

Memory and Non-Linear Storytelling in Film

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Animation. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ella O'Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'O' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'n'.

Ella O'Sullivan

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore how filmmaking technique and non-linear narrative are used to portray memory in film. A clear link between psychoanalysis of trauma and the subconscious, and editing and compositional filmmaking technique is drawn through research into film theory and trauma studies. Through analysis and comparison of *Mirror and Hiroshima, mon Amour*, methodology for varying effective portrayals of memory in film is extrapolated. In the case of *Mirror*, use of imagery evocative of the director's own childhood proves a useful tool to portray personal memory. In *Hiroshima*, montage-style editing and documentary-style footage combine to create a study of the impact of a major public trauma on the individual.

Analysis of the films with a non-linear narrative structure; *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Je T'Aime*, *Je T'Aime* and *Memento*, provides an insight into how the atemporal format parallels Freudian theory on trauma, and the "repetition compulsion" (Freud 21). Through cross-disciplinary research into philosophy and film theory, this dissertation also considers the authentic portrayal of public trauma in fiction film. Finally, it looks at how archival footage can be used to both heighten the authenticity of a film, and to push a political narrative, as is the case with *Hiroshima* and *Mirror*, respectively. Ethical questions related to memory are dissected through the lens of *Eternal Sunshine*

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Introduction

This thesis examines the correlation between psychological constructs relating to memory and trauma and the structuring of films relating to the same subject. This thesis takes the position that the properties of film cater to capturing moments in time, but, due to the medium's connection to subjective representation, there is no single approach to portray memory in film. The intention of this research is to dissect how the film form can be a successful representation of memory from a practical perspective, leading to findings that are relevant to both future researchers and practitioners.

The first chapter discusses how concepts related to personal memory have informed filmmaking techniques in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* and various works by Alain Resnais, most notably, *Hiroshima, mon Amour*. The editing techniques used by Resnais, and how they were informed by psychological constructs relating to trauma and memory, are then compared with Tarkovsky's process. In the second chapter, there is a discussion on the use of non-linear storytelling in memory film and how the structure of the films *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Memento* are effective in emulating functions of the mind. The editing style of *Eternal Sunshine* successfully portrays processes of the subconscious mind, while the parallel narrative structure of *Memento* creates confusion and prompts the audience to unravel the story in the same way as the protagonist does. Resnais' *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* is discussed in the context of its influence on *Eternal Sunshine* and its narrative structure that has paved the way for "atemporal" film (McGowan 86). Use of documentary film footage is established as shorthand for implanting memory into the mind of the audience, drawing on the theory of "prosthetic memory" (Radstone 334). The third chapter delves into the ethical implications of using documentary footage to heighten the emotions of films that deal with major

public trauma. In this example, *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima, mon Amour* are compared in regard to portrayals of WWII with sensitivity to these traumas. A comparison is then drawn to the use of specific pieces of archival footage in *Mirror*, and how Tarkovsky uses these images to contextualise his childhood memories. *Mirror* is also discussed through the lens of how the director's choice of archival footage is at odds with the ideas related to filmic authenticity previously discussed. In the final section of the chapter, the ethical questions related to the content of *Eternal Sunshine* are discussed from various philosophical viewpoints.

To better understand how the human memory process is reflected in the narrative structure of memory films, my research has been conducted through scholarly sources, in the realm of film theory and audio and visual analysis of films, using case studies from different filmmakers. These studies also involved analysis on editing and indexicality in film, as well as trauma studies, psychology, and philosophy. This cross-disciplinary approach is intended to aid in formulating a layered analysis of the films in discussion.

Chapter One

Technical Approaches to Memory Film

This chapter aims to compare the various working methods used to portray memory in film and their effectiveness within the respective methods. The film *Mirror* and various works of Resnais will be discussed through the lens of practical filmmaking technique as well as, in the case of Resnais, how psychoanalytical concepts relating to trauma influence the editing style of his films.

***Mirror* and Andrei Tarkovsky's Working Process**

The first section of this chapter outlines Tarkovsky's interest in the "moral, inner qualities" of time (Tarkovsky 58). According to the filmmaker, past and present are linked inextricably, with one being a consequence of the other. He compares it to the idea of cause and effect, in which, when confronted with the effect of something, it is only natural to examine its cause. Tarkovsky believes that memory is a "spiritual" experience (57). Memory ties a conscience to a person, and according to the director, implants a sense of regret and dissatisfaction in them. He implies that it is easy to cause oneself pain through reminiscence, but that vulnerability is part of what makes us human. *Mirror*, Tarkovsky's most autobiographical work (Graham and Petrie 111), follows what he describes as a film about "a man dying and acquiring a conscience" (Tarkovsky 110).

Mirror is considered one of Tarkovsky's most obscure and difficult to comprehend films (Graham and Petrie 115). It is episodic in structure, with scenes moving between past and present. Le Fanu explains that film elicits a dreamlike feeling, where the viewer has an emotional, rather than intellectual, understanding of the film. The intention of the director is not

that viewers should understand exactly what is happening the entire time, but connect with how it makes them feel (Le Fanu 69). Tarkovsky received letters after the release of the film, supporting the effectiveness of his filmmaking methods in connecting with the emotions of the audience. One viewer asks the director “how did you know about [their childhood]?”, indicating that Tarkovsky’s efforts to appeal to the universality of childhood memory were successful (Tarkovsky 10).

In this section, the question of which specific methods Tarkovsky employed to evoke this feeling within his audience will be discussed. Johnson and Petrie conclude that the visual style of the film is its most vital element of Tarkovsky's film (Johnson and Petrie 48). Further analysis of *Mirror* reveals how the director merges dreams, personal memory and public memory through changes in visual texture, distinct, “primal” images, audio motif and archival footage from the 30s and 40s.



Fig. 1 Tarkovsky pulls from a “universal stock” of imagery .

