

The Concept of Cinephiliac Memory: A Study of Unforgettable Cinematic Moment and Episodic Memory

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Abstract

This research combines the concepts of ‘cinephiliac moment’ and ‘episodic memory’ to examine how past cinematic experiences are preserved and narrated. The ‘cinephiliac moment’ refers to emotionally profound and uniquely significant moments within a viewer’s engagement with cinema, which leave lasting impressions. ‘Episodic memory’, on the other hand, pertains to the individual’s ability to recall personally experienced events within their spatial and temporal context. The concept of ‘cinephiliac memory’ emerging from the intersection of these two ideas, has been defined and analysed as an outcome of the analytical process in this study. The aim of the research is to understand how cinephiles recall their unforgettable cinematic moments and explore the role these memories play in personal and partially societal contexts. To explore this phenomenon further, in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve Turkish participants aged sixty and above, who share a profound passion for cinema. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, and the participants’ responses were grouped under five main themes. Through these themes, similarities and differences were identified and interpreted in detail. The findings reveal that cinematic experiences have a significant impact on the formation of personal identity, life narratives. Additionally, the study highlights the critical role of cinephiliac memory in the interpretation and meaning-making of these experiences at the individual level.

Keywords: Cinephiliac memory, Cinephiliac moment, Episodic memory, Cinephilia, Nostalgia

Introduction

The cinematic experience is fluid and transient. It does not offer specific predictions on what images within a flow will be remembered or forgotten, yet defining and categorising what is watched facilitates remembering on a personal scale. Social existence, cultural habits, and emotional awareness are influential in making certain moments privileged, but it is still a question of how memory is constructed based on these constituent factors. From here, an outline will be developed based on the concepts of the cinephiliac moment and episodic memory.

The cinephiliac moment primarily corresponds to the impactful, special moments in cinematic encounters. Such moments profoundly impact the viewer, eliciting emotional responses and lasting effects on the memory. As Paul Willemsen (1994: 233-234) puts forward, the cinephiliac moment encounters and interacts with moments that provide privileged pleasure and enchantment. Christian Keathley (2005: 32) considers this a kind of *mise-en-abyme*¹ where the passion for cinema is intensified. On the other hand, episodic memory is related to the individual's subjective space-time experiences and includes the ability to remember personally experienced events. An individual with episodic memory remembers the chronological order of discrete events and recalls experienced events through a mental time journey (Tulving, 1993: 66). Moreover, episodic memory manifests itself with a distinct conscious awareness, different from other conscious experiences. This conscious awareness carries different qualities from conscious awareness based on semantic information (Tulving and Szpunar, 2009).

This article examines how past cinematic experiences are preserved and narrated through the integration of the concepts of 'cinephiliac moments' and 'episodic memory'. The study defines 'cinephiliac memory' as a conceptual framework that naturally emerges from the intersection of these two notions. By exploring the emotional resonance of 'cinephiliac moments' which shape unforgettable cinematic memories, in connection with 'episodic memory', the research seeks to better understand the multifaceted role of cinematic experiences in shaping individual life stories. For this purpose, in-depth interviews have been conducted with twelve individuals aged sixty and above who frequented cinemas in their childhood and youth and have been connected to cinema. The choice of this age range is based on specific reasons:

1. As Hasan Akbulut et al. (2018) have emphasised, individuals aged sixty and over tend to have a better recall of the distant past. This age group is thought to have reached memory maturity, and their rich life experiences are expected to provide valuable and detailed insights. Known as the Baby Boomer generation, they grew up during a period of economic growth, social transformation, and technological advancements. These experiences have significantly shaped society and influence today's cultural and political landscape. Their memories of the past are likely intertwined with major social and historical events, which may explain their sharper recollection of the distant past compared to other age groups.

¹ Keathley (2005: 113) addresses this concept both in its primal sense and in the context of a passion for cinema. Cinephiliac moments signify a special place in the history of cinema, and these moments emerge as the point where history may disappear and potentially be regained. This notion denotes a structure that contains a narrative within the narrative or a tangible, sensuous experience within the realm of the visual.

2. These individuals are thought to serve as cultural ambassadors that will bridge generations by conveying the classic experience of going to the cinema, thus transmitting social and cultural values.

3. One of the fundamental criteria is that participants have attended cinema at certain times in their lives, specifically having experienced the cinema culture during the *Yeşilçam* era. The participants' memories and insights about this period will shed light on past cinema experiences.

Given the age group of participants, the research naturally concentrates on the 1970s and 1980s, aligning their formative cinematic experiences with this period of significant cultural and historical change in Turkey. However, it is important to emphasise that this study focuses on the personal and autobiographical dimensions, without disregarding the social changes and historical impacts. As Dibeltulo and Treveri Gennari (2023: 216) note that memories of cinema-going habits and film genres are recurring events, while memories of specific films often reflect personal or self-defining moments. Thus, narrated film memory serves an autobiographical function, contributing to identity creation.

This study was designed within the framework of narrative research, aiming to gain insights into individuals' perceptions of the world by analysing their experiences and stories (Creswell, 2007: 53). Data were collected through snowball sampling from a small group of individuals with firsthand cinema experiences during the *Yeşilçam* era. Participants were purposefully selected based on their direct and unique connections to the cinema culture of that period, using a combination of purposive and referral techniques. Semi-structured questions were posed to gather demographic information and explore participants' past cinema experiences and film memories, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of their relationship with cinema.

