TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY

Memory and Material Culture

ANDREW JONES

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Memory and Material Culture

We take for granted the survival into the present of artefacts from the past. Indeed, the discipline of archaeology would be impossible without the survival of such artefacts. What is the implication of the durability or ephemerality of past material culture for the reproduction of societies in the past? In this book, Andrew Jones argues that the material world offers a vital framework for the formation of collective memory. He uses the topic of memory to critique the treatment of artefacts as symbols by interpretative archaeologists and artefacts as units of information (or memes) by behavioral archaeologists, instead arguing for a treatment of artefacts as forms of mnemonic trace that have an impact on the senses. Using detailed case studies from prehistoric Europe, he further argues that archaeologists can study the relationship between mnemonic traces in the form of networks of reference in artefactual and architectural forms.

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TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY

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Memory and Material Culture

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To Hannah and Steph

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Preface

Coincidentally while writing this book I suffered a stroke that affected my memory. Fortunately, it mainly affected my bodily memory, specifically my ability to walk, rather than my cognitive memory. I have therefore had first-hand experience of one of the very subjects I was writing about. It took around three months to recover from the physical effects of this experience, most of which time was spent lying in bed reading detective novels and watching film noir classics. I regard this time spent reading and watching films as probably the most important period of research. This is because it gave me time to think and reflect on the then partially written manuscript. We live in an age of speed. The current value system that most British academics labour under subscribes to a belief in targets and accountability. Coupled with this, academic institutions are overburdened with the British disease of overwork, bureaucracy, and the audit culture (for a useful insight on this, see Madeline Bunting's excellent book *Willing Slaves*, Harper Perennial, 2005). There are times at which we seem to

drown under evaluation forms. Research time has become a little like the proverbial candle burnt at both ends and is squeezed into the last remaining moments of the working week (evenings and weekends). As such, research is conducted with no time for pause and reflection.

I regard my illness as a physiological response to the psychological stresses of this value system. As such I have come to believe that we need more time to allow ideas to develop and less for research-for-the-sake-of-fulfilling-targets. I have become a keen advocate of the Slow Movement, which takes time to savour life rather than treating it as a perpetual contest or race to the next staging post. For this reason I am very grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, who partially funded my sabbatical time, which allowed me time for this reflection.

The finished book is therefore a result of this period of reflection, and the book comprises a distillation and reworking of some of the themes and ideas on memory that I have been developing over the past five years or so. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 are all new. Chapter 7 was previously published as 'Drawn from Memory: The Archaeology of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Archaeology in Earlier Bronze Age Britain and the Present' in *World Archaeology* 33 (2), pp 334–56, under the editorship of Chris Gosden. It has been reworked for publication here. A fragment of Chapter 8 was published as 'By Way of Illustration: Art, Memory and Materiality in the Irish Sea Region and beyond', pp 202–13, in the volume edited by Vicki Cummings and Chris Fowler entitled *The Neolithic of the Irish Sea: Materiality and Traditions of Practice*, published by Oxbow Books. A fragment of Chapter 9 comes from the proceedings of a conference to honour the retirement of Professor Barbara Bender held in UCL, in March 2005, and published in the *Journal of Material Culture* 11 (1/2) under the editorship of Chris Tilley. Both of the relevant fragments from these chapters have been substantially reworked for publication here. Chapter 4 comprises a total revision of ideas related to material culture and personhood in the European Neolithic, an earlier version of which was published in the *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5 (2) as 'Lives in Fragments?: Personhood and the European Neolithic.'

A huge number of people contributed help and comments over the occasionally difficult period of writing this book. For helpful comments on the manuscript I thank Barbara Bender, Richard Bradley, and Joshua Pollard. I especially thank Katina Lillios and Alasdair Whittle for their services in correcting my wayward thinking. I am also grateful to Dan Hicks for many stimulating discussions about the subject from a different disciplinary perspective. Chapter 9 was written after hearing a characteristically mind-blowing seminar by Tim Ingold in Bristol on the 12 December 2005. This helped me reorganise my thoughts considerably.

For general comments of support during the writing of this book I thank Barbara Bender, Richard Bradley, Thomas Dowson, Davina Freedman, Gavin MacGregor, Colin Richards, Mike Parker-Pearson, Fay Stevens, Aaron Watson, and Howard Williams.

The illustrations were carried out with characteristic professionalism by Aaron Watson. I am grateful to Knut Helskog for providing the illustrations of Norwegian and Russian rock art in Chapter 9. I am also especially grateful to Brian Graham, who supplied the cover illustration. Brian was especially enthusiastic about the project. Brian's work is explicitly archaeological and evocative of memory. The reasons for using Brian's cover image is well expressed by the text (written by Clive Gamble) to his most recent exhibition at the Hart Gallery, Islington: 'Applying pigment provides many references to the accretion of time and his canvases are themselves active landscapes. As a result there is a sense of experience being laid down and continually being up-dated, rather as personality and a sense of self, who we are, are described as a process of sedimentation during life. And in those sediments memory is also contained'.

Finally, two people helped to keep me alive during the writing of this book. My wonderful partner, Hannah Sackett, and the best friend and colleague anyone could ask for, Stephanie Moser. This book is dedicated to both of them.

1

Memory and Material Culture?

Human memory is fragile and finite. We mentally store our experiences as memories. However, memories are easily forgotten, and the retrieval of memories, through the act of remembering, is inexact and faulty. Due to our finite ability to mentally store our memories, human societies have produced a series of devices for storing memory in extrabodily form. These have included notched bone implements, clay and stone tablets, carved stelae, and, at a later stage in history, maps, drawings, photographs, phonographs, and other recording technologies, and, finally, the computer. Each of these offers an increasing capacity for the storage of memory. Each new technology therefore acts as an ever more efficient prop for human memory.

A version of these views can be found in the discourse of a number of disciplines whose purpose it is to debate the development and structure of the human mind – from psychology and cognitive science to philosophy, anthropology, and archaeology. They also represent a kind of 'folk model' of memory, which is broadly representative of the experience of memory for the majority of people raised in Western society. The aim of this book is to question the validity of these views, especially as they pertain to the study of material culture. I argue that such views are predicated on a modernist assumption of the differentiation amongst mind, body, and world. In fact, to assume such a distinction throughout the course of human history is to overlay a series of modernist assumptions upon the distant past. In examining the relationship between memory and material culture, the aim is to propose a more complex and satisfying analysis of the relationship between human memory and material culture.

THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

At this juncture it is useful to define the parameters of the discussion. Those who have opened this book expecting to read about the evolution of the ancient mind (e.g., Mithen 1996) or the cognitive composition of the ancient mind (e.g., Lewis-Williams 2002; Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005) will be heartily disappointed. Although these approaches have their place, I am less concerned with the composition of the human mind and more concerned with the relationship between people and artefacts and how this relationship produces memory.

With an array of studies from disciplines such as anthropology, history, and sociology, the subject of memory has become a hot topic in academia. The subject is comparatively well served in archaeology, with a series of recent books devoted to the subject (Alcock 2002; Bradley 2002) and a number of edited volumes (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Williams 2003). Much of that work has focused on what has come to be known as the 'past in the past' (Bradley

and Williams 1998). This is a fruitful strand of research; however, it presents a fairly narrow definition of memory in the past, being concerned mainly with the reinterpretation of ancient sites and monuments in the past over the long term. The subject of memory is vast, and not all aspects of the subject can be tackled in a book of this size. Some topics, such as the cultural biography of artefacts and the issue of monumentality, are comparatively well worn; many other authors have discussed these issues, and to do so again would require at least another volume (or two!). In this volume I touch on these issues only in a tangential manner (biography in Chapter 7; monuments in Chapter 8).

The subject of this book is closer to the set of concerns outlined by Rowlands (1993) in relation to the role of memory in cultural transmission. The intellectual thrust of this book is to explore the implications of Prown's (1996) point that artefacts are the only class of historic event that occurred in the past but survive into the present. As physical materials, artefacts provide an authentic link to the past and as such can be reexperienced. It is through this reexperiencing that the world of the past, the other, is brought into contact with the present. The contents of this book are a meditation on this point. Given the durability of material culture, what are the implications for our understanding of the role that artefacts play in cultural reproduction?

Given this perspective, it is my contention that an investigation of the subject of material culture and memory involves a reconsideration of a number of key archaeological issues. These include the categorisation of artefacts (Chapters 6 and 7), the archaeology of context and the definition of archaeological cultures (Chapters 5 and 6), the relationship between archaeological chronology and prehistoric social change (Chapter 4), and the definition of archaeological landscapes (Chapter 9). I also deal with the relationship amongst history, memory, and identity (Chapters 3 and 4), and the relationship amongst text, history, and prehistory (Chapters 8 and 9). This volume is less concerned, then, with the approach defined as the 'past in the past' but looks instead at how a consideration of

practices of remembrance affects how we examine the reproduction and change of prehistoric artefacts.

The book is divided into two sections. In the first, I discuss the treatment of memory in a host of disciplines and look at ways in which memory can be studied archaeologically. The discussion shifts from the study of memory to the analysis of the practices of remembrance and then discusses how the person is framed by collective modes of remembrance. In Chapter 4, I expand upon this theme and discuss the concepts of indexicality and citation in relation to cultural practice, touched upon in earlier chapters. Chapter 5 discusses this issue by comparing practices of remembrance and personhood in the Neolithic of Scotland and continental Europe. Chapter 6 examines the way in which identities are formed through the manipulation of categories of material culture, whereas Chapter 7 discusses the interrelationships and chains of remembrance pertinent to artefacts in assemblages. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the important role of inscription and remembrance; in Chapter 8 I discuss the way in which inscriptive practices (the production of megalithic art and the decoration of artefacts) reinforce the relationship between place and memory. In Chapter 9, I focus on rock art in two regions of Europe to argue that rock art plays an important role not only in creating place but also in creating cohesive relationships between different kinds of places in landscapes. In each archaeological case study I pursue the way in which indexical fields work in relation to artefacts, artefact assemblages, places, and landscapes.

I argue that while considerable attention has been paid to the relationship between objects and society, insufficient attention has been paid to the way in which material forms come into being and the extent to which things are interstitial to the process of social reproduction. The mediatory and constitutive force of objects on society is a central focus of my discussion. How people act on objects and how objects can be considered to affect social actions are paramount concerns. In order that we understand social reproduction, we need to know how it is that people engage with objects and how, and in

what manner, objects are used to mediate for people. An analysis of the role of memory in these processes is therefore key to how we describe society and define what we traditionally term *culture*. I am interested in not only 'how societies remember' but also how things help societies remember.

The societies that I discuss are those of the fifth to the second millennium BC (spanning the Neolithic to the Bronze Age) in Europe. Many of my examples are specifically derived from the Scottish Neolithic and Bronze Age. I make no apologies for discussing this region of the British Isles as a case study because Scotland represents one of the richest, yet one of the least studied, regions of Britain (compared to the prevailing focus on a small region of southern England). I chose Scotland because of familiarity: most of my fieldwork to date has concentrated in this region. However, in what follows, the Scottish material is placed in context alongside materials found in other regions of Europe.

EXTERNAL SYMBOLIC STORAGE

One of the clearest and most provocative discussions of the relationship between material culture and memory comes from the work of Merlin Donald (1991, 1998). Donald takes an explicitly evolutionary approach to the cognitive development of the human mind. He proposes a series of evolutionary phases in the development of hominid (or hominin) cognitive abilities which include the episodic, mimetic, linguistic (or mythic), and theoretic. These phases are cumulative, and each is associated with new systems of memory representation. The final of these phases involves the development of systems of memory storage and retrieval that are external to the person. Earlier phases, such as the linguistic and mimetic phases, are concerned with the information storage capabilities of the human mind and principally pertain to the changing configuration or 'architecture' of the mind. The mimetic phase is related

to mainly nonlinguistic representation, which often includes bodily modes of communication, whereas the linguistic or mythic phase is associated with linguistic representation.

For Donald (1991) the Linguistic or Mythic culture is characterised by early *Homo sapiens* and Theoretic culture utilising External Symbolic Storage typified by literacy, urbanization, and the rise of the state in seventh-century BC Greece. Renfrew (1998, 2) has rightly criticised Donald for the abrupt nature of these phases, which jump from the development of language in the Upper Palaeolithic to the earliest writing. To rectify this, he includes the development of symbolic material culture – itself a form of external symbolic storage – during the Neolithic and Bronze Age as an adjunct to Donald's scheme. Renfrew's critique is important because it emphasises the fact that most forms of material culture are mnemonic in character; however, I believe there are more pressing problems with Donald's scheme, which pertain to the core concept of 'external symbolic storage' itself.

On the face of it, the notion of external symbolic storage appears attractive because it seems to capture the sense in which artefacts act to promote human memory and in turn act back on the human subject. It also foregrounds the important point that artefacts act as an external means of knitting societies together. Ultimately, however, there are a series of problems with the notion of externality and with the idea of figuring memory as a form of storage (whether in artefactual form or in the mind). There are also problems with treating the mnemonic role of artefacts as purely symbolic in nature. I address each of these in turn.

PROBLEMS WITH THE NOTION OF EXTERNALITY AND STORAGE

Donald's scheme appears to consider the mind as a distinct entity set against the external world. Curiously, despite the discussion of

biology in a number of his earlier phases (especially the episodic and mimetic phases and the transition to the linguistic phase) a consideration of the role of the hominid (hominin) body in relation to the mind is also absent from Donald's account. The treatment of the mind as an isolated entity has a series of consequences for our understanding both of memory and of the constitution of the person. Furthermore, it has critically important consequences for understanding our mnemonic relationship to material culture.

Donald's description of the relationship between mind and world relies upon a computational model of the human mind (Lakoff 1987; Thomas 1998, 150). According to such models of the mind, objects existing in the external world are represented to the mind as images. The external world is treated as objective; material things are viewed as ontologically unproblematic – they are simply components of the environment awaiting experience through being sensed by the thinking subject.

