



# The TV Series “Severance” (2022): An Essay on the Visual Mechanisms of Oblivion and Canceling within the Contemporary Pop-Cultural Paradigm

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## Abstract

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In this essay, the TV series “Severance” (2022) serves as a lens through which we explore the role and function of memory and oblivion in molding social relations and influencing the human psyche. While the narrative of the series touches on many pertinent issues, the realm of social memory remains insufficiently plumbed by researchers, paving the way for further inquiry and interpretations. An examination of the narrative motifs in “Severance” unveils concerns related to both individual and collective memory. Furthermore, “Severance” stands as a salient example of the visual mechanisms used to depict oblivion and “cancellation” and their subsequent role in sculpting collective memory and social dynamics. Philosophers, sociologists, cultural analysts, and those passionate about the intricacies of memory and oblivion in modern social relations will likely find the conclusions of this essay enlightening.

## Keywords

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Memory; Oblivion; Collective Memory; Social Relations; “Severance” TV series; Visual Mechanisms; Representation; Autonomy; Individuality; Contemporary World



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# «Разделение» (2022): эссе о визуальных механизмах репрезентации забвения и отмены в контексте современной поп-культуры

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## Аннотация

В данном эссе рассматривается проблема роли и функции памяти и забвения в формировании социальных отношений и их воздействия на человеческую психику на примере сериала «Разделение» (2022). Автор обращает внимание на то, что несмотря на явное наличие многих актуальных проблем в сюжете сериала, область социальной памяти остается недостаточно освещенной, что открывает путь для дальнейших исследований и интерпретаций данного вопроса. В разборе сюжетных мотивов сериала «Разделение» можно уловить неявное, но вполне определенное рассмотрение вопросов не только индивидуальной памяти, но и ее коллективных проявлений. Результаты анализа показывают, что сериал «Разделение» представляет собой интересный пример использования визуальных механизмов для репрезентации забвения и отмены, которые влияют на формирование коллективной памяти и социальных отношений. Выводы эссе могут быть полезны для философов, социологов, культурологов и всех, кто интересуется проблемами памяти, забвения и их влияния на формирование социальных отношений в современном мире.

## Ключевые слова

память; забвение; коллективная память; социальные отношения; сериал «Разделение»; визуальные механизмы; репрезентация; автономия; личность; современный мир



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## Introduction

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Cultural memory, serving as a conceptual link, holds a pivotal position within European social anthropology, demonstrating its deepest affiliations with German and French intellectual traditions. Notably, it is not confined merely to the dimensions of individual experience but extends to the boundaries of collective perception, signifying the intertwining of personal and societal narratives. This perception of memory not only emphasizes the past but also shapes anticipatory contours of the future, thus providing a canvas for interpreting historical perspectives. The understanding of memory transcends a solely introspective gaze, encompassing a broad spectrum of sociocultural processes (Stychinskii, 2020). Historiography, in turn, emerges as a venue where the notion of cultural memory is actively shaped and scrutinized, offering scholarly insight into its mechanisms and dynamics (Nora, 1989, 1996; Terdiman, 1993). Cultural studies, following this trajectory, elucidate the ramifications and manifestations of this memory, examining its presence within diverse cultural artifacts (Stewart, 1993). Collectively, these avenues foster a multidisciplinary approach to studying memory as a paramount element of cultural heritage.

Individual memory, for the most part, has been the focus of the scientific community, primarily within the realm of natural sciences, providing a foundation for empirical research into its structures and functionalities. However, when addressing collective memory, its contours exceed the boundaries of natural scientific methodology, necessitating an integration of sociocultural disciplines. This form of memory, lacking a specific physiological locus, manifests as a multifaceted sociocultural phenomenon, warranting analysis within the domains of social anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies (Trufanova, 2020, pp. 19–20).

