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Subject of Social Memory and the Transmission of Historicity

Abstract:

In the context of the fragmentation of historical perception and the deformation of subjectivity, issues concerning the integrity of historical experience, the transmission of collective identity, and the prognostic functions of historical imagination become particularly relevant. The study subject is the semantic, categorical, and functional aspects of the imaginary as an epistemological phenomenon within historical knowledge, its connection to social memory, subjectivity, and the dialogical structure of the historical process. The study object is the epistemology of history as a distinct field of philosophical inquiry, within which interrelations between historical imagination, social forms of memory, symbolic structures of culture, and the subject of historical action are explored. The study aims to analyse and provide a philosophical and epistemological justification for the role of the imaginary and social memory in shaping a coherent historical consciousness and in the reproduction of historical subjectivity. To achieve the aim and address the set objectives, the study employs a range of scholarly methods, including the hermeneutic method, phenomenological analysis, the epistemological approach, cultural-historical analysis, the comparative-historical method, and the method of critical reflection. The study draws on the works of European, American, and Russian scholars in philosophy. The author examines the interrelations between epistemological discourse and historical subjectivity, identifies the place and role of social memory in this process, and demonstrates that social memory serves as a means of forming the social organism and educational processes. An attempt is made to comprehend the unity of the past, present, and future within a unifying concept of the logical and procedural organisation of history.

Keywords: epistemologiya of the history, subjects of history, social memory, archetypes, collective unconscious, symbols.

Introduction

Contemporary philosophical and historical-epistemological thought is undergoing an intensive turn towards the study of symbolic forms, the imaginary, and social memory as key mediators of cultural-historical consciousness. In the context of fragmented historical perception and the deformation of subjectivity, issues concerning the integrity of historical experience, the processes of transmitting collective identity, and the prognostic functions of historical imagination become particularly pertinent.

The phenomenon of the imaginary, considered within the logical and procedural organisation of history, represents both a heuristic resource and a mode of philosophical articulation of the meanings of historical existence, as well as a means of overcoming the epistemological crises of modern culture.

The subject of the study comprises the semantic, categorical, and functional aspects of the imaginary as an epistemological phenomenon within historical knowledge, its connection to social memory, subjectivity, and the dialogical structure of the historical process.

The object of the study is the epistemology of history as a distinct domain of philosophical knowledge, within which the interrelations between historical imagination, social forms of memory, symbolic structures of culture, and the subject of historical action are examined.

The study aims to analyse and provide a philosophical-epistemological justification for the role of the imaginary and social memory in shaping a coherent historical consciousness and the reproduction of historical subjectivity.

Based on the purpose, the following study objectives have been formulated:

- identify the epistemological foundations of the problem of the imaginary in history;
- describe the functions and forms of social memory as the basis of collective identity;
- explore the relationship between the historical subject, memory, and symbolic imagination;
- analyse the significance of symbol and dialogue in the reproduction of historical experience;
- investigate the potential of the imaginary in the context of forecasting “possible worlds” of history;
- justify the necessity of a coherent epistemological discourse as a counterbalance to the fragmented perception of historical reality;
- trace the transformations of historical subjectivity under the conditions of mass culture and informational influence.

Methods and Materials

To achieve the purpose of the study and address the objectives set, several scholarly methods were employed, including the hermeneutic method, which enables the interpretation of texts and symbolic forms within the context of historical tradition and cultural memory; phenomenological analysis, aimed at identifying the subjective experience of history and the formation of the imagined image of the world; the epistemological approach, focused on reconstructing the modes of historical knowledge and understanding; cultural-historical analysis, which allows for the uncovering of mechanisms for the transmission of meanings and forms of identity in historical consciousness; the comparative-historical method, used to analyse changes in the understanding of subjectivity and memory across different historical periods; and the method of critical reflection, directed at identifying ruptures, distortions, and potential pathways of integration within historical epistemology.

The study drew upon the works of notable European and American researchers in philosophy.