Vasudevan explains that Tarkovsky did not take ownership of the imagery he used, but believed he was pulling from an existing collection of “primal experiences and memories that made up shared, transcendent language” (Vasudevan 175). There is imagery in the film that appears vague or inexplicable, such as the dream sequence where water pours from the ceiling and the mother figure levitates, which drives the viewer to look for metaphor or symbolic meaning in what the director portrays on screen. This idea is rejected by Tarkovsky, along with the notion of “poetic cinema”, in favour of conveying “a specific, unique, actual fact” (Tarkovsky 72). He is interested in his audience experiencing a “revelation”, rather than a complete understanding of the film (41). Vasudevan explains that Tarkovsky’s rejection of symbolism is due to his idea of the cinematic image needing to be “indexical” (Vasudevan 173). He wanted the image to exist in its own right, without any hidden meaning. Both Vasudevan and Johnson and Petrie in their respective writings conclude that while this may have been the director’s intention, it was impossible to avoid the subconscious symbolism in his film (38).

In terms of the practical decisions made to evoke memory, many elements of costume and set design were inspired by Tarkovsky’s childhood. He used old photographs of the clothes his mother wore as inspiration for Margarita Terekhova’s costume, who portrays the mother figure, Maria. The dacha from the childhood sequence was built in the image of his own childhood. His own mother and son play the narrator’s mother and son, respectively, and he includes a voiceover of his father, Arseny Tarkovsky, reading his own poetry (Johnson and Petrie 53). By choosing to make the film so personal to him, he taps into the universality of childhood memory, to “talk of all that was most precious to [him]” (Tarkovsky 133).

The opening shot of *Mirror* leads the audience to a young woman sitting on a fence in the Russian countryside, while a man talks in voice-over about the beauty of pre-WWII Russia. The narrator, being too young to remember these events, creates a “mosaic” of what he knew, what he imagines, and what he was told about, linking the past with the present (Johnson and Petrie 116). The director depicts the subjectivity of memory, being constantly changed by new knowledge over time. The film itself is a mosaic of scenes with differing visual texture and a blend of fiction and reality.

The opening scene changes as children appear in frame, running to see the burning barn. The image of the barn is one of the “primal”, elemental images (see Fig. 2) described by Vasudevan, intended for “expressive purposes” (175). The heightened expression through visual means is an aid to the emotional revelation that Tarkovsky intended, and of which the letters he received are indicative. The extreme sensory imagery of bright colour is imprinted on the narrator’s childhood memory, but leaves an “eerie” feeling with the viewer (Johnson and Petrie 118).



Fig 2. "Primal", elemental imagery.

While Johnson and Petrie have accused Le Fanu's writing on *Mirror* of misinterpreting much of the events of the film (131), both parties agree on use of mirrors and reflective surfaces as a thematic device. Le Fanu considers them a connection between the past and the present, using the first dream sequence of the film as an example. The image changes visual texture to black and white, indicating that this is no longer the same memory, but a dream instead (Le Fanu 73). Johnson and Petrie counter with the idea that the colouring of the film does not specifically denote whether it is a flashback, dream or documentary, but is used to signal general change (132).

The dream sequence of the father's return approaches the surreal as flames leap from the stove and water pours from the ceiling. This is another example of the elemental imagery used to heighten the emotions of the scene. The woman character (Terekhova) is reflected in a mirror,

but an older woman (Tarkovsky's real mother) is in her place, wearing the same clothing. Based on the logic put forward by Le Fanu that the mirror is a portal between the past and present, this suggests the contrast in the way that the narrator, and by extension, the director, remembers his mother, and how she looks in the present. Johnson and Petrie conclude that this sequence is a guide for the audience to follow for the film's duration, and that while initially confusing, it can be understood towards the end of the film (118). This theme can be applied to the memory of the narrator, and how an understanding of what he witnessed as a child only came to him towards the end of his life, from the viewpoint of the present.



Fig 3. The mother's reflection is a portal between the past and present.

Alain Resnais' Documentary-Style and Trauma Film

Johnson and Petrie express confusion as to why Western audiences did not understand *Mirror*, when they would have been exposed to film with complicated structures and similar themes, such as the likes of Bergman, Fellini and French New Wave director Alain Resnais (Johnson and Petrie 134). Neupert distinguishes Resnais from other French New Wave directors through his choice to take advantage of “daring” pieces of literature for adaptation by novelists such as Marguerite Duras (Neupert 301). This section intends to outline Resnais' methods for exploration of memory in fiction and non-fiction, and how they compare to the working process of Tarkovsky.

Before 1959, Resnais made primarily documentary films, and after 1959, primarily fiction (Hirsch 87). *Hiroshima, mon Amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad* are notable examples of Resnais' use of memory in fiction films. Hirsch points out that the differences in posttraumatic documentary and trauma in fictional film are reflected in the differences between *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, although Resnais tended to blend elements of both (Hirsch 87).

Hiroshima, Mon Amour was created when Resnais was approached to make a documentary about the bombing in Hiroshima, similarly to how *Night and Fog* depicts the atrocities committed in Nazi concentration camps (Hirsch 87). Hirsch alludes to the fact that the transition of *Hiroshima* from documentary to fiction film is analogous to the structure of the film. Similar to his documentary work, Resnais uses a contrast between archival footage of the past and present-day footage of the same place to demonstrate the dichotomy between the

point of view of a person who witnessed the event, and the outsider trying to understand what has happened (Hirsch 87-88).

While Tarkovsky uses archival footage to contextualise the suffering of his family in Stalinist Russia, Resnais uses it to analyse how public memory exists as a construction of different streams of information from varying sources, often changing when new information is revealed. Hirsch also cites Turim's *Flashbacks in Film*, which explains that films catalogue the changes in "historical consciousness" as more information becomes readily available, just as the cinematic technique of the flashback is used to give the viewer new information (Hirsch 89; Turim 211). Flashback originally intended to resolve present narrative problems by introducing the past, without disrupting the pacing of the narrative (Hirsch 93-94). Influenced by Resnais, it has become a tool to create narrative disruption (Hirsch 97). Resnais used flashback as a tool to embed information that audiences wouldn't fully understand until later in the film. This leads to a less linear narrative format, but with a fulfilling emotional payoff.