The contemporary cultural landscape is not indifferent to shifts in understanding morality and social norms, as evidenced by the emergence of the concept of “cancel culture.” Originating in the late 2010s and early 2020s, this term refers to a specific sociocultural phenomenon in which individuals or groups that violate certain moral or social codes become subjects of public condemnation and ostracism (Bromwich, 2018). A distinctive feature of this phenomenon is that such social exile or boycott can occur even for ill-considered or inadvertent words and actions, regardless of when they occurred. The introduction of this concept into the cultural space has sparked vibrant discussions about its semantics and implications, with discourse surrounding it often carrying negative connotations. This negativity often arises in the context of allegations of suppressing free speech and infringing on intellectual liberty. It should be noted that the concept of “cancel culture” has been adopted by different sociocultural groups and interpreted based on their political and ideological beliefs. Free speech advocates see “cancel culture” as a dangerous form of censorship, while moral and social standards advocates see it as an essential mechanism for maintaining societal moral norms. As a relatively



novel phenomenon in public discourse, “cancel culture” stands at the crossroads between free speech and the imperative for social accountability, making it a subject of profound academic and philosophical scrutiny. In the modern cultural landscape, the nuances of “cancel culture” manifest in the phenomenon of “oblivion,” which, in turn, challenges the principles and structures of “cultural memory” (Lübbe, 2016). This juxtaposition between oblivion and cultural memory reveals deep epistemological and ontological gaps in our understanding of the past and present (Smagambet et al., 2021). It also underscores the intriguing dialectic between preservation and loss, where core concepts of idea and identity are in perpetual flux. Overall, within the context of this cultural dynamism, “oblivion” should be viewed not merely as an antithesis to memory but as a complex occurrence shaped by sociocultural, philosophical, and psychological processes.

In the context of a rapidly shifting cultural landscape, where Canceling culture is gaining significant relevance, particularly concerning pop culture celebrities, there arises an urgent need for a profound analysis of the mechanisms underlying this phenomenon. Notably, pop culture, confronted with this wave of changes, finds ways not only to respond to ongoing events but also to depict the mechanisms of oblivion and Canceling within its works. The TV series “Severance” (2022) stands at the core of our investigation, providing a unique spectacle of these processes' representation through symbols and imagery, occasionally addressing them explicitly. An analysis of this production enables comprehension of pop culture dynamics as well as an exploration of how it frames and reinterprets the context of contemporary cultural space.

At the heart of the series' narrative lies the actions of the opaque technological corporation, Lumon Industries, which, drawing upon modern medical techniques, develops a procedure termed “severance.” This process artificially separates the working and non-working memories of employees, creating a dichotomy in their psychological makeup. Through Mark's experiences as the main character and one of the “severed,” the audience engages in a profound dialogue about the intrigues and foundations of this method. Mark's gradual unveiling of the intricate web of schemes and conspiracies tied to both sides of the “severance” procedure offers a deep analytical perspective on the ethics, morality, and consequences of such technological innovations. The series, in its artistic interpretation, immerses the viewer into a world interwoven with diverse cultural and social issues (Ackerley, 2022; Collier, 2023), highlighting matters connected to the Marxist understanding of labor alienation and the dialectics of human-technology interaction. However, despite this broad visual scope of modern world examination, studies focusing on the analysis of cultural artifacts, like this series, seldom delve into the exploration of social memory and mechanisms of oblivion. This oversight touches upon a crucial aspect: the role and function of memory and oblivion in shaping social relationships and their impact on human psychology. Despite the evident presence of many



pertinent issues in the series' narrative, the realm of social memory remains under-represented, paving the way for further research and interpretations of this subject.

An analysis of the narrative motifs of the TV series “Severance” reveals an indirect but clear examination of not only individual memory, but also its collective manifestations. The predominant focus of scholars on the individual aspect of memory might have overshadowed how deeply and intricately the series sheds light on manipulations of the collective perception of reality. Researchers, by concentrating on the micro-level – the manipulation of individual memory – overlook the macro-level – the transformation of collective reality under the influence of corporate actions. The series presents us with the challenge of examining the transformation of the sociocultural context through the lens of the interplay between the individual and collective. Studies that consider this aspect could substantially broaden our understanding of the interconnections among memory, technology, and society.

Within the framework of this essay, primary attention is given to analyzing the specifics of visual representations of oblivion, highlighting the unique characteristics and nuances they embody. These representations, situated at the intersection of mechanisms of oblivion and Cancel Culture, establish certain regimes of visibility that warrant a closer examination. A hallmark of these regimes is their ability to modify and redefine standard conceptions of memory and historical context. Thus, our analysis is geared towards understanding how these visual mechanisms can serve as tools for sociocultural influence and altering perceptions of reality. Lastly, in the context of this study, it's essential to comprehend how the combination of oblivion and Cancel Culture impacts the formation of contemporary cultural and philosophical paradigms.

