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Counter-Memory Agents of Thatcherism. How British Filmmakers Challenge the Dominant Perceptions of the 1980s.

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Citation

Troost, B. (2023). *Counter-Memory Agents of Thatcherism.: How British Filmmakers Challenge the Dominant Perceptions of the 1980s.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

**Counter-Memory Agents of Thatcherism: How British Filmmakers Challenge the
Dominant Perceptions of the 1980s.**

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BA Thesis

Semester 2 – 2022-2023

BA English Language and Culture

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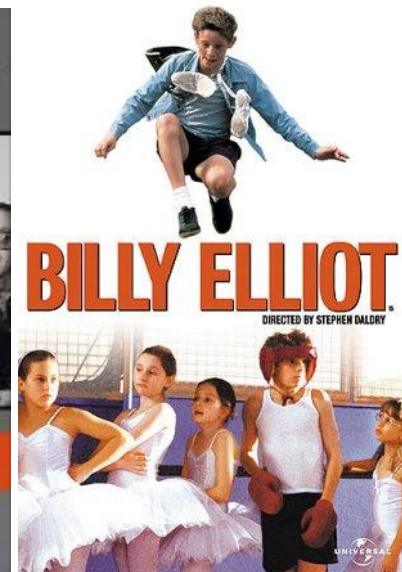
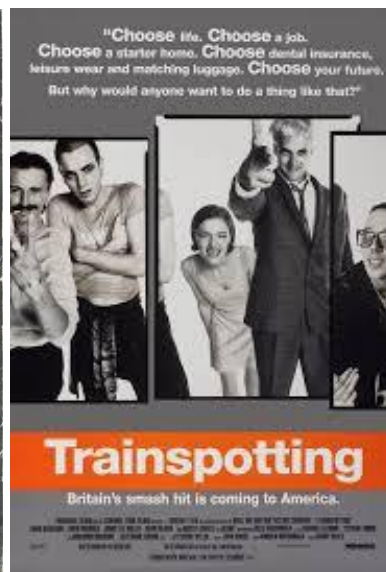


Table of Contents

List of figures	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2 Theory.....	6
2.1 Memory Theory.....	6
2.2 Class.....	8
2.3 Thatcherism.....	9
2.4 Counter-voices.....	10
2.5 Comedy.....	11
3. The Commitments	12
4. Trainspotting	19
5. Billy Elliot	26
6. Comparison	31
7. Conclusion	33
Works cited.....	37

List of figures

Figure 3.1. (<i>The Commitments</i> 00.01.30)	13
Figure 3.2 (<i>The Commitments</i> 01.44.04)	19
Figure 4.1 (<i>Trainspotting</i> 00.44.55)	21
Figure 4.2 (<i>Trainspotting</i> 00.31.50)	24
Figure 5.1 (<i>Billy Elliot</i> 00.02.40)	27
Figure 5.2 (<i>Billy Elliot</i> 00.59.28)	28
Figure 5.3 (<i>Billy Elliot</i> 00.59.29)	29
Figure 5.4 (<i>Billy Elliot</i> 01.38.09)	30

1. Introduction

On 31 October 1987, Britain's neo-conservative and first-ever female Prime Minister Thatcher famously expresses her view on British society with the words "There is no such thing as society" (Thatcher interview in *Women's Own* 8-10), while Queen Elizabeth II reportedly labelled Thatcher's politics as "uncaring, confrontational and socially divisive" (LA Times Archives, 23 July 1986). Certainly, the so-called 'Iron Lady' sparked polarisation in British society during the 1980s. As contested as her politics are nowadays, throughout the 1980s, Thatcher promoted her politics as the only solution to "make Great Britain great again" (Margaret Roberts' general election address 3 February 1950). The cultural texts following her time in office reflect the political tensions of that era. I argue that the films in this corpus contribute to constructing the memory of neglected regional narratives in the era of Thatcherism, an ideology that suppressed the voice of working-class people in Britain and Ireland during the 1980s.

In my thesis, I will explore and compare three films issued in the decades after the 1980s for their representation of neglected regional working-class memory – for which I use the term counter-memory throughout my thesis – of Thatcher's politics. Counter-memory presents the narratives of the people who struggle in the dominant culture. All three of the films in this corpus are directed by British filmmakers. *The Commitments* (1991), directed by Alan Parker, is set in Dublin, Ireland. *Trainspotting* (1996), directed by Danny Boyle, is set in Edinburgh, Scotland. Stephen Daldry's *Billy Elliot* (2000) is set in County Durham, England. I critically examine how these films challenge or reinforce the capitalist hegemony of the 1980s and how their critique of society influences the memory of that era. Overall, I argue that the abovementioned films represent different sides of working-class counter-memory in a kaleidoscopic view of the same: counter-memory of the socio-economic effects of the political strategies in Britain and Ireland of the 1980s.

To analyse these films as agents of regional counter-memory in Britain and Ireland during the 1980s, I use three different mnemonic concepts in my thesis: collective memory, cultural memory, and counter-memory. I will briefly list my definitions now and provide more in-depth explanations with references to the key theorists in the next chapter. Firstly, Maurice Halbwachs' 1950 coinage of collective memory (Brian 7) represents a community's shared recollection and interpretation of political choices and historical events. The collective memory helps to form, validate, and reinforce the collective identity of that group (Brian 5-15). Then, Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as follows: in each society and era, commonly used "texts, images and rituals" (15) create and support the shared knowledge and identity of a group's past and present. Lastly, I use George Lipsitz' definition of Michel Foucault's 1977 concept of counter-memory. Lipsitz defines counter-memory as memory that "looks to the past for the hidden histories of those excluded from dominant narratives" (162). Thus, memory reshapes history. I apply these concepts to substantiate that my films act as agents of counter-memory. Additionally, I use Stuart Hall's scholarship for the references to Thatcherism and the counter-voices in popular culture. Hence, I argue that these films become part of the cultural memory and consequently contribute to the collective memory.

My body of research displays peripheral working-class counter-memories of Thatcherism in the British Isles. In Britain and Ireland's increasingly divided society of the 1980s, a contrast grows between the booming London economy, representing the dominant classes or hegemony, versus the regional underclasses who suffer the consequences of Thatcher's politics. According to Morgan, 1980s businesspeople and "smaller entrepreneurs" (443) welcome the abolition of the British welfare system and favour neoliberal capitalist policies, while their opponents believe that the welfare system forms an essential part of a developed society (Hall "The Great Moving Right Show" 374-393). Unable to afford the private property schemes, people in the region endure the crushed power of Britain's trade

unions when Thatcher executes her state-owned industry privatization strategies. Riddell (160) shows that in Northern Ireland, the North of England, and in Scotland and Wales, unemployment and poverty soared during the Thatcher years. Right on England's doorstep, the economic hardships of the 1980s in Ireland provide a stark contrast to the image of the booming 1980s promoted by Thatcher. In these divided times, the experiences of the working classes (Perchard 79-81) start to emerge through expressions of popular culture. I examine three films within this context.