Hirsch uses the example of the scene from *Hiroshima, mon Amour* after the prologue, in which the camera cuts back and forth between the two main characters in bed; the man sleeping peacefully, and the woman lost in a distant memory. Resnais uses a match cut between the man's hand on the bed, and the hand of a dying man, without context (see Fig 4. and Fig 5.). The audience later discovers that the man was a German soldier with whom the woman had a love affair during the German occupation of France. The combination of the match cut, which can be considered film shorthand for "associative memory", and the lack of information given to the audience about the meaning of the flashback, allow for the recreation of the "posttraumatic flashback" within the film. This method, Hirsch concludes, succeeds in creating a

“disorientation” and “emotional disturbance” that mimics how it feels for those that experience these traumatic flashbacks in real life (Hirsch 98-99).



Fig 4. The female character's Japanese lover sleeps with his arm held out.



Fig. 5 A graphic match to her dead lover in Nevers.

Johnson and Petrie outline Tarkovsky's general dislike of Eisenstein's montage editing style, claiming that it disrupted the natural rhythm and "real time" within shots. Eisenstein's definition of montage was a technique that created "conflict" between two scenes (Eisenstein, qtd. in Morales and Fernando 20). Tarkovsky's focus on staying true to the natural timing and rhythm of shots, with limited cuts, was important to his working process (Johnson and Petrie 37). Resnais, on the other hand, pulled from Eisenstein's theory of the "structural relations" between contrasting imagery. The emotional disturbance and disorientation caused by Resnais' conflicting shots in *Hiroshima* is an effective use of the montage method. This is also evident in *Night and Fog*, in which the relationship between past and present images is a study of public memory and "historical consciousness" (Hirsch 53).



Fig 6. Footage of Auschwitz, ten years after the liberation of the camp.

In contrast to Tarkovsky's priority of the image and visual style of the film, Resnais felt that the film image shouldn't be most important, and that, at some points, it could even be at odds with the sound and dialogue of the film (Hirsch 43). Kovács notes how *Last Year at Marienbad* was a product of Resnais moving towards a narrative of "memory and fantasy" (104). In *Marienbad*, the female protagonist, while being shown scenes of the love affair between her and the male character, repeatedly denies that it ever happened, and thus, creates a dissonance between the film's visuals and spoken dialogue. Kovács compares the way memory is approached psychoanalytically to *Hiroshima*, wherein traumatic memories must be relived to process and overcome them.

By contrast, Kovács believes that the approach to memory in *Marienbad* feels more like "hypnosis" and "persuasion" (Kovacs 106). The past and the present are intertwined in layers of mystery and uncertainty, and it is not clear by the end of the film what events actually took place. In all earlier discussion of memory, it was concluded that the past was always looked to as a cause for problems in the present. In the case of *Marienbad*, the past narrative the audience is

given is presumably false, but still has a direct impact on the present. The film blurs the lines between past and present, making it impossible to discern whether events are happening or have already happened. Here, the past is used not for longing or trauma, but as a manifestation of desire.

This chapter has outlined how the filmmaking techniques of Tarkovsky are effective in evoking childhood memory in its universality. His focus on long shots and dedication to indexicality allows the viewer to experience an emotional revelation about the nature of their own childhood, while highlighting the inextricable link between past and present. The way in which Tarkovsky's and Resnais' techniques differ is demonstrated by way of the intended understanding; *Mirror* is an emotional revelation about the viewer's own childhood, while *Hiroshima* offers an exploration of the psychological effects of a major public trauma on an individual. Resnais' montage editing and graphic matches, as well as juxtaposing audio and visuals are an exploration of traumatic memory and take a more psychoanalytical approach to examining the impact of the past on individuals.

Chapter Two

Non-Linear Narrative Structure in Memory Film

This chapter aims to explore the influence of psychoanalytical constructs associated with memory and the subconscious on the narrative structure and editing of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. It will then be compared to the structures of *Je T'Aime*, *Je T'Aime* and *Memento*.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind: Exploring the Conscious and Unconscious in Atemporal Cinema

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind is a film that utilises what McGowan refers to as “atemporality” to explore trauma and desire in the unconscious mind (86). According to the author, films with a non-linear structure “undermine” typical romantic tropes, as the warping of time creates an opposing emotional arc that does not have a stereotypical happy ending (McGowan 85). *Eternal Sunshine* has a dual structure, moving forward in the present, and moving backward through the protagonist Joel’s dream-like memories of his relationship with Clementine. The sequence of events begins with their breakup and ends with their first meeting. Gondry uses this cinematic mode to subvert audience expectations, and instead of rooting for the couple, the audience is burdened with knowing that their incompatibility is insurmountable (McGowan 107).

Lee explains that *Eternal Sunshine* disregards the limits of chronologised time to create a negative to positive relationship arc for the audience, so that by the end of the film, the events in the beginning hold emotional weight and melancholy (para. 4). McGowan agrees that end of the relationship “haunt[s]” the earlier, happier memories that they shared (90). However, reversal of the relationship arc demonstrates Joel’s reflection and reexamination of his relationship with

Clementine. This technique allows the audience to understand the emotional impact of Joel's actions by the end of the film, similar to how Resnais' flashback technique is designed for retrospective understanding of the film in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Hirsch 97).

In *Poetics*, Aristotle describes the structure of a tragedy as having a “beginning, middle and end” (Aristotle, qtd in Butler 48). *Eternal Sunshine*, while portraying a sequence of “related” scenes, defies the traditional Aristotelian format (48). Butler compares the narrative structure of *Eternal Sunshine* to “flipping back and forth through a screenplay”, reflecting writer Charlie Kaufman's desire to create a more complex structure for the film (54). The narrative begins when Joel and Clementine coincidentally meet on a train to Montauk after both having their memories wiped of each other through the Lacuna procedure. It is revealed over the course of the film that this is a manifestation of their subconscious memory. Due to the gap in their memories, they begin to repeat the events that are missing. McGowan compares this to Freud's analysis of trauma patients (98). Freud's theory of the “repetition compulsion” is recreated throughout the film, defined by a subconscious desire in trauma victims to recreate or repeat traumatic scenarios or events that they cannot remember (Freud 21).

“The failure to remember a traumatic event is the key to its power over us.” (McGowan 99)

In one scene from the film, Clementine takes Patrick (who tries to court her by imitating Joel) to the Charles River, repeating this gap in her memory that lingers in her subconscious. This imperfect repetition makes her confused and agitated (McGowan 95). Touching upon McGowan's analysis of Freud and atemporal cinema, Butler regards atemporal films like *Eternal Sunshine* and *Memento* (to be discussed in further detail in section 2 of this chapter), which “embrace the cyclical and repetitive” as a representation of the Freudian “repetition compulsion”, which Butler refers to as the “death

instinct” (54). He concludes that McGowan’s reference to the “death instinct” is a repetition of Joel’s “failed desire” for Clementine (57).