### **Separation of Individual Memory as a Mechanism of Social Oblivion**

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In considering the concept of duality of self in the TV-S series “Severance”, we grapple with the issue of how individual memory can be transformed. The severance procedure, which creates two parallel versions of one individual, serves not merely as a dramaturgic device, but underscores the complexities of memory and oblivion mechanisms. One of these versions, the “extra”, possesses the ability to recall and retain certain past moments, while its counterpart remains in the shadow of ignorance, avoiding confrontations with potentially painful realities. This portrayal of memory suggests deeply ingrained suppression mechanisms equipped within human consciousness. These mechanisms might serve as a kind of shield from traumatic memories, allowing the mind to avoid re-experiencing pain or discomfort. The idea of memory blockade, as depicted in the series, offers a deeper understanding of the intricacies of human experience and the interaction with memory. While the series is a work of fiction, it prompts us to contemplate intricate



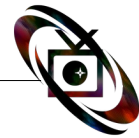
philosophical questions regarding the nature of memory, its role in shaping individuality, and its influence on human experience.

The series offers viewers a profound look into the concept of oblivion, portraying it not merely as incidental forgetfulness but as an active and intentional process. Within this narrative space, the severance procedure offers individuals the chance to sidestep unpleasant experiences or memories, illustrating deep psychological mechanisms governing perception and recollection of the past. For instance, the protagonist, Mark, views the severance procedure as a potential means of catharsis, a solution to the overwhelming grief of losing his beloved, Gemma. In pursuit of relief from emotional torment, Mark pins his hopes on the intervention offering him a respite from painful memories, thereby granting him a path to inner harmony. However, such a decision ushers in a plethora of philosophical and ethical questions concerning self-awareness, personal identity, and the role of memory in shaping human experience. At what point can an individual find certain memories so unbearable that they should be erased from consciousness? And doesn't such a decision strip a person of their full existence, curtailing the capacity for self-reflection and personal growth? Ultimately, Mark's choice to seek solace in the severance procedure represents an attempt to engage with deeply rooted human desires to avoid suffering and seek meaning in traumatic experiences.

Another illustrative case, that of Gabby Arteta, serves as perhaps the most vivid exemplar of this concept in action. Her decision to undergo the severance procedure during childbirth to avoid the painful experience of labor highlights her desire to shield herself from a potentially traumatic ordeal. However, it is important to consider whether this decision denies her the chance to encounter and handle intense emotional moments, which are a crucial aspect of human experience. Such dynamics prompt reflections on how memory can sometimes be reshaped, even distorted, for psychological comfort. From this, it can be inferred that oblivion, when seen as a psychological defense mechanism, is two-fold. On the one hand, it allows the individual to avoid the immediate pain associated with traumatic memories. On the other, this approach could deprive them of a thorough understanding of their past, which could foster a distorted comprehension of their personal history.

Throughout the first season of the TV series "Severance," we observe the process of splitting an individual into two personalities ("extra" and "intra") as not merely a medical or technological intervention but as a profound quandary regarding what delineates human essence. Each "intra," formed as a result of the procedure, begins to live an independent life; yet, their relationships with the world undergo serious transformations and re-evaluations. For instance, in one episode post-severance, one of the "extras" fails to recognize their best friend, casting doubts on the solidity of their friendship and their shared intra-past. Memory loss, in this context, doesn't just sever individual memories but also blurs





the boundaries of social connections, eradicating foundational moments upon which interpersonal relationships are built. This concern becomes even more pertinent considering that a person's identity is shaped not just by internal memories and experiences but also through interactions with others. In another episode, when a family confronts a “severed” relative, their reactions and sentiments shift, as they can't fully associate him with the person they once knew. Therefore, the severance process depicted in the series acts as a mirror reflecting the issue of how individual memories and experiences shape human identity and societal bonds. It also confronts us with the question of what it means to “be oneself” when one's inner world and interactions with the external world undergo such radical shifts. Moreover, the impact of severance on interpersonal relations underscores the significance of memory as a fundamental component determining how we see ourselves within the broader social organism.