Cinephilia: Moment, Love, Recollection and Nostalgia

At the core of cinephilia lies the passion that constitutes the essence of the unique experiences art offers to individuals. The process of film-watching enables the viewer to become a part of a collective shared by millions. However, the love for cinema transcends the communal experience, becoming an individual and personal journey. Everyone identifies with films that become a part of their own story and experiences emotional connections delivered through these films. As Sarah Keller (2020: 13-14) has pointed out, the aura of films is significant. Viewers engaged with films can perceive objects and moments differently, hearing and experiencing them differently, broadening their visions and experiential horizons.

The relationship cinephiles have with moments evolves through evaluating, understanding, internalising, and sharing the unique experiences films offer. Jean Epstein (1988: 314-318) believes that cinematic images contain a deeper meaning and sublimity than the natural beauty or familiar forms of objects or humans. This notion brings a particular language-aesthetic harmony that activates the viewer's imagination and triggers emotional responses. Similarly, Willemen (1994: 234-240), defines these as cinephiliac moments. They are specific processes of meaning where a passion, experience, or connection toward cinema intensifies. This moment can occur during the viewing of a film or an emotional, intellectual, or aesthetic response

stemming from the cinematic experience. As Marijke De Valck and Malte Hagener (2005: 14) argue, cinephiles desire to be enthralled by the magic of moving images. They construct moments of personal discovery and joy, developing their rituals and solidifying their love within unique communities.

Six years later, Keathley refined Willemen's framework, according to him (2000), the cinephiliac moment is a viewer-specific subjective experience that can vary based on personal history, cultural references, and tastes. This moment could be expressed differently, such as intensely feeling a film, achieving deep comprehension, or gaining a new perspective on cinema. Keathley, citing Willemen, defines the cinephiliac moment as a 'celebration of intersubjective encounters with "fleeting, evanescent moments" in the film experience'. According to Keathley (2005: 39), whether it is the movement of a hand, the strange rhythm of a horse, or a sudden change of expression on a face, these moments are perceived by the viewer as an epiphany, an enlightenment. The fetishisation of these otherwise marginal, mundane details exists alongside cinema itself. Even if these moments may not mean something for everyone, for a single viewer who engages with the film, they can signify transcendental meanings. However, small nuances can be observed when evaluating the approaches of Willemen and Keathley. For example, Willemen (1994) also considers the cinephiliac moment within a social context. According to him, the cinephiliac moment is an experience shared within a community, like a film festival. Film lovers gather with like-minded individuals, watch films, and share this experience. Furthermore, Willemen notes that the cinephiliac moment is invisible and only becomes tangible through media outputs like film reviews. In his dialogues with Noel King, Willemen (1994: 237) portrays a viewer nudging the person beside them with their elbow when experiencing a cinephiliac moment, as if to share the moment's magic. These acts are examples of collective moments referencing cinema's social and communal aspects. Girish Shambu (2020: 60) receives this nudge as a resilient image of cinephilia. This simple gesture signifies the boundless nature of cinematic moments that can emerge unexpectedly.

Even though efforts have been made to rationalise the moments of cinephilia by associating them with various concepts, as emphasised in Jordan Schonig's research (2020: 255), the characteristic feature of cinephiliac moments is their innate resistance to theorisation. These moments in films evoke something beyond themselves. With their experiential qualities, they challenge intellectual paradigms. Rashna Wadia Richards (2013: 24) defines cinephiliac moments as minor, non-narrative events that overshadow iconic scenes, offering glimpses where traditional representation breaks down. Catherine Fowler (2012: 34) emphasises remembering films through these moments, focusing on personal impressions rather than plot-critical scenes. Similarly, Thomas Elsaesser (2005: 40-41) highlights fragments in films as unique memory tools, suggesting that films are composed of these special, impactful parts.

Remembering Through Films and Episodic Memory

The core functions of human memory include encoding experiences, forming associations, linguistic expression, recall, and narration. According to Ricoeur (2004: 5-6), remembering entails locating past experiences, which resurface through mental imagery. This process, termed the

'transformation of moments into images', highlights how memory operates through the mental reconstruction of past events. Within this framework, cinema emerges as a powerful source of such evocative images. As Duruel Erkiş (2014: 69-70) suggests, certain cinematic images leave lasting imprints on memory. These images not only reference the past but also generate new meanings, existing independently of their narrative context. They persist in memory with a transcendent, time-defying quality, deeply impacting the viewer's consciousness.

However, as Maurice Halbwachs emphasises (1992: 51), we remember what we see, do, feel, and think at a given moment in time; thus, our memory does not blend with others. Contrary to Halbwachs, Jan Assmann (2011: 23) argues that the subject of memory and remembrance is always the individual yet concedes that they depend on the context that constructs their memories. In other words, individual memory develops through participation in various communicative processes, ranging from family to religious and national communities. Likewise, Jeffrey Olick (1999: 336) proposes that collective memory defines individual memories, collective representations, and shared identities. Understanding how cinema is remembered, narrated, and transferred remains significant. Kuhn (2002: 9) stresses the need to focus on how stories about the past are generated in personal or communal narration activities to understand cultural memory, emphasising the importance of paying attention to the structure and narrative of these memory stories. Similarly, how cinema shapes and impacts these memories should also be considered.

