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**Memory Under Control: Visibility, Omission, and
Informational Governance in *Never Let Me Go* and *The
Memory Police***

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Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Yōko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* (2019) explore how memory is shaped within systems that regulate what can be remembered and forgotten. This thesis argues that both novels present memory not only as a personal faculty, but as something managed through structures of visibility, omission, and delayed revelation, reflecting the logic of contemporary algorithmic and AI systems. The first section examines how memory and identity are shaped through the control of information, silence, and disappearance. The second section focuses on narrative form, showing how memory is reconstructed through storytelling and mediated perception. The third section considers memory as a form of resistance, exploring how storytelling and material traces challenge processes of erasure. Together, the novels suggest that systems of control do not simply determine what is remembered but shape the conditions under which memory itself can emerge.

Keywords: Memory, algorithmic systems, narrative, visibility, AI, Kazuo Ishiguro, Yōko Ogawa.

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0. Introduction

Introduction

In the contemporary digital landscape, algorithms increasingly shape our access to information, influencing not only public discourse but also perceptions of selfhood and memory. Algorithmic systems—defined as "encoded procedures that perform specific calculations to transform input data into desired outputs" (Gillespie 2014, 167)—can be understood as systems of selection, ranking, and visibility that filter and personalize content for users, including the recommendation and ranking algorithms used by platforms such as Google and Facebook. They are not neutral tools; they are infused with human biases—both pre-existing social biases and those emerging from technical limitations—shaping the information landscape in ways that may reinforce echo chambers—environments in which users are primarily exposed to information and opinions that mirror and amplify their existing beliefs—and filter bubbles—algorithmically curated information spaces that limit exposure to diverse perspectives—(Bozdag 2013, 209). What people see repeatedly, and what remains hidden from them, can shape how they understand the present and what they are later able to remember.

These questions become even more important as artificial intelligence becomes part of everyday life, extending automated forms of selection and decision-making into areas that were once shaped more directly by human judgement. As Donahoe et al. note, "AI automates decisions that people used to make" (2019, 115). Throughout this dissertation, artificial intelligence is understood not as synonymous with sentient or self-aware machines traditionally associated with science fiction, but as contemporary computational systems—such as machine learning models and large language models—that identify patterns in data and generate predictions or outputs without possessing consciousness or understanding. This provides a useful context for reading Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* (2019), which imagine different systems through which access to knowledge,

memory, and individual autonomy can be regulated. The connection between these novels and contemporary algorithmic systems is not that the novels directly represent digital technology. Rather, both raise questions about how systems organise information and shape what people are able to know, remember, and understand.

This comparison makes it possible to consider how decisions about what is made visible, accessible, or unavailable can affect people's relationship with the past. As Bogert et al. highlight, as tasks become more complex, individuals tend to rely more heavily on algorithmic advice than on human judgment or social influence (2021, 1). This growing reliance on automated systems highlights the relevance of speculative fiction to contemporary debates about the control of information. As Sarah Chan observes, speculative fiction engages with imagined futures not only to express concern about technological progress, but to interrogate its underlying ethical and social implications (2009, 398). The novels offer distinct representations of how access to knowledge and memory can be controlled. In *The Memory Police*, forgetting is enforced through disappearance, while in *Never Let Me Go*, Hailsham—a boarding school for clones in England where much of Ishiguro's novel is set—shapes how the characters understand their past and future. While one novel controls memory through erasure, the other shapes it through narrative and social conditioning. When read together, the novels suggest that controlling memory does not necessarily mean simply deleting the past; it can also involve influencing the ways in which that past is understood and interpreted.

In terms of literary genre, *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police* can be understood as dystopian novels. As Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan argue, dystopia can act as a "prophetic vehicle" (2003, 2), drawing attention to social and political tendencies that are already present in the world around us. Both novels place their characters inside communities where rules, conformity, and control have become part of everyday life. This reflects Baccolini and Moylan's observation that dystopian narratives "usually begin directly in the terrible new

world" (2003, 5). Because the characters have grown up within these systems, what is happening around them can initially seem ordinary rather than openly oppressive.

Both novels can be understood as forms of what might be described as "quiet" or "soft" dystopia, moving away from spectacular authoritarianism in favour of forms of coercion that are gradual and normalised within everyday social practices. As Baccolini and Moylan suggest, in dystopian narrative "a counter-narrative develops as the dystopian citizen moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation and resistance" (2003, 5). Both novels revise this model by presenting resistance without open rebellion. In *Never Let Me Go*, resistance remains personal and largely confined to the reflective space of Kathy's narration. In *The Memory Police*, resistance takes the form of acts of remembrance: the narrator's decision to continue writing, the concealment of R, and the preservation of memories that the state seeks to erase.

Language and perception are also central to sustaining these dystopian worlds. Baccolini and Moylan emphasise that control in dystopian fiction is exercised not only through physical or material force, but also through the regulation of language and discourse (2003, 5–6). In *Never Let Me Go*, euphemistic language obscures the exploitation of the clones. In *The Memory Police*, the disappearance of words gradually makes certain forms of thought and resistance more difficult. Although the two novels use different mechanisms, both show how language can become a means of governance by influencing what people are able to recognise, express, and remember.

This form of dystopia can also be connected to the technological context in which the novels emerged. The novel *Never Let Me Go* focuses on the management of biological life, presenting cloned bodies as sources of biological value whose lives and futures are institutionally determined. *The Memory Police*, on the other hand, shifts attention from the body to memory itself. Through the disappearance of objects and words, Ogawa's novel

presents forgetting as an organised institutional process. This connects with the posthumanist critique articulated by N. Katherine Hayles, who argues that the posthuman view "privileges informational pattern over material instantiation" (2008, 2), treating identity as something transferable rather than tied to embodied existence. In *The Memory Police*, identity is progressively detached from material experience as the disappearance of objects, language, and memory erodes the embodied foundations through which individuals understand themselves and their world. Together, the novels question what happens when human identity is increasingly organised according to informational rather than embodied logic.

The novel *Never Let Me Go* is narrated through the reflective recollections of the protagonist Kathy H. It traces the lives of three clones—Kathy, Ruth and Tommy—whose lives are organised around an institutionally imposed destiny of compulsory organ donation for the benefit of humanity. Kathy's way of telling her story is closely connected to the world Hailsham has created around her. Rather than giving readers a clear and complete account of the past, Kathy moves back and forth in time, admits when she is uncertain, and leaves gaps in her story. Her narration therefore shows memory as something that changes as she looks back on her experiences and tries to make sense of them.

The Memory Police presents the problem in a more direct and unsettling way. On an unnamed island, ordinary objects disappear without warning, taking with them the memories and associations attached to them. The unnamed narrator watches as these losses gradually affect the island, making it harder for people to hold on to the things that once helped them understand their lives. Whereas Kathy remembers within an institution that has conditioned the meaning of her memories, Ogawa's narrator struggles to remember in a world where the conditions that make remembering possible are progressively destroyed. Together, the two novels demonstrate that memory may be governed both through the institutional shaping of how the past is understood and through the systematic erasure of the past itself.

Combining close textual analysis with theoretical frameworks drawn primarily from memory studies, this dissertation examines *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police* in relation to contemporary concerns about informational control and the ways digital systems shape access to information and memory. The argument is not that human memory itself becomes algorithmic. Instead, this dissertation asks how institutions and other systems shape the conditions in which memories are formed and preserved. The issue, then, is not simply that memory can be unreliable, but that the systems around us can influence what remains available to remember and what gradually becomes harder to recover.

This thesis examines how both novels present memory as a space where remembrance, control, and resistance come into conflict. In *Never Let Me Go*, the analysis focuses on Kathy's retrospective narration, Hailsham's Gallery as a carefully controlled space for creativity, and Norfolk as a place where the clones imagine their lost memories and possessions might still be found. In *The Memory Police*, the focus is on the disappearance of objects and language, the narrator's attempts to write and remember, and the role of material objects and human relationships in holding on to the past.

The dissertation is organised into a theoretical chapter and three analytical sections that examine memory from complementary perspectives, moving from systems of control to the experience of remembering and finally to resistance through remembering. The first section examines how institutional systems regulate memory in *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*, focusing on mechanisms of surveillance, informational control, and selective access to knowledge. The second section shifts to the characters' experiences of remembering, analysing how Kathy H.'s and the unnamed narrator's recollections reveal memory as selective, fragmented, and reconstructive. The third section considers remembering as a form of ethical resistance, examining how storytelling, material traces, places, and interpersonal relationships preserve memory and challenge processes of erasure and control.

Section 1. Theoretical Framework: Memory, Technology, and Power

This section establishes the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*. It draws on memory studies, digital memory studies, and theories of power to examine how memory is shaped by social, cultural, technological, and institutional forces. I begin by introducing Maurice Halbwach's concept of collective memory, which shows how closely remembering is tied to the people and communities around us. Jan Assmann and Pierre Nora then help develop this idea by showing how memories are preserved and passed on through cultural practices, shared spaces, and sites of remembrance. Van Dijck further develops this understanding by focusing on the mediated nature of memory and the role of objects and technologies in shaping how people remember. This also provides a way of considering how memory is shaped by more recent technologies and media. Andrew Hoskins considers how digital media and artificial intelligence are changing the ways memories are created, stored, and circulated. Alongside these perspectives, Michel Foucault brings questions of power and control into the discussion. His work on discipline, biopolitics, and governmentality helps explain how surveillance and institutions can shape behaviour without relying on direct force. His ideas are particularly useful for reading the two novels, where control often becomes part of everyday life and influences what characters are able to know, remember, and question.

1. Memory as Socially Embedded: Halbwachs's collective memory

Contemporary approaches to memory begin with an important recognition: remembering is not simply an internal or cognitive process. What people remember is shaped by the communities they belong to, the stories they share, and the ways they have learned to understand the past. As Halbwachs argues, "it is, of course, individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on

that context to remember or recreate the past" (1992, 29). His central argument, therefore, is that memory does not develop in isolation. Even memories that appear deeply personal are shaped by the social worlds through which individuals interpret their experiences.

Halbwachs refers to these social contexts as "collective frameworks" (1992, 45). These are the shared values, assumptions, narratives, and relationships that help individuals make sense of their memories. They do not simply provide a place for memories to be kept; they also shape what people remember and how they understand it. As Halbwachs explains, "collective frameworks are precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society" (1992, 45). What people remember is shaped by the social world around them and by the ideas that become accepted within it.

The social nature of memory also explains why isolated remembering becomes fragile, and in the end unsustainable. Memory develops within relationships that shape what people consider worth remembering and how they understand their experiences. As Halbwachs writes, "a person who alone remembers what others do not resemble someone who sees what others do not see" (Halbwachs 1992, 81). Individual memories can become harder to hold on to when the people who sustained them are no longer around. Halbwachs suggests that autobiographical memories may also fade when we lose contact with those who were part of the experiences we remember (1992, 31). Writing and storytelling can help keep these memories alive, allowing experiences to be passed on even after the people who shared them have gone.

Memory depends on collective frameworks, which is why societies continually reshape the past in response to present needs. Halbwachs notes that "society rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium" (1992, 189–190). Remembering is not simply a matter of bringing back an unchanged version of what happened. We often reinterpret the past as our understanding of it changes, and, as Halbwachs explains,

"when reflection begins to operate, we reconstruct the past through an effort of reasoning because we wish to introduce greater coherence" (1992, 190). Language is important to this process because, as he observes, "we speak of our recollections before calling them to mind. It is language that allows us at every moment to reconstruct our past" (1992, 179). The way people talk about the past can shape how we remember it, giving experiences meaning through the words and narratives available to them.

2. Cultural memory and sites of memory

While Halbwachs establishes the importance of the social frameworks within which remembering takes place, Jan Assmann develops this argument by distinguishing between communicative and cultural memory. Assmann describes cultural memory as the knowledge and experiences through which societies make sense of their past (2011, 3). Cultural memory depends on institutional forms of preservation. It must be actively maintained through socially recognised media and practices, including archives, texts, monuments, rituals, and images. As he explains, cultural memory "can only be realized institutionally and artificially" (2011, 9). These external forms make it possible for societies to preserve and transmit shared knowledge beyond the limits of individual experience. Assmann stresses that it is "subject to the vast range of historically conditioned changes, including those brought about by the evolution of media technology" (2011, 10). This is important because societies have always relied on different ways of passing the past on, from oral storytelling and writing to print and, more recently, digital media. These changes affect not only how memories are stored but also how people encounter and understand the past. This becomes especially relevant today, as digital search engines and AI-assisted systems increasingly influence which histories, theories, and perspectives people are most likely to encounter.

Assmann argues that the storage of knowledge is not static but is constantly reshaped by changing social circumstances and individual experiences (Assmann 2011, 27). Cultural memory changes as people reinterpret the past from the position of the present. He describes collective memory as working in two directions: it reconstructs the past while also influencing present experiences and guiding future action (Assmann 2011, 28). This is important in *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*, where the characters inherit ideas about the past that affect how they understand themselves and the world around them. Assmann also draws attention to the role of media in these changes. He describes electronic media as a form of "artificial memory" and compares their development with earlier changes brought about by writing and the printing press (2011, 7). His point is that when the ways of storing and passing on knowledge change, the way people relate to the past can change with them.

Alongside cultural memory, Assmann identifies communicative memory, which emerges through the everyday exchange of lived experience. Unlike cultural memory, which is preserved through monuments or archives, communicative memory circulates informally through family stories and personal recollections and generally reaches back no more than a few generations. Assmann characterizes it as "memories related to the recent past" (2011, 36) that are rooted in generational experience and emerge and disappear with those who carry them. As he explains, those memories are "formed, vouched for, and communicated solely by way of personal experience" (2011, 36). In this sense, identity emerges not only from official histories but from the ordinary act of sharing memories with others. Communicative memory plays an important role in social cohesion as it allows individuals to situate themselves within a common framework of meaning. However, without institutional preservation, communicative memory is fragile and fades with the passing of its carriers.

