

Experience of Revived Memories: Emerging Memory and History

IKUKO KARASAWA

Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University

Sometimes a long lost memory suddenly surfaces. In the famous novel of Proust, a memory suddenly arises from smell or taste, with the sense acting as trigger for memories to appear. Including such experiences, as Bergson writes, we cannot reach the past unless we frankly place ourselves within it. And as Merleau-Ponty writes, when the body opens itself to the past, and to co-existence, the memory is recovered. How about history? According to Hideo Kobayashi, history itself emerges in a serious reader of history who does not interpret history based on his or her own criteria, when he escapes from himself and strains his ears to it. At this stage, Kobayashi's mu-shi (no-self) becomes very similar to the mu-shin (no-mind) of Daisetz Suzuki. In both, when we have nothing at all and fully open ourselves to the world—which means when we are truly passive—things come to us. If history comes to us in this way, the way the past emerges might share the same structure as the way memory comes to us, as we have seen before. Although it is certainly important to carefully examine the differences among philosophers who think about where history and memory come from, what I think is essential is to ponder a place beyond ourselves and a place of co-existence in the present.

AN INSTANCE OF REVIVED MEMORY

Sometimes a scene from the past suddenly surfaces, one that is not linked to my present circumstances and that calls to mind a long lost memory. Even if the revived memory was lost for a long time, it can be easily integrated into my narrative when it relates to my present situation or relationships. But a memory that falls outside the framework of my current narrative cannot be so easily integrated into it. Perhaps sometimes it should not be so. These kinds of memories might remain in my mind like foreign objects and create gaps between my current internal circumstances. Sometimes I feel somewhat shocked or uncomfortable when a memory of this kind arises. Then I think about why I forgot it and whether I had recalled it before. Sometimes I would feel bad about the past or have forgotten it, and a feeling of sorrow would remain.

A very significant memory of this kind might be a matter for psychoanalysis. Also, a serious memory might change the current situation itself. But it is also certain to occur in daily life.

THE PAST THAT MANIFESTS ITSELF TO US

How do long lost memories appear in our minds? In the famous novel by Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, sometimes a memory suddenly arises from smell or taste, with the sense acting as trigger for memories to appear. However, a revived memory is not always linked to such sensory experiences. During my last experience, I was sitting in a train idly looking out a window, not thinking at all. Then, a long lost memory suddenly arose.

In discussing memory, Bergson wrote, '(T)he truth is that we shall never reach the past unless we frankly place ourselves within it. Essentially virtual, it cannot be known as something past unless we follow and adopt the movement by which it expands into a present image, thus emerging from obscurity into the light of day' (Bergson, p. 173).

According to Bergson, we cannot reach the past unless we frankly place ourselves within it. When we place ourselves within the past, the past arises or emerges as if coming up from obscurity into the light of day.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty stated, 'The memory or the voice is recovered when the body once more opens itself to others or to the past, when it opens the way to co-existence and once more (in the active sense) acquires significance beyond itself' (Merleau-Ponty, p. 191). He said that memory surfaces when the body opens up to others or to other objects, but not when the body is secluded or consciously waiting for something.

Looking at these two philosophers' statements, at the very least, we can see a common structure between them, although careful examination is needed to determine whether or not they have located memory in the same place. According to these two philosophers, we must be free from ourselves and frankly open to others or the past before memory can emerge.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Although a firsthand experience like the one above is not the same as a historical narrative, I believe they share some common features allowing us to think over the past that appears or manifests itself to us.

According to Jon A. Levisohn's paper titled "Negotiating Historical Narratives: An Epistemology of History for History Education," William Cronon described the anxiety among historians and theorists of history generated by their awareness of the apparently inevitable ideological bias of those historical narratives. Cronon wrote, 'Historians may strive to be as fair as they can, but it remains possible to narrate the same evidence in radically different ways' (Cronon, p. 1370). Levisohn wrote, 'The question of which narrative we should teach would seem to be dependent (at least in part) on the question of which narrative is true. But what could it mean for a narrative to be true?' (Levisohn, p. 2). On this topic, Hayden White is a rather radical disputant. White argued that narrative structure floats freely above the constraints of evidence and argument: 'There is no such thing as a real story. Stories are told or written, not found. And as for the notion of a true story, this is virtually a contradiction in terms. All stories are fictions' (White, p. 9). Levisohn raised a few questions about White's argument. First, although White argued that facts are correct given the best available evidence, how can we differentiate narratives from facts? Second, if all stories are well-made fictions, then the world is only a never-ending series of discrete, disconnected, and hence meaningless moments. Is that true? Third, if the best justification for choosing a perspective is ultimately aesthetical or moral rather than epistemological, meaning that narratives come from the imagination of historians, what might it mean for teachers to adopt an historical narrative? (Levisohn, p. 7). Levisohn deliberated over these three questions by developing a critique by David Carr, who had argued that experience of an event is always an experience that possesses something like a narrative structure. Levisohn continued to argue that narratives come from other narratives, and that the creation of historical narratives is always

the product of a negotiation among multiple narratives (p. 12). Therefore, the answer to the question of where narratives come from is that narratives are generated by a negotiation among prior narratives and that those narratives come from still other narratives. At every stage, narratives are altered and adjusted in light of the contradictions and gaps among and between them, and in light of new inquiries that are motivated by those contradictions and gaps (p. 16).