For instance, considering the participants' age range, their cultural memories predominantly focus on the mid-1970s and 1980s. As Lüleci (2020: 498) notes, the political turmoil triggered by the March 12 Memorandum, economic crises, widespread social violence, and international sanctions after the Cyprus Peace Operation marked the 1970s as one of Turkey's most turbulent periods. Sectarian conflicts in 1978 further destabilised society, and by 1980, the military coup accelerated the transition to a free-market economy (Kongar, 1999: 372-373). Challenges like unemployment, inflation, and urban migration reshaped the social structure. These events show how memory and remembrance processes are shaped by socio-political and cultural contexts, influencing even the way films are remembered. In light of these historical events, it is evident that the processes of memory and remembrance are profoundly shaped by societal experiences. This interaction can be observed across a broad spectrum, ranging from the simplest daily encounters to complex social phenomena. On a micro level, the way films are remembered is influenced by socio-cultural factors, political, economic and the societal contexts that frame these phenomena. The way films are remembered is shaped within a broad framework extending from socio-cultural factors to political and economic contexts. As Marc Augé (2020: 20) emphasises, memory residues are the result of erosion caused by forgetting. This dialectical relationship between remembering and forgetting leads to memories appearing in fragmented and partial forms. Due to these characteristics, it is necessary to focus particularly on episodic memory.

The characteristics of episodic memory, also referred to as autobiographical memory, were defined by Endel Tulving. The primary features of this type revolve around the recall of information obtained from personal and specific past events and situations. According to Tulving (2002: 5), episodic memory enables mental time travel, allowing the individual to re-experience previous experiences through subjective time travel facilitated by autonoetic awareness. Episodic elements are usually represented as visual images that contain summary records of sensory,

perceptual, conceptual, and emotional processing, preserving long-term activation patterns. They always possess a perspective and usually represent short intervals of the experience in chronological order. However, they can be quickly forgotten and can be re-experienced upon retrieval by customising autobiographical recall (Conway, 2009). Furthermore, episodic memory relies on the verbal declarations of completely subjective and mental experiences that encompass the phenomenological aspects of individuals and events (Allen and Fortin, 2013: 10379). Situations remembered episodically will often be deduced rather than directly remembered for the general context in which the event was first experienced; people will generally infer where an event occurs within their life stories (Mayes and Roberts, 2001). In this regard, it can be concluded that value is attributed to past experiences in proportion to their impact on one's life, and they are considered worth remembering. When an event is tried to be remembered, more than just the event itself is represented (narrated); it is also blended and conveyed with personal experiences related to the event in question (Mahr and Csibra, 2017: 2). Therefore, episodic memory can be characterised as a mental life journey consisting of sediments anchored to the future. Indeed, the traces transferred to the future serve as a catalyst in the individual's struggle to become a subject, kneaded with self-construction and perception of the future. From this point, it can be argued that episodic remembering is a constructive process closely related to future-oriented mental memory (Michaelian, 2016: 57).

Methodology

This study² focuses on the recollection processes of cinematic memories. It is also concerned with the potential convergence of these experiences under the umbrella of 'cinephiliac memory' through concepts of the cinephiliac moment and episodic memory. Kuhn (2011: 87-93) categorises film memories into three main types across a broad spectrum: Type A: scenes that appear in our minds like photographic frames, possessing a dream-like atmosphere; Type B: enduring memories where individuals recall film scenes by relating them to their own life experiences, with this recollection significantly varying across different contexts; and finally, Type C: memories of the act of going to the cinema that do not involve films at all. In this study, the form of recollection conceptualised as cinephiliac memory lies at the intersection of Kuhn's Type A and Type B. However, this does not mean that Type C is dismissed or rejected; rather, it is included to a lesser extent compared to the other two types. Therefore, cinephiliac memory not only shapes personal cinema experiences through individual identity, life story, and emotional connections, but also creates a unique realm of meaning that includes the viewer's past experiences and personal narratives.

The fundamental objectives of the study are as follows:

1. The primary objective of this study is to understand and analyse cinema experiences and memory. Specifically, by combining the concepts of the cinephiliac moment and episodic

² This research has been approved and deemed ethically compliant by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Özyeğin University with decision number 2023/11 dated 21 July 2023.

memory, it aims to comprehend the unforgettable cinematic moments experienced by audiences and how they recall them.

2. Working from the premise that cinema experiences are imbued with emotional responses and form personal connections, the study explores how the passion for cinema is remembered and narrated.

3. The study presents aspects of how cinema experiences are recalled and leave lasting impressions on memory. Simultaneously, it seeks to understand individuals' connections with cinema and explore how these connections are ingrained into memory.

This study is anchored in the narrative model among qualitative research design. In narrative research experiential narratives are crafted through dialogue with the subject of investigation. The hermeneutic or interpretive essence of narrative research is emphasised, focusing on converting orally recounted stories into written text. In this vein, this study employed in-depth interviews as the qualitative data collection method. The participants for this research were selected adults aged sixty and above who could provide diverse and rich information about their film experiences. Participants were chosen based on the principle of diversity in terms of age, gender, educational background, and cinema experience. A total of twelve participants were selected using the snowball (chain) sampling method. As Guest et al. (2006) have noted, the size of a sample can vary depending on the type of study, its objectives, and the saturation of data. In this study, data saturation is believed to have been achieved with twelve participants. Aligned with Beitin's (2012) emphasis on the sufficiency of six-twelve participants in a narrative research framework and Creswell's (2007) recommendation for an in-depth examination of a small number of individuals in narrative studies, this research selected a sample of twelve participants. The sample, designed to explore cinephiliac memory, demonstrated diversity in gender distribution (five women, seven men), educational background, and cinematic experiences, ensuring the inclusion of varied perspectives. The observation of recurring responses and the sufficiency of data to address the research questions further supported the appropriateness of the sample size.