Dutch philosopher F.R. Ankersmit’s work is devoted to the study of the role of metaphor and rhetoric in historical knowledge. He offers an original approach to historiography, treating narrative as a constitutive element of historical meaning. His book is crucial for understanding the tropological turn in the philosophy of history and the issues of representing the past.

The work *The Epochs of Interpretation* presents the philosophical views of Gianni Vattimo on historicity as interpretation and the notion of “weak thought”. The author critiques the idea of a single truth, emphasising the multiplicity of narratives. This text is important for shaping the postmodernist approach to the epistemology of history and social memory.

In her book *Philosophy of History After Postmodernism*, Ewa Domańska explores the main directions in the development of the philosophy of history following the so-called “linguistic turn”. The author highlights the importance of the ethical dimension of historical knowledge and the reconsideration of traditional explanatory models. This work serves as a key reference point for contemporary critical historiography.

In the seminal work *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelius Castoriadis introduces the concept of the “social imaginary” as the foundation of society’s historical and cultural self-organisation. His work provides a productive theoretical tool for analysing collective memory and the symbolic structures of society.

In the course of the study, certain works by Russian scholars were also utilised.

In his monograph *The Meaning of the Possible: Connotative Semantics*, S.S. Gusev explores the principles of connotative analysis and the potential of semantics as a tool for uncovering latent meanings in texts and social narratives. The book is particularly significant for studies concerning the reconstruction of historical meanings and cultural memory.

A.I. Makarov’s study *The Phenomenon of Supra-Individual Memory: Image—Concept—Identity* is devoted to the phenomenon of collective memory as a supra-individual form of cultural identity. The author analyses the interaction between image, concept, and the social construct of memory, making the work highly relevant to the epistemology of historical consciousness.

The article by L.V. Balakhonskaya and V.V. Balakhonsky *Societal Security: Historical-Philosophical and Theoretical Aspects of Understanding* examines the concepts of security through the lens of historical-philosophical analysis, with an emphasis on the dynamics of social perceptions of risk, control, and stability. This work brings to the fore the philosophical interpretation of historical experience as a source of social regulation.

A.A. Gryakalov’s succinct and insightful article *Night in Broad Daylight: Towards a Hermeneutics of Subjectivity* offers a hermeneutic analysis of subjective experience in the context of cultural memory. The author regards subjectivity as an epistemological dimension essential to the reconstruction of the meanings of the past in contemporary interpretive practice.

N.S. Mudragey’s article *The Middle Ages and Scientific Thought* provides an overview of approaches to scientific knowledge during the medieval period, demonstrating how the religious-symbolic system shaped the epistemological boundaries of understanding. The work is valuable for a retrospective analysis of paradigms of historical thinking.

Results

The epistemology of history represents the correlation of actual social processes, despite the diversity of their interpretation and the theoretical logic of historicity. Within this field of interactions, social memory serves as a special “meeting place” (*Vattimo & Rorty, 2005, p. 219*). The relationship between epistemological discourse and historical subjectivity is complex and contradictory, particularly in regard to the loss, removal, or dispersion of the subject. Social memory becomes the focal point for the restoration of the subject and subjectivity—it is here

that collective experiences of history intersect with the epistemological reflection on history. What is at stake is a holistic form of collective memory that enables the formation of individual destiny, just as existing within history provides the means for the socialisation of the individual in and through history.

