Memento

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Exactly, What is a Momento?

**Momento:** An object or item that serves to remind one of a person, past event, etc.; keepsake; souvenir.

The main character, Leonard uses notes, tattoos, and photographs as mementos.

The first memento we are exposed to is the photograph of a dead body who we find out is Teddy in the opening scene.
Opening
Opening

The picture fading instead of developing establishes a few things. This represents how the film begins at the end of the story and progresses toward the beginning. The fading of the photograph also establishes the mental state of its main character, his short term memory loss.

It’s also worth noting that because this scene ended with the gunshot, Leonard actually lost his memory right before shooting Teddy hence why he screams out “No!”
Plot/Story
Narration

First person - Leonard’s perspective

Movie’s structure helps with the POV

From moving from the end to the beginning we become disoriented with the facts just like Leonard.
Plot/Story

Leonard is tracking down the man who raped and murdered his wife. The difficulty, however, of locating his wife's killer is compounded by the fact that he suffers from a rare, untreatable form of memory loss. Although he can recall details of life before his accident, Leonard cannot remember what happened, where he's going, or why.

The film starts with the Polaroid photograph of a dead man. As the sequence plays backwards, the photo reverts to its undeveloped state, entering the camera before the man is shot in the head. The film then continues, alternating between black and white and color sequences.
The black and white sequences begin with Leonard Shelby, an insurance investigator, in a motel room speaking to an unseen and unknown caller. Leonard has anterograde amnesia and is unable to store recent memories, the result of an attack by two men. Leonard explains that he killed the attacker who raped and strangled his wife, but a second clubbed him and escaped. The police did not accept that there was a second attacker, but Leonard believes the attacker's name is John or James, with a last name starting with G. So, Leonard conducts his own investigation using a convoluted system of notes, Polaroid photos, and tattoos.
Plot/Story

From his occupation in the insurance industry, Leonard recalls a fellow anterograde amnesiac, Sammy Jankis. Sammy's diabetic wife, who wasn't sure if his condition was genuine, repeatedly requested Sammy's assistance with her insulin shots; she hoped he would remember having already given her an injection and would stop himself from giving her another before she died of an overdose. However, Sammy continues to administer the injections, and his wife falls into a fatal coma.
In the final black-and-white sequence, prompted by the caller, Leonard meets with Teddy, an undercover officer, who has found Leonard's "John G," Jimmy, and directs Leonard to the abandoned building. When Jimmy arrives, Leonard strangles him fatally and takes a Polaroid photo of the body. As the photo develops, the black-and-white transitions to the final color sequence. Leonard swaps clothes with Jimmy, hearing him whisper "Sammy." As Leonard has only told Sammy's story to those he has met, he suddenly doubts Jimmy's role. Teddy arrives and asserts that Jimmy was John G, but when Leonard is undeterred, Teddy reveals that he helped him kill the real attacker a year ago, and he has been using Leonard ever since.
Teddy points out that since the name "John G" is common, Leonard will cyclically forget and begin again and that even Teddy himself has a "John G" name. Further, Teddy claims that Sammy's story is Leonard's own story, a memory Leonard has repressed to escape guilt (referencing an earlier black-and-white scene where Jankis is replaced by Shelby for a split-second as he sits in the asylum).

After hearing Teddy's exposition, Leonard consciously burns Jimmy's photograph, writes a message to himself on Teddy's photograph that he should not trust Teddy, and drives off in Jimmy's car. He then plans to have Teddy's license plate number tattooed on himself, deceiving himself to eventually believe Teddy was the second attacker, leading to Teddy's eventual death.
Plot/Story - Chronological
Plot/Story - Cuts
There are also flashback scenes that happen even before the black and white timeline. These memories are objective as they are what Leonard knows to be true as they were before the accident.

However, memories are unreliable. The objectivity of Leonard's memory is come into question at the very end when Leonard is shown to have doubts about if his wife had diabetes or not.

If your eyes are fast, it's even hinted mid-way through the movie that Sammy Jenkins is Leonard.
Objective vs Subjective - Color Timeline

The movie begins in the colored timeline which works from the end to the beginning. In this timeline everything is subjective because Leonard along with the audience don’t have enough context to know what is the truth. As the movie goes on we get to learn more about the characters and events leading to John G.’s death that it becomes more objective.

The camera usually follows Leonard closely showing majority of it’s shots from his perspective/denying us of the same information he is denied.
Objective vs Subjective - B&W Timeline

The black & white timeline has an objective POV from the beginning; it’s not shown from Leonard’s perspective. There is no narration to tell us exactly what he’s thinking and the camera depicts him from a far in downward angle and not by his side all the time. Everything we know at this point in this timeline is **objective**.