Assmann further emphasises that memory is an active process of reconstruction rather than a passive storage of the past. As he argues, memory emerges through participation in

communicative and social frameworks, since "a person's memory forms itself through his or her participation in communicative processes" and through involvement in various social groups, "ranging from family through religion to nation" (2011, 23). Memory therefore "lives and survives through communication," meaning that when communicative frameworks change or disappear, forgetting follows (Assmann 2011, 23). Therefore, memory is dynamic rather than simply archival. Societies do not only store the past; they continually reinterpret it. Remembering necessarily involves selection, since making sense of the past requires certain details to be emphasised while others gradually recede. Forgetting, from this perspective, is not simply a failure of memory, but one of the conditions that makes remembering possible. Without some degree of selection, the past could become an overwhelming accumulation of impressions.

Assmann similarly stresses that collective memory is not transferable at will but that it forms part of specific social contexts. He states that "collective memory is dependent on its bearers and cannot be passed on arbitrarily," (2011, 25) and that it "is related exclusively to the standpoint of one real and living community" (2011, 25). This means that memory cannot exist independently of those who sustain it. Moreover, he explains that "the temporal and spatial elements operate within an existential context filled with ideas, emotions, and values" (2011, 25), suggesting that collective memory is inseparable from emotional and ethical dimensions. Memory does not only record events, but it provides communities with a shared sense of history, purpose, and orientation in the world. He states that collective memory "not only reconstructs the past, but it also organizes the experience of the present and the future" (2011, 28), and that "the past is continually subject to processes of reorganization according to the changes taking place in the frame of reference of each successive present" (2011, 27). Rituals and ceremonies also help communities remember the past. As Assmann argues, "the collective identity needs ceremony" (2011, 38). By repeatedly using texts, images, gestures, and shared

practices, communities reinforce particular ways of understanding the past. When a community continues to commemorate an event, that memory can remain part of how the group understands itself. When those practices disappear, the memory may become less present in everyday life. This shows that memory is shaped not only by what is preserved, but also by the practices that allow certain memories to remain part of a community's life.

Pierre Nora develops this idea by considering what happens when these shared, everyday forms of remembrance begin to weaken. His concept of *lieux de mémoire* emerges from the tension between living memory and the growing need to preserve traces of the past. Nora connects this to what he calls the "acceleration of history" (1989, 7), describing it as "an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good" (1989, 7). As he puts it, "we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (1989, 7). When memory is no longer naturally carried through everyday life and shared experience, people increasingly turn to particular practices and symbolic sites. He argues that "there are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory" (1989, 7).

Nora's argument is particularly useful for understanding memory as a living and dynamic process rather than a fixed record of the past. He describes memory as "a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present" (1989, 8), emphasising its continuous relationship with present experiences. As he further argues, "memory is life, borne by living societies" (1989, 8). Therefore, memory is shaped by the people and circumstances around us, and its meaning can change as we return to the past from different points in our life.

Nora's understanding of memory as a living and socially embedded process also helps explain why material and symbolic sites become important to its preservation. He insists that memory "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (1989, 9). These tangible supports become significant once memory can no longer rely on direct lived

transmission. However, Nora explains that physical sites do not automatically function as *lieux de mémoire*, but that they only acquire this status when they are invested with symbolic meaning. He specifies that such sites exist simultaneously on three levels: "material, symbolic, and functional" (1989, 18). *Lieux de mémoire* arise when there is a perceived need to preserve what might otherwise disappear. In this sense, they depend on a deliberate "will to remember" (1989, 19).

3. José van Dijck: Mediated Memory and the Materiality of Remembering

While Halbwachs, Assmann, and Nora demonstrate that memory is fundamentally social and culturally mediated, van Dijck extends these approaches by examining the role of media technologies and material objects in the processes of remembering. She introduces the idea of "mediated memories" to describe "the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies for creating and re-creating a sense of our past, present, and future selves in relation to others" (2007, 170). For her, remembering is closely tied to the media and objects people use in everyday life. As van Dijck puts it, "media and memory are not separate entities" (2007, 38). Memory is therefore not something that exists only in the mind; it develops through the interaction between the "brain, mind, technology, and materiality" (van Dijck 2007, 38). This shifts attention towards the objects and technologies that become part of everyday remembering and provides a link between cultural memory and digital memory studies. Media does not only preserve memories that already exist; they participate in how memories are constructed, interpreted, and connected to identity. Van Dijck also emphasises that remembering can change the memory itself. She argues that "memories effectively are rewritten each time they are activated" (2007, 32). Remembering is therefore not simply a matter of retrieving an unchanged record of what happened. Each time a memory is recalled, it can be understood differently.

Van Dijck develops this idea through the metaphor of a shoebox containing photographs, letters, diaries, and recordings. These objects do more than remind people of the past; they can also connect people to one another, as they "mediate not only remembrances of things past; they also mediate relationships between individuals and groups" (2007, 1). At the same time, van Dijck makes an important distinction between personal and collective memory. Although individual memories are influenced by wider cultural frameworks, "the sum of individual memories never equals collectivity" (2007, 25). Individual and collective memory cannot be reduced to one another. Instead, memory develops through an ongoing interaction between personal experience and shared cultural practices. Mediated memories therefore reflect a broader cultural process involving "various agents—individuals, technologies, conventions, institutions, and so forth," whose practices reveal the ongoing tension between individuality and collectivity (van Dijck, 2007, 25). This becomes clearer when we look at the objects people keep, such as photographs, videos, diaries, and digital archives. Van Dijck describes them as "mediated building blocks that we mold in the process of remembering" (2010, 24). In other words, the things people choose to keep and return to can affect how they remember the past. Through "selecting, recording, rerecording, and sharing assorted items of mediated culture," people build personal collections that become closely connected to how they understand themselves (van Dijck 2010, 24). Remembering is therefore an active process in which people select, revisit, and give new meaning to the things they keep. She explains that mediated memory objects "never stay put for once and for all"; instead, they "are agents in an ongoing process of memory (re)construction" (2010, 37–38).

Human memory is not equivalent to a technological database that stores information for unchanged retrieval. While digital databases can preserve records in relatively stable forms, human remembering involves interpretation, forgetting, and reconstruction (van Dijck 2010, 152). Van Dijck describes media technologies as "tools for selecting, framing, and

encapsulating autobiographical memories," giving them "a constitutive role in the continuous (re)construction of our selves" (2007, 161). This understanding of mediated memory is useful for reading both novels because they attach memory to material objects, institutional practices, and spaces, but use these forms of mediation differently. In *Never Let Me Go*, objects and institutional practices help shape how memories are interpreted and transmitted; in *The Memory Police*, the disappearance of objects progressively removes the material conditions through which memories can be accessed and sustained. Therefore, the instability of the characters' memories is not simply a result of the limits of human recollection but is also shaped by the environments in which they live.

4. Andrew Hoskins' studies on digital memory

Extending this account of mediated memory, Hoskins examines the networked digital environments in which contemporary remembering takes place. He argues that memory is no longer mainly stored in stable institutions (archive, museum, canon) but is distributed across platforms, devices, databases, and daily user practices such as posting, searching and sharing (2017, 2). This connective media environment produces what he calls "the restless past": the past is continuously reanimated through connectivity and search, and so the boundary between past and present becomes less stable and less controllable (2017, 5).

Hoskins examines how digital media and artificial intelligence can reshape the conditions under which memories are produced, accessed, and reconstructed. Rather than simply extending human memory, digital media fundamentally transform what memory is, how it functions, and who controls it under conditions of hyperconnectivity and datafication. As Hoskins explains, "digital devices, apps, and services increasingly penetrate and constitute everyday experience" (2024, 4) and "never have billions of individuals instantly produced, recorded, and shared so much data and information about themselves, their experiences,

thoughts, preferences, and relationships" (2024, 4). This vast scale of data production creates new conditions for memory, in which the past is no longer attached only in lived experience or intentional recollection but is continuously generated, collected, and recomposed.

Hoskins identifies artificial intelligence as inaugurating "a new battleground between humans and computers in the shaping of reality" (2024, 1). In this context, memory becomes a space in which human agency is both expanded and threatened. Hoskins argues that "generative AI, and related technologies and services, both enable and endanger human agency in the making and the remixing of individual and collective memory" (2024, 2). This raises important questions about what is remembered, how memories are produced, and whose perspectives are prioritised. Unlike human memory, which is generally connected to lived experience and acts of recall, AI can produce memories that are, as Hoskins suggests, "generated rather than retrieved" (2024, 3). The result is what he describes as "uncanny memory": a version of the past that may appear familiar while simultaneously feeling artificial or unreal (2024, 3). Contemporary digital systems increasingly participate in the production, retrieval, ordering and circulation of representations of the past, potentially displacing or reshaping human agency in remembering, creating what Hoskins calls "the production of a past somewhere between, as well as within, the human and the machine, with the latter possessing an increasingly powerful, complex, and opaque memory" (2024, 4).

Hoskins describes this transformation as the emergence of a "third way of memory" (2024, 1). This refers to a form of memory that is neither fully human nor simply technological storage. This third way can "challenge and also replace the agency of human remembering and forgetting" (2024, 3), as systems remember automatically, operating beyond human control or understanding. Hoskins refers to an "AI agentic past" marked by the machine's capacity for "forging and remaking long-term memory" (2024, 3). Unlike human memory, traditionally understood as "an active, willed, functional deliberating memory" (2024, 3), AI can endlessly

reshape and reproduce versions of the past. As AI systems take on a greater role in remembering, the question of personal autonomy becomes increasingly complex. Hoskins notes that "our personal data is being used increasingly without our consent" and that we "cannot possess a full grasp of the future uses and abuses of our digital trails" (2024, 6). These digital trails circulate across platforms and institutions, carrying "potentially profound impacts on memory, consciousness, privacy, and agency" (2024, 6). These digital systems shape how individuals are categorized and interpreted, as individuals become comprehensible to machines in ways that exceed their own self-knowledge.

This expansion of machine memory is closely tied to the growing appeal of what Hoskins describes as total memory. He notes that AI platforms are beginning to blur the boundaries "between implicit or explicit, unconscious or conscious, individual or collective, in the recording, remediating, and repurposing of experience" (2024, 6). They move towards what might once have seemed like a form of total recall, even "producing a past we don't need to humanly remember" (2024, 6). Memory apps can therefore "host or create your past" (2024, 8), making it easier for people to rely on technology to record and organise experiences that they might otherwise remember for themselves. However, this total memory comes at a cost: "the benefits of the amassing of a total memory also involve the creation of a memory that is no longer your own" (2024, 10). In this way, total memory threatens to displace personal agency in the very act of preserving the past.

Hoskins also develops these concerns through the concept of "grey memory." He uses the term to describe what happens when digital technologies blur or push out of reach conscious, willed remembering through opacity, overload and ownership risks (2024, 13). As he puts it, "a conscious, active, willed memory is obscured in the digital era" (2021, 676). People also increasingly "give (memories) away" (2021, 676), handing over parts of their personal experience to digital systems without always knowing what will happen to that

information afterwards. This creates what Hoskins calls "the unremembered self" (2021, 684), where people may no longer know who controls or processes the traces of their lives. Although this version of the self may disappear from an individual's conscious awareness, it can remain accessible to institutions and algorithms through the extensive amounts of personal data that are routinely collected and retained (2021, 684). This has important implications for identity. Personal identity may increasingly be shaped not only by what individuals consciously choose to remember but also by systems of data collection and algorithmic categorisation. The problem becomes even clearer in a world of constant digital connection. Hoskins observes that "all our communicational acts are archival" (2021, 677), meaning that everyday conversations and interactions can be recorded and stored long after we have forgotten them. The boundary between what we personally remember and what technology keeps on our behalf becomes increasingly difficult to separate. As Hoskins puts it, "in hyperconnective media you cannot erase the past" (2021, 677). Digital media thus changes not only how memories are kept, but also what it means to forget.

5. Michel Foucault: Power, Discipline, Biopolitics, and Governmentality

Hoskins's discussion of algorithmic memory raises a broader question: who decides what is kept, what is forgotten, and what people are able to access? Michel Foucault's work on discipline, biopolitics, and governmentality provides a useful way of thinking about how power operates through surveillance, social norms, and institutions. Control does not always involve direct censorship or punishment. It can also work through the ways people are observed, classified, and encouraged to behave. Over time, people may begin to follow these expectations themselves, even when no one is directly forcing them to do so. This also affects memory, since the environment people live in can shape what they remember, what they accept, and what remains difficult to question.

In "Society Must Be Defended," Foucault describes a shift in the way modern power works. Power is no longer based only on the sovereign's right to take life, the "right of the sword"; it increasingly becomes concerned with managing and organising life itself (2003, 240). This means paying attention to bodies, health, reproduction, and populations, rather than relying only on punishment or prohibition. Foucault describes this as the power to "'make' live and 'let' die" (2003, 241). Power therefore becomes involved in decisions about how people live, including questions of health, reproduction, longevity, and survival. This broader form of power is what Foucault calls biopolitics. It focuses on populations and processes such as "the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction and the fertility of a population" (2003, 243).