The scope of the study was structured around a temporal framework and the criterion of cinephilia. The snowball sampling method was employed to expand the range of participants, enabling the research to transcend geographical boundaries. Consequently, the study was not confined to a specific region or city but instead followed the structural requirements dictated by the research design. The participants share a common characteristic: they have all spent a part of their lives in Istanbul. However, they currently reside in different regions across Turkey. Given this context, imposing a geographical limitation on the study would be neither practical nor meaningful.

The first participant, selected based on their strong passion for cinema and specific cinephiliac criteria, was contacted via Facebook. Subsequent participants were identified within this individual's circle of acquaintances. Virtual interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform, employing semi-structured questions formulated by the researcher to encourage participants to detail their past cinema experiences and cinephiliac moments. Before the primary interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted to assess the questions' effectiveness and explore potential adjustments. During the analysis phase, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and examined through thematic analysis, a systematic method for categorising textual content and identifying relationships between categories (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). This approach

allowed for a detailed explanation of the data with minimal interference. The sample included cinema enthusiasts aged sixty and above, with interviews conducted between 26 July 2023 and 15 August 2023. Of the participants, five were female, and seven were male. In the sections where participants are first quoted, brief contextual background information is provided to frame their personal narratives. Additionally, each quotation is followed by the participant's date and place of birth in parentheses. This approach aims to highlight the socio-cultural and historical weight carried by the narratives, while also enhancing their interpretability by anchoring the narrators in specific temporal and spatial contexts. By allowing the participants' life stories to be read in relation to the periods they belong to, this method underscores the significance of historical and geographical frameworks in the construction of individual memory. In doing so, it seeks to reveal the multilayered nature of personal narratives and how they are shaped by the interplay between memory, time, and place. Responses were grouped under five thematic axes, with similarities and differences interpreted to derive meaningful patterns.

First Cinema Experience: Vaguely Recalled

Participants were asked about their first cinema experiences, and those who remembered often connected specific events to the films they watched. Open-air cinemas played a significant role in their personal histories, with various factors aiding recall, such as notable moments in the narrative, the atmosphere of the viewing setting, emotional triggers, or unique objects tied to the cinema experience.

Of the participants, nine could recall the first film they watched, while three could not. However, even those who could not remember the film could comment on specific aspects of the venue and films. The list of remembered films includes *Masterson of Kansas* (dir. William Castle, US, 1954), *Awaara* (dir. Raj Kapoor, IND, 1951), *The Great Dictator* (dir. Charlie Chaplin, US, 1940), *Sound of Music* (dir. Robert Wise, US, 1965), *The Fixer* (dir. John Frankenheimer, UK, 1968), *Gone with the Wind* (dir. Victor Fleming, US, 1939), *El Dorado* (dir. Howard Hawks, US, 1966), *Goodbye Charlie* (dir. Vincente Minnelli, US, 1964), *Blow-Up* (dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, ITA/UK/US, 1966). It is noteworthy that none of these films are Turkish productions. The predominance of foreign films in respondents' memories could be linked to their social class. According to Akbulut et al. (2018), it is possible to conclude that in Turkey, those considered to be 'modern' may be inclined to choose foreign or American films due to their perceived excitement, in contrast to 'traditionalists' who may not show much interest in such films. Moreover, it was observed that participants' first cinema experiences generally took place under the supervision of their families. The influence of family in shaping film culture makes it easier to recall and form shared memory residues. Feelings of admiration, awe, and impact stand out in early cinema experiences. Tom Gunning's (1989) concept of 'cinema of attractions' describes the emotional state evoked by shocking images in these experiences. Drawing on Cemal Kafadar's concept of 'wonder', Nezi̇h Erdoğan discusses how transcendent emotions, such as love, reveal the deceptive nature of reality. Erdoğan (2017: 99-100) questions whether astonishment is limited to the initial encounter with cinema and explores how long this emotion endures under the influence of visual transformations. He also emphasises that these experiences enhance

spiritual awareness through extraordinary events and highlight how astonishment unveils the illusory nature of reality. Having studied medicine in Istanbul before switching paths to establish a tourism business, Özgün (Eskişehir, b. 1963)³ exemplifies this sense of wonder and astonishment, as well as the reflective process it triggers:

Kılıçoğlu Theater had a curtain. It was golden yellow and wavy; (...) It felt like a gateway to another world. (...) I watched a film there: a story about a child lost in the desert. (...) One particular scene from the film deeply moved me. The child walks and walks and walks (...) but then, he realizes he has returned to where he started: the plane wreckage. That scene and that film left a profound impact on me. (...) I questioned myself for a long time, unable to shake its effect, and I still remember it vividly. (Özgün, Eskişehir, b. 1963)

Özgün's (Eskişehir, b. 1963) analysis frames the cinema curtain as a gateway to another world, aligning with Gunning's *cinema of attractions* where visual and emotional allure merges anticipation (via the rising curtain) with dramatic narrative to create lasting viewer impact. The cyclical return of the child protagonist underscores reality's illusory nature, echoing Erdoğan's concept of *wonder* and its transient yet profound audience effects—a tension resolved through Özgün's emphasis on film as an indelible, transformative experience. Additionally, Özgün's vivid recollection of *Kılıçoğlu Theater's* golden curtains exemplifies Tulving's episodic memory, wherein cinematic memories integrate sensory, spatial, and affective dimensions. This narrative transcends mere scene evocation, reflecting how episodic memory reconstructs past experiences as cohesive wholes, embedding atmosphere, space, and emotional metamorphosis.