This model of the mind emerges with the theories of early modernist thinkers such as Descartes and Locke. Locke, for example, considered memory to be generated by the empirical experience of sense perceptions. Sensations imprint themselves upon the memory. It follows from this that thoughts or ideas are nothing more than actual perceptions in the mind, and the mind has a power to revive perceptions in memory with the additional perception that it had them before (Locke 1997[1690], 147–8). Locke reasoned that after sensation (or perception), the retention of ideas in memory is crucial because it is this that allows us to reflect upon ideas to attain knowledge. Memory is therefore seen as a form of channel, or gateway, which mediates between actual perceptions and the formation of ideas and knowledge. This empirical understanding of how memories are formed has enormous consequences for subsequent understandings of the phenomenon. For example, because memory is figured as an internal mental process, which retains or stores the impression of our perceptions, we tend to treat memory as a kind

of object that itself retains the objects of perception. In this sense Locke (1997[1690], 147) refers to memory as the 'storehouse of ideas'.

The metaphor of the 'storehouse' persists in popular accounts of memory:

> I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things, so that he has a difficulty in laying hands on it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones. (Conan Doyle 1981[1887], 19)

So Sherlock Holmes expounds his theory of memory to Dr. Watson upon their taking up rooms at Baker Street, in *A Study in Scarlet*. This idea of the mind as a lumber room or physical space in which thoughts are stored as physical entities has remarkable popular appeal. Precisely the same metaphor is employed by Umberto Eco (possibly conscious of its earlier use by Conan Doyle) in his recent novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (Eco 2005). Upon losing his memory, the protagonist, Yambo, plunders the attic of his family home for the reading matter (comics and books) which influenced his early development. The attic comes to stand for the space of his mind and the books his memories; as cupboards crammed with books overspill, his memories likewise come gushing forth. The metaphor

of memory as a storage container both has popular appeal and is treated as a scientific verity (Johnson 1991).

The predominant metaphor of memory as a container in which a finite set of memories can be stored posits that our memories act as repositories of knowledge, as we saw with Holmes's exposition. According to this model, for us to remember, some knowledge must be removed (or forgotten) so that other knowledge can be retained (Johnson 1991). Metaphorically, the form that memory storage takes may vary: memory has variously been conceived as a library, as an encyclopaedia with memories stored on numbered or lettered pages, or as a map with constellations of sites placed around the landscape (Fentress and Wickham 1992; Yates 1966).

An important correlate of the notion of memory as container is the idea that representations are objective and that the authenticity and accuracy of knowledge depends upon the clarity of recall. Such a view of memory relates very closely to a conception of knowledge as a series of semantic categories: objective 'packets' of knowledge retained by the mind. As we shall see, there are problems with this view. As Fentress and Wickham (1992, 31) put it: 'memory entails a degree of interpretation. Our memories no more store little replicas of the outside world made out of mind stuff than do the backs of our televisions'.

The notion of memory as storage container and the emphasis upon authenticity and clarity of recall are two major legacies of early empirical descriptions of memory. Donald's formulation of the mind in relation to body and world would therefore seem to be reliant upon empiricist traditions of thought. It is curious that such a position is adopted, especially when we consider that other strands of contemporary cognitive science explicitly consider the relationship amongst the mind, body, and world. For instance, the analysis of processes of categorisation suggests that it is not helpful to treat the mind as a disembodied entity. Rather, the structure of our cognitive categories indicates that such categories are grounded on what Lakoff (1987, 348) describes as 'conceptual embodiment'. The fact that the body and mind operate as a unified

system provides an insight into the formation of our most basic categories, as well as more complex metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). A clear example is the way in which bodily orientation influences the sense of linguistic metaphors. Because our bodies are upright, to feel 'up' has a positive connotation, whereas to feel 'down' is negative.

In a similar sense, the cognitive scientist Andy Clark (1997) describes a 'classical' view of the mind as one that views mind and world to be discrete entities in which the body serves simply as an input device (see also Lakoff 1987, 338–52). Cognition is centralised and memory is viewed as a simple process of retrieval from a stored symbolic database (Clark 1997, 83). The resemblance between these views and those discussed in the context of Donald and the Enlightenment thought of Locke is evident.