Biopolitics, however, does not replace earlier disciplinary mechanisms. Foucault identifies techniques of power "centered on the individual body" that develop through surveillance, spatial organisation, and the close observation of behaviour (2003, 242). These disciplinary practices regulate individuals at the level of everyday conduct. Discipline functions by making individuals observable and controllable, reducing collective life to bodies that can be "kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished" (2003, 242). By the eighteenth century, biopolitics had developed alongside disciplinary power rather than replacing it. Foucault explains that it "does not exclude disciplinary technology, but it does dovetail into it" (2003, 242). Therefore, modern power works on more than one level: it can shape individual behaviour while also managing populations as a whole. Foucault describes these as "two technologies of power" that emerge at different points but come to operate alongside one another (2003, 249). Together, disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms create a complex network through which both individual behaviour and collective life are organised.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examines the everyday institutions in which these mechanisms become particularly visible, including schools, prisons, and hospitals. Discipline relies on "a mechanism that coerces by means of observation," in which "the techniques that

make it possible to see induce effects of power" (1977, 170–171). Disciplinary power works more closely at the level of the individual. When people know that they may be watched, they can begin to monitor their own behaviour and adjust it to fit expected norms. Foucault describes this form of power as both "absolutely 'indiscreet', since it is everywhere and always alert," and "absolutely 'discreet'," because it can operate quietly and continuously (1977, 177). The important point is that constant physical force is not necessary. The possibility of being watched can be enough to make people regulate themselves. This is where normalisation becomes important: individuals learn what is considered acceptable and begin to judge their own behaviour against those standards. Foucault explains that norms make it possible "to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities" and to render differences useful (1977, 184). Individuals are consequently measured, compared, ranked, and adjusted according to particular standards. The examination becomes the key mechanism that consolidates this process: it is "a normalizing gaze" through which subjects are observed, classified and corrected (1977, 184). Through constant visibility, power operates quietly, as people come to see themselves as subjects who can be evaluated and improved.

The logic of this system becomes particularly clear in Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon. He describes a structure in which individuals occupy fixed positions and can potentially be observed at any time, while their behaviour can also be recorded (1977, 197). What makes the system effective is not that someone is constantly watching everyone, but that people cannot be sure when they are being watched. Therefore, they begin to behave as though observation could happen at any moment. The Panopticon's major effect is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1977, 201). Power is no longer imposed from outside, as individuals are caught up "in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers" (1977, 201). The Panopticon is not limited to prisons. Foucault describes it as "a generalizable model of functioning," (1977, 205)

and for that reason, this model can be applied across schools, hospitals, factories, and other institutions where supervision and visibility shape conduct.

In "The Subject and Power," Foucault's central concern is not power itself but "the subject." He identifies different ways in which individuals become subjects, including dividing practices such as sane/mad or healthy/sick, as well as through processes by which individuals come to understand and recognise themselves as subjects (1982, 777–778). For Foucault, power does not work only through direct force or commands. Instead, it shapes the choices and possibilities that people see as available to them, describing power as an "action upon an action" (1982, 789). Power can shape behaviour by influencing what people come to see as possible, acceptable, or expected. Foucault describes governing as "to structure the possible field of action of others" (1982, 790). This helps explain his idea of governmentality: power can work through institutions, social norms, and the choices people learn to make for themselves. At the same time, Foucault does not describe people as completely trapped by these forms of power. As he notes, "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight" (Foucault 1982, 794). Resistance remains possible because power never completely determines what a person can do.

Foucault does not develop a theory of memory comparable to Halbwachs or Assmann; his relevance to the present study lies instead in providing a vocabulary for analysing how institutions regulate subjects through visibility, classification, surveillance and shape the field of possible action. These ideas are useful for examining how control over information, behaviour, and access to knowledge can influence what people are able to understand and remember.

Taken together, these approaches establish a progression from the social construction of memory to its cultural institutionalisation, material mediation, technological transformation, and political regulation. Halbwachs demonstrates that memory depends upon social

frameworks; Assmann and Nora show how these frameworks are sustained through cultural practices and material sites; Van Dijck extends this account by demonstrating that media technologies participate in the production of personal and collective memory; Hoskins shows how networked and algorithmic technologies increasingly reorganise the conditions under which memory is produced, accessed, and forgotten; and Foucault provides a vocabulary for understanding these processes as relations of power. This progression provides the conceptual basis for reading *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police* as fictional representations of systems in which information, memory, visibility, and subjectivity can be regulated.

Section 2. Hailsham and The Memory Police as manipulative systems

This section examines how Hailsham in *Never Let Me Go* and the regime in *The Memory Police* regulate memory through different forms of control. In *Never Let Me Go*, memory is controlled mainly through what the students are not told. At Hailsham, they are given fragments of information about their lives and futures, but never enough to fully understand the system that determines them. These omissions gradually shape how they make sense of their own origins and what lies ahead. *The Memory Police* presents a different form of control. Here, objects and words disappear, and eventually the memories connected to them disappear as well. Therefore, one novel conditions what individuals understand about their reality, while the other progressively destroys the material and cognitive conditions through which that reality can be remembered. Despite this difference, both novels depict how power operates through the regulation of what can be known, remembered, and accessed. In *Never Let Me Go*, the guardians at Hailsham release fragments of information at carefully chosen moments, a process reinforced by the rule of "not discussing the donations openly" (Ishiguro 2005, 84). Similarly, in *The Memory Police*, those in power decide not only which objects disappear, but they also influence how people process and react to these losses, as the protagonist says, "I don't even know what it is I should be remembering" (Ogawa 2019, 83).

Ogawa extends this control beyond information and into the material world of everyday life. The Memory Police enforce these disappearances by searching homes, confiscating prohibited objects, and removing those who continue to remember what has been lost. From the outset, disappearance is presented not as a sudden rupture but as a condition that gradually settles into the fabric of everyday life, as the narrator explains that "one morning you'll simply wake up, and it will be over, before you've even realized [...] you'll feel that something has changed from the night before, and you'll know that you've lost something" (Ogawa 2019, 6). The danger lies not only in the disappearances themselves, but in people forgetting what

disappeared, until, as the narrator warns, the island will become "nothing but absences and holes" (Ogawa 2019, 55). Van Dijck's discussion of mediated memory is useful here because the objects on the island are part of how the characters remember their past. When an object disappears, the loss is not limited to the object itself. It also means losing something that helped people remember and make sense of their experiences. As van Dijck explains, memory is "not simply triggered by objects but happens through these objects; brain, mind, technology, and materiality are inextricably intertwined in producing and revising a coherent picture of one's past" (2007, 38). The Memory Police do more than remove reminders of the past: by confiscating objects, they destroy the material conditions through which remembering itself becomes possible. In this sense, the novel presents the destruction of objects as a form of memory control, in which the disappearance of material traces progressively weakens both personal and collective memory.

This control over material traces is reinforced through organised practices of surveillance and confiscation. This becomes clear when photographs, calendars, perfumes, birds, and roses disappear. Their loss is not only physical. The memories and associations attached to them become harder to hold on to as well. Assmann makes a similar point when he argues that cultural memory relies on external forms through which the past can be preserved (2011, 9). This is reflected in the Memory Police's methodical searches: they "knew exactly where they were going [...] setting to work with remarkable efficiency," while others "ran their fingers over every inch of the walls" (Ogawa 2019, 15). These inspections open the private space to continuous observation, echoing Foucault's "normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish" (1977, 184), where surveillance works through routine visibility rather than overt force.

This control extends beyond objects to people themselves. Those who continue to remember are treated as dangerous once it becomes "obvious that some people [...] did not

lose their memories,” leading the Memory Police to “begin taking them all away” (Ogawa 2019, 23). Their removal demonstrates that the regime controls not only what can be remembered but also who is permitted to remember. The narrator notes that after these incidents, “it took a moment before time resumed its normal flow” (Ogawa 2019, 25). Even after the raids have ended, people continue to behave as though another disappearance could happen at any moment.

The Memory Police's searches appear chaotic, but they are also highly organised. During the raids, they work in “the most efficient manner [...] creating chaos” while still giving “an impression of careful order” (Ogawa 2019, 16). The disorder, then, is not simply the result of uncontrolled violence. It is part of the operation itself, making the intrusion more disruptive while remaining carefully controlled. This tension is also evident when the narrator burns vanished calendars and reflects that “the disappearances [...] could be blown away on the wind with very little regard for what they might once have been” (Ogawa 2019, 130). The image shows how disappearance has become routine: once an object is gone, the narrator no longer treats its loss as something that requires attention, so even the destruction of what remains becomes an ordinary task. The Memory Police are therefore effective not only because they remove objects, but because people gradually become used to those objects disappearing from their lives. Foucault's description of disciplinary power as both “indiscreet” and “discreet” (1977, 177) is useful here. The Memory Police make their presence known, but their interventions become normalized as part of ordinary life. People become accustomed to living with them.

While algorithmic systems tend to prioritise efficiency and optimisation, human memory is tied to personal and collective identity—a tension that *The Memory Police* explores by showing that memories can survive even when they become difficult to access. This is evident when the narrator describes memories as still accessible despite the ongoing

disappearances: "they're just floating in a pool where the sunlight never reaches. All you have to do is plunge your hand in and you're bound to find something. Something to bring back into the light" (Ogawa 2019, 171). The image suggests that memories can remain present even when the narrator can no longer easily bring them to mind. This distinction is important because it shifts the focus from memory as something simply stored or erased to memory as something whose visibility and accessibility can be regulated. Ogawa's representation of forgetting can therefore be read alongside contemporary informational systems, where information does not always need to be deleted in order to disappear from attention. It may remain technically available while becoming increasingly difficult to encounter because it has been filtered, deprioritised, or obscured. As Olivia Ruhil observes, such systems can "forget for us [...] in the cold calculus of relevance" (2025, 1317). The Memory Police similarly alter not only what exists, but the conditions under which the past can be accessed. Their power lies partly in transforming something that once belonged to ordinary experience into something increasingly difficult to retrieve.

The narrator's relationship with R—the only character who can still remember—also shows how deeply forgetting has become part of life on the island. His ability to remember makes him different, but it also unsettles the narrator. Through her relationship with him, a tension emerges between remembering what has been lost and continuing to live within a society organised around forgetting. R's presence makes remembering feel dangerous rather than comforting, as she admits that "I wanted to remember, but I also feared what remembering might bring" (Ogawa 2019, 91). This reflects Halbwachs's observation that remembering becomes difficult when an individual can no longer share their memories with those around them (1992, 81). R's memories consequently become a source of unease, as they expose a past that the rest of the island has learned to live without.

Ogawa also emphasises how power depends on opacity. This is visible in the structure of the Memory Police, whose authority depends on secrecy and division of knowledge, as their operations are "divided...[in] a complex" structure and "must be kept secret" (Ogawa 2019, 102–104), making the mechanisms of memory erasure inaccessible and resistance or comprehension nearly impossible. A similar form of control can be seen in contemporary algorithmic systems, where influence often works through opacity rather than visibility. As Steven Williamson and Victor Prybutok argue, "the covert nature of AI's influence plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of manipulation, as individuals may not be aware that their decisions or beliefs are being influenced by an external agent" (2024, 15–16). This lack of awareness is also relevant to questions of memory. Digital systems can influence what people see, retain, and return to without making those processes fully visible. As Tutuncuoglu puts it, "we no longer rely on human stewards of memory alone; we defer to systems that decide what should be remembered, surfaced, or forgotten—often without our awareness or consent" (2024, 4). When these processes remain hidden, people may not even know why something has disappeared, why one piece of information remains visible while another does not, or why certain memories are easier to access than others.

The system's control extends into narrative form itself, where storytelling becomes another site in which disappearance is reproduced. This is illustrated in the novel-within-the-novel that the protagonist writes, which depicts a young woman confined in a clock tower who gradually loses her voice and ability to communicate. Within this embedded narrative, a controlling teacher imprisons a typist and gradually strips away both her freedom and her sense of time. The typist reflects that "time passes like a long, frigid stream, without my knowing the month or date or day of the week [...] it's enough to be imprisoned here just as he wants me to be" (Ogawa 2019, 157). The embedded story reflects the same forms of control that shape life on the island, showing how these constraints influence the way experience is represented.

Storytelling becomes a space in which the effects of control are registered and reproduced, revealing that the governance of memory extends beyond the physical disappearance of objects and into the forms through which experience itself can be narrated.

In the embedded narrative, control shifts from regulating memory to regulating expression itself, as the professor gradually takes possession of the typist's creative voice and recasts expression as something that can be owned: "You'll forget you ever had a voice [...] You'll move your lips as you just did, go looking for a typewriter, a notepad. But soon enough you'll see how pointless it is [...] Then, at last, you'll be all mine" (Ogawa 2019, 128). Rather than constituting a separate process from forgetting, the suppression of expression becomes part of the same logic of disappearance, in which memory, voice, and agency are progressively dismantled. This has a contemporary analogue in digital systems that shape what users can see, share, and communicate, suggesting that control over information can affect the conditions under which expression becomes possible.

Within this embedded narrative, the professor enforces corrections in a calm and measured manner, pointing out "each error" while the narrator feels "increasingly oppressed [...] backed into a corner" (Ogawa 2019, 91). These minor corrections accumulate into a steady sense of pressure and constraint on the typist's writing. This recalls Foucault's notion of the "examination," where power operates through observation, comparison, and judgment (1977, 184). The professor's behaviour reflects this form of control, as the typist's writing is constantly judged against unspoken expectations and subtly corrected whenever it fails to meet them.

While *The Memory Police* presents control through disappearance, *Never Let Me Go* presents a different kind of conditioning. In Ishiguro's novel, memory is not erased completely but shaped through selective framing, omission, and repeated narratives. Hailsham first appears to be a caring and progressive institution, yet it slowly becomes clear that the students are clones whose lives have already been planned around future organ donations. Although the

school presents itself as protective, it also prepares the students to accept the future that has been decided for them rather than question it. A life beyond their role as donors is never presented as a real possibility.

