

Representation affecting bodies : how we re-invent memories

Clémence Ortega Douville

One last but important point of the theory to the sensorimotor paradox, is that it is all a matter of memories. Human beings live all experiences through their body. According to the sensorimotor paradox proposition, the imaginary would have been born in the separation of perceptive images from the capacity to enact them into sensorimotor interaction. Then, all mental images that we use separately from any of those direct interactions are sourced in memories, experiences, traumas.

This is important because it makes it all quite simple, even in its richness and complexity. Memory re-enacts pain through traumatic embedding, which elaboration creates ways to equilibrate the possible re-enactment of pain. It does that by mingling images re-enacting painful experiences with others. This is, basically, what the activity of the signifier sources in, to redistribute pain across ways of equivalence. If that someone else there seems not to be feeling any pain in some situation that I can relate to, it may create a dissonance with what I am actually struggling with but also divert it away for a time. It creates a frame for diversion. Language itself systematically diverts us from memories of actual situations by taking the very memory of speaking with somebody else as the main course of my attention. Imagination and language always struggle together to create movement away from the pain of living with one's own body that is, due to a very human moral and social teaching, in a state of sensorimotor paradox almost all the time.

It doesn't mean that pain and the immediate experience of our body is not *real*, but that the experience of sensory and emotional *contact* is very soon taken up by the necessity to embed it into imagination. Because we cannot *react* to everything – that we have learnt not to through our evolution and our social and moral rules and codes of conduct –, we have to keep in balance with the incessant and mingling stream of our memories. And memories are not as formal as we conceive them when we talk about scenes that we would be able to describe. Every one of our moves and sensory experiences is constituting memory on a sensorimotor basis. Every living being is a constituting memory that elaborates means of interaction with their perceived environments (F. Varela, E. Thompson & E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, 1991, again).

So it brings some relativity to any referential system based on cultural and symbolic assumptions. We *all* are memory and none given but all elaborated through time and context. We are *all* fantastically equal as to the nature of our being here with and in our very own bodies. Language in symbolic systems crystallise specific forms for their reproduction, but they only are that formal on paper. A symbol in memory would always be blurred out to the fluidity of sensory impressions. A system of analogy and combination such as linguistics' creates another reality and realm for experience *and* memory that is the experience, for example, of writing and symbolisation. The concept of *artification* proposed by Ellen Dissanayke comes in very powerfully here to remind us that once it is enacted and expressed, the reproduction of a mental image on a shared sensory-experienced medium and material becomes another and completely new object for another kind of experience and thus, another kind of memory.

The *mark* left by this new object of experience constitutes a new form of alterity that only enables for formalisation as it would constitute a scene, a situation of meeting that may recall some other but more distant memories. The *artification* process creates the distance necessary to believe that the convergence of memories of pain with some resemblant situations that I would find myself confronted to may be controlled, in the same way that I control my hand that can be taken as someone else's in some strange experience of my vision. The elaboration of symbolic contractions, once expressed to the field of sensory experience, becomes something else entirely. They become objects and new experiences that we have to deal with, most of all collectively. For most of the

time, we don't know anymore how to relate the experience of such objects of language to our own primary experiences of the other – that is a structuring relational situation and the foundations of traumatic elaboration and individual development. And we are organic matter, hence the whole of it is memory, that is obvious when it comes to the neural system.

But, it all comes from here, not from any abstract set of rules, that are only a way to approach it. We have to be careful when it comes to symbolic-based analysis, otherwise, one would tend to forget that it is secondary-related experience ; that means, the experience of someone else's speech about it (or oneself as someone else's). One reason we mostly equilibrate pain through the constant work of self-situation in the stream of our thoughts, is that we learn to separate the spaces where we speak of what is happening from those where we experience our reality in the solitude of our own body. The spaces for speech bring consistency to the state of sensorimotor paradox for it allows us to derive our anxiety to a relational structure where there is someone else to listen and hold our attention. This kind of space structures the way we cope with the suspension of memories into images that may be up to reviving memories of pain. The situation of sensorimotor paradox forces us to navigate memories of situations to which it is not the place to respond. The incapacity to respond to the situation that we are in *now* places us as well in the incapacity to respond to other imaginary situations that come to our disturbed mind, that is a disturbed neural system.

The founding principle of the sensorimotor paradox theory is that the capacity to hold on motor responses from sensory stimulation is disturbing and that our neural system is not prepared to being held too long. So mental image generation is, in a way, an emergency response to that situation that forces to constantly bring movement to the way we represent ourselves being caught in impossible situations. Imagination is a way out in distress, for we can't jump out of the paradox once it all depended on our capacity to maintain it and behave according to a certain prescribed conduct. There are other ways to ease up that distress, that would bring a sense of security and lower the urgency of an escape. So much depend now on our capacity to produce work from our capacity to associate our memories to the structures of language. But it is all based on material constructs and debt-based symbolic and traumatic ties, ultimately to be able to eat and survive.

Therefore, domination dynamics and political systems of oppression that are based on traumatic memory are as real as we can analyse and deconstruct their basis. But we need to remember our strict equality before the living as we are *all* made out of memories that are proper to us and to which we develop our own ways to relate.