

The best memories

IDENTITY, NARRATIVE, AND OBJECTS

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Introduction

MEMORY IS EVERYWHERE IN *BLADE Runner 2049*.¹ From the dead tree that serves as a memorial and a site of remembrance (“Who keeps a dead tree?”), to the “flashbulb” memories individuals hold about the moment of the “blackout,” when all the electronic stores of data were irretrievably erased (“everyone remembers where they were at the blackout”).² Indeed, the data wiped out in the blackout itself involves a loss of memory (“all our memory bearings from the time, they were all damaged in the blackout”). Memory, and lack of it, permeates place, where from the post-blackout Las Vegas Deckard remembers it as somewhere you could “forget your troubles.” Memory is a commodity, called upon and consumed by the Wallace Corporation, purchased from the memory-maker, Dr Ana Stelline, who constructs and implants “the best memories” in replicants so as to instil in them real human responses. Memory is ubiquitous in *BR2049*, involving humans, replicants, objects, and machines. Even “God,” we are told, “remembered Rachael.”

Nowhere, though, is the depiction of memory more important than in the attempt to solve a question of identity. Officer K has a memory of his past. Even though he knows it is an implant, it is a memory he is emotionally attached to, frequently narrating it to Joi, his digital

girlfriend. But it is a memory that starts to puzzle and trouble him. When K discovers the remains of a dead replicant, a female NEXUS 7, he uncovers a secret—this replicant was pregnant and died during childbirth, a discovery that could “break the world.” K is charged with hunting down the offspring and making the problem disappear. Yet as K starts seeking answers to the question of the offspring’s identity he becomes inextricably caught up in the mystery. Is he merely K, or is he Joe, the miracle son of Rachael and Deckard? The answer to this question hinges on K’s memory. But is the memory genuine? Is the memory his?

BR2049 encourages us to think deeply about the nature of memory, identity, and the relation between them. Indeed, the film does not just serve as a starting point for thinking about philosophical issues related to memory and identity. Rather, as we show in this chapter, the film seems to offer a view on these philosophical issues. BR2049 offers us a view of memory as spread out over people, objects, and the environment, and it shows us that memory’s role in questions of identity goes beyond merely accurately recalling one’s past. Identity depends not on memory *per se*, but partly on what we use memory for.

Humanhood and personhood

BR2049 is, essentially, the story of a replicant on a quest to discover his identity—a journey that takes him from being a mere replicant to coming to terms with believing he is a “real boy,” but then only to discover he was not a child born into the world after all. The concepts of humanhood and personhood play a key role in the narrative arc of the film. Let’s have a closer look at what philosophers have to say about these concepts.

In the metaphysics of personal identity, two questions are distinguished. One, what is personhood? Two, is there continuity of personhood over time? BR2049 explores both questions. We’ll focus on the second question, but to answer it we first need to address the notion of personhood. Philosophers have suggested various properties characterising personhood, such as agency, sentience, consciousness, self-awareness, and the possession of certain cognitive and emotional states (see Kind, 2015, for a nice overview). All these capacities come in degrees and have to be satisfied sufficiently in order for personhood to exist in an individual. Most adult human beings sufficiently satisfy these

properties, but a foetus or patient in an irreversible vegetative state does not. However, given the complexity of these capacities and the fact that they come in degrees, personhood is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Infants, toddlers, feral children, animals such as chimpanzees, and perhaps even artificial intelligence systems exhibit some of these capacities to some degree. We are born as humans but gradually become persons when our cognitive, emotional, and moral capacities develop. It is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint an exact moment in time when humans become persons. But it is clear that most adult humans are persons.

It is important to realise that personhood and humanhood are two different concepts. Persons are sentient, conscious, and self-aware. For these reasons, they are part of a moral community, having certain rights and obligations. Humans, on the other hand, are mere biological entities that possess a metabolism, a specific body plan, human genetic material, and a specific evolutionary lineage. So, a foetus or a patient in an irreversible vegetative state may qualify as human but not qualify as a person. For these reasons, even though mere biological humans may still have rights they will lack obligations. In short, personhood is a higher-level moral category, whereas humanhood is a lower-level biological category.