According to Levisohn, narratives come from prior narratives, and narratives should be altered and adjusted in light of the contradictions and gaps among and between them. But, it is notably evident that a past event or history itself does not come from prior narratives. I believe that even when considering narratives, or before considering narratives, we must consider how history itself appears to us and how we face it.

HISTORY: THE STATE OF *MU-SHI* (NO-SELF)

To examine how history appears to us, I would like to examine Hideo Kobayashi's concept of *mu-shi* (no-self).

Kobayashi writes that although it was very difficult to avoid new viewpoints or interpretations of history, unmovable history that defies new interpretation is beautiful (Kobayashi, p. 144). In response, Tadashi Nishihira wrote that, in order to affirm the above, Kobayashi had to insist that history itself emerges in a serious reader of history who does not interpret history based on his or her own criteria. Nishihira continued that this process or event in history or other things that emerge in a serious reader is called *mu-shi* (no-self) by Kobayashi (Nishihira, p. 203).

According to Kobayashi, history should not be read based on one's personal views. One should not newly interpret history but rather strain one's ears to it. To strain one's ears to history, one should escape from oneself so that history can appear as it is. But this idea is absolutely different from objectivism (Kobayashi, p. 58). One does not look at history but is rather absolutely absorbed in history without any bias. At this stage, although Kobayashi's *mu-shi* (no-self) emphasizes one's earnest engagement in history, the process or event becomes very similar to the *mu-shin* (no-mind) of Daisetz Suzuki.

In his famous lecture on *mu-shin*, Suzuki emphasized its passivity. According to him, when we have nothing at all and fully open ourselves to the world—which means when we are truly passive—things come to us. He said that we must realize that the state of *mu-shin* is not static (Suzuki, p. 289) but dynamic in the sense that things come to us when we are fully open and clean, like a vacuum. This structure of *mu-shin* is very similar to that of *mu-shi*. When we escape from ourselves and are fully open to the world, things come to us.

If history comes to us in this way, the way the past emerges might share the same structure as the way memory comes to us, as we have seen before.

WHERE HISTORY AND MEMORY COME FROM

As we have seen, memories or the past may arise when we escape from ourselves. So, we can say that the place where history or memory appears from might be beyond ourselves.

Even now, we normally go about our lives thinking that all of our past and memories

reside within ourselves, albeit sometimes vanished or weakened, they are based on the past and memories. But after Freud's discovery of the unconscious mind, we now realize the existence of a type of area or state that is beyond ourselves or our consciousness.

Maybe in Japan this concept, already in the stream of *mu-shin* thought, had been commonplace. But these days, when originality and personality are emphasized, this concept has been forgotten. In historical narratives, because the original interpretation is popular, we have perhaps not sincerely strained our ears to history and faced up to it.

Although it is certainly important to carefully examine the differences among philosophers who think about where history and memory come from, what I think is essential is to ponder a place beyond ourselves and a place of co-existence in the present.

NOTE

The original version of this paper was presented at The 7th International Symposium between the Institute of Education, University of London (UK), and the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University (Japan).

REFERENCES

- Bergson, H. (1911) *Matter and Memory*, N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin).
- Cronon, W. (1992) A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative, *The Journal of American History*, 78. 4, pp. 1347-1376.
- Levisohn, J. (2010) Negotiating Historical Narratives: An Epistemology of History for History Education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 44. 2, pp. 1-21.
- Kobayashi, H. (2003) *Mujo to Iukoto [what is mujo] Kobayashi Hideo Zensakubin [complete works] vol.14* (Tokyo: Shinchosya).
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*, C. Smith, trans. (London: Routledge and K. Paul).
- Nishihira, T. (2014) *Mushin no Dainamizumu [Dynamism of no-mind]* (Tokyo: Iwanamisyoten).
- Proust, M. (2001) *In Search of Lost Time; vol.1*, C. K. S. Moncrieff and T. Kilmartin, trans. (London: Everynman Publishers).
- Suzuki, D. (1968) *Mushin to Iukoto [what is no-mind] Suzuki Daisetz Zenssyu [complete works] vol. 7*, S. Hisamitsu, S. Yamaguchi and S. Furuta (eds.) (Tokyo: Iwanamisyoten), pp. 115-303.
- White, H. (1988/1999) Literary Theory and Historical Writing, in: *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: MD, Johns Hopkins University Press). First published as 'Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased': Literary Theory and Historical Writing', in: R. Cohen (ed.) *The Future of Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge).