# CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND EVOLVING CONCEPTIONS OF MEMORY'S MEDIATIVE FUNCTION

by

KATHERINE PARSONS

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of English

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

September 2024

# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines evolving conceptions of memory and media in contemporary fiction. I read representations of memory and media in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021), to argue that the representation of memory in these novels reaches an understanding which is analogous with the ecological view emerging in contemporary memory studies, including that which highlights the particular effects of digital transformations. Ecological memory, a concept which draws particularly from work on ecologies in media studies, cognitive psychology, and memory studies, is broadly defined as the cognitive entanglement of a memoring subject with their environment.

My selection of each of the novels studied in this thesis, written between the early onset of networked digital technologies in 1995 and the post-digital landscape of 2021, is broadly guided by three interrelated criteria: i) the representation of memory objects is thematically, structurally, and/or formally significant; ii) the representation of media other than the novel is similarly thematically, structurally, and/or formally significant; iii) the text engages with the contemporary media landscape in which it was written and published. In showing how these novels depict an ecological model of memory, I demonstrate how this can, in turn, expand the concept as it is currently deployed; in other words, how this fiction (knowingly or otherwise) exhibits an ecological model can be used to extend the understanding of that model.

The first chapter of this thesis argues for reading *The Unconsoled* as a media novel – whilst acknowledging its anti-media overtones – which depicts memory as the presentification of the narrator's biography within the physical space of an unknown city. I recognise this spatial disposition of events as a reordering of time representative of an ecological model of memory.

Chapter Two focuses on social meaning-making and linguistic memory objects. This chapter contends that Atwood's depiction of language as a means of mediating memory in *Oryx and Crake* demonstrates the embeddedness of linguistic memory objects within a broader ecological system, and the importance of understanding linguistic memory objects as created and encountered within that context.

Chapter Three considers the representation of the re/mediation of events – and particularly of news events – in *Falling Man* and the role of the novel as a cultural document of or response to a significant contemporary moment. This forms the basis of a study of shared memory objects as an application of an ecological approach to memory.

Chapter Four reiterates that the ecological entangling and re-ordering of the past is not simply a new phenomenon introduced by digital media, but can also be applied to the relationship between memory and media more broadly as a cognitively distributed act. By applying an ecological understanding of memory to Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*, this chapter analyses the aspects of the contemporary media landscape which make digital cultures the vantage point from which the concept of ecological memory has been made visible.

By undertaking a detailed analysis of literary representations of memory alongside the ecological model as outlined above, this thesis i) establishes the roots and foundations of this ecological memory and in doing so ii) explores the boundaries of ecological terminology as applied to literary scholarship, iii) illustrates the cultural and phenomenological resonance of this idea through close reading of contemporary novels, and iv) expands the applications of ecological memory beyond its current association with digital media to include literature.

CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of books and what they can do changes as our technologies do. This is a central tenet of book history, a field described expansively by James Raven as

> a history reaching back 5,000 years, not simply a history of the paper codex, or indeed of the printed book, but the history of how diverse peoples in different parts of the world, in different ways, for different reasons and with very different consequences have striven to store, circulate and retrieve knowledge and information.[1]

That the study of methods of information storage, circulation, and retrieval is aligned, or even synonymous with a study in *book* history speaks to the prominence of the book over other media as being the primary physical repository of information. The cultural turn towards networked digital technologies in recent decades, however, has had a significant impact on our contemporary media landscape, not only with regards to the capacity of information storage, but also our conceptions of that storage, of the sociality of information, and of memory. Similar shifts can be observed in relation to various media, such as film, television, and radio, and form the basis of studies in media archaeology which 'investigate the new media cultures through insights from past new media'.[2]

Whereas media archaeology seeks to uncover insights about about new media from studies of past new media, I align this thesis with book history to

---

[1] *The Oxford History of the Book*, ed. by James Raven (Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 3.
[2] *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (University of California Press, 2011); Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Polity, 2012).

instead emphasise how new methods of information storage, circulation, and retrieval through networked digital media can facilitate new understandings of existing media. The introduction of networked digital media impacts our uses and understanding of "old" media, and most significantly of books and book-like ways of thinking. Book history persists; books continue to shape our cognition and perceptions, but we are in a period of profound change, and the past, present, and future of information storage are in the process of being re-evaluated.

My focus in this thesis on the evolution of networked digital media is guided by its import to the emergence of the concept of ecological memory. Ecological memory is concerned with the interrelationship between the subject and their environment – an environment which consists of physical surroundings as well as social and cultural frameworks for remembering and, notably, the use of media in memory processes.[3] While I do not equate information storage and retrieval with memory (a frequently used metaphor that I will unpick later in this thesis), there is an obvious resonance between this process and memory's mediation: that is, information storage and retrieval is one way of describing mediation (for example, the representation of an event as a text or photograph) to *afford* memory. In this thesis, I focus on the evolving conceptions of memory and its mediative function – i.e. the use of external media in memory processes – within an increasingly digital environment. Although I draw from scholarship on memory, media, and other related fields of study, I seek to highlight here the contributions of a seemingly less likely group of stakeholders in this discussion: the authors of

[3] This brief definition draws from Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies', *Memory Studies*, 9.3 (2016), pp. 348-357. I discuss the concept of ecological memory in greater detail below.

four contemporary novels, each of which observes memory and media from the standpoint of an increasingly digital environment, and which together ask: what do novels (still) have to do with memory?

The novels selected for this thesis are Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2004), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021). Each of these novels was written between the early onset of networked digital technologies in 1995 and the post-digital landscape of 2021. All have an investment in their representation both of memory and of media, and while literary scholarship often separates memory and media as distinct subjects of study, I suggest that each of these novels are specifically concerned with the entanglement of memory's mediative function, i.e. how external media become a real part of memory processes. The texts selected for this thesis hold this relationship between memory and media as central to the work of contemporary fiction, and the thesis itself investigates the significance of this indivisible relationship.

I further suggest that in these novels, we find representations of memory that are analogous with the concept of ecological memory that has recently emerged in memory studies – though the novelists are not explicitly engaging with academic discourse on memory. Ecological memory, which I explore in greater detail later in this Introduction, focuses on connectivity, positing memory as an emergent process shaped by encounters and interactions between the memoring subject and their environment. As defined by Andrew Hoskins (2016), an ecological approach to memory invokes 'a world of individuals and groups

encountering and interacting with objects, interfaces and others, in a situated, ongoing and yet predisposed fashion'.[4] In showing how these novels depict an ecological model of memory, I demonstrate how this can, in turn, expand the concept as it is currently deployed; in other words, how this fiction (knowingly or otherwise) exhibits an ecological model can be used to extend the understanding of that model.

In particular, the novels' representation of memory and media reflects an ecological view which highlights the effects of the digital transformations of the acts of memory and the evolution of how they are conceived. Hoskins situates the concept of "memory ecologies" as following 'the connective turn': 'the massively increased abundance, pervasiveness and potential accessibility of digital technologies, devices and media that shape an ongoing re-calibration of time, space (and place) and memory by individuals and groups as they connect with, inhabit and constitute both dense and diffused social networks'.[5] Although the emergence of the concept of memory ecologies is closely associated with the emergence of digital media in this way, my examination of the selected fictional representations of memory highlights the pertinence of the ecological model to media types beyond the networked digital, including literature itself. Where other media are depicted in a novel, the novelist is always contending first and foremost with the affordances of the novel in relation to those of the media represented within it, meaning that it is often the book, and the novel specifically, with which

[4] Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies'.
[5] Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies', p. 351.

these writers are most pressingly concerned. My close reading of the novels chosen here reflects that dual interest in literature and other media types.

Each chapter of this thesis examines the representation of memory's mediative function in a contemporary novel, predominantly by engaging close reading analysis to address the novels' investment in the relationship between memory and media, the author's positioning of the novel itself as a memory object, and the relation of these to contemporary theories of memory. This positioning of the novel as memory object is contrasted with the authors' presentation of the relationship between memory and other media types in each of the novels. My close reading in each chapter therefore considers the role of other media types in ecological memory, as presented by the authors, against which is defined the role of the novel, and literature more broadly, in memory.

My study of specific media types includes environmental objects, literature and language, audio/visual media and broadcast news, and finally culminates in Chapter Four with a focus on social media that highlights the present association between an ecological approach to memory and digital memory studies. As I note in my literature review below, this association is not exclusive: there are studies which touch on ecological memory with regards to photographs, monuments, and other non-digital objects. By recognising the resonance between contemporary fictional representations of memory's mediative function and the notion of ecological memory, I outline a further expanded view of ecological memory, which also acknowledges the function of literary memory objects.

By undertaking a detailed analysis of literary representations of memory alongside the ecological model, then, this thesis i) establishes the roots and

foundations of this idea and in doing so ii) explores the boundaries of ecological terminology as applied to literary scholarship, iii) illustrates the cultural and phenomenological resonance of this idea through close reading of contemporary novels, and iv) expands the applications of ecological memory beyond its current association with digital media to include literature.

In this Introduction, I outline the value of the selected texts to a study of literary representations of memory's mediative function and the methods of this thesis, both in terms of their prevalence in literary scholarship on memory/media and their relevance to a study of ecological memory. I then establish the terms used to discuss memory in this thesis and their theoretical underpinnings. This includes a literature review of memory ecologies in contemporary memory studies and an overview of its central influences: media ecology, cognitive science, and environmental psychology. This understanding informs the ecological memory perspective of my readings throughout this thesis.

*Selection of Texts*

This thesis focuses on representations of memory in four novels: *The Unconsoled* (1995) by Kazuo Ishiguro, *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood (2005), *Falling Man* (2007) by Don DeLillo, and *No One Is Talking About This* (2021) by Patricia Lockwood. My reading of these novels is concerned with their representation of memory – and particularly memory's mediative function – as analogous with the concept of ecological memory. Through this reading, I also consider the novels as memory objects themselves, analysing the role of literature in memory's

mediative function and positioning literary texts as ecological memory objects within a digital environment.

My selection of each of the novels studied in this thesis is broadly guided by three interrelated criteria: the representation of memory objects is central, thematically, structurally, and/or formally, to the text; the representation of media other than the novel is central, thematically, structurally, and/or formally, to the text, and the author engages with contemporary media culture to inform their representation of evolving conceptions of memory amidst a rapidly changing media landscape. As I will demonstrate, these novels have already been recognised as meeting at least the first two of these criteria – for the most part – by literary scholars. Where this is not the case, I argue for recognising the authors' engagement with memory and media through my analysis of the text and in reference to paratextual materials.

To make the claim that these authors are interested in memory and media is, for the most part, to tread terrain that is already well-trodden in literary scholarship – though not in every case, as discussed below. For example, while Kazuo Ishiguro (the focus of Chapter One) is well known for his close attention to memory throughout his writings, my reading newly highlights the centrality of media to *The Unconsoled*. The relation of these authors' engagement with memory to their engagement with media, or the relation of either of these to the evolving media context in which they were written, has yet to receive due attention. An extended study which considers these four contemporary novels as analogous with contemporary theories in memory studies offers a significant contribution to existing literary scholarship.

*What do novels have to do with memory?*

In her recent monograph *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget*, Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng argues compellingly for the suitability of the novel form to contribute to discussions around evolving conceptions of memory.[6] Assessing work by Penelope Lively, Tom McCarthy, Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Felicia Yap, Tseng concludes that contemporary novels 'function as a critical response to and as a vehicle for envisioning the changing state of memory; in the meantime, they facilitate or even reshape our understanding of how memory works in the age of digital technologies and social media'.[7]

There are three aspects of Tseng's argument that I want to emphasise in relation to the contribution made by the present literary project: i) novels form a critical response to the changing state of memory; ii) novels envision the changing state of memory; iii) novels facilitate or reshape our understanding of how memory works in the age of digital technologies. The first of these points – that novels respond to the changing state of memory – informs my criteria for the selection of relevant texts for this study, stated above. The crucial point that Tseng articulates here – that novels can envision, facilitate, or even reshape our understanding of how memory works – is critical to understanding the potential contribution of a literary project to scholarly discourse in contemporary memory

[6] Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023),
[7] Ibid., p. 2.

studies.[8] I argue that *The Unconsoled*, *Oryx and Crake*, *Falling Man*, and *No One Is Talking About This* each offer a vision of memory which is in line with a shifting understanding of memory and media as ecological, and, to varying degrees, contribute to reshaping our understanding of how memory works within the context of digital cultures. I return to this concept in each chapter of this thesis to highlight the importance of taking a literary perspective on contemporary memory studies.

In this thesis, I position literature both as a material object and as a cultural artefact, a perspective grounded in scholarship from book history and media studies. This distinction facilitates two processes central to the argument of this thesis: the examination of literary media as memory objects, and the recognition of the reflexive representation of memory's mediative function in the selected novels as analogous with ecological memory. The complex entanglement between a text and its embodiment has been a point of interest for scholars of media studies and book history. I draw on these areas of study as they offer precedents for studying the similar interdependence of ecological memory objects and memoring subjects that underpins this thesis; the particular relationship between the affordances of text and book-object is explored at length in Chapter Two.

While it may seem an obvious point, then, I want to explicitly acknowledge here the relationship between novels and books: novels (i.e. texts) are also material things (i.e. book-objects), and their materiality matters. In 'Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep' (2004) Katherine Hayles notes that '[u]seful as the vocabulary of

[8] Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced*, p. 2.

text was in expanding textuality beyond the printed page, it also had the effect, in treating everything from fashion to fascism as a semiotic system, of eliding differences in media' and calls instead for media-specific analysis, which 'insists that "texts" must always be embodied to exist in the world.'[9] I raise this distinction between texts and embodied book-objects to point towards the dual nature of books as both material objects and cultural artefacts: the role of literature in memory is defined by both of these elements.

To consider the relationship between texts, their materiality, and conceptions of memory, I turn to book history and the storage, circulation and retrieval of knowledge and information.[10] As noted at the opening of this Introduction, there is an obvious resonance between information storage and retrieval and memory's mediation, in that information storage and retrieval is one way of describing mediation (for example, the representation of an event as a text or photograph) to *afford* memory. However, the implied intentionality of information storage and retrieval proscribes its use in articulating, for instance, the mediative quality of spontaneously encountering a familiar perfume or landscape. Likewise, 'storage and retrieval' strongly suggests that there are two symmetrical processes taking place, so that what is stored can be retrieved exactly. The association of particular media – and particularly books – with processes of information storage, circulation, and retrieval nevertheless lends weight to their conception as memory objects and affects their affordances as

[9] N. Katherine Hayles, 'Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis', *Poetics Today*, 25.1 (Spring 2004), pp. 67-90 (pp. 69-70).
[10] Raven, *The Oxford History of the Book*, p. 3.

such, in large part because they are commonly assumed to be enacting memory's mediative function in ways that other media (such as sculpture) are not.

This is true for books in relation to both their material nature and their content: a book can afford memory both via its text and as a physical object. My distinction between a 'book-object' (a physical thing) and 'text' (a string of words) here follows Leah Price's analysis in the introduction of *How to do Things with Books in Victorian England* (2012). Book-objects afford memory in their handling – where handling is understood to mean the apprehension of a physical object. Texts, on the other hand, afford memory in their reading – through the mediation and comprehension of information. In this way, a book-object might afford memory by having a familiar cover or scent, while a text might afford memory by describing, in language, a past event. There is also overlap between these aspects of the book, as Price notes:

> If "book" really connoted materiality, there would be no need to affix the pleonastic "object"; if "text" really provided an adequate term for a linguistic structure, I would refer to what you're now reading as "this text." Only the ambiguity of sentence openings prevented me from generalizing the distinction between the Bible (a text) and the bible (an object) to Books and books.'[11]

By highlighting the material nature of book-objects as (at least partially) distinguishable from their text, I aim to draw attention to the role of novels in constructing the affordances for memory of our physical environment. In discussing novels I am layering a third distinction: discussing the book-object, the text, and a literary form (fictional, long-form narrative prose), all as distinctively memory objects. Novels can themselves afford memory, and they can also contribute to cultural understandings – and therefore perceptions and uses – of

[11] Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 4.

other memory objects. The complex entanglement between a text and its embodiment is indicative of the similar interdependence of ecological memory objects and memoring subjects that underpins this thesis; the particular relationship between the affordances of text and book-object is explored at length in Chapter Two.

**Reading Ecological Memory in Contemporary Literature**

This thesis observes a dual connection between novels and memory: memory is a process or experience which many authors represent in fiction; memory is also a system in which novels participate. The argument of this thesis concerns both aspects of this relationship by claiming that the representations of memory in the four selected novels are analogous with theories of ecological memory, an aspect of which is their presentation of literature as participating in memory processes, or as an ecological memory object – a term I explain in detail below.

I read the dual connection between novels and memory as an echo of the relationship between novels and media: like memory, media is something which can be represented in novels, and media is also a system in which novels participate. As I go on to show later in this Introduction, the idea of memory ecologies was in part derived from the earlier notion of "media ecologies" which emerged in the 1960s. My reading of contemporary fiction from an ecological memory perspective throughout this thesis therefore depends on the longer tradition of scholarly work on media ecologies, particularly as this relates to literary studies, and which I outline below in relation to the emerging concept of ecological memory.

*Origins of ecological memory: media ecology*

To understand how media ecology informs the notion of ecological memory as put forward by the selected authors, and how it frames my close reading of four contemporary novels in this thesis, I provide here an overview of some of the key approaches to media ecology and consider how these might feed into our understanding of memory and its literary representation. Steven Brown and Andrew Hoskins (2010) conceived of memory ecologies by 'cross-fertilizing psychological and media and cultural studies approaches via the concept of 'schema' to show how remembering is dynamically configured through socio-cultural practices and shifting media logics'.[12] Hoskins has elsewhere explicitly cited media ecology as a critical predecessor of memory ecologies.[13]

In setting out the foundations of a theory of media ecology, Marshall McLuhan sought to establish that '[n]o medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media'.[14] This delineates the importance of widening the scope of studies of media: the features, functions, and affordances of any one media type can only be understood with a view to how it interacts with other media. The ecological imperative to consider media within a vast system of interacting elements marks an intervention in otherwise

[12] Steven D. Brown and Andrew Hoskins, 'Terrorism in the new memory ecology: Mediating and remembering the 2005 London Bombings', *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 2.2, pp. 87-107.
[13] Andrew Hoskins, 'The Forgetting Ecology: Losing the Past Through Digital Media and AI', in *The Remaking of Memory in the Age of the Internet and Social Media*, ed. by Qi Wang and Andrew Hoskins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, In press). See also Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies'.
[14] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Gingko Press, 2013), p. 26.

understanding memory as merely either a faculty of the mind or an object. My discussion of ecological memory in this thesis is underpinned by the recognition that 'No medium has its meaning or existence alone': that it is the interplay of media which makes it ecological. In drawing on theories of ecological memory in my reading of contemporary fiction in each chapter, I study the fictional representation of particular media types and their affordances for memory. Following the principle of media ecologies, these studies do not consider media types in isolation, but specifically as this relates to the broader media environment. This also brings literature itself into comparison with the media types that these novels seek to represent.

It is worth noting that media ecology, according to McLuhan, emphasises media as an *environment*, not only as objects in use, and therefore the interconnectedness of media. McLuhan describes media ecology as the medium in which we live, as fish do in water. I apply this understanding of media ecology to my reading of ecological memory particularly in Chapter One, in which my close reading of Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* focuses on the representation of memory as a physical environment. The interconnectedness of the media ecology raises consciousness of the impact of a shifting media landscape even when media are not used to the full extent of their technological potential: as N. Katherine Hayles notes of medial ecology, 'change anywhere in the system means change everywhere in the system'.[15] The introduction of new technologies has a knock-on effect to the whole interconnected, ecological system, and this

[15] N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, p. 33.

media phenomenon, as applied to memory ecology, is the focus of Chapter Four, with regard to perceptions of digital new media.

Neil Postman has emphasised the structural role of media: how the technological specifications of media structure what we are seeing or thinking, and why media make us feel and act as we do. In a keynote address in 2000 which reflected on the early formation of media ecology, Postman explained:

> [W]e wanted to make people more conscious of the fact that human beings live in two different kinds of environments. One is the natural environment and consists of things like air, trees, rivers, and caterpillars. The other is the media environment, which consists of language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that make us what we are.[16]

An ecological approach to media, in other words, does not only invite the theorisation of media as an interactive system, but further spotlights an applied understanding of what that system *does*: how our actions, thoughts, feelings and, crucially, memories, are impacted and shaped by the media around us.

We can start to see an ambiguity in what should be included in the ecologies being discussed – in this thesis, I take a broadly inclusive approach to understanding what comprises memory ecologies. While McLuhan suggests that media ecology refers to an ecology of all media, Postman's definition (above) of the media environment as consisting of 'language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that make us what we are' leaves open the question of the limits of what is to be considered: in other words, what might be excluded from this media environment.[17] At the other end of the scale, Christine Nystrom narrows the scope of media ecology more

[16] Neil Postman, 'The Humanism of Media Ecology', keynote address delivered at the inaugural Media Ecology Association Convention, Fordham University, New York, June 16–17 (2000).
[17] Ibid.

explicitly, and defines it as where 'complex communication systems [function] as environments'.[18] I take an inclusive view as to what can be considered a participant in ecological memory. In my discussion of representations of other media types in the selected novels (environmental objects, linguistic memory objects, audio/visual media, and social media) I suggest that all objects which afford memory can be considered as comprising memory ecologies. In transposing key principles of media ecology to memory ecologies, then, this thesis looks to extend current understandings of ecological memory to include a wider scope of media types, including literature.

The concept of media ecology has been taken up by literary scholars, particularly as it relates to the role of narrative within the ecology. In 1997, Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz published *Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology*, a text which addressed the role of literature in the context of a rapidly evolving media landscape. They note that 'shifts in the role of one medium within a whole cultural ecology do not just shuffle the prominence of different media; they also suppress or emphasize qualities that have always been implicit within those media'.[19] It is partly on this premise that the present study of ecological memory (a concept, again, developed in association with the study of digital media) finds its relevance in a literary thesis: I argue that from the vantage point of digital cultures, the affordances of these other media for memory become newly visible.

---

[18] Christine Nystrom, 'Towards a Science of Media Ecology: The Formulation of Integrated Conceptual Paradigms for the Study of Human Communication Systems', (doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1973).
[19] Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz, *Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology* (Cornell University Press, 1997).

Daniel Punday's *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology* (2012) informs my application of theories of memory ecologies to a reading of contemporary literature. I take Punday's analysis as a way in to thinking about ecology and literature in two respects. First, Punday's text suggests that '[t]he concept of the media ecology offers us a flexible understanding of the environment in which the novel functions today'.[20] This thesis undertakes a study of memory ecology which similarly considers the environment in which the novel – as a memory object – functions today. Punday also argues that 'contemporary novels use other media to explore the nature of novelistic writing, not as a simple aesthetic parallel (as the mise en abyme use of media does), but instead to provide an occasion for comparison and contrast, through which the novel emerge'.[21] I suggest that this is the case in each of the four novels selected for study in this thesis. Each chapter of this thesis therefore considers how the author's representation of media works to establish the novel in comparison with the media depicted.

The concept of media ecology, as I have briefly outlined here, is formative to the ecological model of memory – both in terms of the recent ermergence of this idea in memory studies, and as I use the ecological model to frame the present study.

[20] Daniel Punday, *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 14.
[21] Ibid., p. 73.

*Memory ecologies*

Having outlined the relevance of media ecology to literary studies, and the importance of media ecology to my reading of memory and media in contemporary fiction, I turn now to consider the understanding of memory ecologies put forward in recent years by memory studies scholars. As I show in this thesis, an ecological model of memory can be applied to reading representations of memory and media in literary texts. To situate this thesis, and my reading of ecological memory in contemporary novels, I offer here a review of contemporary memory studies scholarship. As I demonstrate, the ecological approach to memory and forgetting which is put forward by these scholars sets out the following principles: i) memory is an active process, not a static object; ii) memory does not exist in a void, but as a system of multiple interacting elements; and iii) memory is both publicly accessible (memory objects in the ecology can be shared) and uniquely subjective to individuals (the apprehension of a memory object is dependent on its intersection with the wider memory ecology). These principles of the ecological model of memory inform my reading of memory literature throughout this thesis.

A significant point of contention for memory scholars over recent decades has been a perceived dichotomy between individual and collective memory. 'Collective' memory is a concept advanced by the work of French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs that describes the action and effect of memory among a group of people.[22] The notion of the collectivity of memory assumes that similar

[22] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For further discussion of divergent theories of collective memory and their terminology, see Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), pp. 25-29.

experiences, communal access to information, and acts of commemoration are equivalent to memory being shared by a group of people. This has provided the basis for many fruitful studies, but has also come under scrutiny for its implicit negation of individual subjectivity within a collective.[23] This, along with heightened interest in memory of the last few decades (the so-called 'memory boom') has led to a splintering of the notion of 'memory' into a plethora of modifiers within memory studies scholarship, each of which effectively corners off a particular aspect of memory to be defined and studied.[24]

Continued discussions of how memory functions among groups of people have yielded more precise alternatives such as 'cultural' memory, linked to historiography and its effects;[25] 'popular' memory, which focuses on the dominant memory of a particular period or event;[26] 'social' memory, a concept introduced by Elizabeth Tonkin with the aim of balancing the social context of memory with individual consciousness;[27] and 'communicative' memory, the short-term fluctuations of memory and knowledge that immediately follow the

[23] See, for example: Paula Hamilton, 'A Long War: Public Memory and the Popular Media', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 299-311 (p. 300); Jennifer Good, *Photography and September 11th: Spectacle, Memory, Trauma* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 25; Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85-109; Debra Ramsay, 'Tensions in the Interface: The Archive and the Digital', in *Digital Memory Studies*, ed. by Hoskins, pp. 290-302 (p. 283).
[24] See Brown and Hoskins, 'Terrorism in the New Memory Ecology'; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Jay Winter, *War beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[25] See, for example, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).
[26] Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method', in *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics*, ed. by Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 205-252.
[27] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 105-106.

communication of information.[28] Moving away from ideas of a homogenous 'collective,' each of these concepts raises consciousness of individual differences within a group. Nevertheless, all continue to rely on the notion of memory being somehow shared among multiple people. Each of these notions have proved useful to their respective studies, but do not offer an interdisciplinary model of memory's social function.

The present discussion of the concept of 'ecological' memory does not pose another splintering of the vast field of memory studies, but rather a holistic way of understanding what memory is, what it includes, and how it works. I align this thesis with an ecological model of memory: one where memory is understood not as an internal faculty of the mind nor as historic record, but rather as a vast and complex emergent system of interacting human and non-human elements. An ecological understanding of memory marks a significant intervention in the individual/collective memory discourse: though I am not the first to recognise this (as shown below), I suggest that the importance of ecological memory to this aspect of memory studies has so far been understated.

As I examine the application of ecological thinking to reading various kinds of memory throughout this thesis, I note the usefulness of the ecological model in expressing the private and social functions of memory. In addressing the existing wealth of scholarship on individual and collective memory, I indicate below several prior remarks on the potential of an ecological model of memory to resist clear distinctions of a memoring collective. Acknowledging this as a

[28] See also: Jan Assman, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), pp. 125-133; Joanne Garde-Hansen and Gilson Schwarz, 'Iconomy of Memory: On Remembering a Digital, Civic and Corporate Currency', in *Digital Memory Studies*, ed. by Hoskins, pp. 217-233.

significant contribution of memory ecologies to memory scholarship, I suggest that the ecological model goes further still, not only resisting the idea of a cohesive collective but also challenging the boundaries of the individual subject in memory studies. I elaborate on this approach below, and offer a more detailed analysis of the contribution of an ecological approach to memory scholarship in Chapter Three of this thesis.

The concept of 'memory ecologies', as this is currently understood, is often attributed to Brown and Hoskins' 2010 article, 'Terrorism in the New Memory Ecology: Mediating and Remembering the 2005 London Bombings,' and Hoskins' more recent papers which further argue for an ecological view.[29] While these works are commonly cited in memory studies scholarship, the concept of memory ecologies has only recently been taken up in earnest by memory scholars, and so far with relatively little attention to the theoretical grounding of its terms. I review below notable uses of 'memory ecologies' and 'ecological memory' in recent scholarship to contextualise the contribution of this thesis and the application of this concept to the present literary study.

Brown and Hoskins define 'the new memory ecology' through 'cross-fertilizing psychological and media and cultural studies approaches via the concept of "schema" to show how remembering is dynamically configured through socio-cultural practices and shifting media logics'.[30] As noted at the beginning of this Introduction, and as I demonstrate through my reading of representations of memory and media in contemporary novels in each chapter of

[29] See, particularly, Brown and Hoskins, 'Terrorism in the New Memory Ecology'; Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies'; Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', Hoskins, 'The Forgetting Ecology'.
[30] Brown and Hoskins, 'Terrorism in the New Memory Ecology', p. 87.

this thesis, ‘shifting media logics’ are at the core of the selected authors’ considerations of memory. Furthermore, the chronological framing of the thesis through analysis of novels written between 1995 and 2021 gestures towards shifts still occurring in the media landscape within the context of digital cultures.

The notion of memory as ‘dynamically configured through socio-cultural practices’ is of particular focus in the second, third, and fourth chapters of this thesis, which consider representations of memory within and without the context of human society, of public mediations of memory relating to 9/11, and of the creation and response to public memory objects through social media, respectively. Following Brown and Hoskins, this thesis also acknowledges the construction of ecological memory as ‘a cross-fertilization of psychological, media and cultural studies approaches’: I theorise ecological memory by drawing primarily from work in cognitive science, ecological psychology, and media studies. The language of ecology, whilst notably following recent work in these other disciplines, stems from the biological study of living organisms and/in their environment and how this environment affords survival and other behaviours. Conceiving of memory as ecological therefore relies, first and foremost, upon the transposition of terms from this context: that is, understanding ecological memory as a study of the subject and/in their environment, and the impact and affordances of that environment for memory.

Hoskins significantly extended this understanding of memory ecologies in his article ‘Memory Ecologies’. Here, Hoskins offers the notion of ecologies as a way of bypassing common issues involving the individual/collective dichotomy in memory studies discourse by suggesting that ‘a more productive way of

formulating these questions is to look for memory as a link or connection between the individual and the collective, rather than attempting to establish its location in either domain'.[31] In 'A Long War: Public Memory and the Popular Media' (2010), Debra Ramsay similarly notes that 'A more useful approach to memory [than collective memory] …is to regard it as neither individual nor collective, but as a process that takes place within a complex system, or ecology.'[32] She goes on to suggest:

> The various interfaces engaged within the threshold state of the digital interface work in conjunction to create a narrative about the past, folding history and memory together in an ongoing process of evaluation and re-evaluation in which the role of the archive as an organisation "in-between" becomes clear, as it mediates between users, archival principles, and ever-shifting cultural, social and political contexts.[33]

Charles B. Stone and Ava Zwolinski also recognise the impact of ecological thought on the conception of the social aspect of memory in their recent paper in *Memory, Mind & Media*: 'The mnemonic consequences associated with sharing personal photographs on social media'.[34] This paper discusses the (Western) history of the psychological science of memory with a focus on how researchers have moved from an individualistic view of human memory towards an ecological (i.e. environmental) approach.

As noted above, I engage at length with an ecological approach to individual/collective memory in this thesis, considering the resistance to notions of either the individual or collective subject to be one of the most crucial interventions of an ecological understanding of memory. Hoskins, Ramsay, Stone

---

[31] Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies'.
[32] Ramsay, 'Tensions in the Interface', p. 283.
[33] Ibid., p. 300.
[34] Charles Stone and Ava Zwolinski, 'The mnemonic consequences associated with sharing personal photographs on social media', *Memory, Mind and Media* 1:e12 (2022).

and Zwolinski – cited above – note the importance of memory ecologies to moving away from a binary view of individual/collective memory. An alignment with an ecological conception of memory precludes discussions of 'individual' or 'collective' memory in which memory is a faculty attributed to a single or collective memoring subject. Instead, where memory is a process defined by the entanglement of a memoring subject and their environment, the social aspect of memory is likewise located beyond the subject. Rather than defining memory itself as 'individual', 'collective', 'shared', or similar, then, ecological memory shifts the focus to the shared memory *object*.

In my discussion of shared memory objects, I recognise the continued usefulness of distinguishing between different kinds of privacy and sociality in, for example, creating, curating, and interacting with memory objects. In its resistance to conceiving memory as belonging to any particular (individual or collective) subject, ecological memory facilitates greater analytical precision in considering the variously private, social, and public elements of memory ecologies and processes. These are not clearly delimited, but instead understood to be in constat flux.

Each chapter of this thesis considers a different facet of the relative privacy or sociality of ecological memory as represented in the selected novels. For example, the first chapter of this thesis considers the implications of a conceptual turn to ecological memory for understanding the experiences of an individual memoring subject, particularly as this relates to the entanglement of the subject with their physical environment. Chapters Two and Four both consider the social means of creating and curating memory objects, though in vastly different social

contexts (humanity on the brink of extinction and the hyperconnectivity of social media, respectively). Chapter Three examines, in its analysis of DeLillo's representation of media witnessing 9/11 in *Falling Man*, how an ecological model of memory encourages an understanding of memory *objects* as shared, rather than memory itself. As I discuss at length in Chapter Three, this notion of shared memory objects is a major contribution of ecological memory in reframing the individual/collective memory binary.

In his 2018 chapter in *Digital Memory Studies* titled 'Memory of the Multitude', Hoskins expounds once more the idea of memory ecologies in the context – as the publication suggests – of new digital media. He suggests that 'the medial gathering and splintering of individual, social and cultural imaginaries, increasingly networked through portable and pervasive digital media and communication devices, attach shadow archives to much of everyday life, that also blend and complicate that which was once considered as distinctly public and private'.[35] Because of this, Hoskins argues,

> The archive is no longer only collected, organized, managed, walled and kept by an array of institutional memory keepers, but is also diffused through a 'new memory ecology'. This is the current digital environment's (re)ordering of the past by and through multiple connectivities of times, actors and events, which also shifts the very parameters of memory and memory studies.[36]

The understanding of ecological memory put forward in this thesis, and my readings of contemporary memory literature, while drawing on work from across memory studies scholarship, is most heavily informed by Hoskins' work, and particularly builds upon the descriptions of the 'new memory ecology' found in

[35] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude'.
[36] Ibid., p. 87.

'Memory of the Multitude'. Here, Hoskins describes the new memory ecology in media-chronological terms: ecological memory is a modern phenomenon which exists within – and indeed as a result of – a digital environment. The concept of connective memory also derives from Hoskins' work on ecological memory, and serves as a methodological and analytical tool to inspire memory studies 'to explore memory by tracing and analyzing how different interactional trajectories intersect with and compete against each other'.[37] This further highlights the importance of ecological approaches to memory in contemporary memory studies scholarship and the association of ecological theories of memory with technological advances and digital technologies.

Within this digital context, Hoskins understands the ecological model as memory breaking out from its previous physical confines, with the past now able to exist atemporally, everywhere. In Hoskins' more recent work, he considers the present 'environment of digital participation and entanglement as a *forgetting ecology*'.[38] He suggests that '[t]o understand the processes and impact of remembering and forgetting in and on individuals and societies, we need to grasp the messiness of the multiple connectivities of brains and bodies, individuals and groups, as we collide and interact with others and events over time,' and goes on to argue that it is now the case that 'we have passed a "tipping point" in the human capacity to know about these shifts, precisely at the same time as the digital and AI-shaped transformations of the ecology herald a new era of the past'.[39] While the focus of this thesis is on memory, this framing of a forgetting ecology usefully

[37] Robin Ekelund, 'Connective Memory', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Memory Studies*, ed. by Lucas M. Bietti, Martin Pogacar (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).
[38] Hoskins, 'The Forgetting Ecology', emphasis in original.
[39] Ibid.

delineates a dual approach to memory and forgetting as both ecological processes.

The emergence of ecological approaches to memory coincides with the proliferation of networked digital technologies: this evolving media landscape is intrinsic to the origins of the use of ecology to describe media and memory. The interconnectivity of global media and cultures which led to Fiore and McLuhan's notion of the global village has evolved with networked media into a digital *hyper*connectivity.[40] This has led to a close association between memory ecologies and digital media – not least because digital cultures both form and frame how the ecological concept has been observed and articulated. Likewise, my selected authors are each writing about memory and media within an emerging and deepening digital context.

With this formation of the ecological concept in mind, I demonstrate throughout this thesis that each of the key observations of ecological memory also holds true for other media, expanding the notion of a 'new memory ecology' (which has tended to so far be applied to describe a digital context) to a more expansive understanding of ecological memory (which has been recognised within a digital context, but which is also more broadly applicable to all media). As such, the three principles of ecological memory outlined above – that memory is an active process, exists in a system of multiple interacting elements, and is both publicly accessible and uniquely subjective – are used to guide my close reading of the four contemporary memory/media novels which act as each

[40] Andrew Hoskins and John Tulloch, *Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Media and Memories of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

chapter's case study. Each of the selected texts engage with memory's mediative function as a '(re)ordering of the past by and through multiple connectivities of times, actors, and events', and from within a digital context, though networked digital media are only the focus of the final chapter's analysis of *No One Is Talking About This*.[41]

My more expansive reading of ecological memory shares a great deal of common ground with the notion of 'memory in the wild', as set out in brief by Barnier and Hoskins in 'Is there memory in the head, in the wild?' (2018) and later developed by Fawns (2022).[42] As the title of their article suggests, Barnier and Hoskins outline memory in the wild as a way of thinking through the slippery nature of memory's location: is memory in the head *or* in the wild? And is memory that is in the head also, by nature, always already wild?[43] Memory in the wild is situated as an umbrella concept which includes ideas such as transactive memory, collective memory, prosthetic memory, mediated memory, and similar concepts – all of which suggest that memory occurs beyond the mind of an individual subject. This view of memory in the wild – in opposition to memory in the head – coincides with a challenge to brain-bound cognition in cognitive science. I discuss this in greater detail at the end of this Introduction, with reference to extended cognition in particular, in order to establish an understanding of memory as a process which extends beyond the body and brain and exists as a system of interacting elements.

---

[41] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', p. 87.
[42] The title of this article echoes Edwin Hutchins' influential work in cognitive science, *Cognition in the Wild*. See Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (MIT Press, 1996).
[43] Amanda Barnier and Andrew Hoskins, 'Is there memory in the head, in the wild?' *Memory Studies*, 11.4 (2018), pp. 386-390.

As Fawns summarises, 'memory as an object of study must be a form of *remembering* that is not just influenced *by* context, but produced *in* context… recognising context as a constituent element, rather than an external influencer, is a framing of *remembering in the wild*.'[44] This clearly identifies a central gain from discussing memory as ecological: by doing so, we can more fully account for the role of the environment as a constituent element of memory. My reading of ecological memory throughout this thesis therefore seeks to establish how we might recognise context as such in the selected novels. The recognition of context as a constituent element, rather than an external influencer, of memory is one of the key points of resonance between the selected novels and ecological memory.

The use of 'memory in the wild' to describe this perspective on memory demonstrates the current slipperiness of terminology around ecological conceptions of memory. While Fawns gestures towards the 'ecological validity' offered by memory in the wild, and Barnier and Hoskins mention memory ecologies in their article, this notion is not explicitly linked to the development of an ecological model of memory.[45] Anna Reading's insightful article on 'rewilding memory', which seeks to 'enable the recentring of diverse humans co-constructing memories with and through the environment', further muddies the terminological waters, as it introduces the concept of 'more-than-human-memory' as being 'ecological'; the ecological aspect of this text is an expressed focus on the natural environment. While the natural environment is a significant aspect of an ecological understanding of memory (as a notion developed from media

[44] Tim Fawns, 'Remembering in the wild: recontextualising and reconciling studies of media and memory', *Memory, Mind and Media*, 1:e11 (2022).
[45] Richard Heersmink, 'Narrative Niche Construction: Memory Ecologies and Distributed Narrative Identities', *Biology and Philosophy* 35.5 (2020), pp. 1-23.

ecology, for example), there is a clear disjuncture between this use of 'ecological memory' and those discussed above.

Together, these papers suggest that memory scholars are taking up the notion of ecological memory as a generative model. 'Ecological', as these scholars show, does not modify memory in the same way as terms such as 'transactive', or 'communicative': ecological memory does not narrow the definition of memory for a specific application, but rather provides a way of understanding memory in a general sense. It is a holistic approach to memory that does not render modifiers such as 'communicative', 'transactive', or 'public', obsolete but instead can be held in conjunction with these approaches as a way of understanding the mediative function of memory with which they work.

However, ecological memory also remains understudied: the theoretical underpinnings of ecological memory have not been expounded at length. Richard Heersmink (2020) renders the theoretical foundations of ecological memory in brief in an article on 'Narrative niche construction: memory ecologies and distributed narrative identities'. In doing so, Heersmink draws heavily from work on cognitive ecologies (e.g. Hutchins, 2010; Tribble and Sutton, 2011), which have advanced the notion of the distribution of memory and other cognitive processes across the brain, body, and environment.[46] Heersmink aims to conceptualise how we interact with memory ecologies and even engineer them to construct personal memories and personal pasts in this article. In doing so, he distinguishes between personal and public cognitive niches: an ecological term

[46] In particular, Heersmink cites Evelyn Tribble and John Sutton, 'Cognitive Ecology as a Framework for Shakespearean Studies', *Shakespeare Studies* 39 (2011), pp. 94-103, and Edwin Hutchins, 'Cognitive Ecology', *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2.4 (2010), pp. 705-715.

which denotes 'a setting of environmental features that are suitable for an animal, into which it fits metaphorically'.[47] Heersmink uses a niche construction approach to suggest that people change and utilise the objects in their environment in order to engineer their cognitive niche; on a larger scale, public cognitive niches are engineered with public informational resourced, such as traffic signs, thesauruses, textbooks, and Wikipedia.[48]

Heersmink briefly and broadly theorises ecological memory in terms guided by the use of existing scholarship in other related fields, thus extending the ecological metaphor. In this thesis, I draw from this aspect of Heersmink's analysis – distinguishing between personal and public cognitive niches – in particular in setting out the contribution of ecological memory to discussions of individual/collective memory. While this article goes some way to clarifying the foundations of ecological memory, its full potential as a framework for thinking about memory has yet to be recognised. This is not only true of its position as an intervention in memory studies, but also with regards to its possibilities in being transposed to other fields.

Part of the project of this thesis, then, is to establish a framework for thinking about ecological memory within a literary context and to begin to demonstrate its significance for deepening the analysis of both specific media (i.e. books) and of stories which directly engage and/or represent memory. I demonstrate that a reading of ecological memory in the selected novels can offer new insight into the function of memory and media in these texts; in bringing an

---

[47] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).
[48] Heersmink, 'Narrative Niche Construction'.

understanding of ecological memory to these novels, I further argue that the literary perspective of this project can illuminate and extend the contributions of an ecological approach to memory studies.

## Defining Ecological Memory: Key Concepts and Terms

Having established the applications of ecological memory which have so far been recognised in memory studies, I set out here some of the foundational concepts of ecological memory as deployed in this thesis.

### *Memoring*

To think of memory as ecological is significantly impeded by our existing terminology: even when we speak of 're-membering', we buy into the notion that memory is the preservation, calling up, and/or reconstruction of something from the past. The 're-' prefix has long been associated with definitions of memory: as the memory studies scholar Jens Brockmeier points out, 'memories are *re*called, *re*trieved, or *re*membered; they are *re*turned from the past to the present'.[49] This is associated with a 'general sense of "back" or "again"', and implies that events themselves can somehow be 'performed a second time' or 'restored' to their previous state.[50] This alignment of memory with an act of putting something back together, or else as the retrieval of something past, suggests that some essential kernel of a past experience can persist across time and exist in the present. This runs counter to an understanding of memory as ecological, which instead looks

[49] Jens Brockmeier, *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 258.
[50] Entry 're-, prefix', *Oxford English Dictinoary*, n.d. <www.oed.com> [accessed March 2020].

more broadly to the whole system of media, actors, and events which comprise the memory ecology.

To this end, where possible throughout this thesis, I remove the 're-' prefix from the language of memory. I turn to the root *memor* instead (meaning a particular active mindfulness of the past) and will refer to acts of memory as 'memoring'. This allows me to disentangle discussions around memory from a conception of the past as a thing that can either be *re*constructed or *re*turned to. With this small change in terminology, I aim to defamiliarize the language of memory used throughout this thesis to highlight both the importance and current strangeness of an ecological way of thinking about memory. In short, I want to continually ask: what does it mean to consider memory not in terms of something we *have*, nor as something that *is*, but instead as something we *do*?

*Extended Cognition*

To understand an ecological view of the role of memory objects in memory's mediative function, I align this thesis with the claim that objects beyond the brain and body are potential sites of cognition and, consequently, of memory. Recent scholarship has done much to expand the parameters of cognition beyond the brain and central nervous system.[51] In their critical work 'The Extended Mind', Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers (1998) define two opposing theories of cognition: 'brainbound' and 'extended', which I briefly summarise here.

[51] Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* 58.1 (1998), pp. 7-19. See also N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Lambros Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: a theory of material engagement* (MIT Press, 2013).

The conservative 'brainbound' model understands the mind as being located exclusively within the brain and central nervous system. The brainbound model represents the traditional model of cognition, one which has long been echoed in the design of digital devices, and our language for them. Early computers (such as the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) were designed and described as "giant brains", a commonly-recognised concept which has since directed digital innovation, and only intensified with current endeavours in artificial intelligence. Likewise, there is an ongoing discussion in AI research which considers how, in order to do human-like thinking, AI models might first need human-like bodies to experience human-like processes of embodied learning.[52] This shows the critical importance of how we understand cognition, and cognitive acts such as memory, as this understanding feeds into the design, perception, and use of new technologies.

In opposition to brainbound is the 'extended' model of cognition, which proposes that the mind can also be located in 'loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body and world,' meaning that 'the local mechanisms of mind… are not all in the head. Cognition leaks out into body and world.'[53] In 'The Extended Mind', Clark and Chalmers offer several examples of cognitive coupling which extends beyond the brain, including using our fingers to aid working memory when doing difficult calculations.[54] This model explicitly challenges traditionally neuro-centric views of cognition as a faculty of the mind

[52] This is an idea articulated in Hubert L. Drefus, *What Computers Still Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (MIT Press, 1992).
[53] Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xxviii.
[54] Clark and Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind, p. 10.

alone. If we accept the extended model, then we can start to locate acts of memory, at least in part, within the objects which are used to mediate it. For example, the act of linguistic memory representation through writing would implicate the mind, writing implement and writing surface as cognizers. Someone who litters their house or office with post-it note reminders would likewise be seen as outsourcing cognition, through the use of a pen or pencil, to those pieces of paper.[55]

The extended mind is a useful concept for its de-privileging of cognition as an exclusively organismal faculty. It is worth noting that Clark and Chalmers' work is part of much larger conversation about cognition which has expanded to include, most notably, 4E (embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended) and distributed cognition.[56] For the purposes of this thesis, I focus simply on the premise that cognition can be extended beyond the brain and central nervous system to highlight the importance of understanding ecological memory objects as genuinely cognitive and therefore as participating in memory. Recognising extended cognition facilitates questions of how we might consider the inclusion of external media in what is commonly seen as a brainbound process.

While this thesis accepts the extended model of cognition insofar as it provides a framework by which to understand the involvement of media in cognitive processes, one of the contributions of this thesis is to raise

---

[55] See *Cognition Distributed: How Cognitive Technology Extends Our Minds*, ed. by Itiel E. Dror and Stevan Harnad (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008); Michael P. Lynch, 'Neuromedia, Extended Knowledge and Understanding,' *Philosophical Issues* 24.1 (2014), pp. 299–313; J. Adam Carter, 'Autonomy, Cognitive Offloading, and Education,' *Educational Theory* 68.6 (2019), pp. 657-673.