Firstly, set in the poorest areas of Dublin, *The Commitments* reveals a theme of working-class survival strategies through its light-hearted musical-comedy mode. Protagonist Jimmy sets off on the path of founding a band, called The Commitments. The group emerges against the backdrop of a poverty-stricken country, in which Parker invites his viewers to acknowledge Dublin's youngsters' lack of prospects in life. Additionally, Parker contradicts Thatcher's promotion of individualism by contrasting a positive view on the band as a collective with the disadvantages of the individual bandmembers attempts to stand out. Using comedy, he gently shapes his counter-voice to the capitalist movement of the time. Therefore, I argue that the humour in *The Commitments* elicits its international audiences to consider working-class youngsters' search for a better life.

Secondly, released five years later, *Trainspotting* portrays a distinctively less wholesome tone. This film displays the underclass gloominess and despair in Scottish and British society through a post-modern clash of dialogue, image, and soundtrack. As a result, *Trainspotting's* audiences connect the young heroin addicts' living conditions with the political decisions of Thatcher's government. According to Stalcup (123), Edinburgh's heroin epidemic is a direct result of Thatcher's politics. Although friendship and community are recurring themes in *Trainspotting*, the film challenges these concepts by exposing its protagonists' individualist goals. Furthermore, *Trainspotting's* dark comedy functions as the

carrier of a counter-memory to the hegemonic memory of the past by allowing the underclasses' heroin epidemic to penetrate the cultural memory of the era.

Thirdly, *Billy Elliot*'s release in 2000 has enough temporal distance from the original events to offer a historical overview of the consequences of Thatcher's politics and the hegemonic perceptions of the 1980s. This film interweaves Billy's individual battle to follow his passion for ballet with the collective battle of the mining strikes. The film shows the strikes that follow the dismantling of the mining industry while also pinpointing the results of Thatcher's deliberate policy of reducing the power of the unions in Britain's industrial heartlands. Although Billy's struggle to develop his individual talent reinforces a Thatcherite individualism, this film clearly visualises that Billy can only achieve his ballet career with the support of his community. Like the previous films, humour in *Billy Elliot* invites audiences to consider working-class viewpoints of political decisions during the 1980s through the involvement of the main characters in the 1980s miners' strikes.

Since the films in my corpus have not yet been considered as agents of counter-memory, with scarce academic research available on instances of counter-memory in either of the films, I would like to underline the originality of my arguments and research. I suggest that these films contribute to establishing the counter-memory of Thatcher's politics, as "instruments for sense-making" (Erl and Rigney 1) and consequently change Britain and Ireland's collective memory of the 1980s.

All in all, these films build on expectations of how underprivileged people cope with the direct and indirect power dynamics of the hegemony in the 1980s. By their critical and sometimes even satirical or mocking display of working-class identity, the three films address how the lives of the common people contrast with the hegemony. In my thesis, I focus on how my films portray regional difficulties and the social consequences of Thatcherism for the working classes, in terms of their depiction of despair, unemployment, and poverty. As

versions of the period they symbolise, and in their modes of cultural representation, these films serve as agents of cultural memory. Supported by scholarship on Thatcherism, class, hegemony, and memory as described in the next section, I claim that these works create cultural memory through their display of regional counter-memory of Thatcherism in Ireland, Scotland, and the industrial North of England.

2 Theory

In this chapter, I will explore the theories related to my thesis in general. These theories need introduction before I apply them to the case studies to establish how memory theory, theories of class, Thatcherism, and comedy function within the research corpus.

2.1 Memory Theory

To analyse the counter-memory of my corpus, I compare theories of collective memory, cultural memory, and counter-memory with my body of research, which represents the memory of suppressed voices in the 1980s. The collective memory is always challenged by new insights, perspectives, and contrasting recollections. For individual memories to become part of the collective memory, a democratic process challenges the dominant group's perspective of the past. Leading memory theorist Aleida Assmann (214-17, 368) explains that culture provides images that force people to see beyond the usual. Thus, memory arises, develops and survives across generations. She argues that the recollection of events, periods, or experiences demands a mnemonic process that "shifts, distorts, reevaluates and reshapes [single memories into] a driving force" (19) that can suppress or resurface neglected narratives. In my analyses, I describe the collective memory of either the dominant classes or the underclasses of the 1980s in Ireland and Britain.

Regarding cultural memory, I emphasize the inextricable interweaving of written history, personal memory, and cultural memory. Cultural memory includes many different and often contradictory memories, which all demand the right to collective acknowledgement. Sturken presents cultural memory as a cross-fertilisation of individual memories that generate cultural meaning, emphasizing that cultural memory is a constant “re-evaluation of the past” (17) negotiated by the present. So, scholarship of cultural memory recognises the transformation of individual experiences into shared claims. Consequently, I argue that the cultural memory of a nation is always in flux under the influence of counter-memory.

Opposite to the dominant narrative lies counter-memory. The corpus shows and elicits the counter-memory of the lower classes in Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England. Counter-memory represents the perspective of the suppressed narrative in a given culture at a given time (Foucault 139-64). The examined films oppose the dominant image of the neo-conservative politics of the 1980s. Thus, they contribute to the cultural memory and their narrative will enter the collective memory of British and Irish society. According to Huyssen (21-38), resurfacing local perspectives and reconsidering dominant narratives influence the collective memory. In the counter-movement’s striving for acknowledgement, film functions as an agent to form, preserve, and change the memory of a culture (Rigney “Remaking Memory” 12). Therefore, I claim that the films in my corpus provide a socio-economic counter-memory of the period that Thatcher was in power.

An example of how counter-memory affects the collective memory lies in *Mississippi Burning* (1988), another Alan Parker film. At its release, this film sparked a nation-wide interest in the US, prompting all sides of the debate into joint commemorations of the killings in Mississippi. According to Rigney (“Remembering Hope”), memory activism through various commemorations – including film – facilitates the reframing of past memories and supports the community. Her argument also applies to the Mississippi killings. With the racial

violence against the black community – the counter-memory presented in *Mississippi Burning* – and the white community’s role openly on display, a process of redemption and understanding was triggered in both black and white Mississippi communities. Whitlinger’s study (648-70) proves the importance of cultural memory and counter-memory caused by the film’s release. She reports that the film contributed to developing awareness and recognition of the horrible events in the Mississippi community (665) and paved the way for an interracial commemoration (658). In this way, films both represent and generate counter-memory.

All in all, cultural memory needs a constant influx of counter-memory to value the perspectives of other groups within the collective, for the collective to embrace a shared memory.

2.2 Class

Studying regional counter-memory demands a definition of a ubiquitous notion in popular culture: class. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1-17), social class is shaped by several forms of capital. These forms include social networks, economic resources, and cultural capital. Notably, he claims that cultural capital – personal preferences, and common interests – helps people navigate social hierarchies. As such, cultural capital determines social class and supersedes the importance of economic dimensions. During her years in office, Thatcher distinctly limited references to class, attempting to erase the class system from British society. According to McGlynn, Thatcher’s policy of reducing references to the “conceptual category” (310) of class has not received sufficient attention. Therefore, it is crucial to study regional and lower-class counter-memory in relation to Thatcher’s rule. In this thesis, I examine films for their portrayals of the unheard voices of the 1980s.