As an alternative, based upon practical experimentation in diverse fields such as computer science, cybernetics, and developmental psychology, Clark notes that we may consider the mind in quite a different light. Instead of treating mind, body, and world as distinct entities, he proposes that we treat them as fields of interaction. The mind is best understood as emergent in its interactions with the world. For example, he discusses how recent advances in robotics have dispensed with producing robots with centralised processing units and instead produce robots able to interact and problem solve within their given environments. Their 'minds' are problem-solving devices produced in and through these interactions. In a similar vein, drawing on studies in child development, he recounts how infants learn to interact with slopes of differing gradients. Depending upon whether they crawl or walk, the slope is negotiated in different ways. Indeed their negotiation of slopes is action specific. Although they may learn to successfully climb a slope as a crawler, this knowledge has to be relearned as a walker (Clark 1997, 36–7). Knowledge is therefore gained through embodied engagement with the world and is dependent upon contingent interactions amongst brain, body, and world. In this alternative view of the mind, cognition is seen as

decentralised and distributed amongst brain, body, and world. In Clark's terms, the brain is 'leaky'.

According to this view, memory is treated as a process of pattern re-creation and the environment is considered to be an active resource which, when interacted with, plays an important role in problem solving (Clark 1997, 83–4). Clark's views have important things to say about the relationship between memory and material culture, which we will explore later.

Here it is important to underline the importance of pursuing memory beyond the confines of the brain and to consider its relationship with the body. The role of the body in the production of memory has been widely discussed. The major characteristic of body memory is that it is habitual (Bergson 1991[1908]). It is less consciously articulated than cognitive modes of remembering; nonetheless, it is critically important because it is the basis from which most of our everyday actions are formed. In effect, body memory consists of the memory of the past embodied in our bodily actions. Memory is effectively *sedimented* in the very movement of the body. If this statement seems exaggerated, it is worth speculating on the number of actions undertaken daily, from simple actions, such as brushing one's teeth, to complex actions such as driving cars, to taken-for-granted actions, such as walking, which require a prereflective understanding of how to perform them. Casey (1987, 151) notes that habitual body memory is efficacious and orienting. It is efficacious in that the actions carried out due to a person's bodily memory have an effect upon the world which the individual inhabits. More than this, bodily memory constitutes the ground for individuals to perceive themselves as discrete and continuous entities; it is the continual performance of habitual body memory that provides a sense of constancy. Body memory is orienting because this is one of the ways we gain a sense of our own bodies and their position in relation to the world about us.

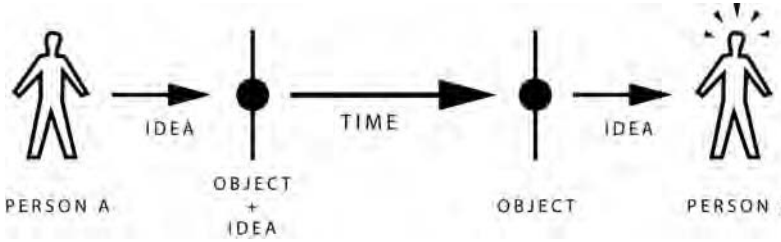
It is important to note that this sense of habit is inculcated through cultural practices (Connerton 1989). It is the repetitive

incorporation of bodily movements that forms habitual body memory, and these movements are culturally prescribed. Connerton (1989, 72–104) describes a whole series of learned behaviours which are concerned with disciplining the body of the child in some way, for example, table manners, the acquisition of 'good handwriting' and speech, deportment, and hand gesture. Bourdieu (1977), too, notes that bodily memory is critical to forming dispositions for cultural action, what he describes as *habitus*. That bodily movement is culturally prescribed is underlined by Mauss's observation that the most mundane of human movements and sequences of action are the domain of culture, from walking down the street to making love (Mauss 1979[1950]). In terms of material culture, it is critical to realise that these 'techniques of the body' not only encompass bodily dispositions and movement but also incorporate the correct usage of extrabodily instruments and objects. For example, the acquisition of 'good handwriting' intimately involves the correct usage of the pen with which to write.

MATERIAL CULTURE, MIND, AND SYMBOLISM

We have seen that there are problems with treating the mind as a disembodied entity disengaged from the body. If we are to understand the relationship between memory and material culture it is critical that the body is included in our accounts and that we assume a level of interaction between embodied individuals and the material world. If we return to the notion of external symbolic storage, a number of problems remain. In this formulation, material culture is treated as a repository or product of purely mental activity (Thomas 1998, 149). Ideas that emerge inside a person's mind are then transferred onto material objects (Fig. 1).

Things are therefore treated as initially mute materials, which are made meaningful only once they have received the impress of intentional human minds. In evolutionary terms this is curious because it implies that the material world begins to have meaning only once it



1. The relationship between objects and people in 'information transfer' theories of remembrance, such as Donald's.

is employed as a means of external symbolic storage. The concept of symbolic storage also encapsulates the idea that the act of inscribing meaning into or onto an object fixes meaning. The meaning captured in this fashion is seen to act back upon the human mind to 'create specific states of knowledge intended by the creator of the external device' (Donald 1993, 747). However, as Thomas (1998, 153) points out, meaning is never fixed by the author; rather, symbols always demand interpretation. In fact, meaning is not simply read out of a signifier, it is read *into* it (Olsen 1990; Thomas 1998, 153.). The act of reading is both creative and situational. The reader is situated within specific cultural contexts; as such, an encultured individual reads on the basis of his or her own life experiences. On this basis, material culture cannot be seen as a storehouse or bank of past experience any more than the human mind can be (Rawson 1998, 107).