In the TV series “Severance,” we discern that the Lumon Corporation is not merely providing a technological service but is exerting a far more subtle and fundamental influence on the psyche and self-perception of its employees. Under the guise of philanthropy, this organization essentially rewrites and restructures human memory, transforming it into a tool for impacting individual identity. In one episode, for instance, an employee who underwent the “severance” procedure discovers that not only his traumatic memories were erased but also other moments of his life that could pose a threat to the corporation's interests. Thus, the Lumon Corporation not only assists its employees in “forgetting” but also dictates what exactly should be remembered and what should be expunged from memory. It operates as a power structure, controlling and manipulating the memories of its workforce. This interference in an individual's memory transcends mere medical or psychological intervention and takes on profound philosophical and ethical connotations. Is there freedom of choice in one's perception of the past if external forces can deeply intervene in one's recollections? What is the cost of such a “service,” and what implications might it have for both the individual and society at large? Clearly, memory is not just an archive of events; it is more akin to a barometer of our identity, determining how we see ourselves and how we perceive the world around us. When a corporation assumes the role of curator of this “archive,” concerns arise about the authenticity of our memories and, consequently, our sense of self. In this way, the actions of the Lumon Corporation as depicted in the series confront us with pressing questions about the boundaries of morality and ethics in a modern world where technology offers capabilities previously deemed impossible or even unimaginable.

The protagonists of the TV series “Severance” grapple with a paradoxical dilemma of loss and discovery, juxtaposing memory erasure against the imperative of its restoration. While the “severance” process liberates the individual from traumatic memories, it concurrently severs their profound ties to the past, erasing the very foundations of identity. Nevertheless, the series does not shy away from the notion that the restoration of memory, even if those memories are painful, can



be a pivotal step in the healing of the soul. Mark, in his pursuit of oblivion, inadvertently loses a portion of his identity. Yet, a discovered image in “intra mode”—a wedding photograph with Gemma, wherein he recognizes a fellow corporation employee—serves as a catalyst for realizing the depth of his loss. This narrative segment stands as a testament to the significance of memories that constitute the core of human essence. Thus, the unseen threads of memory, severed by the procedure, can be mended, and as Mark's experience illustrates, even the most painful recollections bear intrinsic value. They enable an individual to reexamine their life, reinterpret their actions, and perhaps find a path to healing. In the light of such an understanding, the series highlights the intricacies of human memory and its role in shaping individual identity. Through this lens, we comprehend that memories are not merely custodians of the past but active participants in our present, dictating who we truly are.

### **Technological Intervention in Identity**

The TV series plunges viewers into a labyrinth of technological advancements where machines and procedures begin to play a pivotal role in defining the essence of a human being. The Lumon Corporation, embodying futuristic technological concepts, offers the severance service, allowing individuals to confront their alternate selves. Beyond mere duplication, this process delves deeply into the psychological matrix of an individual, segregating and rewriting memories, experiences, as well as emotional and moral attributes. Helly, a character in the series, epitomizes this duality. Post-severance, her identity bifurcates into two distinct personas—Helly and Helena Eagan. Despite originating from a shared root, they possess different memories, varying life experiences, and consequently, unique identities. This poses the individual with the dilemma of one's own identity and the potential for its distortion or loss. The severance procedure offered by the Lumon Corporation undeniably stands as a hallmark of scientific progress. Yet, it also harbors the latent threat of losing one's authentic “self,” which until that juncture, one might have perceived as unchangeable. Mark embodies this dilemma in his quest for his genuine “self.” Encountering fragments from his alternate “extra” life post-severance in “intra” mode, he navigates a maze of introspection, endeavoring to discern which version genuinely mirrors his true identity. This inner turmoil, stemming from technological intervention in the human psyche, questions the value and stability of human memory and identity. Mark's endeavors to reclaim lost memories and answer the quintessential question, “Who am I truly?”, illuminate the spectrum of risks associated with technological innovations that impinge upon consciousness. Hence, irrespective of the external benefits and possibilities these technologies proffer, they might also precipitate profound existential crises where the very foundation of human identity becomes elusive.

Technological advancement, especially when it engenders fundamental shifts in the bedrock of human existence, invariably becomes a catalyst for the emergence





of multifarious conflicts. This is particularly evident in the TV series “Severance,” where the severance procedure proposed by the Lumon Corporation offers individuals the chance to craft an alternative version of themselves, essentially duplicating their essence. This process undeniably spawns a plethora of questions regarding the nature of human identity and the ethics of such profound intervention into its fabric. Intriguingly, the focus isn't so much on the severance procedure itself but on its societal and individual ramifications. Helly, for instance, grapples with the weighty moral and psychological implications of this technological innovation. Her endeavor to articulate the challenges associated with living as the “severed” is an attempt to shed light on the intricacies of this dilemma. However, she faces opposition from Cobel, the department head. This clash of interests, between personal experiences and corporate ambitions, exemplifies how deeply technology can influence social structure and relational dynamics. Representing the corporate perspective, Cobel senses a threat to Lumon's interests and likely fears the potential fallout from a public reckoning with the complexities of severance. Consequently, one can deduce that the interplay with technology in this narrative is not merely a tool for progress but a pivotal factor generating conflicts of varying scales—from personal tribulations to grand social confrontations.

Technological intervention into the realms of personal identity and memory undoubtedly stands as one of the most provocative and contentious phenomena of contemporary society. Within the narrative of the TV series “Severance,” this influence becomes a catalyst for profound shifts in interpersonal relationship structures, exemplified by Mark in his relationships with Gemma and Irving with Burt. As a result of technological intervention, characters' identities and memories are reevaluated, giving rise to new complexities in their interactions. It's evident that when boundaries between past and present, reality and alternative consciousness blur due to technological innovations, it poses significant challenges to personal identification. Moments when Mark and Irving strive to retrieve their memories and discern their true essence showcase the difficulty in maintaining one's individuality in the face of technological dominance. For Gemma and Burt, the situation also becomes intricate as their partners have transformed not just physically but psychologically, casting doubt on their prior relational experiences. Consequently, each finds themselves grappling with the need to reconsider their stance in the relationship and their role in their partner's life. Overall, this narrative facet underscores the multifaceted and intricate impact of technology on the human experience. The introduction of the severance technological procedure probes the liminal spaces between technology and humanity, illustrating how technological advancements can radically reshape and even distort our experiences, interactions, and self-understanding within a social context.



## **Oblivion Mechanisms as Instruments of Social Control**

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The emergence of technology capable of manipulating human consciousness and memory offers Lumon Industries unprecedented opportunities to shape and control its corporate image. The concept of oblivion, propagated by the company into the mass consciousness, is not just a technological milestone but also a tool for influencing public opinion. This phenomenon is vividly illustrated through the character of Helly. Bereft of clarity regarding her true identity, Helly unwittingly becomes a puppet in the company's hands, playing the role of a marketing gimmick. Her promotion of the severance procedure not only showcases Lumon Industries' technological prowess but also aims to foster brand loyalty among potential clients. However, the company's interests don't always align with those of the individual, as reflected in Cobel's actions. Her attempt to prevent Helly from expressing her viewpoint at a public event indicates the corporation's readiness to take drastic measures in defense of its image. Within this framework, memory and identity are not just individual attributes but also battlegrounds in the corporate struggle for dominance over public opinion.

Oblivion, as a concept, serves not only as a mechanism of technological intervention but also as a means to control the individual, suppressing dissidence and potential resistance. In this context, amnesia induced through technological means is not merely the loss of specific memories but also the erosion of key facets of individuality. This undermines the autonomy of the subject and their capacity for critical thought. Irving's story stands as a particularly telling example. Stripped of memories from his service in the US Navy, he not only loses a part of his identity but also becomes less critical of the world around him. This, in turn, makes him less inclined to resist and more susceptible to manipulation by the system. Nonetheless, not all characters remain passive in the face of oblivion. Helly's endeavors to articulate the true feelings of the severed signify an intent to challenge the system's imperatives. Yet, her efforts are met with vigorous opposition, exemplified when Natalie seizes her during a speech. This incident underlines Lumon Industries' readiness to take decisive actions with the aim of quashing any signs of dissent.

In an era of technological innovations and the pervasive influence of digital culture across all realms of human activity, mechanisms of oblivion serve as tools for enhancing and consolidating corporate power, especially for potent corporations like Lumon Industries. The logic of information management underpinning the power of this company not only accumulates data but also dictates which pieces of information are to be disclosed and which are to be concealed from the general public. Devon, in revealing to Mark the tumultuous past of Gemma, not only affirms his grasp of the significance of information in the contemporary world but also directly highlights Lumon Industries' intent to control, and even manipulate, this information. This instance testifies to the fact that in the hands of a powerful corporation, information can become a tool for not just commercial, but also ideological, domination. Milchik, in his endeavor to infiltrate the security office during



the “intra” sabotage, showcases determination and a keen understanding of the importance of information control within corporate politics. His actions attest to the notion that the information and data held by Lumon Industries bear not only economic value but can also be leveraged as tools for power amplification. In a globalized landscape of information flow and technological dependency of the individual, mechanisms of oblivion and information control emerge at the forefront of efforts to bolster corporate influence. Lumon Industries, harnessing these mechanisms, seeks dominance within this realm.

Within the context of profound socio-cultural transformations and the emergence of novel technological practices, the procedure of severance, as portrayed in the discussed narrative, becomes an allegory for the individual's interaction with societal structures. This procedure isn't merely a technological novelty but evolves into a tool for intervening in social issues, providing a means for their, so to speak, “technological” resolution. Gabby, opting to undergo the severance procedure in the maternity ward, aims to avoid the traumatic experience of childbirth. However, her decision can be viewed not just as an attempt at individual adaptation but also as a manifestation of societal pressure, pushing towards the adoption of such radical technological methods to address social “problems” or discrepancies. Helly, on the other hand, illustrates how the severance procedure can be employed for not just individual but societal purposes. Her transformation into a promotional stunt to advance the procedure indicates that this technology can serve as a means to fortify or reproduce a particular social order. Thus, the severance procedure is not a neutral tool; it plays an active role in shaping and reshaping social relations, acting as a mechanism for regulating societal norms and expectations. This engenders a polarity in the perception of this procedure, where some individuals see it as an avenue for personal fulfillment, while others become subjects of manipulation within larger sociocultural projects.

In conclusion, the severance procedure acts as a mirror, reflecting the intricate and multifaceted interrelations between the individual and society in an era of technological revolution.

## **Visual Representations of Oblivion**

Within contemporary cultural narratives, visual representations play a pivotal role in the formation and transmission of philosophical and sociocultural ideas. In this context, the images of dark corridors that Irving continuously reproduces on his canvases transcend mere visualization and acquire profound symbolic and metaphorical significance. Seeing these dark corridors as allegories of oblivion brings out a particular tension between the conscious and the unconscious. These corridors symbolize pathways of memory that may have once been explored but are now lost or forgotten in the infinite labyrinths of consciousness. Every depiction of a corridor crafted by Irving serves as a reminder of the fragmentary and volatile nature of human memory, illustrating how effortlessly one can become lost amidst



one's recollections or conversely never find the way to long-forgotten moments. Additionally, the repetition of the same corridor motif may attest to Irving's ceaseless endeavor to comprehend or even transcend oblivion. Perhaps, each new painting represents an attempt to delve deeper into the uncharted corridors of his memory, striving to rediscover lost or forgotten memories.

"The Testing Floor," as a spatial embodiment, gains semantic depth in the context of analyzing memory and identity, especially when its visual representations resonate with the corridors depicted in Irving's paintings. When Miss Casey finds herself on the "Testing Floor," her journey transforms into a metaphorical voyage through the labyrinths of memory, where each passage may lead to lost, distorted, or even erased recollections. This process potentially embodies a continuous confrontation with one's identity, its reevaluation, and perhaps transformation. The fact that the corridors in Irving's paintings visually correspond to the "Testing Floor" amplifies the allegorical connection between the two images. These corridors likely symbolize the pathways and processes of consciousness where memories can be forgotten, altered, or even lost. Thus, the "Testing Floor" can be regarded not only as a physical locale but also as a metaphysical space where the human psyche undergoes scrutiny, doubt, and even deconstruction. This realm, perhaps, becomes the battleground between past and present, between what was and what may be forgotten or rewritten. Within the plot's context, the "Testing Floor" emerges as the site where Miss Casey confronts her memories, fears, and possibly even the loss of her identity. Her traversal of this floor symbolizes a journey through memory, where identity can be challenged, and recollections can be reexamined or even obliterated.

Certain artifacts often become a means of capturing and preserving the past. Within this context, the wedding photograph of Mark and Gemma serves not merely as a documentary testimony of their union but also symbolizes a segment of time, forgotten and lost in the depths of Mark's consciousness. Discovering this relic of the past, Mark grapples with pressing questions regarding the reliability of his memories. This photograph, imbued with meaning and emotion, embodies what seemed forgotten and becomes a pivotal tool in the process of reconstructing personal history. Thus, the photograph not only evokes feelings of nostalgia and melancholy but also poses profound philosophical inquiries concerning the nature of memory, time, and reality. Within this narrative's framework, it acts as a catalytic agent, prompting Mark to delve into his lost memories and attempt a reevaluation and reconstruction of his past. It's noteworthy that such a return to the past via photographs represents a complex process wherein identity and memory undergo reassessment. In this sense, a photograph can serve as a bridge between the past and the present, between actuality and perception.

