiates a mental recovery of some episodic memories, which flash through Robocop's mind and can be seen on an adjacent monitor. So, again, despite having episodic memories of events erased by technology, Murphy's body holds memories in itself that reveals the "authentic" events of the past. This is the case again in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.* Episodes are erased from characters' minds, but the "emotional memories" bubble up despite Lacuna Inc.'s procedure.

Blade Runner is an exception here. It doesn't distinguish episodic and procedural memory systems as one being more potentially inauthentic or subject to technological

mimicry than the other. For instance, the android, Rachael, has memory implants which include episodes, such as watching a spider eaten by its young when she was a little girl. But she has also been programmed to play the piano at a level requiring many years of training for humans. Although the film doesn't greatly separate episodic from procedural memories, *Blade Runner* does use memory in general as a marker for authentic humanity in a world where androids are otherwise undetectable. In fact, the main threat to humanity from the androids in the film comes from their pre-programmed memories as well as their ability to create memories of their own.

3. Where is ideology located? There is, as always, some ideology located in the content and form of the depicted memories. However, what I found to be the most significant ideology in these films lies outside of the memory and in the hands of whoever wields – or can afford to access – these fictional technologies capable of transferring, transforming, implanting, and erasing memories. So, for instance, in the world of *Robocop*, "memory wiping technology" is not in wide use, but it is available to the nefarious and greedy OCP Corporation who used it to steal what remained of Alex Murphy's life to create their product. In *Total Recall*, there is the seemingly benevolent and conventional capitalist ideology of Rekall Inc. who sells memories of leisure and adventure. But there is also a secretive, fascist, "cold-war-spy" ideology when this technology is used by "The Agency" in order to quash rebellion and maintain hegemony through violence to both bodies and memories.

Another example of the external ideologies swirling about these memories is that these films depict memory as an arena where tensions between humanity and technology can be explored. Each film in this chapter places memory at the center of their respective

inquiries about the status of humanity and identity in an increasingly technological culture. Thus there is an ideology – typically one of an anti-technological bent – that technological infiltration of our memories is inevitable and likely disastrous.

Discussion

Practical applications of the ideas in this thesis

The fourth and final research question involved finding practical applications of the ideas developed in this thesis. In this section, I provide just a few possibilities for how such dynamics may operate when it comes to an historical event – in this case, the 2016 presidential election. While the scenarios described here are hypothetical, they provide examples of how the vocabulary and concepts regarding ideology in and around memory may apply.

Chapter three featured cinematic depictions of amnesia being used – opportunistically or intentionally – as a tool to further an ideology. Using the template of "motivation, method, and consequences" – those conditions surrounding amnesia as a means to power – and applying it to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, one may see how media, ideology, and amnesia intersect here. So, for instance, news media may reinforce memory via saturation coverage of an event or encourage forgetting through neglecting to report on other events. The consequence may be that through excessive coverage of some areas and intentional neglect of others, there will be induced an ideological amnesia that permits enough voters to overcome their cognitive dissonance about the nominee and vote. Such media-affected, selective amnesia may support beliefs or help to resolve cognitive dissonance thus permitting voters to join with their political tribe to vote for a candidate who may not align with one's own individual principles.

In the film examples analyzed in chapter four, The depictions of memories appear to be ideological not only in content, but in form. That is to say that whatever explicit or implicit ideologies are contained in the content of the memory seem to be somewhat reinforced or diminished by the form given to the memory. Some films depicted memory as seemingly complete, accurate, and objective "movies in the mind." This manner of perceiving autobiographical memory reinforces ideologies coded into the content by making the memories seem to be an accurate reflection of how things "actually were." Other films show memories as somehow altered by the rememberer and these depictions of ideological memory can be more attributed to the state of mind of a character and thus is less presumptuous that the memory depicts the past accurately.

Returning to the 2016 presidential election, it seems a case can be made for ideological autobiographical memories potentially affecting decision-making during political seasons. For instance, Donald Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again" carries an implication that the past was somehow "better" for his target constituency and that the present and future represent a diminishing of their life experiences in terms of cultural changes, economic policy, demographic shifts, and so on. That the nation has gone "off-track," is headed for certain disaster, and needs rescuing is certainly a common theme in any contemporary American political race. However, for Trump 2016, this theme resounded across the country and was whipped to new levels of "nostalgia outrage."

For those who agree with the notion that America had once been great, is no longer great, and that – through his leadership – it can be returned to greatness: to what extent do they perceive their memories to be objectively accurate or subjectively

interpretive? This matters. When a person believes that the past was a "better time" and they also believe that their memories of the past are accurate, objective "movies in the mind," like those in *Little Big Man* or *Stand by Me*, then the ideology of the superiority of the past becomes obscured by the presumptions of the accuracy of those memories. For those who believe their memories to be accurate and complete rather than subjective, limited perspectives of the past influenced by other minds, a slogan like "Make America Great Again" – with all of its inferences regarding the past, present, and future – may have been effective.

And here, I think, there is real ideological power in what I would call "nostalgia films" – films that glamourize the past, whether a cultural past or youth culture in general. They not only promote particular, agenda-driven visions of the past, but reinforce those positions through ideological visions of memory itself. The main flashback in *Stand By Me* serves these dual purposes. It depicts a fantasy-past as an internal, autobiographical memory and then reinforces the notion that how one remembers the past is how it actually was. This cinematic dynamic hints that believing one's memories to be accurate makes one less likely to be critical of the implied ideologies contained therein.