However, in this instance we also need to be alert to problems with the metaphor of reading. Although we need to be aware that ideas are not simply inserted into objects to be banked for the future, we also need to critically address the assumption that the material world can be treated as a system of signs to be read. In a sense, the assumption that artefacts might be treated as symbols is in danger of reenacting the distinctions amongst mind, body, and world by treating objects as being made up of two distinct components: a component composed of physical matter and a symbolic component that is 'read'.

READING AND REREADING MATERIAL CULTURE

What do we imply when we say that we are 'reading' material culture? Here I want to critically assess prevailing notions of 'reading' in the study of material culture and ask in what sense the concept of reading is useful to the study of material culture. The idea that material culture might be amenable to the process of reading stems from the conceptualisation of the world of objects as a signification system (system of signs), analogous to language. The theoretical impulse for this treatment of material culture is the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. According to de Saussure, a sign consists of two separate components, a signifier (the acoustic image of the spoken word as heard by the recipient of a message) and a signified (the meaning called forth in the mind of recipients resulting from the stimulation of the signifer). The sign is then composed of three elements: the signifier, the signified, and the unity of the two. The unity between signifier and signified is determined by culture. The assignment of the signifier, such as the word *chair* to some signified object, depends upon what a particular community of users understands a chair to mean. The relationship between signifier and signified is not given but is culturally prescribed (Gottdiener 1994, 5–6). This linguistically derived approach to signs has had an enormous impact on the development of Western thought, from structural linguistics to structuralism and poststructuralism, and a similar approach to signs was adopted in archaeology and adapted to the study of material objects (Hodder 1982; Shanks and Tilley 1987; Tilley 1991). It is in this sense that we traditionally speak of 'reading' material culture; excavated artefacts are treated as signs (or vehicles for the expressions of abstract concepts).

The problem with this approach is that – because it is arbitrarily related – the signified (the object or artefact) need have little relation to the signifier (its cultural meaning). If we are to view sign and signifier, idea and thing, to be conjoined only in an arbitrary fashion, the correlate of this is that the mind is again treated as

disembodied. It is disengaged from a world of things it can only ever grasp mentally (Gosden 1994, 49). This poses considerable difficulties in archaeology when cultural meaning is the very element we wish to reconstruct. The problems with treating signifiers as adjuncts to the material properties of the artefacts were recognised from the outset. For Hodder (1986, 48) the object was to be viewed as both an object and a sign. This is because objects are always encompassed or framed by language, and the two cannot be separated (Olsen 1990). The arbitrary yet all-encompassing nature of language poses some problems for material culture analysts. Ideally, to archaeologists, the material character of artefacts ought to be of some aid in reconstructing their cultural meaning. Are we to retain a sense that the material character of objects is divorced from their cultural meaning and can be understood only through knowledge of cultural convention?

This poses problems if we want to understand how objects might act as aids to memory. If we conceptualise objects solely as sign-vehicles, we seem to return to Donald's view of objects as simple containers for ideas stored external to the human subject. It may be useful at this juncture to distinguish between a narrow definition of objects as carriers of information (e.g., Schiffer 1999; Shennan 2002) and a wider definition of objects as having the potential for evoking meaning either linguistically or nonlinguistically, in either a codified or a noncodified manner. For example, objects such as the knotted string figures (*Khipu* or *Quipu*) of the Andes (Saloman 2001; Vansina 1973, 37) or the shell-and-stick navigational charts of Micronesia (Gell 1985; Mack 2003) are evidently constructed to convey codified information; however, it seems unrealistic to suggest that all objects convey codified symbolic information. The reading of objects is not a trivial matter of information retrieval. Objects convey meaning in a multiplicity of ways.

The question of how objects convey memory turns on how we consider objects to communicate meaning. Although the act of reading may be more complex than Donald envisaged; as ciphers for the written word, for him objects essentially serve the same function. This again returns us to Lockean empiricism, because if we treat

objects as external reservoirs of ideas, then perception and memory serve only as conduits for transferring ideas from the external world to the internal mind. None of these formulations strike me as being satisfactory, mainly because they relegate material culture to a passive role and do not take account of the materiality of objects or their mnemonic role in social practices.

There are other ways in which we might consider 'reading' material culture. To help us consider this let us briefly return to those famous rooms on Baker Street:

> But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor's stick? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance. Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it.