BR2049 seems to operate with a different conceptual framework because being human is more important than being a person. Humans have souls and empathy, whereas replicants lack these features. The distinguishing property of humanhood suggested by the first *Blade Runner* film is empathy. The Voight-Kampff test is used to gauge physiological responses associated with empathy, and supposedly only humans exhibit this response. BR2049 suggests, at least on a first reading, that the distinguishing property of humanhood is having a soul.

Do replicants have personhood? The film suggests that they do, because they exhibit the properties that characterise personhood such as agency, sentience, consciousness, self-awareness, and so on. But they are not humans in the biological sense of the term as they were not born and do not have a human evolutionary lineage. Rather, they are genetically engineered, manufactured in a laboratory, and come into the world as adults. So, the way replicants come into existence is different from biological humans. This is important because, as K says, “To be born is to have a soul, I guess.” Since replicants aren’t born, they have no soul. This is why the child of Deckard and Rachael (Dr Ana Stelline) is so important

for the narrative arc of the film because it means that replicants have the potential to become human. It's unclear, however, what a soul precisely is and whether K refers to a notion of a non-material soul or a metaphorical notion meaning something like the essence of a person or someone's consciousness. When Lt. Joshi asks K to kill the offspring of Rachael and Deckard, the following dialogue unfolds:

- K: I've never retired something that was born before.
 LT. JOSHI: What's the difference?
 K: To be born is to have a soul, I guess.
 LT. JOSHI: Hey. You've been getting on fine without one.
 K: What's that, madam?
 LT. JOSHI: A soul.

K seems to be struggling to articulate something that separates humans from mere replicants, something that makes humans special. On one reading, the thought that K is struggling to articulate is the idea that having a soul relates to holding an empathic capacity, and that this empathic capacity, part of which may involve feeling love and being loved, is the essence of humanity. Replicants do not show empathy, apparently, but K's reluctance to kill the child seems to subtly betray the idea that this is not so. This reading brings BR2049 close to the idea presented in the original film about the importance of empathy to being human, and it also closely intertwines the notions of humanhood and personhood. This is because we can distinguish two senses of what it means to be "human." In the first instance we can simply mean humanity in the biological sense. But we can also understand humanity in an evaluative sense, where such "evaluative humanity" means "to be disposed to kindness, forgiveness and in general to be empathetic" (Gaut, 2015: 35). The original film makes it clear that such evaluative humanity is open to replicants, and by the end of the film, BR2049 makes it clear that K demonstrates evaluative humanity. Going beyond the Tyrell Corporation's sales pitch, we can say that in many cases the replicants can be described as "more human than human." By the end of the film, K has found his empathy, his emotional connection to others; K has, in a sense, found his soul.

Memory, narrative, and identity

BR2049 provides a fascinating cinematic thought experiment regarding the continuity of personal identity over time. Philosophers have suggested that either biological or psychological properties ensure continuity of such identity. Some philosophers argue that our identity over time consists in having the same body. Others argue that identity consists in the continuity of our mental states, including beliefs, desires, intentions, and memories. These two camps are broadly characterised as biological and psychological approaches to personal identity. BR2049 operates with a psychological approach, as it portrays memory as crucial for identity.

Replicants have not had childhoods, yet they still have implanted memories of childhood experiences, many of which are made by a memory-maker (Dr Ana Stelline). K, for example, has a memory of a childhood experience. His memory image depicts a young child in an orphanage being chased by a group of boys who want a carved wooden horse the child possesses. The image then portrays the child staring into a furnace, no longer in possession of the horse, having secretly hidden it. And even though the child suffers violence at the hands of the boys, he (or she) does not reveal its whereabouts.

While the content of this memory does not change during the film, K's relation to it, namely, what he thinks it depicts, does shift over time. K begins by thinking his memory is an implant. He knows that he is a replicant and that he never had a childhood, but nonetheless he is emotionally attached to this memory, and he frequently narrates it to Joi. Then, he begins to think that his childhood memory is genuine—that he experienced the event in question, that he is the child depicted in the memory image—and the memory takes on even more importance. Finally, upon finding out the truth about the memory—that the memory-maker has used one of her own genuine memories for this implant, and that the child in the memory is her, Ana Stelline—K uses this memory, and the emotional import of it, to guide his actions and to influence not only his own future but also that of Ana's. As we shall see, it is this shift in K's appraisal of the memory that appears to be responsible for his subsequent transformation; it is not the content of the memory that matters, it is K's attitude towards it.