The students learn to understand themselves through what they are told at Hailsham. The guardians and teachers encourage particular ways of thinking about who they are, while leaving out information that might make them question what is expected of them. For instance, artistic production is given a sense of importance and value, while the full implications of the students' future—and particularly their eventual deaths—remain unclear or deliberately obscured. Kathy, the novel's narrator, reflects that "a lot of the time, how you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at 'creating'" (Ishiguro 2005, 15). This becomes materialised in institutional practices, most clearly in the Gallery—a collection of artwork produced by the students—which they understand as a formal system for recognising their inner selves, where their pieces are collected and presented as "evidence" of their inner selves (Ishiguro 2005, 86). In this sense, the Gallery turns the students' artwork into a means through which identity is evaluated and constructed according to Hailsham's standards. The artworks are not passive records of the clones' inner lives but material artefacts through which identity is constructed and negotiated. The Gallery consequently shapes not only how the clones are valued by others, but also how they come to understand and remember themselves.

Over time, the students begin to internalise and enforce the institution's restrictions on what can be discussed, particularly around topics such as donations and their future. As Kathy recalls, when sensitive topics such as the donation arise, "we'd done everything to avoid the subject [...] we'd backed off at the first sign we were entering that ground" (Ishiguro 2005, 67), and in relation to their understanding of the Gallery, "we never mentioned it to the guardians [...] it seems to me this was a rule we imposed on ourselves" (Ishiguro 2005, 27).

The clones absorb these restrictions so thoroughly that they police not only their own conversations but also those of other students, helping maintain the rules and silences encouraged by Hailsham. Hailsham's control becomes effective precisely because the students begin censoring themselves.

At Hailsham, pedagogical methods are used to shape and constrain how the clones understand and remember their lives. The students are taught to value their artwork as a reflection of their inner selves. Miss Lucy, one of the teachers, emphasises this when she tells Tommy—Kathy's best friend—that "your art, it is important. And not just because it's evidence. But for your own sake. You'll get a lot from it, just for yourself" (Ishiguro 2005, 86). Miss Lucy tells the students that their capacity for creativity is essential because it reveals their ability to appreciate beauty in the same manner as real humans do. However, they are never explicitly told about the true purpose behind their artwork, nor are they told about the inevitability of their early deaths. In one of her classes, Miss Lucy breaks from this pattern, but she only exposes the truth partially, telling them they are "told and not told [...] Your lives are set out for you [...] Your futures, all of them, have been decided" (Ishiguro 2005, 64-65).

Miss Lucy reveals to them the futility of their dreams and reminds them that the system has planned their futures long before they have the chance to shape their own. After revealing this truth, Miss Lucy falls silent, but Kathy reflects: "she went silent, but my impression was that she was continuing to say things inside her head, because for some time her gaze kept roving over us, going from face to face just as if she were still speaking to us" (Ishiguro 2005, 65). As Dominick LaCapra explains, "silences may also speak in their own way, having a performative dimension that is not devoid of objective significance and moral force" (2016, 377). Miss Lucy's silence is important because the students can sense that she is not telling them everything about their lives. They notice the gaps, but they do not know what those gaps mean or what they should be asking. This is similar to the experience of users within digital

systems, where decisions about what becomes visible and what remains hidden are often made without their knowledge. As Tutuncuoglu argues, "algorithms are not passive conveyors of content—they are architects of memory. They determine which historical moments are highlighted, which voices are preserved, and which truths are rendered invisible" (2024, 7). Similarly, Hailsham's guardians determine which truths the students encounter, and which remain beyond their understanding, limiting their ability to question the system that governs their lives.

The novel also complicates the idea that memory can ever belong fully to the individual. The clones' memories feel intimate and meaningful, yet they are formed within a system that carefully limits what they are allowed to know. Kathy becomes aware of this when she recalls Tommy's idea that the guardians may have "timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just too young to understand properly" (Ishiguro 2005, 66). This means that the clones' memories are not entirely separate from the system that shaped their lives. Their experiences are real, but their understanding of those experiences develops within limits established by the institution. Hoskins's concept of "grey memory" is useful here because it draws attention to the instability of memory and its openness to external influence. As he writes, "the present and the future forged from all of the pasts of ours and others' digital participation and trails seem incredibly uncertain and unpredictable" (2024, 13). Hailsham produces a form of memory that is neither entirely personal nor entirely imposed: the clones genuinely experience their memories, but the frameworks through which they interpret them have already been institutionally shaped.

In *Never Let Me Go*, control also works through the stories and collective myths the students grow up hearing. The guardians manage information in a way that encourages fear and discourages curiosity, so that the students begin regulating themselves. One example is the story of the boy who ran into the woods and was later found mutilated, his body supposedly

"tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off" (Ishiguro 2005, 41). The story turns the outside world into something terrifying and reinforces the danger of crossing Hailsham's boundaries. Similarly, the account of a girl who once wandered outside the fences and was denied re-entry deepens this atmosphere of repression and collective paranoia: "[The girl's] ghost was always wandering about the woods, gazing over Hailsham, pining to be let back in" (Ishiguro 2005, 41–42). The ghost story keeps fear alive even after the event itself has passed.

Although the students themselves circulate these stories, they remain institutionally framed. Kathy explains that "the guardians always insisted these stories were nonsense. But then the older students would tell us that was exactly what the guardians had told them when they were younger, and that we'd be told the ghastly truth soon enough, just as they were" (Ishiguro 2005, 42). Therefore, the rumours become part of the students' shared understanding of the world, reinforcing the idea that the outside is dangerous while Hailsham remains the only place of safety.

By carefully regulating what the clones are allowed to know, Hailsham ensures that their memories and understanding of themselves develop within institutional boundaries long before they have the opportunity to question them. In this sense, Hailsham creates an informational environment in which the students are repeatedly exposed to ideas that reinforce these boundaries. A similar dynamic can be seen in digital systems, where, as Williamson and Prybutok explain, "users may find themselves in echo chambers, predominantly encountering information and perspectives reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs and values" (2024, 15–16). This is evident in Miss Lucy's warning: "it's just as well the fences at Hailsham aren't electrified. You get terrible accidents sometimes" (Ishiguro 2005, 6). The "fences" symbolise not only the physical barriers of the institution but also the psychological boundaries that prevent the clones from questioning their circumstances. The euphemism "terrible accidents" softens the reality of their early deaths, reflecting how the institution downplays and obscures

the risks and injustices it perpetuates. Miss Lucy's words are drowned out by the student's laughter, carrying a chilling undertone that Kathy reflects upon with "what accidents? Where?" (Ishiguro 2005, 63). This dismissive response on the student's part shows how effectively the system has normalised ignorance, preventing the students from recognising what they are being told.

The gallery at Hailsham symbolises the construction and commodification of memory, as it represents the students' inner lives and repressed realities. Kathy notes that "everyone talked about it as though it existed, though in truth none of us knew for sure that it did" (Ishiguro 2005, 27). The students hold onto a shared and idealised version of their past, one that is built more on selective memories and collective belief than on any stable or objective truth. The Gallery can be understood as a physical expression of this cultural memory, a space where the clones' shared ideas—especially about the value of their creativity—are collected and displayed. At the same time, this sense of recognition is complicated by Madame, a woman who visits Hailsham and acts as the external authority figure overseeing the school. She selects the clones' artwork and keeps it in her own home, in a room the students will never see. In this way, what appears to be recognition of their work also becomes a form of extraction: their artwork is taken away and controlled by others. The Gallery can therefore be understood not simply as a space that preserves the students' memories, but as a mechanism that determines which traces of their lives become visible and to whom. This dynamic echoes Tutuncuoglu's insight that "the task of curating memory—deciding what content is shown, emphasised, or buried—has been silently delegated to algorithms. Far from being neutral tools, these systems are active mediators of cultural memory, shaping what individuals and societies come to know, recall, or forget" (2024, 5). Madame and the guardians can similarly be understood as human "gatekeepers" of visibility at Hailsham. They control, to different degrees, what the students are allowed to know about their lives and futures. This becomes particularly clear when Miss

Emily, a guardian, later describes the students as "pawns in a game [...] lucky pawns" (Ishiguro 2005, 205). The phrase reveals how much of the students' understanding of themselves has developed through information that was carefully managed and only partially revealed.

The clones understand parts of their future, but not the larger system controlling it. Kathy admits that they knew they were different and even sensed "donations waiting for us", but "didn't really know what that meant" (Ishiguro 2005, 57). These gaps are not accidental but shaped through the guardians' selective disclosure of information. As Frank Pasquale suggests, a "black box" system is one in which inputs and outputs are visible while the processes that connect them remain inaccessible (2015, 3). Kathy's memories work in a similar way, made up of moments whose meaning is only partially available to her. What matters, then, is not only what is remembered, but also what remains out of reach.

A related dynamic appears in *The Memory Police*, where disappearance is likewise encountered through its effects rather than its causes. R insists that people "can't even imagine what these disappearances mean" (Ogawa 2019, 27). He points not simply to a failure of memory but to an inability to conceptualise the significance of that loss. Objects do not disappear in a way that can later be traced or explained. They are removed without warning, leaving the characters to live with the consequences without ever fully understanding the system behind them. In this sense, the mechanisms of disappearance remain just as difficult to grasp as the memories that have been taken away.

In both *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*, systems of control establish the terms of belonging, yet these boundaries are also sustained from within. In Ishiguro's novel, Tommy's lack of "good" artistic production marks him as an outsider, as "everyone was talking at once about how Tommy never even tried to be creative. I suppose the truth was, by that stage, each of us was secretly wishing a guardian would come from the house and take him away" (Ishiguro 2005, 10). What stands out here is not just the authority of the institution itself,

but the way the students take it in and start repeating its assumptions almost without realising it. Over time, they begin to act in line with what Hailsham expects from them, as if those ideas were their own. A similar pattern appears in *The Memory Police*, where memory itself becomes tied to whether someone belongs in the community or not. As Assmann suggests, collective memory depends on those who carry it (2011, 25), and in this setting, those who continue to remember become unsettling figures rather than valued ones. R's insistence—"But I remember [...] I haven't forgotten anything" (Ogawa 2019, 64)—places him outside a world organised around shared forgetting. His exclusion shows how the Memory Police make remembering a reason for people to be seen as different, leaving those who resist the system feeling like outsiders in their own community.

Across *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*, it becomes clear that memory is shaped by external systems, but these systems are most effective when their influence is experienced as something internal rather than imposed from outside. Hailsham's students learn to reproduce its silences, categories, and assumptions, while the inhabitants of Ogawa's island gradually accept disappearance as part of ordinary life. Taken together, the novels show that memory governance operates most effectively when external control becomes embedded in everyday practices of perception, behaviour, and self-understanding.

Section 3. Kathy and the Unnamed Narrator: Selection, Omission, and the Mediation of Memory

This section examines how the different forms of memory governance established in the two novels shape the reconstruction of the past. In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's recollections are shaped by the narratives and categories she has absorbed from Hailsham, meaning that institutional conditioning continues to influence how she selects and interprets her memories. In *The Memory Police*, by contrast, the narrator's recollections are increasingly fragmented because the objects and concepts through which memory can be accessed are progressively removed. The difference is therefore significant: while Ishiguro depicts a subject whose memories remain available but are shaped by an institutional framework, Ogawa depicts a subject whose access to memory itself becomes unstable. Neither novel gives us the past as something complete that can be simply retrieved. Kathy and Ogawa's unnamed narrator both have to work through what they remember, what they cannot remember, and what only returns in fragments. Their stories are shaped as much by gaps and uncertainty as by the memories they are able to recount. What has been forgotten does not simply disappear from their narratives; the gaps themselves affect how they understand and communicate what happened. Tseng describes this unstable position as a "space of latency", where memory exists in a liminal state between "passive forgetting and active remembering" (2023, 20). In this state, memories can be "reshaped, re-ordered or lost" (2023, 2). The characters can return to the past, but they cannot always recover it in the same form. Hoskins makes a related point when he argues that contemporary media systems make "our hold on the past" increasingly uncertain (2018, 103). The ways memories are stored and accessed can affect what is still available to us when we try to remember.

In Kathy's case, her recollections feel truthful and intimate, yet they frequently reproduce Hailsham's categories of what is meaningful and safe to revisit. For instance, Kathy

recalls that "years and years later, that day Tommy and I found another copy of that lost tape of mine in a town on the Norfolk coast, we didn't just think it pretty funny; we both felt deep down some tug, some old wish to believe again in something that was once close to our hearts" (Ishiguro 2005, 54). However, the meaning Kathy attaches to the memory is not entirely self-generated. Kathy's desire to "believe again" emerges from the myths she has internalised, particularly the fantasy of Norfolk as a place where lost things can be recovered. Hoskins describes a similar destabilisation in contemporary media systems, as they "increasingly blur what might have been once thought of as implicit or explicit, unconscious or conscious, individual or collective, in the recording, remediating, and repurposing of experience" (2024, 6).

This reliance on shared narratives is particularly evident in Kathy's recollections of Norfolk. Rather than existing as a stable record or individually formed memory, Norfolk is shaped through collective beliefs that give form to uncertainty. The students' belief in Norfolk as England's "lost corner" (Ishiguro 2005, 148) emerges gradually from shared repetition rather than individual origin. Kathy herself reconstructs its emergence with hesitation—"Someone—I can't remember who it was—" (Ishiguro 2005, 53), yet the idea quickly "caught on" and became an "accepted fact" within the group (Ishiguro 2005, 53). Even when Tommy later claims that they "never really believed" in the myth, Kathy insists, "I'm pretty certain he was wrong" (Ishiguro 2005, 53). In line with Halbwachs's idea that memory is structured through "collective frameworks" (1992, 45), this scene shows how shared narratives shape what can be remembered and how it is interpreted.