Needless to say, Watson's reconstruction is vague and erroneous, beyond saying said stick belongs to a country doctor because of the character of the implement and because it is a presentation item (it is inscribed). Moreover, the iron ferrules of the stick are worn, indicating a country doctor who – in the age before motorcars – had occasion to do a lot of walking. Holmes takes the stick and fills in the details:

> I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country practitioner. And he walks a good deal. . . .
>
> . . . . I would suggest for example, that a presentation to a doctor is more likely to come from a hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials "CC" are placed before that hospital the words "Charing Cross" very naturally suggest themselves . . . I can only think of the obvious

> conclusion that the man has practised in town before going to the country.
>
> . . . . Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the staff of the hospital, since only a man well established in a London practice could hold such a position, and such a one would not drift into the country. What was he then? If he was in the hospital yet not on the staff, he could only have been a house-surgeon or a house-physician – little more than a senior student. And he left five years ago – the date is on the stick. So your grave family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty, amiable, un-ambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite dog, which I should describe as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff. . . . (Conan Doyle 1981[1902], 9–10)

Holmes later reveals the thinking behind his interpretation: only amiable people are given gifts upon retirement from a job and the person is unambitious because he moved from town to country and absent-minded because he had forgotten his stick! As for the dog, its size and character was estimated from the span of its teeth marks on the stick, a fact confirmed when Dr. James Mortimer returns for his stick followed by a curly-haired spaniel!

Here we encounter a different sense of the phrase 'reading material culture'. The discourse surrounding the stick which opens his most famous adventure (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*) was based on Holmes's celebrated method of observation. Here the material character of an object is minutely examined for traces of evidence of wider causes. This method of assessment involves quite a different semiotic procedure from the one traditionally employed when archaeologists talk about 'reading' material culture.

Curiously, around the same time that de Saussure was formulating his ideas on linguistics and Conan Doyle was penning his famous detective stories, on the other side of the Atlantic the American scholar Charles Sanders Peirce was devising a theory of semiotics

in parallel to that of Saussure. His approach to semiotics was far closer to Conan Doyle's than to Saussure's (Eco 1984). Unlike Saussure, Peirce conceived of the sign as a three-part relation: a vehicle that conveys an idea to the mind (which he called the representamen), another idea that interprets the sign (which he called the interpretant), and an object for which the sign stands (see Gottdiener 1994, 9). The crucial difference between the two approaches to semiotics is that Saussure was concerned with language as a mode of communication and he did not consider whether an objective world was essential to language. By contrast, Peirce was not an idealist; he believed that the real world existed because it was the attempt of the sciences to understand reality (as a scientist he worked for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey for more than 30 years; Corrington 1993, 5) and his work sought to establish the necessary conditions for the success of truth claims.

Just as the function of signs was divided into three terms, so the sign itself could be envisaged as having three forms: index, icon, or symbol. The most basic of these is the *index*. The meaning of an index is not a product of social conventions or codes; instead, it is established as a sign through pragmatic understanding of the material world. The association between lightning and thunder is an index; when we see lightning we anticipate the sound of thunder, the meaning of this index is a storm. Holmes's reading of the doctor's stick at the beginning of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is an example of the way material objects can be read as indexes, or indices, of past events. An *icon* is a sign that conveys an idea by virtue of its close reproduction or resemblance of an actual object or event. A good example of this would be traffic signs, which convey their meaning directly without the aid of language or social convention. They do this on the basis of physical resemblance – the shape of an aeroplane is used to signify an airport. A *symbol* is closer to what Saussure meant by a sign, it is a sign-vehicle that stands for something else which is understood as an idea in the mind of the interpretant; it is conventional and regulated by culture and is a sign by virtue of a law or rule.

The advantage of Peirce's approach is that it acknowledges the existence of the object world, thus avoiding the idealism of Saussure. Similarly his triadic, or threefold, classification of signs avoids simple dichotomies and allows for the analysis of all systems of signification, including natural signs and cultural signs. For these reasons I believe Peircean semiotics is especially appropriate for the analysis of material culture (see also Bauer and Preucel 2001; Gardin 1992; Gottdiener 1994) because it allows of the fact that – at a fundamental level – the significance of artefacts might be effected by their material properties. The basic tenets of Peirce's approach determine both lower-order and higher-order archaeological interpretations. Consider a fundamental or lower-order interpretation of material culture: if I were to analyse the profile of a sherd of pottery I would look for colour changes as an indication of the atmospheric environment of the fire or kiln. Such a procedure involves indexical analysis because the colour is treated as an index of the oxidising or reducing atmosphere in the fire/kiln. The atmosphere has a direct effect on the colour of the clay and leaves a trace to be read by the archaeologist. Higher-order interpretations also involve indexical analysis: for example, Bauer and Preucel (2001, 91) note that a jadeite axe deposited in a burial context in the Eurasian steppes indexes trade or interaction with Central Asia (the geographical origin of jadeite). Approaches to material culture which focus upon indexical analysis therefore permit a wide range of interpretations of past behaviour.