A Peculiar Space and Its Magical Atmosphere: Cinema

Before analysing participants' cinephiliac moments, it is essential to examine the spatial contexts prominent in the remembrance function. Analyses reveal that cinematic images—integrated with cinema spaces—are shaped by temporal, societal, and spatial dynamics. Cinema's memorability generates mythologised frameworks through nostalgia-laden sanctified narratives, transforming their perception.

What most affected me was the curtain opening. For years, there has been, for example, Akün Cinema in Ankara, similar to Emek Cinema. The curtains in both are multi-layered, made of that shiny velvet; the gong rings, and the movie starts. This ceremoniousness has perhaps most affected me; I don't know what happened now. Large cinemas have been divided into smaller ones... (Ertuğrul, Ankara, b. 1962)

³ Participant's name is given first, followed by the place of birth and the year of birth. The abbreviation *b.* stands for *born*, indicating the year of birth.

I feel melancholy. Two things come to my mind at the same time; one is, when you sit in the balcony, I definitely remember those balcony railings. They would cover half of the screen, and I would get angry because I was such a little child. On the other hand, when you go to open-air cinemas, it seems like everyone had to eat sunflower seeds. We also ate, for some reason, crackling and crunching sounds mixed with the creaking of those chairs. (Tunga, Ankara, b. 1962)

Cherry plum-colored covers on the chairs, oh my God. Color immediately comes to my mind (...) In decoration, tones of cherry plum brown always dominated those very warm colors. I love those colors too (...) Secondly, Alaska Frigo ice cream had a unique taste there. We only ate it there. (Gülşat, Istanbul, b. 1960)

Within the network of relationships, space shapes its structure through social production at both macro and micro levels. In cinema, these spaces transform in memory, serving as cultural heritage for audiences. For example, as can be understood from Ertuğrul's (Ankara, b. 1962) response—who mentions being in the early stages of Alzheimer's and currently residing in Zonguldak—decorative elements and aesthetic details in the cinema can be retained in memory. Ceremonial practices also create rituals unique to cinema. As Elisa Ravazzoli notes (2016: 33-34), cinema as a cultural phenomenon is associated with sensations, reactions, and memories produced by rituals, practices, and representations. Ertuğrul perceives the gong's sound and the curtain's motion as part of these rituals, storing them in memory.

Conversely, as noted by video artist Tunga (Ankara, b. 1962), not only positive but also negative architectural features can be remembered. Railings and balustrades in balconies have obstructed viewing, leaving lasting impressions. The tradition of snacking on dried fruits is another memorable aspect of the experience. Similarly, Gülşat (Istanbul, b. 1960), who grew up in the Moda district of Kadıköy, highlights the significance of colour in cinema, linking it to decorative features. Many participants reference Alaska Frigo ice cream as a key component of their cinema habits. Emphasising sensory memory, these accounts reveal how visual, auditory, tactile, and gustatory stimuli shape viewer engagement.

As Laura Marks (2000) states, sense memory acts as a cultural artifact, with sensory experience encoded through bodily interaction. Ertuğrul calls the curtain a 'gateway to another world', underscoring visual elements' importance. Tunga highlights auditory details—such as creaking chairs and open-air cinema sounds—that enrich the social experience. Özgün (Eskişehir, b. 1963) describes how tactile acts, like placing a jacket for comfort, personalise viewing. Gülşat recalls the taste of ice cream and the warm hues of cinema interiors, reflecting how such sensory inputs generate memorable cinematic moments. These narratives show how cinema, as a multisensory medium, transcends its visual base to evoke embodied memory and deepen recollection.

My cousin is going to an open-air cinema with his wife. (...) At some point, he feels something on his leg. It turns out the man sitting behind him was trying to harass my cousin by extending his foot. (...) Of course, when he realized this, there was a big fight and noise. (...) Whenever I went to an open-air cinema, I would always do

something; I would place a cushion or a cardigan, if I had one, underneath me. So, I would take precautions. (Özgün, Eskişehir, b. 1963)

We learned that my eyes were severely myopic at the cinema. Because I am going to the third grade. I am nine years old. They realized I can no longer read the subtitles. I am trying to read by squinting my eyes. My parents realized when they said you are squinting your eyes that my eyes were four and a half degrees myopic, and somehow this was not noticed at school but was noticed at the cinema. The cinema has this side for me. (Tunga, Ankara, b. 1962)

The cinema was synonymous with my dog for me. My dog would come with me to the movies, his name was Sancho, named after a famous character's dog in a cowboy film. He would sit right by my feet, sometimes watching a movie, sometimes dozing off—this is an unforgettable memory for me. (Ahmet, Izmir, b. 1954)

A cinema is more than just a venue for watching films; it holds a significant place in the lives of its visitors. Indeed, as a multidimensional space for cultural practices, it offers unique experiences for the audience. As can be understood from the narrative of (Tunga, Ankara, b. 1962), this memory related to the health of the interviewee's eyes is a crucial memory for him synonymous with cinema. This memory is a thought-provoking example of the interviewee's personal experience and the various ways cinema impacts life.