Unconscious association is also used as an editing tool to connect the structure of the film to the psychology of the subconscious. McGowan uses the example of the cut between a card with “Lacuna” written on it to the next shot at the Lacuna offices (see fig. 7 and fig. 8)(104). This use of “metonymic” imagery unravels the nature of remembering to its “primal” function, similar to the way in which Tarkovsky uses simplistic imagery to relate to the visuals of childhood memory. The film’s editing, by Valdís Óskarsdóttir, plays a major role in revealing the frailties of the Lacuna procedure itself, creating a bridge between reality and Joel’s unconscious mind.

Scenes from Joel’s dream-memory involve intrusions from the outside world, and at certain points, Joel can hear secondary character’s conversations from the real world in his dream-memory landscape. McGowan also outlines the blurring of scenic boundaries within the dream, where voices and actions from one scene will carry over and affect the next scene (104). According to McGowan’s analysis, what Gondry attempts to represent is that every memory is interlinked and makes up a whole. The author points out that due to the nature of unconscious association, there is no way to single out memories of Clementine in Joel’s mind because she is entwined in the collective of his memories (106).

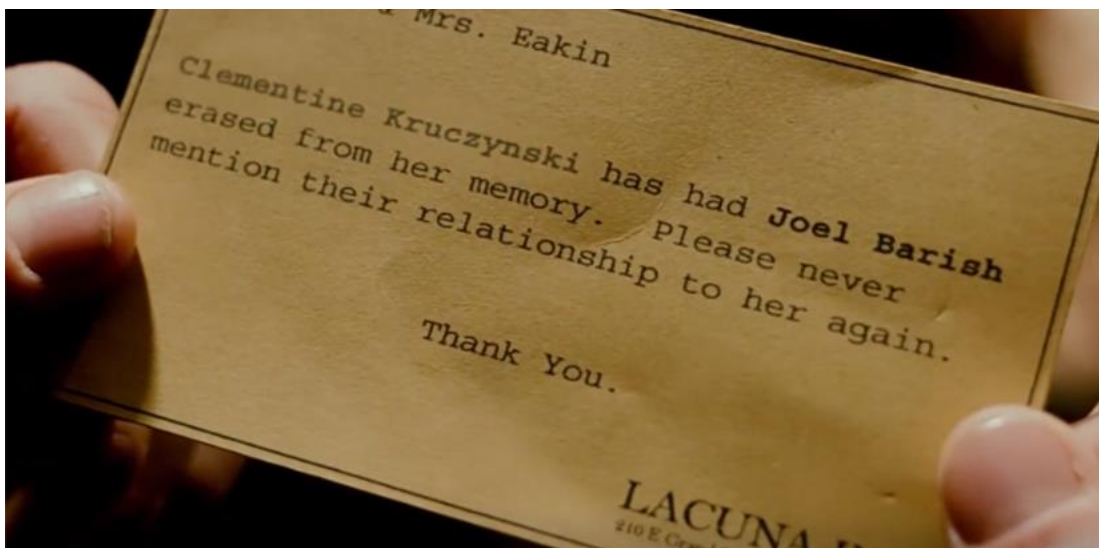


Fig. 7 the "Lacuna Inc." logo on a card.



Fig. 8 The "Lacuna Inc." building.

***Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* and Resnais' Influence on Modern Memory Film**

According to Lee, the purpose of *Eternal Sunshine* is to examine questions about the value of remembering people and past experiences. He compares the concept to Nietzsche's idea of "eternal recurrence" (para. 6). In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche asks the reader if they would live their entire life over again in perfect detail forever (273), before concluding that the answer lies in whether a person has many positive experiences that are worth reliving. In considering Nietzsche's motive for this thought experiment, Lee argues it is intended to encourage the reader to live a fulfilling life (para. 7). One of *Eternal Sunshine*'s major influences, *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* also incorporates the concept of "eternal recurrence" (Rosenbaum). The protagonist, Claude Ridder volunteers for a time travel experiment, reliving mere seconds of his past, up until the point of his attempted suicide.

This section seeks to outline the ways in which Resnais' filmmaking has influenced non-linear memory films, and how graphic matches in editing have become a filmic shorthand for unconscious memory. *Je T'Aime* consists of seconds-long snapshots of various moments in Ridder's life, circulating around the relationship with and death of his wife. Resnais rejected the idea that these scenes were a series of flashbacks, instead considering them a "perpetual present" (Rosenbaum). Turim quotes the director's stated intention for creating an impression of "eternal occurrence" in order "to arrive at a kind of dramatic vision different from that of a chronological narrative" (Resnais, qtd by Turim 220).

Rosenbaum remarks on the difficulty of having a chaotic, abstract sequence of scenes that can also have an emotional and intelligible arc, as per Resnais' film. Turim suggests that the rejection of the term "flashback" by Resnais could have been because the flashback is, according to her text, inherently subjective and solely from the character's point of view (220).

Despite Resnais' beliefs in the format of the film, Turim argues that it still relies on a sense of chronology, although suspended in montage (221). Rosenbaum believes that Resnais' work is commonly misunderstood as a "puzzle" to solve, rather than an "experience" (para 6.). This reading draws a parallel to Tarkovsky, whose body of work is meant to be understood on an emotional level, rather than an intellectual one (Le Fanu 69).

In Resnais' film, Ridder volunteers for the experiment to see his dead lover again, but when the machine fails, he is sent repeatedly to different snapshots of his past. Turim points out that these memories specifically gravitate towards memories charged by desire and guilt, which suggests a link to Ridder's unconscious mind. She regards what began as a simple experiment now as a torture device, leaving him "condemned to remember" (Turim 222). Similarly, in *Eternal Sunshine*, Joel is tortured by his memories of Clementine that he must relive through the Lacuna procedure. By the time he realises the value of holding onto his memories, it is already too late.



Fig 9. Ridder relives a moment on the beach with his late wife.