Space, whether physical or psychological, plays a pivotal role in the process of memory and identity formation. Irving's apartment, as depicted in certain episodes, becomes not merely a place of residence but a locus where the past and present



intersect, and where perception and reality intertwine. Crossing the threshold of this space, characters encounter fragments of their past that had long been forgotten or suppressed. Such trigger-spaces can be interpreted as visual allegories of lost corridors of memory, which, while remaining unseen and elusive, can nonetheless be activated by specific stimuli. Intriguingly, these places invoke not only recollections but also reflection, analysis, and introspection. Engaging with these spaces of memorial allegory, an individual might become aware of the gaps and fissures in their memory, as well as moments that have been distorted or reinterpreted over time. This offers an opportunity to reevaluate the past, refine it, and even reconsider one's relationship with it. However, it's crucial to recognize that such places can also serve as realms of oblivion. Navigating through them, an individual might confront not only memories but also moments they'd prefer to forget or evade. Thus, the interaction with such spaces represents a dual process: the exploration and restoration of the past on one hand, and potential oblivion or distortion on the other. Spaces where the past and present intertwine are potent tools for exploring memory, identity, and self-awareness, becoming mirrors in which an individual might see reflections of their past, their losses, and their quests.

### **Cancel Culture and Social Interaction**

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Cancel culture, in its contemporary understanding, can be perceived as a deeply institutionalized expression of power relations, where mechanisms of exclusion and control become intensively employed tools to reinforce social order. Irving, whose solitude is illustrated by his consistent engagement in drawing, can be viewed as a casualty of a sociocultural dynamic that positions the individual in a state of isolation. His repetitive paintings not only express his inner state, but also symbolize an outer world in which uniformity and stereotyping are the dominant tendencies.

Helly, striving for perfection in data processing, immerses herself in a process that seemingly should lead to her integration within the society of other 'intras'. Yet, her isolation and excessive fixation on percentage efficiency paradoxically amplify her social alienation. The procedure of severance can be comprehended as an external instrument of power, intended for the creation and maintenance of specific social structures. However, this procedure also impacts the psychological state of the individual, intensifying their sense of isolation and detachment. Such practices don't merely manifest as random expressions of culture but represent internal mechanisms through which power is manifested and consolidated. In this dynamic, the individual, when subjected to these mechanisms, becomes an object of control and regulation. Cancel culture and social isolation through the procedure of severance act as manifestations of a global power dynamic, where the individual not only becomes an object but also an active participant in this process, accepting, applying, and reproducing these practices.





Within the intricate web of sociocultural practices that shape and reshape individual and collective identities, alienation and misunderstanding in relationships can be viewed as fundamental components of contemporary human experience. The spectrum of relationships, in its multifaceted complexity, becomes a realm where power imbalances, control, and suppression manifest. Mark and Miss Casey, both having undergone the severance procedure, grapple with the surreal reality of lost shared memories. In this context, severance serves not merely as a mechanical tool of oblivion but also as a metaphor for profound sociocultural estrangement when institutional mechanisms erase or distort the most intimate and significant life moments. Irving's return to Burt and his discovery of Burt's new relationships symbolize a profound loss of social connections. This moment illuminates not only Irving's personal sense of alienation but also a broader societal state where the rapid pace of sociocultural shifts engenders feelings of instability and uncertainty. These individual experiences are not random or isolated manifestations but rather the outcomes of broader discursive practices that mold, regulate, and oversee societal relations. Institutions and cultural practices set the boundaries within which relationships are formed, evolve, and disintegrate. It can be posited that relationships in contemporary society have become a battleground for identity, understanding, and belonging, where institutional mechanisms and discursive practices play a pivotal role in shaping experiences of alienation and misunderstanding.