On the other hand, Akbulut's (2017) study, based on interviews with female audiences who went to cinemas in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s, reveals that women go to the cinema more out of habit than to watch films, often due to limited economic and cultural resources. For them, cinema is a form of entertainment derived from their needs. However, it also has the potential to be a threatening environment for women. Indeed, the account of (Özgün, Eskişehir, b. 1963) vividly demonstrates this. Anxiety stemming from a traumatic memory led her to take precautions to prevent harassment in later situations. Similarly, public spaces like cinema venues carry the risk of encountering criminal elements. Nevertheless, cinema has become deeply integrated into everyday life. Ahmet (Izmir, b. 1954), a short film maker and recipient of an award from the *Hisar Short Film Festival*, shares a unique bond between his cinema experiences and his dog. He recalls how his dog accompanied him during movie screenings, sometimes attentively watching and sometimes sleeping, creating a distinctive and memorable dimension to his cinematic experiences.

A Profound Passion: Cinema and Cinephilia

Participants have emphasised their attachment and love for cinema while conveying their cinematic experiences. From these narratives, it can be inferred that their perception and understanding of cinema are interwoven with love and passion, marking it as a significant act.

Cinema is the greatest passion of my life. It is the happiest place for me. I have been affected by every moment of it. Both domestic and international films have influenced me, and I have learned many lessons from them. In other words, we have gained a culture in cinemas. Cinema has educated us. (Saim, İzmir, b. 1955)

I feel films as a part of me. They accompany every aspect of life. There are different valuable films, and they all belong to me. In other words, I cannot imagine life without films; cinema is one of the things that make life bearable. Especially good cinema, not every cinema, of course. (Özgün, Eskişehir, b. 1963)

I learned life from cinemas. All my life experience is owed to cinemas (...) Cinema has given me self-confidence. Since I have already experienced these events there, I never hesitate when encountering life situations. (Recep, Bursa, b. 1953)

According to participants, their passion for cinema distinguishes them markedly from those who merely seek escapism or adventure in daily life. Viewing life through the lens of films emerges as a common action for cinephiles. In addition, Sontag (1996) suggests that pure love for films is not enough to describe cinephiliac qualities, but specific tastes shape preferences. For participants, the meaning of cinema consists of multi-dimensional and deeply internal connections that reach the level of addiction. Özgün (Eskişehir, b. 1963) views films as extensions of himself, assigning irreplaceable qualities to cinema. On the other hand, Recep (Bursa, b. 1953), an electrical engineer who has lived in the same house in Istanbul for sixty-eight years, argues that his reactions in daily life have developed through cinema, suggesting that he has learned life from cinema. Similarly, having worked as a civil servant and engaging in hosting during his free time Saim (İzmir, b. 1955) has established that cinema serves as a means of cultural enrichment. It also points to the individual's way of forming identity and experiencing life. As Hansen also noted (1993: 197), cinema is a significant public space for expressing personal identities and lifestyles. As a social institution creating rituals, cinema has a culture-reforming aspect. Consequently, as participants have also narrated, cinema enriches and equips human beings in its artistic, social, cultural, and emotional dimensions.

I may not know all films by heart, nor the names of most actors. However, when the lights go out, watching those projected images and leaving the cinema with joy constitute my world of cinema. I was also a projectionist for a while. I had to watch every film. Even if I watch films multiple times, I never get bored. It's such a thing. (Yavuz, Şırnak, b. 1963)

The ritualistic perspective the participant focuses on forms another facet of the love for cinema. This ceremonial atmosphere has left lasting traces in the memories of the audience — particularly in Yavuz's personal narrative (Şırnak, b. 1963). Yavuz describes himself as being subject to this atmosphere, shaped by years of cinematic accumulation. His account illustrates how the participant becomes immersed in the ceremonial world of cinema through repetition, memory, and emotional attachment. Even after experiencing the magical world of films multiple times, they can be watched again without boredom — as if each viewing renews the pleasure.

The narrative of the participant evokes Daniela Treveri Gennari's concept of 'pleasure memory'. According to Treveri Gennari (2018: 42), this concept can evoke a sense of beauty, abundance, self-respect, hopeful thoughts and positive emotions within the memory of cinema.

Memory Scenes: Participants' Cinephiliac Moments

Cinephiliac subjects often find great interest in moments within film narratives that are frequently overlooked or seem to be passed over with a superficial glance. The incidental noticing and subsequent detailed examination of such 'glanced over' details constitute a pleasurable experience for cinephiles. They seize upon an element that might initially seem arbitrary or neglected, and through a more in-depth examination fueled by an intuitive sense of curiosity or emotion, uncover the profound significance of this ostensibly inconsequential component (Toles, 2010: 160). Alongside, the relationship of cinephiles' engaged ways of thinking about specific moments to 'memory' emerges through this understanding. As Elsaesser (2005: 27) has defined, the term cinephile is ultimately associated with nostalgia, devotion, yearning, and privilege. Cinephiliac moments not only allow for the discovery of the power and depth of cinema but also bestow a unique experience and perspective with the magic of remembrance. Participants were asked the following question: Can you describe a movie moment that means nothing to someone else but has the most impact on you?