[56] For more on distributed cognition, see Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild*; for a comprehensive account of 4E cognition, see *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, ed. by Albert Newen, Leon De Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher (Oxford University Press, 2020).

consciousness of the need for a broad range of media-specific analyses to consider how the material nature of memory objects affects their impact on memory. Clark's comment that '[c]ognition leaks out into body and world' wrongly implies a horizontalization of cognitive processes which occur in different sites: the question is not, and cannot be, only whether or not cognition is extended to external sites, but also how the material nature of those sites will affect a cognitive process. For example, the effect of writing reminders on post-it notes will differ widely from the effect of setting and labelling a smartphone alarm or asking a trusted third party to mention something at a later point in time.

In this thesis, I consider each of these acts to be essentially cognitive, accepting that the physical items are genuinely part of the system that cognises, this should not be taken to mean that a cognitive assemblage is a collaboration of like forces. To some extent, this is already readily assumed in our day-to-day interactions with media: we may assume, for example, that a digital alarm may participate as a more reliable cognitive aid in some circumstances than asking a friend for a reminder. Likewise, we know that to reminisce about the past in collaborative nostalgia would likely be a task better performed by an old friend than a digital alarm.

Discussing the materiality of language in her call for 'media-specific analysis', examining the impact of material differences, Hayles notes that '[t]o change the material artefact is to transform the context and circumstances for interacting with the words, which inevitably changes the meanings of the words as well'.[57] This approach can be applied, by extension, to the nature of interacting

[57] N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (MIT Press, 2002), p. 24.

with any material artefact in a cognitive assemblage: to change the material artefact, whether it is a mediation of language or not, is to transform its meaning in the memory ecology. I suggest that an ecological reading of representations of memory and media in the selected novels can highlight the importance of recognising media-specific affordances for memory. Chapter Three attends to this in relation to various mediations of the events of 9/11 and the attack on the World Trade Center, considering the photograph, 'Falling Man' alongside Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man*.

By aligning this thesis with theories of extended cognition, I also seek to raise consciousness of the need for a broad range of media-specific analyses to consider how the material nature of memory objects affects their affordances for memory. It is with this understanding that I extend the notion of a memory ecology as a way of recognising the interactivity of the subject with a vast system of cultural and material elements, not only to claim that these elements *do* interact, which is a key principle of ecological memory, but also *how* different media types and our perceptions of different media types shape those interactions. Paying attention to media-specific affordances for memory serves to highlight the inclusion of nondigital memory objects in an ecological view of memory, and also allows us to observe – as I demonstrate at length in Chapter Four – the makeup of digital cultures from the vantage point of how the selected authors and memory studies scholars come to an ecological understanding of memory.

*Affordances*

The ecological model of memory centres interactions between a memoring subject and their environment. This assumes that objects in the environment (regardless of their spatial colocation) are potential sites of cognition; when used in memoring acts, the function of these objects is genuinely cognitive, and I use 'memory object' to refer to any and all of these elements of the memory ecology. This understanding is further grounded in environmental psychology and J. J. Gibson's theory of affordances.

Gibson defines affordances as 'what the environment *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill'.[58] Physical features of the environment *afford* particular behaviours for living creatures. For example, a flat enough terrestrial surface affords support and thereby affords standing and walking upon it, while a steep surface affords climbing, and the surface of water affords sinking. In other words, affordances are the potentialities at the meeting point of a subject and their environment. Gibson's work is formative to my understanding of ecological memory, as it sets out a way of understanding the function of objects beyond the possession view. In this vein, I define memory object as any object which affords (in this specific sense) memoring.

Terence Cave describes how affordances proliferate in the human ecology: 'Humans make tools, weapons, instruments of all kinds that help them to extend their reach into and control over the environment', both in physical and mental terms, noting that 'the notion of affordance thus shares ground with

[58] Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, emphasis in original.

"extended mind" or "distributed cognition"'.[59] Ecological memory largely occupies this shared ground between the extended mind hypothesis and the theory of affordances, and arises from ideas which are consistent with both concepts. Where understanding cognition as extending into the body and world allows us to think of objects in the memory ecology as cognitive, the theory of affordances gives us, in addition, a way to conceptualise the potentialities of objects (i.e. the specific role they play) and the subjectivity of our perceptions of them, and further illuminates the sense in which we *encounter* those objects in the environment. In turn, where extended cognition implies a confluent assembly of animal/environmental cognisors, the theory of affordances stresses their complementarity.

First, applying the theory of affordances to memory objects frames how we perceive the function of objects in memory and their relation to the memoring subject. Affordances 'impl[y] the complementarity of the animal and their environment', as affordances are neither the action of an individual nor a physical property of the environment, but instead exist as the potentiality of the environment *relative* to the memoring subject.[60] For example, a substantial knee-high object may afford sitting, but this can be measured only relatively speaking; something which affords sitting for an adult may not afford sitting for a child. Particular foods may afford pleasure for one person and displeasure for another; a peanut affords nutrition for many but affords an allergic reaction, in addition, for others. The theory of affordances is therefore concerned with the

[59] Terence Cave, *Thinking With Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 47.
[60] Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, p. 127.

complementarity of the animal and environment. This is how memory objects afford memory.

Furthermore, affordances allow us to consider the conditionality of memory. A book that affords memory needs the memoring subject to read it; an old piece of furniture might afford memory, but only if the memoring subject takes time to notice and reflect upon it. In this way, affordances highlight the weight of potentiality in memory objects: they may *afford* memory, but they do not necessarily *evoke* it (though, in the case of nonvolitional memory, discussed at length in Chapter One, I show how memory objects can evoke memory without further action from the memoring subject). This explanation also goes some way to understanding the subjectivity of perceiving memory objects, as the memory affordances of any object will likely differ from person to person.

Anthony Chemero's discussion of ecological niches clarifies the notion of subjectivity and relativity in the ecological system: for Chemero, Gibson's notion of niches as sets of affordances for a particular animal means that '[d]ifferent animals, with different abilities, may have physically collocated but nonetheless nonoverlapping niches. For example, a human and a bacterium may share a physical location (as when a bacterium is inside a human), but their niches will not overlap'.[61] This is also true for ecological memory: different memoring subjects, with different abilities and experiences of the world, may encounter the same memory objects and have nonoverlapping responses to them. Two people may walk past the same house, for example, but if one of them once lived there and the other is a visiting tourist in the area, its affordances for memory will be

[61] Anthony Chemero, *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science* (MIT Press, 2009), p. 147.

very different for each of them. The ecological niches of these memoring subjects – the set of affordances available to each of them – are different. There may, on the other hand, also be some overlap, as with the affordances of iconic objects (news footage of large-scale events, national landmarks, etc.).

The concept of ecological niches as sets of affordances therefore demonstrates both the commonality and differentiation between various subjects' experiences of the world, and also forms the foundation for my contribution to discourse on collective memory, as I theorise 'shared memory objects' throughout this thesis. In Chapter Three, I expand on the notion of shared memory objects as a way of holding in balance both the public accessibility of memory objects – particularly in relation to news images which are highly reproduced, repeated and widely recognisable – and the subjectivity and individuality of responses to those objects.

*Memory Objects*

In referring throughout this thesis to 'memory objects', I suggest that objects afford memory, and that these affordances are relative to the memoring subject; 'memory object' is a term which can be applied to any element of the ecology (treating a word, its speaker, and its language system as equally 'objects'). Objects do not need to be explicitly or even consciously perceived as affording memory in order to be recognised as memory objects.

My use of the term 'memory objects' encompasses equally all things which afford memory, regarding, for example, people in the same terms as souvenirs, smells, and landscapes, as well as the similar functions of language, voices, novels, and words, and the role of mobile phones themselves as well as the social

media posts they contain: these objects constitute a memory ecology. This is not to suggest that each of these memory objects might not individually – in many other contexts – be better described in terms other than 'objects'. However, flattening all these various aspects of the environment with the term 'object' follows Gibson's example in setting out elements of the environment as all equally being ecological objects. In defending this, Gibson states that 'The other person, the generalized *other*... is an ecological object with a skin, even if clothed. It is an object, although it is not *merely* an object.' I therefore suggest that we consider things, people, technologies, and systems all as equally memory objects, although they are not all merely objects, nor do they act equally effectively or significantly within any process of memoring.

My use of this term is intended to emphasise that within the ecological model, memory ecologies are co-constituted by the memoring subject and their environment. This draws attention to the parallel between various interactions within the memory ecology, across what may seem like intuitive divisions such as the difference between human or non-human objects, olfactory or more tangible objects, a word and the voice that speaks it, etc. We can examine the relationship between a memoring subject and their diary, for example, alongside the entanglement between the same subject and video footage of 9/11, or the voice of their loved one. All are, in the terms set out in this thesis, equally memory objects, and all are equally participants in the memory ecology (though, as I will go on to show, they do not participate equally). My interest here is in the ecological interaction of each and all of these elements, and by considering all flatly as memory objects I seek not to neglect or to oversimplify the complex

dynamics of human actors, systems, sensations, and technologies, but rather to acknowledge them all as being true actors within a broader entangled ecology.

**Thesis Overview**

The first chapter of this thesis, 'An Amnesiac's Memory Ecology: Bumping into the Past in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995)' takes, as a case study, a novel narrated by Ryder, a man who appears at times to have severe amnesia as he seems to be lost in an unfamiliar environment among unfamiliar people, a view frequently destabilised throughout the novel as several apparent strangers are jarringly revealed to be intimate acquaintances of his (most notably including Ryder's partner, stepson, and old school friends). Written in 1995, a time when networked data and communication were in the midst of becoming widely accessible to many, this novel offers valuable insight into memory's mediative function through its representation of interactions between the subject (primarily the narrator) and their environment. I read the anti-media overtures of the novel as a response to this, while recognising a more nuanced approach to media which prioritises the use of things, places, and the body in memory over and above complex media which might more obviously be used to afford memory for Ryder, such as a scrapbook or written agenda.

Ishiguro is well-known for the prevalence of the themes of memory and forgetting (on individual and national scales) which are woven throughout his work.[62] *The Unconsoled* is no exception to this, and is frequently included in

[62] Yugin Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

studies of 'the contemporary memory novel' and what has been called Ishiguro's 'bewilderment trilogy', which is used to describe three novels – *The Unconsoled* (1995), *When We Were Orphans* (2000), and *Never Let Me Go* (2005) – which all foreground a grappling with memory and the narrativization of time.[63]

Ishiguro has described the novel as being 'a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself'.[64] Clearly, then, it is a novel which is fundamentally concerned with its representation of memory. What is less clear – and less prevalent in criticism of the novel – is its investment in media more broadly. While I read *Oryx and Crake*, *Falling Man*, and *No One Is Talking About This* as straightforwardly media novels (i.e. novels 'in which media other than writing appear as a thematic or structural element'[65]), I position *The Unconsoled* as a kind of anti-media novel in which obvious memory objects, including writing, disappear from the text, and it is their avoidance which forms a central thematic and structural element. This disappearance of media is intrinsically linked to Ryder's bewilderment, as the novel repeatedly gestures towards memory objects which are either out of reach or avoided in the text.

The centrality of both memory and media in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* – as well as its engagement with the contemporary media landscape – is the subject of Chapter Two, '"These are things from before": Making Sense of

---

[63] Peter Kemp, review of Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *The Sunday Times*, 20 February 2005; Ana-Karina Schneider, 'Flying Machines and Time Experiment in Kazuo Ishiguro's "Bewilderment Trilogy"', *English Studies* 103.2 (2022), pp. 247-266.
[64] Maya Jaggi, 'Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi', in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. by Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2008), pp. 110-119 (p. 114). See also Peter Oliva, 'Chaos as Metaphor: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. by Shaffer and Wong, pp. 120-124 (p. 123).
[65] Punday, *Writing at the Limit*, p. 3.

Linguistic Memory Objects in a (Post-)Social Context in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2004)'. *Oryx and Crake* tells the story of a man known as Snowman in the present, and as Jimmy in narrative flashbacks to his life before an extinction-level pandemic event engineered by his best friend. For the majority of the novel, Snowman – and therefore the reader – presumes that he is the last surviving human. Although digital – and particularly audio/visual – media are present in the text through analepsis, the novel foregrounds textual mediation and the role of language in memory's mediative function. Atwood's approach to this is embedded in the generic conventions of speculative fiction, which has been well-documented with regard to other aspects of the novel.

Atwood's understanding of *Oryx and Crake* as speculative fiction, and the affordances of this genre for speaking to the contemporary moment, are most often cited in relation to ecocritical analyses of the novel in literary scholarship – a subject which arises, for instance, in Dana Philips' chapter on the *Maddaddam* trilogy in *Literature and Sustainability*, and Alejandra Ortega's recent article, 'Calculating the Costs: Effects of Land Consumption in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy'.[66] The vantage point from which this novel speculates is the evolving media landscape of the early 2000s; written at the turn of the millennium and set in a post-apocalyptic landscape in which humankind seems to be all but extinct, this novel imagines a world in which networked digital technologies are

[66] Dana Phillips, 'Collapse, Resilience, Stability and Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy', in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, ed. by Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham, and Louise Squire (Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 139-158; Alejandra Ortega, 'Calculating the Costs: Effects of Land Consumption in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 29.3 (2022), pp. 726-750. See also literary criticism of *Oryx and Crake* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy in *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context*, ed. by Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley (University of Calgary Press, 2013).

increasingly relied upon to question what is durable, what is left when electronic media are made defunct, and to position literature (in terms of oral storytelling and writing) as a form of preservation.

Chapter Three, 'A Novel About the News About 9/11: Public (Re)mediations as Shared Memory Objects in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007),' considers the re/mediation of events – and particularly of news events – and the role of the novel as a cultural document of or response to a significant contemporary moment. Many of Don DeLillo's novels are defined by their engagement with mass media and its effect on contemporary culture. This is certainly the case in *Falling Man*, a novel which depicts the events of 9/11. This includes news mediation of the event such as: video footage (both "live" footage and the replayability of that footage); the iconic 'Falling Man' photograph; the performance art of David Janiak, the fictional Falling Man who recreates that photograph; as well as the writings of an Alzheimer's group. The mediative function of the novel *Falling Man* as a representation of 9/11 and its media-specific affordances for memory are brought into comparison with the affordances of these other media – the photograph and DeLillo's fictional performance artist – through their shared title.

Although the events of the novel are set before the onset of Web 2.0, the novel itself was written at the point of transition towards networked and participatory digital cultures, and is therefore tuned-in to the features of user production and distribution that become particularly significant in that later context. Language as a means of communication for sharing memory objects is discussed at length in Chapter Two; this chapter instead considers DeLillo's

representation of what is shared and how. This forms the basis of my study of shared memory objects as an application of an ecological approach to memory.

Since its publication in 2021, studies of Patricia Lockwood's novel *No One Is Talking About This* – the subject of my final chapter – have readily claimed its formation as an Internet or media novel, in part because the innovative and fragmentary form of the novel seems to represent the experience of scrolling through social media. Barry Sheils' paper on 'Clickbait Modernism', for example, takes *No One Is Talking About This* as 'an internet novel' in order to analyse its relation to realism; in '"Perfectly, perfectly funny"?: laughging with the internet in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*', Giorgia Garilli focuses on Lockwood's representation of the internet as a 'troubled transposition of a fundamentally online form to the novel'.[67] Lockwood's representation of the internet in the novel, and the attention it has garnered in reviews and literary criticism, further led to its use as an exemplary 'media novel' in a recent call for abstracts for a special issue of *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*.[68] Although the representation of memory in the text has so far received significantly less attention than its engagement with digital media, my close reading considers the representation of memory's mediative function in the novel, as well as of conceptions of memory and how the language of memory has evolved around

[67] See, for example, Barry Sheils, 'Clickbait modernism', *Textual Practice* 38.1 (2024), pp. 84-111; Giorgia Garilli, '"Perfectly, perfectly funny"?: laughing with the internet in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*', *Textual Practice* (2024), pp. 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2024.2318038>

[68] Call for expressions of interest/abstracts, 'Novel Media/Media Novel: Theorising Digital Media Cultures in the Contemporary Novel', guest editors Dong Xia and Sandro Eich, *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*. https://essenglish.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Novel-Media-Media-Novel_C21-Special-Issue.pdf accessed 21 August 2024.

digital media – for example with the introduction of ‘memory’ to describe computer hardware and the language of virtual space.

The autofictional basis of this novel – which depicts in short fragments how the life of the narrator transforms with news of her sister’s pregnancy, the diagnosis of the foetus with Proteus Syndrome, and the child’s subsequent birth and death – as well as frequent references to real memes and milestones in internet culture, highlight the novel as a mode of mediating real events. This chapter reiterates the argument of the previous chapters of this thesis, which states that the ecological entangling and dis-/re-ordering of the past is not simply a new phenomenon introduced by digital media, but can also be applied to the relationship between memory and media more broadly as a cognitively distributed act. By applying a reading of ecological memory to Lockwood’s novel, I analyse in this chapter the aspects of the contemporary media landscape which make digital cultures the vantage point from which the concept of ecological memory has been made visible.

It is clear, then, that each of these major recent works of fiction is deeply invested in memory, media other than the novel, and the contemporary media landscape in which each was written. Cultural conceptions of memory (influenced by shifts in language use, developments in cognitive science, etc.) and the conditions of digital cultures (which comprise not only the capabilities of digital technology, but also popular use and accessibility) both alter across the period of the novels’ publication (1995-2021). While I note and nuance these changes, I also argue that all four texts nevertheless share a particular language and understanding – informed by contemporary cultural understandings of memory

and by the digital contexts of their production – which facilitates their articulation of memory in a way that resonates closely with the ecological memory model. These four texts recognise and mediate something of the digital context in which they each were produced; the authors' observations, though rooted in this context, nevertheless also articulate a view of memory that applies to media other than the digital. The novels openly contend with the role of literature in memory, highlighting the contrast between the role of the novel as a memory object and that of other media types, and both at a private/individual and public/cultural level.

My analysis of the selected novels across the next chapters evidences how these texts present memory – and from the vantage point of increasingly digital/digitized cultures – as ecological in a way that aligns with contemporary theories in memory studies. Using an ecological memory approach to reading these novels, I explore how the authors use the novel form to bring the affordances for memory of other media types into contrast with literature. Doing so produces new understandings of the representation of memory and media in these works of contemporary fiction. By addressing the resonances between representations of memory in these novels and the concept of ecological memory, I further recognise and extend the applications of an ecological model by emphasising a need to substantially broaden the view of memory ecologies beyond digital media and to consider a longer history of ecological memory objects, highlighting the need for media-specific approaches to different types of memory objects.[69]

[69] For media-specific analysis see Hayles, 'Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep'; Hayles, *Writing Machines*, p. 24.

# 1. THE AMNESIAC'S MEMORY ECOLOGY: BUMPING INTO THE PAST IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE UNCONSOLED* (1995)

## Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Unconsoled* (1995) was once described as 'one of the strangest books in memory'.[1] In this chapter, I twist this slightly: it is one of the strangest books *on* memory. Memory has long been considered one of the central themes of the Nobel-Prize winning work of Ishiguro: Yugin Teo, in his book *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*, goes so far as to claim that '[t]he work of memory is an aspect of [Ishiguro's] writing that makes him unique among his contemporaries', while Ana-Karina Schneider notes that Ishiguro's 'subtle treatment of memory […] is not only formally outstanding but epistemologically complex'.[2] *The Unconsoled* is no exception to this. It is a novel narrated by Ryder, a man who frequently appears to have severe amnesia, and who is seemingly lost in an unfamiliar environment among unfamiliar people – unfamiliar, that is, except for the appearance of several supposed strangers with whom, it is only gradually revealed, Ryder is in fact intimately acquainted.

Ishiguro has described *The Unconsoled* as 'a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself'[3]– a feature of the novel which will become key to my reading of ecological memory in this

[1] Review excerpt on book cover. Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (Faber and Faber, 1995).
[2] Yugin Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 151; Ana-Karina Schneider, 'Flying Machines and Time Experiment in Kazuo Ishiguro's "Bewilderment Trilogy"', *English Studies* 103.2 (2022), pp. 247-266 (p. 27).
[3] Jaggi, 'Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi', p. 114. See also Peter Oliva, 'Chaos as Metaphor', p. 123.

chapter. My reading uses insight from contemporary memory studies to newly highlight the way memory and media function in an understanding of the lived biography of the novel, and particularly how memory is depicted as the presentification of Ryder's biography within the physical space of the city. This argument for the presentification of biography draws on the work of Ana-Karina Schneider, who suggests that *The Unconsoled* proposes 'a spatial disposition of events, whereby several avatars of the same character, *déjà vus* and temporal overlaps are laid out paratactically rather than chronologically'.[4] I recognise this spatial disposition of events as a reordering of time which is representative of an ecological model of memory.

I examine both the conspicuous absence of certain media types – such as writing and photographs – to aid the narrator's memory, and the contrasting importance of the narrator's environment for memory processes in the novel. I read the novel as an illustration and interrogation of cognition wherein the strange unreality of the novel – and the removal of the narrator's contextual knowledge of himself and his surroundings – puts both memory and media at the structural and thematic centre. In his representation of the entanglement between the narrator and his environment, Ishiguro reaches an understanding of memory which is comparable to an ecological approach to memory.

The focus of *The Unconsoled* on both memory and media, together with its peculiar representation of biography, provide a useful case study for an ecological reading of memory. Through all its strangeness, the novel constantly turns the reader's attention to what memory is and does, depicting memory as an

[4] Schneider, 'Flying Machines and Time Experiment', p. 29.

emergent process and centering the narrator's encounters and interactions with objects in his physical environment. Ryder, the narrator of the text, arrives as the novel begins at a hotel in an unknown, 'pan-European, resolutely unspecified' city;[5] there he must fulfil an unknown (but apparently very important) agenda.

The novel follows Ryder's harried meanderings through the city as he is buffeted between a series of unexpected appointments (for which he is invariably late) across a physical landscape which morphs as he moves through it – for example, buildings which are explicitly described as being at some distance from one another later become conjoined and, at another critical juncture, a piano is found inside a toilet cubicle.[6] Throughout all of this confusion, tension grows as 'Thursday night' – an important public event, the precise nature of which is unclear, but at which Ryder will feature in some central way – draws closer.

In Ryder, Ishiguro offers us a narrator who has little to no initial, functional understanding of where he is, why he is there, or his relation to the people he encounters. Much of the text is infused, for example, with the anxiety and frustration Ryder feels at meeting people who seem to be strangers to him, only to gradually realise he has known them for years – including a pair of strangers who are slowly (and only ambiguously) revealed to be his long-term partner and her child. Knowledge of the narrator's life and circumstances is denied not only to the reader, as is the case at the opening of most novels, but also to the narrator: Ryder's understanding of himself and his circumstances therefore appear to develop in line with the reader's own.

---

[5] Catherine Charlwood, 'National Identities, Personal Crises: Amnesia in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Buried Giant', *Open Cultural Studies* 2.1 (2018), pp. 25-38, (p. 29).
[6] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 338.

The fictional representation of memory in *The Unconsoled* reaches an ecological approach to memory in the following ways: i) by setting out an interconnected web of actors and events shown (even where this contradicts real-world logic) in terms of their relation to a single subject, and ii) by focusing on a narrator with minimal prior understanding of his own identity and past, so that every event of the novel hinges on how Ryder responds to memory objects as he apprehends them and their affordances. Below, I discuss several further aspects of ecological memory which can be recognised in this text, and in doing so explore the pertinence of the ecological model to non-digital objects.

My reading of this novel focuses on Ishiguro's representation of the relationship between memory and memory objects in *The Unconsoled*, highlighting the avoidance of obvious memory objects and the inclusion, instead, of the more unusual memory objects which Ryder does encounter. This takes up two prevalent themes in existing discussions of the novel – those of memory and narrative time. The strange unreality of the world of *The Unconsoled* – which is similarly identified by Carlos Villar Flor (2000) as the novel's 'global unreliability' and by Cynthia Quarrie (2014) as its epistemological and ontological unreliability – has led to several attempts to parse the relationship between Ryder's apparent forgetfulness and the distortion of narrative time.[7] Scholars such as Barry Lewis (2000), Richard Robinson (2006), Natalie Reitano (2007), A. Harris Fairbanks (2013), and David Coughlan (2016) have variously read Ryder as having amnesia, occupying a dream world or alternate reality, or some combination of

[7] Carlos Villar Flor, 'Unreliable selves in an unreliable World: the multiple projections of the hero in Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Unconsoled"', *Journal of English Studies* 2 (2000), pp. 159-169 (p. 161); Cynthia Quarrie, 'Impossible Inheritance: Filiation and Patrimony in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Unconsoled', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 55.2 (2014), pp. 138-151 (p. 140).

both.[8] While I subscribe to the premise of these accounts, which is that the world of the novel is in some way a representation of Ryder's psychological faculty, I draw on insights from memory studies to argue that the spatiotemporal distortions in the novel combine with Ryder's strange encounters to form a representation of an ecological memoryscape.

My suggestion that the novel can be read as a depiction of ecological memory rests on its representation of media. While, in Daniel Punday's terms, a media novel is a novel 'in which media other than writing appear as a thematic or structural element', many memory objects in *The Unconsoled*, including writing, conspicuously disappear from the text at crucial moments, and it is their avoidance, and the weight of their absence, which forms a thematic and structural element of the text.[9] The anxiety which permeates the novel places pressure on Ryder's interactions with objects in his environment as a way to provide a clearer understanding of who he is and what might be required of him. Despite this, obvious contenders for remedying the confusion of the text are not merely absent but explicitly denied to us: we learn that Ryder was once given a complete schedule for his trip but has misplaced it, leaving him to run late for almost the entire duration of the novel; another character repeatedly offers up a scrapbook of press clippings about Ryder's past and career for his perusal – an invaluable resource for a narrator and reader who are both uncertain as to what this career

[8] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Richard Robinson, 'Nowhere, in particular: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* and Central Europe', *Critical Quarterly* 48.4 (2006), pp. 107-130; Natalie Reitano, 'The Good Wound: Memory and Community in *The Unconsoled*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49.4 (2007), pp. 361-386; A. Harris Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Unconsoled"', *Studies in the Novel* 45.4 (2013), pp. 603-619; David Coughlan, 'The Drive to Read: Freud, Oedipus and Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Parallax* 22.1 (2016), pp. 96-114.
[9] Daniel Punday, *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 3.

might be – but he persistently avoids this. These acknowledgements of various absent media highlight an alternative narrative possibility in which various mediations of memory might have aided Ryder. In the absence of other media, the novel focuses instead on Ryder's physical environment and the people he encounters: Ryder relies on ephemeral memory objects such as the weather, other people's voices, and his environment to get by.

This chapter therefore considers Ishiguro's representation of media and memory in Ryder's (physical) context, including how environmental factors affect volitional ('I tried to recall') and non-volitional ('as *x* happened, I recalled *y*') memory. The focal points of this study are representations of *environment*, *place*, *things*, and *bodies*: in the absence of flashback, Ishiguro gestures to the mediative nature of these objects that one can 'bump into'. I argue that this representation of memory reaches an ecological understanding of memory as an environment. Indeed, I read it as a somewhat literal depiction of that metaphor: *The Unconsoled* functions (in Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng's terms, discussed in the Introduction) as a vehicle for envisioning the changing state of memory.[10]

## The Unconsoled *and ecological memory*

I have already gestured toward the strangeness of *The Unconsoled* as a reason for using it as the primary text for this chapter – this bears elaboration. The novel is saturated with a sense of unreality in various ways, first subtly introduced when a short elevator ride inexplicably takes as long as seven pages of dialogue.

[10] Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023), p. 2.

Ryder's apparent lack of memory of the people, places, and objects he encounters is still more disconcerting to read, not only because it demonstrates his personal confusion, but because this uncanny, amnesiac quality underpins the world of the text in general.

As noted above, literary critics often refer to the amnesiac quality of *The Unconsoled* as being an issue regarding the memory of the narrator alone, but, crucially, those whom Ryder fails to immediately recognise seem as likely to think him a stranger, too. The slipperiness of this understanding is captured in Fairbanks' article on 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', who addresses the common misconception of Ryder's seeming forgetfulness: 'If Ryder is simply a victim of amnesia, why does Sophie's father, Gustav, not recognize him?'[11] Fairbanks goes on to argue that, contrary to summaries of the novel which describe Ryder as having forgotten his wife and child, Ryder '*remembers* that he has a wife and child, but in his strange world, as in dreams generally, one may have the experience of "remembering" something that one has not previously forgotten or even known before'.[12] This brings us some way towards understanding that Ryder's condition is not one of forgetting, exactly, whilst still suggesting that his series of encounters throughout the novel can be understood as a certain kind of remembering.

Other studies of *The Unconsoled* have pointed towards the ontological slipperiness of the world of the novel, together with Ishiguro's engagement with psychoanalysis in writing it, to suggest that the environment of the novel is a kind

[11] Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', p. 603.
[12] Ibid., p. 608, emphasis in original.

of ‘dreamscape’ (a setting in which the laws of physics are, as in a dream, not fixed or constraining).[13] Signs of this dream logic include: that ‘Time flows as if in slow motion, allowing Ryder to do much more than a twenty-four-hour day would in reality’ (as in the case of the seven page elevator ride); the ‘claustrophobic aura’ of the novel; patterns of fear and anxiety typical to dreams, such as being lost, oversleeping, and being unprepared for a critical event; ‘space-time deformations’; the experience of ‘“remembering” something that one has not previously forgotten or even known before,’ and a ‘self-conscious deployment of Freudian dream theory’.[14] The authors of these studies do not suggest that Ryder is actually dreaming, as this would imply there is some ulterior reality behind the events of the novel, which doesn’t ever appear to be the case. Instead, this is a world in which ‘events happen to a given subject ego in the ways that they happen in dreams and which that ego registers in ways typical of dreaming’.[15] While there is a broad, overarching sense of narrative, the novel is full of false connections and incongruent events and experiences as Ryder navigates the city without any contextual understanding of his own environment.

While this notion of the novel as a dreamscape is certainly compelling, I argue that the same principles of unreality can be applied to a reading of ecological memory in the novel, and the aspects of the narrative which point towards a dreamscape can instead be read as relating to a memoryscape: a setting in which the laws of physics are secondary, in constructing the reality of

[13] Coughlan, ‘The Drive to Read’, p. 96. See also Drag Wojciech, ‘Elements of the Dreamlike and the Uncanny in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled*’, *Styles of Communication* 2 (2010), pp. 31-40; Reitano, ‘The Good Wound’.
[14] Wojciech, ‘Elements of the Dreamlike and the Uncanny in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled*’, pp. 34-35; Coughlan, ‘The Drive to Read’, p. 96; Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro*.
[15] Fairbanks, ‘Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled*’, p. 605.

the novel, to the logic of memoring. In other words, Ishiguro's interest in creating a world which prioritises the logic of mind over the laws of physics, combined with the representation of memoring as a non-linear, emergent and situated process, conceptualises memory as a physical environment. Rather than as a linear narrativization of past and present, *The Unconsoled* therefore depicts memory as the presentification of Ryder's biography in his physical environment. Within the confines of the city, Ryder bumps into his past and future selves, as well as impossible objects from his past.

As noted above, Ishiguro has himself described the novel as being 'a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself'.[16] Responding to this comment, Natalie Reitano writes that 'in Boris, Stephan, Hoffman, Gustav, and Brodsky, one discerns a Ryder for every season of life […] Unloosed from their/his own unfolding history, each may emerge identically against some universal ground without a determining past or an altering future: they are all *present*'.[17] I suggest in my reading below that Ishiguro achieves this, in part, through an extended metaphor of Ryder's identification with other characters – meaning his ability to empathise with these characters is amplified until his identification *as* them is all but explicit.

To demonstrate the overlap between Ryder and these other versions of himself, I take as an example here the character of Stephan Hoffman, a young pianist who shares with Ryder an acute anxiety about performing due to a need

[16] Jaggi, 'Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi', p. 114. See also Peter Oliva, 'Chaos as Metaphor', p. 123.
[17] Reitano, 'The Good Wound', p. 372, emphasis in original.

to impress his/their parents. Leading up to the events of the novel, Stephan's parents have neither spoken to one another, nor watched him play piano, in many years.[18] This reflects and stimulates Ryder's own anxieties about Thursday night, which he believes will be the night on which his parents will finally attend one of his performances.

So far, the similarities between Stephan and Ryder's circumstances appear merely circumstantial. The notion that Stephan is an 'earlier version' of Ryder can be inferred from the transition from Ryder's focalised narrative perspective to a rare moment of omniscience:

> The young man remained silent for a long time and I wondered if he had become angry with me. But then I caught sight of his profile in the changing light and realised he was turning over in his mind a particular incident from several years ago. It was an episode he had pondered many times before – often when lying awake at night or when driving alone…[19]

This is a transition which first delineates the boundaries of Ryder's perspective as narrator, in order to then unambiguously traverse those boundaries. Ryder's uncertainty as to the other character's thought process is made explicit as he 'wondered if [Stephan] had become angry'; he then assumes an omniscient perspective, realising the specific incident that is on Stephan's mind. This goes beyond inductive reasoning, or mere empathy – Ryder's knowledge that Stephan is troubled by this episode 'when lying awake at night or when driving alone' speaks to an unexplained, intimate identification not only *with* but *as* him. Ryder then goes on to narrate an event from Stephan's past in great detail, without any input from, or (as far as the reader is aware) any prior knowledge of Stephan himself.

---

[18] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, pp. 65-71.
[19] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 65.

Reitano notes a similar connection between Ryder and the characters of Brodsky, a heartbroken and aging conductor, and Boris, the boy we might presume by the end of the novel is Ryder's own son or stepson.[20] Adopting such readings, we can therefore see that, as Ryder 'bumps' into these projections of younger (Boris) and older (Brodsky) versions of himself, he encounters his own past and future. This transforms the temporal linearity of Ryder's life and memoring into the physical space of the city. I suggest that this reading can be extended by drawing on theories of ecological memory to include other people and objects in Ryder's environment: just as elements of Ryder's past are revealed through encounters with these earlier and later versions of himself, he also bumps into old schoolmates, his childhood bedroom, and his old family car, despite being in a Central European country far from the Worcestershire countryside in which he was raised.

By using the novel to illustrate a world in which memory and reality are equally unreliable, Ishiguro represents the fallacies and strange connections experienced as part of the memoring process by externalising and realising them. Where a person might internally (and perhaps subconsciously) make an association between, for example, an event they are anxious to attend and experiences from their childhood, Ishiguro represents these associations in *The Unconsoled* with the sudden and strange appearance of an 'old ruined car' which Ryder purportedly recognises as his parents' – despite, as mentioned above, the novel taking place in an unspecified city in Central Europe, and Ryder having been raised in Worcestershire – outside an event at which he is nervous about

[20] Reitano, 'The Good Wound'.

speaking publicly.[21] Similarly, as I detail in my analysis of the body as a memory object, painful memory is represented in the novel by a physical wound. I read these encounters as representational of how a memoring subject encounters their physical environment, with the narrator bumping into the past in his physical environment.

One of the defining aspects of ecological memory put forward by Andrew Hoskins is the '(re)ordering of the past by and through multiple connectivities of times, actors and events'.[22] This is a phrase introduced by Hoskins (as seen in the Introduction above) in relation to the digital memory ecology, referring to the ways in which this (re)ordering of the past is achieved by new digital media according to the perceived immediacy and permanence of memory objects stored and shared digitally (discussed further in Chapter Four). This connectivity is made literal – and physical – in *The Unconsoled*, as the encounters that Ryder has with people, places, and objects in the novel are elements of other times (his past and future) being brought into a perpetual present set in the confines of an unnamed city.

Hoskins' description of ecological memory as re-ordering the past is key to my reading of *The Unconsoled.* Rather than arranging times, actors, and events chronologically, the lived biography frames every aspect of Ryder's life and history in an unknown city where it is 'always not yet time and already too late'.[23] Whether Ryder's experience of time in the novel can be defined as

[21] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 261.
[22] Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85-109 (p. 87).
[23] Reitano, 'The Good Wound', p. 372.

'present' is debated among literary critics. While Matthew Mead observes that, aside from describing memory, 'the present tense is entirely absent from the novel's narration', others have pointed to the compounding of Ryder's past and future as the creation of a 'perpetual' or 'permanent' present.[24]

Rather than forcing either view of time onto a reading of *The Unconsoled*, it is more useful to consider how the distortion of temporality serves to orient the narrative in a self-contained and atemporal space in which the past and present can co-exist. The circular, cyclical structure of the narrative facilitates its presentification of Ryder's biography. The novel opens with Ryder's arrival at the hotel – itself a liminal space within the city – and ends with something just short of a departure, as Ryder circles the city on a tram and anticipates his next trip to Helsinki.[25] While time in *The Unconsoled* is figured as an approach to 'Thursday night', Fairbanks notes that 'the conclusion is figured not as the climax of a recognition plot but as a deliberate anti-climax'', further suggesting that 'the story constitutes not the single trajectory of a life but one episode in a cyclical pattern that is about to renew itself'.[26] While the novel takes place over several days, by framing Ryder's visit to the city as 'one episode in a cyclical pattern that is about to renew itself', the narrative resists the imposition of a longer temporal trajectory. The issue at hand, then, is not so much whether the present does or does not exist in the novel, but rather how it synchronises with elements of the past.

[24] Matthew Mead, 'Caressing the Wound: Modalities of Trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Textual Practice* 28.3 (2014), pp. 505-507; Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', p. 610.
[25] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 535.
[26] Fairbanks, Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, p. 617.

Throughout the novel, Ryder physically encounters objects of the past, manifesting the experience of memory as something which can only ever occur in the present, whereas devices such as flashback might otherwise imply a 'return' to the past. This represents a disordering – or re-ordering – of time according to its context as embedded in the present, connecting times, actors and events in the single atemporal zone of the novel. This reflects the emphasis in contemporary work in memory studies on recognising memory as an emergent process which is always grounded, first and foremost, in its present context, resisting narratives that would suggest that memory objects are primarily things of the past.

This re-ordering is isolated in *The Unconsoled* to Ryder's perspective, with events of the novel converging around his experience alone, turning the physical environment of the city into a kind of lived biographical space where Ryder's childhood coexists with his youth and old age. Each of these elements of Ryder's environment substitute for conventional memory and narrative flashback, establishing memory as something which is not an isolated, ruminative act but instead something grounded in the narrator's present surroundings.

Rather than conceiving memory as a return to the past, as through flashback, this idea of showing memory as something Ryder 'bumps into' evokes a sense of memory being always emergent from its present context.[27] Drawing on insight from contemporary memory studies, we can see that the novel itself presents an ecological representation of memory: Ishiguro has reconceived

[27] See Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', p. 610. For emergence, see Paul Humphreys, *Emergence: A Philosophical Account* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

memory as a lived and present encounter. In this representation of memory, as I demonstrate below, the focus is on how Ryder – the memoring subject – responds to memory objects in his environment in the present moment, showing memory to be an active process emerging from the complementary relationship between the memoring subject and their environment.

Because Ryder has an absolutely minimal understanding of his own past, almost everything and everyone he encounters is initially treated as unfamiliar. For example, seemingly without any apparent knowledge that he has a partner or child, he meets Sophie early in the novel as though for the first time, though it is gradually revealed that she is his long-term partner. Rather than focusing on the dissonance between Ryder's lack of recognition with Sophie's assumption of his prior knowledge of their life, Ishiguro instead focuses the narrative on cues that Ryder receives throughout their encounters. The first time he meets Sophie, Ryder identifies her only according to an earlier description of her, noting with some surprise that she is both older and more attractive than he expected her to be: 'Although the porter had referred to her as a "young woman", Sophie was in early middle age, perhaps around forty or so. For all that, she was somewhat more attractive than I had expected.'[28] This first perception, including Ryder's reference to his father-in-law as 'the porter', makes no suggestion of the relationship between Ryder and Sophie as anything other than strangers.

Almost immediately, the conversation turns to a house that Sophie has found, which she says 'might be exactly what we've been looking for,' which is the first indication to the reader that Sophie may already have a significant

[28] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 32.

connection to Ryder.[29] Rather than questioning the peculiarity of this, Ryder first goes along with it ('Ah yes. Good.') and then elaborates:

> I remained silent, but only partly because of my uncertainty as to how I should respond. For the fact was, as we had been sitting together, Sophie's face had come to seem steadily more familiar to me, until now I thought I could even remember vaguely some earlier discussions about buying just such a house in the woods.[30]

This is typical of Ryder's encounters with people and places in the novel, few of which he seems to be prepared for or to fully understand. Ryder outwardly shows very little anxiety about not knowing who Sophie is or the events she references, and indeed never goes to any lengths to tell anyone that he doesn't know them or understand the references they make to his past. Instead, he (generally) passively allows others to lead him from place to place, not scrambling for social cues but simply responding to whatever arises.

The sense in which Sophie – along with many other environmental objects in the novel – becomes 'steadily more familiar' to Ryder is consistent with the Freudian dream logic of the novel as outlined by A. Harris Fairbanks, being 'interpretable as the common dream phenomenon known as condensation'.[31] In Freudian psychology, 'condensation' includes the 'construction of collective and composite persons' by which features distinct to two or more separate persons are combined in a single dream-image of one person.[32] Fairbanks notes that the dream logic by which this occurs is shown by Ryder becoming gradually aware

[29] Ibid., p. 34.
[30] Ibid., p. 34.
[31] Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', p. 606.
[32] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by A. A. Brill (Wordsworth, 1997), pp. 172-3.

that something or someone in his environment is intimately familiar to him; I suggest that Ishiguro presents this as a quality of memoring in the novel.

In each instance of condensation in *The Unconsoled*, familiarity is gained through Ryder noticing the specific affordances of his environment. In this meeting with Sophie, it is first her face that begins to bring back memories of buying a house in the woods together; a few moments later, when Sophie apologies for 'that last phone call', it is her voice: 'I found a faint recollection returning to me of listening to this same voice – or rather a harder, angrier version of it – on the end of a telephone in the not-so-distant past'.[33] Ryder's encounter with Sophie's voice in the present forges a connection with the past by his association of her voice with this recent telephone call.

In this way, through each of Ryder's strangest encounters the narrative focuses not so much on how Ryder is responding to the situation itself (meeting a stranger and then realising she is someone with whom he has been planning to buy a house), as on how Ryder perceives the memory objects in his environment and what they might afford him (encountering a stranger and gradually recognising her face and voice). Applying an ecological understanding of memory to this aspect of the novel, we can see that Ishiguro centres cognitive entanglement to the representation of memory. In the sections which follow below, I consider how Ishiguro represents this ecological view of memory in volitional and nonvolitional acts – memoring which Ryder is either actively striving towards or is unconsciously reminded of. In both cases, my close reading of the

[33] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 35.

novel shows that Ryder's experience of memory is defined by his situatedness in his physical environment and his encounters with memory objects.

**Volitional Memory**

In *The Unconsoled*, Ishiguro represents Ryder's experience of memoring in two ways: Ryder is always either actively trying to provoke the act of memory or else memory is happening to him, as though he is a passive subject. Both kinds of memoring pivot on Ryder encountering his environment and its affordances, suggesting an ecological conception of memory. I distinguish between these two kinds of memoring as variously "volitional" and "nonvolitional" memory, respectively characterised in *The Unconsoled* by the constructions 'I tried to recall *x*' and 'as *x* happened, I recalled *y*'.

First, then, I consider memory at its most deliberate: acts of memory where Ryder is found searching for specific details or information. This ecological reading focuses on *how* Ryder makes those attempts, how Ishiguro presents Ryder's environment and the contribution of its affordances to the volitional undertaking of memory. The experience of volitional memory in *The Unconsoled* is characterised by the phrase 'I tried to recall…', as well as by Ryder's focus on the use of memory objects as potential cues. This occurs in two main ways: through the use of a physically present memory object, and by reflecting on the environmental context of an object which is absent. An ecological reading of memory in *The Unconsoled* demonstrates that Ryder uses a volitional method for memoring which focuses on the interconnectedness of objects in his physical environment.

The close reading which follows is of volitional acts of memory in *The Unconsoled* which exhibit an ecological conception of memory as embedded within a broader system of interacting elements in two distinct ways. First, memory *objects* are always embedded within their environment: the apprehension of a memory object always intersects with perceptions of its physical context. Second, memory *acts* are always embedded within their environment: the physical surroundings of the memoring subject, regardless of their relation (or non-relation) to the act of memory, can either afford memoring or are an impediment to memoring. I divide my analysis of volitional memory to highlight the ecological context of memory objects and memory acts in turn.

I focus here on one recurring motif throughout the novel: a question relating to football trivia which has apparently been put to Ryder before the outset of the text, and which he repeatedly attempts to answer. The question itself, and how Ryder came to be asked it, are details which are as slippery as any other in the novel. Early in the novel, Ryder mentions a 'little quiz question' that had been put to him by a fellow passenger on the plane journey he has 'just' completed – implying that this encounter refers to the day immediately prior to the novel's opening. In this first iteration of the event, Ryder notes that, while he was 'studying the schedule for this visit… the man next to me had awoken and after a few minutes… he had leaned over and put to me some little quiz question, something about World Cup footballers.'[34] The accuracy of this is later cast into doubt as Ryder refers to the same event as having occurred on a plane journey

[34] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 15.

years previously, and, rather than studying his week's schedule in this instance, he later claims he was reading a book.[35]

Indeed, the quiz question itself is never clarified either, as each time it arises in the novel Ryder is attempting to think of a different piece of trivia: variously the names of the entire Dutch football team, the names of three pairs of brothers who had all played together in World Cup finals, and the name of the second goal-scorer in a World Cup match between the Netherlands and Italy.[36] Three common factors in each reference to this quiz question are the volitional act of memory (Ryder's mindful attempts to think of the various footballers' names), its interruption by various environmental stimuli, and Ryder's frustration when memoring is obstructed. This motif of the football trivia question (or questions, as the case may be) serves as a focal point for the ecological representation of volitional memory in *The Unconsoled*. Although the information Ryder is seeking bears no apparent relation to personal sentiment and does not serve any practical purpose in alleviating his many sources of confusion, these instances come to represent Ryder's more general difficulties in understanding the most crucial details of his circumstances.

We see this is the case in the narrator's first mention of the football trivia question, as the only notable importance of the encounter is the fact that it interrupted Ryder's only chance to study the schedule for the trip which comprises the entire novel. As Ryder collapses into his hotel room for the first time, he begins to realise that something important might be at stake in the week ahead of him:

---

[35] Ibid., p. 162.
[36] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 15, 162, 245.

'this city was expecting of me something more than a simple recital. But when I tried to recall some basic details about the present visit, I had little success.'[37] It is during this attempt to think of what the visit might have in store for him, or what his schedule might have been, that Ryder first thinks of his fellow passenger on the plane, who had interrupted his study of it. The football trivia question is therefore introduced as an indirect response to the more immediately pressing question of Ryder's schedule, a failure of memory which plagues him throughout the narrative.

Ryder's many anxieties throughout the novel derive from this first failure to learn his schedule: as a result, he spends the duration of the novel perpetually in the wrong place, running late, and letting people down. Ryder's later attempts to think of the names of the footballers always refers back to this first account of the trivia question, and therefore becomes symbolic of his struggle to think of important information regarding his visit and, more generally, his past.

The idea that memory objects – such as Ryder's schedule – are never perceived in isolation, but rather as part of a vast, interconnected ecological system is, as discussed in the Introduction, at the core of existing theories of ecological memory.[38] In Ishiguro's representation of volitional memory acts in *The Unconsoled*, an awareness of this interaction of elements is often found in the way Ryder tries to reach whatever information he is missing by touching on whatever relevant, peripheral details he can think of. We can think of this in terms of ecology: the affordances of a memory object are not only determined by the

[37] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 15.
[38] See, for example, Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies', *Memory Studies* 9.3 (2016), pp. 348-357; Tim Fawns, 'Remembering in the wild: recontextualising and reconciling studies of media and memory', *Memory, Mind & Media*, 1:e11 (2022).

physical qualities of this or that object, nor even the entanglement of these qualities with the memoring subject, but by the whole system of memory objects bound up in an ecology. In other words, memory objects exist within – and their affordances are determined by – their physical context.