Over time, it becomes more like the colored scenes where we follow Leonard and things become less true.

At the very end the two timelines merge together borrowing element from each other.
The Merging of the Timelines
Leonard Shelby

A man on path of vengeance who is hunting down the man responsible for his wife's murder, John G.

The problem is he has this condition. After the same incident that supposedly killed wife, he lost the ability to make new memories.
Leonard’s motivation for his actions in the story. She was raped and killed.

However it’s suggested later by Teddy that she survived the accident and really died in the manner of how “Sammy Jenkins wife” died.
John Edward Gammell (aka “Teddy”)

Our “villain” of the story.

At first presented as the murderer and rapist of Leonard’s wife but later revealed to be the cop assigned to help him track the real rapist a year ago.

He manipulated Leonard into killing different drug dealing J.G.’s in order to give a sense of purpose.

DON’T BELIEVE HIS LIES
HE IS THE ONE. KILL HIM.
Natalie

Natalie is the girlfriend of Jimmy, a drug dealer that helps Leonard in return for helping her.

She is a perfect example of how Leonard can been manipulated. At the beginning of the film and the near end of the story we believe Natelle to be trustworthy.

Towards the end of the film we find out how she’s took advantage of Leonard for her own gain.

“Do not trust her”
'SHE HAS ALSO LOST SOMEONE, SHE WILL HELP YOU OUT OF PITY'
Dodd

The guy that was dealing with Natelle and her boyfriend Jimmy.

He serves as an example of how easily Leonard can become manipulated as while getting chased and chasing him, Leonard makes rash decisions based on his notes.
Sammy Jenkins & His Wife

Sammy Jenkins is the character that Leonard investigated during his career with insurance and tries to determine whether or not "conditioning" would help Sammy learn new memories.

There are two interpretations of the story of Sammy Jenkins. One from Leonard and the other from Teddy.
The Story of Sammy Jenkins & His Wife
The Story of Sammy Jenkins & His Wife

According to Teddy Sammy Jankis did exist, but never had a wife. He faked his condition and Leonard exposed him as a fraud during the investigation.

After getting a similar condition Leonard then projected his own life, and his accidental killing of his own wife, onto Sammy when remembering the story.
Leonard’s tattoos

- CONSIDER THE SOURCE [then underneath it] MEMORY IS TREACHERY
- FIND HIM AND KILL HIM
- PHOTOGRAPH: HOUSE, CAR, FRIEND, FOE
- JOHN G. RAPED AND MURDERED MY WIFE
- CONDITION YOURSELF
- EAT
- remember sammy jankis

- FACT 1: MALE
- FACT 2: WHITE
- FACT 3: FIRST NAME JOHN [then, in his own hand] OR JAMES
- FACT 4: LAST NAME G________
- FACT 5: DRUGDEALER
- FACT 6: car license number SG13 7IU
- I’M NO DIFFERENT
- HIDE YOUR WEAKNESS

- DON'T TRUST
- SHE IS GONE TIME STILL PASSES
- buy film
- CAMERA DOESN'T LIE
- NOTES CAN BE LOST
- HABIT & ROUTINE
- LEARN BY REPETITION
- NEVER ANSWER THE PHONE
- [dreamed of] I’VE DONE IT
Leonard’s tattoos
Leonard’s tattoos

There are different categories of tattoos

1st Category - Everyday things: Eat, condition himself, adapt through habit and routine and repetition, buy film.

2nd Category - Cautionary tattoos: Never answer the phone, notes can be lost, don't trust, hide your weakness, consider the source, memory is treachery, and remember sammy jankis

3rd Category - Other
“remember sammy jankis tattoo”

Our hands are probably the part of our body we look at most, which is why people write things on their hands when they want to remember them.

On Leonard's hand, the “remember sammy jankis tattoo” is written. This is one of the most important tattoos to Leonard because it's a warning against having a poor system.
“remember sammy jankis tattoo”
Leonard’s other tattoos

“She is gone and time still passes tattoos” - Leonard's wife's death hasn't always been so solid in his memory. This suggests everytime leonard loses his memory he still thinks his wife is still with him only to be hit again with the truth, she is dead.

“I'm no different” - No certain interpretation for this tattoo. Some believe it may be him reminding himself that he is no different from people. Others believe that its to tell himself that he is no different than who he was before the incident which is true from his personal identity but not how others see him.
Theme

Does Leonard really want a resolution to the story or a purpose?

Leonard already killed the original John G., he took out 12 pages from a police file to create a puzzle he could never solve, framed Teddy, and conditioned himself into believing he didn’t kill his own wife.

“You’re living” - Teddy

“Only for revenge” - Leonard
“You’re living only” “Only for Revenge”
“So what if you lie to yourself, we all do it.”
Memento is a good story because it explores how people will always strive to find a purpose in the world even when that means lying to themselves. The message behind the movie Memento is sometimes people would rather have a purpose to live rather than an actual resolution. If Leonard were to have the resolution he got he is bound to live idel like the story of Jenkins.
Four V's

Voyeuristic: The movie is voyeuristic because we can see a lot of Leonards private life which some of his private life is seeing how his wife had not just died but also an accident in which she almost did die.

Visceral: The movie is also visceral as we are put in the perspective of Leonard, each decision he makes based on the information he’s given makes sense. If the movie was played forward from the other characters perspective we’d probably yell at Leonard for being an idiot, but as we are just as confused as he is, his gut feelings make sense.
Four 4 V's Cont.

Vicarious: We can feel his emotions because we can understand his pain of losing his wife and because the movie is only giving us the information that it wants to show us which will make us feel bad for him and what happened to his wife until the very end where we find out the truth.

Verisimilitude: Throughout the movie we found that the movie was real but what really happened to Leonard's wife was a lie. It was a lie because he was the one that killed his wife but for him to forget he lumped it with the sammy jenkins thing.
Christopher Nolan's Memento is a neo-noir film structured to align the viewer with Leonard Shelby, a man presumably on the hunt for the person who murdered his wife, but who cannot remember anything that happens or happened after the traumatizing event of his wife's supposed death. To, in a sense, throw the viewer directly into the action of the moment with no context is to show them how Leonard feels when he finds himself places and has no idea what he is doing or how he got there. To achieve this effect in every color scene of the film following Shelby's investigation, the film has been edited to begin on the final scene of Leonard's 'investigation' and progress backwards to the beginning of the story.
Terms/Elements/Concept Cont.

With this backward structure, the audience is able to slowly get a feel for the characters Leonard interacts with while never knowing what had just happened moments ago. This allows us to understand Leonard's constant cognitive dissonance, as he can only trust his own notes and tattoos as he meets people for the first time over and over again, finding that they already know a lot about him, and that he was the one that told them. This allows us to truly absorb the heart of the film; a question of what reality is and whose eyes really see the truth, for everyone distorts their own memories.
Though the backward narrative does well to put us inside Leonard's head, it creates a film that is somewhat incomprehensible and hard to understand without multiple viewings. At least, it would had not this backward story been interwoven with a second story, a prequel of sorts to the backward story, and one which moves chronologically. Alternating, one after another, the backward story is told in color and the chronological prequel is told in black and white. The alternating pattern is straightforward, but effective, allowing each couplet of scenes to inform one-another.
Diegetic Elements/Non Diegetic Elements

Diegetic

Some examples of diegetic elements in the film are ordinary things like the telephone ringing to the sound of Leonard's gun being fired.

Non Diegetic

The examples of non diegetic elements in the film are when Leonard is being chased by a random person whom he has no memory of why he is being chased. During this time we get a brief voiceover from Leonard wondering who the guy is that he is chasing.
“I’ve done it”
Parallelism

The main example of Parallelism is the story of Sammy Jenkins and his wife. Towards the end of movie, the audience realizes that Sammy Jenkins is actually Leonard and he killed his wife by insulin overdose from failing the conditioning by continually forgetting that he already gave his wife insulin.
Motivation

There is a flash of his fantasy with a tattoo that reads “I’ve done it”. This is him fanatising a perfect happy ending in which he escapes his murderous suffering for revenge, but he decides to stay in it by marking that Teddy is the next John G anyways. Like the phrase, “Ignorance is Bliss”. He is doing this because he wants to find that happy ending that he knows is impossible. So he continues on regardless of the truth, filled with rage and vengeance forever to find that perfect ending.
Range

Range - An example of range occurs during the scene when Leonard fights with Natalie. She takes advantage of Leonard by making him kill Dodd because he was harassing her with her boyfriend’s drug money. She knows she can say and do whatever she wants and still be “friends” with Leonard. Leonard eventually punches her and she walks out to her car with all the pens knowing he will forget what just happened. She then walks in and pretends her bruise and bloody nose was caused by Dodd and his boys.
Depth

Camera views are usually close to Leonard within the colored scenes and from a distance in the black and white scenes.

There are scenes where we do not follow Leonard or his perspective and the camera actually lingers on in the scene such as when Natelle is spitting in Leonards cup.
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