Turim indicates that Resnais' use of "elegant associative matching" from shot to shot aids the audience in their understanding of relationships between characters without the need to provide concrete narrative exposition (224-225). This allows the atemporal format to operate coherently by connecting the protagonist's memory with the subconscious of the audience. The approach draws parallels to the editing style of *Eternal Sunshine*, supporting Rosenbaum's claim that Resnais' film was a major influence on Gondry.

While there is no pleasant conclusion for *Ridder*, except escaping from the torture of reliving his past mistakes, Joel and Clementine have the opportunity to start anew, despite having heard tape recordings about their dislike of each other, and their evident incompatibility. McGowan regards this new beginning not as the couple changing fundamentally but accepting each other's imperfections. Their lack of memory of past failures is what enables them to begin again (McGowan 107).

Memento and the Souvenir

Similar to the narrative structure of *Eternal Sunshine*, *Memento* utilises an unconventional temporal structure, evenly balancing a sequence moving forward chronologically, with one moving in reverse. The reverse chronology is in colour, and the forward chronology is in black and white. The temporal nature of these sequences is revealed as they converge at the end of the film. The confusion and desire to reconstruct the narrative that this evokes within the audience is in parallel to that of the protagonist, Leonard Shelby. Leonard, who suffers from anterograde amnesia, attempts to solve the murder of his wife. Little articulates that the audience's experience of the film, through its filmic techniques dedicated to turning the narrative into a puzzle, leaves an impression of something missing or lacking. The author draws a parallel to the "detective work" that the audience must do to piece the story together, with Leonard Shelby's efforts to solve the mystery within the film (68).



Fig 10. Shelby (Pearce) is trapped in a cycle of repetition. Courtesy of MovieStillsDB.

While *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* was not intended as a puzzle to be solved (Rosenbaum), Nolan's narrative technique in *Memento* allows for audience interaction in piecing together the structure of the film. Butler draws a comparison of *Eternal Sunshine* to other "puzzle film[s]" such as *Memento*, and while the plot twist of that film leaves the audience unable to corroborate the actions of the protagonist, Butler believes that the audience has no choice but to believe Joel's version of events (53).

The purpose of this section is to analyse how exploration of memory, objects, and absence have shaped the structure of *Memento*. The subject matter of the film is representative of the experience of those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with the protagonist's trauma trapping him in a cycle of repetition. A parallel can be drawn to Freud's "repetition compulsion" (Freud 21), which also affects Joel and Clementine in *Eternal Sunshine*. In the case

of Nolan's film, the memento itself provides the same function as trauma, opening the door to reliving past experiences.

Little cites Stewart's examination of the souvenir as representative of desire for an experience that is not repeatable (70). It is used to evoke the feeling of an event, and to recreate it in partiality, but can never encapsulate it fully (Stewart 135). According to Stewart, "The souvenir is by definition always incomplete" (136). This is reflected in *Memento* through Leonard's use of photos, notes, and tattoos to record information about the case of his wife's murder. He collects many of these objects of partiality, but he can never truly make up the full picture with them because they are defined by what they lack.

Little draws a comparison between the nature of the souvenir and the structure of the narrative itself. The forward and reverse chronological sequences play out with a promise to the audience that there will be a fulfilling resolution to the film (Little 71). Rather than truth and clarity, what they are left with is a startling twist and more confusion as to whether any of the characters were being truthful in the first place. McGowan concludes that although over the course of the film the audience acquires new information, they do not gain distance from the traumatic event that is the cause of Leonard's suffering. Having more pieces of information does not get the audience nor Leonard any closer to understanding the mystery, and therefore healing from said trauma (McGowan 235).

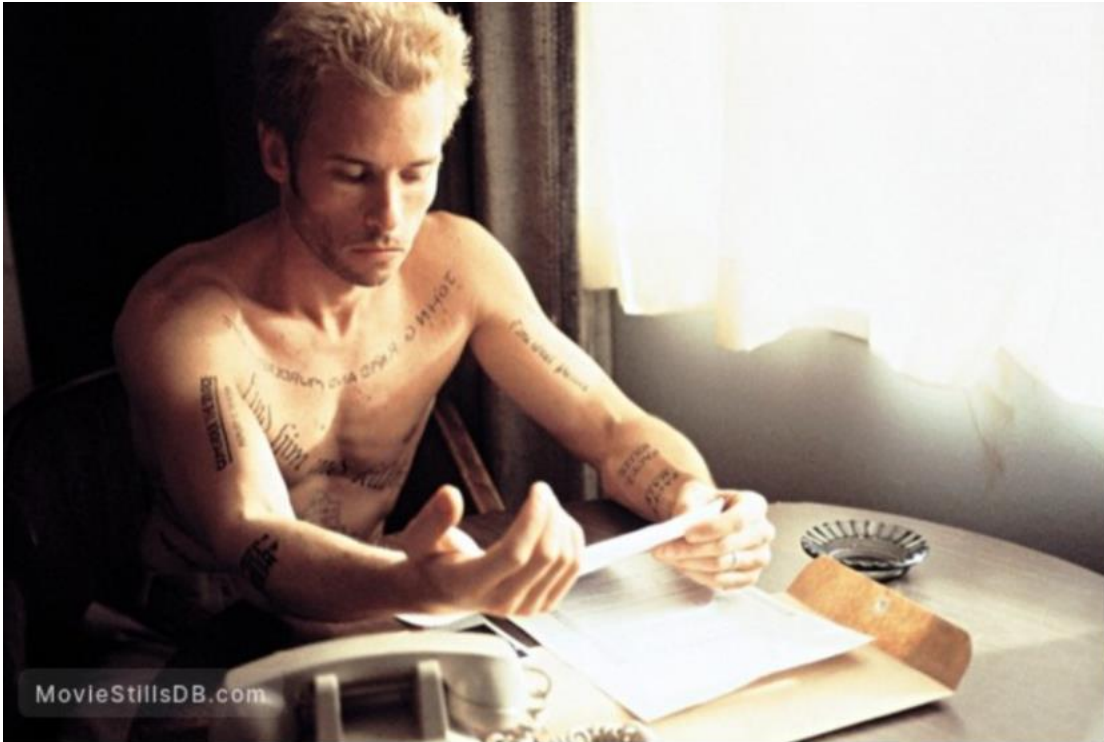


Fig 11. Shelby collects artifacts and “mementos” to help him solve the case. Courtesy of MovieStillsDB.