When addressing this issue, it is essential to consider the experience of theoretical reflection on history. One must pay particular attention to the fact that the themes of the image of the human being and their historical world are initially embedded in cosmological ideas, in which the concept of life far exceeds the life of the individual in both duration and complexity. Accordingly, collective memory—defined in other “formats” as social or supra-individual—enables thought to unfold within a mode of continuity: the past, present, and future converge within a unifying concept of the logical-processual structure of history. In this sense, memory operates not only as an epistemological tool, a means of understanding reality, but also as an ontological value of existence. F.R. Ankersmit quite rightly speaks of a radical change in the “epistemological rules of historiography”, even of the destruction of traditional epistemological standards: “This is what could be called the psychoanalysis of science and scientific practice.” (*Ankersmit, 1994, p. 315*)

Moreover, the virtual aspect of the epistemology of history must also be taken into account. The highly complex question of the socio-historical has long eluded traditional philosophy of history precisely because it tended to reduce the significance of imagination and the imaginary. It is therefore more appropriate to assert that the problematic of the imaginary within the logical-processual organisation of history constitutes an essential component of the contemporary worldview, acting as a fundamental guide in the search for temporal meaning. It emerges as a particular kind of phenomenon that integrates creativity, freedom, value orientations, and a theme particularly significant in Russian thought: that of “cosmic projection”. One could say that the imaginary constitutes a point of convergence for the most vital intellectual quests in Russian philosophy—thus becoming a kind of synthesis or event of thought that can be considered in the present context of contemporary inquiry.

It is important to reflect on the semantic configuration that the imaginary may structure within the realm of social memory: “we are faced with the question of the possibility of humanity—and humanity as possibility” (*Gusev, 2003, p. 361*). This calls for an investigation into the semantic and categorical status, the functions and contemporary understanding of the imaginary, as well as the origins and historical development of the image and the concept of the imaginary as a distinct socio-cultural phenomenon. Such an approach corresponds closely to the intentions of contemporary philosophy and the epistemology of history to comprehend the states of cultural-historical consciousness, mentalities, and the facts of everyday life. The imaginary indicates ways of shaping a prognostically oriented philosophical vision of the human being, which, in the current climate of heightened interest in the virtual worlds of “future history”, social imaginaries, and possible worlds and communities, is both timely and in demand.

The phenomenon of the imaginary opens up possibilities for a sustainable understanding of both culture and the human being, counteracting the fragmentary representations of postmodernism concerning the human subject and history. The imaginary correlates directly with the “history of mentalities”, restoring at the level of ideal images and representations the order of collective existence. In this respect, the imaginary is directly related to the problem of

archetypes, the collective unconscious, and may be integrated into the current context of forecasting the strategies of “possible worlds” in history.

The aforementioned reflections on the imaginary and the virtual in the interpretation of the processual logic of historicity are particularly significant in that they entail the definition of the “possible future”. Projecting the present onto the future enables an assessment of the viability of the potentialities already discovered by human reason (*Guser, 2003, p. 369*). One might say that the phenomenon of imagination connects educational paradigms across time, remaining a stable constant in the human endeavour to construct a meaningful existence.

If we proceed from the assumption that the ancient cosmos implied a corporeal and plastic embodiment of human history, as A.F. Losev argued, then memory becomes the means through which the social organism and processes of education are formed. Memory contains the semantic core of tradition, a constant of meaning for the entire body of texts within a given culture. This core is composed of symbols of group identity which, beyond their role in ensuring socialisation, serve to orient members of a civilisational collective within the semantic space of that cultural community. Should these symbols lose their capacity to perform such functions, it results in the disintegration of the systems of historical and cultural orientation.

In the epistemology of history, texts that are aligned with the semantic invariant of culture prevail; this invariant allows a culture to maintain its self-identity despite the variability of interpretations. Y.M. Lotman noted that the mechanisms of societal disintegration are set in motion when a rupture occurs between cultural memory and the synchronous mechanisms of text production. In his description of a “cultural explosion”, Lotman raised the issue of historical moments when a “gap of being” appears—through the world of established meanings, the “ultimate reality” of the world image begins to shine through. It is precisely this *manifestation* that makes it possible to speak of the experience of a holistic image of the world—only through such revelations can interest in the processual logic of history acquire a truly personal, responsible attitude towards the world.

The conduits to the repositories of memory are specific symbolic images. In this sense, a symbol may be defined as an image that has exceeded its boundaries; the unveiling of a true image is, in fact, an act of philosophical inquiry. However, the problem of the truth of the image of history inevitably arises.