Opposite to the group of unheard voices lies the concept of hegemony. The economic power of the dominant classes – the hegemony – enables the propagation of their ideologies, and thus silences opposing messages. Antonio Gramsci defines hegemony as a mode by

which the dominant classes of the nation rule by consent of the people, who install and support the governing party to rule the nation (Storey 69-75). Farrall & Hay suggest that “key social forces” (320) collaborate to assert and maintain dominance of ideology and politics. Building on previous cultural theories by Marx and Gramsci, Hall argues that the dominant often ignore the circumstances of the dominated and deprive the underclasses of their voice (“Encoding” 269). Thus, Hall expands prior scholarship into objections to the Thatcherite hegemony. By extension, I argue that counter-memory requires building on other cultural expressions of discontent. Moreover, I equate Assmann’s earlier quote on the formation of cultural memory (395) to the construction of counter-memory to prove that it takes time to oppose “preferred readings” (Hall “Encoding” 269). Analysing the corpus in terms of counter-memory, I aim to prove that in the context of this corpus counter-memory becomes more explicit over time.

2.3 Thatcherism

Before describing the dominant view on 1980s politics, I will briefly define the term “Thatcherism” (Hall “The Great” 376). Characterized by a combination of his anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist convictions, Hall opposes Thatcher’s policies. He condemns her encouragement of traditional values, her discouragement of governmental control, and her free market stimulation as the only way to establish economic growth. In Savage’s words, Thatcherism involves the “application of market forces, jingoism, a hard-line morality and the explicit disenfranchisement of the dispossessed” (541). According to Farrall & Hay, Thatcher stimulates individuality at the cost of the collective (9). Her advocates are businesspeople, stockbrokers, and yuppies. Morgan claims that this 1980s hegemony hails the political swing towards a “new wave of enterprise and individualism” (438). After a difficult start, the military victories in the Falklands war boost Thatcher’s image into a new “Boadicea”

(Morgan 461), thus solidifying her image of “The Iron Lady”. In this context, I will outline Hall’s objections to the Thatcherite hegemony.

2.4 Counter-voices

Dominating narratives of “lavish lifestyles” (Littler 212) and spending easily earned money suppressed socio-economic data of rising unemployment, income inequality, and poverty during the Thatcher years. In the 1980s, Hall formulates an academic counter-voice that validates real-life working-class experiences under Thatcher’s politics. Seeking understanding for the political developments of the time, Hall describes how Thatcher’s ideology threatens working-class structures (“The Great” 374-92) .

Hall refutes the deliberate dismantling of the welfare state, and Thatcher’s overall anti-statist policies (383). He rebuts the intentional budget-cuts on state education and signals the social consequences of diminishing the power of the unions. Thatcherism, according to Hall (383), signifies state deregulation. Thatcher rejects collectivism and transforms a socialist country into an individualist consumer society, with the declared aim of “making Britain ‘Great’ once more” (Hall 384). Linking 1980s politics to 1990s reflections of that period, Eley (127-139) signals a response of British Filmmakers to the “seemingly unstoppable casualising of labour markets (de-skilling, de-unionising, de-regulating, de-nationalising) with their disorganising of the material circumstances and social relations of working-class life” (130). These counter-memory representations remain alive in the cinema.

While researching counter-memory in my films, I caution that with their “versions of the real” (Hill 134) my films could as well underpin hegemonic values. According to Hall, “the reality effect” (“The rediscovery of Ideology” 110) in media causes media representations — read films — to construct a sense of reality that appears natural and inevitable and often reinforces dominant ideologies. So, to an audience seeking confirmation of Thatcher’s values, these films might support Thatcher’s morals. In all three, a willing

viewer finds supportive arguments in favour of capitalism, neo-liberalism and individualism. However, following Hall's arguments, I propose that whether they represent the hegemony or counter-perspectives, my films do influence the collective memory with their representations of poverty and working-class community, as does their comedy.

2.5 Comedy

All three films deliver critical reactions to society through humour and satire and are classified as comedies (IMDb.com). Therefore, I analyse what comedy means for cultural memory and counter-memory. Historically, critics have regarded comedy as popular or mass culture rather than elite culture. However, nowadays comedy transcends all social levels, as seen in Friedman's claim that today's privileged classes are glad to consume both "high and low cultural forms" (350) for their amusement. As to why comedy pleases its audiences, McGowan mentions a cohesion between "difference and sameness" (54) referring to the captivating gap between expectations and reality. For example, in *The Commitments*, comedy provides a contrast to the convention of a happy ending with the slapstick breakup of the band. At the exact moment when they would have been discovered by Wilson Pickett, the band falls apart. Joey's words, "success of the band was never relevant; [...] this way it is poetry" (1:45:23 – 1:45:38) emphasize the contrasting expectations that are so funny in this film. Similarly, the unexpected final scene of *Trainspotting*'s protagonist stealing his friends' criminally obtained money gratifies audiences and causes grins of laughter because this ending supersedes even the viewers worst expectations. Likewise, *Billy Elliot*'s funniest moments are created by showing big contrasts between powerless individuals and a powerful, hostile state. For example, a poor old woman protects Tony from the armed police just by resolutely closing the door after him (00.52.53). This similarity-versus-contrast effect of comedy creates connection with broad audiences and enables films to convey their societal

critique. In my body of research, comedy converges with counter-memory. The examined films form contrasting voices to Thatcherism, and with the films' humour, social critique transcends diverse in-crowds, social class limits, and even national boundaries, given the international success of all three films. According to 't Hart (1-20) "Humour and laughter can serve as a powerful tool in social protest" (1). Through comedy, audiences connect with diverging views or experiences and consider the inconceivable. Thus, the films in my corpus function as agents that foreground the counter-memory of the working classes.

3. The Commitments

With rising complaints towards the end of Thatcher's reign of an ever-growing divide in British society since the early 1980s, I read Dublin-based *The Commitments*' late 1980s story for its contrast to the economically thriving Thatcher years in neighbouring Britain. By adopting the Victorian distinction between "the deserving poor" (Evans 607) and the "undeserving poor" (607), Thatcher justifies her approach to the less fortunate in Britain. Reflecting on the previous decade, British filmmakers, like Alan Parker, start to visualise the suppressed voices of the 1980s and early 1990s. To counter Thatcher's assertion of a share for "everyone in that growing prosperity" (Fowler cited in Riddell 149), Parker seeks attention for the increased poverty and unemployment throughout the British Isles during the 1980s in *The Commitments*.

Additionally, there was the Irish political elite of the time who attempted to navigate between the British government and the conflicts north of their border, the Troubles, while an unyielding Thatcher maintained her staunch conservative attitude during the Troubles (Morgan 1990). This situation not only affects the people in Northern Ireland, but also deeply affects the people in the neighbouring Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, according to Norquay and Smyth (28-45) the film plays with expectations of Irish identity. I suggest this

surfaces through its comedic themes. The opposition to Thatcher’s message of a booming Britain is already present in *The Commitments*’ depiction of poverty at the Dublin marketplace (00.01.30–00.02.53).