It is on this memory that the question of K's identity hangs, and we will return to it throughout the rest of this chapter. We first note that there is an important ambiguity in the notion of "identity" here. It could be argued that throughout the film K never doubts that he is the *same person across time*, whoever he is. What he is unsure of is *who* he really is: his "identity" in the sense of the characteristics and narrative that are true of him. Yet, even though K may not doubt whether he is the same person across time in a metaphysical sense (a question about reidentification), from the point of view of personal identity in terms of characterisation (Schechtman, 1996), K's identity does change over time. Indeed, it is the memory of the childhood experience, or more precisely K's relation to this memory, which effects this change in identity. The characterisation question of identity relates to *practical identity* and concerns the characterising properties of an individual such as one's beliefs, desires, preferences, inclinations, and dispositions. It is thus about describing what makes a person the person he or she is. The reidentification question, by contrast, concerns *numerical identity*, and is about the conditions under which a person at one point in time is properly reidentified at another point in time. For Schechtman, bodily continuity theories speak more to the reidentification question, whereas psychological continuity theories better explain identity in the sense of characterisation, and how questions of characterisation relate to our practical interests in identity (Schechtman, 1996).

At this point, at least three questions arise. One, why do replicants have memories of a childhood at all? Two, what roles do memories and narratives play in identity? Three, can there be psychological continuity between different persons?

Regarding the first question, in the first *Blade Runner* movie Tyrell tells Deckard, "If we gift them [replicants] the past, we create a cushion or pillow for their emotions, and consequently we can control them better." Ultimately, memories are used as a mechanism of control. The following dialogue between Officer K and Ana Stelline not only sheds light on the relation between memory, emotion, and identity, but also suggests that authentic memories, or at least the feeling of authenticity, are needed to generate real human responses.

K: Why are you so good? What makes your memories so authentic?

- ANA STELLINE: Well, there's a bit of every artist in their work. But I was locked in a sterile chamber at eight ... So, if I wanted to see the world, I had to imagine it. Got very good at imagining. Wallace needs my talent to maintain a stable product. I think it's only kind. Replicants live such hard lives, made to do what we'd rather not. I can't help your future, but I can give you good memories to think back on and smile.
- K: It's nice.
- ANA STELLINE: It's better than nice. It feels authentic. And if you have authentic memories, you have real human responses. Wouldn't you agree?
- K: Are they all constructed, or do you ever use ones that are real?
- ANA STELLINE: It's illegal to use real memories, officer.
- K: How can you tell the difference? Can you tell if something ... really happened?
- ANA STELLINE: They all think it's about more detail. But that's not how memory works. We recall with our feelings. Anything real should be a mess.

Having childhood memories thus “maintains a stable product,” in that replicants have more coherent identities, making them better slaves. Moreover, memories that feel authentic generate real human responses and, conversely, feelings trigger certain memories. This dialogue thus sketches a view on the relation between memory, emotion, and identity as mutually interwoven. Coherent identities require emotionally laden personal memories (Goldie, 2012; Heersmink, 2018). Even though K knows his memory is merely an implant, he still somehow feels it is authentic, and it comforts him to think of it. Just like the fictional poet, John Shade, in his favourite novel, *Pale Fire*, by Vladimir Nabokov, K's

vision [memory] reeked with truth. It had the tone,
 The quiddity and quaintness of its own
 Reality ...
 Often when troubled by the outer glare
 Of street and strife, inward [he'd] turn, and there,

There in the background of [his] soul it stood,
 Old Faithful! And its presence always would
 Console [him] wonderfully.³

In response to the second question, John Locke (1689/1975), or at least an influential reading of Locke, famously argues that memory is the criterion for continuity of personhood over time.⁴ In Locke's view, when I can remember the experiences of my past self there is continuity between my past self and my present self. For Locke, specific and direct memories of the past provide continuity of selfhood over time. Others have taken Locke's key insight and argued that it is not specific memories but an integrated narrative that provides continuity of self over time. Narrative theories of personal identity, for example those of Marya Schechtman (1996, 2011), claim that personal memories and other psychological properties are integrated into a narrative structure, implying that our autobiography plays a central role in who we are. In this view, we don't just have a number of distinct personal memories, but we also integrate them into a coherent story about our past. Generating meaningful relations between personal memories is referred to as *emplotment* (Ricoeur, 2004). Typically, this occurs through the agency of the person who is creating the narrative. A self-narrative is a subjective and personal story of a series of connected events and experiences that are (essential to) the person. Importantly, a self-narrative is seen by the person as part of an unfolding trajectory where the present situation follows from past events and is used to anticipate the future.

Yet here it is useful to distinguish between two levels of selfhood: first, a minimal, or embodied self and, second, a narrative self. As we just saw, memories and narratives typically are taken to play constitutive roles in identity (Rowlands, 2017; Schechtman, 1996; but compare Strawson, 2004). Oliver Sacks (1985) describes a patient, Mr. Thompson, with Korsakoff syndrome. Due to his excessive drinking, Thompson remembers nothing for more than a few seconds, is continually disorientated, and, most importantly, cannot remember most of his past. He is unable to tell the narrative of his past and, as a result, he confabulates a different micro-narrative on the spot each time someone talks to him. Sacks writes that it is deeply tragic to talk to Thompson, who himself seems unaware of any problem. But there is, of course, a

problem, which is a lack of a narrative self. Sacks describes the problem as follows:

It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a “narrative,” and that this narrative is us, our identities. ... Each of us is a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us—through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions, and not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. A man needs such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self. ... Deprived of continuity, of a quiet, continuous inner narrative, he [Mr. Thompson] is driven to a sort of narrational frenzy.

(Sacks, 1985: 105–106)

Thompson is, of course, still a person, as he satisfies the criteria outlined above, but due to the lack of a narrative and the inability to consolidate new personal memories, he has no psychological continuity over time. So, he has a minimal self, in that he has the capacity for subjective experience (Gallagher, 2000), but not a narrative self. Due to the lack of a narrative self, there is no continuity and persistence of his self over time, which means that his identity in the sense of characterisation is constantly shifting. This demonstrates how important memory and narrative are for identity over time. Importantly, the mere confabulations of Thompson do not contribute to his identity in a narrative sense. Rather, it is memories of events that really took place, and which hence exhibit consistency, that are important for one’s identity. Thompson is thus a human with a minimal self. We can reidentify Mr. Thompson at different points in time, but we cannot say that he has a coherent diachronic identity.

Just like the original film, BR2049 plays with the notion of apparent memories and identity, but in a kind of mirror image. Rachael, in *Blade Runner*, thinks her memories are genuine only to discover that they have been implanted. Officer K, however, initially knows that his memory is false, but begins to slowly suspect that it may in fact be real. But is K’s memory genuine? A straightforward answer is no. It turns out that K’s memory belongs to Dr Ana Stelline, a memory-maker who designs memories to be implanted into replicants. Indeed, the memory belongs to her in two senses: it was she who created the memory implanted

in K, but it is also a memory from her own personal past. The answer to the question of the truth of K's memory is therefore complicated. Certainly, "someone lived this" experience, but it wasn't K, it was Ana, and it is the memory of Ana's experience that K possesses. The memory is a genuine memory of an event in someone's past, but it wasn't K's past. K's memory is, on the one hand, false—it is not his memory. On the other hand, however, the memory is true—it is a genuine memory from the past of another person.

This point relates to our third question. Can there be psychological continuity between different persons? An intuitive response to this question is "no"—one's memories and other psychological properties are one's own and, because they can't be shared or spread over individuals, there cannot be psychological continuity between different persons. Yet, an important objection to psychological continuity theories of personal identity can be raised at this point.⁵ This objection bears on the answer to our third question and complicates matters of psychological continuity between persons. It can be charged that accounts of personal identity that invoke a criterion of memory are circular. That is, because memory provides access to our own past experiences, it presupposes identity, and so any appeal to personal memory to explain personal identity is bound to be circular. Most psychological continuity theories of identity go beyond memory, appealing to the sharing of other psychological properties, but even these neo-Lockean theories fall prey to the circularity objection (Parfit, 1984: 220).

To blunt the force of the circularity objection, some theorists appeal to the notion of *quasi-memory* (q-memory).⁶ Q-memories are memory representations of past experiences that *someone* had, and that are causally dependent (in the right kind of way) on that past experience. Personal memory, then, is a subclass of q-memory; personal memory is quasi-memory of our own experiences (Parfit, 1984: 220). Because q-memory does not presuppose personal identity, an account of identity in terms of q-memory is not circular. Parfit is clear that we currently do not quasi-remember other people's experiences. But, he suggests, one day we may do so. Even if memory traces involve a distributed network of brain cells rather than being localised, we may one day develop techniques to implant memories into the minds of others. This possibility in our world is an actuality in the world of BR2049.

As an example of q-memory, Parfit asks us to imagine the case of Jane and Paul. Jane undergoes surgery and has copies of some of Paul's memory traces implanted in her brain. When she recovers consciousness, Jane has vivid memories, recalled from the inside, of some experiences Paul had in Venice. According to Parfit, Jane should not dismiss her apparent memories as mere delusions. Rather, because they have been caused in the right way as genuine experiences undergone by Paul, she should conclude that she has accurate quasi-memories of Paul's experiences: "When Jane seems to remember walking about the Piazza, hearing the gulls, and seeing the white church, she knows part of what it was like to be Paul, on that day in Venice" (Parfit, 1984: 221). Importantly, this is not to suggest, Parfit adds, that "if I have an accurate quasi-memory of some past experience, this makes me the person who had this experience" (Parfit, 1984: 222). The mental life of one person may include a few quasi-memories of the experiences of another person, but for sameness of personal identity one would need to have many quasi-memories in common with the other person (as well as other properties). Nonetheless, q-memories provide knowledge about other people's past lives. We know, in part, what it was like to be another person.

Think again of K's memory. K knows that his 'childhood' memories are implanted. When Lt. Joshi asks him to tell her a childhood story, K says: "I feel a little strange sharing a childhood story, considering I was never a child." Yet he then discovers that the memory is genuine, that someone had this experience. K's memory is a quasi-memory. It is a representation of a past experience that Ana had. Of course, because of the ambiguity in Ana's response ("Someone lived this"), K takes this memory to be one of his own. But the possibility of mistaking the quasi-memory for one's own past experience is built into the notion of quasi-memory because of its structural ambiguity ("someone did have this experience") (Parfit, 1984: 220). The "someone" who lived this experience was not K but Ana. Even if this q-memory is not identity-constituting in the sense of maintaining psychological continuity with a previous past self, it does provide a sense in which a limited psychological continuity between two different individuals can come about. Although there may not be real continuity between Ana and K in that they are not the same person, the quasi-memories give K knowledge of what it was like to be Ana, at least in that moment, and these implanted

memories also play an important role in K's identity (in the sense of characterisation).

Yet it is not only through quasi-memories that we can get a sense of what it was like to be another person. Memories and narratives are not just contained in the minds of individuals, they are spread over objects in the world and shared with others in everyday life. Such socially shared and physically distributed memories also play an important role in constituting our identities.

The spread of personal memory

BR2049 provides some interesting views on the nature of memory and its relation to technological objects and other persons. Objects and structures often play important roles in personal memory (Heersmink & Carter, in press; van Dijck, 2007). We frequently remember past experiences by interacting with objects such as photos, videos, books, letters, souvenirs, clothing, works of art, and various other mementos. Such artefacts can trigger memories of past events and experiences. For example, a photo album may remind one of a past holiday, a video taken at one's graduation ceremony may remind one of that ceremony, a CD cover may remind one of a certain concert or festival one attended, and an old analogue camera may remind one of a past period in which one developed an interest in photography. Media theorist Sherry Turkle (2007) refers to such artefacts as "evocative objects":

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative object brings together these two less familiar ideas. Underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love, we love the objects we think with.

(Turkle, 2007: 5)

When remembering our past, the contents of our memories are often infused with emotions. It's not the case that we first have a memory and then an emotional response to the memory; rather, the cognitive and affective are interwoven. In the phenomenology of remembering, it is

thus difficult to disentangle the cognitive and affective components of our personal memories. Evocative objects are thus rightly called *evocative* as they trigger and mediate emotionally laden personal memories (Colombetti & Roberts, 2015). Such mediated memories can only arise when interacting with material culture. José van Dijck argues: “Mediated memories can be located neither strictly in the brain nor wholly outside in (material) culture but exist in both concurrently, for they are complex manifestations of a complex interaction between brain, material objects, and the cultural matrix from which they arise.” (van Dijck, 2007: 28)

Importantly, it is not just objects that play important roles in personal memory; other people such as family members, friends, and colleagues also play significant roles in remembering our past. Cognitive psychologist Daniel Wegner (1987) developed a view on memory in which the memory systems of different persons are linked and interwoven. Wegner describes how small-scale social groups process and structure information, thereby developing what he refers to as a transactive memory system. A transactive memory system is a cognitive system comprising people in close relationships in dyads or larger groups who engage collaboratively in encoding, storing, and retrieving information. Consider the following example of a transactive memory system in which a long-married couple try to remember the name of the show they saw on their honeymoon more than forty years ago (Harris et al., 2010).

- Wife: And we went to two shows, can you remember what they were called?
- Husband: We did. One was a musical, or were they both?
I don't ... no ... one—
- Wife: John Hanson was in it.
- Husband: Desert Song.
- Wife: Desert Song, that's it, I couldn't remember what it was called, but yes, I knew John Hanson was in it.
- Husband: Yes.

If you would ask the wife and husband individually, they would not be able to give you the answer to the question, but when they are able to give each other cues, they jointly construct the answer by integrating autobiographical information stored in different brains. Wegner points

out that transactive memory systems cannot be reduced to individual memory; rather, it is a group-level property that emerges from the interactions between its members. The emergent memory system is more than the sum of its parts. Typically, the longer group members know each other and the more shared experiences they have, the deeper their individual memory systems are integrated and the better the transactive memory system works.

Personal memory should thus not be seen as instantiated only in individual brains, but as technologically and socially distributed (Heersmink, 2017, 2018). Therefore, to better understand human memory, we have to enlarge the unit of analysis from individuals to individuals interacting with objects and other persons. This is an important point in itself, but it also has implications for personal identity. If who we are as persons depends on and is shaped by our past experiences, and if being able to remember our past experiences depends on evocative objects and other people, then our personhood and sense of self are partly constituted by those environmental structures. Personhood is thus relational, a view which is also portrayed in *BR2049*.

A key example of an evocative object in *BR2049* is the carved wooden horse. When K finds the wooden horse in the orphanage, he thinks he has discovered a tangible connection to his past, an evocative object linking his present self to his past childhood self. Discovering the wooden horse in the same location he remembered hiding it causes an identity crisis in K. When he asks Ana whether his memory is real, she answers: “Someone lived this, yes. This happened.” The wooden horse thus becomes the material proof that he had an actual childhood and was born rather than created in a laboratory, making him the “miracle child” instead of a mere replicant.

Another example of evocative objects is the little tin box containing a baby’s sock and a photo of Freysa standing next to the dead tree in front of Sapper Morton’s house. These objects (presumably) remind Sapper of the birth of Deckard and Rachael’s daughter that took place in his house. The dead tree itself serves as a memorial and a site of remembrance, somewhat similar to a gravestone. The tree has the date of Rachael’s death and Ana’s birth carved on it, which is the same date carved on the wooden horse. *BR2049* thus accurately portrays how humans keep evocative objects to remind them about past events which, in turn, helps them to construct their narrative identity.

K has shared his implanted childhood memory with Joi, his holographic girlfriend. Joi repeatedly reminds K that the dates on the dead tree and wooden horse are the same, highlighting the possibility that Officer K may be the child of Rachael and Deckard. Joi thus helps Officer K to put the pieces of the puzzle of his fragmented and confusing past together. A key feature of transactive memory systems is that its members typically have shared experiences and thus shared memories. This is clearly the case for K and Joi. They share many experiences such as talking in K's apartment, kissing in the rain on the rooftop, analysing DNA sequences in the DNA Archive, and going to the orphanage in K's spinner. In the film, Joi has a more active role in K's memory than the other way around. Joi's memories are easily accessible to K. When Joi asks K to break the antenna on her emanator, she says "If they come here looking for you, they'll have access to all my memories. You have to delete me from the console." BR2049 thus presents a future in which biological memory and cognition are interwoven not just with mere cognitive artefacts like calculators, navigation systems, and computers, but also with artificial companions. Current artificial companions such as robots don't yet have the capacity to function as full transactive memory partners, but it is not difficult to imagine a future in which companion robots equipped with personalised AI systems exist as genuine transactive memory partners, perhaps in the manner depicted by BR2049. Yet there is another sense in which K's implanted memory is shared. And this shared memory is the one that plays a fundamental role in his search for meaning and identity.