Stewart suggests that “The souvenir displaces the point of authenticity” by becoming “the point of origin for narrative” (136). Because Leonard’s condition does not allow him to experience the passage of time, he cannot use mementos to their full extent, as Little explains, due to the value of the memento lying in the owner’s knowledge of “the object’s distance in time from that which it recalls” (71). McGowan explains that Leonard lives outside of time and so he does not have access to the respite from his trauma that comes with the passing of time (233). His notes and polaroids are more like clues in a puzzle rather than objects of nostalgia, as he has no memory to connect them to. The story that the mementos themselves tell is the only context he has to go by. When another character in the film, Teddy, gives a version of the story that Leonard does not like, Leonard goes as far as falsifying the information for his

future self to keep up the search and give his life purpose. Thus he “displaces” the “authenticity” of the narrative that the objects were intended to convey (Stewart 136).

Each of the protagonists in *Memento* and *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* are bound to living in a “perpetual present”, unable to escape in any meaningful way. Nolan’s use of non-linear structure and memory objects is successful in allowing the audience to feel the confusion and discord that the protagonist feels. Gondry’s editing style and dual narrative structure, while bearing similarities to Nolan’s film, evokes melancholy rather than anxiety and confusion. Resnais’ lasting influence on memory film in the 20th century through his editing style is evident in both *Memento* and *Eternal Sunshine*, as well as psychoanalytical constructs related to trauma and lack of memory, such as Freud’s idea of the “repetition compulsion”, which seek to explore memory in regard to traumatic experience. This research highlights the connection between the repetitive nature of atemporal film and Freudian ideology, to be examined in further detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

Ethics and Memory Film

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ethics of the portrayal of sensitive topics using dramatic film technique, as well as how implanted documentary footage can be used to heighten the authenticity of films in relation to memory and non-linear storytelling. The ethical questions posed by the plot of *Eternal Sunshine* will also be discussed.

***Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and Authenticity in Post-War Trauma Film**

In the introduction to *Afterimage*, Hirsch examines the various viewpoints in the relation to the portrayal of the Holocaust in cinema. The heightened drama and “emotional manipulation” that is associated with the filmmaking of the tv series *Holocaust* was discredited by writer and survivor Wiesel, who argued that the Holocaust was “not just another event” (4). While Wiesel argues that this event was fundamentally unrepresentable, there is an oppositional belief, as presented by Hirsch, that it is acceptable to format the Holocaust as a “melodrama” to make it understandable and accessible to wider audiences (4-5). This poses the question of whether it is the duty of the filmmaker to aspire to the most authentic representation of an event, or if it is ethical to employ dramatic storytelling in the context of a sensitive historical event. Hirsch offers his own answer to this question, explaining that an “essential truth” of what took place is inaccessible, regardless of how direct the account is (6). This was the same stance that Resnais took, and his reasoning for shifting genres from documentary to fiction during the production of *Hiroshima, mon Amour*, as examined in chapter 1.

Film footage is considered closest to reality due to its indexicality, therefore both documentary style films and fictional films can immerse the viewer and make them feel as

though they have personally experienced the events on film (Hirsch 7). Rushton attempts to discern the meaning of the viewpoints of Bazin, and his belief that the medium of film is a vehicle for realism (43). However, Bazin believed that the only way to achieve “realism in art” was “through artifice” (Bazin, qtd. by Rushton 44). Rushton elaborates on the position that there is no way to truly convey reality, because humanity cannot perceive a true reality; in the same way that reality is “mediated” by film and photography, it is also mediated by human perception (46). Therefore, if there is no true reality, Rushton believes, “there is no point in even trying to represent reality” (45). There is a link here to the evolution of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, as previously mentioned, wherein Resnais had deemed the tragedy of the Hiroshima bombing unrepresentable, and consequently shifted the genre and focus of the film.

Night and Fog, as a documentary, rejects dramatisation of the horrors that are portrayed onscreen, opting instead to show contrasting archival footage of the concentration camps from when they were occupied, with the present day, ten years after their liberation. The film footage, lacking elaborate set pieces or complicated editing, aims to represent “direct reality” (Rushton 43). Although, there are glimpses of Resnais’ style of graphic matching with present-day footage, which employs “artifice” for the purpose of conveying a difficult reality. In this case, non-linear editing helps communicate the reality of what is being documented on screen, without undermining the authenticity of the subject itself. There is not the same discourse as with fictional takes on the Holocaust on the authenticity of *Night and Fog*, as no part of it attempts to fictionalise any of these events. *Night and Fog* demonstrates that it is possible to apply artistic license with the structure of a film without losing its authenticity. This suggests a contrast with stylising the content itself through dramatisation, with media such as *Holocaust*.



Fig 12. The indexicality of film footage evokes realism and aids audience immersion.

The decision to experiment with the film form in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* opens it up to discourse on the authenticity of the portrayal of its historical and political backdrop. French highlights the film's tendency to blend together multiple political events into a single trauma, that the male and female character bond over (2). She outlines that this general blend of trauma removes the nuance from both the bombing of Hiroshima and the German occupation of France. However, removing the focus from major public traumas and on to the trauma of the individual allows for a more successful representation of the impact of World War II. The film's unnamed female character relives the trauma of the death of her lover and her subsequent break from reality both in the past in Nevers, France and in Hiroshima with the Japanese man she is having an affair with. This portrayal of individual suffering is an exploration

of Freud's idea of the "repetition compulsion" that similarly affects the characters in *Eternal Sunshine* and *Memento* (Freud 25).

French draws on research from Kristeva, who frames *Hiroshima* as an evolution from representing public memory to focusing on the memory of the individual (8). Kristeva believes that "there can be no artifice involving Hiroshima" (231). She argues that instead of trying to make sense of the bombing by describing it, Duras' choice to only speak of the "impossibility" of the resulting horror is a more effective strategy (Kristeva 233). Duras' exploration of the psychological effects of the war and death of her lover on Riva's character is a template for "melancholia" (234).