Figure 3.1. (00.01.30)

Through the gritty images of Dublin, with fire, rubbish and horses in the streets, the film portrays the severe economic depressions of the 1980s in the Republic of Ireland (Morgan 1990). So, right on England’s doorstep, Parker illustrates a counter-memory that opposes the hegemony of the booming London finance markets in the 1980s.

In an interview, Parker mentions his desire to feature a group of youngsters that “use the music to get out of the world they’re in” (DVD features 00.2.39-42). He parallels them with the destitute circumstances of his own youth in North London and thereby creates a counter-memory of the young lower classes. Parker confirms the extent of this group, stating, “that’s pretty relevant wherever you are in the world” (00.02.45-50). Released shortly after Thatcher’s reign, *The Commitments* provides the least explicit counter-memory of this corpus. According to O’Toole, *The Commitments*, bears a subdued protest voice in its “quiet political commentary” (39). O’Toole’s comment supports my idea that counter-memory starts with subtle terms of discomfort before they turn into clear expressions of working-class counter-

memory. Clearly, Jimmy's goal expressed with the words: I'm "puttin' a band together" (00.10.06) is an early step in constructing counter-memory to the hegemony of the economically prosperous side of neighbouring Britain. According to Norquay and Smith (28-45), author Roddy Doyle develops and reshapes the regional and marginalised narratives in his 1987 novel, later adapted for film. With his *subdued* political commentary, Parker creates the counter-memory of the impoverished British working classes; those unable to profit from Thatcherism. His film elicits audiences from all classes to consider the narratives of the young and deprived in their own countries. Additionally, Parker creates sympathy for the misery in Ireland, a country dominated by economic depressions, "extremely high unemployment" (O'Toole 39) and the conflicts of bordering nations. Parker presents Ireland's political violence in a humoristic manner. Instead of portraying outraged counter-voices, the characters joke about the Troubles. Joey's comic remark that "the Irish wouldn't be shooting the arses off each other if they had soul" (00.24.04) directs viewers to the Irish Troubles (Kunz 53-57) and simultaneously links this violence with soul music as a form of protest that soothed the pain of the enslaved African Americans. So, by positioning American soul music as an avenue of hope in *The Commitments*, the film inserts a counter-memory into the existing cultural memory that incorporates the experiences of the working classes into the collective memory of the 1980s.

Although this film has been dismissed as merely providing amusement (Ebert), it can be regarded as a considerable work of counter-memory similar to *Mississippi Burning*. *Mississippi Burning* reveals slavery's history and the racial divide in America. As soul music is the protest-voice of the Black Americans, *The Commitments* parallels the fate of the Black Americans to the injustice of the class divide in Ireland through soul music. Hence the film's theme of escapism. In his making-of documentary, Parker explicitly refers to his focus on entertainment as diversion from misery, not for mere commercial reasons but to

unambiguously illustrate the profound desires of poor young people to flee the likelihood of being “on the dole” (00.40.23). I equate Parker’s intentions to Loach’s desire “to move our audience to new conclusions and insights about society and their lives” (28). For that purpose, Parker positions soul music as an opportunity for a better life in this film. For instance, through Jimmy’s character conveying his class’s explicit dreams:

Jimmy: You want to be different. You want to stand out from the rest o’ the tossers. You want to get up and shout: I’m Derek f***ing Scully and I’m not a tosser! ‘Isn’t that it? That’s it, Jimmy. Well, don’t forget it! Unless you want to spend the rest o’ your life wrappin’ frozen f***in’ chickens! (00.58.59–59.13).

Jimmy’s monologue expresses his desire to escape the poverty and lack of possibilities for young working-class people in Ireland. The connection with soul music as a means to escape their misery occurs in the next scene:

Jimmy: There’s lots of music yeh can get off on, but... soul is more than that. It takes yeh somewhere else. It grabs you by the balls and lifts you above the shite. (00.28.46–54)

Jimmy refers to Black soul music as a carrier of hope that helped generations of Black Americans overcome the violent and systematic racial divide in America. The soul music in this film uplifts the band members to a better place. The “shite” (00.28.54) refers to their hopeless perspectives, while music in Irish culture serves as an agent of hope. In *the Commitments*, soul music provides a potential way for young people to escape the lack of opportunities and develop a sufficient financial basis to earn a living. Although the film presents itself as a light-hearted musical comedy, the theme of escapism masks subtle political references to the Irish recession, as seen in the following scenes: Unemployment officer: “Mr. Rabitte, you’ve been collecting unemployment benefits for two years. Are you telling me you can’t get a job?” (00.40.10) Jimmy: “We’re a third world country. What can yeh do?”

(00.40.11-13). According to Parker (Making-of doc, 00.02.45–48), in the 1980s, the Irish either escaped through emigration, by becoming professional football players, or, like U2 and Sinead O’Connor, become famous musicians. Accordingly, Jimmy’s unemployed saxophone player, Dean Fay, mentions that “It feels much better bein’ an unemployed musician than an unemployed pipe fitter” (00.40.32–36). So, for Dean Fay, the fate of being unemployed feels less gloomy while taking a shot at a music career. Soul music for *The Commitments*’ characters creates the hope of a better future. At the same time, the film itself provides its audience with hope and understanding of the neglected working-class experience of the 1980s. Parker’s explicit escapist trope, therefore, brings the position of the unheard voices to the attention of the mainstream audience and therefore matters as counter-memory.

Befitting its comedy genre, *The Commitments* uses the band’s working-class identity, similar to the way the working-class uses comedy for relief. Humour reduces the stress of oppressed groups, while conveying messages of social protest. Accordingly, Whitehead mentions comedy as a “survival mechanism” (4) for the working classes and ‘t Hart (1-20) mentions that “jokes are often viewed as safety valves” (7). This has become an essential part of the working-class identity portrayed in *The Commitments*. Strikingly, the film uses humour to challenge its audiences to consider the lower classes as living individuals with vivid dreams. Two examples of this occur in reporter Roddy Craig’s interview with Jimmy and Outspan:

Craig: So, how did this band come about?

[...]

Jimmy: Destiny! We’re a band with a mission.

Craig: What kind of mission?

Jimmy: Bringin’ soul to Dublin. Bringin’ the music to the proletariat

Outspan: We're against racial and sexual discrimination, apartheid, and heroin
(01.19.58–01.20.06).

Here, Outspan's interjection refers to the punk/new-wave rock band The Clash's mission statement: "We're anti-violence, we're anti-racist and we're pro-creative" (Biography - The Clash Official Website) and shows that countercultures explicitly express their purpose in life. At the same time, Outspan's jumbled citation creates a funny link to his new wave appearance rather than the Black identity of the soul musician that he should exhibit in his band, The Commitments. Then, the second example follows:

Jimmy: We're the guerrillas of soul. We hit, then we sink back into the night.

Jimmy peeking at Craig's notebook: That's guerrilla with a U, not an O.

(01.20.09-17)

The homophones in this dialogue – words that sound the same but are spelled differently – generate a pun. The comic effect lies in the difference in meaning between the serious political engagement of a guerrilla and the fact that a gorilla is an ape. This way, the dialogue emphasises the tongue-in-cheek mood of the film. By combining the theme of soul music as a form of protest with jokes that serve as comic relief for the poor, the film underlines working-class identity. Rigney ("Remaking" 10-23) explains that surprising aesthetic effects in novels, poetry, or film shape memorability of the silenced desires and pleasures of the working class for middle-class audiences. So, the film reveals a contrast with their own middle-class lives through this humoristic trigger of counter-memory. With the subtle referral to the guerrilla rebellion, Parker shapes the oppositional stance of the film, which acknowledges the suppressed voices of the counter-memory community.