Within the context of such social interactions and institutional structures, public condemnation emerges as a potent tool for control and regulation, attesting to deeply ingrained discursive practices that create and sustain specific standards of norms and values. These standards, defined by dominant institutions and social groups, are invariably accompanied by sanctions for those who deviate from the established order. Cobel, becoming a target of public scrutiny, faces sanctions from the board of directors, highlighting how corporate and economic structures interact with public sentiment in the process of forming and reinforcing their authority. Cobel's withholding of information is perceived not merely as an individual transgression but as an act that jeopardizes the corporation's stability and reputation, thereby revealing the power of corporate discourse. Helly, attempting to elevate the memories of the severed to a public pedestal, encounters resistance from Natalie. This act of interruption not only represents an individual conflict between the two characters but also illustrates how dominant social groups and institutions strive to suppress and control "dangerous" discourses. Moreover, in halting Helly, Natalie not only ensures the preservation of the social order but also exemplifies the mechanism of social control that underpins discursive practices.

Thus, public condemnation and societal reactions are not merely incidental social phenomena but are the outcomes of deeply rooted discursive structures that shape and dictate which practices and actions are permissible within a given socio-cultural context.



Social pressure and the imperative to meet specific expectations can be construed as mechanisms of power, operating through practices of normalization and regulation of individual behavior. These practices, while appearing minute or at a superficial level, permeate deep structures of social consciousness, influencing the acceptance of certain decisions and actions. Helly, upon discovering her true name and role within the company, is confronted with a dilemma embodying societal conflicts. Her newfound identity demands of her a behavior that aligns with established standards and expectations, reflecting the overarching discursive structures that impose constraints on individual trajectories. Gabby, on the cusp of such a significant and transitional life event as childbirth, experiences the weight of sociocultural expectations. Her decision to undergo the severance procedure at the maternity hospital is not just an individual choice but unveils how social norms and expectations can shape personal experiences and decisions. Gabby's fear of the childbirth experience not only mirrors intimate emotions but also reveals deeply entrenched power structures, cultivated over generations, and embodying prevailing notions of femininity, motherhood, and biological realities.

These two examples, although seemingly disparate at first glance, explore the theme of social pressure as a mechanism of control steered by dominant sociocultural practices. Under the influence of this insidious power, individuals often make decisions in line with societal expectations, even if they might contradict their personal beliefs or desires.

Within the profound symbolic context of the TV series "Severance," the division of the individual into "extra" and "intra" not only manifests as a metaphysical stratification of reality but also underscores the manner in which a person is effectively erased from social space and time. The "extra" represents a person who is excluded from dialogue with sociocultural reality, detached from societal expectations and norms. Irving, for instance, immersed in his monotonous paintings, epitomizes this process of alienation from the social world, becoming a captive of his personal memory labyrinths and severed from mundane time. In contrast, the "intra" embodies itself within the corporate realm, becoming entirely dependent on its established rules and rituals. The "intra" individual submits to a structure that, while providing them with a role and occupation, limits their ability to interact with the external world. Helly, engrossed in her work routine, exemplifies this total immersion in "work" time, detached from societal time and space. The metaphor of the office space labyrinth accentuates the intricacies of the human psyche, where each turn might unveil new corners of consciousness or hidden facets of one's personality. However, delving into these depths, by corporate standards, is perceived as a transgression, underscoring society's ambition to control and regulate individual introspection. Thus, corporate ethics, assuming the role of the regulator of an individual's inner world, acquires religious undertones, evolving into a sort of sacred canon that demarcates the permissible from the forbidden.



## Conclusions

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In the context of analyzing contemporary society through the lens of the TV series “Severance,” the infiltration of various mechanisms into the realm of human memory and identity becomes evident. The instance of individual memory severance, wherein Mark and Miss Casey forget each other as husband and wife post-severance, illuminates questions about the possibility of social oblivion. Technological intervention, exemplified in the series by Gabby, who opts for severance out of fear of the childbirth experience, represents a novel tier in understanding individual autonomy, as well as the complexities and potentials of human consciousness. Mechanisms of oblivion, observable in the erasure of memories from characters, such as Mark and Gemma's recollections of their wedding day, can serve as methods to shape new realities or reinterpret the past.

Visual representations of oblivion, such as the dark corridors sketched by Irving, or the “Testing Floor” where Miss Casey confronts her past, mirror the role of imagery in constructing and reinterpreting reality. Lastly, Canceling culture and social interaction within the series' context highlight the rapid shift in understanding social norms. This is illustrated in moments when Cobel becomes the target of criticism due to concealed information or when Helly attempts to voice the sufferings of the severed.

Consequently, exploring these facets through the series enables us to delve deeper into the intricacies and nuances of contemporary society, especially in the context of evolving changes and technological advancements.

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