Hirsch argues that the film maintains some form of indexicality through its use of documentary-style footage of Hiroshima and the use of the city as a film backdrop within the actual film (88). There is, however, the question of whether this film can be subject to the same criticism as *Holocaust* for the dramatic elements of the film, or whether the World War II backdrop was necessary for a film exploring individual trauma.



Fig 13. The city of Hiroshima provides a backdrop to a film about trauma.

Kaplan describes the mode in which *Hiroshima* is told as from the voice of the “creative non-victim” (de Bruyn 15). Originating in feminist film theory, she argues that this point of view is the “politically most useful position” for telling stories about trauma (Kaplan, qtd. by de Bruyn 14). The idea of the creative non-victim is to address the audience as a witness to a character that is living through and processing a traumatic experience (de Bruyn 13). If Resnais believed that actual representation was impossible, exploration of the general feeling of these events through a separate figure was a logical approach. Instead of subjecting audiences to reliving WWII not more than a decade after it had ended, Resnais opts for exploring the singular grief and psychological impact of the war and its effects experienced by those who directly experienced the conflict. While the emotions are heightened by visual editing and character performances, the film's purpose of exploring post-traumatic stress “deliver[s] an illusion” of individual grief (Rushton 43), which appeals to post-war audiences in a

demonstrably authentic way. There is a chain of perception, beginning from the main female character's memory of the War. It is then perceived second-hand by the audience. This dilutes the levels of reality experienced by the viewer, contrasting the indexicality of *Night and Fog*. Instead, however, it is a creative method to explore a psychological reality experienced from the viewpoint of the creative non-victim.

Mirror's Archival Reel and Authentic Memory

Documentary footage taken from real life events is a unique tool that can be utilised in fiction films to both grant authenticity and disrupt conventional narrative structure, implanting artificial memory into the mind of the audience. Drawing on Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory" (334), Radstone explores the possibility of cinema to "implant" memories into the viewer that they would not have otherwise experienced (335). Applying this concept to *Hiroshima, mon Amour* suggests the potential to aid audiences' understanding of the bombing by remembering the event as if they had witnessed it themselves. Radstone highlights that the concept of "prosthetic memory" does not account for how the viewer chooses to navigate these images, overlooking the distinction between "representation and event" (335).

Radstone introduces the more developed concept of "Cinema/Memory", which suggests that the memory of the individual is shaped by a mixture of scenes from film and those from the "inner world" (337). This theory suggests the dissolution of boundaries between personal memory and cinema. Van Dijck draws on the research of scientist Steven Rose, whose findings indicate that individuals often have difficulty distinguishing between photographic aids

and their own memories (73). Van Dijck points out that even before the conception of film, memory has always had parallels to photography and visual media (74). He uses the example of the psychological phenomenon of the “deathbed flash”, where a person sees their life in the form of a film reel in their last moments. The concept of footage as inherently an exteriorisation of how time and memory is perceived links closely with the work of Tarkovsky, who proposed that cinema was conceived to bring forth what Proust referred to as a “vast edifice of memories” (Proust, qtd by Tarkovsky 59).

Brunow outlines how documentaries utilise archival footage to convey actual fact, and that it “heightens the authenticity” of the film (6). The footage legitimises the narrative the director is looking to convey. This is also a matter of contention, however, as the camera viewpoint remains subjective (6-7). When used in a fiction film, it creates a sense of grounding the film within our cultural and historical landscape. Archival footage is employed in response to the director’s need to convey “actual fact” (Tarkovsky 72). There is also evidence to suggest that Tarkovsky’s use of archival footage in *Mirror* reflects his desire to legitimise his ideals that were shaped by childhood experience. Vasudevan outlines the nature of the archival footage in *Mirror*, as relating to the director's view of Russia, and how this perception was shaped by the various events showcased on the reel. He notes that the portrayal of world history is not exempt from Tarkovsky’s stereotypical outlook. For example, in the scene where a Spanish immigrant discusses his emigration from the Spanish Civil War, the visuals begin with footage of a bullfight (Vasudevan 180). This underscores the distinction between the actual event and its representation on screen, suggesting a counter argument to the use of archival footage as an authenticator.



Fig 14. Archival footage reflects the director's view of countries outside Russia.

Vasudevan concludes that Tarkovsky's interweaving of "different levels of time-space" throughout *Mirror* is an effective exploration of the impact of history on personal memory (182). Although representations of historical events are ultimately subjective in comparison to firsthand experience, their eligibility for providing educational support and a gateway to greater empathy in society are evidenced through the examples in this chapter. The footage chosen by Tarkovsky contextualises his life and the tension in the world at the time, maintaining authenticity to his own world view in a film that functions as a story of his life.

***Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and the Implications of Forgetting**

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind explores how memory and experiences are embedded in the subconscious mind, which in turn, leads characters who underwent the Lacuna procedure to face emotional distress and enact Freud's theory of the "repetition compulsion". Grau's research compares different philosophical viewpoints on memory, and the choice to forgo remembering. Relating the subject to *Eternal Sunshine*, he questions the practicality of the film's Lacuna procedure and asks whether or not it could be beneficial to erase a person from another's memory (119).

Grau touches on the utilitarian viewpoint from philosophers such as Sedgewick, of which the main priority is to perform actions that "increase happiness" and "minimize suffering" (120). By this logic, the Lacuna procedure would be a useful tool, as it removes painful memories from patients. Grau points out, however, that the characters in the film who have undergone the procedure experience emotional duress because of their lack of memory (120). One of the characters, Mary, repeatedly falls in love with her boss, Dr. Mierzwiak, who reveals that this had already occurred, and that she had undergone the procedure several times. This leads to her character experiencing considerable distress.

Tarkovsky states that memories are what make up a person, and that without memory, a person becomes a "prisoner of an illusory experience" (57). He believes that memories are tools of morality, making a person "subject to pain" (58). Tarkovsky's argument that memory is necessary because of the suffering it causes is an interesting answer to the questions posed

by *Eternal Sunshine*. This implies that experiencing the pain of remembering is what allows a person to remain grounded in reality.



Fig 15. Joel and Clementine in an “illusory experience”.

Grau brings in the concept of Nozick’s “experience machine”, but applying it in reverse (121). This thought experiment poses the question of whether a person would rather do things, or experience doing them through the machine. Reversed, it asks if a person would choose to eliminate their experiences. Grau argues that removal of memories grants happiness, but at the cost of the truth (122). While reflecting on the controversiality of Kant’s ideology, he concludes that within the frame of his thinking, “deprivation of the truth” inherently causes harm to a person also (123).

Chen remarks that the core values of neo-Confucianism are “to live in truth and not self-deceive” (19). The desire for “truth” and authenticity in life is at odds with the pursuit of happiness in *Eternal Sunshine*. To achieve supposed exemption from life’s suffering, patients must forfeit their authenticity. To achieve this authenticity and truth, one must live an “examined

life”, where they spend time reflecting on their actions (Chen 19). While Joel is undergoing the Lacuna procedure, he is given the opportunity to re-examine his life with Clementine. This allows him to have a realisation about his relationship, but in a dramatic irony, it is too late for him to stop the procedure. Having been given the opportunity to see his entire life with Clementine, it can be inferred that Joel becomes aware of the harm that he is causing himself by erasing her. This supports Grau’s research as well as various cross-disciplinary arguments highlighted in this section.

This chapter highlights the complexities arising from the question as to whether a public trauma should be portrayed authentically and sensitively. The research argues that true reality is unable to be defined, and therefore impossible to convey on film. Therefore, the answer may lie in exploring the individual impact of trauma through the lens of another character. Conversely, there are methods for heightening the perceived authenticity of a film through the use of archival footage. Similarly to how all footage is mediated by a photographer, it is mediated again by way in which it is edited into a film. Tarkovsky exemplifies this in using footage that reveals his cultural beliefs, shaped by childhood experience. The questions raised by *Eternal Sunshine* on whether it is either ethical or beneficial to have memories removed finds a consistent answer among research highlighted in this chapter. The procedure deprives humans of truth and therefore of an authentic existence. Memory removal causes a disruption in the subconscious that manifests itself in emotional distress and attempts to replicate missing memories, but in the realm of philosophy, is also considered morally wrong.

Conclusion

There is a clear delineation of theory relating to memory within the working process of the filmmakers in discussion. While there are varying methodologies used in evoking memory in film, there are several key factors that have influenced “memory film”. Tarkovsky’s belief of memory being a “spiritual concept” (Tarkovsky 57) has influenced his style of filmmaking in *Mirror*. Opting for a slow, drawn out pace full of childhood imagery, the nostalgia evoked in the film is designed to allow the audience to come to a revelation about their respective childhoods. Tarkovsky’s replication of memory is inherently reflective; the film’s narrator observes the events of the film retrospectively, and with a deeper understanding. The use of “primal” and “transcendent” (Vasudevan 175), elemental imagery speaks to the universality of the childhood experience and reflects its inherent wonder and mysticity.

In comparison, Resnais’ style, evolving from documentary filmmaking, employs a strategic editing style that draws on Freudian analysis of post-traumatic stress and represents an evolution in the use of the flashback technique. The use of graphic matching and Eisensteinian montage editing in *Hiroshima* delivers an effective representation of the way that memory functions, according to working theory on the nature of trauma. Evidenced by authors and viewers alike, these directors take different approaches to the representation of memory but succeed in their respective portrayals.

In *Eternal Sunshine*, this thesis argues that Gondry takes inspiration from Resnais’ *Je T’Aime, Je T’Aime* to formulate a narrative that reflects the theoretical workings of the subconscious. Using concepts such as unconscious association, graphic matching and the

blurring of audio and visual boundaries between scenes, the audience is immersed into the dream-like memories of the protagonist. This immersion in turn heightens the emotional core of the film, while the “atemporal” narrative structure subverts the typical Hollywood romance by reversing its arc. The first time viewing and reflection on the relationship are intrinsic for the audience, mimicking the viewpoint of the protagonist. Like Resnais, Gondry also draws on Freud’s theory of the “repetition compulsion” that links the narrative to subconscious processes of the human mind.

The atemporal structure is also used effectively as a narrative device in *Memento*, in which the puzzle-like nature of the film is intended to disorientate the viewer and compel them to try to put the story together in the same way as the film’s protagonist, Leonard. The film makes effective use of the concept of the souvenir to represent Leonard’s trauma and memories he cannot access. There are distinct parallels to be drawn by these three protagonists, who fall victim to the cyclical torment that characterises atemporal narrative structures. Synthesizing these different strands of research posits a formalised method of using non-linear structure to represent memory. Through research into film theory and the realm of psychoanalysis, a clear connection between the structuring and editing of memory film, and theory on PTSD and trauma responses has been established.

Research into ethics and philosophy has also granted an insight into the questions of authenticity posed by the use of archival and documentary footage in memory film, concluding that because all forms of reality are mediated, there can be no true authentic reality. Documentary footage is used by Resnais to give a dimension of reality to his films, due to the inherent indexicality of film footage. On the other hand, archival footage can still be mediated in a way that caters to beliefs expressed by the director, such is the case with Tarkovsky’s *Mirror*.

The question of whether it is ethical to use a real public trauma as the backdrop for a fictional narrative has been addressed, concluding that there is a suitable mode for representation when it comes to approaching a sensitive topic, known in feminist film theory as the viewpoint of the “creative non-victim”.

In regard to applications to film practice, my research on Tarkovsky’s practice suggests that incorporating strong emotive and elemental imagery to tap into the universal recollection of the past heightens audience engagement and the overall emotional impact of memory film. As well as this, non-linear editing styles involving visual match cuts that mirror the audience's subconscious processes are a highly effective tool for evoking memory in film. Evidence from *Eternal Sunshine* suggests that blending contrasting visuals and audio to create overlap between scenes is a useful method for portraying the connection between memories and blending of the senses.

This research was limited to how non-linear storytelling is used to portray memory only, but research on this topic has led towards examining the concept of desire and how it is also represented in non-linear, atemporal storytelling. There are pathways for further research into this concept, and how it influences film technique in other works by Resnais, such as *Last Year at Marienbad*, and Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The research into memory and trauma was also limited to theory from the 20th Century, such as Freudian theory about the “repetition compulsion” (21). There is a pathway for further research on how modern studies on memory and trauma can be applied to filmmaking practice.

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