Another important counter-message of this film is its anti-individualist mood, shown through clear images of joy, friendship, and togetherness while contrasting later renderings of individualism in the film. Parker explicitly counters Thatcher's encouragement of

individualism by emphasizing individuals' greater strength as part of a crowd, or as part of the band. According to Norquay and Smyth, "In a soul group, [...] the individual is less significant than the ways in which individuals combine and inter-relate" (34). Clearly, Parker presents the strength of the collective by associating the rhythm of the band with the appreciation of a joint effort, and by contrasting successful performances with failures when individualism emerges. The following scene shows the destructive side of individuality:

Dean: "I went to hell learnin' the sax. Now I wanna get better. I wanna express myself."

Joey: "That's commendable, Brother Dean. But what you were playin' was not soul. Soul solos are part of the song. They have corners. You were spiralling. That's Jazz."

Dean: "I'm just tryin' to stretch meself."

Joey: "Jazz is musical wankin'. If you wanna wank, use that thing in your hand, not your sax!" (01.18.58 – 01.19.16)

Thus, Parker condemns individuality. As the film draws near the end, Parker shows that the individual development of the band members comes at a cost when the band members' individual needs prevail over those of the group. Their slightest success causes a sudden need for "roadies", "proper tea towels", and "bottles of mineral water" (1.37.52 – 01.38.03). They quarrel over which fans belong to whom, when finally, Natalie exclaims that "they're murdering each other" (01.43.56).



Figure 3.2 (01.44.04)

Of course, this all seems comical, yet the band's break-up confirms Parker's counter-message to the growing individualisation of society, thus emphasizing the counter-memory of the individual experiences of affected working-class members who could no longer depend on the protection of the collective.

Without a serious note in the dialogue, *The Commitments* feels like a comical celebration of the working-class counter-memory as the band's manager, Jimmy, constantly underlines their class identity. While poking fun at himself during his imaginary interviews, Jimmy firmly ordains their working-class status. Thus, this film uses humour to establish a counter-memory of the working class in a way that is accessible to audiences at all levels of society.

4. Trainspotting

Released five years after the Thatcher era, *Trainspotting* visualises the underclass youth culture in Edinburgh's poorest area, Leith. As the film opposes the success of Thatcherism with shocking images, I suggest that *Trainspotting* serves as a strong agent of counter-memory for its middle-class audiences. According to Smith, the protagonists' "hell-raising"

(9) way of life in the council estates of Edinburgh reveals young people's feeling of exclusion from the "increased prosperity" (Margaret Thatcher, House of Commons, Hansard, 17 May 1988, col. 796) that Margaret Thatcher asserted for everyone. Smith and Cardullo (158-62) also argue that the film's oppositional tone and anti-Thatcherite sentiments clearly emerge in its non-condemnatory portrayal of heroin use, violence, and thieving. According to Rigney ("Remaking") film creates counter-memory by combining "words, images, and sounds" (14) that spark interest in the lives of people not belonging to the hegemony. She further argues that works of art create awareness by shocking their audiences. Haywood defends this rebellion with the words, "history has [...] been singularly unkind to Scotland's urban youth" (158). Therefore, I consider *Trainspotting* an artwork that reveals groups that reciprocate society's rejection of its underclasses. This film displays a counterculture filled with disillusionment, emotional despair, and subsequent heroin use. The unexpected combination with black humour awakens the conscience of the hegemony, as argued by Rigney ("Remaking" 14), and thus creates an explicit counter-memory to the hegemony of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Firstly, I examine how the film's music adds meaning to the dialogue and visuals, and thereby triggers counter-mnemonic processes in its audience. *Trainspotting's* punk-rock soundtracks emphasise this film's countermovement character. Secondly, this film displays a political counter-voice in terms of its portrayal of the heroin epidemic in Edinburgh. I consult scholars (Mendelsohn; Cardullo; Norquay and Smyth (28-45) who link *Trainspotting's* split society to the abolition of the typically masculine industries in Scotland. Thirdly, as scholars (Haywood; Cardullo; 't Hart) name satire or dark humour in relation to protest, I analyse how comedy and the comic effect of the vernacular language in this film formulate the counter-memory of the underprivileged in Edinburgh. Overall, I suggest that the temporal distance of

counter-memory plays a role in *Trainspotting*'s more explicit display of counter-memory of Thatcherism.

Exploring *Trainspotting*'s soundtracks, I suggest that they contribute to the film's mood of protest. According to Smith, this film refers to the Beatles films, and exaggerates the rock paradigm of "live fast, die young" (15). In the opening scene, the "non-diegetic, commentative music" (Smith 62) by punk-rock artist Iggy Pop accentuates Renton's anti-capitalist monologue: "Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television. Choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers" (0.30 – 0.43). According to Smith, Iggy Pop's punk-movement lyrics support Renton's anti-establishment monologue. Scholars (Stalcup 126; Smith 20-1) describe former heroin addict Iggy Pop's "Lust for Life" as suitable support for Renton's escape into addiction as "psychic defence" (Stalcup 126) rather than choosing life. Later, punk artist Lou Reed's "Perfect Day" (44.56 – 48.18) lyrics ironically narrate the chilling visuals of Renton's accidental heroin overdose. Without much dialogue and just the images of Renton's body disappearing underground, as if in a coffin, it is Lou Reed's lyrics and melody that inform the viewers of the protagonist's slipping away into oblivion.



Figure 4.1 (00.44.55)

In comparison, the lines “You made me forget myself / I thought I was / Someone else, someone good” allegedly refer to Reed's struggle with heroin addiction (Perfect Day by Lou Reed - Songfacts). Clearly, the discourse of the film is emphasised by the soundtrack here. According to Norquay and Smyth this freewheeling script-writing technique “highlights the loss of individual self-control” (34) caused by *Trainspotting*'s protagonists' drug abuse. I argue that the absence of the narrator highlights punk culture's ultimate desire to discard traditional values and define their own destiny. In describing the punk-rock movement of the 1970s, Savage (541) confirms punk's anti-consumerist messages, dissident beliefs, and pervasive drug abuse, until the social rebellion it represented was overtaken by Thatcher's Conservative society. Therefore, the rebellion of punk music in *Trainspotting* so accurately accentuates the counter-memory of Scotland's wasted youth.