Today, the fallacy of “discrete” historical consciousness has become evident—that is, the tendency to focus on isolated fragments of the world image. One might speak of a topological turn in the epistemology of history. In the real process of history, and accordingly in its logical comprehension, irreconcilable elements become apparent: continuity and discontinuity, richness and poverty, the familiar and the alien. When attention is focused solely on fragments of epistemology or the experience of historical processes, a holistic representation becomes utterly impossible, due to the absence of a unified field of explanation and understanding. Ultimately, this results in a phenomenon akin to “social autism” or even “social schizophrenia”—an inability to explain or comprehend the coexistence of various worlds of values and meanings.

In the dialogic epistemology of history, it is precisely dialogue that must be actualised—for it is here that social memory and the real processes of “life knowledge” encounter one another. In Russian historiosophy, the personal is necessarily correlated with the impersonal and the supra-personal as forms of transcendence. The experience of history and its meaning are

mutually redefined in an existential act of vision—this points to the theme of meaningful and responsible engagement with the world, which transcends concrete historicity.

It should also be taken into account that real processes of socialisation form a special kind of social sensitivity, attuned to the enchantment with the fragmentary and the episodic. Such enchantment obstructs engagement with the whole—an overarching historical narrative—obscures the vision of the whole and impedes the assessment of events in terms of their embeddedness within the broader historical perspective. In this case, a unified epistemological discourse of history is absent—it becomes dispersed, while simultaneously recorded across both proximate and distant spheres of practical activity—in politics, economics, religion and religious studies, ethno-cultural relations, art, power structures, and the interpretation of alienation and social autism.

Thus, in a situation of discreteness and fragmentation, the very value of tradition is called into question—contemporaries perceive only intense fragments. Against this background, it is the socio-philosophical approach that has the capacity to construct a coherent “logic of history”, which in turn makes it possible to represent a fragmented world as an “epistemologically balanced” semantic unity. The historical materiality that is present is revealed in the epistemological discourse: the positions of historical knowledge are “object-based and corporeal” in the sense of their real existence within the historical process. This is precisely how an image of contemporary epistemology of history is shaped—one where there is no single standard, but there are dialogical strategies for defining the “unity of multiplicity” within current configurations of modernity.

The notion of “historical accord” among humanity existed during the Enlightenment era—it was what was termed the “universal model of culture”. Today, however, the focus of the epistemology of history has shifted towards mechanisms that are not so much universal and cultural, as discursive and socio-anthropological. What is required is the analysis not only of significant symbols—“gestures of life”, spatial imagery, the organisation of material environments and everyday life—but also of the epistemology of history’s own paradigms and discourses. Contemporary discursive models possess meaning-generating energy no less potent than the categories of speculative philosophy of history.

Equally important is the fact that individual consciousness is now far more intensely connected to the sphere of collective experience than in the past—an individual's survival depends upon collective knowledge. Conversely, the formation and self-preservation of social organisms are made possible through their connection to specific supra-individual structures of consciousness. The key concept here is that of the socio-historical environment, defined as an immense set of contexts external to the human psyche. This includes the sphere of social relations, the realm of symbolic cultural forms, and supra-individual consciousness structures.

The essential premise in the matter of transmitting social experience is that experience is not given “in and of itself”—human experience is dependent upon the organisation of the exchange of personal experience, the processing of information, the combination and recombination of images, the preservation of information and its transmission from generation to generation. This transmission takes place through channels of social communication—foremost among them being the symbolic medium of culture. History may be understood as a

network of symbols interwoven around the human being—emerging through the social interaction of meanings and actions.

A person encounters reality, leaving behind a “trace-image”—in the course of action, these traces are reflected upon; thought exists in dialogue as an image of memory. The fusion in consciousness of a meaningful image and a material thing produces a symbol, which points towards a possible world. The distinctiveness of human thought and consciousness lies in the fact that symbolic forms possess both a virtual aspect (meanings) and a material one (carriers of meaning).

Meanings may be fixed and preserved over time through two different mechanisms: within individual consciousness as a system of associations grounded in biographical memory, and within social consciousness in the form of material cultural artefacts. Through systems of codes, particular forms of life activity are transmitted through space and time. Collective and supra-individual forms of organising historical experience are indispensable precisely because the individual alone cannot ensure their own survival. One may therefore argue that the basic survival of the human being presupposes the existence of such phenomena as compensate for the lack of genetic information. Information about appropriate behaviour within an environment is obtained through the synthesis of past and present experience and necessarily requires an orientation towards the possible—often defined virtually—future.

It is precisely the “universal dimension of memory” or “supra-individual memory” that enables the transmission of worldview-related knowledge and the principles of collective identity from one generation to the next. The symbolic sphere of communication plays a particularly important role here, as within it the subjects of social memory “construct themselves into the sphere”—the heuristic aspects of dialogue act as programmes of socio-cultural action and converge with education in performing the function of foresight: ensuring the agency of the collective in the future through the transmission of socially significant information to younger generations and teaching them the “technologies of survival”.

At the same time, the communicative function of the symbol enables people to engage in interaction and helps to create a specific communicative space. It possesses both psychological and sign-symbolic dimensions. The psychological aspect of communication generates emotional resonance aimed at uniting the collective and contributes to the formation of individual and collective identities. The sign-symbolic aspect functions as a sort of “language of the collective”. This is manifested through the transmission of information via speech, sound expression, and material-symbolic representation. In this sense, the symbol accumulates both social and individual experience—i.e., social memory.

The compensatory function of the symbol is closely related to the nature of cultural dialogue in the sense that dialogue may act as a special dimension of historical existence, through which social alienation can be overcome. In this context, frustration and alienation may be resolved by compensating for a lack of social experience in spiritual culture. At the same time, there is the possibility of so-called illusory compensatory fulfilment—most often and traditionally realised within the framework of religious experience and the arts. The regulative and value-oriented functions of the “dialogue of history” serve as models, norms, and rules of action in real-life situations—dialogue appears as an ideal form of relation and a particular kind of cultural

constant. These include various types of prohibitions: moral, legal, and religious. In primitive societies, systems of social prohibition took the form of taboos.

This typology can ultimately be reduced to the core idea of dialogue: its socio-cultural function is to preserve and transmit meaning and socially significant information. One may thus speak of the artistic-aesthetic aspect of the epistemology of history (“the aesthetics of history”), which manifests as the form and emotional experience of historical activity; the pedagogical aspect, realised through the cultivation of particular personal qualities within a framework of “social demand”; the ideological aspect, which takes the form of the imposition by the “upper strata” and the absorption by the “lower strata” of specific systems of theoretical views; and, finally, the worldview aspect—the formation of a set of beliefs and convictions regarding the individual’s place and role in the universal interconnectedness of historical objects and processes.

The affinity between symbol and dialogue lies primarily in their capacity to unite what appears to be fundamentally divided. In this sense, M.M. Bakhtin’s assertion that “to be means to be in dialogue” is entirely apt. Understanding requires its own actualisation within the space of culture. For the Christian interpretation—or rather, experience—of history, this meant, among other things: first, explaining the earthly world in connection with a world of an entirely different ontological order—the heavenly world; and second, constructing a picture of the world consistent with the spirit and letter of Holy Scripture. The solution was found precisely in the symbol as a method of explaining being through the union of two worlds, a means of connecting the phenomenon with that which it signifies but which remains elusive without this unity (*Makarov, 2009, p. 89*). The experience and understanding of history flow into the individual’s value orientation—ultimately, into the existential experience of being, what M.M. Bakhtin termed the philosophy of the act.