The narrator of *The Memory Police* occupies a more precarious position. Whereas Kathy can return repeatedly to memories that remain available to her, the unnamed narrator increasingly encounters memories that cannot be accessed at all. She remembers wanting to tell R that she still remembered but finds that "no matter how hard I concentrated, the object

sitting before me did not trigger a single memory" (Ogawa 2019, 142). Her attempt to remember exists between recollection and absence, illustrating Tseng's claim that "storytelling frequently takes place in a transitory, interstitial space between remembering and forgetting" (2023, 20). When objects and their meanings disappear, storytelling becomes an act of selective retrieval shaped by the constraints imposed by the regime. In this context, the narrator's dependence on R becomes especially apparent when she admits that "I was sure that any memories that remained inside him would be very much alive, so different from my own, which were few in number and very pale" (Ogawa, 2019, 155–156). Memory, therefore, cannot rely on individual retention alone but depends on external forms of preservation and mediation.

Another form of preservation occurs through the hidden room, which provides a physical refuge for objects that have disappeared elsewhere on the island. The narrator explains that "we're protected here—you, me, all the things that were hidden in the sculptures. Even the Memory Police haven't been able to find us" (Ogawa, 2019, 253–254). The room therefore protects more than the objects themselves. It also protects the possibility of remembering what they represent. As van Dijck argues, "objects and technology inform memory instead of transmitting it" (2007, 41–42). The photographs, manuscripts, and perfume bottles do more than preserve traces of the past; they remain connected to the narrator's attempts to remember experiences that are no longer part of everyday life. The hidden room cannot restore what has been lost, but it keeps some of those traces within reach.

A similar relationship between memory and loss appears in Kathy's fragile recollections. Kathy's memories of her experiences at Hailsham and her friendships with Tommy and Ruth are portrayed with a sense of loss and disorientation, as they are distant, incomplete, and overshadowed by regret. When Kathy reflects on her separation from Tommy and Ruth as she leaves to become a carer for other clones, she admits, "it never occurred to me that our lives, until then so closely interwoven, could unravel and separate over a thing like

that. But the fact was, I suppose, there were powerful tides tugging us apart by then, and it only needed something like that to finish the task" (Ishiguro 2005, 153). By describing the forces dividing them as powerful tides, Kathy turns structural coercion into the language of nature. The metaphor makes these forces feel natural and inevitable rather than part of a constructed system of exploitation, showing how the clones come to see their separation as natural. Kathy's retrospective narration also shows how her understanding of the past changes as she learns more about her life and the people around her. As van Dijck argues, "our memories of the past change along with our expectations of the future; memories are constantly prone to revision just as memory objects are constantly amenable to alteration" (2007, 173). Kathy looks back on earlier experiences with knowledge she did not have at the time, giving new meaning to events that she could not fully understand when they happened. Her memories are shaped not only by what she experienced, but also by what she has since learned about herself, Tommy, Ruth, and the world that determined their lives.

For Halbwachs, collective memory is sustained through continuity, repetition, and social reinforcement (1992, 31). Ogawa presents the opposite process, showing what happens when communal frameworks and material reference points are destroyed. As objects and their meanings vanish from the island, the shared references that help people remember the past begin to disappear as well. This is reflected in the narrator's observation that "our memories were diminishing day by day, for when something disappeared from the island, all memory of it vanished, too" (Ogawa 2019, 271).

In Ogawa's novel, forgetting gradually becomes ordinary. The Memory Police enforce the disappearances, but their authority also depends on the willingness of ordinary citizens to participate. People remove objects from their homes even when those objects carry personal meaning. The narrator's observation that "soon enough, things are back to normal as though nothing has happened [...] no one makes much of a fuss" (Ogawa 2019, 7) captures this process

particularly well. Over time, the islanders stop grieving what disappears and instead become emotionally detached from loss. This is seen in the Old man's reflection: "I've lived here three times longer than you have, which means I've lost three times as many things. But I've never really been frightened or particularly missed any of them when they were gone" (Ogawa 2019, 55).

The process of forgetting is revealed through the islanders' repeated disposal of disappeared objects: they burn them, bury them, or throw them into the river to detach themselves from the past. The narrator captures the psychological struggle behind these practices: "It's disturbing to see things that have disappeared [...] So we have no choice, really, but to burn them or bury them or send them floating down the river, anything to push them as far away as possible" (Ogawa 2019, 144). After an object disappears, people are expected to get rid of the physical traces that remain. Van Dijck notes that people use material objects not only to keep memories but also to "alter them, annihilate them, or reassign meaning to them" (2007, 37–38). The burning, burying, and disposal on the island can be read in these terms. People are encouraged to remove the physical reminders of what has disappeared, making it easier to distance themselves from the memories attached to them. Assmann argues that collective identity "needs ceremony" (2011, 38). These repeated acts give the process of letting go a shared, almost ritualised form, as the islanders collectively participate in removing what has disappeared.

Yet, some people on the island continue to remember what has disappeared. Because remembering itself has become dangerous, those who retain these memories have to hide them as well as themselves. As the narrator explains, "the people who don't forget [...] have no distinguishing features [...] if they're careful [...] they should be able to pass" (Ogawa 2019, 27). R complicates this possibility by suggesting that memory cannot be fully suppressed or convincingly performed as absence: "the conscious mind is embedded in a subconscious [...]"

which may make trying to pretend almost impossible [...] If it were easy to pretend, they wouldn't be hiding away in these safe houses" (Ogawa 2019, 27). Remembering therefore leaves traces in behaviour, making concealment difficult.

In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's narration illustrates how memory is shaped by her limited understanding of the institution's control over what she is allowed to know, as seen through her hesitation, omission, and retrospective rationalisation. Van Dijck argues that memory is "intrinsically a mediated phenomenon," shaped by "mind, technology, and culture" (2007, 178). Kathy's repeated hesitations therefore reveal more than unreliable memory; they show how the institutional limits on knowledge continue to shape what she can remember and narrate. Expressions such as "I suppose" (Ishiguro 2005, 75), "I can't remember" (2005, 108), and "it never occurred to me" (2005, 99) collectively suggest a fragmented way of remembering. Van Dijck similarly argues that "personal memory is always embedded in sociocultural forms and practices, which are partly responsible for its shaping" (2007, 176). Kathy's hesitations reveal not only uncertainty about the past, but also the limits of the framework through which she has learned to understand it. These hesitations and incomplete explanations are very revealing. They reflect a life in which information has been carefully distributed, leaving her to make sense of experiences that she was never allowed to fully understand.

The effects of this institutional conditioning extend beyond Kathy's narration to the ways in which the clones come to understand themselves. This internalisation is seen in Ruth's metaphor of the clones being modelled from "trash": "we all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We all know it, so why don't we say it?" (Ishiguro 2005, 128). Ruth speaks as though this is something the students already accept about themselves, turning the institution's prejudice into an unspoken truth.

At the same time, Kathy's narration becomes a way of preserving what the institution does not value. Keith McDonald describes her narration as a life-writing project that seeks to "preserve" those who are "dying or already gone," particularly Tommy and Ruth (2007, 80). Kathy spends much of her narration returning to ordinary moments with them, including memories that have no place in Hailsham's official account of the clones. By telling these stories, she keeps those relationships present even after the people themselves are gone.

Unlike Kathy's retrospective reconstruction, Ogawa's narrator experiences memory as something that is becoming less reliable as the things connected to it disappear. Rather than disappearing completely, memory continues to surface through fragments that escape complete regulation. Ogawa's narrator constructs a narrative in which what is missing becomes as meaningful as what remains explicitly remembered. This is evident in her reflection on a music box: "The box exists without any doubt and it's right in front of us. The music continues to play, before the disappearance and after [...] The only thing that's different is the hearts of those who once heard it" (Ogawa 2019, 144). Yet memory itself remains fragile, as the narrator acknowledges that "memories don't just pile up—they also change over time [...] and sometimes they fade of their own accord" (Ogawa 2019, 82). This instability becomes especially clear when she attempts to recover the past: "I seem to remember something, but it's very vague [...] I remember only one thing [...] I recall my mother, as she unfolded it as gently as you just did" (Ogawa 2019, 206). What remains, therefore, are sensory and emotional fragments rather than a coherent account of the past.

The contrast between individual responses to memory is very clear in *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy tends to remember and empathize, Ruth often avoids sustained reflection—especially when conversations approach painful subjects such as their "possibles" or Norfolk—and Tommy tends to downplay what has happened as a way of coping. Kathy, as the narrator, takes on the role of archivist, as she preserves and recounts the details of her past and tries to make

sense of her memories. She focuses on childhood affection, friendship, and loss rather than openly challenging the system that determines the clones' lives. Her account nevertheless exposes the emotional consequences of that system. This is particularly clear in her recollection of Tommy shortly before his final donations, when she notices the sadness behind his words: "Yes, we're doing this now and I'm glad we're doing it now. But what a pity we left it so late" (Ishiguro 2005, 220). This moment preserves an emotional truth that the official donation programme has no language for, showing how the clones experience loss and the passage of time that the system cannot account for. What the institution disregards as unimportant, Kathy restores as lived experience.

Tommy, by contrast, adopts a strategy of filtering and deflection. As Tseng explains, Tommy "downplays the importance of the Hailsham experience in their identity by generalizing what happened in Hailsham and shifting the topic of conversation" (2023, 105), an act that Kathy views as a way for him to detach from the past and accept his predetermined future. Kathy notes, "if, for instance, the two of us were reminiscing about old Hailsham people, he'd sooner or later move the conversation round to one of his current donor friends who'd maybe said or done something similar to what we were recalling" (Ishiguro 2005, 214). Tommy's habitual topic-shifting functions as a form of emotional deflection, minimising the past's intensity in order to make his future bearable.

A differentiation in memory practices also appears in *The Memory Police*, where remembrance is distributed unevenly across characters. While the narrator forgets things along with everyone else, the character of R ends up becoming a custodian of the past, holding on to experiences that the rest of society can no longer reach. R's capacity to remember isolates him rather than empower him, as memory persists only in isolated and fragile traces rather than as something collectively sustained. This struggle is evident when the narrator admits, "I don't even know what it is I should be remembering [...] I have to make do with a hollow heart full

of holes" (Ogawa 2019, 253). In this way, those who do remember occupy a position of ethical burden, holding onto fragments of a past that everyone else pushes away. As the narrator recalls, "I remembered the quiet sound of my mother's voice as she told me stories about the secret objects—and the troubled look on her face when I had asked her why she remembered these stories and had not forgotten them like everyone else" (Ogawa 2019, 36). This uneven distribution also highlights the relational character of mediated memory. Van Dijck argues that mediated memories "mediate between self and others," serving not only to preserve an individual past but also to establish connections with others through which memory acquires meaning (2007, 171). R's ability to retain memories gives him a role that extends beyond personal recollection: his memories preserve connections to people, objects, and experiences that the wider community has been forced to abandon. In this sense, remembering becomes both a form of personal resistance and a means of maintaining a relationship with a disappearing collective past.

However, the preservation of memory depends not only on those who remember but also on the material supports through which the past can be retained. The destruction of these supports is especially visible in the burning of the island's library: "The library was completely engulfed in flames [...] everything seemed to recede into the distance" (Ogawa 2019, 177). The destruction signals not only the loss of texts but also the physical disappearance of the knowledge they contain. The same process occurs through the removal of everyday objects such as ribbons, bells, perfume, hats, and books. This becomes clear when the narrator tries to reconnect with a scent-based memory: "I peered into the little drawer and took a deep breath [...] But all that filled my chest was the chill, stale air" (Ogawa 2019, 64). The missing object can no longer provide the material point of contact through which the memory might be recovered.

Ishiguro presents a different way in which material objects become part of collective memory. Hailsham shapes collective memory through its rituals and practices such as the Sales and Exchanges—systems in which students trade their handmade art for tokens and outside items. Kathy notes, "I can see now, too, how the Exchanges had a more subtle effect on us all. If you think about it, being dependent on each other to produce the stuff that might become your private treasures—that's bound to do things to your relationships" (Ishiguro 2005, 15). The Exchanges therefore create shared routines through which objects acquire emotional and relational significance.

Kathy recalls how, during these Sales, students would become excited by small objects, even though they were often "a big disappointment" (Ishiguro 2005, 35), and yet she reflects that "we couldn't ever shake off the old feelings of hope and excitement" (Ishiguro 2005, 35). Hailsham gives ordinary possessions a particular importance. Objects that seem insignificant become tied to the students' experiences of the school and to what those objects come to mean to them. Their significance is shaped by the world Hailsham has created around them, where even ordinary possessions become connected to particular values and assumptions. This connects with Assmann's claim that "the past only comes into being insofar as we refer to it" (2011, 27). Kathy does not simply retrieve a complete past. She gives it shape by deciding which experiences, people, and objects remain part of her account. However, this process of selection does not place the past entirely under her control. Kathy's changing memories can be compared to Hoskins's concept of "grey memory" in digital systems, where the constant remixing and mediation of the past places authenticity and individual control under increasing pressure (2024, 1).

Material objects also mediate memory differently across the two novels. In *The Memory Police*, preserved objects such as photographs and perfume bottles retain emotional and mnemonic significance even after they have officially disappeared, allowing fragments of the

past to survive despite the regime's attempts at erasure. In *Never Let Me Go*, by contrast, objects become embedded in the social routines through which the clones form relationships and understand their experiences, particularly through the Sales, Exchanges, and their artwork. As Assmann observes, "external objects as carriers of memory play a role already on the level of personal memory" because memory exists in interaction with "things" and outward symbols (2008, 111).