Already in the title, *Trainspotting* presents anti-Thatcherite messages through its implication of drug use. According to Mendelsohn the title hints at the “obsessional, hopeless nature of the addict's life” (33), invoking the heroin junkie's compulsion and despair in life. In effect, the film's allusions to drug addiction imply a split in society of which *Trainspotting*'s half is inhabited by the dropouts of the conservative system. Stalcup blames the “gloom of the Iron Lady's reign of terror” (122), and Haywood (150-1) describes that people who feel alienated from society by poverty and unemployment are forced into a parallel reality. *Trainspotting* portrays people who declare not to participate in traditional ways of living. Renton's line: “I chose not to choose life: I chose something else. And the reasons? There are no reasons. Who needs reasons when you've got heroin?” (00.02.00) underlines the existence of juxtaposing societies in Britain, just as Renton's voice-over tells, “there was no such thing as society and even if there was, I most certainly had nothing to do with it” (01.00.21). This cynical remark confirms the junkies' parallel world beside Edinburgh's traditional society. Leith draws in people who feel rejected by Thatcher's neo-liberal conservatism. I propose to

link *Trainspotting*'s heroin use with Rigney's ("Remembering") claims that "History is where it hurts" (368-380), so the painful stories form a counter-memory based on the experiences of the people who were negatively affected by Thatcher's politics.

When exploring *Trainspotting* as an agent of Thatcherism's regional counter-memory, many scholars (Smith; Perchard; Haywood) mention the film's portrayal of disempowered working-class men. According to Smith, *Trainspotting* visualises this cause of the heroin epidemic in its portrayal of the "phenomenon of working-class men [who are] displaced from their economic, and thus their social and psychological roles" (12). Scholars (Smith; Perchard; Norquay and Smyth) suggest that films show men's lack of purpose due to the abolition of the traditional Scottish industries and the subsequent unemployment and poverty. However, *Trainspotting*'s relationship to counter-memory demands a brief word of nuance. Given that Renton betrays his friends on multiple occasions, but certainly at the end, *Trainspotting* might, in fact, be considered a good example of Thatcher's "sanctity of the individual and individual choice" (Farrell & Hay 9). As such, Hall's 'reality effect' also applies to this film. Nevertheless, *Trainspotting* clearly embodies the disillusioned youth of the 1990s, "floundering" (Haywood 141) in contempt for any traditional lifestyles. For example, Renton's anti-establishment attitude surfaces when asked if he can fill in the gaps in his employment record. During his job interview (which has been deleted from the DVD version of the film), he answers,

Yes, I can. The truth – well, the truth is that I've had a long-standing problem with heroin addiction. I've been known to sniff it, smoke it, swallow it, stick it up my arse, and inject it into my veins. I've been trying to combat this addiction, but unless you count social security scams and shoplifting, I haven't had a regular job in years. I feel it's important to mention this. (Missing scene from *Trainspotting* – YouTube)

This answer illustrates Renton's clear rejection of the part of society that does comply with the Thatcherite conventions. Renton presents the neglected perspective of the underclass by cynically conforming to the Conservative Party's vilification of its political opponents.

Haywood claims that Thatcher "demonises" (159) the British working class, so its youth turns to heroin because they have no other option. Through clearly illustrating *Trainspotting's* characters' rejection of society, the film challenges the hegemonic perspective that Thatcherism gave all people in Britain the opportunity to thrive.

In *Trainspotting*, director Danny Boyle uses much of the irony employed by the original novel's author, Irvine Welsh. Film critic Cardullo suggests that the humour in this film serves to "shock the bourgeoisie" (161). The irony and sarcasm in the film help to construct a clear counter-memory of Edinburgh's underprivileged neighbourhood, Leith. *Trainspotting* has several scenes where its characters sarcastically rant against bourgeois ideologies. For example, during the scene where the group leaves the city for an outing by train, Tommy asks Renton if he the landscape does not make him proud to be Scottish. Contrasting the picture-perfect Scottish scenery of the holidaying middle-classes and Tommy's nationalist reference, see figure 4.2,



Figure 4.2 (00.31.50)

Renton bursts out,

I hate being Scottish. We're the lowest of the fucking low, the scum of the earth, the most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat into civilization. Some people hate the English, but I don't. They're just wankers. We, on the other hand, are colonised by wankers. (00.32.03–22)

Here, the protagonist does not only oppose Scottish nationalism, but he also backhandedly compliments the English for just being 'wankers'. This scene shows Renton coping with his hopeless existence by airing his grievances through irony and sarcasm. According to 't Hart humour reduces "discontent among the oppressed" (7). Moreover, Cardullo suggests that the humour in *Trainspotting* serves "to satirize bourgeois society and shock bourgeois sensibility" (160). When linking Rigney's suggestion that creative works serve to "disrupt habits of memory" (17), black comedy and counter-memory reinforce each other. Indeed, the film's sarcastic attitude funnels into a protesting message through the scene of Allison's discovery that her baby has died due to her own heroin-fuelled neglect. When Allison asks Renton for a shot of heroin for comfort, he dryly comments that "she got a hit, but only after me. That went without saying" (00.39.32–34). This example of dark humour shows a sarcastic remark that appals the audience. Mendelsohn confirms the use of "shock tactics" (32) to question the societal values of the day. Consequently, the – wry – comedy in *Trainspotting* constructs a clear counter-memory of the hegemony that promoted Thatcher's story of economic success for all.

Additionally, the creation of counter-memory in this film is strikingly achieved through the characters' use of regional language (Smith 25). I argue that through the characters' Scottish dialect, *Trainspotting* provokes compassion for Leith's disenfranchised youth, thus creating counter-memory in its audience. Norquay and Smyth mention the "local urban patois in terms of rhythm, accent and slang" (35) which applies to every dialogue in *Trainspotting*. They claim that the vernacular emphasizes class differences between the

people who cannot or will not speak standard English out of protest and the hegemony, which asserts control through maintaining societal conventions by means of the standard language. According to Rigney (“The Remaking”) “unfamiliar experiences” (15) - like this film’s use of regional dialect - generate an audience’s counter-memory. Therefore, I conclude that the regional vernacular dialogues cause an increased awareness of and understanding for the past experiences of Leith’s destitute underclass youth. Mendelsohn marks the tone as shocking, “jerky and in-your-face” (32), which contributes to the dark humour of the film. Renton and his mates’ Scottish tongues captivate the audience with their machine-gun-staccato effects. According to Mendelsohn, *Trainspotting*’s use of the Scottish dialect is both distancing and thrilling, which fits McGowan’s theory of “difference and sameness” (54) as a justification for the comedic appeal of the film’s language use. Referring to Rigney’s (“The Remaking”) reasoning again, the surprising language used in this film forces audiences to consider the counter-memory of the other. Following this rationale, the regional voices of the characters’ vernacular tongues in *Trainspotting* create a firm counter-memory to Britain’s hegemonic recollection of Thatcherism.

All in all, *Trainspotting* strongly displays and uncompromisingly triggers the counter-memory of the marginalised sub-cultures through provocative images, punk music, dark comedy, and shocking dialogues. This addition to the cultural memory invites audiences to consider the underclass perspective and, as such, contributes to the collective memory.