Ryder's approach to memoring as a system of interacting elements is illustrated by his attempts to think alternately of the content of his schedule and the answer to the football trivia question. Trying to think of his schedule, Ryder says, 'I could recall the very texture of the thick grey paper on which the schedule had been typed, the dull yellow patch cast on it by the reading light, the drone of the plane's engines – but try as I might, I could remember nothing of what had been written on that sheet.'[39] In his attempt to think of the content of the schedule, Ryder casts around for the information that he needs, piecing together the context in which he read it. He clearly has no trouble envisaging the environment in which that information was embedded, from the 'thick grey paper' to the 'dull yellow patch cast on it by the reading light' and even the 'drone of the plane's engines' as he read it. This also makes a clear distinction between the book-object (the 'thick grey paper' of the schedule) and its text (the schedule itself). Although this does not ultimately bring Ryder to knowledge of his week's agenda, the process suggests that Ryder is hopeful that a heightened consciousness of the environment in which he encountered the schedule should lead him to the information it contained – he is frustrated ('but try as I might') when it does not. Ishiguro presents Ryder as deploying what we can understand as an ecological conception of memory: in Ryder's method of setting out the contextual

[39] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 15.

information that he *does* know, in order to think of the details that he doesn't, we see an awareness of an interconnected and interdependent web of elements which were present when he was looking at his agenda, and perceives that this knowledge will render it possible to extrapolate the information he is missing from them.

In a later attempt to think of the answer to a football trivia question – the name of a Dutch footballer who scored against Italy in a World Cup – Ryder repeats the process shown above, in which Ryder describes the environmental context in which he first read his schedule. Trying to think of the footballer's name, Ryder tries to visualise the goal itself: 'I saw again the ball floating through the sunshine, past the curiously transfixed Italian defenders, drifting on and on, beyond the outstretched hand of the goalkeeper.'[40] The language of this description is suggestive of slow-motion replay, drastically slowing the action of the event Ryder is envisaging: the ball 'floats', 'drifting on and on', and the defenders are 'transfixed'. This slowness emphasises the way Ryder is manipulating and emphasising the information he does have access to, metaphorically replaying the moment in his mind and apparently able to visualise every element of this image except for who had taken the shot. Just as the texture of his schedule and the 'dull yellow patch' of light by which he read it, the description of this goal emphasises a high sense of precision with regards to every detail except for the information which is the very focus of each of these acts of volitional memory. The method employed in each case is the same, as Ryder hopes that associated details will lead him to the information he lacks.

[40] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 245.

In an earlier appearance of this motif, while trying to think of the names of three pairs of brothers who had played together in World Cups, Ryder notes, 'I remembered that that the Charlton brothers had played for England in the 1966 final, the van der Kerkhof brothers for Holland in 1978. But try as I might I could not remember the third pair.'[41] His frustration with this process is again highlighted by the phrase 'try as I might', marking this out as a deliberate, considered attempt at memoring. In each of the quotations above, describing Ryder's attempt to think of the content of his schedule and the name of a goal-scorer, he reached for environmental context to guide him towards an answer: the 'thick grey paper' and the 'ball floating through the sunshine', respectively. In this instance, he is cataloguing the nationalities and dates of the two pairs of brothers he knew. In all three of these examples, Ryder is reaching for all of the knowledge he has which is associated with the detail he is missing. The nationalities of the Charlton and van der Kerkhof brothers and the dates in which they competed serve much the same purpose as the environmental context of Ryder's schedule in reaching for its contents, or his visualisation of a goal in trying to think of its scorer. Ryder first begins these acts of volitional memory by evaluating what he does know as a contextual foundation from which to try and realise what he does not.

A reading of this method – piecing together elements of the memory ecology that are connected with a particular detail in order to identify that detail – can even be extended to include Ryder's recurring interest in World Cup trivia. As has already been noted, the question put to Ryder on the plane (at least according to Ryder's first account of it) interrupts his chance to read the schedule

[41] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 162.

for his trip, and this is the last and only occasion on which he seems to have been in possession of that schedule. This means that the process of considering World Cup trivia is inherently linked to volitional memory acts regarding the nature of his schedule: just as Ryder thinks of the texture of the printed schedule to try and figure out what it said, or visualises a goal in order to figure out who took the shot, so he – perhaps unwittingly – repeatedly returns to World Cup trivia because of its contextual association with his lost schedule. The connection between World Cup trivia and Ryder's schedule may not be as immediately apparent as the connection between, say, the relation between a goal and its scorer; nevertheless, it plays a similar role in Ryder's volitional memory.

A reading which draws from ecological memory to understand Ryder's method with regards to World Cup trivia therefore reveals the importance of this novel's representation of *objects* as existing within a broader context; such a reading of the outcomes of his method reveals the same of memory *acts* in the novel. While the interaction of objects with other environmental factors will affect their affordances for memory (such as the effect of handwriting on the affordances of a personal diary) the physical context of memory acts can also more generally afford either memoring or an impediment to memoring, such as through interruption or distraction. Ryder's attempts to think of World Cup trivia questions are invariably unsuccessful; in each of these volitional memory acts, Ryder is eventually diverted from his task by interruptions from his environment, thus demonstrating the importance of the environmental context of memory acts as represented in this novel.

The first instance of interruption occurs while Ryder is trying to think of the names of the players in the Dutch football team in a particular year. Having managed to name all but two of the players, Ryder describes how his environment begins to impede his progress: 'As I tried to remember, the sound of the fountain behind me, which at first I had found quite soothing, began to annoy me. It seemed that if only it would stop, my memory would unlock and I would finally remember the names.'[42] Whether or not this is in fact the case is immaterial. Ryder's acute awareness of the affordances of the water fountain – first its soothing quality, then its distraction – demonstrates the importance of the environmental context of memory acts. Ryder describes his memory as something that can 'unlock', as though through sheer force of uninterrupted will. This use of language is interesting for its ambiguity as to whether Ryder is perceiving memory here as a static object (something which is waiting passively for him to access it) or as an active, ecological process which relies on his encounters with the environment around him (being situated in a quieter environment would, Ryder assumes, enable memoring). An ecological reading of this moment can point us towards the latter in relation to the instances of volitional memory which follow in the discussion below.

On two later occasions in the novel, Ryder is similarly interrupted by Boris, the young child of his partner. Having successfully named two sets of brothers, but unable to think of the third, Ryder narrates his frustration, saying, that he 'became quite determined' not to leave the breakfast table he occupied, 'nor embark on my day's commitments until I had succeeded in remembering the third

[42] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 24.

pair of brothers'.[43] In this case, the setting (i.e. his seat at the breakfast table) has so far afforded Ryder the necessary peace and focus to think of two sets of brothers; he perceives that it will continue to do so, and so vows not to leave. However, with the following sentence the narration goes on: 'I was brought out of my reverie by the realisation that Boris had come into the room and was making his way towards me.'[44] Ryder's environment first affords memoring, then affords distraction.

Similarly, Ryder later finds himself 'lulled into a tranquil mood watching the sun setting over the deserted highway' as he drives Boris and Sophie, both of whom 'remained dreamily silent'.[45] With this visual setting and the silence of the car affording Ryder's tranquillity, he again turns to World Cup trivia and attempts to name the Dutch goal-scorer: 'I was systematically going through the names of all the Dutch footballers I could recall from that era, when Boris suddenly said behind me…'.[46] Here, too, Ryder's environment affords him peace and the quiet he requires for memory, until Boris' interruption once more affords distraction and an impediment to that memory act. These interruptions echo the initial interruption of Ryder's attempt to learn his schedule for the week by his neighbour on the plane: the impediment to memoring afforded by the water fountain and Boris' interruptions re-enacts this early event.

Examining this novel with an ecological theory of memory in mind, we can see that Ishiguro calls attention to the environment as variously affording and impeding memoring. This way of envisioning and enacting memoring is in line

[43] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 162.
[44] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 162.
[45] Ibid., p. 245.
[46] Ibid., p. 246.

with an ecological model of memory which situates memory acts as always occurring within their physical context. An environment can variously afford memoring or present an impediment to memoring, but no act of memoring occurs outside of being embedded in an environment which includes objects and settings which affect how memoring occurs and what can be brought (back) to mind.

**Nonvolitional Memory**

I have so far discussed in this chapter how Ishiguro represents instances of volitional memory in *The Unconsoled* in a way that can be read as ecological, recognising through doing so the importance of the environmental context of memory objects and memory acts. This discussion has so far only touched upon the representation of memory acts undertaken intentionally, memory acts which primarily concern an active and intentional striving for information. Such acts are characterised in *The Unconsoled* by phrases such as 'I tried to recall' and 'try as I might', placing emphasis on the process of intentional memoring as seen in the case of the World Cup trivia. I now turn to a reading of ecological memory in representations of how memory objects in the novel can afford nonvolitional memory acts, which are depicted as occurring not necessarily *against* the subject's will, but simply without it. By drawing a distinction between volitional and nonvolitional memory in this text, I do not mean to negate the considerable overlap between these two phenomena, and instead note Ishiguro's representation of these two elements of an entangled process. By identifying representations of volitional and nonvolitional memoring in this text, I aim to recognise what is distinctive about each in *The Unconsoled* and how

representations of both demonstrate different aspects of an ecological view of memory.

Instances of nonvolitional memory, which occur frequently in the novel, are characterised by the formulaic structure, 'as *x* happened, I recalled *y*'. Variations on this include, 'as I listened to his whispering, I recalled…'; 'As I followed close behind… a certain memory came back to me'; 'As he said this, I remembered…'; 'I spotted the white building… and remembered…', and so on.[47] This narrative structure suggests causation: memory seems to occur as a result of Ryder's environment. The implication here is that, had Ryder not 'spotted the white building', for instance, then he would not have 'remembered' what he goes on to describe – likewise for each example above. Similarly, this implied causation suggests that Ryder's role in these instances is not that of the *actor*, but of the *acted-upon*, one possible way into understanding the subject-object relations of the ecological model of memory which I discuss at length below. This is, in part, circumvented by Ishiguro's frequent choice to use 'As *x* happened, I recalled *y*' as opposed to something more explicitly to do with causation: for example, '*because x* happened, I recalled *y*'.

On the one hand, some instances of nonvolitional memory are clearly linked to Ryder's environment, exemplified by Ryder's conscious acknowledgement of causation: 'his mention of my "complacency" had triggered something, causing me suddenly to remember…'.[48] On the other hand, as shown by the more frequent phrasing of "as *x* happened, I recalled *y*," the associative

[47] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 41, 47, 187, 267.
[48] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 328.

links brought about by environmental stimuli can appear almost incidental. The text acknowledges this when Ryder speculates, 'Perhaps it was to do with the reproachful expression she [Fiona Roberts, an old school friend] was now wearing, but I suddenly found myself recalling an afternoon from our childhood'[49] In this instance, Ryder is consciously aware of the affordances of his environment for memory: 'I suddenly found myself recalling' is a far cry from his intense intentionality to recall elsewhere (contrasting particularly with phrases such as 'try as I might' and the description of his more systematic approaches to memoring). Ryder does not go so far as to assume that Fiona's expression is the sole instigator of the memory act which follows, suggesting instead that it may yet be an incidental factor ('perhaps it was to do with…'). Where memory is not primarily driven by intent, Ryder perceives its cause as likely to be an entanglement of the affordances of multiple various memory objects (Fiona's reproachful expression does indeed afford memory, but perhaps in conjunction with other factors), as to be a single trigger such as seen above with the word 'complacency''.

Whether recognisably causative or otherwise, Ryder's experiences of nonvolitional memoring directly contrast with his attempts to think of, for example, the names of various footballers throughout the novel, which is a process driven by Ryder's own motivations. Unlike a volitional memory act, in which Ryder intends to think of something in particular and make considered use of the objects that may afford such memory, nonvolitional memory is initially a reactionary response to the apprehension of memory objects. An ecological reading of

[49] Ibid., p. 171.

nonvolitional memory in *The Unconsoled* demonstrates the importance of memory objects Ryder encounters in the environment which are perhaps less obviouosly able to afford memory than, for instance, a scrapbook full of newspaper clippings about his career. My following analysis of ecological memory objects focuses on encounters with places, things, and bodies and their affordances for memory.

**Ecological Memory Obects: Places, Things, and Bodies**

With the analysis that I have conducted so far in this chapter of volitional and nonvolitional memory, I have demonstrated Ishiguro's consistent presentation of memory *acts* in *The Unconsoled* as embedded within an ecological context. In the following section, I turn to a reading which examines, drawing on theories of ecological memory, memory *objects* in the novel. As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, I use the term "memory objects" to refer to any object which affords memory; my study of memory objects and their affordances in this thesis is used to emphasise that memory ecologies are co-consituted by the memoring subject and their environment. As discussed briefly at the start of this chapter, I propose to read *The Unconsoled* as a media novel both in spite and because of the disappearance of media such as photographs and writing from the text. I suggest that adopting an approach to reading this novel based on an understanding of ecological memory highlights (through the avoidance of these media) a turn towards simple environmental objects in their stead: places, things, and bodies.

Ishiguro calls attention to each of these elements of the memory ecology at various times in the novel, and the perceived affordances of certain objects for

memoring often explicitly depend on where they are encountered, and on Ryder's own physical state (for example, his state of relative tiredness or anxiety). In my analysis here, I sketch out separate close readings of place, environment, things, and bodies as memory objects in *The Unconsoled* to demonstrate the media-specific qualities attributed to various environmental objects in the novel. I also note moments in which their interaction is made relevant to memoring in the text. I describe these objects all as relatively simple environmental objects, reading the encounter between the memoring subject (Ryder in almost every case detailed below) and their physical surroundings as something which is simply apprehended, rather than *read* or comprehended. Often, this is depicted as Ryder's recognition of an object as something he has seen before. This reflects the general tone of the book which shies away from complex memory objects or assemblages. Through this analysis, I demonstrate how Ishiguro's representation of memoring in *The Unconsoled* resonates with an ecological view of memory.

*Things*

In the Introduction to this thesis, I explained that my reference to memory "objects" in this analysis is applied broadly to include people, systems, artefacts, sounds, and all manner of things that might – in other contexts – be helpfully understood in more precise terms. All are ecological objects, although they may not be *merely* objects.[50] By referring to "things" here, then, I mean to distinguish between the broader term of "memory object", which also includes people,

[50] This follows J. J. Gibson's analysis of people as ecological objects in James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

systems, environment, sounds, etc., and objects which in fact *are* merely objects. My following analysis focuses on Ishiguro's representation of things as memory objects in *The Unconsoled* – i.e. ecological memory objects which afford memory by apprehension and, often, by recognition– to argue that, even in the absence of more complex media such as written schedules or scrapbooks, media are at the centre of Ishiguro's representation of memory in *The Unconsoled.*

To demonstrate the function of things in the novel in relation to the spatiotemporal distortion which I have described elsewhere in this chapter as a presentification of biography, or a memoryscape, I take as a case study the unlikely appearance of a car from Ryder's childhood, which he encounters on his way in to an important event. In the middle of a field of nearly a hundred vehicles, all 'polished to a gleam,' Ryder spots 'an old ruined car that had been left abandoned in the grass'.[51] He immediately recognises this old car as the car his parents owned throughout much of his childhood, and this begins a four-page narration of Ryder's thinking about the car and his past. Upon seeing the car, he observes:

> There were no wheels and the driver's door had been torn off at the hinges. The paintwork had been gone over on numerous occasions, on the last of which the painter appeared to have used house paint before giving up mid-way. Both rear fenders had been replaced by mismatched substitutes from other vehicles. For all that, and even before I had examined it more closely, I knew I was looking at the remains of the old family car my father had driven for many years.[52]

The car is entirely transformed from how it looked when Ryder last saw it. The wheels and door, as Ryder knew them, are absent; familiar paintwork is buried by new; the rear fenders have been removed and replaced; and, as Ishiguro goes

[51] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 260.
[52] Ibid., 261.

on to write, the 'remains' of the car are in a state of deep disrepair. To the list above, Ryder later adds that 'Some flying object had struck the [rear side] window,' causing 'spiderweb cracks,' the seat is 'covered in fungus,' 'Rain water had pooled in one corner where the seat cushion met the arm-rest,' and 'one end of the seat had fallen through the floor of the car'.[53]

The most striking aspect of this description is not the wreckage of the car itself, but Ryder's instant recognition of the car in spite of its total transformation since he last saw it – 'I knew'. The car is, in other words, a Ship of Theseus paradox of a memory object, and begs the question: how many parts of the car would need to be replaced, damaged, or covered over before it ceases to afford memory in this way – before it becomes unrecognisable, unknowable? To what extent is it necessary for a memory object to be *obviously* a memory object? In short, what makes a thing a memory object?

I suggest that Ishiguro's description of this encounter goes some way to illustrating the similarities between memory as it is presented in the text and an ecological view of memory—and thus the value of deploying the latter approach to read this text. The physical presence of the car is the starting point for Ryder's long period of contemplation of his childhood: in this, we see the centrality of external media to memory acts. This is underlined by Ryder's general lack of hindsight and frequent inability to access even a basic understanding of his past – his encounter with the car wreck echoes other significant memory acts in the novel, where memoring is instigated by the affordances of the objects around him. Ryder must think with the car in order to perceive something of his past.

[53] Ibid., p. 263.

Ishiguro complicates the relationship between Ryder and the memory object, highlighting the dependence of memory on both the car's physical qualities and Ryder's attention to it, and also drawing attention to memory's mediative function by locating memory in the physical space of the car. The memory act described in this passage is contingent on the physicality of the car: its appearance signals the appearance of memory, greater proximity to it is conducive to more vivid 'recollections', and when Ryder gains access to the interior space of the car, he likewise 'goes into' a memory. The unlikely placement of objects relating to Ryder's past in his immediate proximity in this novel suggests that memory is something which occurs in the encounters between the narrator and his environment.

At the initial point of recognising the car, Ryder takes 'a few steps towards the wreck,' and is drawn slowly closer to the car as he begins to think of all the associations he has with it.[54] As he remembers the game he used to make of slamming the car doors (and his mother's dislike of this practice), Ryder inadvertently finds himself 'holding the car in a virtual embrace… resting [his] cheek on its roof while [his] hands made smooth circular motions over its scabbed surface'.[55] Ryder appears to be in a trancelike state as he gets closer to the car, only becoming aware that he is embracing it when he is interrupted by Sophie behind him – a break from the act of memory which is embodied by Ryder putting some distance between himself and the car and kicking it. In order to return to his previous thoughts, Ryder has to physically, and with great difficulty, enter the

[54] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 262.
[55] Ibid., p. 262.

inside space of the car, at which point he once again finds ‘a memory coming back’.[56]

Ryder’s entry into the space of the car wreck also signifies him entering symbolically into the space that he occupied as a child. He chooses to sit in the back seat where he ‘spent so many contented hours,’ and once seated, his emulation of his younger self is exacerbated by the broken rear seat which leaves him ‘unnaturally low’ and therefore with a child’s perspective of the car.[57] Once inside, Ryder’s experience intensifies and his thoughts morph into a dream, marking the metaphorical conflation of his entry into the car and entry ‘into’ memory. This is not something that Ryder is conscious of as it happens, nor is it revealed to the reader except in hindsight: after narrating, at length, ‘one of the happier expeditions undertaken in this vehicle’, Ryder notes, ‘I must have dozed off for I awoke with a jolt.[58] Ryder then immediately exits the car, and once out of it, does not think of it again. This correlation between Ryder’s proximity to (and occupation of) the physical space of the car and the intensity of memoring posits the car as a kind of memory within the logic of the text: by entering into the car, Ryder metaphorically enters into his memory of childhood experience.

The unreal logic by which the world of the novel operates invites the supposition that the car is a manifestation of Ryder’s anxiety. Ryder is persistently anxious about his parents’ opinion of him, and most of Ryder’s references to his parents regard how underprepared he feels for their arrival in the city, both practically and emotionally.[59] He believes them to be attending a performance of

[56] Ibid., p. 263.
[57] Ibid., p. 263.
[58] Ibid., p. 265.
[59] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*. p. 176, 328.

his for the first time, and music has historically been a source of discord in his family. It makes sense, then, that he might be thinking of them as he approaches a significant public appearance for which he also feels underprepared.

Indeed, we can find similar instances of Ryder's anxieties mentioned elsewhere in the novel. He is often running late and stuck in the wrong place, and on one occasion stands to deliver an important address in an open dressing gown.[60] Elsewhere in the novel, Ryder encounters a room which 'resembled exactly the back part of the parlour' in a house he lived in in Manchester, which 'quickly came to represent not only an exciting change, but the hope that a fresh, happier chapter was unfolding for us all' – just before the novel takes on a brief tone of budding possibility.[61] It is possible – given this logic, the improbability (in a realist sense) of the car's presence, and Ryder's anxious state – that Ryder's anxiety is made manifest in the car's presence. It makes perfect sense, within this context, that Ryder's parents' car should appear on his approach to an event celebrating his prowess ahead of his performance, only a few pages after he expresses concern about his parents' arrival.[62]

Even leaving this possibility aside, for a moment, we might consider that the car wreck is not the car that Ryder presumes it to be, but that he has instead mistaken the wreck for his parents' car as a result of his anxious preoccupation with their arrival. Fairbanks reads this preoccupation as 'obsessive', suggesting that Ryder neglects both 'his mission of public service' and his relationship with Sophie and Boris because he is too concerned with gaining his parents' approval

[60] Ibid., pp. 144-145.
[61] Ibid., p. 214.
[62] Ibid., p. 254.

to give anything else due attention.[63] We can read the appearance of the car as a physical representation of Ryder's past in the present: something he bumps into, or re-members into the memoryscape of the city.

The reader is posed with two options, then: either to accept, considering the internal logic of the novel, that the car has been brought into being at this improbable moment, or to assume that Ryder is mistakenly imposing a history on the object that does not belong to it. The latter might seem more readily acceptable from a realist perspective, particularly given the catalogue of changes that Ryder observes about the car's appearance. The novel is full of appearances of people from Ryder's past which are just as improbable as the car being really his parents', but these people are able to demonstrably reciprocate his recognition of them: he bumps into old school friends by what seems like perfect coincidence, and is set up to meet the daughter of a porter at his hotel only to (eventually, long after meeting her) find she is his long-term partner.[64] Ishiguro calls into question the validity of Ryder's claim that this object is the same car that his parents owned many years ago, but he also dismisses the question as irrelevant. In the context of all these coincidences, the exact nature of the car and its past ownership do not matter so much as the way Ryder encounters it. Whatever the car is, and however it comes to be here in this moment, Ryder's encounter with the object is influenced by his anxious state of anticipation.

For Ryder, the car is highly significant, even despite there being objectively very little reason for him to recognise the car as his parents'. Whether Ryder's

---

[63] Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Unconsoled"', p. 615. For more on the importance of familial estrangements and parental neglect within *The Unconsoled*, see Flor, 'Unreliable selves in an unreliable World'.
[64] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 171.

recognition of the car is correct or not therefore ultimately does not matter, as the affordances of the object are relative and subjective: the car has significance here because Ryder believes that it does and responds to it as though it must; whether or not the car's history is as Ryder believes, its affordances are functionally the same. The memoring affordances of the object, then, are dependent on Ryder's response. As a result of this, we can understand the appearance of his parents' car at this juncture in the novel – when it would be reasonable for Ryder to exhibit anxieties about his role at the event he is attending – as a manifestation of memory, an indication that the world of the novel constitutes a memoryscape.

*Place(s)*

While Ryder encounters things in his physical environment which afford him memory, such as his parents' car, Ishiguro also calls attention to the affordances of his wider physical environment. I apply ideas from ecological memory to my reading of the novel to representations of place (as in the general placement or physical context of both the memoring subject and of memory objects) and also of specific *places* (reading place as itself a memory object) to illuminate the entanglement of memory and place/s in the novel. With regard to the former, we might consider how quiet, undisturbed environments were seen earlier in this chapter to afford volitional memory to Ryder – for instance, in attempting to think of particular details of World Cup football matches. In my close reading below, I identify places as ecological memory objects in the novel which are shown to hold rich associations for Ryder, and to afford memory.

The concept of nostalgia is often linked to the notion of return – not only to another time, but to a particular place. Nostalgia speaks to *dis*placement, longing for a home that may no longer exist.[65] There is also a long history of places serving as shared memory objects for communities and cultures, and particularly as sites of pilgrimage or memorialisation.[66] While memorialisation often takes physical form, such as a monument erected, a museum built, or, less formally, flowers left, this is very often attached to the affordances of place. Even the association of identity with place speaks to its centrality to memory, a notion which has been particularly generative in research with regards to migration, language, and globalization.[67] Given that *The Unconsoled* is a story set in a city – and perhaps even a country – in which the narrator appears to be a newcomer, it is therefore surprising to find that place serves as a significant memory object for Ryder. In taking an ecological memory approach to my reading of place as a memory object in *The Unconsoled*, I highlight the first, and therefore most surprising, moment in the novel in which Ishiguro depicts place as an element of the memory ecology: a memory object which affords memory by recognition, but also invites conscious engagement from Ryder, and steers the reader towards the emergent nature of ecological memory.

I previously noted that *The Unconsoled* opens with Ryder's arrival at a hotel, which was preceded by a long plane journey.[68] He shows no sign of

---

[65] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 17.
[66] For more on this, see Shelley Hornstein, *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (Routledge, 2011); Cathrine Degnen, 'Socialising place attachment: place, social memory and embodied affordances', *Ageing and Society* 36.8 (2016), pp. 1645-1667.
[67] See, for example, *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, ed. by Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (De Gruyter, 2014); *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, ed. by Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (University of Toronto Press, 2011).
[68] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 4, 15.

familiarity with the hotel itself, with the lobby, or with the hotel staff. The novel is set in some unnamed, likely Central European, country – far from the Worcestershire home in which Ryder was raised.[69] In other words, there is no reason for Ryder's hotel room to evoke in him any kind of recognition. Although it initially does seem unremarkable, it is not until Ryder has settled into the room and scrutinised the ceiling 'for some time,' that he feels 'the sense of recognition growing stronger by the second': 'The room I was now in, I realised, was the very room that had served as my bedroom during the two years my parents and I had lived at my aunt's house on the borders of England and Wales.'[70] The slow and gradual process by which Ryder becomes aware that the hotel room was once his childhood bedroom is a form of 'condensation' consistent with the dream logic of the novel.[71] Condensation refers to the shifting identity of objects in dreams (a recurring pattern in *The Unconsoled*) such as the shifting identity of someone who appears at first to be a stranger, who later is recognised as someone with whom the dreamer is intimately acquainted. Ryder's hotel room, as the first example of condensation in the novel, sets the tone for later instances of this dreamlike phenomenon. This 'sense of recognition' that Ryder describes also identifies that the room affords memory in some way through a vague notion of apprehension.

---

[69] Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', p. 605; Robinson, 'Nowhere, in Particular', p. 107; Brian W. Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).
[70] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 16.
[71] Peter Childs, *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction Since 1970* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 139. Also mentioned in Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrtive Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', p. 605.

As with the car wreck described above, there is, of course, no logical explanation offered as to how Ryder's actual bedroom from the border of England and Wales has appeared here, now, in the upper floors of a distant European hotel. Indeed, readers might be inclined to dismiss the claim that the rooms are the same – an argument I acknowledge in greater detail below – as Ryder himself notes the many changes: the ceiling 'had been recently re-plastered and re-painted, its dimensions had been enlarged, the cornices had been removed, the decorations around the light fitting had been entirely altered'.[72] Nevertheless, Ryder is certain: this is 'the very room', and 'unmistakably the same'.[73] While one obvious response to this would be to question the reliability of the narrator, the condensation of this room is consistent with the manipulation of physical (im)possibility that structures the rest of the novel. In the setting that is continually developed throughout the novel – in which buildings move, time slows, and pianos are found in toilet cubicles – Ryder's assertion that this is his bedroom of two years seems more reasonable. What we contend with here as readers, then, is not the practical question of how Ryder's old bedroom is physically present in this hotel, but instead why it matters and what the place affords Ryder as a memory object. Further, as with Ryder's unlikely encounter with a car from his childhood, we are reminded that the validity of his perceptions does not matter as much as what those perceptions afford him.

With this, we begin to see what Ishiguro meant by describing Ryder as 'wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later,

[72] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 16.
[73] Ibid., p. 16.

versions of himself'.[74] Rather than Ryder experiencing or narrating memory as an internal event, his encounter with this hotel room is a re-ordering of times and objects made manifest: a re-ordering of place across the biography of Ryder's life, from past to present, with an emphasis on its function as a memory object. This process of recognition, and Ryder's subsequent engagement with his surroundings, illustrates how the nonvolitional affordances of the room lead into a volitional act of memoring. Shortly after he recognises the room as his old bedroom, Ryder narrates, 'I reached down a hand and let my fingers brush against the hotel rug, and as I did so a memory came back to me…'[75] This follows the construction generally associated with nonvolitional memory: 'I reached down a hand [as *x* happened]… and as I did so a memory came back [I recalled *y*]'. Unlike most other instances of this in the novel, however, Ryder has actively 'reached down' to make a physical connection with the rug in an instinctive response to memory; in doing so he recognises the affordances of the space he occupies and invites further revelations from the object he is touching.

I read Ryder's encounter with the hotel room (signified here by his physical encounter with the rug) as an illustration of the emergent nature of memory, and as an instance of Ryder bumping into elements of his past in the present of the novel. Upon touching the rug, Ryder notices 'a torn patch that had always been a source of much irritation' in his childhood, as it had impeded his imaginary games – until, one day, he realised the tear in the rug 'could be used as a sort of bush terrain for [his] soldiers to cross'.[76] The narrator continues: 'This discovery

[74] Jaggi, 'Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi', p. 114; Oliva, 'Chaos as Metaphor', p. 123.
[75] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 16.
[76] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 16.

– that the blemish that had always threatened to undermine my imaginary world could in fact be incorporated into it had been one of some excitement'.[77]

This image – of Ryder incorporating into his narrative the very thing that threatened to ruin it – is played out in the present day of the novel in his assessment of the hotel room and later memory objects. Ryder's recognition of the hotel room, for example, could very easily be undermined by its lack of similarity with his old bedroom. As noted above, the ceiling is not only different superficially, but is also larger than Ryder believes it once was. Ryder incorporates these flaws into a narrative of how the room has been altered over time, recognising the years that have passed between this moment and his last encounter with it, and narrativizing the changes. For instance, the ceiling is not simply "different", but 'had been recently re-plastered and re-painted'; it is not "larger" than it was, but 'had been enlarged', and so on.[78] Ryder's ability to patch over these differences depends on small acts of creative thinking: he tells a story of change, rather than simply cataloguing difference, and in doing so paves the way for memoring with the room.

The notion of ecological memory is key to my reading of the emergent – and creative – nature of memory that Ishiguro seeks to represent in *The Unconsoled*. An alternative to this approach would be to consider memories as discrete, static objects: as an event occurs, a memory of it is formed, and it persists in this form over time to be re-turned to – or re-membered – at will. Or, alternatively, memory is externalised in some object which itself persists, and is

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 16.

maintained over time, and can be used to remember at will. The process Ryder goes through as he encounters his hotel room balances this sense of encountering something from the past against a recognition of memory as an emergent process.

Ryder's recognition of the hotel room as his childhood bedroom might gesture toward a sense of an externalised memory having persisted over time, but his narrativized incorporation of the inconsistencies between the room as it was then and the room as it is now places the focus of this memory act squarely on Ryder's engagement with the place. In other words, Ishiguro resists locating memory in either the memoring subject's head (as in the metaphor of internal 'memories') or the objects around them (as in the rug itself being or evoking '*a* memory') in this passage. Instead, the room affords memory according to the subjective observations of the individual. Reading this passage through the lens of ecological memory therefore highlights the emergent nature of memory in *The Unconsoled*.

*The body*

This chapter has so far been concerned with memory objects which Ryder, as the memoring subject, encounters and bumps into outside of himself. The final aspect related to ecological memory represented in *The Unconsoled* that I call attention to here is the subject's body. Ishiguro recognises the subject's body as a memory object in their environment: an ecological factor which – like any other – can variously afford memoring or an impediment to memoring. Although I draw on theories of embodied memory (and embodied cognition more broadly) in my

analysis, I resist the term 'embodied memory' here due to the emphasis of the phrasing on its implication that memory itself is located in the body, and to instead highlight the affordances of the body as a memory object which can be encountered and apprehended, and as a medium with its own particular affordances.[79] To demonstrate how an ecological view of the body is reached in this text, I take as my focus here physical wounds.

For this close reading, I turn to the character of Brodsky, an aging conductor who refers in vague terms to a wound he has from 'many years ago', which 'hasn't really healed at all'.[80] It is vague throughout much of the novel as to whether the wound is spoken of literally, in the sense of a physical injury, particularly as all we know about Brodsky for much of the novel could support the idea that the wound refers to tragedies from his past: he has a failed career, appears to be fairly reclusive, and spends much of the novel lamenting the break-up of a long romance and drinking heavily.

The ambiguity of Brodsky's 'wound' is acknowledged in the text when Ryder asks Brodsky outright whether the pain he is referring to is an emotional pain.[81] To this, Brodsky responds, 'No, no. It's a wound.'[82] Ryder makes the ambiguity explicit here, wondering, just as the reader might, whether Brodsky means a physical or emotional wound, but Brodsky's answer does not do much

---

[79] For more on this, see Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Francisco J. Varela, Eleanor Rosch and Evan Thompson, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (MIT Press, 1992); Anthony Chemero, *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science* (MIT Press, 2009); Katinka Dijkstra and Rolf A. Zwaan, 'Memory and Action', in *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*, ed. by Lawrence Shapiro (Routledge, 2014), pp. 296-305; Ianí Francesco, 'Embodied Memories: Reviewing the role of the body in memory processes', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 26 (2019), pp. 1747-1766.
[80] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 209, 308.
[81] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 308.
[82] Ibid.

to dispel it. He only reiterates the same word that he has used exclusively up to this point to describe the 'wound'. This does not assert the physicality of the wound, as this response could be interpreted as contradicting either aspect of Ryder's comment: that it is a 'pain' (as opposed to a wound) or that it is 'emotional'. As a result of this ambiguity, Brodsky's wound has received critical attention according to both readings, and has also been read as a metaphor for the city's troubles at large.[83]

In a strange turn of events, again characteristic of *The Unconsoled*, the wound is shown to be physical near the end of the novel, when Brodsky appears to have lost his leg in a car accident, only to reveal that the leg was wooden – his mentions of an 'old wound' are found in this way to have referred to a lost limb.[84] The presence of a literal bodily wound here, to which Brodsky attaches a prosthesis, briefly subverts much of the metaphorical significance that the reader would like to attach, indeed may have attached, to the idea of the wound. Reitano argues this, suggesting that the apparent metaphorical significance built up around Brodsky's wound – and its subsequent undermining – is a statement on meaning in the novel: that meaning is prosthetic, and no more than a phantom substitute for what is missing.[85] This is a reasonable assessment of the scene in which Brodsky's wound is revealed: any initial presumption that the wound is entirely metaphorical proves false.

The revelation of the physical wound still does not do quite enough to negate the significance of the wound in discussions of memory and emotional

[83] Mead, 'Caressing the Wound', p. 504.
[84] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 464.
[85] Reitano, 'The Good Wound', p. 377.

pain earlier in the novel, however, both with relation to Brodsky's leg and to other wounds. The pervasive ambiguity between the physical and the emotional in the text moreover offers a model of the affordances of the body for memory, i.e. the ways that a wound is significant for *both* its physicality, and for its ecological affordances.

Before the referent of Brodsky's 'wound' is revealed, Ishiguro repeatedly draws it into associations with emotional trauma. At one point Brodsky asks Ryder, 'Mr Ryder, don't you have a wound?'[86] While there may arguably be a possibility that Brodsky is asking after Ryder's physical condition, this ambiguity is absent from Brodsky's next encounter. A little later, whilst walking in a cemetery, Brodsky comes across a woman grieving the loss of her husband. He says to her, 'Someone you love has died. This is a precious moment… Come. Caress your wound now. It will be there for the rest of your life. But caress it now, while it's raw and bleeding'.[87] This creates a clear link between emotional pain and Brodsky's frequent references to 'wounds', and resonates with the language Brodsky uses to describe his own wound (a parallel I discuss in greater detail below).

Brodsky also refers to 'old wounds' when he has a chance to speak with Miss Collins, the woman whom he speaks of as the great love of his life. While discussing whether or not they should revive their romantic relationship, Brodsky says, 'all those old wounds will be re-opened. They will hurt, they will give you agony'.[88] Indeed, it seems for much of the novel that Brodsky's 'wound' might refer to his loss of Miss Collins, as the two most important details we are given of

[86] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 313.
[87] Ibid., p. 372.
[88] Ibid., p. 431. Miss Collins echoes this sentiment on p. 458.

his character (that he was once a great conductor, and that he drinks too much) are made to seem like secondary characteristics in light of the long and emotive passages dedicated to his wound and Miss Collins. Certainly, his first reference to the wound could plausibly be an allusion to feelings of regret: 'These old wounds… They stay the same for years. You think you've got the measure of it. Then you get old and they start to grow again.'[89] Through each of these references, then, Brodsky's wound comes to represent both physical and emotional pain.

I noted previously the advice Brodsky offers a widow in the novel: to 'caress [your wound] now, while it's raw and bleeding'.[90] This echoes and illuminates an earlier passage, in which Brodsky offers the following description of encounters with his own wound:

> When I conducted my orchestra, I always touched my wound, caressed it. Some days I picked at its edges, even pressed it hard between the fingers. You realise soon enough when a wound's not going to heal… I liked the feeling, pressing the wound, it fascinated me. A good wound, it can do that, it fascinates… It looks a little different every day. Has it changed? You wonder. Maybe it's healing at last. You look at it in a mirror, it looks different. But then you touch it and you know it's the same, your old friend. You do this year after year, and then you know it's not going to heal and in the end you get tired of it.[91]

Brodsky's experience of his wound as a younger man is one of initial fascination. Interestingly, this description omits any mention of pain connected with the acts Brodsky describes. The advice he offers to the widow directly invokes this first description, particularly with the repetition of the word 'caress' in both instances. Even if we subscribe to a reading of Brodsky's wound as physical as it is shown

[89] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 309.
[90] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 372.
[91] Ibid., p. 313.

to be at the end of the novel, Brodsky's words of comfort to the widow ask that we also apply this excerpt to emotional pain: what would it mean to 'caress' the wound of losing a loved one, to press it hard between the fingers? This comparison is further heightened by the later knowledge that Brodsky's wound similarly refers to loss (as in the absence of a limb).

This image of engaging with wounds, both physical and otherwise, describes memoring with the body as a process of ecological entanglement not unlike Ryder's recognition of either the hotel room (as he reaches out to touch the hotel rug), or the car wreck (which he actively climbs into to maximise his engagement), both discussed above.[92] In this excerpt, the imagined embodiment of emotional pain is not only felt in the passive sense, but is also 'touched', 'caressed', 'pressed', and even befriended: the wounds described here therefore do not represent particular memories, but instead memory-objects with which the wounded parties engage and memor with.

The distinction between these two possibilities is found in Brodsky's close engagement with the wound (it does not offer up or evoke memory, or otherwise appear to be memory; instead, it is something that he can poke and press and become fascinated with), and in the emphasis Ishiguro places on the emergence of experience through engagement. Brodsky's fascination with his wound is an indicator of his obsession with the past. When Brodsky speaks of his wound, he mentions that 'It looks a little different every day': it is visibly changed but remains the same to touch. That the wound feels the same 'year after year' despite its visible changes expresses the same instinctive recognition as Ryder experiences

[92] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 16, 261.

when he is faced with the impossibly familiar hotel room and car wreck – in each of those instances, Ryder sees how visibly different the objects are than they once were, but Ishiguro demonstrates how they afford memory nevertheless. This process is echoed by Brodsky when he says of his wound, 'You look at it in a mirror, it looks different. But then you touch it and you know it's the same, your old friend.'[93] Although the hotel room, car, and wound are all visibly different from how they have been known in the past, they are nevertheless recognised for their persistence in the present moment and their affordances – particularly through touch – for memory.

In this way, reading ecological memory in *The Unconsoled* highlights Ishiguro's representation of memory as an active and emergent process, afforded by the entanglement of the memoring subject and the objects of their environment – even when, as in this case, their own body is the memory object they encounter.

**Conclusion**

My study of things, places, and the body in this chapter has established how the literary representation of memory objects in an ecological setting can point towards the affordances of media other than the novel – in this case, the physical environment – for memory. By undertaking a reading of Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* which draws on theories of ecological memory, this first chapter demonstrated the potential applications of ecological memory to reading contemporary fiction. As I have shown here, insights from memory studies can

[93] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, p. 313.

offer a new perspective of *The Unconsoled* as a media novel in which Ryder's apparent amnesia and dreamlike experience of the world – a defining feature of the text – can be understood instead as the presentification of the world of the novel, a representation of memory in which Ryder "bumps into" not only people, but also things and places from his past.

*The Unconsoled* offers a model of memory as an emergent, active process through the re-ordering of times, actors, and events, which I have read as ecological in this chapter. This goes some way to showing how theories of ecological memory can be applied for the purpose of a literary study; I further suggest that doing so can bring new insights to memory studies. My framing of *The Unconsoled* as an emergent act of memory, as well as my analysis of things, places, and the body within the novel has established how the literary representation of memory objects in an ecological setting can illustrate the affordances of the novel and other media for memory. While *The Unconsoled* was published in 1995, and written from the vantage point of understanding networked digital technologies, Ishiguro highlights the function of comparatively simple objects (such as the subject's physical environment, and things encountered within it) as interacting elements within a broader memory ecology.

# 2. ‘THESE ARE THINGS FROM BEFORE’: MAKING SENSE OF LINGUISTIC MEMORY OBJECTS IN A (POST-)SOCIAL CONTEXT IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S *ORYX AND CRAKE* (2004)

## Introduction

My reading of Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2004) in this chapter draws on theories of ecological memory to consider how two parallel extinctions in the novel – of humanity and of human languages – engage language as a mode of cultural preservation.

The present focus on sociality and linguistic memory objects extends the understanding of ecological memory which I set out in Chapter One in relation to individual experience. Whereas my analysis of *The Unconsoled* considered the subject’s physical environment as the contextual setting of memoring, my reading of *Oryx and Crake* turns to the social and cultural contexts which frame memory acts. This sets out an ecological approach to understanding a deeply social aspect of memory processes, the creation and curation of memory objects through a shared and co-created language system, as set apart from the notion of individual or collective memory. In other words, this chapter contributes to the ongoing discussion of ecological memory’s reframing of memory within – and without – a social context. Jimmy/Snowman’s isolation exacerbates the inherently social nature of linguistic expression, as he constantly reflects on how meaning is given shape by social and cultural contexts. As I go on to discuss later in this chapter, this also highlights the subjective access to a shared system: linguistic memory objects are created using a socially co-created language, but expressed and interpreted subjectively.

Atwood's depiction of language as a means of mediating memory in *Oryx and Crake*, particularly through contrasting sociality and isolation, demonstrates the embeddedness of linguistic memory objects within a broader ecological system, and the importance of understanding linguistic memory objects as created and encountered within that context. By deploying an ecological view of memory in my analysis of this novel, I demonstrate that the social production of meaning gestures towards the social aspect of creating and interpreting linguistic memory objects, and that as a means of mediation in the novel, selectivity of language is shown to shape meaning and, by extension, memory.

*Oryx and Crake,* the first instalment of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, follows the journey of a man (known as Snowman in the present, and as Jimmy in narrative flashbacks to his pre-apocalyptic life) who lives among genetically engineered humanoid creatures called 'Crakers'. For the majority of the novel, Snowman is presumed to be the sole human survivor of an extinction-level pandemic event – an act of bioterrorism enacted by Jimmy's best friend, Crake. As a character who is deeply interested in language, both its purpose and its meaning, Jimmy/Snowman's narrative perspective raises questions around the centrality of language to human memory, and situates these questions at the tipping point of human extinction in this novel.[1]

Believing himself to be the last surviving human, Snowman witnesses the death throes of civilization in general alongside those of his own language.[2] In

[1] See Andrew Tate, '"In the beginning, there was Chaos": Atwood, apocalypse, art', in *Apocalyptic Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 61-82.
[2] See J. Brooks Bouson, '"It's Game Over Forever": Atwood's Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39 (2004), pp. 139-156.

Snowman's view, the use of language itself becomes an explicit act of remembering. Merely by his capacity to use, think with, and communicate with language, Snowman is memoring a pre-apocalyptic human society. Although by the end of the novel Snowman is proven not to be alone in surviving the pandemic, I refer throughout this chapter to Snowman as the last surviving human in emulation of his own sense of being so, and in order to highlight how the conceit of the lone survivor is used in the early chapters of *Oryx and Crake*.

My reading of the novel is informed by Atwood's commitment to defining the genre of speculative fiction as 'things that could really happen' and her consignment of the *MaddAddam* trilogy to this genre.[3] Fiction, in this view, can be considered as speculative fiction according to its closeness both to literary realism and to 'real-world' speculation: speculation that we generally understand to be nonfictional, such as that which is used to define climate futures, in stock market projections, and by national security agencies.[4] As a work of speculative fiction, and with a consciousness of Atwood's own understanding of this genre, *Oryx and Crake* has received significant attention for its depiction of environmental collapse in the near future as a result of human excess, applying real-world observations to the fictionalisation of the near future.[5] That this genre

---

[3] Margaret Atwood, 'Margaret Atwood: the road to Ustopia', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2011, <www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/14/margaret-atwood-road-to-ustopia> [accessed 9 August 2024].

[4] Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (Virago, 2012). See also Ashley Winstead, 'Beyond Persuasion: Margaret Atwood's Speculative Politics', *Studies in the Novel* 49.2 (2017), pp. 228-249.

[5] See, for example, literary criticism of *Oryx and Crake* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy in: Dana Phillips, 'Collapse, Resilience, Stability and Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy,' in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture* ed. Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham, and Louise Squire (Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 139-158; Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley, eds., *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (University of Calgary Press, 2013); Alejandra Ortega, 'Calculating the Costs: Effects of Land Consumption

lends itself to this kind of literary criticism supports my use of the text in this thesis: Atwood's own understanding of speculative fiction speaks to her close attention to the world in which she writes, and although *Oryx and Crake* is fiction, it makes astute observations about the current workings of the world and – in Atwood's terms – real speculations about possible futures (even if sometimes in hyperbolic terms). I argue that this extends to the representation of media and memory in *Oryx and Crake*.

Just as she is attentive to the political and environmental conjuncture, I suggest that Atwood is, in *Oryx and Crake*, attending to the memoring media landscape of the early 2000s as typified by, for example, the mainstreaming of the early internet, the normalisation of mobile phones, the third rise of videogames, and the rise of biotechnology. In outlining the importance of novels to understandings of memory (and evolving conceptions of memory), Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng claims that contemporary novels 'function *as a critical response to* and as a vehicle for envisioning the changing state of memory'.[6] *Oryx and Crake*, particularly in light of Atwood's view of speculative fiction, makes a strong case study for the function of the novel as a critical response to the changing state of memory, and changing conceptions of memory and media. The rising importance of language and literature within the post-pandemic world of the novel contributes to Snowman's perception of himself as having been tasked with the preservation of all humanity.

---

in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 29, no. 3 (2022), pp. 726-750.

[6] Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023), p. 2, emphasis added.

My analysis of speculative fiction as a model of ecological memory is informed by memory studies scholarship on the link between memory and imagined futures. In 'Memory Ecologies', Andrew Hoskins points towards 'a growing body of work that calls for a refocusing of memory studies to rebalance its past-oriented *modus operandi* to more fully account for the influence of the future as imagined, desired and feared by individuals and groups, on how the past is remembered, interpreted and managed and vice versa'.[7] As I argue throughout this thesis, it is the vantage point of digital cultures which shapes the ecological representation of memory and media in the selected novels; in my reading of *Oryx and Crake*, I emphasise the influence of imagined – or speculative – futures on how memory is represented. This offers a new way of understanding the interplay between representations of memory in the novel and its grounding in an imagined future.

An ecological memory approach to this novel particularly highlights the social aspect of memory, i.e. how memory objects are fashioned and interpreted through socially-constructed language systems. In order to develop my ecological reading of the novel, I first consider the social production of meaning with linguistic memory objects in order to demonstrate, drawing on insights from contemporary memory studies, the emergent nature of memory through mediation and interpretation in *Oryx and Crake*. Following this, I consider how this novel treats texts and book objects as always embedded in a wider context, taking into account both the sociocultural and material context of linguistic memory objects. Through this analysis, I argue that the relationship between

[7] Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies' *Memory Studies* 9.3 (2016), pp. 348-357.

memory and media which is presented in *Oryx and Crake* is analogous with contemporary theories of ecological memory because of its demonstrated interest in memory as an emergent process and the interconnectedness of the memory ecology. This turn towards the social aspect of memory, in particular, forms the premise for discussions of shared memory objects in Chapter Three.

**Language and Society**

My ecological memory approach to reading language and society in *Oryx and Crake* draws from media ecology in considering the media environment as that which structures the way people see and think, feel and act.[8] For the majority of the novel, language death appears to be beyond doubt and its extinction imminent which, I argue here, transforms its affordances for memoring. I refer to language death, in sociolinguistic terms, to signify the extinction of a native-speaking community.[9] Echoing the fate of many human languages throughout history, language death in *Oryx and Crake* is the direct result of speciocide.[10]

While the apocalyptic events of *Oryx and Crake* have implications for all human languages, it is the death of English which Atwood explores in the novel, through Snowman's narrative perspective and his interactions with the Crakers. The extent to which English can be said to survive in these conditions is extremely limited: in the novel the language is reduced to its usage by a sole native speaker, and the changed sociocultural context of the Crakers' small community sees

[8] Neil Postman, 'The Humanism of Media Ecology', keynote address delivered at the inaugural Media Ecology Association Convention, Fordham University, New York, June 16–17 (2000).
[9] David Crystal, *Language Death* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[10] Ibid., pp. 89-119.

many of the language's referents either transformed or else destroyed in the post-apocalyptic landscape.[11] In their article on 'Endangered Languages', Low et al. describe the inseparability of language from its native culture, stating that 'language death entails two significant [and, they argue, intertwined] losses: the loss of cultural heritage and a unique system of thought expression'.[12] Snowman has experienced these losses acutely. The imminent loss of language as a system of thought expression haunts Snowman throughout *Oryx and Crake*, a preoccupation expressed through his encounters with linguistic memory objects.

Although the Crakers speak fluent English insofar as it is required of them in their highly sheltered early years, their initial inability to understand colloquialisms, abstraction, and references to anything of the pre-catastrophic world nevertheless places Snowman – at least for the majority of the novel – as the sole witness of the death of language, inhibiting his ability to communicate about the past. It is only once the Crakers' understanding of language and storytelling begins to develop under Snowman's mentorship, and as Snowman finds evidence of other human survivors – in other words, when language becomes a shared system once again – that this threat is eventually replaced with the hope of preserving both language and civilization by passing linguistic memory onjects on to an understanding audience.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood centres the potential of language as a means of cultural preservation because of its representation of the social structures of

[11] While the term native can have problematic overtones, I use it here with conscious awareness of the connections between nationalism and culture that it often carries – and which Atwood is mobilising.
[12] Dylan Scott Low, Isaac Mcneill and Michael James Day, 'Endangered Languages: A Sociocognitive Approach to Language Death, Identity Loss, and Preservation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence', *Sustainable Multilingualism* 21.1 (2022), pp. 1-25 (p. 2).

communities. The sudden reduction of Jimmy/Snowman's language from being part of a vast social system to being the sole native speaker is a break which indicates the high importance in the novel of language for memory. The loss of a community that shares Snowman's language also removes the possibility of collaborative memory acts.[13] It is within this context that Jimmy/Snowman's story is narrated for the reader, and this serves to highlight the fact that Snowman's understanding of the past is no longer influenced by the sympathies or challenges of a present audience. Because Snowman does not have an audience, nor a community with which to co-create meaning through communication, his framing of memory is – and can only ever be – effectively monologic. In my discussion of this below, I explore Atwood's representation of language as a system that is always in flux and discuss the consequences of this for meaning-making and its affordances for memory.

A contemporary conception of memory as ecological suggests that as language adapts and changes, so does our means for memoring. Even the briefest consideration of language quickly points to the vast array of underlying – and primarily social – factors which affect how language comes to have meaning, from the interplay of multiple words within language systems, to the context in which that language exists. The very existence of the field of sociolinguistics is a testament to this, along with the long history of academic literature dedicated to the social nature of language, which I draw upon in the analysis which follows below. In the following close reading of language death in *Oryx and Crake*, I

[13] This is something touched upon briefly in Chapter One. See, for example, Amanda J. Barnier, Louis Klein, and Celia B. Harris, 'Transactive Memory in Small, Intimate Groups: More Than the Sum of Their Parts', *Small Group Research* 49.1 (2018), pp. 62-97.

examine Atwood's representation of the use of language as not only affording personal reminiscence but also as a potential means to preserve a society or legacy. Language facilitates the creation of and sharing of memory objects.

*Remembering Society: Species Extinction and Language Death*

Throughout *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy/Snowman perceives language as a way of remembering – and even preserving – something of a past society. Through his narrative perspective, Atwood represents linguistic memory objects as symbols of sociality and its loss. The consequences of Crake's bioterrorism in the novel are most immediately made apparent via Snowman's physical surroundings. Devoid of other humans and littered with the rubble of the pre-pandemic world, this is a landscape familiar to dystopian, and particularly post-apocalyptic, fiction. What is striking about *Oryx and Crake* is that Atwood constructs this image of a dying species (where Snowman is the last *surviving* human) with a focus on language (where Snowman is the last *speaking* human). Atwood emphasises throughout the text the concurrent extinctions of humankind and the languages of humankind: from Snowman's post-apocalyptic vantage point, we witness the end of humankind through the extinction of a language – while English is the sole focus of language, this stands in synecdochically for all language in the novel.

Words and phrases from the past are markers of the end-of-the-world dystopia of this novel, scattered throughout the narrative in the same vein as the abandoned buildings and human corpses that Snowman encounters. Madison Gretzky also notes this parallel being drawn between the end of language and of humanity, describing words and phrases in the novel as being 'ripped from their

proper context and set adrift. Like Snowman, too, they are out of place in this new post-apocalyptic world'.[14] Language is presented as a part of this ruptured ecology. The centrality of language to Atwood's construction of a post-apocalyptic landscape is made apparent in the opening of *Oryx and Crake*, which creates a dystopian atmosphere with vague descriptions of Snowman's physical environment.

The reader is alerted to the fact that Snowman is the sole inhabitor of what was once a populated area, for instance, by 'reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble'.[15] His isolation, and in particular the breakdown or absences of social norms is signified by the statement, 'Nobody nowhere knows what time it is'.[16] The chapter then ends with a troubling illustration of the death of language.[17] After Snowman's parenthesised wondering, '…jute plantations. (What was jute?)', sets out the use of obscure language as something of the past, Atwood succinctly illustrates the fall of human society with a moment of forgetfulness: '"In view of the mitigating," he [Snowman] says. He finds himself standing with his mouth open, trying to remember the rest of the sentence.'[18] Here, Atwood sets out the slow death of language that we see play out in the novel on a larger scale.

Both 'jute' and 'In view of the mitigating' are notable for their historicity. Snowman's inability to remember what jute 'was' or once referred to, and the unspoken significance of the complete phrase, 'In view of the mitigating

[14] Madison Gretzky, 'After the Fall: Humanity Narrated in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy', *Margaret Atwood Studies* 11 (2017), pp. 41-54 (p. 52).
[15] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Virago Press, 2004), p. 3.
[16] Ibid., p. 3.
[17] Ibid., p. 3.
[18] Ibid., p. 5.

*circumstances*', demonstrates his social isolation. The reader's anticipation of the end of this phrase may appear to detract from the notion of the privacy of language. However, we are reminded of Atwood's use of genre here: as a work of speculative fiction, this is not a fictional *present* with which we are incongruous spectators, but an imagined future in which we will not exist. The reader is a spectral presence in these moments: by anticipating the end of the sentence, we identify with the victims of posthuman bioterrorism and environmental collapse. The reader does, to some extent, negate the sense of Snowman's isolation – but in doing so, is reminded that this narrated privacy is contingent on our possible future. As the last person who understands pre-apocalyptic human concepts such as jute plantations and rhetorical configurations, the failure of Snowman's memory signals the last time these terms will ever be used. His attempts at recall are a way of marking the incremental diminishment of the human vocabulary, because this vocabulary has been reduced to his own private store of words. As such, the linguistic memory objects which still exist in this post-apocalyptic world become increasingly meaningless, demonstrating the fundamental importance of sociality to the creation of shareable memory objects.

The death of language, as illustrated through Snowman's own forgetfulness, becomes a recurrent motif as the novel goes on. Thinking of the word '*Mesozoic*' but unable to recall its meaning (nor its ironic connotations of extinction in this context), Snowman observes that 'This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space.'[19] Snowman later 'has a vision of the top of his neck, opening up

[19] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 43.

into his head like a bathroom drain. Fragments of words are swirling down it, in a liquid he realizes is his dissolving brain.'[20] Each of these instances offers an image of the disappearance of language; language lost to the individual symbolic of pieces of a society lost forever. In this way, we begin to see language objects (words, phrases, and whole systems) as memory objects. Snowman's frequent oscillations between thinking of words and phrases and forgetting their meanings is a repeating pattern throughout the text which brings language to the fore as a signifier of extinction: the reader is made to witness the end of a species through the forgetting of its languages.

A reading of ecological memory in this novel, and of this specific feature of the narrative, draws our attention to the impact of the transformation of the sociocultural context on the affordances of memory objects. Any and all comprehending audiences for Snowman's carefully hoarded words have been lost; linguistic objects are everywhere in a state of decay. Snowman encounters, for instance, 'a notebook, its pages soaked, the handwriting illegible'.[21] Although the notebook has found an unlikely witness in Snowman, the description of its material decay here signifies the presumed death of its author along with the extinction of humanity, and the obsolescence of language in a world where there is no one (or nearly no one) left to read it.

Snowman is conscious of the obsolescence of language in relation to his own past writings: returning to the Paradice compound, the site of his early isolation at the outbreak of the pandemic, Snowman finds 'a few sheets of paper,

[20] Ibid., p. 175.
[21] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 265.

which must have been the last he'd ever written' and asks, 'What is it that the Jimmy he'd once been had seen fit to communicate, or at least to record – to set down in black and white, with smudges – for the edification of a world that no longer existed?'[22] This swift revision of 'communicate' to 'record' signifies the demise of the function of language post-apocalypse, reinforced further by the description of writing that follows: 'to set down in black and white, with smudges'. This reduces writing from an act of communication – and therefore a means of creating shareable memory objects – to something futile: to describe his own final letter as nothing but 'smudges' represents the loss of language seen throughout the novel: with no expected audience, and no one with whom to communicate, language itself becomes devoid of meaning. Just as human society ceases to exist, so too does any and all meaning of its languages.

The anticipation of a future audience – or the inability to anticipate one – is therefore fundamental to the creation of meaning and, by extension, a key factor in the creation of memory objects. Literature, indeed all writing, is always speaking to some imagined and unknowable future encounter. Acknowledging the parallel between his own position and the literary trope of the survivalist novel, Snowman considers how he might spend whatever time he has left: 'he could keep a diary. Set down his impressions […] He could emulate the captains of ships, in olden times – the ship going down in a storm, the captain in his cabin, doomed but intrepid, filling the logbook.'[23] This notion of keeping a diary is explicitly stated as the intentional creation of a memory object: an act of writing

[22] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 403.
[23] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 45.

with the primary aim of recording events for posterity. Snowman sets down what is left of humanity; his own recollections are made sacred in this context where they seem to be all that is left. How are they then mediated, communicated?

In bringing the reader's attention to the trope of the lone survivor, as Atwood does in the quotation above, *Oryx and Crake* reflexively, and metafictionally, guides the reader's attention to their own relation to the text. After first suggesting that he could become some kind of castaway figure, Snowman goes on to dismiss the idea of keeping a diary, because 'even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who'll come along later and find his bones and his ledger, and learn his fate'. Snowman can make no such assumption: he'll have no future reader, because the Crakers can't read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past.'[24] There is a formal irony in these references to Snowman's isolation in language use, such as that 'he'll have no future reader', given that these phrases are found in a novel: any reader of the novel is, by nature of the text, contradicting this notion. In this quotation, we begin to see that memory objects can be fashioned with a particular purpose: their creation also often anticipates a particular audience. Without being able to imagine any reader for his account, Snowman is unable to imagine a purpose for written communication; lacking a society in which to communicate meaning, the affordances of linguistic memory objects are rendered useless.

The death of language, as a signifier for the death of humankind, is fittingly foreshadowed long before Crake's speciocide, just as the extinction of humanity is preceded by references to the popularity of a computer game, *Extinctathon*,

[24] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 45.

which catalogues those species of animal already extinct.[25] In perhaps the most sharply ironic passage in *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy encounters a household of conceptual artists whom he derisively recalls had claimed that 'the human experiment was doomed' from the moment agriculture was invented ('first to gigantism due to a maxed-out food supply, and then to extinction') and had also named the 'main by-products' of human society as 'corpses and rubble'.[26] Jimmy's mocking of the artists is read through the lens of Snowman's present existence in a world which is, indeed, defined by human corpses and rubble, and in which humankind is all but extinct.

A preoccupation with extinction suffuses Snowman's memory of a past girlfriend's 'Vulture Sculptures' art project:

> The idea was to take a truckload of large dead-animal parts to vacant fields or the parking lots of abandoned factories and arrange them in the shapes of words, wait until the vultures had descended and were tearing them apart, then photograph the whole scene from a helicopter… Vulturizing brought [the words] to life, was her concept, and then it killed them.[27]

This description of vultures picking over scraps of language, the vulturization of words and bodies together in 'abandoned' and 'vacant' spaces, foreshadows (retrospectively, as it is told in analepsis) the un-peopled post-pandemic landscape in which Snowman lives. The bringing together of the figurative death of language with the actual death and decay of animal bodies points to the broader symbolic correlation between the breakdown of signification and the dying-out of human society in the text.

---

[25] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 92.
[26] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 285.
[27] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 287.

The parallel drawn in this text between the threat of language death and the imminent extinction of the human race demonstrates Atwood's presentation of the social nature of language and the framework by which it affords both personal memory acts and cultural preservation. With every instance in which language is shown to be transient, dying, or simply devoid of meaning without its previous societal context, Atwood gestures towards the near-future of the novel, in which humans are not only extinct, but also forgotten. It is this imminent threat of the fading memory of humankind which drives Snowman to care so much about language death and his role in preserving meaning for as long as he is able.

*Language and meaning-making: a social system of communication*

*Oryx and Crake* foregrounds private memoring to highlight the idea that memory is afforded by socially-constructed systems of meaning (i.e. language) and shared means of communication. Jimmy/Snowman experiences the reduction of a vastly social system of communication (a language spoken across the world) to an extremely limited one (a language with only one native speaker). A reading of language and society informed by contemporary memory studies illuminates the contrasting sociocultural contexts in which memory objects are engaged with in the pre- and post-apocalyptic threads of the narrative. Similarly, the representation of media in this novel sets Jimmy's hugely complex media environment (one where digital media are highly prolific) against Snowman's life without electricity; this centres the entanglement of memory and language, a relationship which is present both before and after Crake's speciocide.

The meaning of language as a communicative and memorising tool in the text involves fluctuations according to the evolving sociocultural landscape in which it operates, such as the addition of words, the evolution of the meaning of existing words, and the fading out of other words as they become obsolete or pass out of fashion. Making sense of words and phrases within the wider context of their use is a frequently recurring invitation of the novel: for instance, both before and after the pandemic, Jimmy/Snowman indulges a habit of listing disused and rare words, such as '*Valance. Norn. Serendipity. Pibroch. Lubricious*', for the sake of keeping them in use.[28] While the meanings of the words Jimmy/Snowman lists are not generally generally directly relevant to the narrative, his persistence in holding onto them is tied o the historical fact of their *having had* meaning. These lists of obsolete words are inherently linked to the complex social histories in which their meanings were developed and had once been useful: by gesturing towards their obsolescence in the present, Atwood implicitly emphasises the losses that have now rendered them useless.

I suggest that the construction of meaning for linguistic memory objects as depicted in *Oryx and Crake* exhibits the principles of ecological memory: meaning and memory are always already emergent, and are always embedded in their present context, which has been formed by the (often unrecognised) past. This draws on Andrew Hoskins' description of memory ecologies as invoking 'a world of individuals and groups encountering and interacting with objects, interfaces and others, in a situated, ongoing and yet predisposed fashion'.[29]

[28] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 78.
[29] Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies'.

Jimmy/Snowman's perception of language as a means of memoring in *Oryx and Crake* exaggeratedly embodies the 'situated, ongoing and yet predisposed fasion' of these ecological encounters as we can observe the shifting affordances of memory objects according to their changing sociocultural context.

Through Jimmy/Snowman's lists of old words, for example, Atwood observes the adaptations inherent to language, as meaning is not a stable construct but varies according to circumstance and could, for instance, be differently construed by different people or at different times.[30] In her essay on 'Variation, meaning and social change', Penelope Eckert takes this further, arguing that language 'is not just a system that *happens* to change, but a system whose change is central to its semiotic function': it is the potential for change that makes language viable.[31] Atwood's representation of memory in this novel – particularly through the recontextualisation of language from the pre-pandemic society depicted in the novel to the post-pandemic confinement of language to Snowman and a group of non-native speakers – indicates that the social context of language shapes its meaning, and that language is a composite part of ecological memory.

*Oryx and Crake* disrupts the normative structures of society, and consequently of language and of linguistic memory objects, by considering how the function of language changes when the context of that language is reduced from a vast community to an individual. Although the Crakers can communicate with Snowman, in the immediate aftermath of Crake's speciocide Snowman is

---

[30] See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983).
[31] Penelope Eckert, 'Variation, meaning and social change', in *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates*, ed. by Nikolas Coupland (Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 68-85 (p. 69).

the only surviving native speaker – the only person fluent not only in the functional use of English, but in its abstractions. To study the representation of language in *Oryx and Crake* hinges on the apocalyptic collapse of society to demonstrate a *before* and *after* effect of language spoken in a community and out of it; language is suddenly reduced from a shared social system to an intimate means of preserving something perceived as lost. This makes language something more than a method of communication by which a memory object might be fashioned: Snowman understands the use of language as a kind of memoring. Just by maintaining his ability to use, think with, and communicate with language, Snowman is memoring pre-apocalyptic human society.

The sudden reduction of language from a social system to something so isolated suggests that, to some extent, Snowman's language has become briefly private, detracting from the social and cultural context of meaning-making and therefore calling into question its use in preserving anything of the social system in which it was created. 'Private language' is a concept Ludwig Wittgenstein presents as an impossibility in *Philosophical Investigations*.[32] According to this thought experiment, the privacy of language would require that another person cannot reasonably understand the language; private language is by nature indecipherable to others. This is because the very structure defining the vocabulary of private language is by nature inaccessible to others: 'The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations.'[33] Wittgenstein suggests that such privacy is inherently

[32] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §243.
[33] Ibid., §243.

impossible, that language is social by nature, and that to be truly private language would also need to be unintelligible to its user, lest the potential for its being deciphered by others remain.

To some extent, however, the character of Snowman in *Oryx and Crake* offers some possibility of a language made private via circumstance. Although the language Snowman speaks is historically rooted in a shared social system, the apparent destruction of human civilization has left him with a sense that language is now his alone – and although he remembers many old words, he does not necessarily remember their meanings. Snowman finds it impossible to communicate to the Crakers, despite their proficiency in the English language, concepts referring to experiences with which they are unfamiliar. One such concept is 'toast', which Snowman recognises they will not be able to access due to the complexity and obsolescence of 'electricity,' 'bread,' 'flour,' and 'cooking,' an understanding of each of which must precede an understanding of 'toast'.[34]

This leaves Snowman with something at least akin to a private language, rendering it unhelpful in the creation of linguistic memory objects: a language rooted in the context of a pre-apocalyptic civilization that he perceives as inherently inaccessible to the Crakers, despite their ability to communicate. Rather than a private language generated from scratch by an individual, then, as Wittgenstein imagines, this depicts Snowman's language as having been suddenly reduced from a social context to a private one by the apparent extinction of his species. This is, ultimately, only a brief glimpse at private language: language might persist somewhat privately, but its meaning still originates from a

[34] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, pp. 112-113.

social context; Snowman is still able to imagine a past community of language users that give his utterances meaning, even to himself.

Likewise, there is an irony in the presentation of the death of language in a novel – a linguistic object which always inherently points toward an imagined reader as a repository for all the language that Snowman is trying to preserve. While this irony may be apparent to the reader and disrupt the notion of private language in the novel, I am interested here in how Atwood presents Snowman's perception of his own isolation. Broadly speaking, and at least in Snowman's understanding, the social practice of language is interrupted by speciocide; the survival of language briefly appears to Snowman to hinge on his role as a lone native speaker, and then language sees a slow revival as the Crakers and other human survivors offer a return to social practice, proving that it is not truly private in Wittgenstein's sense. By recognising that Snowman perceives language as private during this middle interlude, however, we begin to see its reduction through speciocide as a form of language death which renders linguistic memory objects inaccessible, and Snowman's hope of preserving a history of human society apparently futile.

An ecological reading of Jimmy/Snowman's view of language reveals a persistent nostalgia for societies past in *Oryx and Crake* and repeated attempts to preserve linguistic memory objects as a way of holding onto the past. While the division of *Oryx and Crake* into pre- and post-apocalyptic narratives seems naturally to lend itself to readings of nostalgia for the society of a pre-apocalyptic world, a close reading of language in the novel reveals instead the permeation of this sentiment even in Jimmy's younger years, originating long before the

apocalypse rather than being caused by it. Jimmy devotes himself to the study of language despite his society's disdain for this pursuit, obsessing over the preservation of old words and old literature: before the pandemic, he hoards obsolete words from previous decades with a reflective nostalgia; after the pandemic, this habit takes on a greater sense of urgency, as he begins to feel a post-apocalyptic duty to preserve something of humanity. Just as Atwood presents civilization as already under threat of collapse prior to the pandemic, she foreshadows in parallel the death of language and, with it, the perceived redundancy of linguistic memory objects.

Jimmy/Snowman's desire to preserve linguistic memory objects is intrinsically linked to the dystopian setting of the novel and Jimmy's mythologising through language of the past: it is a nostalgia which, as Svetlana Boym defines it in *The Future of Nostalgia*, seeks to 'obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time and space'.[35] Jimmy's habit of 'ferreting out arcane lore' is impelled by 'stubbornness; resentment, even' because 'the system had filed him among the rejects, and what he was studying was considered – at the decision-making levels, the levels of real power – an archaic waste of time.'[36] The origin of Jimmy's collection of old words, then, is always tied to an acute awareness of its futility according to others, a futility only magnified by the disintegration of the world around him.

Before humanity is driven to extinction in the novel, language and literature are considered worthless pursuits in a science-centric society: an exaggeration

[35] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 18.
[36] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 229.

of the gradual devaluation of the humanities in the real world. 'The arts', as such, are long dead in Atwood's novel, and although Jimmy's humanities degree is still taught, its only value is in his qualification in 'spin': the study of language for its potential use in marketing campaigns. Despite – and indeed because of – it being an 'archaic waste of time,' Jimmy seeks out obsolete words and phrases from a time before his own 'of a precision and suggestiveness that no longer had a meaningful application in today's world', in the hope that by continuing to know and use these words, Jimmy can extend the affordances of them to remember society past.[37]

Jimmy's collection of old language is always tinged with an acknowledgement that it is ultimately a futile act, as he cannot maintain or preserve a language alone: the emergent meaning of linguistic memory objects depends too much on their broader ecological context. Jimmy initially takes pleasure in being the only person in a conversation to understand his own linguistic and literary references, peppering outdated words into conversation, making up books, and delighting in the fact that nobody around him notices, thereby emulating in adulthood the joy he found in introducing the invented word 'cork-nut' to his schoolmates.[38] Later, when writing advertisements, the privacy of his inventions depresses him because it only proves that 'no one at AnooYoo [Jimmy's employer] was capable of appreciating how clever he had been'.[39] The disinterest of his colleagues removes the joy of social intimacy from Jimmy's inventive use of language and transforms it into a mark of his isolation.

---

[37] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 230.
[38] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 230.
[39] Ibid., p. 292.

When Jimmy is further removed from an understanding audience by the destruction of human society, all language quickly comes to take on a similar quality of isolation that his obsolete and invented words once had, as the shifting sociocultural context of the language reduces its capacity for meaning. With Snowman as the sole native speaker of the language, the pandemic is the great equaliser of supposedly useful terms such as 'toast' and 'regroup' and Jimmy's stores of words that were already obsolete, such as 'norn' and 'pibroch'.[40] Early in the text, Snowman recognises that 'When they're gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone, everywhere, forever. As if they had never been.'[41] An ecological view of memory suggests that language objects (such as these words) function as memory objects. Snowman's desire to hold onto these words reflects this understanding, as he is conscious that with the loss of these words from the memory ecology, another aspect of the society that shaped them will be forgotten.

It is not difficult to apply the same sentiment – that the obsolescence of words contributes to the loss of society – to Snowman's circumstances more broadly: once Snowman himself is gone, it will be as though humanity itself had never been. As a young man, Jimmy felt a desire to hold onto cultures of the past by internalising words and phrases that had been forgotten by others; after the apocalypse, this intensifies into the weight of responsibility for preserving humanity itself through the recollection of a language that is dying with its people. Andrew Tate, writing of Snowman's role as a post-apocalyptic storyteller, describes Snowman's 'desire to "hang on [to] the words" [as] a kind of godless

[40] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 112, 317, 78.
[41] Ibid., p. 78.

prayer' and an act of 'linguistic consecration' – phrases which emphasize Snowman's sense of the significance of language in this period of its apparent privacy, as he recognises that he is unable to maintain a social system of meaning making and of sharing memory objects on his own.

The relative success or failure of language being used to preserve something of a past culture in this novel – and across the *MaddAddam* trilogy – is less the focus of the narrative than the importance of its attempt. Jimmy/Snowman's conscious engagement with the language of the past holds the sole hope of preservation, and provides a foundation from which he is able to consider the forgetfulness of society and its loss. For the majority of the novel, this is represented through the privacy of Jimmy's language as a tool for personal reflection and internalised preservation, 'like having his own baby teeth in a box'.[42] Like any private memory, Snowman believes that the language of humanity, including his stores of rare words, will die with him.

As *Oryx and Crake* nears its conclusion and the presence of other humans is made known, however, Snowman begins to consider language as a tool for continuity. Before he leaves to find the other survivors, Snowman wonders about the possibility of doing 'some social interaction' with the Crakers, to 'Help them invent the wheel' or to 'Pass on all my words', a notion he returns to immediately before his departure with an added weight of responsibility: 'He should say something to them… Leave them with a few words to remember.'[43] In both of these instances, Jimmy is, for the first time in the novel, no longer sure of the

[42] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 307.
[43] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 396, 426.

futility of language, but rather struck by its potential. At the point of Snowman's departure, language is at the centre of his offering, showing the transformation of his focus on language from a meaningless habit to a duty performed for his lost community. Alone, Snowman cannot sustain a language beyond the moment of his own death; alone, Snowman cannot prevent all of humanity from fading into obscurity as if it had never been. With the promise of community, however, there is renewed purpose in the affordances of linguistic memory objects.

**Textual Memory Objects as Ecologically Situated**

According to an ecological view, linguistic memory objects cannot exist in a vacuum any more than words can be isolated from their means of mediation. To understand the affordances of language, Atwood examines how memoring with language intersects with other elements of the memory ecology. Atwood draws attention to the act of mediation, or re-presentation, which occurs when putting something into words, and how this interacts with memoring. She does this primarily through her descriptions of meaning-making, by showing how memory objects can be fashioned (consciously or otherwise) with language and interpreted (or misinterpreted). Here I set out an understanding of language and meaning-making which draws from structuralism and media studies, which is also reached by close reading depictions of memory and media in *Oryx and Crake*. Whereas my close reading of memory and media in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* in Chapter One concerned objects which afford memory by apprehension and recognition (things, places, people, and bodies), this meaning-

making aspect of memory objects relates to objects which *represent* an event or memory, whereby information is coded and decoded to afford memory.

As I demonstrate below, moments where Atwood alerts the reader to language as a means of conscious mediation in *Oryx and Crake* are used to highlight the use of linguistic mediation as a means of determining memory acts. The relationship between a representation and the object it represents – and particularly between a *linguistic* representation and the object it represents – has long been a subject of interest among scholars. The work of Ferdinand de Saussure, and of Structuralism more broadly, sought to explain the capacity of language for meaning-making.[44] Linguistic representation always involves some element of translation to adapt the vagaries of reality into the specific delimitations of language. In a similar vein, Alfred Korzybski, in developing the field of general semantics, highlighted the abstract nature of language with his assertion that 'the word is not the thing'. [45] This is a sentiment also expressed by René Magritte's painting, *The Treachery of Images*, which famously accompanies a visual representation of a pipe with the words, '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*' ('This is not a pipe') to make explicit the distinction between reality and representation.[46] The use of language to create or enforce meaning is likewise understood as an act of representation, and is shown in *Oryx and Crake* to afford memoring.

---

[44] See Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*; William Downes, 'Communication: words and world', in *Language and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 323-367.
[45] Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, 5th edn. (Institute of General Semantics, 1994), p. 58; Edward Temple Bell, *Numerology* (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Co., 1933; repr. Westport: Hyperion Press, 1979), p. 38.
[46] René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images*, 1929, oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The fashioning of memory objects through the use of language is distinct from Ishiguro's representation of memory in *The Unconsoled*, which in the previous chapter was shown to actively avoid language, along with other representational media, as a memory object. While Atwood does engage with the relationship between memory and linguistic media, she also situates language within a broader ecological context composed of places, people, and things. Atwood importantly situates language as a memory object embedded in, and intersecting with, other media, echoing the ecological model of a system of interacting elements.

The ecological situatedness of language and its affordances for memory is a recurring concern of the novel. Jimmy is first introduced to the work of Shakespeare, for example, whilst watching 'At Home With Anna K. Anna K. was a self-styled installation artist with big boobs who'd wired up her apartment so that every moment of her life was sent out live to millions of voyeurs.'[47] Jimmy's first encounter with Shakespeare was Anna K. reading *Macbeth* 'while sitting on the can with her retro-look bell-bottom jeans around her ankles'.[48] Atwood situates this mention of 'At Home With Anna K.' amidst descriptions of live broadcast assisted suicides (which Jimmy was reluctant to watch), executions, and pornography, making Jimmy's encounter with Shakespeare – and his gratitude for Anna K. introducing him to words such as '*Sere*' and '*Incarnadine*' – pointedly incongruous.[49] 'At Home With Anna K.' is the only channel that Jimmy expresses particular interest in watching, telling Crake not to change it because

[47] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 96.
[48] Ibid., p. 97.
[49] Ibid., p. 97.

he had 'been seized by – what? Something he wanted to hear.'[50] This sentiment contrasts with the uneasiness he feels watching assisted suicides, for instance, which is the subject of the novel's previous paragraph. Jimmy's experience of *Macbeth* through 'At Home With Anna K.' highlights the importance of context to linguistic memory objects in the novel, making the relative mundanity of this channel – and its appeal to Jimmy's interest in language and literature – something Jimmy feels is worth holding on to.

In Snowman's musings in the early aftermath of the pandemic, he reflects on the phrase, 'We are not here to play, to dream, to drift,' wondering, 'what atrophying neural cistern in his brain did that come from? The Life Skills class, in junior high.'[51] Later, he says aloud, 'Star light, star bright' – followed, presumably by way of explaining how he knows this phrase, by 'Some grade-school teacher.'[52] Indeed, Snowman often refers to his personal associations with various texts and sources, where we might otherwise expect a different comment – either on their content or their origin – to follow. His first encounter with Shakespeare's writings, for example, is overshadowed by Snowman's long elaboration on 'At Home With Anna K'.[53] In contrast with Snowman's lists of individual words – very few of which he ever elaborates upon – this description of the context in which he first comes across Shakespeare's work demonstrates how the context of language participates in the memory ecology.

This is something which Kazuo Ishiguro also explores in *The Unconsoled* – as discussed in Chapter One – with reference to the environmental context of

[50] Ibid., p. 97.
[51] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 46.
[52] Ibid., p. 111.
[53] Ibid., pp. 96-97.

memory objects. The examples which I have highlighted above from *Oryx and Crake* similarly gesture out towards the contextual aspect of memory objects, and how this can afford memory.

*Names and re-naming*

Jimmy/Snowman's narrative perspective in *Oryx and Crake* points towards the politics of storytelling as it relates to memory, as it demonstrates the potential ramifications of fashioning memory objects through language. As the apparent last survivor of his species, Snowman has total autonomy over how he represents both himself and the past to the Crakers. This allows him to change his name, lie about the past, and invent a set of myths in which he elevates Oryx and Crake – his lover and best friend, respectively – to godlike status, partly out of spite because 'Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification.'[54] Snowman is able to do so because there is, as far as he and the reader are aware, no one else alive to contradict him. Although the reader is given a fuller vision of Jimmy/Snowman's past by the end of the novel, an awareness of his persistent lies throughout also highlight the privileged position he has in being the sole focus of narrative perspective. Atwood thus raises questions surrounding the potential influence that the fashioning of shared linguistic memory objects can have over public representations and perceptions of the past.

The language that Snowman uses to frame retellings of the past is under the added pressure of his being the only person able to relate to any audience

[54] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, pp. 119-120.

how humankind came to extinction. While the Crakers share some of his language, Snowman is in the position of being able to teach them the meaning of words and shape their use of language, thereby shaping their means for communicating about the past. Snowman expresses a consciousness of this when he observes that '[the Crakers] were like blank pages, he could write whatever he wanted on them.'[55]

Biases which influence his choice of language therefore shape not only his own memory, but also the legacy of humankind as it is passed on to the Crakers. Because of the transformative aspect of representation, linguistic mediation requires a series of (sub/conscious) selections of words to describe an object. The influence of this as a method of fashioning memory objects and influencing perceptions of the past is highlighted in *Oryx and Crake* by acts of naming and re-renaming. Importantly, Atwood shows this relationship between language and memory to be, at least to some extent, reciprocal: while Jimmy/Snowman's language influences memory by imposing particular biases in its representation, his memory also influences the meaning of language through repeated recontextualizations.

The most prominent act of renaming in *Oryx and Crake* is introduced early in the novel with an overt nod to the separation of identities marked out by having two separate names: 'Once upon a time, Snowman wasn't Snowman. Instead he was Jimmy.'[56] By making a clean break between the pre-pandemic existence of Jimmy and the post-pandemic existence of Snowman, the narrator implies that

[55] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 407.
[56] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 17.

there is a further distinction – of life experience, of humanity, of relatability – to be made between these identities.

At the end of the novel, we are made privy to the moment of transition from one identity to the other, as Snowman introduces himself as 'Snowman' for the first time:

> [Snowman had] thought this over. He no longer wanted to be Jimmy, or even Jim… He needed to forget the past – the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation. As the Crakers did. Perhaps a different name would do that for him.[57]

Despite the irony of this hope, which is proven futile by the chapters of obsession with the past which precede this quotation in the novel, this perception of language as a tool by which to self-consciously refashion the past reveals its use in memory and preservation. Snowman does not forget the past, but the division of his character into two parts – Jimmy and Snowman – does influence the reader's understanding of his experience, anticipating throughout the novel the definitive before/after moment which divides him. Assuming a new name 'to forget the past' demonstrates Snowman's desire not only to be someone else in the present, but *to have been* someone else before the pandemic, to now be untethered from the guilt he feels over his part in the manufactured extinction of his species.[58]

This is a reading further reinforced by the almost total omission of the name 'Thickney' from Snowman's narrative retelling. Thickney is a name given to Jimmy by Crake early in the novel, when they begin to play *Extinctathon*, and

[57] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 407.
[58] Katherine V. Snyder, '"Time to go": The Post-Apocalyptic and the Post-Traumatic in Margaret Atwood's "Oryx and Crake"', *Studies in the Novel* 43.4 (2011), pp. 470-489 (p. 472).

at the same time as he names himself Crake. Although it is mentioned that 'Thickney' comes back into use later, when Jimmy starts working for Crake in the Paradice compound, Snowman at no time suggests a substantial association with this name. While this may be in part because it is not a name that he chose for himself, it also reflects his reticence to be known according to the terms of his involvement in promoting the BlyssPlus pill which Crake used to transmit the disease that wiped out almost all of humankind. Rather than acknowledging this part of his identity, Snowman gives space only for 'Jimmy', the name given to him by his parents and therefore carrying with it connotations of innocence and childhood, and 'Snowman', the name he chooses for himself to try and forget his past.

Atwood therefore posits names as memory objects with clear affordances: in this case, 'Jimmy' affords an identity which preceded the pandemic. While 'Snowman' does not necessarily remove, overwrite, or otherwise repress that identity, the division of Jimmy and Snowman is an act of self-fashioning. This affects the reader's experience of *Oryx and Crake*, as we only access Jimmy/Snowman's narrative through the framing of his past and present selves as two separate identities.

We perceive Crake only as 'Crake' (who was originally named Glenn) for the same reason: the reader's access to the novel is always filtered through this particular representation of his identity. This contrasts starkly with Snowman's treatment of his own identity:

> Snowman has trouble thinking of Crake as Glenn, so thoroughly has Crake's later persona blotted out his earlier one… there was never any real Glenn, *Glenn* was only a disguise. So in Snowman's reruns of the story, Crake is never Glenn, and never *Glenn-alias-Crake* or

> *Crake/Glenn*, or *Glenn, later Crake*. He is always just Crake, pure and simple.[59]

This explanation of Glenn/Crake's renaming in the text is in direct contrast to that of Jimmy/Snowman's, quoted above. When Snowman renames himself, it is with the explicit acknowledgement that he had lived a previous identity, with the duality of his name throughout the novel marking out his past (Jimmy) and present (Snowman). Snowman retrospectively applies Crake's new name, on the other hand, to his entire life, suggesting that 'Glenn' was a fabrication that must be corrected.

Snowman takes on a new name to absolve himself of guilt; he assigns Crake the name associated with speciocide in order to ascribe that responsibility to him even in hindsight. This is particularly significant because the name 'Crake' was initially chosen for the *Maddaddam* game which becomes the digital gateway for Crake's later crimes. Remembering Glenn-the-child only and always through the later filter of Crake-the-speciocidist removes the sense of dual identity afforded to Jimmy/Snowman and implies that even in his youth, Crake already embodied the essence of the man he would become. Snowman's own memory is reconstructed by renaming Glenn as 'Crake', a consistent choice of language which prevents Snowman from thinking of Crake without a conscious reminder of the adult bioterrorist he became. This retrospective renaming makes impossible a recollection of Snowman's childhood as it was experienced, without the hauntings of hindsight: 'Crake' is a moniker invented after many of the narratives

[59] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 81.

being told of their childhood, and so always refers to that which is destined to come.

Atwood depicts Snowman's deliberate choice of names for both himself and Crake as a tool in the production of memory objects, and a method of shaping his own legacy. The reader's perception is wholly formed by this choice of names. The narrative retelling of Snowman/Jimmy's past demonstrates a conscious fashioning of memory via language. In *Oryx and Crake*, the effect of meaning-making through naming is exaggerated to the reader and illuminates the very real process of intentional alteration that Jimmy/Snowman incorporates into the fashioning of memory objects.

In this way, Atwood explores, throughout *Oryx and Crake*, how the selection of language constructs meaning and frames memory objects. Through acts of renaming, I have shown how Snowman attempts to carefully curate his own memory with his choice of language in order to demonstrate the importance of how memory objects are created and how these structures may apply to them. By renaming Glenn as Crake, even retrospectively, all future memory acts which have anything to do with Crake will be filtered through this choice; likewise, by renaming himself as Snowman and continuing to refer to his past self as Jimmy, there is some segregation of identity in memory acts, and some retrospective attempt at an absolution of guilt. We can see the effect of this clearly through the perspective of the reader of *Oryx and Crake*: whereas 'Glenn' is a name only mentioned in one brief passage of the text, and Crake used consistently throughout, Jimmy and Snowman are clearly distinct (a distinctiveness which I uphold here by referring to events that involve Jimmy/Snowman according to

whichever name he uses for himself at that time). These choices further demonstrate Atwood's critical engagement with questions of how memory objects are created, by whom, and how their meanings are produced.

Perhaps a less obvious way that Snowman attempts to reframe memory is by exerting control over his own thoughts by using language. Trying to distance himself from the narrative of his past life as Jimmy, Snowman says aloud, 'I am not my childhood.' The text goes on, 'He hates these replays. He can't turn them off, he can't change the subject, he can't leave the room. What he needs is… a mystic syllable he could repeat over and over to tune himself out. What were those things called? Mantras.'[60] Thoughts of a mantra quickly turn to Snowman's imperative to 'Hang onto the words.'[61] This stems from a desire to bring nonvolitional memory to a halt. That Snowman perceives memoring as 'replays' that he cannot turn off speaks to his past immersion in a highly mediated society; his desire to 'leave the room' likewise suggests an external quality to memory which could be escaped. This distinguishes Snowman's preoccupation with maintaining language as a means of preserving something of the past (the social system which enables sharing memory objects) and his general discomfort with thinking of his own past.

Snowman's attempt, quoted above, to 'tune himself [and therefore memory] out' using a kind of mantra ('hang on to the words') is the first of many in the novel. The most poignant examples of this are at some of Jimmy's lowest moments, such as after his mother dies and while he is watching the effects of

[60] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 77.
[61] Ibid., p. 78.

the pandemic play out on a computer screen from within the Paradice compound. Describing the former: 'Then he'd stay up too late, and once in bed he'd stare at the ceiling, telling over his lists of obsolete words for the comfort that was in them. *Dibble. Aphasia. Breast plough. Enigma. Gat.*'[62] Later, watching the apocalypse: 'Sometimes he'd turn off the sound [of the television], whisper words to himself. *Succulent. Morphology. Purblind. Quarto. Frass.*'[63] This strategy does not always prove useful, however. Although Jimmy notes it 'had a calming effect' in this second example, after listing words to find comfort after his mother's death, he goes on: 'there was no longer any comfort in the words. There was nothing in them.'[64]

Although not always successful, the desire to use old words as a kind of mantra to comfort himself is still a significant aspect of Jimmy's – and later Snowman's – relationship with language and society. It is the structured approach to using language to gain control over thoughts and memory that matters here, more than its relative success or failure. Each of these incidents represents an attempt to find a way out of memoring, or, in Snowman's terms, to turn off the replays. While Snowman is desperate to hold onto words (i.e. that which is dependent on sociality) as a way of memoring human society, this does not extend to his own past: instead, Jimmy/Snowman holds onto these words – obsolete because they no longer hold social meaning – to try and drown out thoughts of his own past. This highlights the perceived affordances of linguistic memory objects, which are inherently social and about sociality.

---

[62] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 306.
[63] Ibid., p. 401.
[64] Ibid., p. 307.

*The iterability of language*

My close reading of *Oryx and Crake* has so far shown that language choices in the novel – such as acts of naming and renaming – frame memory; likewise, that language may afford an impediment to memoring when used as a kind of mantra, as Snowman attempts to do. In her representation of memory and media, Atwood suggests that memory can also shape the meaning of language, such as by recontextualization. I read this here through the lens of ecological memory to suggest that the iterability of language in the novel draws attention to the interconnectedness of memory objects and their wider context; by repeating and recontextualising certain words and phrases and demonstrating their changing meaning, Atwood gestures towards the vast web of entangled objects, actors, and events that comprise the memory ecology.

To examine Atwood's representation of this, I turn to the concept of iterability, as defined by Jacques Derrida in 'Signature Event Context', to explore linguistic drift and the importance of the ecological context of memory objects – and particularly, in this instance, linguistic memory objects – to defining their affordances for memory. Iterability is, in Derrida's terms, the possibility that every sign can be 'severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its context)'.[65] The iterability of a sign is its structural potential to be subtracted from one context and grafted into another.[66] In other words, the

[65] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 307-330 (p. 318).
[66] Hannu Poutiainen, 'Additions, Subtractions, Iterations: Deconstruction and the Actuality of Context', *Journal of Literary Theory* 8.1 (2012), p. 179.

meaning of a word is singular and never quite repeatable. Derrida conceives of iterability in relation to language (the iterability of the elements of language, such as words), which I use here to read Atwood's presentation of meaning and memoring as contextually dependent according to the ecological view of memory.

There are plenty of real-life examples of radical catalysts to the construction of the meaning of terms already embedded in the traditional structures of a language system – we may think, for instance, of the recontextualization of words such as 'lockdown,' and 'pandemic' in light of COVID-19. With a longer-term view, the ever-shifting meaning of language has been theorised as 'linguistic drift', the gradual and cumulative shifting in the meaning of language over time.[67]

The consequence of the iterability of words and linguistic drift is exacerbated in *Oryx and Crake* in Snowman's relationship with the Crakers, for whom all but the most functional language appears brand new, rather than embedded in a tradition of social meaning. This means that each iteration of a word carries a proportionately higher significance to the emergence of a word's meaning in comparison to reiterations of already established uses of language. As a result, the 'special direction' in which language moves can more easily be suddenly reversed. For example, in *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman imagines a variety of inventive ways he might have explained the concept of 'toast' to the Crakers, including that 'Toast was an implement of torture that caused all those

[67] Edward Sapir, 'Language as a Historical Product: Drift', in *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1921), pp. 147-170 (p. 155). For relevant work on linguistic drift, see David G. Butt, Alison Moore and Kathryn Tuckwell, 'The Teleological Illusion in Linguistic "Drift": Choice and Purpose in Semantic Evolution', in *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring Choice*, ed. by Lise Fontaine, Tom Bartlett and Gerard O'Grady (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

subjected to it to regurgitate in verbal form the sins and crimes of their past lives.'[68] Although he does not offer this definition to the Crakers, this highlights his capability to sever signs from their previous referents and give words new meaning in this new small community.

Another dramatic example of linguistic drift can be found in the names Crake assigns to the Crakers, all of which follow various historically significant figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Sojourner Truth. This is an ironic nod to a history which the Crakers are entirely unaware of. For the Crakers, these signs are severed from their previous, American-centric referents: only Snowman is aware that they once had cultural relevance and have been recontextualised in this way. This demonstrates the importance of the sociocultural context of memoring with linguistic memory objects: for Snowman, the Crakers' names act as linguistic memory objects, a kind of externalisation of the hoarding of old words; for the Crakers, without the same understanding of the history of their names, this meaning – and the affordances of their names for memoring – is lost.

A more gradual example of the iterability of language and its changing affordances for memory in *Oryx and Crake* is Atwood's exploration of the changing nature of the word 'cork-nut' according to its context within Jimmy's life. Reading this shift in the meaning of a particular phrase over the course of the novel illuminates how the affordances of memory objects evolve in conjunction with their temporal, as well as sociocultural, context. 'Cork-nut' is the creation of

[68] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 113.

Alex, a parrot from a *Classics in Animal Behaviour Studies* instructional video with a propensity for inventing words.[69]

Although Jimmy understands 'cork-nut' as Alex the parrot uses the term to mean almond, he begins to say 'cork-nut' to 'anyone who pissed him off… who wasn't a girl,' identifying the origin of its power: 'No one but him [Jimmy] and Alex the parrot knew exactly what cork-nut meant, so it was pretty demolishing.'[70] Thus, a word intended to refer only to almonds becomes an inside joke, taking on a new meaning as a shared, but private, insult. Jimmy clearly perceives this as the beginning of a social bond between himself and Alex, despite the fact that Alex is a parrot from an old video. The confrontational power of 'cork-nut' among Jimmy's schoolmates is not derived from the intended meaning of the word (almond), but instead from Jimmy's sense that his audience doesn't understand him – a theme that recurs in his later years. He nevertheless focalises himself 'and Alex' as the only two who understand his private joke, framing the joy and power of language as something rooted in social connection – however tenuous. As such, the linguistic memory object ('cork-nut') is shown to derive its meaning and affordances from sociality, an emergent meaning in line with the ecological view of memory.

The eventual popularisation of the word 'cork-nut' at Jimmy's school becomes a source of great nostalgia for Jimmy later in life, due to its indication of social intimacy – a shift which indicates the first recontextualization of the word which determines its affordances in the memory ecology. Jimmy's first reunion

[69] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 61.
[70] Ibid., p. 67.

with Crake after they leave the compound in which they grew up together is a passage steeped in uncomfortable anticipation, having transitioned from a comparatively easy relationship spending their free time in each other's homes to a year of awkward question-and-answer communication via email. This anticipation climaxes with Jimmy's observation that Crake looks 'older and thinner and also smarter than ever,' emphasising how much he has changed in their time apart in the light of his own insecurities. An immediate reprieve to this tension is granted by Crake's greeting: '"Hi there, cork-nut,"… and nostalgia swept through Jimmy like sudden hunger.'[71] The use of 'cork-nut' here, a shared and intimate language from Jimmy and Crake's childhood, is used to quickly reassert their familiarity with one another.

Just as Jimmy previously found solace in 'No one but him and Alex the parrot' knowing what this word meant, he is now soothed by the use of a term that no one but he and Crake understand. At this point, the word 'cork-nut' takes on a new meaning for its signification of Jimmy and Crake's childhood friendship, demonstrating how the linguistic memory object can afford memory differently depending on the context of its encounter.

The significance of 'cork-nut' for Jimmy undergoes a gradual transformation from an indicator of social bonding in childhood, to a sign of past intimacy in young adulthood, and finally becomes a symbol of isolation after he witnesses the videoed execution of his mother:

> On the worst nights he'd call up Alex the parrot, long dead by then but still walking and talking on the Net, and watch him go through his paces. Handler: *What colour is the round ball, Alex? The round ball?* Alex, head on side, thinking: *Blue*. Handler: *Good boy!* Then Alex

[71] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 233.

> would be given a cob of baby corn, which wasn't what he'd asked for, he'd asked for an almond. Seeing this would bring tears to Jimmy's eyes.[72]

Here, Jimmy perceives 'cork-nut' as an isolating act of language because it is misconstrued by the parrot's handler. Jimmy had previously found enjoyment and comfort in using the word 'cork-nut' only because he perceived in it the makings of a social bond between himself and Alex the parrot, and later between himself and Crake, and the invented term was rendered a socially intimate act of language. Where this understanding – and, consequently, this intimacy – is lacking, Jimmy perceives 'cork-nut' as something of a linguistic mis-fire: an obstacle to communication between the parrot and his handler.

The isolation signified by the word 'cork-nut' in the example above foreshadows the loneliness of Snowman after the apocalypse, as the last surviving being with a concept of human language. Over the course of the novel, Jimmy's identification with Alex the parrot becomes a summation of the broad narrative of his life, moving from experiences of shared and intimate language to a demonstration of private language, reduced to isolation. Here, we see the word 'cork-nut' as both a symbol of social meaning-making, and a symbol of isolation. As such, it demonstrates the changing affordances of the word (and, by extension, other language objects) as a memory object.

Through reading ecological memory in this novel, the shifting meaning of 'cork-nut' therefore constitutes a significant contribution to Atwood's examination of language and memory in *Oryx and Crake*: the meaning of 'cork-nut' still retains some relation to its referent (in this case, almond) while accumulating other

[72] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 306.

associations (childhood, intimacy, isolation) over time, demonstrating the importance of context for fashioning and understanding the meaning of linguistic memory objects. Even though ‘cork-nut’ does not radically alter over the course of Jimmy’s life, its appearances in the novel nevertheless shape and are shaped by acts of memory. This example offers a small-scale illustration of how the meaning of language is transformed in the novel by the pandemic, by a sudden loss of speakers.

With Alex the parrot, Atwood demonstrates the power of small recontextualizations to alter the meaning of language, and – crucially – how this relates to its social use. This illustration concerns just one phrase, ‘cork-nut’, and a handful of changing social factors: Jimmy’s social status at school, intimate reassurance from an old friend, and an expression of isolation. These modulations, though small, are shown to be significant markers of the progression of Jimmy/Snowman’s narrative. As a memory object, the phrase ‘cork-nut’ affords memory in various ways across Jimmy/Snowman’s life: it is at once a reminder of social intimacy and of isolation, and – for this character – imbued with experiences of innocence and loss. How much greater, then, the changes imposed upon language by the new context of a sole native speaker among a new species in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. A close reading of Atwood’s treatment of this phrase is therefore representative of how the entanglement of language and memory is treated in the novel. In attending to the iterability of language, Atwood illuminates the changing affordances of language for memory according to its wider ecological context.

**Book-Objects in the Environment**

My study of the ecological context of linguistic memory objects has so far focused on social and cultural factors in their affordances. Here, I briefly draw attention to Atwood's representation of the environemt in which language is communicated – a close reading which posits linguistic memory objects as embedded within their physical context in much the same way as any other ecological element – before focusing on the mediation of language. I consider the materiality of linguistic memory objects in the novel in light of work in media theory, as outlined in the Introduction of this thesis. In *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan*, Robert K. Logan draws a parallel between the connectivity of the media ecology and a semantic web, 'in which the meaning of every word merges from the context in which that word relates to all the other words in the language […] How can one understand the written word without understanding its relation to the spoken word or understand the printed word without understanding its relation to both the spoken and written word?'[73] In the following analysis, I highlight the various affordances of – and the perceived differences between – linguistic memory objects according to their materiality, examining Jimmy/Snowman's contrasting experiences of, for example, the spoken and written word in the pre- and post- pandemic worlds of *Oryx and Crake*.

The importance of physical context in determining the affordances of memory objects in *Oryx and Crake* is most strikingly depicted in relation to the items left behind by the humans who died in the early stages of the pandemic.

[73] Robert K. Logan, *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan* (Peter Lang, 2010), p. 10.

When retracing his journey from the Compounds – gated middle-class communities for employees of wealthy companies – Snowman comes across 'a trail of objects people must have dropped in flight, like a treasure hunt in reverse', which includes 'A suitcase, a knapsack spilling out clothes and trinkets; an overnight bag […] A bracelet, a woman's hair ornament in the shape of a butterfly,' and, notably, 'a notebook, its pages soaked, the handwriting illegible'.[74] Because the writing is illegible, no meaning is transferred by whatever was once written and the text within the notebook no longer serves as a memory object.

By removing language from an object intended to afford memory through that medium, Atwood invites the reader to focus on its other affordances for memory: its physical context here indicates its abandonment, presumably as the notebook's owner sought sanctuary from the rapidly spreading pandemic; the handwriting, though illegible, signifies presence. Any impression of whatever might have been inscribed in the notebook is made secondary to its physical state, as the writing is no longer readable. Reading this moment in the text according to an ecological view of memory shows that the context of language and its relative ability to convey meaning – dependent variously on the legibility of handwriting, the cultural codes recognised by of its audience, or other contextual factors – is something which Atwood presents here as language embedded in a broader environmental context: meaning is produced by the interaction of multiple interconnected elements.

Turning to media, then: language cannot be communicated without being mediated by some other object, be it speech, a printed book, an email, or some

[74] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 265.

other form of media. To better understand how language intersects with other elements of the memory ecology, I offer a reading of some of the methods of mediating language depicted in *Oryx and Crake*, with a particular focus on how Jimmy/Snowman perceives the affordances of language for memory as dependant on its mediation, as demonstrated by the contrast between his perception of pre-pandemic society in the novel and the orality of the Crakers.

*Mediating language*

As I have previously noted, and as I demonstrate further below, the affordances of linguistic memory objects depend on and emerge from their material context. Beyond this, Atwood also draws attention to the impact of the *conceptions* of various media. In Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this thesis, I return again to this notion that the perceived qualities of certain media can be as formative to understandings of their use as their actual qualities. For instance, photographs and film are often perceived as trustworthy or authoritative representations of reality (proving that something happened or existed in a certain way), and digital media promise immediate access to infinite information. While these perceptions do not reflect the real qualities of these media, they do inform how users and audiences will encounter them and, by extension, how they may be used to afford memory. Similarly, I argue that Jimmy/Snowman's perception of the differences between written and spoken language shape how they are used in the novel to afford memory.

The Vulture Sculptures project mentioned above, performed by Jimmy's 'girlfriend of the moment', Amanda, illustrates the mediation of language with

particular flair.[75] Rather than language being merely inscribed on paper or communicated through the usual channels, Amanda's process of rendering language is innovative and pointed: [the artist] creates the shape of a four-letter word with 'large dead-animal parts', waits for vultures to enter the scene, and then photographs the word from a helicopter.[76] This process highlights the importance of the interacting ecological elements involved with the mediation of language. The embodiment of language as animal parts, the staging of the vultures' descent onto the word, the aerial view of the scene (particularly in a world where security clearance to fly anywhere is not lightly granted), and the medium of the photograph all appear to play a role in how the word will be perceived – so, too, does the location used for these events, which take place in 'vacant fields or the parking lots of abandoned factories'.[77] It is, for example, a violent and bleak way to materialise the word 'love', as Amanda does at the breaking point of her romance with Jimmy. In this case, the vulturization of the word is intended to signify love's end, and the material nature of the carcasses suggests no small amount of bitterness in this.[78]

This demonstrates a broader point of agreement between the representation of media and memory in *Oryx and Crake* and an ecological view of memory, which is that the medium and the message are intertwined and consequently affect the affordances of language for memory.[79] Later chapters of

[75] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 283.
[76] Ibid., p. 287.
[77] Ibid., p. 287.
[78] Ibid., p. 290.
[79] My phrasing here draws on Marshall McLuhan's influential work, 'The Medium is the Message', in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: MIT Press, 1964), pp. 7-21.

this thesis will deal with the involvement of other cultural codes and ecological elements in the structure of memory objects; here, my focus is on the structures applied to memory objects according to how language is mediated and perceived.

My analysis focuses on Jimmy/Snowman's position as someone who experiences a shift from living in a cultural context in which language is commonly mediated through writing, print, and digital text, to the post-apocalyptic world of the novel in which he is alone in understanding the written word. In *Oryx and Crake*, the sudden sociocultural recontextualization of language from human society to the small community of Crakers marks an abrupt break from a culture deeply rooted in the material mediation of language. For Snowman, the burden he feels of carrying on a dying language is tied in with the oral culture of the Crakers. While both Jimmy and Snowman are invested in the collection of words and phrases, Snowman is always conscious of their evanescence. This is the reason for his anxiety that words are 'swirling away with his dissolving brain.'[80] As previously noted, this is in large part because Snowman is the only remaining speaker of English as it existed before Crake's speciocide, but it also has a lot to do with his inability to continue to write things down and his frustration with the shift in media available to him.

Snowman's perception of the affordances of written and spoken linguistic memory objects can be understood through Walter Ong's influential work, *Orality and Literacy* (1982). While Ong's analysis of literate and oral cultures has been critiqued from a decolonial perspective, a brief consideration of *Orality and Literacy* suggests how Snowman's perception of the different affordances of

[80] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 175.

spoken and written linguistic memory objects affects his approach to memoring. An ecological memory approach to reading *Oryx and Crake* raises the importance of recognising the perception of memory objects and their affordances, as well as their actual qualities. Ong observes that one of the most crucial differences between orality and literacy is that 'Without writing, words as such have no visual presence […] They are occurrences, events.'[81] The perception of words as 'occurrences' or 'events' rather than as material objects suggests that words are not something to be kept, stored, archived, returned to, or remembered. The notion of occurrence instead ascribes an emergent quality to the memory object. In oral societies, then, even the same stories repeated – even almost word for word – are perceieved as active and emergent events.[82] This runs counter to Snowman's compulsion to hang onto words and store them up; unless they are written down, Snowman can only perceive words as brief occurrences, rather than as a reliable means of memoring.

Ong refers again to this aspect of language in oral societies when he writes that 'Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent.'[83] This notion of spoken language as 'perishable' or as 'evanescent' is crucial to understanding how Snowman perceives his responsibility to keep repeating words from the past. The evanescence of sound is more than immediate: it suggests that words are not something which can ever be present, except in the moment of their passing. Even then, the word cannot be present all at once – the sound of each syllable

[81] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (Methuen & Co., 1982; repr. New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 31.
[82] Jack Goody, *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[83] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 32.

passes, and each syllable changes the context of those which preceded it, thereby changing their meaning. For Snowman, this lack of a visual mediation of language has a significant impact on his understanding of language and its affordances for memory.

In contrast with the evanescence of sound, Ong states that for 'deeply typographic folk,' words tend to be 'assimilated to things, "out there" on a flat surface'.[84] If words are 'out there' in some material way, they can be kept, giving rise to the notion of 'holding onto' memory.[85] Ong notes these qualities of words as experienced by 'deeply typographic folk' not as actual qualities of words, but as the conceptualisation of words by people immersed in a typographic culture. To perceive words as material, rather than evanescent, suggests their durability and consistency. We can therefore observe in *Oryx and Crake* that Snowman thinks of words as swirling away and becoming lost, in part, because he perceives words without writing as occurrences which are naturally momentary.

When Snowman thinks of the possibility of writing down his last thoughts like the captains of ships in olden times, he is conscious of his lack of a 'future reader' – though he already has a listening audience.[86] While the Crakers do later begin to recognise written words as a form of mediation, this early pressure on orality reveals much about Snowman's perception of its affordances for memory. Snowman tells and retells the creation story until the Crakers themselves know it by heart: a story which seems to change and grow with each retelling as they

[84] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 32.
[85] Ibid., pp. 7-8.
[86] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 46.

express new curiosities. The dynamic nature of Snowman's mythmaking in *Oryx and Crake* represents the plasticity of the oral memory object.

The Crakers are said to have not understood any concept of abstraction when Snowman first takes them from the Paradice compound, confused by the idea of representation: upon seeing pictures on food packaging, for example, they ask Snowman, 'Is it real?', then, 'What is this not real?'; Snowman marks how they have gradually come to understand the notion of representation through a storytelling tradition in his explanation to them, 'Not real can tell us about real.'[87] He has mythologised their creation, making Crake and Oryx into godlike figures, and his interactions with the Crakers early in the novel are characterised by his retelling of this creation story and their boundless curiosity about it. Snowman's story, as is typical of oral cultures, follows the same themes and patterns in each retelling, though it seems that many details are dynamic and emergent, depending on the Crakers' involvement.

Snowman notes that every story he tells the Crakers begins with a visual demonstration of 'chaos': mixing sand and water in a bucket. [88] The Crakers have come to understand this abstraction and enjoy its integration as a visual aid to the story. This foreshadows their interest in writing and telling their own stories later in the trilogy. At this point in *Oryx and Crake*, however, it is Snowman's perception of orality which Atwood uses to highlight the different affordances of language for memory according to the method of its mediation.

[87] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 118.
[88] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 118.

## Conclusion

My analysis of *Oryx and Crake* has demonstrated how Atwood represents the affordances of language for memory as fundamentally different according to its mediation, highlighting the importance of understanding language as always interacting with multiple ecological elements, including the various components involved in its mediation. I have established two broad claims about the function of language as gesturing towards an ecological system of memory in the novel: first, that the social production of meaning gestures towards the social aspect of creating and interpreting linguistic memory objects; second, that as a means of mediation in the novel, selectivity of language is shown to shape meaning and, by extension, memory. This uses an ecological view of memory to critically engage with the social, cultural, and physical contexts of linguistic memory objects.

*Oryx and Crake* raises the stakes for linguistic memory objects by depicting a narrator who is both the last native speaker of English and also the narrator of the apocalypse. Throughout this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate the parallel drawn between the death of a species and the death of its language and how this affects the representation of media and memory in both the pre- and post-pandemic world of *Oryx and Crake*. By examining Atwood's treatment of language in this way, it is possible to better understand the weight of Snowman's responsibility: as the last surviving human, he appears solely responsible for the preservation of language and the memory of human civilization.

The present chapter has introduced – with reference to *Oryx and Crake* – an ecological memory reading of the social aspect of memory object creation and

demonstrated the embeddedness of memory objects in not only their material, but also their sociocultural, context. This develops the focus on the representation of media and memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* in Chpater One, which explored conceptions of private memory processes as ecological in relation to the narrator's immediate physical environment. Chapter Three continues this trajectory from a focus on the individual to the social aspect of ecological memory with its discussion of shared memory objects in relation to Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007).

# 3. A NOVEL ABOUT THE NEWS ABOUT 9/11: PUBLIC (RE)MEDIATIONS AS SHARED MEMORY OBJECTS IN DON DELILLO'S *FALLING MAN* (2007)

## Introduction

This chapter considers the representation of memory and media in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and argues that this novel demonstrates an ecological understanding of memory. DeLillo's interest in the evolution of media – particularly mass media – and their impact on contemporary culture has been well documented. *White Noise* (1985), for example, famously offers an account of the simulacra of modern media with its depiction of television and radio broadcast.[1] *Falling Man*, the plot of which focuses on the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre, on the 11th of September 2001, likewise demonstrates DeLillo's interest in media. While the plot of the novel ostensibly centres around the *event* of 9/11, DeLillo frequently represents this in mediated terms, by exploring the *news* of 9/11, and the related experiences of media witnessing.

*Falling Man* is a media novel which depicts a particular moment in the shifting media landscape of the turn of the millennium: in which global news coverage of 9/11 demonstrated the potential reach and impact of the live broadcast of audio/visual media. In *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968), one of the early texts key to the concept of media ecology, Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore set out the idea that new media – especially the increasing interconnectedness of international communication and global media consumption – are making the world smaller.[2] While

[1] Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Picador, 2011).
[2] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and peace in the global village* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 1968).

the ‘global village’ was conceived of long before 2001, the media event of 9/11 would keenly embody the effects of global media consumption described in McLuhan and Fiore’s text. The widespread recognition of particular, highly repeated and reproduced, images was a catalyst to perceptions in popular culture of watching live news broadcasts as being a kind of shared memory – a notion explored at length later in this chapter with reference to accounts of media witnessing of 9/11.

I return to Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng’s claim for the importance of novels in understanding the changing state of memory to highlight how *Falling Man* facilitates and reshapes our understanding of how memory works from the vantage point of digital cultures.[3] I argue in this chapter that reading *Falling Man* with an understanding of memory as ecological can direct us to an understanding of shared memory *objects*, rather than of memory itself as shared. Understanding memory objects as shared allows for the public nature of iconic, highly recognisable media, whilst also acknowledging that the affordances of those media for memory remain relative and subjective to the individual.

Through my analysis of *Falling Man*, I examine DeLillo’s representation of the affordances of audio/visual media (such as photographs and film footage) for memoring and consider the entanglement of visual imagery, language, and genre in news broadcasts. In its focus on the mediation of a global news event, the novel highlights the contrasting affordances of different media types for memory, particularly those which are accessed by a multitude of people. DeLillo’s interest in the relationship between media and memory – and specifically in writing as a means of memoring – is

[3] Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023), p. 2.

further indicated by the inclusion in this novel of a fictional writing group for people affected by Alzheimers.

I analyse the novel as an ecological representation of memory in several respects. First, this chapter considers how DeLillo positions the novel *Falling Man* alongside other media of the same name (an iconic photograph from real news coverage of the event and a fictional performance artist), as cultural records of the events of 9/11. I then read DeLillo's depiction of news coverage of 9/11 in the novel in light of this, and particularly as a response to the evolving memoring landscape of the early 2000s. My close reading of media witnessing in the novel reads DeLillo's presentation of the news through insights from Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory to consider how perceptions of of audio/visual shared media affect the affordances and use of these media as memory objects.[4]

This chapter demonstrates the confluence between the social aspect of memory represented in *Falling Man* and an ecological model of memory. My reading further, by drawing on theories of ecological memory, extends the applications of an ecological model of memory to suggest how an understanding of shared memory objects – as opposed to shared memory – can contribute to existing discourse in memory studies around the relative sharedness of memory. I explore the significance of the ecological notion of shared memory objects to existing scholarship in memory studies in this chapter with reference to DeLillo's representation of select news images of 9/11.

[4] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

**'Falling Man': Novel, Performance Artist, Photograph**

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo describes the work of a fictional performance artist, David Janiak: 'A man was dangling there, above the street, upside down. He wore a business suit, one leg bent up, arms at his sides. A safety harness barely visible, emerging from his trousers at the straightened leg and fastened to the decorative rail of the viaduct'.[5] In the novel, DeLillo describes both Janiak's intensely physical performances and the mediatization (in news reports and photographs) of those performances. References to Janiak are infrequent but provide symmetry to the novel, set as they are, near to beginning and end. The book's title and cover also direct our attention to this event: the Picador edition of *Falling Man* features an image of the two towers and a falling person.

If the intended referent of the various 'Falling Man's of the novel is unclear, DeLillo goes further still in making the connection explicit: whilst searching for information about Janiak on the Internet, Lianne – one of the novel's central characters – reads about an ongoing dispute as to whether his performances were 'intended to reflect the body posture of a particular man who was photographed falling from the north tower of the World Trade Center, headfirst, arms at his sides, one leg bent, a man set forever in free fall against the looming background of the column panels in the tower?'[6] DeLillo continues: 'She did not read further but knew at once which photograph the account referred to. It hit her hard when she first saw it, the day after, in the newspaper. The man headlong, the towers behind him.'[7] Although Janiak is DeLillo's invention, this pose refers to the real photo, taken by Richard Drew, which originally appeared in newspapers around the world on 12 September 2001, and is

[5] Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 33.
[6] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 221.
[7] Ibid., p. 221.

one of the most famous images of 9/11.[8] The book's title, its cover, and David Janiak's performances are all allusions to this original image: a shared memory object, recognisable to many as an iconic, if horrific, piece of media relating to a historical event. I contend that DeLillo's treatment of the image is an exploration of the specific affordances of the image as a shared memory object, and sets these against the affordances of both *Falling Man* and the novel form more broadly.

To understand the affordances of the image of the falling man in the novel, the cultural significance of the photograph must first be understood: 'Falling Man' was a highly controversial image following its initial publication in 2001. There was significant backlash to the publication of the photo in newspapers on the morning after 9/11: scholar Jared Gee has recounted in detail the complex reaction to – and widespread suppression of – this and similar images of people jumping or falling from the towers.[9] Scholar Kate Birdsall recalls this in her 2015 article on representations of 9/11, writing, 'we were offended—even viscerally repulsed—when the media fed us photographs and video of people jumping from the towers in the moments before their collapse'.[10] The controversy of the images of people who jumped or fell from the towers was caused by the sensitive nature of publishing a photograph of a person's final moments, but also by a public reaction against the depiction of a death by what was perceived as suicide.

This view was, in part, countered by Tom Junod's assertion in 2003 that 'Falling Man' could also be seen as a patriotic symbol of power and freedom – not a photograph of suicide, but a last automonous act in the face of an impossible

[8] Kira Pollack, *100 Photographs: The Most Influential Photographs of All Time* (New York: Time, 2016), p. 232.
[9] Jared Gee, 'Revisiting "Falling Man" at 20: the 9/11 Archive and Missing Images of Jumpers', *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 18.4 (2021), pp. 448-461.
[10] Kate Birdsall, 'Frenzied Representation and the Forbidden Image: 9/11's Falling Man and the Unrepresentable', *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies* 8.1 (2015), pp. 39-55 (p. 40).

situation.[11] Junod writes, of these two possible perspectives on the photograph, that 'Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else-something discordant and therefore terrible: freedom. There is something almost rebellious in the man's posture, as though once faced with the inevitability of death, he decided to get on with it; as though he were a missile, a spear, bent on attaining his own end.'[12] The photograph invited suggestions that it was only used and deemed acceptable for publication in the first place because it is framed in such a way that it appears serene as other images, even from the same series, did not: the iconic image was captured 'at the fleeting moment when [the falling man's] body seemed to assume the stylized pose of an Olympic diver'.[13] Hamilton Carroll, for instance, notes that many read 'heroic poise in the attitude of ['Falling Man's] subject'.[14] By invoking the falling man in his novel, then, DeLillo does not only refer to the events of 9/11, nor to news coverage of the event in a general sense, but also to the specific and highly contested images of people jumping from the towers.

The controversial – and often suppressed – history of images of people jumping from the towers is represented in *Falling Man* by the absence of the titular falling man from the novel itself.[15] DeLillo presents the falling man only euphemistically despite, as noted, there being several references to his existence, including a description of one of the characters looking at the photograph. The absence of the falling man in the novel emulates the anonymity of the falling man in the photograph, which has – because the man has never been concretely identified – become a symbol, the

[11] Tom Junod, 'The Falling Man', *Esquire Magazine*, 1 September, 2003 <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/> [accessed 21 July 2024].
[12] Ibid.
[13] Rob Kroes, Miles Orvell, and Alan Nadel, 'The Ascent of the Falling Man: Establishing a Picture's Iconicity', *Journal of American Studies* 45.4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875811000995>.
[14] See Birdsall, 'Frenzied Representation and the Forbidden Image', p. 42.
[15] For more on this, see Aaron Mauro, 'The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11', *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011), pp. 584-606.

'Unknown Soldier' of 9/11.[16] When Lianne looks at the image, she responds to it by thinking, 'It is the ideal falling motion of a body', and describes him as a 'falling angel'.[17] This strange language of the '*ideal* falling motion' and 'a falling *angel*' reflects how the image – despite its depiction of someone falling to their death – might be seen as participating in the suppression of more graphic images, including other images of those who jumped from the towers.

Similarly, it is significant that the novel opens with an account of a character who is present in one of the towers at the time of the attack. DeLillo's description of the scene does not refer to falling men, but rather to falling shirts: 'He watched it coming down. A shirt came down out of the high smoke, a shirt lifted and drifting in the scant light and then falling again'.[18] The falling shirt is a euphemism for what could have alternatively been a far more graphic moment in the novel, alluding – particularly with the title of the novel in mind – to the unknown fate of its owner.

Faced with a proliferation of possibilities, the reader is constantly faced with the question: where, then, is the falling man in *Falling Man*? It is possible that the title may refer to the performance artist, David Janiak, rather than the man whose death he emulates. Art supplants life. David Janiak's performances of the 'Falling Man' photograph – and DeLillo's fictional references to it – raise questions of how the production of the news affects how we bear witness to and think of mediated events: who gets to tell these stories, and who has access to them? What choices are made in how they are (re)presented? How does the mass production of images affect their function as memory objects? What does it mean to mediate such questions through the novel form? The title of the novel refuses to distinguish between kinds of mediation

[16] Junod, 'The Falling Man', p. 177.
[17] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 222.
[18] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 4.

by referring simultaneously to the 'Falling Man' photograph and the fictional performance artist who visually recreates that photograph.

I call attention, in this chapter, to the effects of using such a highly reproduced piece of media to frame the novel. Every (real and fictional) reference to 'the falling man' in *Falling Man* not only refers to the attack on the World Trade Centre itself, but more directly, it refers to the news coverage of the attack. The novel then constitutes a self-conscious mediation of this history of 9/11. Indeed, DeLillo uses Janiak's performance to reflect on the act of writing a novel about 9/11, with both artists attempting to afford their audience memory of that day; the performative and fictional aspects of each, however, are removed from the high stakes of reality. Just as Janiak's harness is visible and his fall is broken and stilled, the events of 9/11 are reduced to ink and paper by the novel form. The titular falling man of this novel therefore refers to mediation of the event, rather than to the event itself. The subject of the text is not only the man falling, but also – and perhaps even more prominently – the 'Falling Man' of the photograph, the event of the news.

Discussing embedded and embodied memories in *Falling Man*, Katrina Harack suggests that, through his depiction of Janiak and the novel's mediation of the 'Falling Man' photograph, DeLillo demonstrates 'a real, embodied struggle to narrativize the event, to see it anew without reducing it to easily digested symbolism'.[19] Rather than referring to the central narrative of the novel and its fictional characters, prominent references to the photograph in *Falling Man* may appear to guide the reader's focus towards the real event of 9/11, but they only do so indirectly through highlighting acts of mediation.

[19] Katrina Harack, 'Embedded and Embodied Memories: Body, Space, and Time in Don DeLillo's "White Noise" and "Falling Man"', *Contemporary Literature* 54.2 (2013), pp. 303-336 (p. 327).

In the section which follows below, I turn my focus to a study of media witnessing in *Falling Man* as a form of DeLillo's engagement with contemporary perceptions of audio/visual media as substituting for reality. To examine the relationship between media witnessing and ecological memory, I consider Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory through an ecological lens.

**Media Witnessing and Prosthetic Memory**

A reading of mediations of 9/11 in *Falling Man* which takes an ecological view of memory emphasises the entanglement of memoring subjects with the shared memory object of the news broadcast and video footage of the event. One way of understanding this entanglement is through Alison Landsberg's touchstone text in memory studies, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*.[20] This text is situated within a specific media environment, and notes especially the affordances of audio/visual media as substituting for (or acting as a prosthetic) memory. I employ the idea of prosthetic memory in my reading of DeLillo's *Falling Man* below to illuminate how characters in the novel respond to news coverage of 9/11, and situate prosthetic memory as an aspect of an ecological understanding of memory.

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo's representation of characters' perceptions of media and memory suggests a resonance with the idea of prosthetic memory, recognising and expressing an intrinsic trust in audio/visual media. However, as I show here, this externalisation of memory – the idea that encountering film of the event equates to experiencing the event itself – is treated with a detached irony. The genre of television

[20] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory.*

which is DeLillo's focus in this novel magnifies many qualities of audio/visual media that are relevant to an ecological view in a shifting media landscape, particularly with regards to their affordances for memory. *Falling Man* highlights that much of the language we use to describe audio/visual media and its affordances invites a presumption of reality. This is made visible in relation to television news, which provides coverage of real events.

The argument that I have so far been building throughout this chapter depends on two things: that DeLillo's novel is written as a cultural record of the events of 9/11 and the experience of those who witnessed this through news coverage, and that through this DeLillo is observing contemporary shifts in the media landscape. I have so far demonstrated DeLillo's interest in both mediation and the novel as memory object; the following analysis sets out how *Falling Man* engages with the evolving media landscape of the early 2000s and the perceived affordances of audio/visual media for providing prosthetic memory.

*Prosthetic Memory*

The extent to which audio/visual media can be perceived as a wholesale re-presentation of reality at the turn of the millennium is perhaps seen most clearly in Alison Landsberg's theory of 'prosthetic memory' which, though it does not relate exclusively to audio/visual media, places a heavy emphasis on the potentiality of cinema and television as shared sites of experience and therefore as shared memory. Prosthetic memory has been critiqued for overestimating the capacity of images to substitute for experience; I qualify Landsberg's theory below according to similar terms, but through doing so argue that the central ideas of prosthetic memory can be reconceived within an ecological model. Rather than adopting prosthetic memory as

a theory of memory, I make use of Landsberg's text to examine evolving *conceptions* of memory and media. Prosthetic memory illuminates the perceived affordances of audio/visual media, building out from its apparent authority as a certification of presence, and in doing so illuminates a close reading of audio/visual media in *Falling Man* as ecological memory objects.

Landsberg defines prosthetic memory as a 'new' form of memory:

> [prosthetic memory] emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theatre or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history… In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live.[21]

She later goes on to elaborate that 'Prosthetic memories are adopted as the result of a person's experience with a mass cultural technology of memory that dramatizes or recreates a history he or she did not live.'[22] Prosthetic memory is, according to Landsberg, a way of essentially assimilating memory of an event or history of which one has no personal experience, other than via that which has been mediated. This theory seems to implicitly accept the conflation of audio/visual media representations and reality, suggesting that first-hand experience and experience of a mediation can be discussed in like terms with regards to memory.

Landsberg's emphasis on 'historical narrative' and the 'dramatization' or 'recreation' of history lends itself to studies of cinema and other audio/visual representations, but as a 'new' form of memory this notably omits literature. Landsberg discusses at length the potential of fictional representations (focusing on film and television) to simulate a narrative experience, but does not extend this notion to

[21] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 2.
[22] Ibid., p. 28.

include, for example, novels about or historical accounts of the past, such as *Falling Man*. This is, in part, because audio/visual mediations of the past offer a certification of presence, and as such are perceived as a re-membering, able to capture and replay an element of the past in the present. Calling this form of memory "prosthetic" also calls into question the extent to which a mediated experience can exchange for real experience of an event. Landsberg notes that prosthetic memories 'feel real', and partly ascribes this to advancements in technology: 'Whereas simulation in early cinema was imperfect, contemporary cinema is virtually seamless… The improvement of cinematic technology has made identification with filmic images increasingly possible, thereby facilitating the acquisition of prosthetic memories.'[23] This assessment makes sense, in many ways: the increased capacity of film to represent something that *looks* real can only elevate the medium as a certification of presence, and there is some truth to the idea that this will lend itself to greater sympathy from audiences. Whereas texts are perceived as transforming or translating experience, audio/visual media objects can be perceived, in Landsberg's theory, as providing experience.

However, this notion also negates the distinction that remains between representation and reality: despite its visual resemblance to reality, film is still an aesthetic, representational media, no more a transparent reflection of reality than a novel. In film, transitions between scenes, the compressed passage of time, the unrealistic presence of music and light, and even the use of multiple camera angles to depict a scene all undermine an experience of film *as* memory. Those with an unconscious familiarity with the grammar of cinema (established through repeated exposure to such conventions) may not find these elements conspicuous, but they

[23] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 21, 32.

nevertheless place a distance between simulated experience and reality. Prosthetic memory also forgets the narrative perspective of these media, which do not often invoke the experience of the audience directly, but instead invite the audience to sympathise with others. The notion that prosthetic memories 'are sensuous memories produced by an *experience* of mass-mediated representations' also overlooks the absence of taste, touch, and smell, and the literal bounds of the camera lens: the frame which limits experience and serves to remind the audience that whatever is depicted within is mediated.[24]

In addition to this, Susannah Radstone notes that 'Prosthetic memory models the cinema-memory relation as one in which cinema implants memories into passive spectators, but this takes no account of spectators' negotiation of images'.[25] The notion of 'prosthetic' memory assigns an objective, static quality to memory which is assimilable in binary terms, either adopted by the spectator or not. The problems that Radstone cites here, that prosthetic memory presumes memories can be implanted, and the negation of 'spectators' negotiation of images' can be addressed by approaching prosthetic memory from an ecological perspective. Rather than a static object to be 'implanted' into or adopted by a spectator, memory is always an emergent process; instead of a passive spectatorship to media, we must consider that the affordances of memory objects are always relative, always subjective, and always embedded in a wider system of interacting elements. However, if we nuance the terms of prosthetic memory slightly, we can conceive of its central ideas within an ecological model.

[24] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 20.
[25] Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 325-342 (p. 335).

Prosthetic memory does lend itself to a reading of audio/visual media as merely 'implanting' memory into a passive spectator, as Radstone suggests; however, we can push back against this notion by considering the 'prosthetic' as extending the affordances of memory objects, rather than simply substituting for experience. The significance of this model in memory studies scholarship is partly the result, I suggest, of its replicating something of the colloquial sense of audio/visual media as providing a new and reliable externalisation of memory (i.e. the conflation of audio/visual media and reality). When the boundaries between representation and reality are already indistinct, it makes sense to also extend this blurred perception to an understanding of the representation as a form of memory. Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory therefore characterizes a significant aspect of DeLillo's representation of audio/visual media and its relation to memory, particularly in the early 2000s: that such media, due to the metaphorical conflation of representation and reality, can be perceived as substituting for memory.

*Representation and reality*

My close reading of the affordances of audio/visual media in the memory ecology in *Falling Man* first confronts a seemingly innocuous metaphor recognised by media scholars and highlighted by Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory: the conflation of audio/visual media representations with reality. Common expectations of audio/visual media suggest an illusive reality, a conflation of media representation and that which it represents which gives rise to the misconception that media witnessing can substitute for first-hand experience. I read *Falling Man* with this understanding in mind to demonstrate how media witnessing functions in memory acts in the novel.

The conflation of audio/visual representations with reality can be seen clearly in the metaphorical language that is commonly used to refer to photos and video footage as substituting for an event, for example in the use of phrases such as 'I *saw* *x* event' when what is really meant is, 'I saw a *video* of *x* event'. This omission is small, but telling. 'A video of' often remains implied, and this omission is time-saving except in conversations where further clarification is sought. This conflation does not stand up to scrutiny, but the point is not that it is believed to be literal, but rather that the language of 'seeing' things happen is in stark contrast to non-audio/visual media, with reference to which it might be more commonly said that an event was 'read about' or 'heard about'. This stems from a phenomena that media scholars have long recognised, i.e. that the nature of visual imagery captured on camera carries with it a promise of reality, a certification that the subject of the photo or video was present at the time it was taken.[26] This serves to virtually erase the act of mediation from the immediate perception of the viewer.

With reference to media witnessing in *Falling Man*, I suggest that the role of media in memory can rely as much on common percpetions and misconceptions of media as on their actual qualities – as I have outlined above in relation to Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory. It is worth therefore noting a longer tradition in media studies which perceives audio/visual media as substituting for real experience. Media theorist Jean Baudrillard, for instance, describes this as the 'murderous capacity of images' to destroy their referent, to which is opposed 'the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the Real.'[27] In other words,

[26] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in *Art After Modernism: rethinking Representation*, ed. by Brian Willis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. 256.
[27] Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', p. 256.

where representations are not consciously perceived as a form of mediation, they cease to refer to that which they represent.[28]

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes states that the photographic image is a 'certificate of presence', meaning that the visual image promises to have 'captured' something, to have taken its referent and verified that, at least for a moment, it existed in a particular place in a particular way. This is held in contrast with language, which is only ever a certificate of its own authorisation:

> Exodus, chapter 20, contains a copy of what Yahweh's own finger originally had written on two stone tablets: the law. But of the thunder and lightning, of the thick cloud and the mighty trumpet which, according to scripture, surrounded this first act of writing on Mount Sinai, that same Bible could store nothing but mere words.[29]

Another way of expressing this is to consider that language, as discussed in the previous chapter, is always a conscious mediation. If a linguistic representation adheres to specific cultural codes and formulae in order to be comprehensible, this means that the speaker/inscriber of a message must first translate an event into language; its reader/listener must recognise this and decode the message. A photograph, on the other hand, has no such requirement. While it is a mediation, it is not necessarily one that needs decoding, but rather one that points indexically to its referent. Charles Sanders Pierce identified photographs as indexical signs because they physically correspond to that which they represent, unlike the symbolic relationship between language and reality.[30] The inherent claim of the photograph is therefore, as Barthes puts it, 'ça a été' – this has been.[31] While there are certain

---

[28] Celia Lury reviews this field of media studies – which considers the audio/visual representation of reality – in Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 123-128.
[29] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 7.
[30] For more on this, see Charles Sanders Pierce, 'Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,' in *Philosophical Writings of Pierce*, ed. by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 98-119.
[31] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 79. For more on the effects of this on memory and conceptions of the affordances of photographs for memory, see also Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), pp. 8-16.

structures involved in the production of visual images that may lend themselves to coding and decoding – discussed at greater length in the analysis below – the implication of presence alone is not generally contingent on being able to recognise and understand these structures.

In an acknowledgement that audio/visual representations of 9/11 became 'realer than the real,' Gary Krug says of media coverage of the event that 'Time was frozen, dissected, rearranged, and presented for us [the viewers] as "that which happened".'[32] This view of time itself as being 'frozen, dissected,' and 'rearranged' depicts 9/11 as an event subsumed by the event of the news. This separation of time from experience indicates the highly produced nature of television news, and the extent to which it can be perceived as an authoritative medium. Krug's description of the media coverage of 9/11 echoes Barthes in his comment that the news media re-represented 'that which happened', and suggests that the event was perceived as a public memory object.[33]

Although images do not always accurately represent their subject, it is the perception of photographs and film as authorising presence which impacts their affordances for memory and leads to notions such as prosthetic memory. The conflict between what we know (that images can be manipulated) and what we implicitly believe (that images can be trusted) has drawn critical attention in recent years. Travis L. Wagner and Ashley Blewer, in their study of deepfakes and perceptions of reality, note that 'Skepticism around photographs is now common-practice, yet the visual still possesses some degree of presumed truth'; media theorist S. Shyam Sundar likewise comments on this 'general belief that pictures cannot lie,' suggesting that 'people are

[32] Gary Krug, *Communication, Technology and Cultural Change* (SAGE, 2005), p. 3.
[33] Ibid., p. 3.

more likely to trust audiovisual modality because its content has a higher resemblance to the real world' than, for instance, language.[34] A significant contributing factor to this is the residual belief that audio/visual media verify that 'this has been'. Without this trust and the default assumption that, as Sundar puts it, 'pictures cannot lie', manipulated representations would have considerably less impact. While the capacity to manipulate audio/visual media theoretically poses a limitation to the conflation of representation and reality, then, this still has yet to overcome an underlying belief in the image as a certificate of presence.

It is this certification of presence which, I argue, DeLillo identifies as informing the metaphorical conflation of representation and reality; to this perception of photographic material as certifying 'this has been' he attributes real-world consequence. In viewing this news coverage as the event itself, audio/visual media of the event becomes an iconic cultural moment of media witnessing and a public memory object.[35] This can be seen in the following excerpts from *Falling Man* and characters' perceptions of news images.

*Falling Man* offers two accounts of a woman (Lianne) looking for her husband (Keith, from whom she is separated) on a television screen: once while looking at a televised poker tournament, and once while watching footage of the 9/11 attacks. In the first of these, Lianne imagines going to get her son to watch with her, 'so he could see his father, *Look*, in Rio or London or Las Vegas. His father was twenty feet away at the desk in the next room reading bank statements and writing checks.'[36] Here,

[34] Travis L. Wagner and Ashley Blewer, '"The Word Real Is No Longer Real": Deepfakes, Gender, and the Challenges of AI-Altered Video', *Open Information Science* 3 (2019), pp. 32-46 (p. 32); S. Shyam Sundar, 'The MAIN Model: A Heuristic Approach to Understanding Technology Effects on Credibility', in *Digital Media, Youth, and Credibility*, ed. by Miriam J. Metzger and Andrew J. Flanagin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 73-100 (pp. 80-81).
[35] Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 44.
[36] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 213.

Lianne perceives two contradictory realities alongside one another: Keith is simultaneously 'in Rio or London or Las Vegas,' and also 'twenty feet away'.

This is mirrored by another moment in the novel, when Lianne watches footage of the 9/11 attacks and the towers falling, again together with Keith, 'and thought there he is, unbelievably, in one of those towers, and now his hand on hers, in pale light, as though to console her for his dying'.[37] Both Keith on the television and Keith in reality are described in like terms. DeLillo's use of syntax in this quotation produces a delay in Lianne's recognition of Keith's presence: he is first perceived as being 'there… in one of those towers', before she perceives 'his hand on hers'. There is no distinction here in Lianne's imagination between 'seeing Keith' and 'seeing Keith on television' – not even the distinction of time, as both instances describe footage of past events in the present tense. That Lianne imagines, while watching footage of the towers fall, that Keith is holding her hand 'to console her for his dying' even suggests a greater trust in what she sees on the screen than in what she is physically experiencing in that moment, as does the syntactical delay of 'now' in the quotation above: the notion that Keith must be dead briefly wins out over the fact of him standing with her.

Just as seeing something on the television seems to make it true, *not* seeing something mediated likewise appears to make it *un*true: Justin, Lianne and Keith's son, is said to be 'protected' from the news and is not allowed to watch the footage of the towers falling. As a result, he believes that '[t]hey were hit but did not collapse'.[38] Because the collapse lacks the authority of media witnessing, for Justin, it remains unbelievable. This indicates the importance of media witnessing and access to shared memory objects to ratify common histories of modern events.

[37] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 134.
[38] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 72.

Media witnessing, with its noted similitude to first-hand visual experience, can be traumatic; Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory often focuses on the assimilation of traumatic events.[39] The idea of protecting a child from the news coverage of a catastrophe such as 9/11 – particularly when the father of the child in question was present at the attack – is therefore not unusual. However, shortly after this passage describing Lianne's decision to protect her son from the news, she expresses a similar sense of responsibility to protect Keith from it. The language DeLillo uses to explain this resonates with the metaphorical conflation of representation and reality suggested by Landsberg's prosthetic memory.

Lianne watched footage of the attacks as it was broadcast live on television; having seen this, Lianne initially feels responsible to keep Keith from seeing these repeated mediations of the event. This is a protectiveness that derives from the perceived immersive quality of audio/visual media. When Lianne first observes this instinct, DeLillo first says that 'She turned off the TV set, not sure why,' and then immediately corrects this uncertainty: 'protecting him [Keith] from the news he'd just walked out of, that's why'.[40] By referring to the event itself as 'news he'd just walked out of,' the fall of the towers is reduced to the event of the news, even as the concept of the 'news,' inextricably connected to the perception here of audio/visual media, is expanded to an experience that one can 'walk out of'. DeLillo's use of language here depicts not only the conflation of representation and reality in Lianne's perception of 9/11 and its news coverage, but goes further in his focus on the news *as* (rather than 'of') an event that Keith could viscerally experience. Perceiving Keith's first-hand experience of the attack as 'the news he'd just walked out of,' rather than, for instance,

[39] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.
[40] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 87.

describing this in terms that might otherwise distinguish between the real event and its mediation, privileges the reality of the medium over the event itself.

Although audio/visual media clearly do mediate, the pervading presumption surrounding these media – as DeLillo represents in *Falling Man* – is that they are able to re-present reality wholesale. Of course, they do not: there are clear limitations of audio/visual media, not the least of which is the literal edge of the frame which serves as a constant reminder, if attended to, that the framing of any image is deliberate and limited. It is impossible to mediate without making conscious and subconscious choices about representation.[41] However, what DeLillo draws attention to is the perceived affordances of audio/visual media for memory, and, as with so many other media, these affordances rely as much on subjective perception as they stem from actual function.

In his depiction of media in *Falling Man*, DeLillo suggests that this sense of overlap between representation and reality is reciprocal: not only do audio/visual representations seem real, but real experience is often viewed through an imagined camera lens or cinema screen. To take a few phrases from DeLillo's *Falling Man*, characters imagine real experience in terms of what might happen 'In the movie version': 'The moment seemed false to her, a *scene in a movie'*; and when one of the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks moves through an airport, he imagines himself '*on videotape*, passing through the metal detector'.[42] In this way, real experience is shown as pre-memorialised, perceived as something that will soon be – or is already being – archived. This is a recurring motif in much of DeLillo's work.[43] The rehearsed aesthetic

[41] See Kristin Thompson, 'A Formal Look at Realism', in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 197-244.
[42] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 27, 47, 173, 178, emphasis added.
[43] See, for example, Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (Picador, 2010), p. 25; DeLillo, *White Noise*, p. 280, 368; DeLillo, *Underworld*, p. 260.

of real life through continual mediation is something which Susan Sontag discusses in *On Photography*, taking sunsets as a primary example: 'The image-surfeited are likely to find sunsets corny; they now look, alas, too much like photographs.'[44] This framing of real experiences through the saturation of media images is a common feature in descriptions of media witnessing of 9/11.

For example, in his essay, 'The View From Mrs Thompson's, David Foster Wallace notes – of watching the initial news broadcast – that 'at least some of the shock of the last two hours has been how closely various shots and scenes have mirrored the plots of everything from *Die Hard I-III* and *Air Force One* to Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honor*', and describes the 'main contribution' of another viewer as repeatedly 'iterating how much like a movie it is'.[45] In 'The Image at Ground Zero: Mediating the Memory of Terrorism', Maria Sturken also observes this phenomenon: 'It seems that so many people responded to the initial images of the planes exploding into the towers by thinking that it looked like a movie, and then catching themselves and thinking, how can I be thinking this, why do I think it looks like a movie?'[46]

Questions around how media witnessing through television news affects the affordances of media for memory are shared both by contemporary memory scholars and by scholars of media. The editors of *Save As… Digital Memories*, writing of television's relationship with the past, note that 'television is one of the most self-conscious of the electronic/digital media as it reveals and promotes itself in the actual production of that which it documents'.[47] From this self-consciousness is born a

---

[44] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 85.
[45] David Foster Wallace, 'The View From Mrs Thompson's' in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (New York: Black Day Books, 2007), pp. 128-140 (p. 140, 138).
[46] Maria Sturken, 'The Image at Ground Zero: Mediating the Memory of Terrorism', in *Electronic Elsewheres,* ed. by Chris Berry, Lynn Spigel and Kim Soyoung (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 225-243 (p. 228).
[47] *Save As… Digital Memories*, ed. by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 33.

particular kind of performativity as televisual news media is produced as an offering of the real. As Jean Baudrillard puts it, '[t]he news drapes itself in the illusion of the present, of presence – it is the illusion of the live in media, as well as the horizon of the disappearance of real events' – a phenomenon which escalates until '[t]he event of the news substitutes itself for the news of the event.'[48] While other audio/visual media may also offer an illusion of presence, one of the most fundamental aspects of the news genre is its claim to be presenting real events. DeLillo posits live broadcast television news in *Falling Man* as a paradigm of many of the qualities of audio/visual media, placing this in contrast with literature as he uses this form to frame his response to the evolving media landscape.

**Mediating 9/11: Shared Memory Objects**

I now turn to analysis of DeLillo's representation of the news coverage of 9/11 in the novel, a reading informed by scholarship on the news coverage of 9/11 itself. In doing so, I highlight in particular how the news becomes a publicly and widely accessible memory object, facilitating the social sharing of memory objects. In the previous chapter of this thesis and in relation to Margaret Atwood's depiction of language as a shared system of meaning-making in the creation and comprehension of memory objects, signifying one social element of memory acts. My analysis of DeLillo's *Falling Man* below continues to tease out the implications of an ecological understanding of memory for conceptions of so-called individual or collective memory, which respectively locate memory as delimited to a single, isolated subject, or to a collective body of subjects identified by some common factor.

[48] Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities*, trans. by Paul Foss, John Johnston, Paul Patton and Andrew Berardini (Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 127.

The ecological model of memory resists the notion of memory itself being shared, but instead posits the possibility of shared and subjective access to memory objects. According to an ecological view of memory, memory is a process defined by encounter: the entanglement of a memoring subject and their environment. It follows that the social aspect of memory should also be located at that point of encounter. Rather than defining memory itself as 'individual', 'collective', 'shared', or similar, then, I argue in this thesis for an alternative focus on the shared memory *object*. Rather than having experiences of the past or perceptions in the past in common, the social aspect of memory can be understood according to the coexistence of multiple memoring subjects within a vast interconnected memory ecology, each of whom inhabit different ecological niches – a concept discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

The potential contribution of an ecological model of memory is to resist grouping multiple experiences and perceptions of the past into an unclearly bounded 'collective', which risks losing sight of individual subjectivity, and also recognises the social context of memory more adequately than the focused notion of 'individual memory'. An ecological understanding of memory focuses instead on subjective encounters with memory objects within a vast, interconnected ecology. As I argue here, understanding memory as ecological marks a more significant challenge to the individual/collective binary, which continues to haunt memory studies, than has yet been recognised.

Analysing *Falling Man* in parallel with analysis of the real coverage illuminates DeLillo's approach to creating the novel as a mediation. The coverage of 9/11 was a unique media event which amplified the specific qualities of audio/visual media and television news: the editors of *The Memory Effect* ascribe the singularity of 9/11 as a media event to it having been un-premediated, while Jennifer Good in *Photography*

*and September 11th* attributes this uniqueness to the unprecedented, untemplated nature of its media coverage.[49]

The singularity of 9/11 as a media event derives, in part, from the constant commentary on the singularity of the attack itself, and the highly produced media response to the attack, which consequently increased the sense of its unprecedentedness. This perception and presentation of the singularity of the event – the media spectacle of 9/11 – served to elevate its singularity, feeding a narrative of global catastrophe which has since framed perceptions of 9/11 news coverage as an iconic and widely recognised range of memory objects (video footage, photographs, and so on). In addition to this, as a media event, any affordances for memory and the sharing of memory objects are highlighted with reference to this event by the widespread use of a single piece of live footage, with every major news station sharing the same wide-angled, long-range shot of the attacks on the World Trade Center.[50] As a result, this footage became an iconic piece of media, in the sense that it continued to be replayed and repeated after the event.[51] The attack on the World Trade Center was one of the first events of such magnitude to be broadcast live, as the event was still unfolding; a global audience watched the towers fall in real-time. As news networks selectively and repeatedly transmitted the same piece of footage, it became an iconic image of the event while simultaneously obliterating (or at least diminishing) other possible aspects of the event.

---

[49] See *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film*, ed. by Russell J. A. Kilbourn and Eleanor Ty (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), p. 20; on the unprecedented, un-templated nature of its media coverage, see Jennifer Good, *Photography and September 11th: Spectacle, Memory, Trauma* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[50] Good, *Photography and September 11th*, p. 16.

[51] I use 'iconic' to refer particularly to the relationship between iconicity and relative invisibility described by Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 114.

My focus here is on DeLillo's description of this footage and of media witnessing of the event, particularly in comparison with the appearance of the Zapruder film – the footage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy – in his earlier novel, *Underworld* (1998). I compare DeLillo's representation of 9/11 in *Falling Man* with his depiction of this other media event in *Underworld* in order to show the evolution of DeLillo's engagement with audio/visual media between these two texts and how this correlates with changes in the media landscape. The capacity for images to be repeated on loop is a highly significant factor in the affordances of audio/visual media for memory. Although VHS degrades, hardware becomes obsolescent, digital files can be corrupted, and so on, audio/visual media nevertheless affords the potential of replayability.

Audio/visual media can be endlessly reiterated, and therefore recontextualised with emergent meanings. This is something which DeLillo was thinking about long before the events of 9/11. A scene in *Underworld* takes place in a video artist's rooms with TV sets 'arranged in stacks everywhere in the flat,' and even 'banked floor to ceiling' in some places, each showing the Zapruder tape of the Kennedy assassination in an endlessly repeating loop: 'here comes the car, here comes the shot'.[52] The repetition of the tape gradually diminishes its shock to the group of people gathered to watch it: after a while, DeLillo writes, people 'got up and walked around,' 'passed a joint,' and began 'remotely making out'.[53] Eventually, the two characters that the novel follows to this event leave the gathering to eat and play cards, 'and did not talk about Zapruder'.[54] DeLillo was already conscious, then, of the potential for audio/visual media – even of shocking real events – to become a media spectacle, a cultural

[52] DeLillo, *Underworld*, pp. 494-496.
[53] Ibid., p. 496.
[54] Ibid., p. 496.

touchstone, and simultaneously be made banal and familiar due to the replayability of audio/visual media.

As with the Zapruder film, footage of 9/11 was characterised by its singularity and by its repetition. In her book *Photography and September 11th: Spectacle, Memory, Trauma,* Jennifer Good notes that due to 'the unprecedented decision quickly made by news networks to share footage… most of the early moving images seen around the world were essentially the same wide-angle, long-range views, repeated over and over again'.[55] Although there were multiple video recordings of the event, the simultaneous use of this footage at the time across major news networks as the event was first broadcast meant that this image was by far the most viewed, repeated and iconic mediation of the event; public material almost instantly transmitted and constantly repeated, effectively archiving the event as it occurred. This piece of video footage was bound to become an iconic image of 9/11. In 'The Mediatisation of Memory', Andrew Hoskins notes:

> In the contemporary environment that combines the saturation of all things visual with the connection and interconnection of all things media, the shock of the new – the defining image of a moment or event – is overexposed and rendered iconic, sometimes instantaneously. The repetition, replaying and re-publication of an image or series of images, and its accumulation of captions, contexts and narratives, smothers it so that much of its original meaning is leached out.[56]

Footage of 9/11 was broadcast live to a large global audience, and then immediately and extensively replayed – first in the context of the television news as the events of the day were still unfolding, and repeatedly in the decades since the event. Kate Birdsall writes, 'Temporality lost its linear shape as we [the media-consuming public] watched the endless loop of airplanes crashing and buildings collapsing'.[57]

---

[55] Good, *Photography and September 11th*, p. 16.
[56] Andrew Hoskins, 'The Mediatisation of Memory', in Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading, *Save As…*, pp. 35-36.
[57] Kate Birdsall, 'Frenzied Representation and the Forbidden Image', p. 40.

The repeated showings of video footage of 9/11 after the event pervade *Falling Man*. Throughout the novel there are frequent references to the footage – to the initial broadcast, but also gesturing to its constant, ongoing presence on television networks in the weeks after the attacks. Something of this is captured by Lianne's compulsion to watch the footage each time it is played: 'Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching.'[58] The phrase 'every time' here indicates the frequency with which the same footage is still being replayed and broadcast. The phrase 'first one [plane], then the other' is repeatedly used throughout *Falling Man* to describe this footage.[59] This always points back to both the live broadcast, and also to the many repetitions of this footage afterwards: the towers are not described as both falling, plural, but are always separated into the chronology of 'first one, then the other', almost capturing the 'surprise' of the first viewing – except that the word 'first' at the beginning of the phrase always leads with the implication of a 'second', reminding the speakers that the surprise is a repeated and expected thing.[60]

This separation in describing the two towers' collapse therefore evokes the shock of an initial viewing of the footage, but the construction of '*first* one, then the other' – and the repetition of this phrase to describe the footage, too – is a reminder that the footage has been seen multiple times before. Joanne Garde-Hansen, a memory studies scholar, describes the repeated showing of the same footage, in the weeks after the attack, as playing 'over and over again, as if it was always the first time this shocking event was seen by someone in the world somewhere'.[61] This, too, shows the emphasis placed on the shock of the attack – as though every iteration of

[58] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 134.
[59] Ibid., p. 134.
[60] Ibid., p. 135.
[61] Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory*, p. 44.

the footage must be surprising, despite watching it with certain knowledge of what has happened. It is this sense of a repeated present – in which the events of the footage are expected and inevitable, and simultaneously undecided until the moment of their reiteration – that DeLillo portrays with the repeated phrase, 'first one, then the other'.

This echoes DeLillo's description of the Zapruder tape: 'first one, then the other', closely resembles 'here comes the car, here comes the shot'. [62] Both these detached phrases evoke the process of repetitive viewing in which a video becomes less shocking and becomes instead a series of expected events. I note the parallel between DeLillo's representation of the Zapruder tape and of the news coverage of 9/11 – both of which mediate politically significant moments in American history, caught on camera and made iconic – to suggest that DeLillo's representation of the news coverage of 9/11 is intended to illustrate the formation of an ecological memory object that stands for a real event.

DeLillo's fictionalisation of the news event of 9/11 (above) illustrates the function of news media in curating a public archive. The genre of the news comes with an implicit assurance of authority: this stems partly from trust in journalistic integrity, an assumption that a major news network will have done its due diligence in verifying information before broadcasting it publicly, and from the frequent use of expert correspondents. Where audio/visual media is presented within the news format, this assurance of authority is emphasised by the perception that it certifies presence, and re-presents the real.[63] As discussed above, the audio/visual media used as part of television news broadcasts are often repeated, particularly in the case of large-scale incidents which are reported on across an extended period of time, such as 9/11. This

[62] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 135; DeLillo, *Underworld*, p. 494.
[63] This certification of presence, discussed in detail later in this chapter, draws on the work of Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

repetition makes media immediately recognisable, an icon of the event as much as a representation of it.

The authors of *Save As…* articulate this combination of repetition and the highly produced nature of the format as television news 'reflexively scripting the moment-by-moment trajectory of events, and thus constantly adding to its archive, its own repertoire of memory. It selectively sustains and reframes the past through the highly selective repeating of video footage and still images.'[64] Timothy Barker, in his contribution to *Digital Memory Studies*, similarly describes television as 'the vehicle for the screening and repetition of the archive. And it is in this sense that it could be said to produce a temporality, a rhythm, to stored collective memory'.[65] This image of television news adding to 'its own repertoire of memory' or otherwise repeating memory objects is a useful way into thinking about how the curation of public media by the news constitutes the contemporary memory ecology.

I argue that through my close reading of *Falling Man*, what Barker calls the 'repetition of the archive' can be thought of in terms of sharing memory objects. This repetition – and the creation of an archive through persistent and selective screening – can be seen in DeLillo's representation of the replayability of the footage of 9/11, which itself echoes his previous attention to the nature of the Zapruder film as a cultural artefact. Audio/visual media that become a part of the news archive become publicly accessible and shared memory objects associated with the events they represent. As such, memory of the event becomes defined by audio/visual representations of the event – and framed by the public reception of these media. I discuss this phenomenon further in the following section of this chapter.

---

[64] Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading, *Save As…*, p. 33.
[65] Timothy Barker, 'Television In and Out of Time', in *Digital Memory Studies*, ed. by Hoskins, pp. 173-189 (p. 176).

*Shared memory objects: an ecological approach to collective memory*

My analysis so far of DeLillo's representation of news coverage of 9/11 and of the affordances of audio/visual media leads me to the present discussion of shared memory objects as a contribution of the ecological model of memory to discourse in memory studies around the individual/collective memory dichotomy. Collective memory refers, as the phrase suggests, to memory shared collectively among a group of people.[66] Recent trends in memory studies scholarship (outlined in the Introduction to this thesis) have moved away from this notion of collectivity, citing its negation of individual subjectivity as a primary issue and therefore seeking to recognise both the social aspect of memory and the subjectivity of the individual. Challenges to collective memory acknowledge that while there is often a felt sense of collectivity in acts of memoring occurring around common memory objects, the diverse and subjective experiences of individuals must also be better recognised in our conception of memory.

Astrid Erll, in her paper on 'The hidden power of implicit collective memory', states that 'collective remembering does not mean that all individuals would have identical mental representations in their minds. Instead, it means that certain versions of the past are actualised again and again within social groups (via discourses, media, practices), and that they are well-networked with other topics'.[67] This acknowledges – albeit with resistance – that the term 'collective memory' may connote the erasure of individual subjectivity. I argue that, in discussing collective memory (which I use as an

[66] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). For a useful discussion of divergent theories of collective memory and their terminology, see Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), pp. 25-29.
[67] Astrid Erll, 'The hidden power of implicit collective memory', *Memory, Mind and Media* 1 (2022), doi:10.1017/mem.2022.7.

umbrella term here to include the many off-shoots and refutations of Halbwachs' term, including shared memory), we are far better served by referring to the actualisation of certain versions of the past, which Erll describes above, as shared memory *objects*. Resistance to the notion of collectivity has also established that memory is individual, relative, and subjective; an understanding of the importance of this is reached here by examining the relative and subjective affordances of shared memory objects as depicted in DeLillo's *Falling Man* and media coverage of 9/11. The circulation of memory objects among multiple people – such as the mass broadcast of television news – facilitates the sharing of these objects. This aligns with the notion that memory acts are always embedded in a complex, interconnected ecology.

My understanding of shared memory objects is informed by Paula Hamilton's concept of 'public memory' and Hoskins' 'memory of the multitude' which both develop out from the tradition of collective memory. Hamilton's public memory 'refers to a past that is both commonly shared and collectively commemorated… though, of course, not one necessarily shared by all people, unambiguously, in any particular collectivity'.[68] This notion is linked to public or shared access to particular experiences, information, or media. Hamilton suggests that public memory is something which many people might have access to, and to which they respond. I suggest that it is the signs of memory (memory objects), not the act of memory which are shared in this instance, we can conceive of this as public access to shared memory objects, rather than as public memory.

In his essay 'Memory of the Multitude', Hoskins imagines memory as belonging not to a homogenous collective, but instead to a multitude of individuals. This allows

[68] Paula Hamilton, 'A Long War: Public Memory and the Popular Media' in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Radstone and Schwarz, p. 300.

for the notion of a shared social aspect of memory, acknowledging that a multitude of individuals can share something of a memory act. This also avoids the problem of marking out the boundaries of a social collective, as determining the edges of the 'collective' in collective memory often proves slippery and problematic. Studies of the social aspect of memory gesture towards the same problem with collective memory. Jennifer Good, in *Photography and September 11th*, for example, states: 'All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.'[69] In proposing that what is called 'collective memory' is better defined as a 'stipulating', Good draws this notion away from terms of static externalisations of memory and towards an understanding of memory as active: a negotiation rooted in social interaction. Good's critical distinction between 'remembering' and 'stipulating' in discussing collective memory, specifically, marks a significant step towards an ecological view of memory as an emergent social process.

Chapters One and Two of this thesis examined depictions from *The Unconsoled* and *Oryx and Crake* of how the physical and social context in which a memory object is encountered affects its affordances for memory. Similarly, as an object embedded within a complex system of interacting elements, DeLillo's description of the video footage of 9/11 suggests that its affordances are affected by its presentation on the news and within that genre; this entanglement is not only limited to the vagaries of audio/visual media, live broadcast, or the medium of the television, but with a multitude of other contextual elements – such as who the subject may be watching with, or where. Any sense of a *collective* audience is dispelled by this

[69] Good, *Photography and September 11th*, p. 25.

reminder of its heterogeneity, and the individuality of response. Instead, collectivity is replaced by a model of *connectivity*, as the audience (a multitude of individuals) share access to the same memory object, both at the time of its first broadcast, and as it continues to be restipulated and replayed afterward.

The relevance of this novel to the affordance of shared memory objects is best illustrated by its titular and textual references to the 'Falling Man', as established in the introduction to this chapter. The first time the performance artist 'falling man' Janiak appears in the novel, it is when Lianne witnesses one of his jumps first-hand: when she looks to find out why a crowd has gathered and traffic slowed, she notices that '[a] man was dangling there, above the street, upside down.'[70] The narration goes on, 'He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump,' and, shortly afterwards,

> There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body's last fleet breath and what it held. It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all.[71]

The introduction of David Janiak to this novel therefore stands in for the controversy surrounding the circulation and interpretation of these images: it is, in part, the representation of 'human desperation' which is noted as something unseen here.

Janiak embodies at once the photograph itself, and also its controversial reception: by drawing attention to the act of jumping and falling in the stylized pose of 'Falling Man', he situates himself as a public memory object with the presumed intention of evoking the iconic image that was so quickly removed from many public spaces. It is worth also noting that Lianne suggests that 'the single falling figure… trails

[70] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 33.
[71] Ibid., p. 33.

a collective dread' as the 'something we'd not seen'.[72] Especially given that 'Falling Man' was such a widely published and recognised image immediately following 9/11, this again refers to the suppression of other images of people who jumped and fell from the towers. The relative publicity of shared memory objects, as in this instance, indicates the socially-constructed framwork of the memory ecology, as images are produced, curated, re-produced or suppressed. Janiak's presence in the novel therefore points to the importance of public memory objects and the discourse that arises around them.

DeLillo captures something of the connectivity of live broadcast television news in relation to 9/11 as he depicts how experiences of watching the footage are shared. I highlight here two aspects of this representation: the shared experience of watching the news of the attacks, and the subjectivity of this experience. I suggest that this both aligns with and extends an ecological understanding of memory, as the notion of shared memory objects is a departure from notions of shared or collective memory. The potential contribution of an ecological view of memory to discourse around the social aspect of memory has been recognised by memory scholars as a defining feature of this concept. Hoskins recognises this in 'Memory of the Multitude', a text which establishes – from an ecological perspective – the memory of the multitude as 'made from human-archival entanglements of communication through digital devices and networks', and therefore as a concept which 'smashes the exhausted but endemic individual-collective binary that haunts the study of memory'.[73] This is a contribution also acknowledged by Debra Ramsay, who writes that a 'more useful approach to memory [than collective memory] is to regard it as neither individual nor collective, but

[72] *Falling Man*., p. 33.
[73] Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85-109.

as a process that takes place within a complex system, or ecology'.[74] Ekelund's entry for 'connective memory' in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Memory Studies* likewise suggests that, deriving from Hoskins' work on ecological memory, connective memory is designed 'to challenge ideas of "individual memories" and the binaries of individual and collective and active and passive'.[75] Though concepts of individual and collective memory can be regarded in nuanced terms to acknowledge individual memory within a social context, an ecological model of memory makes these nuances an explicit and fundamental part of understanding memory. I suggest that an ecological reading of shared memory objects in *Falling Man* can illustrate and extend the work of memory ecologies in challenging these binaries.

The idea of a collective audience – with all its connotations of passivity and homogeneity – is reflected in *Falling Man* in one conversation between Lianne and her mother:

> "I thought he was dead."
> "So did I," Nina said. "So many watching."
> "Thinking he's dead, she's dead."
> "I know."
> "Watching those buildings fall."
> "First one, then the other. I know," her mother said.[76]

This conversation expresses the felt sense of shared experience: that these were two people among many, all watching the same footage unfold, all thinking the same thing. This emulates a sense of collectivity, bringing to mind the idea that the audience watched as one, and responded to it as one. We might also infer from this interaction the sense that the same audience will come to share memory of the event as part of the same collective, as both characters appear to have responded to the footage in

[74] Debra Ramsay, 'Tensions in the Interface: The Archive and the Digital', in *Digital Memory Studies*, ed. by Hoskins, pp. 290-302.
[75] Robin Ekelund, 'Connective Memory', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Memory Studies*, ed. by Lucas M. Bietti, Martin Pogacar (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). See also Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory Ecologies', *Memory Studies* 9.3 (2016), pp. 348-357.
[76] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 11.

similar ways, and further assume that this is a shared experience with 'so many watching', all thinking the same thing. It is easy to imagine television news audiences as collective in this way – a multitude of people who are all spectators to the exact same audio/visual mediations of an event – but this perspective presumes passivity and negates the subjectivity of individual perception. In this conversation, the collectivity of the audience seems to be taken for granted, yet the emphasis on the repeated first-person pronouns on both sides of this dialogue ('*I* thought', 'So did *I*', '*I* know') represents these characters as individuals within that collective.

DeLillo offers a slight contrast with this account later in *Falling Man* in the dialogue between members of a writing group for people affected by Alzheimers, a feature of the novel which further evidences DeLillo's interest in the subject of memoring as it relates to 9/11. This writing group further points to function of mediative memory objects around the event as a central theme of the novel, as DeLillo depicts the group writing about how they first witnessed news of 9/11. This passage of the novel focuses on the diversity of responses to the events of 9/11, raising consciousness of different and contradictory perspectives.[77] This includes their varying approaches to faith in light of the 9/11 attacks, and also reference to how the mass consumption of the same media is made subjective by the context of individual spectatorship.

Whereas first-hand witnessing of an event is fairly limited, and must take place in direct proximity to it, media witnessing can occur in a range of diverse contexts. For instance, DeLillo juxtaposes the viewing experiences of two members of the writing group: Eugene A. and Omar:

> "I was scrubbing at the sink for once in my life when the phone rings. It's my ex-wife," [Eugene A.] said, "that I haven't talked to in like seventeen years, is she

[77] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, pp. 60-65.

> even alive or dead, calling from somewhere I can't even pronounce it, in Florida. I say what. She says never mind what. That same voice of no respect. She says turn on TV."
> "I had to watch at a neighbor," Omar said.[78]

Both Eugene A. and Omar's experiences of watching the media coverage unfold are defined by the social nature of the event: Eugene A.'s estranged wife reaching out indicates the exceptional nature of the event, and a remote sharing of the experience (via the phone call), while Omar is (presumably) physically present and sharing space with his neighbour while they watch. The contrast between these two experiences and, more generally, the different responses to the event expressed in the dialogue of this section of the novel, highlight the subjectivity of the audience whilst still underlining the shared nature of the object itself: the footage of the event as framed by the live broadcast. This emphasises experience of a publicly accessible memory object, whereby an object is shared across a collective, but the experience of it – and the memory of the event – is subjective. These several people at the writing group have encountered the same object as a public memory object accessed by billions of people, but DeLillo emphasises that they have encountered it separately, variously, and subjectively.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how DeLillo engages with the media landscape of the early 2000s in his depiction of the news event of 9/11. DeLillo draws a comparison between the novel and these other media by evoking the photograph 'Falling Man' through the title of the novel and the performances of David Janiak, who emulates that photograph. By doing so, he situates *Falling Man* as a record of 9/11 and contrasts the

[78] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, p. 63.

affordances of the novel for memory in an ecological setting with those of other media. All of these representations of 9/11 are discussed in this chapter as shared memory objects, produced and curated to memorialise the event.

I have used this analysis to demonstrate the confluence of DeLillo's representation of memory and media and an ecological model of memory by i) examining the depiction of audio/visual media and its affordances for memory in *Falling Man*, and ii) making explicit the contribution of an ecological theory of memory (through my discussion of shared memory objects) to resisting a binary view of individual and collective memory. This leads into my discussion in Chapter Four which, in its close reading of Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*, takes as its focus the social hyperconnectivity of digital cultures and considers the media-specific qualities of digital media which first gave rise to theories of ecological memory.

# 4. ‘YOU HAVE A NEW MEMORY’: THE ILLUSIONS AND AFFORDANCES OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN PATRICIA LOCKWOOD’S *NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT THIS* (2021)

## Introduction

Since its publication in 2021, Patricia Lockwood’s *No One Is Talking About This* has been recognised for its attention to networked digital media, and particularly to the cultural impact of social media. The novel invites this critical view by its fragmentary writing style and formal resemblance to social media feeds: the narrative is broken into short, often provocative, often loosely related (or unrelated) paragraphs that emulate the experience of scrolling through a series of discrete social media posts. *No One Is Talking About This* evokes the affordances of digital media within a context that calls attention to the affordances of literature. Most notably, it speaks to the presentification of the digital, in which archival objects of memory and media are connected across devices, platforms, and actors, and intrude, in all their banality, on the user’s cognitive experience of the world. While Lockwood’s interest in the evolving media landscape is well established, the novel’s representation of memory has so far received considerably less attention. An ecological reading of memory and media reveals the interconnectedness of memory objects and memoring subjects in *No One Is Talking About This*, particularly as this relates to the affordances of networked digital media for the creation and curation of memory objects.

I have referred throughout this thesis to Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng’s statement that contemporary novels ‘function as a critical response to and as a vehicle for envisioning the changing state of memory; in the meantime, they facilitate or even reshape our understanding of how memory works in the age of digital technologies

and social media'.[1] To better understand how Lockwood's representation of memory within a postdigital culture exhibits an ecological understanding of memory, this chapter offers an analysis of what, specifically, about the contemporary moment has made an ecological model of memory newly visible. As I have noted previously in this thesis, it was while writing about networked digital media that Andrew Hoskins first outlined the notion of a 'new' memory ecology. Hoskins defines this new memory ecology as 'the current digital environment's (re)ordering of the past by and through multiple connectivities of times, actors and events, which also shifts the very parameters of memory and memory studies'.[2] Throughout the previous chapters of this thesis, I have shown how this ecological entangling and dis-/re-ordering of the past is exhibited by contemporary novels in their depiction of other media to suggest that this is an understanding of memory as a cognitively distributed act which can be more generally applied: the memory ecology is not limited to digital media, but rather made visible from the vantage point of digital cultures.

To this end, I have so far considered the approach of several media novels – with interests in various media types – to representing memory as ecological, and particularly how this is placed in contrast with the affordances of the novel itself. By doing so, I have examined the notion of memory as ecological with attention to media types other than the digital. In my close reading of Lockwood's novel, I consider how the specific qualities of digital media – as well as expectations of digital media – shape conceptions of memory and offer unique affordances for creating, curating, and sharing memory objects.

---

[1] Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023), p. 2.
[2] Andrew Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85-109 (p. 87).

I argue that the view of media and memory put forward in this novel echoes the terms of memory ecology, and reaches this through its representation of the fluent use of digital devices (and particularly those which are wearable), in conjunction with the joint promise of infinite access to information and infinite storage. With the smartphone, for instance, it is possible to imagine constant and immediate access to personal archives (particularly through online data storage) and to vast amounts of publicly shared information (for instance, via Internet searches). The editors of *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology and the Social* gesture towards the potentiality of a participatory culture brought about by networked digital media, saying, 'Digitization seems, at least in theory, to promote a radical democratization of memory: everything may, potentially, belong to everyone'.[3] While they go on to note that this is something of an illusion (the reality being paywalls and passwords), this promise of immediate access to potentially limitless information has real effects on the perception of networked digital media.

With reference to *No One Is Talking About This*, I examine how the very possibility of immediate access and sharing affects memory and its conceptions, regardless of the reality that this potential may be obstructed by a variety of factors – from poor connection to personal preferences for other media types, or the passwords and paywalls noted above. At its fullest potential, this combination of versatility, immediacy, and infinite storage leads to a perception of digital memory as being fluently incorporated into memory acts. This perception, in turn, leads to an adapted approach to making, storing, and sharing (digital) memory objects.

[3] *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology and the Social*, ed. by Ina Blom, Trond Lundemo and Eivind Røssaak (Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

The work of this chapter is a culmination of the studies of memory and media in contemporary fiction which have comprised the rest of this thesis so far. The first part of this chapter deals explicitly with scholarship surrounding the vagaries of new digital media, considering how the wearability of digital devices, the immediacy of feedback, the illusion of infinite storage, and the increasing inconspicuousness of digital interfaces each contribute to the recognition in recent years of an ecological model of memory as associated with networked digital media. I then turn to a close reading of *No One Is Talking About This* which is grounded in that theoretical discussion. By exploring the foundations of ecological memory as specific to the contemporary media landscape and conducting a close reading analysis of Lockwood's novel, this chapter brings the work of previous chapters – which have emphasised the recognition of nondigital memory objects as ecological in representations of memory – together with an acknowledgement of how the vantage point of digital cultures newly facilitates the conceptualisation of memory as ecological.

**Ecological Memory and Digital Media**

In the section that follows, I note several aspects of networked digital media which extend the affordances of nondigital memory objects and give rise to an understanding of ecological memory in the contemporary media landscape. In particular, I suggest that we can understand digital memory objects in light of the representations of ecological memory discussed in previous chapters with reference to Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2005), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007).

*Wearability of digital technologies*

The wearability of digital media and the fluency of their incorporation in day-to-day activities can be understood as occurring at an individual level in the massive expansion of personal archives: wearable smartphones function as both a means of capturing, storing, sharing, and accessing images. The wearability of the smartphone brings almost limitless access to images into an intimate personal sphere of objects alongside keys, wallets, and so on, a position exacerbated further still by the introduction of smart watches and the use of haptic technology.[4] One of the central ideas on which ecological memory is founded is that of extended cognition, the possibility that cognitive acts do not only occur within the brain, but 'include inextricable tangles of feedback, feed-forward, and feed-around loops: loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world'.[5] This is an understanding of cognition – and, by extension, memory – which has been applied throughout this thesis to representations of various media types, and is central to an understanding of memory as always emergent from the mass of entanglements between objects in the world and a memoring subject.

This perception is exacerbated by the wearability of contemporary digital devices, including smartphones. Their wearability facilitates a fluency of use not seen with other media types, bringing the illusion of infinite storage, the potential for hyperconnective communication, and a perceived virtual space. This, as Tom Valvanis notes in a paper on the wearability of digital devices, exacerbates McLuhan's notion (cited in Chapter Three) of the 'global village': what McLuhan perceived as a global

[4] Anna Reading, 'Memobilia: The Mobile Phone and the Emergence of Wearable Memories', in *Save As… Digital Memories*, ed. by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 81-95.
[5] Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford University Press, 2010), xxviii.

culture becomes a '*participatory culture* that sees the computer not as a new "steam engine" but rather something much more revolutionary in terms of human organisation on a global scale—the new "mechanical clock"'.[6] Anna Reading provides a useful description of how this pertains to memory studies:

> Mobile digital phone memories or memobilia are wearable, shareable multimedia data records of events or communications. They are captured on the move, easily digitally archived and rapidly and easily mobilised. They may be saved as a personal note, shared via the mobile-phone handset with a chosen few or circulated to the many by individuals or via websites. They can include an image of a pet shared via the mobile handset with a co-present friend; keeping an archive of texts from a boyfriend; recording ambient sounds in a pub to listen to later or capturing a mobile-phone video of a London fire and sending it to the BBC.[7]

The wearability of devices, Reading argues, means that mobile phones are 'increasingly being used and experienced as an extension of the embodied self'.[8] The term 'memobile' here gestures towards the synthesis of external media and the self, referring both to the portability of digital media, the mobility of memory itself, and also to the joining of the self ('me') with technology (such as the mobile phone). While other media types are conceivably wearable (a pocket notepad, for instance, or a camera worn on the body), the crucial difference in the fluent incorporation of smart devices into day-to-day activities is their extreme versatility, as Reading suggests here.

To understand how the wearability of devices affects the affordances of digital memory objects according to an ecological view of memory, it is useful to turn once again to theories of extended cognition, and to an understanding of external media as being incorporated fully into cognition. This is a concept explored in N. Katherine Hayles' work, *Unthought* (2017), in which she describes distributed cognition in terms of 'cognitive assemblages,' systems which cross traditional boundaries between

---

[6] Tom Valcanis, 'An iPhone in every hand: media ecology, communication structures, and the global village', *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 68.1 (2011), pp. 33-45.
[7] Reading, 'Memobilia', p. 81.
[8] Ibid., p. 82.

human and technical cognizers and are 'always in transition, constantly adding and dropping components and rearranging connections'.[9] This notion decentres human actors in cognitive (and memory) processes, pointing instead to the importance of interacting elements within a broader system, as in an ecological model of memory.

This idea of cognition extending beyond the brain and body has already been discussed at length throughout this thesis, as it underlies the ecological model of memory: memory is fundamentally a cognitive act which incorporates many various media types. In a broad sense, then, it is understood that media can be incorporated into memory acts: memory objects afford memory. The introduction of digital media to ecological memory demands a new understanding of how, and to what extent, that incorporation occurs. To think about this, we can consider Clark and Chalmers' description of cognitive 'coupling', which 'is intended to make some object, which in and of itself is not usefully (perhaps not even intelligibly) thought of as *either cognitive or noncognitive*, into a *proper part of some cognitive routine*'.[10] As Clark and Chalmers note, 'It is not the mere presence of a coupling that matters but the effect of the coupling – the way it poises (or fails to poise) information for a certain kind of use within a specific kind of problem-solving routine.'[11] The importance of digital media for memory in this sense is its versatility: an object such as a smartphone may poise information for uncountably more uses within uncountably more kinds of problem-solving routines than many other media types. As such, its affordances are multiplied and are abundantly available to the user.

As Reading notes above, a digital notebook and an audio/visual recording device, among an ever-increasing number of other applications, are always potentially

[9] N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 2.
[10] Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, p. 87, emphasis in original.
[11] Ibid., p. 87.

ready-to-hand for mobile phone users. The non-digital media with which these functions are associated – a notebook, video camera, phonebook, calendar, and other media types commonly associated with performing a role in memory acts – are intentionally evoked by the design of the relevant software. Although these are not functions which every smartphone user might consciously engage with on a frequent basis, the *option* of their use itself affects conceptions of memory. The presence of a smartphone, particularly when worn upon the body or kept close to hand, therefore signifies the introduction and fluent incorporation of countless possibilities for the instant creation and storage of memory objects into day-to-day activities. In this way, digital media promises that any experience, any piece of information, *can* be captured and stored with minimal effort from the user. It is also worth noting that this impact is magnified in the context of events which are experienced communally with others. Everything I have outlined here as making digital memorialisation so accessible to the individual user also affects socially distributed, collaborative memory acts.[12] For example, the accessibility of a video recording device and the ease of sharing media has led to the increase in uploaded and live-streamed video footage of events such as a London fire (as Reading mentions above), a concert, a public protest, or a gathering of friends.

By understanding, in this light, the integration of digital media into cognitive processes and social activities as more versatile and fluent in its use than other media types, we can then consider the effect of this on conceptions of and approaches to memory. We have seen the affordances of various media types in ecological memory

[12] For more on collaborative memory acts, see Celia B. Harris, Amanda J. Barnier, John Sutton, Paul G. Keil, and Roger A. Dixon, '"Going episodic": collaborative inhibition and facilitation when long-married couples remember together', *Memory* 25.8 (2017), pp. 1148-1159; Amanda J. Barnier, Louis Klein, and Celia B. Harris, 'Transactive Memory in Small, Intimate Groups: More Than the Sum of Their Parts', *Small Group Research* 49.1 (2018), pp. 62-97.

in previous chapters of this thesis, but this has so far taken for granted a far greater specificity and limitation in their use than we begin to see with digital media. For example, non-digital forms of linguistic media such as written notes and archives may be capable of recording vast amounts of information, but they are too time-consuming to create, curate, and access in order to be able to viably answer every short, simple, banal, or even unnecessary query a person may have, which a smartphone and the use of search engines might readily facilitate. Instead, analogue media take on specific roles: a dictionary for the meaning of words, a newspaper for current events, a diary for personal record-keeping, a notebook for shopping lists, and so on. In contrast to the versatility and portability of digital devices, the creation, curation, and accessing of these objects means that they are each conspicuously encountered with an awareness of their specific purpose and more limited affordances.

The role of digital media in memory and in how we conceive of memory marks a significant departure from this. The use of a device that has the potential to provide all of these facilities as a wearable 'extension of the embodied self' means that smartphone users have near-constant access to almost limitless information.[13] While there are limitations to this, the mere promise of digital technology and the language of limitlessness that surrounds it are important here. With both a raised consciousness that information is always potentially to-hand and the increasing incorporation of digital technology into the problem-solving routines of memory, there is a decreasing need for reflective engagement with memory objects, and less need to find other means of problem-solving. In an insightful examination of the function of search engines, Rosie Graham uses the term 'remembering' to include 'the use of search engines for jogging one's memory for things we would otherwise say we know,' going on to observe that

[13] Reading, 'Memobilia', p. 81.

'[w]e often rely on these kinds of mental placeholders, however empty, because we know that correct searches will remind us of certain facts.'[14] Increasingly, our view of memory is entangled with our use of these empty placeholders and our use of perpetually ready-to-hand devices. Again, there is some extent to which this has long been the case with non-digital media, too: knowing where and how to access information, whether that be another person, an archive, a diary, a post-it note, is often a crucial part of memory. However, the versatility of digital media newly synthesises the location of these mental placeholders in one wearable device, a device which becomes a fluid part of the memory ecology.

*Near-immediate feedback*

It is within the context of the proliferation of wearable digital devices, outlined above, that the prospect of near-immediate feedback impacts conceptions of memory by exponentially reducing the reflective distance between events and memory acts. Drawing on my reading of *The Unconsoled*, which I read through ecological theories of memory as a presentification of biography in the first chapter of this thesis, and scholarship from digital memory studies, I suggest that the prospect of near-immediate feedback provided by new digital media indicates a presentification of memory objects which have otherwise been traditionally defined by acts of creation, curation, and temporal delay.

In my close reading analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995) in the first chapter of this thesis, I emphasised the importance of the environments which afford memory acts (for example, by a lack of interruption or distraction). The

[14] Rosie Graham, 'A "History" of Search Engines: Mapping Technologies of Memory, Learning, and Discovery', in *Society of the Query Reader: Reflections on Web Search*, ed. by René König and Miriam Rasch (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2014).

construction of memory objects through language, as read through Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, similarly requires some reflective distance between an event and a memory act regarding it: to put something into words requires – at the very least – the time it takes to code and decode a message. Where memory objects are both created and later comprehended by the same person, their affordances as memory objects likewise rely on (and assume) the passage of time, as in the writing of a diary. Although my reading of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* in the third chapter of this thesis, in its consideration of broadcast news, may seem to have been edging closer to the notion of immediacy, the possibility of feedback nevertheless remains at a delay. A video may be broadcast 'live', but the ability to play back and replay that footage nevertheless depends on either an external authority (such as programmers, producers, and so on), or else on the individual's capacity to record something, store and replay it. The distinction here is between near-immediate feedback, and near-immediate broadcast. With regards to non-digital forms of photography, the necessity of reflective distance between an event and its representation can be seen more clearly still: a photograph must be developed before it can be viewed.

Digital media newly present us with a method of representation that offers near-immediate feedback, removing the delay between an event and its representation. I refer to 'feedback' here – a term rooted in cybernetic origins – to mean the re-presentation of an event as a media/memory object, as it is a term which resonates across media theory and theories of extended cognition.[15] Jean Baudrillard described television as a social phenomenon which '[brings] society to the parodic level of a total farce, an unstoppable *image-feedback* of its own reality.'[16] In this case, 'image-

[15] See Andrew Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).
[16] Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, trans. by Ames Hodges (Semiotext(e), 2005), p. 190.

feedback' refers to the co-presence of something and its representation: society (in reality) is observing itself (on a screen), the effect of which is something like an infinite mirror.

'Feedback' is also grounded in theories of extended cognition, where it is used to explicate the interactions between cognizers: 'the actual local operations that realize certain forms of human cognizing include inextricable tangles of feedback, feed-forward, and feed-around loops: loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world'.[17] The use of the term 'feedback' in this field of study 'implies that the boundaries of the autonomous subject are up for grabs, since feedback loops can flow… *between* the subject and the environment'.[18] This is all the more relevant in the present discussion of the near-immediate feedback (i.e. the co-presence of an object or event and its representation as a memory object) offered by digital media because of the fluency in these cognitive systems which is promised by immediacy.

'Feedback' is also a useful term for its evocation of audio feedback, the distorted hum that results from the return of a fraction of the output signal to the input of the same device – for example, a microphone too near to the speaker it is connected to. In cybernetics, the term 'feedback' also refers to a form of communication and control: the ability to utilise outputs as inputs in order to achieve stability within a system. If the representation of an event can be viewed in similar proximity to the event itself, there occurs a disruption in the process of memoring. A temporal delay between an event and its representation has long been the space in memory practices that allows for reflective distance; the event settles over time into retrospection. Near-immediate feedback signifies a less linear – and less straightforwardly narrative – temporality

[17] Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, p. xxviii.
[18] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 2, emphasis in original.

and, as I go on to demonstrate, a perceived presentification of the archive. Referring to the near-immediate feedback offered by digital media, then, I evoke these notions both of fluency in the networked system, and of sympathetic reverberations which, held too close to their source, will also have an unsettling, distorting effect. This reflects an understanding of the participation of digital media in memory as both fluently assimilated into memory acts with its promise of accessibility, immediacy, and durability, and also effects a distortion whereby an event and its representation may be temporally indistinct.

In 'Digital Network Memory,' Hoskins observes that '[w]ith electro-digital archives, there is – in *principle* – no more delay between memory and the present, but the technical *option* of immediate feedback, turning every present data into archival entries and vice versa'.[19] Hoskins' focus here is not on the actual creation of an archive, but rather the theoretical possibility or promise of one. Access to information promises that even if there is something one does not know or remember, familiarity with various electro-digital archives will nevertheless allow it to be found out. This is perhaps most easily applied to the use of search engines but extends also to the default storage of messages and audio/visual media, as well as information discoverable through social media.[20]

Whether or not an individual actively employs any of these faculties of digital media in memoring is not the point: the presence of this information, the promise of its permanence, and the immediacy of access inevitably affect how we conceive of memory. This reduction of the reflective distance between an event and its representation means that digital memory objects require less conscious engagement

[19] Andrew Hoskins, 'Digital Network Memory' in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 91-107 (p. 152), emphasis added.
[20] For more on search engines, see Graham, 'A "History" of Search Engines', pp. 109-114.

in their creation and curation, which creates a fundamental shift in the treatment and experience of memory objects. Although a user or memoring subject might choose to take a careful approach to invoking the significations of a memory object, this is no longer presumed to be the case as it might once have been. For instance, analogue photographs have a higher labour and economic value than photographs taken with a smartphone camera due to the several factors, including the somewhat more limited portability of analogue cameras, the time taken to develop photographs and the cost of materials, and the physical space required of a repository for these images (e.g. in a frame, box, or photo album). To whatever extent smartphone cameras are or are not taken up by individual users, the contemporary archive is, as Hoskins notes, transformed by 'the technical *option*' of new, immediate, digital forms of memory object creation and storage.

The premise of ecological memory rests on the notion that anything in the environment, any media type, can and does afford human cognition: previous chapters of this thesis have explored contemporary fictional representations of how various media types compose these feedback loops. Digital connection, however, with its emphasis on the speed and ease of its use, purports to reduce any frictional or cumbersome elements of the process, promising feedback loops and cognitive assemblages in which information can pass freely and easily between the subject and their environment. To take photography once more as an example, the use of pre-digital cameras required, to varying degrees, a period of development before images were accessible: the necessary delay between an event (the object as it is photographed) and feedback of the event (its re-presentation as visual media). Digital photography has all but removed this process of development and delay, as images can be re-viewed and shared instantaneously, repeatedly, and (hypothetically) in

perpetuity. As discussed below in relation to Lockwood's depiction of online experience in *No One Is Talking About This*, this constitutes a critical departure from analogue forms of memory object creation and curation.

The prospect of near-immediate feedback, in combination with the promise of permanence, discussed below, leads on to the exponential expansion and increased banality of archived materials. Non-digital forms of archiving generally signify that time has passed since the events represented therein. This is, in part, due to the nature of non-digital media representations: it takes a substantial amount of time to render an experience in text, to develop photographs, to curate artifacts of significance. Non-digital archives also inherently require the active omission and removal of information: an archive's capacity is limited by physical space, the cost of materials, and the labour of a curator. In the apparent negation of each of these, digital media promises to escape a similar process of selectivity. Near-immediate feedback and the sheer capacity of digital technology therefore result in the increasing banality of archived information, as well as a reduced signification of time passed.

*The illusion of infinite storage*

Digital technologies promise infinite memory storage, both with functionally (at least for most users) limitless capacity and in terms of permanence. In itself, permanence is not a new promise: we may consider the poetic conceit of the immortality of literature (Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 55: Not marble nor the gilded monuments' is a famous expression of this),[21] or the centrality of material longevity to the function of public monuments. However, this is an idea greatly intensified by a language of virtuality

[21] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Lerner Publishing Group, 1978), p. 64.

which promotes a sense of digitally-stored information being placed intangibly elsewhere, stored in the ether (think 'cloud' storage), rather than in material objects. This combines with the versatility of digital media (outlined above) to suggest that digital memory objects have the potential to be forever recovered if corrupt, rediscovered if lost, and reformatted if rendered obsolete.

This promise of infinite memory storage results in the creation of increasingly banal memory objects and increasingly banal conceptions of memory and a reduced need for active curation. Digital objects are, first and foremost, material objects. Just as ink may fade, a record may be scratched, or tape may deteriorate, digital media and the information they contain are subject to material decay.[22] In spite of this, the prevailing perception of digital media foregrounds its ephemerality and its permanence. We should first acknowledge that this is an illusion, characteristic of conceptions of digital memory rather than of digital technologies themselves. However, the idea of infinite digital memory nevertheless impacts how we perceive memory. Whatever the extent to which digital memory might offer higher capacity and endurance than previous or alternative media, it is the illusion of permanence and the conception of digital memory as an enduring ephemeral object that impacts contemporary understandings of memory, including how memory objects are created and curated.[23]

Wendy Chun argues that it is the presence of 'memory' in hardware that gives this illusion of permanence, that '[m]emory allegedly makes digital media an ever-increasing archive in which no piece of data is ever lost.'[24] Memory is at the core of

[22] See, for example, Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (MIT Press, 2012).
[23] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory', *Critical Inquiry* 35.1 (2008), pp. 148-171.
[24] Chun, 'The Enduring Ephemeral', p. 154.

digital media in a way that it is not a part of language, television, or other media: there is a physical part to which we attribute the process of 'memory', the capacity of which we ultimately seem to control. The expansion of capacity, the increasingly compact and accessible nature of digital memory, and the exponentially more prolific use of digital memory to store information, all contribute to this illusion of the 'ever-increasing archive'. This promise of permanence combines with a turn towards digital technologies as performing an almost automatic function of information storage, where deletion of material is more arduous than its creation.

As outlined above, the fluent incorporation of digital media in memory acts has led to the prolific creation of memory objects – digital studies scholars have noted that these are far more rarely reduced than their non-digital counterparts.[25] This, alongside the apparent permanence of digital information storage, makes digital media seem to be an ever-increasing archive where data is not only never lost, as Chun suggests, but also never thrown away. This perception of an ever-increasing archive – both of personal and shared memory objects – is what lies behind the digital memory practices Graham describes: empty placeholders replace other cognitive problem-solving routines as it seems that more and more information can be quickly and easily found on the user's person.

In *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, Viktor Mayer-Schönberger outlines how digital technology has brought about 'the demise of forgetting, and a fundamental shift to the default of remembering'.[26] Mayer-Schönberger considers forms of non-digital mediation as being variously time-consuming, expensive, and transient, whereas digital technology offers a form of information storage and retrieval

[25] See, for example, Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 136-147.
[26] Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete*, p. 11.

that is (again, functionally) omnipresent, costless, accessible, durable, and comprehensive. Given examples include the financial cost of writing implements and the time taken to make records of any kind by hand versus the immediacy of digital note-taking, as well as the financial and time costs involved in developing photographs compared with the ease of taking pictures on a phone's camera. What he describes as 'digital remembering,' 'no longer requires a conscientious act, a tiny bit of time, energy, or money… Digital forgetting, on the other hand,' – the time taken to curate a digital archive – 'necessitates that extra quantum of human effort'.[27] This results in the notion that the curation of digital archives is a process of reviewing and selectively deleting material, rather than the previous non-digital focus on the creation and selective inclusion of material, making it easier and more efficient to retain information than to delete it.

With this in mind, we might return to Reading's list of possibilities for memobilia, noted earlier in this chapter: 'an image of a pet shared via the mobile handset with a co-present friend; keeping an archive of texts from a boyfriend; recording ambient sounds in a pub to listen to later or capturing a mobile-phone video of a London fire and sending it to the BBC.'[28] While this goes some way to describing the scope of possibilities offered by a mobile device, it mimics the language generally used to describe the participation of digital media in memory acts by placing too great an emphasis on the kind of intentionality required. Implicit in each of these scenarios, though it is not stated here by Reading, is that the default of digital technologies is to retain information. 'Sharing', for example, rarely means *sharing with* (as it might in regard to other media types), but rather *duplicating for*, meaning that any image shared

[27] Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete*, p. 167.
[28] Reading, 'Memobilia', p. 81.

with a friend is, by default, kept by both parties. This is increasingly the case with the development of cloud storage, where information is not only stored locally on smart devices, but is also backed up on servers elsewhere. Likewise, '*keeping* an archive of texts' is not so much an act of retaining those texts as it is a passive failure to delete them. The use of terms such as 'archive' is equally confusing: this method of 'keeping' (neglecting to delete) implies none of the consciously curated mode of preservation or collection usually associated with archival practices. The changing nature of information storage – as that which we fail to delete, as opposed to carefully curated mementos of the past – leads to a fundamental shift in conceptions of memory. In this view, the memory ecology is saturated with information and access to memory objects appears to outweigh forgetting.

The promise of permanence means that, in theory, the enduring ephemeral digital object is *out there*, somewhere, bound to be accessible when needed, and information is also more easily stored in duplicate or 'backed up' to multiple storage systems than most non-digital media. The illusion of permanence, then, allows a greater reliance on knowledge of how to find or access information, as opposed to knowledge of information itself. Memory, particularly with regards to objective information (e.g. a person's birthday, or the name of a band's second album) is increasingly memory of where and how to access that information. This is not new in itself – of course, the keeping of records of any kind allows this approach to memory. However, the joint promise of immediacy and permanence magnifies this particular relation of media to memory. A significant way that the evolution of new digital media extends the affordances of memory objects is therefore by appearing immediately available and entirely accessible.

*The inconspicuous interface: language of virtual space and ecological thought*

One of the key markers of how an ecological understanding of media and memory can be developed through an exploration of representations of digital media is the language of 'cyberspace'. In my analysis here I consider both the material object of the digital device and the information to which it gives access.

The incorporation of digital media into day-to-day activities is supported by the effacement of the material object. This is an illusion which emerges from the notion of cyberspace as an ephemeral elsewhere in which information streams exist – material objects such as smartphones become a way of connecting to that elsewhere, rather than a physical repository of information. While the materiality of a digital device may seem self-evident – and, as such, unworthy of mention – the purpose of such an object as an interface means that its physical presence is often effaced. In Alexander Galloway's essay on 'The Unworkable Interface,' he compares this function of digital media with

> Windows, doors, airport gates, and other thresholds', commenting that each are 'transparent devices [which] achieve more the less they do: for every moment of virtuosic immersion and connectivity, for every moment of volumetric delivery, of inopacity, the threshold becomes one notch more invisible, one notch more inoperable. As technology, the more a dioptric device erases the traces of its own functioning… the more it succeeds in its functional mandate.'[29]

In *Media Archeology*, meanwhile, Jussi Parikka describes how media that become 'too effective in what they do […] vanish from view, do their job of mediating, and leave the illusion that all there is is content passing through the channels.'[30]

The concept of digital interfaces as a threshold (or portal) to cyberspace is testament to the effacement of digital objects in use. This is to speak of digital media only in ideological terms, assuming that all works as it is supposed to and the user is

[29] Alexander R. Galloway, 'The Unworkable Interface', *New Literary History* 39.4 (2008), pp. 931-955 (p. 931).
[30] Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Polity, 2012), p. 113.

immersed in their mediated experience.[31] There are instances in which the effacement of digital media fails: a smartphone, for instance, will be rendered conspicuous in its materiality by a dead battery or lack of signal. Issues such as these will cause the physical object at hand to return to consciousness, no longer transparent in its performance but opaque in its failure. Although this is always a distinct possibility in the use of digital devices to access memory objects, it is the ideal state of the interface as inconspicuous which informs conceptions of memory, as I explore further with reference to Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* later in this chapter.

The interface paradoxically refers to two different functions of a digital device: the material notion of the interface is the device at hand, 'a two-dimensional plane with meaning embedded in it or delivered through it', while the metaphorical notion of the interface refers to 'a gateway that opens up and allows passage to some place beyond'.[32] When a digital interface is user-friendly and functioning as intended, the material aspect of the interface fades into a thing of minor importance, giving primary consciousness to the threshold of information transfer: a gateway to the ethereal elsewhere of cyberspace. The importance of the inconspicuousness of digital devices as material objects is in our conceptions of cyberspace and the world around us. As Chun notes, 'our media matter most when they seem not to matter at all, that is, when they have moved from the new to the habitual'[33] – a sentiment Dinnen echoes in defining 'the digital banal' as 'the condition by which we don't notice the affective novelty of becoming-with digital media… [T]he way we use media makes us unaware of the ways we are co-constituted as subjects with media.'[34] The interest of digital

[31] Lori Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. xi.
[32] Galloway, 'The Unworkable Interface', p. 936.
[33] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press, 2017), p. 1.
[34] Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2021), p. 1.

media, then, is its inconspicuousness, its habituation, its banality. In memory studies, this returns us to the notion of reflective distance: just as the possibility of immediate feedback reduces – or erases – the time between an event and its mediation, a diminished awareness of mediation *as* mediation reduces the imperative for conscious reflection.

The notion of the 'interface' in digital media underscores the possibility of reading cyberspace as an ecological concept: it emphasises encounter. Debra Ramsay points out that the term 'interface' holds an inherent tension between 'boundary and convergence,' as 'the interface is not only a layer of material that might have its own characteristics, but also an area of interconnection linking things that might otherwise be separate'.[35] Lori Emerson describes the interface as 'a threshold, but in a more complex sense than simply that which opens up form one distinct space to another distinct space… [W]hile interface does grant access, it also inevitably acts as a kind of magician's cape, continually revealing (mediatic layers, bits of information, etc.) through concealing and concealing as it reveals'.[36] This helpfully characterises the idea of the digital interface as both a material object and a point of interconnection. Likewise, Trotter describes the interface as 'the spot of time at or during which, unable to proceed further in our own existing physical form, we develop a second self: online identity, data double, avatar, Twitter handle.'[37]

The language we use to discuss and describe digital interfaces closely resembles the concept of media ecology. Interfaces encourage us to conceive of our environment in terms of meeting places and to look closely at how we, as individual

[35] Debra Ramsay, 'Tensions in the Interface: The Archive and the Digital', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 290-302 (p. 280).
[36] Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces*, p. x.
[37] David Trotter, *The Literature of Connection: Signal, Medium, Interface, 1850-1950* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 2.

subjects, *encounter* our environments. Studies of the interface further focus on the affordances of digital media as *relative* to the user and in terms of *access* rather than possession.

The popularisation of digital media brought about the introduction of a language of an ethereal *elsewhere*: virtual space, an everted cyberspace that 'becomes palimpsestically layered over or meshed with the physical world' as we carry or wear devices of digital connectivity.[38] As with the other illusions of digital media discussed so far in this chapter – the promises of permanence and immediacy – debating the extent to which cyberspace is understood as either material or ephemeral, real or conceptual, is not the point here. Instead, I suggest that the concept of virtual space posits digital devices as both the simple object (the material fact of the device, which persists regardless of, for example, access to electrical power) and as an interface to a virtual elsewhere. This virtual elsewhere refers both to the actual locatedness of other actors and events and to an ethereal notion of an un-locatable cyberspace.

### *No One Is Talking About This*: Ecological Memory in a Postdigital Culture

With reference to the theoretical discussion of networked digital media above, and the model of ecological memory set out in previous chapters of this thesis, I turn now to a reading of *No One Is Talking About This* which takes an ecological approach to memory to consider the representation of digital technologies as immersive and technologically incorporated due to their wearability and perceived permanence; the resulting banality of digital storage, and reading of the digital interface through which,

[38] Huw Halstead, 'Cyberspace: From fantasies of placelessness to connective emplacement', *Memory Studies* 14.3 (2021), pp. 561-571 (p. 563).

I suggest, we can read the language of virtual space in *No One Is Talking About This* as ecological.

*No One Is Talking About This* is, narratively speaking, split into two halves, respectively depicting the period before and after the narrator's sister experiences a complicated and dangerous pregnancy. The narrator's niece is diagnosed with Proteus syndrome and lives for six months and a day: a tragedy which defines the second half of the novel and which the author uses to foreground many of the idiosyncrasies of digital culture which are first identified earlier in the novel.

*No One Is Talking About This* is a novel explicitly intended to represent a certain aspect of Internet culture and the experience of engaging closely with online communities: it is a self-conscious and insightful response to the author's observations of digital culture. When the narrator of the text is considering the possibility of writing a novel to capture something of the essence of being on the Internet in the early twenty-first century, she suggests that it would have to be like Jane Austen: 'Pale violent shadings of tone, a hair being split down to the DNA. A *social* novel.'[39] If the 'hair' in this analogy is an immersion in online communities and digital cultures, the novel form is the tool with which it is split to its essence and, at times, entirely defamiliarized to the reader. This is achieved partly through the language that Lockwood assigns to various aspects of digital culture: the Internet – assumed, very frequently, to mean social media – is referred to only as 'the Portal'; blogs are 'diaries'.

The author's intention of representing something of contemporary culture, and specifically what it is like to live with the Internet, is drawn into direct contrast with the affordances of the novel itself. Just as Don DeLillo draws attention to the affordances of literature by setting *Falling Man* in opposition to differently mediated representations

[39] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 27.

of 9/11 (David Janiak, the performance artist 'Falling Man', and the photograph, 'Falling Man'), Lockwood makes the dual investment of this novel – in other media and in the novel – apparent by structurally and tonally mimicking the experience of scrolling through social media. This is the value of Lockwood's novel to the present study: Lockwood's determination to provide insight into the social aspect of digital media speaks to the novel's engagement with ideas of connectivity and a self-consciousness of the novel form as a way of representing digital culture.

*Immersion in social media*

I explore here the perceived impact of the versatility and wearability of digital devices, as I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, on contemporary conceptions of memory as presented in *No One Is Talking About This*. I suggest that this understanding of networked digital media can be fruitfully deployed to analyse *No One Is Talking About This*, a novel which espouses precisely this understanding of digital media as fluently incorporated.

One of the characteristic features of how Lockwood presents digital media and its affordances is its pervasiveness within modern life. There is, as far as the novel is concerned, no escaping it. One of the ways that this is shown in the novel is with the use of a language of immersion. The narrator's obsessive relationship with social media is facilitated by the fluent incorporation of digital media into the narrator's perception of self. An ecological understanding of the affordances of digital media for memory can be reached via the notion of media ecology: the proliferation of wearable devices such as smartphones – in conjunction with their versatility and immediacy of use – contributes to the pervasiveness of digital technologies in day-to-day activities.

The impact of the wearability of digital media can be seen in Lockwood's representation of media and memory in *No One Is Talking About This.* In the first half of the novel especially, Lockwood's narrator seems to be obsessively – and to her own detriment – attached to the portal. The immediacy and constancy of access to digital devices in the novel represents the narrator's welcoming of an oppressive presence. Lockwood writes, 'She lay every morning under an avalanche of details, blissed, pictures of breakfasts in Patagonia, a girl applying her foundation with a hard-boiled egg […] the world pressing closer and closer, the spiderweb of human connection grown so thick it was almost a shimmering and solid silk, and the day still not opening to her.'[40] The narrator's daily routine of immersion in online spaces is emphasised here: 'she lay *every morning* under an avalanche of details'.[41] This quotation suggests that her connectedness to others and to information through the Portal is, while purportedly blissful, also vaguely oppressive: the 'shimmering and shining silk' of human connection and of access is also an obstacle to the narrator reaching her own experience of the day ahead.

This blend of the bliss of digital access and its oppressiveness is echoed several times in the novel. The narrator's ease of access to digital media facilitates an inane obsession with connection that limits her ability to engage with the world around her. For instance, Lockwood describes how 'Whole subcultures sprang up on boards where people met to talk about their candida overgrowth. You stumbled across it late one night when you were idly typing in searches: why am I tired all the time […] why is my tongue less pink than it was when I was a child,' as a result of which, 'The next morning your eyes were gritty and your tongue even less pink than it had been before,

[40] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 8.
[41] Ibid., p. 8, emphasis added.

and the people who filtered past you at your job were less real than the vivid scroll of the board dedicated to the discussion of candida overgrowth, which didn't even exist.'[42] Lockwood focuses here on the obstruction to daily life which digital media embodies due to the narrator's inability to balance time online with her life offline; her representation of this also highlights how the portable and versatile nature of digital devices renders them a part of every aspect of the narrator's life. Her time is consumed by the portal daily, first thing in the morning and last thing at night, and this intrudes on how present she is able to be throughout the rest of the day.

The narrator's inability to remove herself from digital spaces is also highlighted by her indicating a need for her husband to rescue her from her distraction:

> When something of hers sparked and spread in the portal, it blazed away the morning and afternoon... She ran back and forth in the flames, not eating or drinking, emitting a high-pitched sound most humans couldn't hear. After a while her husband might burst through that wall of swimming red to rescue her, but she would twist away and kick him in the nuts, screaming, "My whole *life* is in there!" as the day she was standing on broke away and fell into the sea.[43]

Once again, with this quotation Lockwood draws the reader's attention to the sheer amount of time spent in the portal: the narrator's immersion in online spaces is clearly posited here as an obstacle to her experience of the world around her. The fiery image of flames that 'sparked and spread' online implies a viscerally lifelike quality to the narrator's digital interactions. Just as the previous quotation ironically suggests that 'the people who filtered past you at your job were *less real* than the vivid scroll of the board dedicated to candida overgrowth', the image of the narrator screaming to re-enter the portal despite the day breaking away from under her feet indicates a potentially addictive quality of engaging with digital media in this way.[44] The poignancy of the idea that 'the day she was standing on broke away and fell into the sea' then

[42] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, pp. 27-28; pp. 28-29
[43] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 59.
[44] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, pp. 28-29

highlights, by drawing a comparison with coastal erosion, the danger of the time that is lost by putting her attention in the wrong place.

The final aspect of the pervasion of wearable devices in digital cultures that I want to draw attention to as represented in *No One Is Talking About This* is the integration of the peculiar grammar of digital spaces into the writing of the novel.[45] Lockwood contrasts the affordances of digital media with those of the conventional novel form by, for instance, referring in the text to 'caucasianblink.gif', referring to a file that would usually appear as a moving image in online spaces, and by writing out '[clap] W [clap] E [clap] L [clap] L [clap] !!!' in text to signify or hint at the use of an emoji.[46] The fragmentary form and style of social media posts frequently imposes, through the textual representation of images (such as emojis and gifs) on the narrative prose more conventionally expected in a novel, signalling the constant presence of social media and its influence on other aspects of life through the framing of the narrator's thoughts. Although the fragmentary form of the novel generally resembles a series of short-form social media posts, moments like these which render the act of re-presentation visible intrude on this formal quality and serve to emphasise the comparative qualities and affordances of the novel form and of the media this is meant to emulate.

*Entering the portal: inconspicuous interfaces and the language of virtual space*

In my analysis here, I consider both the material object of the digital device and – in Lockwood's terms – the portal to which it gives access. This reflects on an aspect of

[45] I follow Meyrowitz's notion of "media grammar" (1998) in referring to the 'grammar' of social media: the expressive potential of social media according to the technique of content production. Joshua Meyrowitz, 'Understandings of Media', *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 56.1 (Spring 1999), pp. 44-52.
[46] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 93.

ecological memory that has been the subject of discussion elsewhere in this thesis: that both media, and conceptions of media, matter. Lockwood's depiction of digital media reaches an ecological understanding of memory by seeking to emphasise digital media as creating a virtual environment which can be entered, and within which memory objects can be encountered, pointing to their (physical and metaphorical) situatedness.

Lockwood posits the inconspicuous interface of digital devices as a way of thinking about the real and virtual spaces of digital media. In *No One Is Talking About This*, Lockwood pointedly avoids the use of common terminology such as 'social media', and so on. Instead, the narrator's online experience concerns 'the portal': a catch-all term intended to defamiliarize the reader with the media in use, which describes the gateway to online connection, a storage place of information, the digital device she uses to connect, and the communities with which she engages. The language Lockwood uses to describe the portal captures something of the vague, ethereal notion of cyberspace.

Referring to digital connection as 'the portal' gestures towards the concept of space and suggests the possibility that there is an *elsewhere* on the other side of the portal – but this possibility is always unfulfilled. The portal is, according to Lockwood, an entrance to nowhere in particular, only to an endless, placeless, liminal space. The portal can be 'opened,' 'entered,' 'lived in,' 'set down,' and 'played in'; it is a place for putting both words and people and is described as having a liquid form at least twice in the novel, as well as being like a 'fizzling black void'.[47] The narrator asks, 'Why had she elected to live so completely in the portal?' and, elsewhere, describes how

[47] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 3, p. 12; p. 3; p. 15; p. 90; p. 99; p. 118; p. 118; p. 203; p. 32, p. 120; p. 75.

someone's name 'stepped toward her in the portal' with some frequency, referring to the social media presence of a poet posting pictures of his feet as a physical one.[48] These descriptions each attribute to the portal a vivid corporeality – it is somewhere you can live, where there can be an entity walking towards you. This corporeality is destabilised, however, by the strangeness of the metaphors: the portal is somewhere a person could also live less-than-completely, split between dimensions; the entity stepping towards you is not a person, but a name the narrator associates with pictures of feet. Later, she personifies the portal to credit it, rather than its users, with evolving trends in language: 'Why were we all writing like this now? […] because, and this was more frightening, it was the way the portal wrote.'[49]

I suggest that Lockwood's depiction of cyberspace, just like the memoryscape of Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, in this novel presents an understanding of media, and memory, which is ecological. Cyberspace is, in Lockwood's novel, a place with vivid – if metaphorical – physical qualities. The novel's opening lines express this: 'She opened the portal, and the mind met her more than halfway. Inside, it was tropical and snowing, and the first flake of the blizzard of everything landed on her tongue and melted.'[50] For the most part, metaphors of cyberspace offer a similarly abstract vision: that of a vivid sense of interface with some elusive element of *somewhere else* lurking behind it. The simultaneously 'tropical and snowing' climate encapsulates the sense of a surrounding everything-at-once that Lockwood repeatedly returns to throughout the novel as a representation of the experience of information overload. This presentation of cyberspace emphasises the linguistic promise of a tangible place

[48] Ibid., p. 15, p. 29.
[49] Ibid., p. 63.
[50] Ibid., p. 3.

where digital connection, information storage, and communication occur – a promise always balanced against opaque metaphors.

By calling the Internet the 'portal', Lockwood gestures towards something beyond the physical, suggesting that, while we understand that an interface is a feature of the material digital object and that information is stored in distant hardware, an interface is nevertheless felt to be a 'portal' to an emergent reality. This is reflected in terms used for cyberspace, which point towards the ecological nature of media and, by extension, of memory.

I apply previous discussions of the significance of location and locatedness to memory in this thesis to the terms for cyberspace in *No One Is Talking About This*, highlighting how this language is used by Lockwood to depict contemporary conceptions of memory. To illuminate my reading of ecological memory in the novel, I address here the locatedness of memory, and the materiality of environmental memory objects.

*Postdigital remembering and forgetting: a banal archive*

In *No One Is Talking About This*, Lockwood explores how the exponential expansion of the storage capacity of digital technologies, coupled with the diminishing delay between an event and its representation (both in terms of real effects and the illusion of immediate feedback and infinite storage) has contributed to a shift in the archiving process: an increasing capacity and tendency to record the banal by juxtaposing the archiving of experiences surrounding the death of an infant with the digital retention of trivial activities. This is made effective by the equivalence of both the profoundly emotional and the profoundly insignificant in their digital record.

My discussion of banality in *No One Is Talking About This* is concerned with two aspects of digital archiving as it is presented in the novel: the recording of information by an external corporate body, and the personal record of photos on a smartphone. The narrator imagines the record being made and stored by Amazon's Alexa, a cloud-based interface, in the months preceding the baby's death:

> There was a robot in her sister's house that listened to them 24/7, filing their conversations away carefully in case they all murdered each other at some point. Those headlong months of words would be locked in a vault for eternity, sobbing on and on, *what will we do, what are we to do*, underpinned everywhere with the baby's breathing and the blips of her machines, occasionally brightened by her sister throwing out little interrogations of the quotidian like, *Alexa, how tall is Kevin Hart*?[51]

This description of the device and its record invokes ostensibly material language: that the device is 'filing their conversations away carefully' to be 'locked in a vault' seems to highlight the physical nature of digital storage, contrasting with the ethereal terms more usually ascribed to it. The narrator clearly takes for granted here that i) Alexa is constantly recording these intimate moments, ii) this record is committed, without any semblance of selective curation, to an archive, and iii) this digital archive is equal to 'eternity'.

While this passage is written with the hyperbolic tone characteristic of Lockwood's narrator, and of the particular grammar of social media she emulates, it speaks to the pervasive illusion of infinite digital memory. Although 'in case they all murdered each other at some point' is a joking hypothetical, in this context the point is clear: in some ethereal elsewhere, these recordings exist and could be accessed if the need were ever to arise. The effect of digital media on the memory ecology is heightened, in this particular instance, by the lack of personal intent in creating these recordings: that even these contrastingly dull and intimate moments are assumed to

[51] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 173.

be recorded without any of the involved parties having any particular need or desire to record them speaks to the growing sense that every present moment may always already be turning into archival data entries somewhere.

Furthermore, the surveillance described in this passage implies totality: the digital device is recording all audio, all the time. This is how the narrator foregrounds the new equalisation of both the sentimental and the mundane, as the sound of the baby's breathing – a fleeting, intimate, and precious thing – is stored alongside 'little interrogations of the quotidian'. This is something that Lockwood emulates not only in this quotation (in which the intimate details of what Alexa has recorded is interrupted and made lighter by the reference to the comedian Kevin Hart), but throughout her novel. In its depiction of immense tragedy overall, the text also features frequent references to some of the most banal turns of online attention, such as when 'it became important whether you called it *pop* or *soda* growing up… or whether you had that one Tupperware stained completely orange,' and the narrator having 'spent hypnotized hours of her life […] photoshopping bags of frozen peas into pictures of historical atrocities'.[52] These banal interruptions feature in the novel as a representation of what it is like to be immersed in digital culture, and offer an idea of the kind of memory objects being created through this culture.

Leaving aside, for a moment, the broader implications of viral trends such as photoshopping frozen peas into pictures of historical atrocities – for instance, regarding the public creation, curation, and remediation of memory objects – this is an effective demonstration of how memory objects are increasingly casualised.[53] Likewise, debating the terms 'pop' and 'soda' is able to become important because

[52] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 12, p. 90.
[53] Bradley E. Wiggins and G. Bret Bowers, 'Memes as genre: A structurational analysis of the memescape', *New Media and Society* 17.11 (2015), pp. 1886-1906.

this is connectivity for its own sake: there is no apparent limit to digital connectivity, meaning that questions do not have to be inherently useful – or even particularly interesting – in order to be asked.

The form of the novel, which replicates the fragmentary experience of scrolling through social media with its short, disjointed passages, demonstrates the various ways in which social media can be used to create and share memory objects. Lockwood gestures towards memory, in particular, by re-naming blogs and social media profiles as 'diaries,' evoking a space for record-keeping and highlighting the contrast between private records and their socially hyperconnected state by always referring to these in terms of '*Other people's* diaries'.[54] Lockwood further makes memory a central aspect of the observations she makes in the novel by frequently referring to posterity as both the purpose and the joke of digital media with mentions of 'future historians'; the politically-charged question, 'What are we going to tell our grandkids?' is answered with a comment on social media presence: 'Yeah, I went in the portal and told the dictator to change my diaper'; and, speaking just before the child's death, the narrator tells her sister to '"Write everything down," […] the portal had taught her that, that just one word could raise it all up again before your eyes'.[55] Each of these quotations demonstrates Lockwood's consideration of digital media as potentially banal memory objects.

There are two references in the novel specifically to the 'memory' feature common to smartphone camera rolls and social media, whereby a user is periodically notified of having 'a new memory'. These two moments in Lockwood's novel gesture

[54] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 7, emphasis added.
[55] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 52, p. 111.

towards one another in their perspectives of the narrator's sister's life. In the first, the 'memory' announced is humorous:

> YOU HAVE A NEW MEMORY, her phone announced, and played a slideshow of her trying to get a good picture of her butt in a hotel bathroom, at one point lifting up her leg and balancing it on the towel rack in order to get a better highlight on her left glute… "I'll want them after I have kids," she heard her sister saying. "I'll want them in fifty years, when I'm old" – in the nursing home, on an ice floe, looking back to herself as she really was.[56]

The capitalisation of 'YOU HAVE A NEW MEMORY' as an introduction to this feature, along with Lockwood's description of the images, is made to seem absurd. Where photographs were once more costly to create, in terms of both time and money, the idea that photographs such as these would have existed is improbable; that there were enough photographs taken of the same event to create a 'slideshow' of them is laughable. Lockwood makes a point of referencing these uses of digital media, particularly smartphone cameras, which seem to depend on the notion that photographs are now so easily created that they can be taken in abundance, without any apparent thought for efficiency or economy of means. But this quotation also reiterates the assumed permanence of the digital archive, by looking forward to still having the photos and being able to access them 'fifty years' in the future.

The throwaway use of the phrase 'after I have kids' in this first instance of the 'you have a new memory' feature is easily overlooked on first reading; the second appearance of this feature, after the baby's death, then retroactively casts a shadow on this phrase:

> Surrounding the meticulous documentation of the baby's final days in her photoroll were: a picture of Ray Liotta's recent plastic surgery; a screenshot of a news story about how fake nudes of a congresswoman had been debunked by foot fetishists […] and minutes before it happened, herself, bent over in the darkness of that hospital room and wearing sailor stripes. It would show up on her screen in another year, the announcement that she had a new memory.[57]

---

[56] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 86.
[57] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 204.

While it is possible to curate the photos stored, as in this instance, Lockwood's inclusion of the sentimental (the moments before the baby's death) alongside transient, quotidian aspects of the day (celebrity gossip) demonstrates the new default of data retention described by Mayer-Schönberger. Rather than a more traditionally curated selection of photos to mark the baby's life and death, the narrator simply has a mass of images from this period, both related and unrelated, that she retains by default.

**Social Hyperconnectivity: A New Collective**

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the concept of ecological memory offers a holistic model for understanding the social aspect of memory as well as the experience of the individual subject, recognising an extended contribution of this theory to memory studies discourse around individual/collective memory. I have so far demonstrated how theories of ecological memory can apply to readings of the experience of an individual subject (Chapter One), a social means of meaning-making and the creation of memory objects (Chapter Two), and shared memory objects (Chapter Three). Here, in relation to new digital media, I suggest that reading *No One Is Talking About This* alongside contemporary memory studies scholarship on ecological memory can demonstrate a new conception of the collective through the connective turn.

The connective turn indicates a broad shift 'from publics who had no means of replying to media in the broadcast era to today's *participation* whereby a new mass constantly snap, post, record, edit, like, link, forward and chat in a digital ecology of media.'[58] To some extent, this kind of connectivity and engagement is not a new

[58] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', p. 86.

phenomenon: letters to the editor offer one prominent example of how publics might conceivably respond to widely distributed analogue media. What is new in the case of social media is, as has been outlined above, the ease, accessibility, and the immediacy of this response, and the degree to which the content of social media is user-generated. As a result of this, the social hyperconnectivity offered by digital media constitutes an important change in how we understand shared memory, both in terms of the sharing of memory objects and also in terms of studying any kind of collective in the memory ecology. I examine here how social hyperconnectivity informs the way Lockwood conceives of collectives in the memory ecology. I explore this idea in relation to Lockwood's depiction of hyperconnected online communities and the online production of shared histories in order to argue that this is an ecological model of how memory functions across social networks with the introduction of digital media.

Atwood's representation of the social construction of language (as a means by which experience is mediated and re-constituted in the memory ecology) was the subject of the second chapter of this thesis; the third chapter then turned DeLillo's depiction of the role of mass media in the construction of widely shared memory objects. Both of these chapters considered a separate aspect of memory's social function, engaging with discourse around the individual/collective binary and how we can define memory in a shared sense. The present discussion builds on the understanding developed through each of these previous chapters of representations of social aspects of memory, by addressing the social aspect of digital media in light of Hoskins' argument that 'the collective noun for memory is no longer the group, or the community, but rather hyperconnectivity itself'.[59]

[59] Hoskins, 'Digital Network Memory', p. 97.

Wiggins and Bowers regard social media as an inherently participatory culture: 'a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices'.[60] To call this culture 'participatory' is not to say that it is universally accessible or universally welcoming, but points instead to the potentiality of access and response. Memory objects are also now shared more quickly, made more publicly accessible, and have a far greater reach than previously possible. The development of this participatory culture in response to digital media consequently alters the ways in which the language which scaffolds memory evolves, memory objects are shared, and social histories are produced.

'Hyperconnectivity', as the term is most often used, refers to the heightened social connectivity between people as a result of the proliferation of social media. This is an assumption about digital cultures which *No One Is Talking About This* calls into question, suggesting that while digital media may offer, in an ideological sense, the potential for everything and everyone to be more connected, connectivity more usually applies to radically connected small groups which shore up boundaries against connection with other radically connected small groups, often along political lines. While Lockwood does identify the social hyperconnectivity of digital cultures, the representation of this in her novel curtails the generality often ascribed to the term: what is described by media scholars as hyperconnectivity is held, in the novel, in contention with the digital balkanisation of socially hyperconnective networks. My study of social hyperconnectivity in the novel therefore takes into account both its

[60] Wiggins and Bowers, 'Memes as genre'; see also Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (MIT Press, 2009).

fullest potential to create an expansive kind of new collective in Hoskins' terms, as well as its demarcation and enforcement of social boundaries.

*Hyperconnectivity as collectivity*

In discussing 'hyperconnectivity', I distinguish between *social* hyperconnectivity (a heightened person-to-person connectivity, i.e. via social media and near-immediate communication) and *media* hyperconnectivity (i.e. the endless sharing and remixing of media across software, platforms, and devices). Hyperconnectivity is not a new term in either context.[61] Making this distinction is not to say that these are separate phenomena: both aspects of hyperconnectivity are often implied in relevant scholarship, stem from the same properties of digital media, and indeed overlap in various ways. Social media, for example, includes the proliferation of variously intersecting shared media (media hyperconnectivity) across vast social networks (social hyperconnectivity). However, whether one or both aspects of hyperconnectivity are intended in the term's use has been a nuance often left implicit in scholarly discussions of digital media and memory studies. The distinction I draw between social hyperconnectivity and media hyperconnectivity in this chapter provides for a more precise terminology.

Hoskins and Tulloch define hyperconnectivity as 'a multidimensional mechanism of late modernity in its affordance of temporal proximity (and distance) to the past and to an emergent future'.[62] We might recognise the temporal affordances of hyperconnectivity, as Hoskins and Tulloch describe them here, as definitive of the condition Hoskins later suggests is central to the notion of a new memory ecology: the

[61] Andrew Hoskins and John Tulloch, *Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Media and Memories of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2016).
[62] Hoskins and Tulloch, *Risk and Hyperconnectivity*, p. 9.

'(re)ordering of the past by and through multiple connectivities of times, actors and events'.[63] Although I have argued throughout this thesis that several contemporary novels recognise such a '(re)ordering of the past' as taking place outside of a digital context, too, my discussion of hyperconnectivity in *No One Is Talking About This* reflects the aspects of this which are specific to digital cultures.

My reading of Lockwood's novel focuses here on the effects of digital media on conceptions of collective memory, contrasting the ideological view of hyperconnectivity as newly expansive social networks with the politicised balkanisation of social groups online. The systematic manipulation by social media of connections across cyberspace and multitudes has led to José van Dijck's argument for understanding what we call 'social media' as 'connective media'.[64] The promise of connectivity which lies at the heart of social media shifts the focus in social systems away from social interaction and towards connectivity for its own sake. As David Trotter notes in *The Literature of Connection*, '[c]onnectivity's core principle is that what matters most in any act of telecommunication – and sometimes all that matters – is the fact of its occurrence.'[65] Social media sites 'promote interpersonal contact, whether between individuals or groups' but simultaneously only 'encourage weak ties':[66] They are designed to facilitate connectivity, rather than sociability. In other words, they are designed to capitalise on the continual proliferation of connections regardless of quality of communication. As I demonstrate, the hyperconnectivity of social media and its emphasis on prolific production and mass sharing is fundamental to a shift in the memory ecology towards an abundance of memory objects of increasing banality.

---

[63] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', p. 87.
[64] José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 12–13; David Trotter, *The Literature of Connection*.
[65] Trotter, *The Literature of Connection*, p. 2.
[66] Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity,* p. 8.

I distinguish media hyperconnectivity as referring to the heightened connectivity of times, actors, and events through widespread access to media-sharing networks, which uniquely posits digital media as a recognisable model of broader media and memory ecologies. This takes the emphasis away from human connectivity and towards the connectivity of memory objects in the ecology, which – as has been seen throughout this thesis – have always been interconnected. *Hyper*connectivity, in this instance, refers to the newness of mass and increasingly pluralistic sharing of media, the incorporation of digital devices – and therefore digital connectivity – into the conscious perception of the self, and the relative flattening of time (into a singular, extended present), and actors (in an increasingly pluralistic, participatory space of production) in the memory ecology. In considering both the social and media aspects of digital hyperconnectivity *as* 'hyperconnectivity', I follow the language of networks and connectivity that is characteristic of digital media studies.[67]

In attempting to find balance in the long-debated individual/collective memory binary, Hoskins has suggested the 'memory of the multitude' – a concept touched upon briefly in Chapter Three of this thesis. The memory of the multitude, as Hoskins envisages it, takes into account both the subjectivity of the individual and a general sense of a collective – though without the clearly defined boundaries or homogeneity implied by the notion of 'collective memory'. It is within the context of this argument that Hoskins makes the assertion that 'the collective noun for memory is no longer the group, or the community, but rather hyperconnectivity Itself'.[68] Hyperconnectivity in these terms must therefore be understood as heterogeneous, and as referring to a limited (rather than universal or potentially-universal) network. Hoskins characterises

[67] See Trotter, *The Literature of Connection*; Hoskins, *Digital Memory Studies*; Hoskins, 'Digital Network Memory'; Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*; Huw Halstead, 'Cyberplace'.
[68] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', p. 97.

hyperconnectivity as describing a ‘multitude’ rather than a ‘collective’, a distinction attributed to its ‘plural singularities’ as opposed to a perceived homogeneity, and its sense of a ‘perpetual becoming’ of memory as opposed to the neat potential of narrative closure.[69]

Hyperconnectivity, then, can be understood as the mesh of actors and media, the entanglement of multiple human and material elements in shifting community networks and across cyberspace. As Hoskins also notes, this offers a contrast in its ‘infinite extensionality’ and its reductive effect.[70] With hyperconnectivity’s emphasis on participation and plural singularities, there is a disconnect between the importance of the individual subject and the reworking of the individual subject into a hyperconnected web of communities and shared language in a virtual space where individual voices are responding *en masse* to shared public media and are flattened into ephemeral data.

Patricia Lockwood presents the multitude of digital media in *No One is Talking About This* as promoting both individualism and a hive mentality, indicating social hyperconnectivity. This is a concept developed through frequent references in the novel to the online community the narrator inhabits as a ‘spiderweb of human connection grown so thick it was almost a shimmering and solid silk’; language which posits the portal as a single organism composed of Internet users (‘If all this was thinking, then what was the head?’, ‘The mind we were in was obsessive, perseverant’); or, otherwise, as a single-minded group (‘Every day their attention must turn, like the shine on a school of fish, all at once’).[71] This sense of group thinking is

[69] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 92, p. 95.
[70] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 88.
[71] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 8, p. 66, p. 164.

held in contrast with their individual (though still companionable) non-thinking: ‘On a slow news day, we hung suspended from meathooks’.[72]

After the narrator turns away from the Portal following the birth of her sister’s baby, this language is challenged slightly: the narrator describes how ‘She tried to re-enter the portal completely, but inside it everyone was having an enormous argument about whether they had ever thought the n-word, with some people actually professing that their minds blanked it out when they encountered it in a book, and she backed out again without a sound.’[73] This failure to engage with the debate marks a significant break from the narrator’s previous obsession with participation. Something of this distinction is later explained by the narrator’s mention of a period of time when she ‘cried uncontrollably… in the portal, where the entirety of human experience seemed to be represented, and never the shining difference of that face, those eyes, that hair.’[74] This is said, in part, in reference to the distinctiveness of the child, whose rare condition means that the portal holds very little in her likeness, but also more broadly represents the disconnect between the seeming universality that the portal presents through its plural singularities, and the recognition of the individuality that lies outside its means of representation. The shift that occurs in the narrator’s understanding of the portal – from a kind of universal groupthink to a partial representation of humanity – is directed by her situation within it: from her initial position of compulsive participation, to her later absence and only occasional spectatorship.

Representations of the portal in the first half of the book, then, are intended to illustrate the experience of a relatively extreme immersion in social media. In addition to the language used for describing the group mentality outlined above, Lockwood

[72] Ibid., p. 9.
[73] Ibid., p. 163.
[74] Ibid., p. 196.

also contributes to the ongoing discussion of how hyperconnectivity has blurred singularity and plurality through the use of the pronoun, 'you'. Wendy Chun has written on the uses of both 'we' and 'you' as singular/plural identifiers encouraged by digital hyperconnectivity, suggesting that 'networks do not produce an imagined and anonymous "we" (they are not, to use Benedict Anderson's term, "imagined communities"), but rather, a relentlessly pointed yet empty, singular yet plural YOU…'.[75] Chun's identification of this 'relentlessly pointed yet empty' *you* is crucial to understanding the function of hyperconnectivity. What appears as a direct address never speaks to the individual, making this 'you' an identifier which gestures only away from the self and the hyperconnected individual selves, sweeping in its inclusiveness but aimless in its lack of specificity.

This is something that Lockwood picks up in her depiction of her narrator's immersion in online communities. Raili Marling recently noted this in her article, 'Intersubjectivity and the disconnection in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021)', which considers how the novel portrays the constitution of the self in response to others and the values of the communities formed by social media.[76] Early in the novel, Lockwood writes,

> Her pronoun, which she had never felt particularly close to, travelled farther and farther away from her in the portal, swooping through landscapes of *us* and *him* and *we* and *them…* [Her pronoun] passed into *you, you, you, you,* until she had no idea where she ended and the rest of the crowd began.[77]

This morphing of a sense of self into a vague gesture towards some singular yet plural 'you' resonates with Chun's analysis of digital cultures. The 'you' which is emphasised in Lockwood's text is an external, elusive collective that almost – but never quite –

[75] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, p. 3.
[76] Raili Marling, 'Intersubjectivity and the disconnection in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021)', *Subjectivity* 31 (2024), pp. 155-166.
[77] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, pp. 10-11.

refers to the self; it likewise gestures towards but never pins down a sense of a real community. This goes some way to illuminating how hyperconnectivity might be understood as a 'collective noun for memory', as Hoskins suggests.[78]

Social hyperconnectivity offers plurality and participation in place of the generally passive reception which so often characterised, for instance, the audiences of broadcast media in earlier decades; social hyperconnectivity also offers new avenues for creating, curating, and sharing memory objects. Although the terms of this thesis continue to resist the notion of any collective noun for memory, in this way I seek to underline the importance of socially shared memory objects. While memory is not itself shared, the means of memory can be – and with a newly hyperconnected society, this is greatly amplified.

Social hyperconnectivity distinguishes digital cultures from non-digital cultures, in that it expedites communication and allows for near-immediate mass participation. This newly situates the affordances of non-digital media discussed in previous chapters. For example, in Chapter Two I set out the role of linguistic media in framing memory: a shared system of communication founded on social constructions of meaning, and which are always subject to fluctuations and sudden changes. Within a hyperconnective digital context, this aspect of language has the potential to be accelerated. The following analysis sets out the affordances of this for memoring.

*Social hyperconnectivity and shared memory objects*

The participatory culture facilitated by social hyperconnectivity is best seen in depictions of news events online, and particularly in how news is shared across social media. The hyperconnectivity of online platforms means that news is told (and

[78] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', p. 97.

therefore histories are produced) by a mass of voices, rather than curated only by professional journalists, editors, archivists, and so on. The point here is not to say that the Internet is a space of plurality and equality, where any voice might be heard as loudly as any other (a notion which is repudiated later in this chapter), but rather to highlight the turn away from more limited modes of storytelling. Hyperconnectivity newly affords participation and response, and therefore affords new narratives to rise to public attention that may not have been produced or promoted by mainstream venues.

My analysis of *No One Is Talking About This* goes some way to addressing the ways in which digital media facilitate the emergence of news events. Clearly, with different technologies ready-to-hand, representations of events and the ways they are shared have shifted. Part of this change is due to the swift proliferation of images and other records: because memory objects are easy to produce and share, and digital media promises infinite storage, there is a far higher chance of any event being recorded in some way, and an exponentially higher quantity of records of major events. This is a change in how events are publicly *reported*; it logically follows that this has also brought about change in associated acts of memoring. The participatory nature of digital media means that anyone with access to a smartphone is potentially able to make and share records of an event, where such a role may otherwise have been reserved for a small minority of people, and predominantly journalists. Although significant barriers remain to producing memory objects and obtaining prominence on social media platforms (which may be needed for their mass sharing), this has opened up greater opportunities for diversity in mediated accounts of events, and for a plurality in their creation. This includes a public record of accounts from voices outside a majority or mainstream view and amateur journalism, in particular.

The participatory culture of relative multiplicity and plurality which is engendered by digital cultures offers a new means of *responding* to events that have already since passed. These are all social acts of producing shared histories. With reference to Lockwood's novel, we see the impact of social movements on the revision of histories, as well as the significance of the sheer capacity that the Internet offers for the facilitation of multi-faceted histories. Lockwood depicts, for example, two instances of online discourse surrounding social histories of World War Two, one of the most widely memorialised events in history, in order to illuminate the potential of major reversals in popular understandings of history. Both instances are grounded in real and popularised online discourse, and relate to the specific social and political community from which Lockwood's narrator experiences online spaces, producing a new shared understanding of past events.

The first of these concerns the iconic photograph *V-J Day in Times Square* which portrays a sailor kissing a dental assistant, and its viral resurgence in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Questions had been publicly asked for a long time regarding the nature of the kiss depicted in the photograph: Greta Zimmer Friedman, who – it is generally agreed – is the woman seen in the picture, gave an interview in 2005 in which she described her experience of the kiss, stating, 'I felt he was very strong, he was just holding me tight,' and 'it wasn't my choice to be kissed'.[79] This interview resurfaced, along with the notion that the photograph was more a testament to the normalisation of assault than to the celebration of victory, at various points throughout the 2010s, particularly in light of the #MeToo movement.[80]

[79] Greta Friedman Collection (AFC/2001/001/42863), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
[80] Michael Gronseth, 'A Kiss Is Just A Kiss… Or Is It?' in *Popular Culture*, ed. by Mark Howell (Cognella, 2015), pp. 47–52.

In *No One Is Talking About This*, this narrative shift in the popular understanding of the photograph is represented from the perspective of the narrator, who comes across the image as she is scrolling online:

> There was an iconic photograph, crisp in its nurse's uniform, of a woman being bent backward and kissed by a soldier on V-Day. We had seen it all our lives, and thought we understood the particular firework it captured – and now the woman had risen from history to tell everyone that she didn't know the man at all, that in fact she had been frightened throughout the whole encounter. And only then did the hummingbird of her left hand, the uncanny twist of her spine, the grip of the soldier's elbow on her neck become apparent. "I had never seen him before in my life," the woman said, and there he was in the picture, there he was in our minds, clutching her like victory, never letting her go.[81]

The first person plural typical to Lockwood's presentation of online communities is used here to describe the narrator's understanding: '*We* had seen it all our lives, and thought *we* understood'.[82] The 'we' here seems to have a universal implication, but really only indicates the specific online community of people with whom the narrator interacts – and even within that community, only those who similarly had not engaged with the controversy of the photograph before this viral resurgence.

Lockwood's presentation of an apparently total reversal of cultural understanding deliberately removes a more nuanced view of such events, which might otherwise take into account a host of dissenters. With all the absolutism Lockwood attributes throughout the novel to social media, this suggests that there is an old/wrong way of perceiving the highly public and familiar touchstone memory object, a watershed moment of viral recognition, and a new/right way. Among the narrator's online community this is a total shift, with the view within that network now diametrically opposed to other conceptions of the memory object as unenlightened and wrong. This description of the real cultural shift that occurred with relation to the photograph is

[81] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 11.
[82] Ibid., p. 11, emphasis added.

illuminating in a number of ways. It is one example of how the restructuring of who is remembered, and how, has been normalised by digital cultures. Linked as it is to the #MeToo movement, this example demonstrates the political potential of such instances. To understand the implications of this for the construction of shared memory objects, we can consider this excerpt in terms of the function of social hyperconnectivity.

The phrase, '*now* the woman had risen from history' seems also to suggest an anachronous contemporariness of Friedman's comments. This indicates that Friedman's having 'risen from history' is not a reference to the individual subject, but rather the *raising up* of Friedman from history by viral online discourse.[83] This points towards the persistent presence of digital time, a 'presentification in which the locatedness of incidents across time is compressed by their encounter through interactions with technology. In "Digital Network Memory," Hoskins observes this 'unforeseeable re-activation of latent and semi-latent connections of shadow archives' and its effect:

> An older [blog] post can always be "discovered" as new; a new post is already old. This nonsimultaneousness of the new, this layering of chronologies, means that the gap between illocutionary and perlocutionary in high-speed telecommunications may be dwindling, but – because everything is endlessly repeated – response is demanded over and over again.[84]

When confronted with the possibility that *V-J Day in Times Square* might depict an act of assault, rather than one of mutual jubilation, Lockwood's narrator describes an immediate and certain response: she perceives this new understanding as absolutely true in its revelation of the 'hummingbird of her left hand, the uncanny twist of her spine, the grip of the soldier's elbow on her neck'. The construction of '"I had never

[83] This phrasing also evokes the idea of grassroots history, or the 'history from below' movement. See Frederick Krantz, *History From Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rude* (Montreal, Quebec: Concordia University, 1985).
[84] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', p. 92; Chun, 'The Enduring Ephemeral', p. 170.

seen him before in my life," the woman said, and there he was in the picture, there he was in our minds, clutching her like victory, never letting her go,' makes this particularly clear. The repetition of 'there he was' evokes the authority of audio/visual media as a certification of presence (as discussed in Chapter Three), and therefore of truth, as though to view the image is to witness the event. The surfacing of Friedman's statement has led to an absolute reversal in popular conceptions of the photograph according to Lockwood's narrator: the woman said *this*, and now we all can see it. The narrator's response to the photograph and the new perspective she encounters suggests how popular understandings of history and historical events are altered and revised, and social media's role in this.