The importance of these objects also connects to the relationship between memory and place. Physical objects and spaces shape how both individuals and groups remember under conditions of loss. Nora argues that when the environments that once sustained shared memory begin to disappear, material and symbolic objects can become important points of connection with what has been lost. He describes these as "sites of memory"—places, objects, and practices through which fragments of the past can be preserved and reactivated (1989, 9). The objects in the narrator's hidden room serve this purpose in *The Memory Police*. As Nora puts it, these artefacts become "sites of memory, because there are no longer real environments of memory" (1989, 7), and the hidden room itself takes on the form of a constructed *lieu de mémoire*, holding traces of identity in a world where public memory has already begun to break down. When the narrator tries to organise the basement after an earthquake, she becomes overwhelmed as "everything I touched—sketchbooks, chisels, everything—reminded me of my mother, and in the end, I was unable to make any progress at all" (Ogawa 2019, 202–203). The objects resist separation from the past by reactivating memories through sensory contact, even when clear recollection is no longer possible. Ogawa also shows that material traces do not only preserve the past but can trigger strong emotional responses. The narrator repeatedly turns to preserved objects for comfort, explaining, "I would choose one of the objects I had borrowed from the hidden room, set it on my open palms, and breathe deeply to calm myself"

(Ogawa 2019, 249). The physical presence of these objects gives the narrator something tangible to hold on to, even when their original meanings are becoming difficult to recover.

Similarly, Ishiguro gives ordinary objects an important role in Kathy's recollections, as they are associated with particular people and experiences. Their significance comes from the memories Kathy attaches to them. Sometimes an object can bring an earlier experience back without her deliberately trying to remember it. Kathy describes one such moment when "an impulse made me get the cassette out of my collection box and put it into the player" (Ishiguro 2005, 57). Van Dijck's argument that people build "their personal collections as an evolving project of self-formation" (2007, 24) helps explain why these objects carry such significance for Kathy. Her collection is not simply a group of possessions; it is also connected to the relationships, experiences, and sense of self that she has developed over time.

Kathy rarely narrates her exploitation directly. This restraint is significant because it makes the violence of her circumstances appear ordinary rather than exceptional. Kathy's subdued narration does not openly defend Hailsham, yet its careful moderation and emotional restraint reproduce the institution's worldview by making exploitation seem like an ordinary part of life. Reflecting on what the clones understood about themselves, she recalls that they "knew a few things about ourselves—about who we were, [...] hadn't yet understood what any of it meant" (Ishiguro 2005, 30–31).

The effects of this conditioning can be seen in Kathy's reflections on her years as a carer. She describes how "the long hours, the travelling, the broken sleep have all crept into your being and become part of you, so everyone can see it, in your posture, your gaze, the way you move and talk" (Ishiguro 2005, 158). Here, memory becomes intertwined with the physical and emotional consequences of the clones' labour, while Kathy's admission that "I've learnt to live with it" (Ishiguro 2005, 158) signals accommodation rather than critique. Kathy's acceptance of her role is reinforced by the limited freedom she experiences as a carer. She

describes enjoying "the roads, the big grey sky and [her] daydreams" (Ishiguro 2005, 159) before concluding that "being a carer suited me fine" (Ishiguro 2005, 159). Her response reveals how the expectations surrounding her life have become normalised. She does not describe her position as a restriction, as she finds a degree of comfort within it. The effectiveness of Hailsham's conditioning therefore lies partly in its ability to make an imposed role feel familiar and acceptable.

In the case of *Never Let Me Go*, space itself becomes central to recollection. Norfolk functions as a layered mnemonic landscape, both a physical location and a symbolic "site of memory" through which the clones process loss and identity. Norfolk is imagined as the "lost corner of England" (Ishiguro 2005, 131) where "all the lost property found in the country ended up" (Ishiguro 2005, 53), emerging as a collectively sustained fiction through which the clones imagine recovering what has been lost. For Kathy and Tommy, the trip there becomes a fleeting moment of emotional relief, remembered as a day "of fun and laughter" (Ishiguro 2005, 132), while for Ruth it represents an unattainable possibility, especially after the failed search for her "possible," after which she "remained completely closed on the subject" (Ishiguro 2005, 143). Even years later, Kathy returns alone to Norfolk, drawn to its "flat fields" and "huge grey skies" despite having "no real need" to go (Ishiguro 2005, 222), showing how Norfolk continues to function as an emotional and mnemonic point of return.

Norfolk works simultaneously as a real landscape and as a symbolic space shaped by the meanings the clones project onto it. As Anne Whitehead suggests, the Norfolk landscape "seems, powerfully, to designate the novel itself," functioning as a liminal space where loss and memory converge (2011, 80). Kathy's closing image crystallizes this symbolic understanding of the space when she imagines Norfolk as "the spot where everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up" (Ishiguro 2005, 222), capturing the reconstructive

nature of memory, in which the past emerges through narrative interpretation rather than objective recall.

The Memory Police shows how space shapes memory through a contrast between the hidden room and the clock tower. The main narrative and the embedded story of the typist develop within these two confined settings. The hidden room is where the narrator and R keep forbidden objects safe, and it becomes a quiet space of protection, where memory is sustained through physical objects and their shared effort to preserve them. On the other hand, the clock tower is where the typist is held in isolation. She gradually loses her sense of time while living under constant surveillance and sensory deprivation. She reflects that "the ringing of the bell is more frightening here than it was in town [...] I close my eyes and hold my breath [...] I realize how meaningless my feeble resistance will be" (Ogawa 2019, 158). The confinement affects how she experiences time, and she gradually comes to see that there is little point in resisting. The hidden room works differently. Although it is also a confined space, it gives the unnamed narrator somewhere to keep hold of objects and the memories connected to them. The clocktower cuts the typist off from a sense of control, whereas the hidden room gives the narrator something to hold on to.

This contrast also shapes the narrator's act of writing, which connects the hidden room and the clocktower. As the narrator writes the typist's story, she observes that she "continued with the task of writing strings of words that made almost no sense [...] I could vaguely recall the fingers of the typist locked away in the clock tower [...] the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs" (Ogawa 2019, 249), illustrating how her own memory is beginning to fade even as she tries to preserve the typist's story. The typist becomes increasingly powerless inside the clock tower, while the narrator keeps writing even as her memories weaken and her emotional connection to what she is describing starts to slip. This tension comes through when she admits that "as I traced the words one by one [...] I remembered that my novel was about a typist. But

the discovery only made it clearer that writing the rest would not be as easy as R had suggested" (Ogawa 2019, 184). Writing becomes one of the few remaining ways of preserving meaning as memory and language begin to disappear.

A similar instability of memory appears in Ishiguro's novel, where narrative unreliability complicates the reconstruction of the past. Kathy openly acknowledges distortion, stating, "maybe I've exaggerated it in my mind, but I've got an impression of things changing rapidly around then, like day moving into night" (Ishiguro 2005, 62), while her habitual qualifiers—"Or maybe I'm remembering it wrong" (Ishiguro 2005, 8)—reinforce memory's instability. As Ansgar Nünning argues, "unreliable narrators" often show "textual inconsistencies" and "verbal habits" (2008, 95), both of which can be seen in Kathy's way of telling her story. Her memories also "blur into each other" into a kind of "golden time" (Ishiguro 2005, 62), which feels less like careful reconstruction and more like remembering but through her longing and loss. This is especially clear at the end of the novel, when she imagines Tommy as "a tiny figure" in the distance, but then insists she "didn't let" this fantasy develop any further (Ishiguro 2005, 222). Kathy's recurring corrections, qualifications, and self-revisions show that the habits of thought shaped by her upbringing at Hailsham continue to influence how she tells her story.

In contrast, *The Memory Police* presents instability as something imposed through disappearance rather than reconstructed through memory. As the narrator's body fades, she reflects, "I no longer needed to fall into R's arms to descend to the hidden room [...] In that sense, the complete disappearance of my body was actually a form of liberation. Still, if I was not careful, my unreliable and invisible voice might be swept away with the wind" (Ogawa 2019, 265). Here, unreliability signals not distortion but the fragility of what can still be retained at all.

Section 4: Memory, fragility, and ethical resistance

This section argues that remembering functions as an ethical form of resistance in both *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*, but that resistance takes different forms because the novels depict different degrees of memory control. In *Never Let Me Go*, resistance emerges through the continued narration and reinterpretation of experiences that Hailsham has taught its students to understand in particular ways. In *The Memory Police*, resistance depends more urgently on preserving material traces and transmitting memories before they become inaccessible. The distinction is therefore between resistance through narration and resistance through preservation.

Kathy's narration is marked by the uncertainty produced by Hailsham's institutional conditioning. However, rather than treating that uncertainty simply as evidence of unreliable memory, it is worth considering what her continued act of remembering makes possible. Kathy rarely presents her recollections as complete or definitive, qualifying them with phrases such as "as far as I remember" (Ishiguro 2005, 55) and "the way I remember it" (Ishiguro 2005, 107). Such hesitations reveal that remembering is itself a process of reconstruction. Yet the incompleteness of these memories does not make them insignificant. What matters is the attempt to give significance to experiences that might otherwise disappear.

The narrator of *The Memory Police* faces a more radical threat to remembering. While Kathy can repeatedly return to memories that remain available to her, the unnamed narrator confronts memories that are progressively removed from her reach. As disappearances accumulate, memories become harder to recover until they seem beyond reach altogether. She reflects that "what's gone is gone completely. I have no seeds inside me, waiting to sprout again" (Ogawa 2019, 83). Yet emotions, relationships, bodily sensations, and material traces

can still preserve fragments of the past, making the preservation of even incomplete memories an important form of resistance to erasure.

In *Never Let Me Go*, remembering becomes a quiet way of resisting a society that values the clones only for their bodies and pays little attention to their inner lives. At Hailsham, the students become used to being watched. Kathy remembers that even when they tried to hide, "you just knew Miss Emily's footsteps would stop outside and her voice would say: 'All right. Out you come'" (Ishiguro 2005, 36–37). They do not need to see Miss Emily for the threat of being caught to affect them. They already expect her to appear, and this expectation changes how they behave. After a while, the students begin to watch themselves, adjusting what they do even when no one is there to stop them. The rule against "discussing the donations openly" (Ishiguro 2005, 84) reinforces this culture of silence and self-regulation. Foucault's description of disciplinary power, which produces bodies that are both "useful and docile" (2003, 249), helps explain how the clones gradually come to accept their predetermined futures. At the same time, Kathy's retrospective account allows readers to see the conditions that have shaped this acceptance. By recounting ordinary experiences at Hailsham alongside its structures of surveillance and silence, Kathy creates a record of lives that the institution was designed to instrumentalise rather than remember.

Kathy's storytelling becomes a way of preserving her experiences and giving them form within a system that treats the clones as disposable. As Francesca Boschetti notes, "operating on one's memories is a way to heal—both physically, as the patient recovers from donation, and psychologically, as the feelings attached to the event are causing pain" (2017, 44), highlighting how remembering can become a means of processing painful experiences. Kathy's declaration that "the memories I value most, I don't see them ever fading" (Ishiguro 2005, 221) asserts continuity within a society organised around disappearance.

This resistant potential becomes visible in Kathy's repeated return to Miss Lucy's attempt to speak openly about the clones' future. Unlike the other guardians, Miss Lucy is clearly disturbed by the students' lack of understanding about their future. She becomes frustrated by how little they have been told and by the unwillingness of the guardians to speak honestly about what will happen to them. In one of her classes, she directly suggests to them that they are being raised to become organ donors and questions whether they truly know what lies ahead. It is precisely these emotionally charged moments that Kathy repeatedly returns to: "Miss Lucy's words had puzzled me and I kept thinking about them on and off for the next few days" (Ishiguro 2005, 34). Kathy's repeated return to the moment suggests that memory is shaped not only by the passage of time but also by experiences that disturb her existing understanding of the world.

Kathy does more than simply recount personal events. Through her storytelling, she gives coherence and meaning to the clones' lives by connecting fragmented experiences into a narrative that affirms their humanity. As Boschetti argues, while "donors' bodies are disassembled because of the donations, Kathy's continual remembrance allows her to assemble her own identity [...] through a corpus of memories that attests to her existence" (2017, 44). This idea of remembrance becomes politically important when viewed through Judith Butler's concept of grievability, which explores how some lives are treated as worthy of grief while others are ignored. Butler argues that "some lives are grievable, and others are not," and that this difference influences what society considers "a livable life and a grievable death" (2004, 14–15). The clones occupy a marginal position within society, as their deaths are treated as routine and softened by the euphemism "completion." The euphemism disguises the violence of what is happening and removes any expectation that their lives should be publicly mourned. Butler's idea of "unlivable lives" (2004, 15) helps explain this exclusion, since the clones are denied the recognition normally given to human loss. Kathy's narrative pushes against that

logic. By recalling friendships, conflicts, and ordinary moments from everyday life, she restores value to experiences that the wider society treats as disposable and insists that those lives deserve to be remembered.

This process becomes particularly visible in Kathy's relationship with Ruth. When Kathy becomes a carer and starts travelling between rehabilitation centres, she deliberately seeks out people from Hailsham: "I started seeking out for my donors people from the past, and whenever I could, people from Hailsham" (Ishiguro 2005, 6). For Kathy, her relationship with Ruth keeps alive a shared past that belongs to both of them. When they meet again after years apart, Kathy realises how much they still have in common. She explains that "we knew and remembered things no one else did" (Ishiguro 2005, 6) and later reflects that "we seemed to remember everything we'd once meant to each other" (Ishiguro 2005, 181). Their memories are tied to experiences that only they can fully recognise, and time apart has not completely broken that connection. This becomes particularly visible when Kathy accompanies Ruth near the end of her life: "I stayed beside her like that for as long as they let me [...] just for a few seconds [...] she looked straight at me, and she knew exactly who I was" (Ishiguro 2005, 182). Recognition itself becomes meaningful in this moment, preserving their connection within a system that otherwise reduces the clones to their biological function.

That recognition also draws attention to the relationship between memory and the embodied lives through which relationships are formed. Hailsham uses the students' art as a way of displaying their inner selves, as the guardians want to "display their souls" (Ishiguro 2005, 196). At the same time, their bodies are treated as resources that will eventually be used for donations. For the students themselves, their inner lives and their bodies are never really separate. Hayles makes a similar point when she argues that "information [...] cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world; embodiment can be destroyed, but it cannot be replicated" (2008, 49). The shared experiences

Kathy recalls are inseparable from the particular people and bodies through which those experiences were lived.

The clones' relationship with memory also reveals the tension between preserving an individual sense of self and living within a system that denies their full humanity. This is particularly evident when a dying donor asks Kathy not only to describe Hailsham but to help him "remember Hailsham," until "the line would blur between what were [her] memories and what were his" (Ishiguro 2005, 7). His wish for her memories to "sink in" (Ishiguro 2005, 7) suggests that hearing Kathy's memories gives him something to hold on to as he approaches the end of his life. He has no memories of Hailsham himself, but listening to Kathy allows him to imagine a childhood that he never experienced and, for a moment, to dwell in the world she remembers. Tseng describes this kind of exchange as a way in which "memory serves as a source of consolation, and it can be borrowed and appropriated through the act of storytelling as memory becomes a therapeutic tool" (2023, 4). LaCapra also points to the role of memory in shaping both individual and collective memories (2016, 391). The donor's wish to take on Kathy's memories can be understood as a longing for a more meaningful and liveable past. By imagining that he might somehow have shared her childhood, he creates a fragile connection to an experience that was denied to him. Kathy's storytelling briefly allows him to imagine himself beyond the role assigned to him by the donation system.

This longing for Hailsham is not confined to the dying donor. Kathy herself repeatedly returns to Hailsham in memory, revealing the ambivalent relationship between nostalgia and resistance. Moments such as driving past familiar places briefly revive Kathy's hope that she might somehow return to Hailsham, although she eventually recognises that this hope is impossible. Boschetti argues that this longing reveals Kathy's humanity, especially in her desire to "stop, think and remember" (Ishiguro 2005, 32; 2017, 50), while Inbaraj describes it as a "sentimental longing for the past" (2019, 506). Kathy's nostalgia remains ambiguous. Her

attachment to Hailsham allows her to hold onto a sense of self that exceeds her role as a donor. She can focus on moments of happiness and familiarity rather than on the system that has determined what will happen to her. Remembering is therefore complicated for Kathy. It gives her something that belongs to her and helps her hold on to a sense of herself, but it may also make the life she has been given easier to accept. Her memories can be comforting because they allow her to return to a past that feels more familiar than the future waiting for her.

At the same time, Kathy's tendency to describe these memories as "daydream stuff" (Ishiguro, 2005, 89) suggests that her engagement with the past involves a degree of emotional distance. She recalls that she thinks about her essay "the same way [she] might a rounders match at Hailsham [...] or else an argument from long ago [...] It's at that sort of level—daydream stuff" (Ishiguro, 2005, 89). As Asami Nakamura suggests, this tendency to return to the past can be understood as a "happy, creative" act of resistance (2021, 73), since remembering allows Kathy to preserve experiences and meanings that the institutional system seeks to contain. At the same time, this form of remembering may also allow her to manage painful experiences without confronting them directly. Her nostalgia therefore recalls Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia, which remains within ambivalence and contradiction rather than reconstructing the past as a stable or complete truth. Unlike restorative nostalgia, which presents itself "as truth and tradition" (Boym, 2001, 6) and seeks "a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (2001, 6), reflective nostalgia "cherishes shattered fragments of memory" (2001, 8). Kathy's nostalgia stays focused on particular memories of Hailsham rather than trying to bring the whole place back as it once was. She focuses on small moments and familiar details, but what they mean to her changes as she gets older and understands more about her life. It does not lead her to openly challenge the system, but it allows her to keep parts of her past that the institution itself does not value.

Kathy's reflective nostalgia also shapes the way she tells her story. Her storytelling treats the past as dialogic rather than fixed: she frequently hesitates or corrects herself, admitting that "maybe I'm remembering it wrong" (Ishiguro, 2005, 8) or that "I think it was around April" (Ishiguro, 2005, 143). Kathy's uncertainty can be compared to Hoskins's concept of the "conversational past" in digital systems, in which "the past that never existed not only reshapes and remixes individual and collective memory but reconstitutes what it means and what is possible and impossible to forget" (2024 10). Kathy's narrative anticipates this condition by presenting memory as open-ended and resistant to closure, shaped as much by uncertainty and reinterpretation as by recall. Her uncertainty therefore does not weaken the significance of her memories; instead, it allows her to reconsider experiences that might otherwise remain contained by Hailsham's institutional narrative.

This reconstructive process becomes especially evident during Kathy's transition from Hailsham and the Cottages to the Rehabilitation centre as a carer, where she feels the "urge to order all her old memories and try to make sense of all the things that went on between herself, Tommy and Ruth" (Ishiguro 2005, 32). While at the Rehabilitation centre, Kathy gains the emotional and temporal distance necessary to reconsider earlier experiences. Remembering also becomes a process of revising her understanding of other people. Looking back on her friendship with Ruth, she reflects that "when I think about it now, I can see things more from Ruth's viewpoint" (Ishiguro 2005, 99). The past has not changed, but Kathy's relationship to it has.

The fragility of memory takes on a more radical form in *The Memory Police*. Disappearance threatens not only individual memories but also the shared objects and experiences through which people understand their lives. As Ola Elgohary argues, the island can be seen as "an assemblage of the objects (organic and not), concepts, humans, and the interrelation and overlap between the consciousness of objects, concepts, and humans" (2025,

13). This instability extends beyond memory to the body itself. As the narrator observes, "but the arm and leg you see aren't really mine. No matter how much you care for them, they're just shells, empty skin. The real me is disappearing as we speak. Slowly but surely being sucked into thin air" (Ogawa 2019, 253). As disappearances continue, the body itself can no longer provide a stable sense of identity. What is being lost, then, is not only memory or material objects but also the sense of self that those memories help to sustain. As Elgohary further notes, "the physical existence of humans is threatened and its consequential disappearance tightly knitted to the disappearance of humans' memories" (2025, 14–15). In this way, the novel shows that memory is not an internal mental faculty alone but is sustained through everyday relations between people, objects, and experiences.

The people on the island gradually internalise disappearance until it becomes an expected part of everyday life rather than an event to be openly resisted. Rather than questioning every disappearance, the inhabitants of the island learn to anticipate loss and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Before any official announcement, the narrator notices "the sign of a disappearance" and sees that "the neighbors were all outside, too, peering around anxiously" (Ogawa 2019, 13). Their reaction suggests that the possibility of disappearance has already become part of everyday perception. Foucault's account of disciplinary power helps explain this process. A regime based on "conscious and permanent visibility" can ensure the "automatic functioning of power" (1977, 201). In this case, internalised discipline reduces the need for constant direct enforcement, as people begin to anticipate disappearance themselves.

If surveillance helps explain how disappearance becomes normalised, van Dijck's account of memory as an ongoing process of reconstruction helps explain the role that objects can have in remembering. Rather than functioning as stable containers of the past, memory objects become active elements in the process of remembering (van Dijck 2010, 24). In Ogawa's novel, these objects become important because they represent what has not been

completely absorbed into the regime's enforced forgetting. This is reflected in the narrator's attempt to preserve traces of disappeared objects: "Ribbon, bell, emerald, stamp [...] The objects in my palm seemed to cower there, absolutely still [...] as though I were trying to make images of the clouds in the sky out of modelling clay" (Ogawa 2019, 8). The comparison to modelling clay emphasises the difficulty of holding onto something that cannot retain a stable form. Yet the narrator's effort to preserve these impressions gives them significance precisely because they are fragile. The narrator explicitly portrays memory as something that must be actively sustained: "I forced myself to keep looking, afraid that if I didn't the slight stirring in my memory would fall still" (Ogawa 2019, 206). Remembering here depends on deliberate attention, as without such effort, memories risk fading entirely. Memory does not resist disappearance by restoring what was lost; it resists by refusing to let every remaining trace become meaningless.

This attention to what remains is also evident in the narrator's sensory engagement with objects. As Elgohary notes, "humans lose their memories of their objects [...] the world becomes less material [...] which throws them into a state of existential dread" (2025, 11). The narrator's determination to keep listening to the music box reflects her refusal to abandon one of the few remaining connections to the disappearing past: "I'll keep listening to the music box. What else would I do with such a wonderful present?" (Ogawa 2019, 180). The narrator cannot restore what has disappeared; she can only attend to what remains. The decline of the library also illustrates how loss affects not only individual objects but also the places and practices connected to them. The narrator observes that "the library [...] has only a handful of patrons [...] the books seem to cower on the shelves" (Ogawa 2019, 18). As objects lose their place in the world, the spaces that once held and organised them also begin to lose their purpose.

The disappearance of an object does not necessarily eliminate the sensory memory attached to it. The narrator attempts to reassemble memory from partial impressions, noting

that "to calm myself, I tried to recall the song from the music box, and though it had played only a few times, I was able to remember the whole tune from beginning to end" (Ogawa 2019, 147). However, this recovery is never stable: the music she recalls remains uncertain, as "it might have been a lullaby, or a song from an old film, or a hymn [...] I felt the same slow, spinning sensation that I felt every time something disappeared" (Ogawa 2019, 141). Rather than restoring the past, remembering becomes a process that reactivates loss, revealing memory as partial and continually marked by absence. Yet the narrator's continued effort to remember gives these incomplete traces meaning even when they can no longer be fully recovered.

This is reflected when the narrator secretly hides objects from the Memory Police: "I tightened the shoulder straps on my pack and gripped the handle of the suitcase [...] I could almost sense their fear, coming through the bags" (Ogawa 2019, 218), suggesting that objects are invested with affective presence. Even after their official meanings are erased, these remnants retain a residual emotional charge, forming "a collection of objects that concealed things that had long ago vanished from memory, for which even we did not know the names, much less the functions" (Ogawa 2019, 218). Her careful handling of these belongings demonstrates that their significance can persist even when their original meanings have been lost.

Both novels connect identity to material possessions, but whereas Ogawa focuses on enforced disappearance, Ishiguro explores how shame encourages individuals to relinquish meaningful objects voluntarily. As Sara Ahmed explains, shame is tied to "how the self feels about itself" and often emerges "before another," even when that other is imagined (2014, 103), creating a sense of exposure that leads the subject to withdraw (2014, 104). This is clearly seen when Ruth initially collects objects but later abandons them after moving to the Cottages, explaining that once she saw the veterans had no collections, hers felt "not normal," leading her to leave it in a "holdall bag for months" before she "threw them away" (Ishiguro 2005, 128–

29). Ruth admits to Kathy, "you were never embarrassed about your collection and you kept it. I wish now I'd done that too" (Ishiguro 2005, 129). Her regret shows how social pressure can lead people to hide parts of themselves and censor their own emotional attachments.

Ruth's choice to forget can also be understood as a form of trauma suppression—an attempt to silence and repress painful memories that are difficult to confront. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is first encountered "in and through its inherent forgetting" (1996, 22): what cannot be fully understood at the time often returns indirectly, as avoidance or silence. Ruth's forgetting thus reflects an attempt to silence what is painful. By contrast, Kathy's memory preservation is a form of counter-memory—an act of resistance to systemic erasure through the material continuity of objects and the narrative continuity of her memories.

Whereas Kathy remains committed to preserving the past, Ruth increasingly distances herself from it as a form of emotional self-protection. When Ruth claims she has forgotten details about Hailsham, including the out-of-bounds areas, Kathy challenges her directly, insisting: "There's no way you've forgotten" (Ishiguro 2005, 156). Ruth's response—her dismissal of the past with the question "what does it matter?" (Ishiguro 2005, 86)—signals a protective withdrawal, which can be read as an attempt to distance herself from painful knowledge (Boschetti 2017, 49). Kathy responds very differently. Rather than distancing herself from the past, she returns to it repeatedly, trying to understand experiences that have shaped her since childhood.

If Ruth's rejection of Hailsham illustrates how shame can distance individuals from the past, Ogawa presents a more direct form of enforced forgetting, making R's ability to remember an exceptional form of resistance. R occupies a unique position because he continues to remember what everyone else has forgotten. Unlike the narrator, who relies on hidden objects and fading sensory impressions to recover fragments of the past, R's memories have not undergone the same socially enforced process of disappearance. The narrator describes her

memories as "sodden flower petals sinking into the waves or the ashes at the bottom of the incinerator" (Ogawa 2019, 155–156), while R can still recall the past with ease. The contrast between them is important. R's intact recollections preserve a sense of continuity that the regime has tried to destroy, whereas the narrator has to work with fragments of what remains. Her attempts to remember show that resistance is still possible even when memory has already begun to disappear.

Ogawa also shows how important expression becomes when ordinary ways of communicating are taken away. This is clear in the story of the typist, whose situation has some similarities with the narrator's own. When the professor takes away the typist's ability to speak, she turns to the typewriter instead. She can no longer use her voice, but she can still put words onto the page. The typewriter gives her a way to communicate and to hold on to something of herself when her speech has been taken from her. This is evident in her experiments with broken machines: "I chose the newest, least damaged one I could find, but no matter how hard I pressed the keys, they would not move [...] Still, refusing to give up, I tried to pull a likely looking machine from the middle of the pile" (Ogawa 2019, 127). However, the typist persists, investing the typewriter with deferred hope: "Since I started using the typewriter in place of my voice, I use up a ribbon in about three days, but I no longer throw away the old ones. Somehow, I have the feeling my voice may come back one day if I study the letters imprinted on the used ribbon" (Ogawa 2019, 58). Her refusal to abandon communication mirrors the narrator's commitment to storytelling despite disappearance, suggesting that writing itself becomes a form of resistance.