5. Billy Elliot

In this chapter, I examine how Stephen Daldry’s *Billy Elliot* creates counter-memory and expresses social critique to Thatcher’s politics of accelerated privatisations and closures in the mining industry. This film focuses on the experiences of a mining community in the industrial North of Britain in the 1980s. It shapes a working-class counter-memory, which is relatable

for a broad audience because of the contrast between personal experiences and collective working-class experiences. Daldry shows Billy's individual struggle to overcome societal prejudices and juxtaposes it to the miners' shared battle versus the state. The struggles of the protagonists are accentuated by their use of the Northern dialect. Like the other films in my corpus, the protagonist's accents contribute to the comical surprise effects that move *Billy Elliot*'s audience as the main characters humanise the dehumanised. Lastly, Billy's defiant dance moves contribute to illuminating a powerful and positive voice for the opposition of the hegemony. So, through a broad historical overview, Daldry formulates a clear and powerful counter-memory of Thatcherism on two levels.

Firstly, it juxtaposes the working-class community with a usurping state. According to Erll & Rigney, "media" (1) – film in this case – actively engage with the past to form memory. This film produces memory by generating contrasts. For example, when Billy brings his demented grandmother back home to eat breakfast, while armed police gather to battle the picket line.



Figure 5.1 (00.02.40)

Daldry opposes Billy and his grandmother, representing family and community, to the institutionalised violence against the striking miners. To achieve this contrast, he films the innocent twosome in a blooming meadow with a soft-focus lens, while a bit higher up the hill, the riot police make full preparation for battle (00.02.34-04.02). This contrast produces a firm

regional counter-memory for a hegemonic audience, emphasising the power relations between the working-class community and Thatcher's armed forces. Furthermore, *Billy Elliot's* comparison of the vulnerable working man with Thatcher's indomitable police force is expressed by the dynamic between comical and hyperreal images of working-class perspectives during the strikes. According to Erll and Rigney films may cause certain stories to resurface and be reconsidered differently than before (1-10). For example, the 1980s hegemonic opinions are opposed by the chase of Billy's older brother and union delegate, Tony in a setting of endearing, funny, and shocking moments. Supported by - the ultimate British punk group of the 1980s - The Clash's "London Calling" as a symbol of protest, Daldry places an army of police with batons in their right hand, filmed from the back and ready to crush one miner.



Figure 5.2 (00.59.28)



Figure 5.3 (00.59.29)

Opposite the armed police force stands the unarmed Tony, with just a teacup in his right hand (00.53.29). According to Perchar (78-98) the personal experiences of workers in the coal mining areas help to capture the emotions of the collective. This one shot describes the working-class perspective in its simple contrast of one man against the state. Contrary to the 1980s news reels, which portray the desperate miners as nameless hooligans, *Billy Elliot* humanises working-class people within a supportive community, while positioning the police as a faceless mass. They are dehumanised behind their masks and shields and embody unfair attacks on the working class. Through these examples, the film triggers counter-memory in its mainly hegemonic – middle-class - audiences.

Secondly, the film creates counter-memory through the narrative of a boy who opposes his father's values by joining the local dance class. Because of its temporal distance to 1980s politics, *Billy Elliot* can juxtapose the traumatic with imaginations of how future generations can progress from their ancestor's traumas. This film proposes a scenario where the working-class relinquishes their memory of a violent history by entering new and unexplored ways of life. Thus, *Billy Elliot* 's celebration of the unconventional fits Rigney's ("Remembering" 368-380) suggestion to explore the dynamics between past trauma and the present to create room for celebrations of the past that allow for a hopeful future. The film not only foregrounds Billy's rebellious dance moves and the much-discussed underlying

homoerotic friendship with Michael, but it also highlights Jackie's redemption for his old beliefs several times. For one, he accepts Billy's desire to pursue a professional dance career, and he convinces his friends of its positive prospect. Daldry films a hesitant moment of Jackie on his way to his son's performance as the swan prince. Jackie stands in the opposite direction. (01.38.09)



Figure 5.4 (01.38.09)

Viewing backwards while moving upwards on the escalator, he evokes a state of retrospection. In the following shot, however, Jackie transcends the cultural schism of the uncultured miner in London. He shows that not only does Billy leap into a new world, but that his own future might also include positive surprises once he deserts his restraining past. In fact, the film shows the opposite of the anger in mining communities over the “loss of moral direction in society” (Perchard 91) after the “defeat of the labour movement” (Perchard 91). This film shows and opens opportunities for working-class men to imagine themselves in roles beyond traditional frameworks. For example, by the way this film builds on Bourne's transformational choreography of “Swan Lake” (Tchaikovsky 1895; Bourne 1995). Following several scholar's reasoning (A. Assmann, Erlil & Rigney 1-10) that artists supplement cultural memory by building on earlier works of popular culture, *Billy Elliot*, can be considered an agent of counter-memory that supplements the cultural memory of the 1980s. The New York Times (Sulcas 30-1-2020) comments that Bourne gives male dancers a chance to provide

different types of role models. By developing Bourne's choreography, Daldry builds on previous cultural memory himself and thus he creates counter-memory "of a cause" and reshapes it into cultural memory "with a cause" (Rigney "Remembering" 368-80), so that the collective memory of a nation will consist of shared memories. As Aleida Assmann explains, "cultural memory is a prosthetic device, an externalized and re-internalisable collective creation that is transmitted and transformed over time and reshaped by succeeding generations" (395). With this statement, she explains how counter-memory equips cultural memory with personal experiences that link the counter-memory in popular culture to the collective memory.

Although *Billy Elliot* contradicts Thatcher's campaign by displaying 1980s British working-class realism focus on "the consequences of unemployment and poverty" (Hill 167), in *Billy Elliot*, even more so than in my other films, the opposite also goes. Following Hall's 'reality effect' audiences may consider this film a confirmation of Thatcher's promotion of individualism. Billy can be regarded as the epitome of the Thatcher norm; he finds a niche to excel in and escapes poverty. Individualist efforts are rewarded in *Billy Elliot*. However, overall, the images of poverty in this film contradict Thatcher's illustration of the economically thriving situation she claimed to achieve for all. This film addresses the problems of the miners in the county of Durham, and therefore I consider it an agent of counter-memory. Through its representations of poverty and despair, it contributes to the cultural memory.

6. Comparison

All three of the examined films formulate political messages. That is, they produce counter-memory by highlighting their cultural divergences from the English capital-based hegemony. According to Norquay and Smith (, early 1900s novels by Edgeworth and Scott

provoked comprehension of Irish and Scottish cultural differences in their English audience. Including the industrial North of England in this selection, Norquay and Smith's analysis applies to all three of the works in my thesis. In fact, these films all go beyond providing political messages to acquaint English audiences with their particular peripheral cultures. Furthermore, according to Norquay and Smyth, the public associate the aesthetic notions of Ireland and Scotland with the pastoral and the past, significantly contrasting the – predominantly London and Southern – hegemony. Therefore, the regional representations in my films elicit mnemonic processes that include previously neglected counter-memories. They reshape history for international audiences to create understanding for history's untold stories among the marginalised and silenced lower classes.

All three films use realism to present the working-class status of the protagonists through their scenery, their dilapidated surroundings, and the social and regional dialects of the characters. All three films create counter-memory by exploiting their regional vernacular languages. While the shock effects of strong working-class language in *The Commitments* do not offend as much as *Trainspotting*'s language use, these dialects do account for viewers' sympathy, according to Bishop et al.'s (131–154) language research.