For instance, I vividly remember the women with large buttocks riding bicycles in Fellini's film. Because in the movie, you don't have to be beautiful to be interesting, since up until that time, there were always beautiful women and men in such movies. I can't remember the film's name right now, you know, these large-bottomed women are riding bicycles, and as they go, the neighborhood boys are watching them from behind. This moment is always on my mind. (Kumru, Istanbul, b. 1961)

I remember the movie *Gone with the Wind*, where Clark Gable confesses his love; the scene was quite interesting. I was about twelve-thirteen years old then. I remember the costumes. I remember a green dress. I remember that curtain fabric was torn and made into a dress; these all stay in my mind. (Aydan, Istanbul, b. 1960)

My father graduated from the *Village Institutes* (Köy Enstitüsü) (...) We would go to the cinema excitedly. I can't remember the name of one of those films, but it was a Tony Curtis film, and in that movie, a car turns into an airplane, then a ship; it was unbelievable. (...) It was fun and adventurous, and of course, Tony Curtis was very handsome. (...) I really liked that movie. (Dilek, Kastamonu, b. 1962)

As can be seen, the cinephiliac moments of the interviewees are based on a diverse and slippery ground. Indeed, Paul Coughlin (2000) has emphasised that efforts to understand the

sublimity of what is happening, whether it is photogenic, a cinephiliac moment, or a sensory experience, may be fruitless. Sometimes, it emerges fragmentarily and context-free; sometimes, it is captured in an excessive style and presented as a unique moment. Despite these disadvantages, tracing the leitmotifs in the narrated rhizomatic stories carries the potential for forming the nuclei of cinephiliac memory. These narratives activate the memory of individuals, blending moments with love and displaying a rich texture. Mary Ann Doane (2002: 226) emphasises that cinephilia is fundamentally a love of cinema—a deep affection extending beyond the medium to its specific language, such as meticulous shots and gestures. This affection represents a nuanced attachment to film elements that may not resonate with all viewers.

For example, Kumru (Istanbul, b. 1961), whose youth was spent in Istanbul and Ankara and who speaks four languages, emphasises a scene remembered from Fellini's film, alluding to the attractiveness of cinema's ordinariness and difference. Even details like not remembering the name of the movie shape unforgettable memories, and this moment stays as a vivid image in the mind over time.⁴ Kumru's (Istanbul, b. 1961) narrative brings to mind Kuhn's description in the article *What to do with Cinema Memory?* According to her (Kuhn, 2011: 87), remembered scenes may almost appear like a still image; their visual qualities can evoke something dream-like.

On the other hand, Aydan (Istanbul, b. 1960), who worked as a bank employee, shares her memory related to the film *Gone with the Wind*. The interviewee vividly remembers specific scenes from the movie and expresses the impressions these scenes have left on her. Visual details like a green dress and the use of curtain fabric indicate that the participant remembers that moment vividly and clearly. On the other hand, Dilek, (Kastamonu, b. 1962), who works as a microbiology specialist, carries scenes from a film starring Tony Curtis in her memory, particularly the scenes where a car turns into an airplane and then a ship. She highlights the impact the movie had on her, stating that it was fun and adventurous.

This explanation, in certain respects, aligns with Victor Burgin's (2004: 16) concept of the sequence-image, as described in *The Remembered Film* refers to a fusion of present perceptions and past memories that emerge in the mind. These images appear randomly, with some standing out more vividly due to their strong connections with unconscious signifiers. This vividness stems from meanings embedded in the unconscious, giving the images prominence. However, the sequence-image is not a hallucination or pure imagination, but a tangible phenomenon born from the interplay of perception, memory, and unconscious meaning. Overall, the subjective qualities of cinematic experiences construct cinephiliac memory. Participants' recollections—spanning scenes, costumes, or protagonists—reveal cinema's capacity to reflect embodied, multifaceted diversity.

Reverberations in Memory: The Cinephiliac Memory

As previously emphasised, cinephiliac memory combines the concepts of episodic memory and cinephilia within a holistic understanding. Cinephiliac memory encompasses recalling, reconstructing, and contextualising cinema experiences within personal and cultural

⁴ The film referred to by the participant is Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (ITA, 1973).

frameworks. Cinephiliac memory is partially distinct from cinema memory. Considered a subcategory of cultural memory, 'cinema memory' establishes a complex relationship with time and space. It balances individuality with collectivity, public with private, and triggers emotional relationships with spaces, people, and films (Kuhn, 2002, 2011). Cinephiliac memory harbours subjective reflections of love and interest in cinema. While cinephiliac memory focuses on an individual's particular interest and context in cinema, cinema memory corresponds to more general cinematic experiences. On the other hand, cinephiliac memory is timeless. As Jenna Ng notes (2010: 149), cinephilia possesses a timeless quality that alters traditional perceptions of reality. Ng explains this situation by stating that cinephilia is shaped more by a need for time than a need for reality, progressing along a curve that is as mythological as cinema itself.

