

Image, Memory and History Fraught with Multiple Difficulties: In Response to Paul Standish's Lecture

KAKERU ASAOKA

Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University

In September 2013 at Kyoto University, we had a series of lectures entitled 'Education and the retrieval of the past: remembering and forgetting' by Dr. Standish. He posed the following questions: 'The relation to the past is problematic. What is there to remember? What forms of selection are involved? How far do our recollections distort? And what role is there for forgetting?' P. Ricœur (2000) also argued that memory is fundamentally the matrix of history but, therefore, it is often blocked, manipulated, abusively controlled or obligated by history. Also, the work of remembering is almost impossible. This is because he calls the success of the work a slight miracle or happiness. His argument can be thought to help us answer Standish's questions. Thus, this essay has two purposes. One is to separate key concepts we discussed in class into three groups and explain why the concepts in each group can be considered to belong to that group on the criteria of the difference between time and space. The first group comprises image and perspective, the second memory and representation, and the third history and narrative. The other purpose is to demonstrate that each group assumes certain essential challenges that are transmitted among the groups, resulting in the problem that the groups experience multiple difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

P. Ricœur was a philosopher of hermeneutics and theology. He was famous as the author of *Temp et récit (Time and Narrative)* (1983-1985) and *Soi-même Comme un Autre (Oneself Like as the Other)* (1990). He surprised those who had interpreted his thought according to these works by publishing *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli (Memory, History, Forgetting)*, which greatly advanced and revolutionized his thought. In this book, he discussed the nature of the phenomenon of memory, processes and limitation of historiography and relationships between the two. He argued that memory is fundamentally the matrix of history, while it is often blocked, manipulated, abusively controlled or obligated by history. Such a conflict emerged in the enactment of laws of 'duty of memory' in 1990's in his mother country, France. He criticised the laws for neglecting citizens' varying memory capacities.

For it is not to 'the tyranny of memory' that it [=my work] will have desired to contribute. This abuse of abuses is among those it denounces with the same vigor with which it resists the substitution of the duty of memory for the work of mourning and the work of memory, and it limits itself to placing both of these labors under the sign of the idea of justice. (Ricœur, 2000, p. 91)

However, accurately remembering is almost impossible, and he also recognized how difficult

the work of memory is. Therefore, he esteemed the realization of his work as a slight miracle or happiness.

The main target of my study for the past three years has been Ricœur's thinking regarding education, while in September 2013 at the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University, we had a series of lectures entitled 'Education and the retrieval of the past: remembering and forgetting' by Dr. Standish in our class on International Frontiers in Education and Research (C). He posed the following questions: 'The relation to the past is problematic. What is there to remember? What forms of selection are involved? How far do our recollections distort? And what role is there for forgetting?' We then discussed memory and history while invoking such keywords as perspective and narrative. However, I am afraid that we may have tried to entirely consider too many concepts and key words without distinguishing them.

Thus, this essay has two purposes. One is to separate key concepts we discussed in class into three groups and explain why the concepts in each group can be considered to belong to that group on the criteria of the difference between *time* and *space*. The other is to demonstrate that each group assumes certain essential challenges that are transmitted among the groups, resulting in the problem that the groups experience multiple difficulties.

The first group comprises *image* and *perspective*, both of which are related to space. The concept of image was not mentioned explicitly in the class, but I introduce it here, referring to Ricœur. This element could have clarified discussion and, indeed, the manner of watching the movie illustrated there offered examples of images we can or should perceive from an event. Thus, introducing the element of image here clarifies our discussion. The second group comprises *memory* and *representation*, both of which are related to time. The third group comprises *history* and *narrative*, both of which are related to logic. Of course, we should note that the term 'history' encompasses many subjects, but this essay primarily discusses a work of historiography expected to be read by citizens. Table 1 below roughly describes these three groups. The reality group added to the table comprises anything that has ever occurred or is presently occurring anywhere in the world. Every image, memory and history is a consequence of understanding reality, and it cannot be understood entirely in itself through any means. Reality has been called 'History itself', and this appellation has been criticized as the issue of modernity; however, this essay does not address the concept of history in this context.

Table 1: Three Difficulty Concept Groups

Group	Means of Perception	Difficulty	Property
Image	Perspective	Restricted to each individual aspect	Space
Memory	Representation	Exposed to doubt whether imagined and fading	Time
History	Narrative	Restricted to each separate plot	Logic
Reality	(You can never perceive all of it simultaneously)		(Infinity)

IMAGE AND PERSPECTIVE

An image is what comes into one's mind at a particular moment, including one's subjective perception of something here and now, what is imagined as a kind of fiction and what is remembered, regardless of the degree of accuracy, in the present about something that existed

or happened in the past. An imagined image represents something absent both in the present and the past, whereas a remembered image represents something absent in the present but present in the past. The latter composes one's memories, as described later. Despite the various forms of images, any image is fundamentally visual and occurs at a particular moment, which suggests that it is spatial. Even if it refers to an idea that constitutes a memory in the figurative sense, as Ricœur adopted it in his theory, it maintains the nature not of time but of space because only on image as an idea occurs to someone at a specific moment in time.

No image can avoid being restricted by a person's particular perspective. A perspective is, generally, a manner of thinking influenced by one's beliefs or experiences; however, it is also fundamentally visual, as the morpheme 'spect' indicates. Your image of an event in which you are involved depends on your perspective, where you are when the event happens, the physical point from which you observe (or listen to) it, and related factors. However, you cannot perceive everything that happens before you at once. A perception is necessarily selective. If you perceive something as an image, you have no choice but to do so from a certain aspect—with, again, the morpheme 'spect'—that embodies your point of view. Thus, both a perspective as a way of perceiving and an image as a consequence of perceiving are visual and spatial, and any image is always selected and restricted by one's perspective. Thus, we can say that images and perspectives have the nature of space in common.

MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION

A memory comprises a series of represented images, which are, of course, remembered from what occurred in the past, not imagined as a form of fiction. An image emerging from an event can become lost in one's mind, but it can be remembered. When it returns, it is said to be remembered as part of a memory. It is generally thought that some images come into existence in an individual's mind, become forgotten and are later recovered by the individual, or they repeatedly appear and are then retained. Such a memory can be called individual memory. But Halbwachs (1950) identified another form of memories, which he called collective memory. This form of memories is shared among the members of a community or a nation and is handed down from the older to the younger generation or memorialized, especially through traditional social ceremonies. As each form of memories suggests, memories are remembered by two typical methods, recognition and repetition. The former means that memory is forgotten and later recovered, whereas the latter means that it is preserved because it appears in one's mind repeatedly and almost constantly. The difference between the two is described later, and the former is important in this essay.

Regardless of a memory's form, any memory can have its authenticity questioned or challenged. It inherits the essential vulnerabilities of all images because it consists of them. First, it is difficult to distinguish a largely accurately remembered image from one that is purely imagined. Some images represent genuine past events remembered in the present, but others are purely imaginary, as previously mentioned, but both represent images absent in the present, which is the main reason for the difficulty. Second, memories are also strongly influenced by the selection and restriction process influenced by individual perspectives.

Moreover, we must note that the images comprising a memory are representative. A memory, by definition, represents a time gap between the moment when an event occurred

and its images first perceived, and that of the images being represented and recognized as a memory. The gap often raises such questions as how one remembers it or how it has been maintained. Most people doubt that any memory can endure the passage of time. However, this issue also implies the assumption that a memory must be authentic and not imaginary. Contrary to imagination, memory as a phenomenon should be viewed not merely as a literal representation of the past but also as the 're-presentation' of a series of images in one's mind; therefore, a successful memory can only be 're-cognized'. What is imagined is a work of representation whose original has never existed in the real world, and therefore cannot be remembered by anyone, whereas what is remembered is also a work of re-presentation whose original really exists or existed, and it occurs in someone's mind again and becomes re-cognized. The morpheme 're' fundamentally means that something happens again, with a gap of time between its first occurrence and the next event. As the 're' illustrates, a phenomenon of memory relates to the theme of time.

This gap raises another doubt about the authenticity of memories. Any memory inevitably fades. The images of that original event one experiences fall out of consciousness or become replaced by other innumerable images, and they later rise to the surface of one's consciousness or above other images. This phenomenon can be considered a representation, but it still warrants doubt about whether it is an accurate re-presentation or is an outcome of memory or imagination. For the phenomenon to be confirmed as a re-presentation, the returning images must be re-cognized as themselves. They must be re-cognized as those of the event you experienced, or previously 'cognized'. However, this process is extremely difficult, or almost impossible, because the first images have been left behind as if they were a stranger's. Thus, memory as a phenomenon is vulnerable to the difficulty resulting from its temporal nature.

HISTORY AND NARRATIVE

We now bring this essay around to the conclusion of its overall subject, history and its difficulties. Although the question of what history is all about should be, and has been, discussed in various ways, but here we focus on its historiography. That is, we now focus on the fact that history is fraught with multiple difficulties it inherits from memories, of which it consists, and from the original images, of which memories consist.

Reviewing the preceding discussion, the first difficulty is the restriction of images to a single aspect by a particular perspective. One cannot perceive an image of an event without a perspective, because you had to be present to experience the event, which can be regarded as a problem of space. Also, memories inherit the difficulty from the images that comprise them. The second difficulty's first element (Table 1) is the exposure of memories to doubt regarding whether the images composing them are truly remembered or merely imagined, because both types of images are once forgotten and later recalled. This recovery of images can be considered not only a representation but also re-presentation. The second difficulty's second element (Table 1) is the fading of memories caused by the gap between the moment of an original image perception and its recovery. These two elements of difficulty can be regarded as the problem of time. If we consider that memories comprise history, moreover, it suffers from their difficulties. This structure of memories accounts for a series of events in some way, but strictly, it does not consist of those events themselves but of memories about past events that

are described in a passage or otherwise expressed. Therefore, history naturally maintains the difficulties inherent in memories.

Yet another difficulty unique to history results from its narrative nature. It not only describes or expresses a series of events but also edits and plots them. That is, it explains why an event would happen or what event would result from certain circumstances. Even if it does not do so explicitly, it implies selecting certain events from an unlimited number of events that occurred in the same period and arranging them in a narrative. Readers must perceive a plot and cannot help assuming that one event caused, or at least somewhat influenced, another. Underlying this method of perception, we should note that it is almost impossible to separate a single event from the whole with no presuppositions. These problems suggest the difficult relationship between the 'phenomenon itself' and the activity of explanation and understanding. We cannot explain and understand anything without separating and selecting it from the whole and arranging it along a plot line. Thus, history as historiography is fundamentally restricted by its logical nature, which comprises the third difficulty. Because of this conflict and because history is characterized by logic, history is like a fabric whose weft is space and whose warp is time, and logic weaves itself among the spatial and temporal factors. Thus, history and logic relate inextricably with one another.

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

- Halbwachs, M. (1950) *On Collective Memory*, L. A. Coser, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).
Ricoeur, P. (2000) *Memory, History, Forgetting*, K. Blamey, and D. Pellauer, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).