Vicarious memory

K and Ana Stelline share a memory. It was Ana who experienced the event in the orphanage, running away from the boys to hide the wooden horse from them. It was Ana who felt the emotions of that experience: fear at the thought of the punishment the boys would inflict and at the thought of losing the precious object, but also the determination to not reveal its secret hiding place even in the face of violence. Yet K has access to this memory, to this experience, and these emotions. We saw that K has a quasi-memory of Ana's experience, an implant of the memory that gives him a taste of what it was like to be another person. Yet profoundly important shared memories are available in much more

quotidian circumstances, too. In everyday life we share our memories with others through the stories we tell them, and in doing so we give them a taste of what it was like to be us. We also share in the memories and lives of others. When other people share their memories with us, we construct “vicarious memories” of those past events.

Vicarious memories are representations of events and experiences that happened to other people. They occur “when the memories of others become a part of reality for those who hear the memories but have not experienced the events to which the memories refer” (Teski & Climo, 1995: 9). Even though you didn’t experience the event, you still construct a memory of the event, and such vicarious memories typically “have qualities that closely resemble memories of first-hand events, including vivid imagery, strong emotional and physical reactions, and long-lasting life influence” (Pillemer et al., 2015: 234). Vicarious memories also play the same functional roles as personal memories, for example, guiding decision-making, developing or maintaining social relationships, or being incorporated into one’s identity. The key to understanding vicarious memory lies in the realm of emotions: “such memories evoke powerful feelings in individuals, which link them to important ... events they did not experience directly in their individual lives—but which impact greatly on their identities” (Climo, 1995: 173).

There is a key difference between quasi-memories and vicarious memories. Q-memories are representations of events where “someone experienced this.” The identity of the person may or may not be known. Vicarious memory, on the other hand, is usually presented as representations of experiences had by a particular other. One knows the identity of the other person, and one does not mistake those past experiences as one’s own.⁷

By the end of the film K holds something akin to a vicarious memory. Even though it has not been transmitted to him in the usual sense, through stories about the past, K’s memory has the function and phenomenology of vicarious memories. K’s vicarious memory also performs a social function, connecting him more closely to Ana and Deckard. At the end of the film, the following dialogue takes place:

DECKARD: You should’ve let me die out there.
 K: You did. You drowned out there. You’re free to meet your daughter, now.

- K: All the best memories are hers.
 DECKARD: Why? Who am I to you?
 K: Go meet your daughter.

Deckard's question to K is a poignant one. Although K doesn't engage with it directly, one possible response to the question can be found in the role played by K's vicarious memory. K's memory allows him to feel empathy with Ana, to feel her pain and her loss. K and Deckard have formed an interpersonal connection, forged partly on the emotion and feeling found in K's vicarious memory, a memory he shares with Deckard's daughter. K and Deckard are "interlinked" by a vicarious memory.

Memory also serves a directive function, informing and guiding one's present and future behaviour. K uses his vicarious memory, with its emotional force, to make choices that will affect not only him but Ana and Deckard. K's vicarious memory guides his decision-making. As such, Ana is wrong when she tells K: "I can't help your future, but I can give you good memories to think back on and smile." Given the directive and forward-looking aspects of memories (both personal and vicarious), we can do more than look back on events with a smile. We can use those memories to guide us and determine how our futures will unfold. K's vicarious memory, and the choices that it informs, also impacts on his identity. K has changed from being a mere puppet for the state, unquestioningly carrying out his duty, to making informed choices about the type of person he wants to be: one who shows empathy and who makes informed moral choices. If our identities are somehow constituted through our actions and choices (Korsgaard, 2009), then K uses the memory he shares with Ana to guide his actions and constitute his own identity: "[M]emories, if emotionally invested in, create their own effects ... rather than experiences providing the basis for memories, memories become the basis for experiences" (Arnold-de Simine, 2013: 32). Recalling Ana's past vicariously has helped K choose how to act, helping him discover his own (evaluative) humanity.