This is seen in the real-life repeated rediscoveries of the semi-latent Friedman interview and sporadic attention given to the controversy of the photograph over recent decades; a 'layering of chronologies' which Lockwood folds together in the presentification of her narrator's response to the woman she describes as having now 'risen from history'. Lockwood's depiction of the online response to this photograph is therefore both representative of online discourse and suggestive of the way in which social media is a catalyst of change in popular conceptions of history. The narrator's perception is not exactly inaccurate (other than its misrepresentation of the sailor in the photograph as a soldier, and its acceptance of the common misconception that Greta Zimmer Friedman, a dental assistant at the time of the photograph, was a nurse), but is only representative of reality in the broadest sense: it falsely suggests a universal ignorance and collective epiphany, and it centres and presentifies Friedman as an active part of this revelation. This reflects the way in which the narrator comes across this information, scrolling through the Portal, where she seems to have

encountered through her community the social reactionary gist to the photograph rather than the detail in which this is grounded.

While changing public opinion is by no means limited to digital cultures, Lockwood's description of this particular viral event makes clear how social hyperconnectivity can be a major catalyst in such changes. Lockwood's narrator conveys a shocked and immediate reversal of her previous understanding of this iconic photo in response to the opinions expressed by her online community. Particularly in reference to a photograph which is so iconic and well-recognised, this goes some way to showing the new avenues of discourse around shared memory objects facilitated by social hyperconnectivity.

With another reference to the Second World War, Lockwood observes how social media facilitates the spread of information which might alter the popular understanding of histories. Observing that 'there were more and more stories [emerging] about Nazi hunters, about women luring Nazis out to the woods with promises of sex and then shooting them…' the narrator asks, '[w]here had these stories been during her childhood? Those stories had mostly been about people in attics eating one potato a week. But these sex-and-murder-in-the-woods stories – they would have put a different shine on things.'[85] The inclusion of this in Lockwood's novel points to social media as a means of publicising stories which may not be considered part of taught histories, as well as highlighting the particular kinds of stories which are most likely to gain traction online.

The presentation of stories which 'would have put a different shine on things' points towards the sensationalism of how history – and events even as they are developing – are discussed in online spaces. The 'sex-and-murder-in-the-woods'

[85] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 25.

angle is what grants these stories visibility: they are sexualised, shocking, anti-Nazi, recognise women's achievements, and, above all, offer the 'shine' of success. Lockwood's narrator seems to be lamenting the histories she had been taught for lacking the glamour, humour, and excitement of the 'Nazi hunter' stories she is now encountering online. In this, social media is shown to counteract or flesh out the primary, best-known historical narrative ('people in attics eating one potato a week'), and particularly as this might pertain to a retrospective inclusivity of women and minority groups. This highlights, again, the implications of social hyperconnectivity in a political context, offering a phenomenological account of Hoskins' observation that '[t]he memory of the multitude softens history, changing the parameters of the who, what, when and why of remembering. With digital searching, accessing, participating, there is little unseen, untouched or uncommented on by the multitude.'[86]

There have been countless examples of these sorts of instances in recent years. The digital humanities project of the #BlkTwitterstorians is dedicated to a similar retrospective repositioning and bringing to light of minority historical figures. In their article 'Black Scholars Matter: #BlkTwitterstorians Building a Digital Community,' Aleia Brown and Joshua Crutchfield suggest that the importance of bringing histories to light on social media lies in the potential plurality of digital cultures. They comment that the physical landscape, as overseen by preservation officials, often lacks anything that 'connects with Black contemporary social and political movements,' whereas 'the internet contains many sites of memory and consciousness created by and for Black people.' [87] For historically marginalised and underrepresented groups, social media

[86] Hoskins, 'Memory of the Multitude', pp. 88-89.
[87] Aleia Brown and Joshua Crutchfield, 'Black Scholars Matter: #BlkTwitterstorians Building a Digital Community', *Journal of Black Studies and Research* 47.3 (2017), pp. 45-55 (p. 45).

offers a platform where public memory objects can be collectively created, curated, and shared, bypassing the official channels of public memorialisation.

As Lockwood demonstrates in *No One Is Talking About This*, the participatory culture of social media – and of social hyperconnectivity more broadly – facilitates a new way of bringing these histories to the fore. This highlights how we might think of memoring as ecological, rather than in terms of possession: not only the memory objects themselves, but also the means of producing and proliferating them are shared in this instance. Rather than a broadly homogenised history, this allows for multiple narratives to emerge in popular discourse alongside various public responses to shared memory objects – exemplified by Lockwood's acknowledgement of two possible interpretations of *V-J Day in Times Square*. While differences in interpretation are not unique to digital cultures, the public and popular uptake of multiple views is newly facilitated by social media.

*The limits of social hyperconnectivity*

In *No One Is Talking About This*, Lockwood presents a narrator who (as shown by the quick reversals in popular opinion analysed above) experiences a strong sense of community in her experience of social media. To her, this community seems universal in its reach. However, Lockwood also demonstrates an irony in this perception, suggesting that the narrator's understanding of the unity of people on social media is largely a result of over-immersion in particular online spaces. One major consequence of a socially hyperconnected participatory culture shown in Lockwood's novel is that communities, which have – for the most part – previously required geographical closeness, are increasingly formed online along social lines. This is a slight curtailment of the popular notion of hyperconnectivity as I consider hyperconnectivity, not in a

general sense, but as defined by its socio-political delineations on balance with its false sense of expansive community. To examine this, I turn to the function of online humour. Ironic humour – online and offline – is a marker of community boundaries, and its prevalence in online discourse gestures towards the delineation of communities according to political alignment.

Because the decoding of irony demands 'acceptance of one interpretive framework over another, and therefore a positioning of oneself within a certain interpretive community', that interpretive community 'serves as the basis for the production and consumption of humor, and vice versa – humor serves as the basis for the construction of such communities'.[88] In other words, the hyperconnectivity inherent to social media platforms encourages rapid boundary work and the formation of online communities: through 'the ongoing production, performance, and validation of values, codes, and norms… the inclusion/exclusion of individuals in a community not only defines their social positioning, but also constructs the collective itself'.[89] This means that online communities share language and language trends through the production and consumption of shared humour.

In her exploration of social media, Lockwood highlights a particular grammar and pattern of language used by those most devoted to the portal, indicating the formation of such a community in her own engagement with social media. This shoring up of community boundaries is seen in Lockwood's novel both in terms of the apolitical and the explicitly political – from the supposedly funniest ways of spelling certain words to a strong emphasis on what are considered to be the "right" and "wrong" ways to

[88] Noam Gal, Zohar Kampf and Limor Shifman, 'SRSLY?? A typology of online ironic markers', *Information, Communication and Society* 25.7 (2022), pp. 992-1009; Sam Friedman and Gidelinde Kuipers, 'The Divisive Power of Humor: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries', *Cultural Sociology* 7.2 (2013), pp. 179-195.
[89] Noam Gal, Zhoar Kampf and Limor Shifman, '"It Gets Better": Internet memes and the construction of collective identity', *New Media and Society* 18.8 (2016), pp. 1698-1714 (p. 1699).

think. This language is introduced in the novel primarily as a way of interacting with others engaged with the portal and is made increasingly absurd by its continued use outside of that context, where other characters around the narrator and the reader themselves are made to seem outsiders to a particular idiolect.

The narrator of *No One Is Talking About This* is deliberate in her production and performance of this language. She describes 'Ahahaha!' (laughter beginning with an 'a' rather than a 'h') as 'the new and funnier way to laugh,' and assimilates this style in her own laughter, both inside and out of the portal; she goes to great lengths while on stage at a convention to explain 'why it was objectively funnier to spell it *sneazing*,' and explicitly states that '[h]er most secret pleasure were sentences that only half a percent of people on earth would understand, and that no one would be able to decipher at all in ten years,' such as 'binch' and 'what is to be corn cobbed'.[90] This development in how language is socially constructed in digital cultures is made apparent in the production and proliferation of internet memes – 'spreadable media that have been remixed or parodied as emergent memes which are then iterated and spread'.[91] Memes are artifacts of a participatory culture precisely because they rely on social reproduction: a meme is, by definition, a collection of text rather than a singular unit, being not only repeated but also recontextualised and transformed.[92] Memes therefore enact the social construction of meaning virally and transparently: the repetitive remixing of language and visual media shows how meaning is built among a particular community, whereby the community consists of those who are able to decode and understand its meaning across multiple iterations.

[90] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 9, p. 14, pp. 20-21.
[91] Wiggins and Bowers, 'Memes as genre', p. 1892.
[92] Ibid., p. 1891; Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*.

Memes are a useful artefact to consider in terms of the role of language in memory, then, because they generally rely on – or at least benefit from – the audience's familiarity with a format or theme in order to be comprehensible. This makes the interpretation of ironic markers 'not merely explanatory or reflective, but also performative'.[93] Lockwood emulates this approach to language in the narration of the novel, which frequently references hyper-specific memes and moments in Internet culture. This is done with a consciousness of how this will be perceived in some future time, when such references become interesting or useful in memory of the past: 'To future historians, nothing will explain our behavior, except, and hear me out, a mass outbreak of ergotism caused by contaminated rye stores?'[94] These hyperspecific interjections of the colloquial amidst other, contrastingly poetic passages of text, are intended to jar with their absurdity and exaggerate the extent to which shared languages circulate as a means of socialising within established communities online. The emergence of language trends in the narrator's experience of the portal is a recurring theme throughout the text, including the observation that '[t]he word *toxic* had been anointed, and now could not go back to being a regular word.'[95]

It is worth noting that the narrator implicitly aligns her online experience with particular social and political values, demonstrating the formation of communities within particular boundaries – and their apparent universality from within – in contrast with how she interacts with those away from the portal. The performance of new trends such as the intentional misspelling of 'sneezing' as 'sneazing' illustrates the narrator's

---

[93] Gal, Kampf and Shifman, 'SRSLY??', p. 993. For more on this, see also: Paul Mihailidis and Samantha Viotty, 'Spreadable Spectacle in Digital Culture: Civic Expression, Fake News, and the Role of Media Literacies in "Post-Fact" Society', *American Behavioral Scientist* 61.4 (2017), pp. 441-454; Jessica Roy, 'How Pepe the Frog Went from Harmless to Hate Symbol', *Los Angeles Times*, 11 October 2016, <www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-pepe-the-frog-hate-symbol-20161011-snap-htmlstory.html>, [accessed 30 May 2023].
[94] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This,* p. 52.
[95] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 55.

engagement with a relatively banal aspect of the production of shared language online, something that Lockwood extends and applies to political communities.

The narrator's immersion in the political boundary work of social media is illustrated at the opening of the novel, with two consecutive paragraphs which begin, 'Capitalism! It was important to hate it,' and 'Politics! The trouble was that they had a dictator now' respectively.[96] This introduction to the political aspect of the portal sets out a perspective which brokers no argument: indeed, that the novel refers to then-president Donald Trump exclusively as 'the dictator' is a reproach to any kind of challenge to this view, thus emulating the construction of online community boundaries. In the social construction of particular histories, the hyperconnected collective acts as an echo chamber in which stories are extensively shared and remixed, becoming widely recognisable to the communities in which they originate and circulate. Such communicites are defined by their shared language, and often also by their shared humour.

Lockwood furthers this with the tongue-in-cheek assertion by the narrator that 'it was important to hate' capitalism, which suggests that the very importance of this hatred is more about participating in the "right" kind of discourse. Not only this, but participating in this discourse must be executed with the "right" and recognisable formula for indignation – the example here being '[Broad concept]! [Negative, sweeping, declarative statement about the concept; designed to provoke a response.]' This first introduction to the narrator's political sphere online frames her interactions with others both within and without the portal, and must also frame a reading of the novel.

[96] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 5.

The narrator's various outrages – particularly those in the first half of the novel – are often underinformed in terms of the actual issues at hand, while being secure in their understanding and performance of the views of those she associates with online. This is something explicitly addressed in the narrator's comments on her security within the portal: 'It was a place where she knew what was going to happen, it was a place where she would always choose the right side… where she did not read the wrong writers, was not seized with surges of enthusiasm for the wrong leaders, did not eat the wrong animals… where she was not subject to the swells and current and storms of the mind of the time…'.[97] This emphasis on choices being either 'right' or 'wrong' is intended to reflect the lack of ambiguity the narrator encounters amongst her online community, where choosing the 'right side' of everything according to the portal is presented as being of more importance than critical and independent thinking. This, of course, ironically shows her to be very much 'subject to the swells and current and storms of the mind of the time'.

This persistent elimination of nuance through the narrator's engagement with the portal is undercut by her experiences outside of it. For instance, the paragraph which immediately follows the excerpt quoted above, in which the narrator demonstrates her utter certainty in her own faultlessness, reads: '"Colonialism," she hissed at a beautiful column, while the tour guide looked at her with concern.'[98] In this way, Lockwood emphasises the constant production and performance of how language is used online, particularly in its failure to align with how language is used and understood away from the portal, by those outside of the narrator's online community. Lockwood's joke in this is, in part, the way in which the narrator is

[97] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 16.
[98] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 17.

presented as always immersed in the culture of the portal, and always speaking and acting in the exaggerated mode of social media rather than adjusting her language when addressing people outside of that context. There is also irony to be found in the view the narrator has of the portal, that it is a place 'you only entered […] when you needed to be everywhere'.[99] The portal is shown repeatedly to be subject to limitation – the narrator's online community is not universal, her immersion in the portal desensitizes her to reality, and it has progressively less to offer her as tragedy strikes her family – in spite of the narrator's instinctive sense of its vastness, of it allowing access to 'everywhere'.

In these contrasts, literary analysis of *No One is Talking About This* illuminates the changing conceptions of cultural collectives in the memory ecology as defined by social hyperconnectivity. As seen above, the narrator clearly experiences her online community as a potentially limitless collective which seems – to her – to be universal in its logic. However, Lockwood also demonstrates that the narrator's experience is more a result of over-immersion than of accurate perception. In this way, hyperconnectivity is shown to be a sort of networked collective, but with poorly-defined group boundaries and a strongly felt vastness.

**Conclusion**

In this final chapter, I have considered the representation of digital media and memory in Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*. I suggest that this representation reaches an understanding of memory which is analogous with contemporary theories of ecological memory in several respects. In fictionalising the affordances of new digital media for memory, Lockwood places encounter at the centre of memory processes,

[99] Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This*, p. 3.

echoing the ecological focus on the entanglement of a memoring subject with objects in their environment. My study of interface and the language of virtual space in the novel further envisions the *virtual* environment of social media (or cyberspace) as an ecology within which the subject encounters memory objects. Crucially, Lockwood's presentation of the hyperconnectivity of social media positions memory objects in online spaces as shared memory objects, to both underline and undermine the notion of online community: while communities of likeminded individuals are hailed as a singular/plural 'you', Lockwood's presentation of this also draws attention to the digital balkanisation of socially hyperconnective networks. By undertaking this analysis, I have established that *No One Is Talking About This* presents memory as ecological within the context of its depiction of digital media.

# CONCLUSION

In its exploration of the representation of memory and media as ecological in four contemporary novels – Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1994), Margaret Atwood's *Orxy and Crake* (2004), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021) – this thesis has demonstrated some of the ways in which contemporary memory studies and literature might productively intersect and interact.

My transposition of the theory of ecological memory to a literary study demonstrates the importance of reading memory and media as entangled themes in contemporary literature, particularly in light of recent developments in memory studies that show how we are differently conceiving of memory and media in digital and postdigital cultures. The new vantage point offered by a post/digital context has proved fertile ground for the development of the notion of memory ecologies in contemporary memory studies. As I have demonstrated, many of the ideas underpinning memory ecologies have likewise been reached by literary authors writing from this post/digital context. Most notably, these novels – like an ecological model of memory – centre the entanglement of the memoring subject with their environment, emphasising the impact of shifting media logics on conceptions and experiences of memory.

Examining the confluence of memory and media in the selected novels with an ecological conception of memory offers, as this thesis has shown, a significant contribution to literary scholarship. In the case of *The Unconsoled*, such a reading of memory and media in the novel is key to understanding the much-discussed and dreamlike strangeness of Ryder's narration as a kind of memoryscape, in which the presentification of his biography renders it impossible for him to think about the past except through encounters with his immediate physical environment. In *Oryx and*

*Crake*, it is particularly the sociocultural context of Jimmy/Snowman's memoring which is uncovered by an ecological memory approach: in this novel, the parallel threats of extinction to humankind and its languages focalise social forms of meaning-making in the creation and comprehension of memory objects. Theories of ecological memory inform my comparison of the various iterations of the titular falling man of DeLillo's *Falling Man* as a study of the role of mass media in public memorialisation and the creation of shared memory objects. In my reading of *No One Is Talking About This*, ecological memory provides the theoretical foundations for understanding the impact of the hyperconnectivity of online spaces on the narrator's conception of memory.

In addition to offering these new critical perspectives on the portrayal of media and memory, a reading of ecological memory in these four novels also establishes literary studies as a vital contributor to memory scholarship. Throughout this thesis, I have sought to highlight the importance of including both book history and the contributions of contemporary literary writers in the development of theories in memory studies. By identifying representations of memory in these novels as analogous with ecological memory, each chapter of this thesis has demonstrated how an ecological model of memory might be illustrated, extended, and its significance more fully recognised. The interdisciplinary work of this thesis makes three key contributions to memory studies scholarship, summarised below: an expansion of media types included in the ecological model, an exploration of appropriate terms and theoretical foundations for discussing ecological memory, and the concept of shared memory objects.

I have argued that, while the vantage point of post/digital cultures does make ecological memory newly visible, the current strength of association between memory ecologies and digital media risks overlooking the pertinence of this model to memoring

with other media types. The ecological model of memory put forward by this thesis was, in part, developed from the suggestion made by Andrew Hoskins of a 'new memory ecology', in which 'the principal memorial player today is no longer the highly tangible, visible notion of the external media of memory, nor the inner-workings of the mind, but instead the mesh of hyperconnectivity in which they are all irretrievably entangled'.[100] In examining the representation of memory in four contemporary novels, the work of this thesis has challenged the idea that this ecological understanding of memory is confined to, or newly introduced by, the digital. My close reading of these novels has demonstrated ways in which other kinds of media form a vast and complex entanglement with one another and the mind of a memoring subject in a multi-faceted, multi-media, memory ecology. I have argued for a broad conception of memory objects, according to which any object that affords memory should be considered an element of the memory ecology. My study of the selected novels has therefore examined things, places, language, audio/visual media, smartphones and social media all as composite parts of ecological memory. Doing so has extended the application of ecological memory beyond its current association with digital media.

Although the notion of memory ecologies has begun to gain traction in memory studies, it nonetheless remains a relatively new concept. In this thesis, I have explicated at length the theoretical foundations of this term (most notably including in media theory, cognitive philosophy, and ecological psychology), and the usefulness of 'ecology' as a model of memory. This has included the discussion and application of terms such as 'memory objects', ecological 'niches', and the concept of 'shared memory objects'. Conducting this work – establishing the key terms and theories

[100] *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 11.

involved in the development of a holistic, ecological concept of memory – is particularly important given that memory studies is already a disciplinarily diverse field. Conceiving a shared set of terms for this theory that explicitly engage with and include a range of scholarship is vital to interdisciplinarity.

Finally, the concept of shared memory objects itself constitutes a key contribution of this thesis to memory scholarship. As discussed at length in Chapter Three of this thesis, the concept of shared memory objects that I offer here both aligns with an extends the approach to individual/collective memory suggested by existing theories of memory ecologies. In setting out shared memory objects, I recognise the importance of an ecological model of memory to resisting the idea that memory belongs to an individual or collective. If we accept, as ecological memory suggests, that memory is a process defined by encounter – the entanglement of a memoring subject and their environment – then we must find the social aspect of memory is likewise located at that point of encounter. Rather than defining memory itself as 'individual', 'collective', 'shared', or similar, then, I have argued for an alternative focus on the shared memory *object*.

Moving forward, this thesis has wide-ranging implications for scholarship in both literary and memory studies. My reading of representations of memory and media in contemporary novels demonstrates how insights from memory studies – and particularly an ecological model of memory – might be usefully deployed in literary research. Although the selected novelists may not be consciously seeking to contribute to discourse on these evolving conceptions of memory – such as theories of distributed/extended cognition or the notion of ecological memory – these authors nevertheless pay attention to the representation of memory and the representation of media in a way that exhibits various different aspects of an ecological model of

memory. Studying how this is reached in each case has facilitated new readings of the function of memory and media in the novels, revealing, for instance, the presentification of biography in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, the parallel extinctions of language and species in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, conceptions of media as prosthetic memory in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, and the hyperconnectivity of social media in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*.

This thesis also provides a framework for literary interventions in contemporary memory scholarship by demonstrating the prescience of the selected novels to shaping and expressing emerging conceptions of memory. Understanding memory in ecological terms sets *encounter* at the centre of memoring, rather than, for example, memory as possession or action: it generates questions around the media-specific affordances of our environment and invites us to think critically about how we perceive those affordances and respond to them. As I have shown throughout this thesis, the representation of memory in these novels similarly emphasises encounter and the interdependence of a vast ecology of memory objects.

Reading ecological memory across the selected novels, we can see how the affordances of a captioned photograph accessed digitally, for instance, is at once participant in the nature of digital culture's hyperconnectivity (Chapter Four), the certification of presence offered by the visual image (Chapter Three), the sociocultural context of language codes (Chapter Two), and also the material object of the device on which it is viewed and the environmental context of the memoring subject (Chapter One). I have considered these representations of the memory ecology separately in each chapter of this thesis to demonstrate the various distinct aspects of memory they depict; by bringing them together in this thesis, I show how, collectively, they gesture out toward this sense of a vast, interconnected system of ecological elements.

Because the notion of memory ecologies has only recently gained traction in memory studies, focusing on the ecological formation of media and the social aspect of memory in each of these novels has given scope to the potential reach and applications of memory ecologies, exploring several facets of an ecological understanding of memory approached with, for example, a focus on the individual or a hyperconnected multitude, a study of the affordances of familiar objects in the environment, of language, of audio/visual media, and of social media. Although fictional representations of memory and media may not be able to provide epistemological truths about memory itself, I have demonstrated throughout this thesis the importance of reading evolving *conceptions* of memory in contemporary literature. The selected novels frame conceptions of the affordances of other media types in contrast with literature. We see a consciousness of this, for example, in DeLillo's titular gesture towards a remediation of the 'Falling Man' photograph as both *Falling Man* (the novel) and the fictional 'falling man' performance artist, David Janiak.[101] By reading these four novels together – each with a demonstrated investment in both memory and media – I have sought in this thesis to highlight the contribution of literary voices in discussions of contemporary conceptions of memory.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I cited Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng's recent monograph *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget*, in which she compellingly argues for the suitability of the novel form to contribute to discussions around evolving conceptions of memory. Tseng concludes that contemporary novels 'function as a critical response to and as a vehicle for envisioning the changing state of memory; in the meantime, they facilitate or even reshape our understanding of how memory works in the age of

[101] Patricia Lockwood, *No One Is Talking About This* (Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 93.

digital technologies and social media'.[102] While Tseng's account does not engage with ecological memory, there are three aspects of her argument that I want to draw out here as having been foundational to the contribution of literature to this project: i) novels form a critical response to the changing state of memory; ii) novels envision the changing state of memory; iii) novels facilitate or reshape our understanding of how memory works in the age of digital technologies.

In the first instance, I argue that the selected novels critically engage with and respond to shifts in the contemporary media landscape and how these affect conceptions of memory. The chronological structure of the thesis, in which I have examined novels written between 1995 and 2021, has emphasised how each of these novels engages with memory, not in abstract isolation, but specifically in relation to the development of networked digital media and its affordances for memory. This has illuminated the situatedness of, for instance, Atwood's writing of a novel which inherently questions the durability of new media at the turn of the millenuum, and conceptions of cyberspace in Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* in 2021.

Second, I have demonstrated the role of novels as envisioning or representing the changing state of memory. In *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*, N. Katherine Hayles offers similar grounds for the inclusion of literary texts in discussions of digital subjectivity, suggesting that literature is a valuable resource for understanding the world around us much as a simulation might be, in that 'literary texts create imaginary worlds populated by creatures that we can (mis)take for beings like ourselves'.[103] This understanding has been crucial in, for example, recognising Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* as envisioning the presentification of

[102] Chia-Chieh Mavis Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023), p. 2.
[103] N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 6.

biography as a model of ecological memory. Although that novel does not attempt to represent physical reality insofar as narrative time and space are bent to the psychological preoccupations of its narrator, it nevertheless creates an imaginary world in which changing conceptions of memory as ecological can be played out as literal, physical encounters with the past.

Last, this thesis stakes out a claim for the selected novels as contributors to memory studies discourse because they facilitate *and* reshape our understanding of how memory works. These novels, by evincing an ecological model of memory, simultaneously represent and – in doing so – actively involve themselves in reshaping contemporary conceptions of the entanglement between memory and media. This is certainly the case in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, which, in recognising how public mediations of 9/11 became publicly accessed and individually and subjectively experienced, itself extends the understanding of shared memory as shared memory objects.

Tseng's monograph is valuable for elucidating the expansive interest in memory demonstrated in twenty-first century fiction and its value to memory studies; but it stops short of identifying the centrality of media to conceptions of memory, nor acknowledges the emerging concept of ecological memory. Tseng considers, to some extent, 'how literature reflects on and responds to some significant changes and challenges of our contemporary highly digitized memory culture', including connectivity and digital storage technologies, but does not go far enough in assessing evolving conceptions of memory from the vantage point of digital cultures.[104]

The central work of this thesis has been to demonstrate a confluence between contemporary theories of ecological memory and the representation of media and

[104] Tseng, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced*, pp. 6-8, 120-121.

memory in the selected novels, in order to then explore what insights can be gained by recognising this. I have endeavoured to establish the importance of recognising media types other than the digital – including novels – as components of the memory ecology. By doing so, I have shown how literary representations of media and memory which engage critically with these subjects can not only be seen as (knowingly or unknowingly) exhibiting an ecological view of memory, but also as contributing to an understanding of memory ecologies.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


Antze, Paul, and Michael Lambek, *Tense Past: Cultural essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996)

Assman, Jan, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), pp. 125-133

Atwood, Margaret, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (Virago, 2012)

—— 'Margaret Atwood: the road to Ustopia', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2011, <www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/14/margaret-atwood-road-to-ustopia> [accessed 9 August 2024].

—— *Oryx and Crake* (London: Virago Press, 2004)

Barker, Timothy, 'Television In and Out of Time', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 173-189

Barnier, Amanda, and Andrew Hoskins, 'Is there memory in the head, in the wild?' *Memory Studies*, 11.4 (2018), pp. 386-390

Barnier, Amanda, Louis Klein, and Celia B. Harris, 'Transactive Memory in Small, Intimate Groups: More Than the Sum of Their Parts', *Small Group Research* 49.1 (2018), pp. 62-97

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982)

Batchen, Geoffrey, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004)

Baudrillard, Jean, *The Conspiracy of Art*, trans. by Ames Hodges (Semiotext(e), 2005)

—— *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities*, trans. by Paul Foss, John Johnston, Paul Patton and Andrew Berardini (Semiotext(e), 2007)

—— 'The Precession of Simulacra', in *Art After Modernism: rethinking Representation*, ed. by Brian Willis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984)

Beiner, Guy, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007)

Bell, Edward Temple, *Numerology* (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Co., 1933; repr. Westport: Hyperion Press, 1979)

Bergson, Henri, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (Dover Publications, 2004)

Birdsall, Kate, ‘Frenzied Representation and the Forbidden Image: 9/11’s Falling Man and the Unrepresentable’, *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies* 8.1 (2015), pp. 39-55

Blom, Ina, Trond Lundemo, and Eivind Røssaak (eds), *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology and the Social*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2017)

Blustein, Jeffrey, ‘Bridging the gap between the social science and the social ontology of collective memory’, *Memory Studies* 15.4 (2022), pp. 731-750

Bond, Lucy, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen (eds), *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* (Berghahn Books, 2016)

Bouson, J. Brooks, ‘“It’s Game Over Forever”: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39 (2004), pp. 139-156

Boym, Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)

Brockmeier, Jens, *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

Brown, Aleia, and Joshua Crutchfield, ‘Black Scholars Matter: #BlkTwitterstorians Building a Digital Community’, *Journal of Black Studies and Research* 47.3 (2017), pp. 45-55

Brown, Steven D., and Andrew Hoskins, ‘Terrorism in the new memory ecology: Mediating and remembering the 2005 London Bombings’, *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 2.2, pp. 87-107

Burkey, Brant, ‘From Bricks to Clicks: How Digital Heritage Initiatives Create a New Ecosystem for Cultural Heritage and Collective Remembering’, *Journal of Communication Enquiry* 46.2 (2022), pp. 185-205

Butt, David G., Alison Moore and Kathryn Tuckwell, ‘The Teleological Illusion in Linguistic “Drift”: Choice and Purpose in Semantic Evolution’, in *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring Choice*, ed. by Lise Fontaine, Tom Bartlett and Gerard O’Grady (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Carter, J. Adam, ‘Autonomy, Cognitive Offloading, and Education,’ *Educational Theory* 68.6 (2019), pp. 657-673

Cave, Terence, *Thinking With Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

Charlwood, Catherine, ‘National Identities, Personal Crises: Amnesia in Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Buried Giant’, *Open Cultural Studies* 2.1 (2018), pp. 25-38

Chemero, Anthony, *Radical Embodied Cognitive Science* (MIT Press, 2009)

Childs, Peter, *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction Since 1970* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong, 'The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory', *Critical Inquiry* 35.1 (2008), pp. 148-171

—— *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press, 2017)

Clark, Andy, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Clark, Andy, and David J. Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* 58.1 (1998), pp. 7-19

Cordonnier, Aline, Valérie Rosoux, Anne-Sophie Gijs, and Oliver Luminet, 'Collective memory: An hourglass between the collective and the individual', *Memory, Mind and Media* 1 doi:10.1017/mem.2022.1

Coughlan, David, 'The Drive to Read: Freud, Oedipus and Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Parallax* 22.1 (2016), pp. 96-114

Creet, Julia, and Andreas Kitzmann, *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies* (University of Toronto Press, 2011)

Crystal, David, *Language Death* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

De Cesari, Chiara, and Ann Rigney (eds), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (De Gruyter, 2014)

Degnen, Cathrine, 'Socialising place attachment: place, social memory and embodied affordances', *Ageing and Society* 36.8 (2016), pp. 1645-1667

DeLillo, Don, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2007)

—— *Point Omega* (Picador, 2010)

—— *Underworld* (Scribner, 1997)

—— *White Noise* (Viking Press, 1985).

Derrida, Jacques, 'Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 307-330

van Dijck, José, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Dijkstra, Katinka, and Rolf A. Zwaan, 'Memory and Action', in *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*, ed. by Lawrence Shapiro (Routledge, 2014), pp. 296-305

Dinnen, Zara, *The Digital Banal: New Media and American Literature and Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2021)

Downes, William, 'Communication: words and world', in *Language and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 323-367

Drefus, Hubert L., *What Computers Still Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason* (MIT Press, 1992)

Dror, Itiel E., and Stevan Harnad (eds), *Cognition Distributed: How Cognitive Technology Extends Our Minds* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2008)

Eckert, Penelope, 'Variation, meaning and social change', in *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates*, ed. by Nikolas Coupland (Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 68-85

Ekelund, Robin, 'Connective Memory', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Memory Studies*, ed. by Lucas M. Bietti, Martin Pogacar (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93789-8_72-1>

Ellul, Jacques, *The Technological Society* (Random House, 1973)

Emerson, Lori, *Reading Writing Interfaces* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

Erll, Astrid, 'The hidden power of implicit collective memory', *Memory, Mind and Media* 1 (2022), doi:10.1017/mem.2022.7.

Erll, Astrid, and Ann Rigney (eds), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009)

Fairbanks, A. Harris, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Unconsoled"', *Studies in the Novel* 45.4 (2013), pp. 603-619

Fawns, Tim, 'Remembering in the wild: recontextualising and reconciling studies of media and memory', *Memory, Mind & Media*, 1:e11 (2022)

Flor, Carlos Villar, 'Unreliable selves in an unreliable World: the multiple projections of the hero in Kazuo Ishiguro's "The Unconsoled"', *Journal of English Studies* 2 (2000), pp. 159-169

Francesco, Ianí, 'Embodied Memories: Reviewing the role of the body in memory processes', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 26 (2019), pp. 1747-1766

Freud, Sigmund, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by A. A. Brill (Wordsworth, 1997)

Friedman, Sam, and Gidelinde Kuipers, 'The Divisive Power of Humor: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries', *Cultural Sociology* 7.2 (2013), pp. 179-195

Gal, Noam, Zhoar Kampf, and Limor Shifman, '"It Gets Better": Internet memes and the construction of collective identity', *New Media and Society* 18.8 (2016), pp. 1698-1714

—— 'SRSLY?? A typology of online ironic markers', *Information, Communication and Society* 25.7 (2022), pp. 992-1009

Galloway, Alexander R., 'The Unworkable Interface', *New Literary History* 39.4 (2008), pp. 931-955

Garde-Hansen, Joanne, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

Garde-Hansen, Joanne, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading (eds) *Save As… Digital Memories* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Garde-Hansen, Joanne, and Gilson Schwarz, 'Iconomy of Memory: On Remembering a Digital, Civic and Corporate Currency', in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 217-233.

Garilli, Giorgia, '"Perfectly, perfectly funny"?: laughing with the internet in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*', *Textual Practice* (2024), pp. 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2024.2318038>

Gee, Jared, 'Revisiting "Falling Man" at 20: the 9/11 Archive and Missing Images of Jumpers', *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 18.4 (2021), pp. 448-461

Gibson, James J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1979)

Gitelman, Lisa, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Duke University Press, 2014)

Gleich, Lewis S., 'Ethics in the Wake of the Image: The Post-9/11 Fiction of DeLillo, Auster, and Foer', *Journal of Modern Literature* 37.3 (2014), pp. 161-176

Good, Jennifer, *Photography and September 11th: Spectacle, Memory, Trauma* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Goody, Jack, *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* (Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Graham, Rosie, 'A "History" of Search Engines: Mapping Technologies of Memory, Learning, and Discovery', in *Society of the Query Reader: Reflections on Web Search*, ed. by René König and Miriam Rasch (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2014)

Gretzky, Madison, 'After the Fall: Humanity Narrated in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy', *Margaret Atwood Studies* 11 (2017), pp. 41-54

Gronseth, Michael, ‘A Kiss Is Just A Kiss… Or Is It?’ in *Popular Culture*, ed. by Mark Howell (Cognella, 2015), pp. 47–52

Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

Halstead, Huw, ‘Cyberspace: From fantasies of placelessness to connective emplacement’, *Memory Studies* 14.3 (2021), pp. 561-571

Hamilton, Paula, ‘A Long War: Public Memory and the Popular Media’, in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University Press, 2010), pp, 299-311

Han, Yingyi, ‘Evolution of mediated memory in the digital age: tracing its path from the 1950s to 2010s’, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10.603 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02129-4>

Harack, Katrina, ‘Embedded and Embodied Memories: Body, Space, and Time in Don DeLillo’s “White Noise” and “Falling Man”’, *Contemporary Literature* 54.2 (2013), pp. 303-336

Harris, Celia B., Amanda J. Barnier, John Sutton, Paul G. Keil, and Roger A. Dixon, ‘“Going episodic”: collaborative inhibition and facilitation when long-married couples remember together’, *Memory* 25.8 (2017), pp. 1148-1159

Hayles, N. Katherine, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

—— *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (University of Chicago Press, 2005)

—— ‘Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis’, *Poetics Today*, 25.1 (Spring 2004), pp. 67-90

—— *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (University of Chicago Press, 2017)

—— *Writing Machines* (MIT Press, 2002)

Heersmink, Richard, ‘Narrative Niche Construction: Memory Ecologies and Distributed Narrative Identities’, *Biology and Philosophy* 35.5 (2020), pp. 1-23

Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Harvard University Press, 1997)

Hornstein, Shelley, *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (Routledge, 2011)

Hoskins, Andrew (ed), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2018)

—— ‘Digital Network Memory’ in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 91-107

—— ‘The Mediatisation of Memory’, in *Save As…*, ed. by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 35-36

—— ‘Memory Ecologies’, *Memory Studies* 9.3 (2016), pp. 348-357

—— ‘The Forgetting Ecology: Losing the Past Through Digital Media and AI’, in *The Remaking of Memory in the Age of the Internet and Social Media*, ed. by Qi Wang and Andrew Hoskins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, In press)

—— ‘Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory’, in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 85-109

Hoskins, Andrew, and John Tulloch, *Risk and Hyperconnectivity: Media and Memories of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka (eds) *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (University of California Press, 2011)

Humphreys, Paul, *Emergence: A Philosophical Account* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

Hutchins, Edwin, *Cognition in the Wild* (MIT Press, 1996)

—— ‘Cognitive Ecology’, *Topics in Cognitive Science* 2.4 (2010), pp. 705-715

Innis, Harold, *Empire and Communications* (Beach Holme Publications, 1986)

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Unconsoled* (Faber and Faber, 1995)

Jaggi, Maya, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi’, in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. by Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia F. Wong (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2008), pp. 110-19

Jenkins, Henry, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (MIT Press, 2009)

Junod, Tom, ‘The Falling Man’, *Esquire Magazine*, 1 September, 2003 <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/> [accessed 21 July 2024

Kaun, Anne, and Fredrik Stiernstedt, ‘Facebook time: Technological and institutional affordances for media memories’, *New Media and Society* 16.7 (2014), pp. 1154-1168

Kemp, Peter, review of Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), *The Sunday Times*, 20 February 2005

Kilbourn, Russell J. A., and Eleanor Ty, *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013)

Kirschenbaum, Matthew G., *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (MIT Press, 2012)

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford University Press, 1999)

Korzybski, Alfred, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, 5th edn. (Institute of General Semantics, 1994)

Krantz, Frederick, *History From Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rude* (Montreal, Quebec: Concordia University, 1985)

Kroes, Rob, Miles Orvell, and Alan Nadel, 'The Ascent of the Falling Man: Establishing a Picture's Iconicity', *Journal of American Studies* 45.4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875811000995>

Krug, Gary, *Communication, Technology and Cultural Change* (SAGE, 2005)

Landsberg, Alison, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004)

Lewis, Barry, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Lockwood, Patricia, *No One Is Talking About This* (Bloomsbury, 2021)

Logan, Robert K., *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan* (Peter Lang, 2010)

Low, Dylan Scott, Isaac Mcneill, and Michael James Day, 'Endangered Languages: A Sociocognitive Approach to Language Death, Identity Loss, and Preservation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence', *Sustainable Multilingualism* 21.1 (2022), pp. 1-25

Lum, Casey Man Kong, 'Media Ecology', in *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, ed. by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler (Wiley, 2014), pp. 137-153

Lury, Celia, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998)

Lynch, Michael P., 'Neuromedia, Extended Knowledge and Understanding,' *Philosophical Issues* 24.1 (2014), pp. 299–313

Magritte, René, *The Treachery of Images*, 1929, oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Malafouris, Lambros, *How Things Shape the Mind: a theory of material engagement* (MIT Press, 2013)

Marling, Raili, 'Intersubjectivity and the disconnection in Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021)', *Subjectivity* 31 (2024), pp. 155-166

Mauro, Aaron, 'The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer's Photographic History of 9/11', *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011), pp. 584-606

Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton University Press, 2011)

McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Gingko Press, 2013)

McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore, *War and peace in the global village* (Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 1968)

Mead, Matthew, 'Caressing the Wound: Modalities of Trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Textual Practice* 28.3 (2014), pp. 505-507

Meyrowitz, Joshua, 'Understandings of Media', *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 56.1 (Spring 1999), pp. 44-52

Mihailidis, Paul, and Samantha Viotty, 'Spreadable Spectacle in Digital Culture: Civic Expression, Fake News, and the Role of Media Literacies in "Post-Fact" Society', *American Behavioral Scientist* 61.4 (2017), pp. 441-454

Mumford, Lewis, *Technics and Civilization* (University of Chicago Press, 2010)

Newen, Albert, Leon De Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher, *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition* (Oxford University Press, 2020)

Nystrom, Christine, 'Towards a Science of Media Ecology: The Formulation of Integrated Conceptual Paradigms for the Study of Human Communication Systems', (doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1973)

Oliva, Peter, 'Chaos as Metaphor: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', in *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro*, ed. by Brian W. Shaffer and Cynthia Wong (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2008), pp. 120-124

Ong, Walter J., *Orality and Literacy* (Methuen & Co., 1982; repr. New York: Routledge, 2002)

Ortega, Alejandra, ‘Calculating the Costs: Effects of Land Consumption in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* Trilogy’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 29.3 (2022), pp. 726-750

Parikka, Jussi, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Polity, 2012)

Phillips, Dana, ‘Collapse, Resilience, Stability and Sustainability in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* Trilogy’, in *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, ed. by Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham, and Louise Squire (Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 139-158

Pickering, Andrew, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (University of Chicago Press, 2011)

Pierce, Charles Sanders. ‘Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs’, in *Philosophical Writings of Pierce*, ed. by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 98-119.

Pollack, Kira, *100 Photographs: The Most Influential Photographs of All Time* (New York: Time, 2016)

Popular Memory Group, ‘Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method’, in *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics*, ed. by Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 205-252

Postman, Neil, ‘The Humanism of Media Ecology’, keynote address delivered at the inaugural Media Ecology Association Convention, Fordham University, New York, June 16–17 (2000)

Poutiainen, Hannu, ‘Additions, Subtractions, Iterations: Deconstruction and the Actuality of Context’, *Journal of Literary Theory* 8.1 (2012)

Price, Leah, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton University Press, 2012)

Punday, Daniel, *Writing at the Limit: The Novel in the New Media Ecology* (University of Nebraska Press, 2012)

Quarrie, Cynthia, ‘Impossible Inheritance: Filiation and Patrimony in Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Unconsoled’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 55.2 (2014), pp. 138-151

Radstone, Susannah, ‘Cinema and Memory’, in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 325-342

Radstone, Susannah, and Bill Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (Fordham University Press, 2010)

Ramsay, Debra, ‘Tensions in the Interface: The Archive and the Digital’, in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 290-302

Raven, James (ed), *The Oxford History of the Book* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

Reading, Anna, ‘Memobilia: The Mobile Phone and the Emergence of Wearable Memories’, in *Save As… Digital Memories*, ed. by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 81-95

Reitano, Natalie, ‘The Good Wound: Memory and Community in *The Unconsoled*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49.4 (2007), pp. 361-386

Robinson, Richard, ‘Nowhere, in particular: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled* and Central Europe’, *Critical Quarterly* 48.4 (2006), pp. 107-130

Rossington, Micahel, and Anne Whitehead (eds), *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

Roy, Jessica, ‘How Pepe the Frog Went from Harmless to Hate Symbol’, *Los Angeles Times*, 11 October 2016, <www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-pepe-the-frog-hate-symbol-20161011-snap-htmlstory.html> [accessed 30 May 2023]

Sapir, Edward, ‘Language as a Historical Product: Drift’, in *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1921), pp. 147-170

de Saussure, Ferdinand, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983)

Schacter, Daniel L., ‘Media, technology, and the sins of memory’, *Memory, Mind and Media* 1 (2022) doi:10.1017/mem.2021.3

—— ‘The Seven Sins of Memory: Insights from Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience’, *American Psychologist* 54.3 (1999), pp. 182-203

Schneider, Ana-Karina, ‘Flying Machines and Time Experiment in Kazuo Ishiguro’s “Bewilderment Trilogy”’, *English Studies* 103.2 (2022), pp. 247-266

Scolari, Carlos A., ‘Media Ecology: Ecploring the Metaphor to Expand the Theory’, *Communication Theory* 22.2 (2012), pp. 204-225

Shaffer, Brian W., *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998)

Shaffer, Brian W., and Cynthia F. Wong (eds) *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2008)

Shakespeare, William, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Lerner Publishing Group, 1978)

Sheils, Barry, ‘Clickbait modernism’, *Textual Practice* 38.1 (2024), pp. 84-111

Snyder, Katherine V., ‘“Time to go”: The Post-Apocalyptic and the Post-Traumatic in Margaret Atwood’s “Oryx and Crake”’, *Studies in the Novel* 43.4 (2011), pp. 470-489

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977)

Soper, Ella, and Nicholas Bradley, *Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context* (University of Calgary Press, 2013)

Stone, Charles, and Ava Zwolinski, ‘The mnemonic consequences associated with sharing personal photographs on social media’, *Memory, Mind & Media* 1:e12 (2022)

Sturken, Maria, ‘The Image at Ground Zero: Mediating the Memory of Terrorism’, *Electronic Elsewheres,* ed. by Chris Berry, Lynn Spigel and Kim Soyoung (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 225-243

Sundar, S. Shyam, ‘The MAIN Model: A Heuristic Approach to Understanding Technology Effects on Credibility’, in *Digital Media, Youth, and Credibility*, ed. by Miriam J. Metzger and Andrew J. Flanagin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 73-100

Tabbi, Joseph, and Michael Wutz, *Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology* (Cornell University Press, 1997)

Tate, Andrew, ‘“In the beginning, there was Chaos”: Atwood, apocalypse, art’, in *Apocalyptic Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 61-82

Teo, Yugin, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Thompson, Kristin, ‘A Formal Look at Realism’, in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 197-244

Tonkin, Elizabeth, *Narrating Our Pasts* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Trotter, David, *The Literature of Connection: Signal, Medium, Interface, 1850-1950* (Oxford University Press, 2020)

Tseng, Chia-Chieh Mavis, *Memory Made, Hacked, and Outsourced: How the 21st Century Anglophone Novels Remember and Forget* (Palgrave, 2023)

Tom Valcanis, ‘An iPhone in every hand: media ecology, communication structures, and the global village’, *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 68.1 (2011), pp. 33-45.

Tribble, Evelyn, and John Sutton, ‘Cognitive Ecology as a Framework for Shakespearean Studies’, *Shakespeare Studies* 39 (2011), pp. 94-103

Varela, Francisco J., Eleanor Rosch and Evan Thompson, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (MIT Press, 1992)

Wagner, Travis L., and Ashley Blewer, '"The Word Real Is No Longer Real": Deepfakes, Gender, and the Challenges of AI-Altered Video', *Open Information Science* 3 (2019), pp. 32-46

Wallace, David Foster, 'The View From Mrs Thompson's', in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (New York: Black Day Books, 2007), pp. 128-140

Wiggins, Bradley E., and G. Bret Bowers, 'Memes as genre: A structurational analysis of the memescape', *New Media and Society* 17.11 (2015), pp. 1886-1906

Winstead, Ashley, 'Beyond Persuasion: Margaret Atwood's Speculative Politics', *Studies in the Novel* 49.2 (2017), pp. 228-249

Winter, Jay, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006)

—— *War beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Wojciech, Drag, 'Elements of the Dreamlike and the Uncanny in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Styles of Communication* 2 (2010), pp. 31-40

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953)