Dialogue is intended to create, where there is no scientific-conceptual (“purposively rational”) explanation of the world, an ordered yet all-encompassing system of social life in all its main regularities. Cultural memory in history serves as a bridge between abstraction and imagined representation—all the more so since even scientific abstraction necessarily involves the effect of imagination. Dialogue precisely “brings together” – without dissolving one into the other—different forms of cultural creativity and historical existence.

Within topological subjectivity—and it is precisely this we must speak of—operate realities that are incommensurable in classical reflection: if you will, everything begins to be exchanged for everything else, and the rhythm of equivalent exchange is disrupted. Thus, we may speak not only of the production of subjectivity as a describable process but also of an economy of subjectivity as a particular form of self-organisation and domestic arrangement of the self (*Gryakalov, 2010, pp. 220–221*). The hermeneutics of “historical factuality”, therefore, in its present interpretation, must address the issue of identifying the subjects of history: “...the being into which we are thrown and to which we respond from within is characterised in historical terms.” (*Vattimo, 2005, p. 120*) The problem of interpretation becomes especially acute in the context of the global and post-global world, where the informational and mass media effects on historical consciousness are particularly manifest.

The transmission of historicity is disrupted in the process of deforming the subject of social memory into the “mass man”, to use the term of José Ortega y Gasset, whose psychology is based on a belief in the primordial nature of civilisation comparable to that of nature itself. This

belief, as V.V. Balakhonsky and L.V. Balakhonskaya rightly point out, produces in the “mass man” a sense of complacency—a conviction that life ought to be easy, like a game, and free from consciously accepted social constraints. He is not prone to doubt, and he feels entitled to disregard others, to neglect historical memory, and to reject fundamental cultural values (*Balakhonskaya & Balakhonsky, 2012, p. 282*).

Discussion

The main scholarly problem outlined in the article lies in the need to conceptualise the social imaginary as a fundamental category within the epistemology of history—one capable of integrating processes of historical subjectivity, social memory, and the logical-procedural organisation of historical time. The focus is on the phenomenon of the imaginary as a symbolic field where fragmentary elements of historical reality are synthesised into coherent images of the past, present, and possible futures. This issue reflects a growing need to rethink traditional forms of historiography and to move beyond the classical rationalist model, which tends to reduce the historical subject and disregard the ontological value of memory.

Research into this topic faces several challenges. Firstly, there is no unified categorical framework into which the phenomenon of the imaginary can be incorporated within the context of historical knowledge: the boundaries between epistemological, ontological, and cultural-anthropological levels of analysis remain blurred. Secondly, social memory, as a multi-layered phenomenon, interacts not only with history but also with mentality, the collective unconscious, and archetypes, thereby necessitating an interdisciplinary approach and complicating the methodology of analysis. Finally, the virtualisation of historical consciousness—amplified by media environments and digital technologies—gives rise to new forms of historical identity that demand adequate tools for scholarly interpretation.

Several promising avenues for further research may be outlined.

The first involves the development of a theory of the symbolic imaginary within the epistemology of history, aimed at analysing the transboundary and metaphorical structures of historical thought.

The second concerns the study of the compensatory and integrative functions of social memory in the context of cultural fragmentation and post-historical sensitivity.

The third line of inquiry relates to the modelling of dialogical strategies in the epistemology of history, in which the subject and collective consciousness are viewed as active participants in meaning-making under conditions of interpretative plurality.

These directions not only open up new horizons for historiosophy but also contribute to the formation of a stable paradigm of meaning and value orientation for the individual in an era marked by a crisis of historical identity.

Conclusion

The formation of the “mass man” in contemporary society poses the threat of disrupting the transmission of historicity, undermining social continuity, and degrading the historical memory of society.

Thus, it is precisely the dialogue between values and discursive formations that renders the space of cultures internally correlated within the domain of memory. Accordingly, in the

epistemology of history, an inner unity is constructed among various “discursive projects” (art, philosophy, religion, the political and economic organisation of society). Within this topological interaction, the internal dialogism of culture is revealed—in the transmission of historicity, the “discursive energy” of the epistemological unity of history comes into play.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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