Exploring how the films differ from each other, I first suggest that the films exceedingly display countermemory. Scholarship proves that *The Commitments* exudes a friendly rebellion, whereas *Trainspotting* loudly protests hegemonic regimes, and *Billy Elliot* presents a clear historical overview of traumatic class violence. Secondly, the films address different subcultures. While *The Commitments* and *Trainspotting* both draw on youth culture, *Billy Elliot* bridges generations. This film portrays the consequences of the actions of multiple generations in one family. Thirdly, although all my films prominently create meaning and counter-memory through music, they do so in distinctly different ways. I argue that the predominantly diegetic soul music in *The Commitments* appeals to the public for its

connecting quality. The soul music furthers the film's escapist narratives, whereas the non-diegetic punk music in *Trainspotting* supports its explicit themes of intense resentment of traditional society and despair over marginalisation by that same society. *Trainspotting's* frequent use of punk-rock emphasises the spirit of protest as described by Savage (18, 62-4, 113). Thus, *Trainspotting* displays counter-memory more explicitly than *The Commitments*. Lastly, the music in *Billy Elliot* specifically underlines the historical rendition of the miner's working-class protest. Iconic 1980s songs clearly form working-class protest in the last film of my body of research, *Billy Elliot*.

Lastly, my films' comedy types differ from cheerful comedy to dark comedy, to physical comedy. *The Commitments'* visualisation of chaotic band life allows a cheerful comedic atmosphere throughout the film, whereas *Trainspotting's* dark comedy particularly reveals its characters' hedonic lifestyles. For example, Begbie causes violent knockabout moments that nurture the dark comedy element, and Spud's goofy looks and silly behaviour contrast dramatic events. In *Billy Elliot*, the comedy is mainly physical. As a dancer, the protagonist expresses himself through body language, but the scenes of the police chasing Tony show many visual slapstick moments. Even the meeting between Jackie, Tony, and Michael at the theatre has no funny dialogue, but is funny because of their body language.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I argue that the films in my corpus create counter-memory. As agents of counter-memory, my films address the problems of areas outside the realm of power in Britain and Ireland in the 1980s. I propose that my films represent and produce counter-memory via their images of working-class communities in the poor areas of Ireland, Scotland, and England by using three common elements. Firstly, these films all criticise society through comedy. By light-heartedly poking fun at their own working-class identity, *The*

Commitments' characters juxtapose their poverty to Thatcher's political doctrine of economic success. *Trainspotting* mainly uses shock techniques that mock everyone, including its mainly middle-class audience, to deliver a critique of Thatcherism. *Billy Elliot* contrasts the innocence of the working-class community with the overwhelming power of Thatcher's regime through the physical comedy of the scene where Tony, as union leader is chased by riot police, and through Billy's defiant dancing. Secondly, the specific choices of music in all three films emphasise their protesting mood. The soul music in *The Commitments* relates to protesting Black African Americans. The punk music in *Trainspotting* highlights the rebellion of this film's characters, as do the classical ballet music and pop songs chosen for *Billy Elliot*. The music in this corpus is used to accentuate the societal critique of the films. Thirdly, these films' prominent use of regional dialects has their audiences reflect on the working-class narratives that many disregarded during Thatcher's time in office. Thus, these films elicit a counter-memory of Thatcherism in the British Isles during the 1980s, and as such, the examined films contribute to the cultural memory of that era.

In fact, there is a correlation between the release dates of the films in my corpus and the strength of the counter-memory that they represent. As their temporal distance from the 1980s increases, the films portray the counter-memory more explicitly. In my analysis, I describe how the counter-memory in *The Commitments* emerges through its humoristic references to the characters' limited possibilities in Ireland in the 1980s. As such, Parker's film shows a gentle rebellion against the hegemonic perception of the booming 1980s in Britain. Then, released four to five years later, *Trainspotting* shows the weight of the abject poverty in Scotland through its portrayal of Scotland's heroin epidemic raging among young people without any prospects in life. With a greater temporal distance from Thatcher's period of power, this film generates a louder counter-memory through its punk-music, the hedonic lifestyles of its main characters, and its display of the destructive power of individualism for

society. Released ten years after Thatcher's reign, *Billy Elliot* highlights the destruction of the agency of the miners by Thatcher's political decisions. So, with more historical perspective than the first two films in this corpus, *Billy Elliot* forms the memory of the damage to the miners' community through the narrative of Billy's entire family. Thus, the counter-memory in my corpus develops from a subtle notion of escapism in the 1991 release of *The Commitments* into the more aggressive protest tone of *Trainspotting* 5 years later. Finally, another 5 years later, the counter-memory has developed into a specific historical overview of the suppressed narrative of the working-classes in British society in *Billy Elliot*. This development of the counter-memory in my corpus proves that it takes time to formulate a clear counter-memory against the hegemonic forces that suppressed these narratives before.

Scholarship on popular culture and memory studies clarifies my thesis statement that the films in my corpus are agents of counter-memory of the 1980s in Britain and Ireland. With the help of popular culture theorist Hall, I explain Thatcher's neo-liberal policies of the 1980s. Thanks to Hall, I can formulate the counter-voices of the working-class in my corpus. At the same time, Hall's theory of 'the reality effect' goes beyond the limitations of my analysis. Analysing within a wider media ecology, which is itself never neutral, the cultural memory of the audience will also affect how these films are interpreted. In my analysis, I consider the three films of my corpus as specific pieces of culture that uncover some of the effects of anti-Thatcherism and affect the society they critique. Culture is so dynamic, so multi-faceted, and so dependent on different social and ideological factors that it is inseparable from the society it is criticising. Film is part of this society's culture. My cultural analysis is relevant because it reveals that my examined films present the other side of Thatcher's narrative of the economically thriving Britain of the 1980s, and thus I contend that the films in my corpus generate counter-memory.

Additionally, I find support in memory scholarship by Assman, Sturken, and Rigney, who argue that cultural memory develops from a myriad of counter-memories and therefore remains and should always remain in flux. In line with these theories, I prove that my corpus contributes to the cultural memory through its regional counter-memory in *The Commitments*, *Trainspotting*, and *Billy Elliot*. The fact that these films share neglected narratives with a broad audience creates a counter-memory of the lower classes in British and Irish society in the 1980s. Through their particular representations of counter-memory, these films influence the British and Irish cultural memory of the time and change the collective memory. With the addition of counter-memory to the collective memory, an ever-growing number of people will feel represented and may, therefore, be more willing to actively participate in society. Therefore, following on from my examination of how the films in this corpus create counter-memory of Thatcherism in Britain and Ireland in the 1980s, I invite others to advance their research on film in relation to cultural memory and counter-memory of other forms of hegemony. Further research could involve, for example, explorations of anti-Reagonomics or anti-Trumpian expressions in film. In my opinion, the first American films that oppose Trumpism will provide enough acclaimed material to write a substantiated dissertation on the counter-memory of the 2020s.

By critically analysing the films in my corpus through the perspective of memory studies, I establish a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual and collective memory. The expressions of counter-memory in my corpus are reflections of all the variables in British and Irish society in the 1980s that prove the fault in Thatcher's remark that 'there is no such thing as society'. Films and counter-memory prove that society is alive, always in flux, and kicking.

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