For example, I am very afraid of having Alzheimer's because then I will forget my movies. They are like a part of me, a support mechanism, or a kind of richness that cannot be converted into money for me. Just like my friends... (Özgün, Eskişehir, b. 1963)

Well, I fell in love with the world through cinema. I met the people I know through the world of cinema. I can distinguish good from bad. I saw life in the cinema through films. Cinema is a culture. The most important culture for me. A tunnel of adventure where I can beam myself back to my past, experience the same emotions repeatedly, and remember. (Saim, İzmir, b. 1955)

Of course, old films have now become visual building blocks. Some books, some places, and some films... I am what they are. Those films are telling me something internally. But, you know, a person puts himself in, thinks about his life process, and remembers himself through them. (Kumru, İstanbul, b. 1961)

According to Elsaesser, cinephilia is shaped by retrospective timing, enabling it to transcend time and space. He argues that cinephilia involves postponement, spatial shifts, and temporal delays (Elsaesser, 2005: 30). This aligns with episodic memory, which records personal experiences and shapes self-perception through three key features: subjective time perception (mental time travel), a connection to the subject, and autonoetic consciousness (Tulving, 1972, 1983, 2002; Hassabis and Maguire, 2007). In other words, as William L. Randall puts forth in his book, what is remembered episodically is not narrated abstractly but retold through re-storying. Some elements are easier to market and transmit than others and can significantly impact each time they are presented. These are the signature stories through which an individual introduces themselves to the world (Randall, 2014: 215-216). Similarly, Laura Mulvey (2009) describes cinephilia as inspiring nostalgia while also living with current commitments. Indeed, the love for cinema often relies on experiences being displaced or rearranged over time and retold (Turgut, 2022: 257).

Upon evaluating the statements of the participants, it becomes evident that cinephilia leaves a profound and enduring impact on personal identities and life narratives. The accounts from Özgün (Eskişehir, b. 1963), Saim (İzmir, b. 1955), and Kumru (İstanbul, b. 1961) reveal that cinema occupies a significant place beyond mere entertainment in their personal and emotional

realms. Özgün's (Eskişehir, 1963) fear of Alzheimer's and the concern over losing memories of films indicate that cinema experiences are not just a part of his memory but also an integral component of his personal identity. This illustrates that cinema carries a deep meaning and emotional value for the individual. Saim (İzmir, b. 1955) articulates how cinema enabled him to discover the world and make sense of life, describing cinema as an adventure and a cultural exploration tool. This suggests that cinema forms a part of the cinephiliac memory as an accumulation of individual experiences and reflections of lived realities.

Kumru's (İstanbul, b. 1961) statements illustrate how cinema experiences are intertwined with personal memory and how they aid in recalling oneself, past, and life journey. The remark that films 'speak to him' and prompt contemplation of his life process underscores cinema's role not just as a hobby but also as a tool for self-discovery and personal meaning-making. In this context, the participants' narratives clearly delineate the boundaries between cinema memory and cinephiliac memory. While cinema memory comprises a collection of general knowledge and memories, cinephiliac memory emerges as a more profound and personalised form of remembrance where cinema experiences are integrated with personal identity, emotions, and thoughts. These experiences highlight the importance of exploring the connection between cinema memory and cinephiliac memory to understand the deep bond individuals share with cinema and its impact on their identities. The way individuals identify, contextualise, and integrate old films into their personal experiences demonstrates how cinephiliac memory shapes personal and identity meaning.

Conclusion

This study aimed to uncover the layers of cinephiliac memory by not speaking on behalf of the audience but conversing with them, drawing from their subjective experiences and recollections. Cinephiliac memory functions as a complex repository of personal and cultural significance, where film experiences become internalised as affective capital. These memories transcend mere recollection, actively shaping identity formation and emotional landscapes while mediating between individual experience and broader cultural narratives. The testimonies demonstrate how cinematic memories operate as transformative agents in cognitive and emotional development. For instance, one participant vividly recalled the curtain rising in Ankara's Emek Cinema, describing how the gong sound and velvet drapes created an unforgettable ritualistic atmosphere. Another participant shared the profound emotional impact of watching a film about a child surviving a plane crash in the desert. The scene where the child discovers he has walked in circles, returning to the wreckage, deeply resonated with the participant, symbolising resilience and loneliness.

Participants with a profound connection with cinema do not limit this bond to merely a visual or entertainment experience. On the contrary, past experiences carry symbolic and meaningful depth for them, integrating memories that bear traces of the past into their lives. As Dalila Missero (2021: 448) also stated, past cinema experiences are inherently reflective, relational, and mediated. Cinephiliac memory significantly contributes meaning to these cinema experiences and forms personal and cultural connections. The cinephiliac moments narrated by

the interviewees emphasise the power and meaning of past experiences while also showing that each individual possesses different perspectives and emotional responses. For instance, one participant described their fear of Alzheimer's disease, expressing concern over potentially losing their cherished film memories, which they consider integral to their identity. Another participant emphasised how watching *Gone with the Wind* as a teenager left a lasting impression, particularly Scarlett O'Hara's green curtain dress and the emotional weight of her character's struggles. Thus, it can be said that cinephiliac memory is not merely about watching films but represents a rich cultural repertoire deeply intertwined with an individual's identity, memory, and life experiences.

Participants' cinephiliac memories encompass various space, architecture, rituals, and film-watching experiences. These memories reflect individuals' personal histories, identities, and emotional ties while also revealing cinema's social and cultural impacts. Cinephiliac memories represent the personalised and meaningful reflections of this experience. Factors characterising cinephiliac memory, such as 'contingency, fragment, moment, realism, index' (Schonig, 2020: 262), also serve as common elements shaping cinephiliac memory. Ultimately, this study elaborates on episodic memory and cinephiliac moments by focusing on how past cinema experiences and special memories are processed, preserved, and narrated within memory. The intersections produced by these two concepts give rise to the notion of 'cinephiliac memory' the implications of which are open for discussion.

Biographical Note

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