The best memories

K's journey from replicant to human (in the evaluative sense) is based on a memory, a memory that is socially shared and physically distributed.

Although the content of this memory doesn't change, K's relation to it shifts over time. The same memory is initially taken to be false, a mere implant used for controlling K. Then K has a quasi-memory, one which he takes to be a memory of his own past. He starts to use this memory to think about and shape his own future. But then his attitude to the memory shifts again, such that, by the end of the film, his memory is more like vicarious memory. He knows the experience he remembers was Ana's, but he feels emotionally connected to her through this memory, and it informs his decision to reunite her with Deckard, her father. K's actions are based on empathic reactions to others, whom he connects to because of his shared memory. K's choice to help Deckard and unite him with his daughter stems from the memory he shares with Ana, a vicarious memory. Even though it is not a memory of his experience, this shared memory helps K to shape and direct his own identity. It is this memory, a true but false memory, which helps K make decisions about his future and to forge his own identity. K's and Ana's memories and narratives are intertwined. From the perspective of K's identity there is a sense in which he is wrong that "all the best memories are hers;" we should rather say that "all the best memories are theirs."⁸

Notes

- 1 Both authors contributed equally to this chapter.
- 2 Flashbulb memories are memories "for the circumstances in which one first learned of a very surprising and consequential (or emotionally arousing) event," such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and they are thought to be recalled with "an almost perceptual clarity" (Brown & Kulik, 1977: 73). Such flashbulb memories are not like fixed snapshots of the past; they are still prone to change and inaccuracy (Neisser & Harsch, 1992).
- 3 See Nabokov (1962/1984: 40). In the novel *Pale Fire*, the poet John Shade had a near-death experience in which he sees a tall white fountain. Mirroring the theme in BR2049 of false memory, Shade reads in a magazine that a woman had the same vision, and he thinks this is proof of the afterlife, only to find that it was a misprint: it was a "mountain," not a "fountain" that the woman saw. Nonetheless, "the error changes nothing: the image of the tall white fountain had meaning not because it had some objective significance, not because it was empirical proof of an afterlife, but because Shade ascribed meaning to it" (Page, 2017). As we shall see, it is the meaning that K ascribes to his "misprint" of a memory that is also important.

- 4 Locke's account of memory is complex and multifaceted (Copenhaver, 2017), and other readings of Locke do not ascribe to him a memory criterion for personal identity. See, for example, Atherton (1983).
- 5 We leave aside here other worries such as cases of fission in which one person's set of memories and other psychological properties are transferred into two different brains. See, for example, Parfit (1984) and Schechtman (2014).
- 6 See, for example, Shoemaker (1970) and Parfit (1984). See also Schechtman (1990) for a perspective on problems with the notion of q-memory.
- 7 From an aesthetic point of view, K's implanted memory is depicted "from the outside"; that is, we can see the character in the scene as if the memory is being recalled from an external visual perspective, or an "observer perspective" (see Pillemer et al., 2015). The scene does not use a point-of-view shot and, hence, is not portrayed from the original visual perspective, or a "field perspective" (see Pillemer et al., 2015). In this manner, when we first encounter the scene, it leaves open the identity of the protagonist of the memory. In particular, we are unsure if it is K depicted in the remembered scene (although the fact that the protagonist of the memory has long hair while all the boys in the orphanage appear to have shaved hair is a subtle clue that the protagonist of the memory is, in fact, female). K, too, is unsure of the identity of the person depicted in this remembered scene, although this is arguably not usually the case with observer-perspective memories: one's identity is normally given immediately and non-inferentially (McCarroll, 2018). Interestingly, vicarious memories are typically recalled from an observer perspective (Pillemer et al., 2015).
- 8 We would like to thank Tim Shanahan and Paul Smart for their very helpful review of the present chapter. Chris McCarroll would also like to thank his friend, Randal McKay, who first took him to see *Blade Runner 2049*.

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