The last analysis chapter looked at depictions of technology used to externalize, share, and preserve memories. Of course, technology allows for the easy sharing of memories between friends and family, but how does this topic pertain to weightier and more complicated issues in terms of the ideology of the wielder of the technology? To demonstrate, I turn once again to the recent election. On October 7th, 2016, a recording of a conversation held in 2005 between Donald Trump and then Access Hollywood host,

Billy Bush, was released. In the audio, Trump brags that his celebrity status essentially leaves him immune to retaliation for unwanted sexual contact and assault (*Washington Post*). He claimed he could – without discussion or consent – kiss, caress, or grab anyone he wanted to on any part of their body because he himself is rich and famous and the victim wouldn't complain. This recording brought increased global attention to Trump and marked an important change in the tones of the two respective campaigns.

To see how this audio recording fits in with the rest of this chapter, imagine a hypothetical situation. Suppose that, rather than releasing an audio recording, Billy Bush writes an article or goes on live television to tell the American electorate his memory of a conversation with Trump which included the above comments about unwanted sexual aggression. Such an assertion would likely never get media traction. In such a hotly contested election season, acts of witnessing and recalling are not enough. An additional element is needed to transform Bush's memory from gossip to scandal. There needed to be some kind of record of the event to be shared with the public. Not just for the sake of viral media, but to lend authority to the claim. Of course, had the ideology of the owner of that recording been otherwise and they refused to release it, there may have been no public mention of the matter whatsoever and any verbal assertions would have been merely brushed aside.

Witnessed and recalled memories are often not enough to convince people of a candidate's guilt or innocence on an important matter during an intense campaign. Furthermore, an accuser needs to be able to protect themselves from counter-accusations of slander or libel. In these ways technology serves to not only mediate the sharing of memories, but also to authenticate memory. It is for similar reasons that eyewitness

testimony holds so little legal weight in a trial. Witnessing and recalling memories are important of course for one's personal sense of continuity and self, but technology provides share-ability, tangibility and authority to what an individual claims to have experienced.

Conclusions

This thesis suggests that memories are not only composed of varying degrees of fact and fiction, but that they are also, in many circumstances, ideological constructions. Furthermore, I believe this study leads to the conclusion that memories are surrounded by and vulnerable to competing ideologies. For instance, parties able to encourage amnesia about a particular event or who have at their disposal certain technologies that allow them to be the arbiters of "what really happened" may be able to assert power over others in order to fulfill their agendas. Memory seems to be ideological internally and externally as well as between people.

The ideologies of power that were identified in the films also corresponded to Sillars and Gronbeck's (2001) three types of power. For instance there are examples of political power in *Little Big Man, Blade Runner,* and *Total Recall.* There are examples of social power in *Stand By Me* and *Men in Black.* And there are several instances of relational power in *Rosemary's Baby, Mullholland Drive,* and *Natural Born Killers.*

While the influence of ideology in and around memory was what initially sought in this study, one unexpected idea emerged while I was reading Marshall McLuhan. In the introduction of *Understanding Media* McLuhan calls electronic media an 'extension of the senses.' After writing this thesis, I now see autobiographical memory as a sort of 'internalization of the senses.' From this perspective, memory becomes an internal

medium which I imagine shares characteristics with more conventional media beyond their associations with the senses.

Limitations

Of the many limitations that plague qualitative analyses of rhetorical texts, I think the most significant has to do with the scope of this thesis. This study is necessarily incomplete in terms of the number of films that feature memory as categorized above and could not be included here due to space. I have tried to overcome that by providing a relatively large number of films for analysis, eleven, with another dozen or so films that are used as references and counter-examples for dynamics similar to the main films in each chapter. Another shortcoming of the scope is having to exclude cinematic depictions of other memory systems. For instance, films like *Akeelah and the Bee* or *Little Miss Sunshine* or *Stand and Deliver* involve memorizing words for a spelling bee or rehearsing a choreographed dance routine or recalling formulas for performing calculus. Unfortunately those films and those aspects of autobiographical memory cannot be investigated here.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this study lies in the content of the artifacts themselves. It is this component of the study that, were I to have it to do over again, I would most like to address and change. Almost all of the eleven films I analyzed in this study are directed by or feature lead characters who are wealthy, straight, white, cis, able-bodied, neuro-typical, males; a demographic which, of course, carries its own ideologies of power. Despite this last limitation – and the fact that I myself fit most of those demographic characteristics – I think this study has overcome this particular issue since it is, in the end, a study of the dynamics between ideology and memory and not

myself posing as critical theorist presenting a deep analysis of ideologies of race, sex, or gender alone.

Future research

Future research on the topic of how ideologies of power surround and imbue autobiographical memory can take several forms. One could analyze other films, such as *Akeelah and the Bee* or *Little Miss Sunshine* or *Stand and Deliver*, and expand on how these different aspects of memory are visualized. Assessing memory and ideology is not limited to films, of course, and analyses of literature, theatre, and the vast media landscape of the internet could provide further insights into how ideologies of power move people through memory, nostalgia, and the like. For instance there could be some discoveries in doing quantitative studies of perceptions of memory. Perhaps an inquiry into how people understand memory to operate on a scale from "very accurate and objective" to "very interpretive and subjective." Or a study of authoritative language individuals employ when describing their own autobiographical memories. That is, do people describe their autobiographical memories with an authoritarian tone that implies "that's the way it was" or with a more flexible tone of "that's the way I remember it?"

Final comments

Autobiographical memory is an elusive phenomenon to articulate and examine. Ideology is hidden, coded, and self-denying. This thesis aimed to find some means of examining the influences of ideology upon memory. By using cinematic depictions of memory, I was able to identify some characteristics of how these phenomena intersect. It is my hope that this study allows for a continuing conversation about ideology in

autobiographical memory as well as how ideologies are affected by perceptions about the nature of remembering, forgetting, and sharing memories.

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