As the novel progresses, disappearances take on an increasingly political function. The authorities are no longer concerned only with removing objects but also with identifying the people who still remember them. Surveillance therefore shifts its focus from controlling behaviour to controlling memory itself, turning those who remember into a threat that must be

located and eliminated. This becomes clear when the narrator learns that they may be "learning to analyze our genes to find out who has this trait [...] assembling technicians in a secret facility" (Ogawa 2019, 27). This reflects Hayles's description of the human as an "informational pattern" (2008, 12), where identity can be treated as information that a system can identify and manage. The narrator notes that "there are no visible identifiers" (Ogawa 2019, 27), yet the Memory Police believe they can find people who remember by analysing their genes. They want to turn something as personal and difficult to see as memory into something that can be detected and controlled.

The regime tries to treat memory as something that can be identified through the body, but R's decline makes the relationship between memory and the body much less straightforward. As he becomes physically weaker, it becomes harder to separate what he remembers from the person who carries those memories. His condition also brings the body itself into the centre of the novel's concern with disappearance. In this respect, R's experience recalls Kathy's embodied memories in *Never Let Me Go*. In both novels, memory belongs to particular people whose bodies are vulnerable. The narrator describes him as so fragile that "the smallest tap of my finger on his chest would have sent him collapsing, like a marionette whose strings had been cut" (Ogawa 2019, 122). His physical deterioration parallels the increasingly precarious position of memory in the novel, as both depend on fragile forms of persistence. Ogawa reinforces this connection when the narrator reflects that "perhaps it was necessary [...] that the body gradually fade away" (Ogawa 2019, 119). Neither the body nor memory remains secure in the novel. Both can weaken, disappear, or be taken away, and R's condition makes this especially clear. Remembering can help preserve something of a person, but it cannot protect that person from physical decline. Memory still depends on the person who carries it.

This also connects the novel to wider concerns about technologically mediated memory, where what is kept, accessed or lost can depend on systems outside the individual. Hoskins argues that memory has become increasingly distributed across external systems that are "scattered yet simultaneous and searchable" (2021, 2), suggesting that recollection no longer resides only within the individual but depends upon networks of storage and retrieval. Neither *Never Let Me Go* nor *The Memory Police* treat memory as something that exists in isolation. What people remember—or are able to remember—is shaped by the world around them and by the forces that decide which experiences can be acknowledged, and which are pushed aside. Remembering is therefore never just a personal act. It is influenced by institutions, social expectations, and forms of power that determine what can be preserved or forgotten.

If memory depends on the systems through which it is preserved and shared, language becomes one of its most fundamental supports. In *The Memory Police*, language itself becomes vulnerable to disappearance. The loss of names is not confined to a single moment but forms part of an ongoing process of erasure. Many characters remain unnamed throughout the narrative or are identified only by limited designations, such as R or the Old Man. As language begins to disappear, the ability to communicate and share memories with others becomes increasingly fragile. Reflecting on R, the narrator recalls that "when we were cheek to cheek [...] I always wanted to ask him whether he knew what was in the drawers of the old cabinet in my mother's studio [...] but I never found the words" (Ogawa 2019, 12). Her inability to articulate the question illustrates how difficulty with language can prevent memories from being communicated and collectively sustained, leaving identity fragmented and increasingly difficult to express. The loss of language therefore threatens the ability to communicate memory beyond the individual who experiences it. Ogawa makes communication itself part of the struggle against erasure. To remember is not only to retain an impression internally but

also, where possible, to find ways of giving that impression form and communicating it to another person.

Even so, Ogawa does not present remembering as something that must be complete in order to matter. Instead, memory survives through fragments, impressions, and small acts of persistence. R encourages the narrator to remember "no matter how dim the impression" (Ogawa 2019, 63), suggesting that even incomplete memories have value. His words create a subtle change in the narrator, who begins "to sense a faint stirring somewhere deep within" (Ogawa 2019, 64). The phrase "faint stirring" does not describe a full recovery of the past but suggests that even a fragile memory can remain meaningful. The effort to hold onto a fading impression becomes an act of resistance because the regime has made complete recollection impossible. Yet this resistance remains fragile, as she later realises that she can no longer recall even the sound of her own voice, acknowledging that "things I thought were mine and mine alone can be taken away much more easily than I would have imagined" (Ogawa 2019, 159).

A similar idea can be seen in *Never Let Me Go*. Kathy's attachment to her belongings shows how closely some of her memories are tied to the things she has kept from Hailsham. She holds on to her "old Hailsham collection box" (Ishiguro 2005, 128), even though the objects inside it have little practical value. Tseng notes that "the characters are aware of how the objects are invested with their personal memories" (2023, 109). For Kathy, the collection box gives those memories something physical to remain attached to. Keeping it means keeping hold of a small part of the life she had at Hailsham.

Kathy also keeps the past alive by telling stories about the people and experiences that shaped her life. Katsorchi argues that "the diary as an object that outlives its creator can become a fictional space where the posthuman self may develop and live on without the body" (2023, 73). She records memories of Hailsham, Ruth, and Tommy that would otherwise disappear with them. Through telling these stories, Kathy leaves something behind that is not dependent

on the survival of her body. Yet these memories are never entirely under her control. Their fragmented and associative form reflects the unpredictable ways in which recollection emerges. When Kathy briefly mistakes a stranger for Susanna C, a former Hailsham student (Ishiguro 2005, 221–222), the moment illustrates how the past can surface unexpectedly rather than appearing through a smooth and orderly process of recall.

Kathy's narrative preserves experiences that might otherwise disappear with the clones, while Ogawa's hidden room offers another form of protection through shared space and acts of care. The room sustains memory through material and sensory engagement: "the slightest sensation [...] can help you remember" and "restore your memories" (Ogawa 2019, 225). Its importance lies not simply in storing objects, but in creating the conditions through which forgotten memories may be reactivated. Kathy's storytelling performs a similar function, giving vulnerable experiences a space in which they can continue to matter. This is why the narrator insists, "even when I'm gone, you must take care of this room. I hope my memory will live on forever here, through you [...] Closed in the hidden room, I continued to disappear" (Ogawa 2019, 265). Although the narrator herself cannot prevent her disappearance, she transfers responsibility for preserving memory to another person. Resistance therefore continues beyond the individual who remembers.

The role of objects in *Never Let Me Go* similarly demonstrates that material possessions can sustain emotional connections across time. As Tseng notes, "Exchanges allow the students to feel connected to one another by creating new memories through their collective artwork and shared experiences" (2023, 103), suggesting that these objects help sustain relationships even after Hailsham. Kathy also observes that the students later become "nostalgic about their collections" (Ishiguro 2005, 33), showing how these possessions continue to hold meaning beyond the institution itself. Her three music tapes further show how memory can travel across time and place (Tseng 2023, 110). This idea is especially clear in the third tape Tommy buys

in Norfolk, which Kathy says "brings back memories of that afternoon in Norfolk every bit as much as it does [of] our Hailsham days" (Ishiguro 2005, 171). The tape does not connect to just one memory. Instead, it brings together different moments, places, and relationships through sound.

While objects in *Never Let Me Go* preserve emotional continuity, material objects in *The Memory Police* exist under constant threat of disappearance, making remembrance far more precarious. As Nicole Maurantonio explains, collective memory is "a dynamic entity subject to reinterpretation in time and space [...] a communicative process that occurs in terrain that is simultaneously contested and negotiated; memory is political" (2014, 3), emphasising that remembrance is always contested rather than fixed. In Ogawa's island, this contestation becomes especially visible because the political authority of the Memory Police determines whether objects—and the memories attached to them—can continue to exist. The narrator describes arranging hidden objects across the pages of her manuscript: "I would take some of the objects from the statues that I'd hidden next to the funnel speaker and arrange them on the manuscript pages" (Ogawa 2019, 237). Unlike Kathy's collection box, which connects her to an earlier life, these objects remain within a much more precarious system and remain under the constant threat of disappearance. Therefore, their concealment becomes part of the narrator's attempt to keep material traces of the past within reach.

Finally, because memory is reconstructive—shaped by emotional and cognitive environments—personal narratives remain vulnerable to both systems of control and technological disruption. Digital tools such as "cloud computing, social media platforms, and modern electronic devices serve as external repositories of personal and collective memories" (Yvette et al. 2024, 392), while "digital forgetting is intentional, rule-based, and increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence" (Tutuncuoglu 2024, 7). These developments suggest that memory is never neutral. The ways in which it is stored, organised, and erased are increasingly

influenced by technological systems. As Yvette et al. note, literature becomes a space through which such processes can be critically examined (2024, 393), since it allows these mechanisms of storage and loss to be reimagined in narrative form.

Read together, *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police* show that the fragility of memory both limits and shapes its resistant potential. Neither novel gives the characters a way to recover the past completely. In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones grow up with information that is kept from them, and their feelings about their lives are shaped by the way Hailsham teaches them to understand themselves. In *The Memory Police*, the situation is even more severe: objects disappear, words disappear, and eventually the memories attached to them become difficult to recover. Even so, the characters keep trying to hold onto what they can. Kathy does this through her memories, her relationships, and her stories, while the unnamed narrator on the island hides objects, listens to the music box, and relies on R's memories. None of these actions can bring back everything that has been lost or change the system that caused the loss. What they can do is keep particular people, experiences and objects from becoming completely meaningless. Their significance lies precisely in their incompleteness. A fragment does not become worthless simply because it is partial. By holding on to these fragments, the characters challenge the idea that disappearance makes something insignificant. Remembering therefore becomes a form of ethical attention, where people, relationships, experiences and traces remain worthy of care even when they can no longer be fully recovered.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* as novels that present memory not as a fixed record of the past but as a fragile, mediated process shaped by institutional structures, material environments, and lived experience. My initial research question focused on how the control of memory in these novels relates to contemporary concerns about the ways digital systems organise access to information and shape the conditions in which people remember and forget. I am not suggesting that these fictional worlds contain literal computational algorithms. Instead, I have examined how both novels depict systems that control what people can know, access and remember. This becomes relevant as algorithms increasingly decide what information people see and return to. By raking, prioritising and personalising information, these systems can also shape the environments in which memories are formed, reinforced, or gradually forgotten. Hailsham and the mechanisms of forgetting in *The Memory Police* reveal different ways of controlling information: one through the careful management and selective disclosure of knowledge, and the other through the systematic erasure of objects, language, and memory itself.

The comparison between the two novels shows that memory can be controlled in different but related ways. In *Never Let Me Go*, this control works mainly through conditioning. Knowledge is given to the characters in pieces, and they gradually learn to live with what they are told. This means that memory is never separate from these ideas they have grown up with. The tragedy in *Never Let Me Go* is not only that the clones are given a future they cannot escape. It is also that they slowly come to see that future as normal. *The Memory Police* takes this much further. On the island, objects and words can simply disappear, along with the memories attached to them. The two novels show that control does not always have to rely on violence or obvious authority. People can be shaped by what they are told, what is kept from them, and eventually by what they stop questioning.

This dissertation therefore does not argue that human memory itself is algorithmic. Human memory is selective, fragmentary, and reconstructive; rather, my argument concerns the systems that organise the conditions under which memories are formed, interpreted, preserved, and forgotten. In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's insistence that she will have Hailsham "safely in my head [...] something no one can take away" (Ishiguro 2005, 222) demonstrates that memory continues to preserve a sense of identity and connection despite institutional conditioning. Likewise, in *The Memory Police*, the narrator's attempts to preserve disappearing objects and stories reveal that remembering itself becomes an act of resistance against a system determined to eliminate the possibility of remembrance.

Finally, this dissertation opens up several possibilities for further research. Future studies could examine more closely how interpersonal relationships, creative expression, and material practices function as forms of quiet resistance in both novels. The framework could also be extended to Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), where artificial intelligence and controlled access to memory respectively raise related questions about memory, identity, care, and autonomy. Such comparisons could further explore how contemporary literature represents systems that organise informational access and shape the conditions under which individuals can know, remember, and act.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

The undersigned ([Nerea Menorca Hidalgo](#)), student ID number ([909045](#)), enrolled at Ca' Foscari in the Master's Degree in English and American studies, author of the final paper/degree thesis [Memory Under control: Visibility, Omission, and Informational Governance in *Never Let Me Go* and *The Memory Police*](#), thesis supervisor [Lucio De Capitani](#), aware of the penalties provided for in Article 76 of the Consolidated Act set out in Presidential Decree no. 445 of 28 December 2000, and of the loss of benefits provided for in Article 75 of the same Consolidated Act in the event of false or misleading statements, under his/her own responsibility pursuant to Articles 46 and 47 of Presidential Decree no. 445 of 28 December 2000,

DECLARES

☒ that he/she has **NOT** used generative artificial intelligence technologies to support various aspects of the research and writing of the final paper/degree thesis;

☒ that he/she **HAS** used generative artificial intelligence technologies to support various aspects of the research and writing of his/her final paper/degree thesis, in particular (for each point, write in full the requested information):

- ChatGPT Classic (Open AI)
 - provide information on how the tool was used:
- ☒ revision and optimisation of texts to improve clarity and coherence;
- ☐ generation of charts and diagrams for data presentation;
- ☐ support for the automatic drafting of sentences;
- ☐ production of illustrative images to complement the methodological section;
- ☐ other (please specify)

DECLARES FURTHER

that all material generated by AI has been carefully checked, reviewed and reworked by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the quality, accuracy and scientific integrity of the work.