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF TRACES

I argue that we can no longer simply treat objects purely as symbolic media; rather the materiality of objects is best seen as impinging on people sensually and physically at a fundamental level. What I develop herein is an understanding of the way objects can act as physical traces of past events which are amenable to the process of reading. It is this aspect of material culture which helps us consider how artefacts act as aids to remembrance.

The notion of objects as physical traces of memory originates with Freud's discussion of the 'Mystic Writing Pad'; the pad preserved an image of what was written on its surface and for Freud provided a technological metaphor for the workings of consciousness (Leslie 2003, 172–3). Drawing on Freud, Walter Benjamin also employs a series of technological metaphors – including cinematic film and photography – for the notion of the memory trace (Leslie 2003, 176–84). The concept of artefacts as forms of memory trace is pursued later. Jacques Derrida employs the concept of the trace to reconsider the significance of the philosophy of presence. For Derrida the notion of trace evokes the absence of full and present meaning; meaning is differential, a matter of constant referral onwards from term to term, each of which has meaning only from its necessary difference from other signifiers. Meaning is therefore constituted by a network of traces. We will pursue this line of thought further in Chapter 4; here I want to highlight the way in which artefacts embody traces of the past.

Alfred Gell (1998, 233–42) provides a useful basis for our discussion. Gell is concerned with the temporal position of artworks in networks of causal relations. He draws on Husserl's model of time-consciousness as a means of examining how objects are positioned in time. For Husserl, time moves forward as a series of temporal events, but each of these events encapsulates elements of past events (retentions) and embodies components of future events (protentions). Gell employs this concept to analyse the artistic *oeuvre* of both individuals and collective groups. Artworks are positioned in time as a series of 'events' embodied in material form by the artwork itself. By drawing on preexisting artworks the artist embodies, in the new artwork, elements of what has gone before. By materialising the artwork in physical form, the artist projects his or her intentions forward in time in the form of the artwork. What Gell is concerned to relate here is the extent to which artworks can be treated as indexes of human agency and how, as indexes, artworks subsequently affect human action. I will elaborate upon Gell's analysis at a number of points in

subsequent chapters because it has much to say about the temporality of material culture. Gell is especially concerned to describe material objects as indexes of human agency and intentionality. The material attributes of the object index, refer to, or focus attention on, the intentions and skill of the artist. A link is established between the object and the artist; such a link is made possible due to the visually attractive and cognitively powerful nature of artworks. This example is especially pertinent because it provides a good example of the dual and interconnected role of objects and people. The ability of the artist is manifested through the artwork; whereas the material properties of the artwork provide the artist with the ability to act. Without producing artworks the artist cannot be truly thought to exist as an agent, as an artist. We will explore this aspect of materiality further in the next chapter.

What I particularly want to emphasise at this juncture is the point that artworks index events that happened in the past, the event of their production by an artist. This provides one example of the way in which material culture might be considered to index past actions; objects are physical *traces* of past action. Through their very reference to previous works, once they are produced, artworks physically embody memory. As Gell (1998, 233) puts it, without repetition art would 'lose its memory'.

It is not only through production that memory is embodied but also through use and alteration. The history of an object is read in its wear. The shell valuables circulated amongst the group of Melanesian islands known as the Kula Ring are good examples of this. The value of each shell is read from its patina as, over time, the shell passes through the hands of the many men involved in its exchange. The passage of time is reflected in the way the shell changes colour from white to pink or red (Munn 1986). The shell in effect indexes the events of past exchanges and is imbued with value because of this.

Buildings and monuments also index the past. Marshall (1998) describes the way in which the traditional Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka)

house, of the northwest coast of America, underwent curation, cycles of repair and refurbishment, based on the expansion of the residence unit. The history of the kin group was read in the history of the house, and its very fabric remembered these changes and alterations.

Monuments also embody cycles of past events as they are built of components of previous monuments and altered over the course of their use and their eventual abandonment. A classic example of this is the incorporation of decorated stones in the Neolithic passage graves of Brittany at sites such Le Petit Mont (Bradley 1998b; Lecornec 1994; Scarre 2002), La Table des Marchand, and Gavrinis (Bradley 2002; Le Roux 1984; Whittle 2000). The sequence of monument construction at these and other megalithic sites also encapsulates past events. The passage grave at Barnenez, North Finistère, provides an excellent example of this. The cairn is a long mound containing 11 passage graves. The history of the site is complex, with passage graves F to J the earliest component of the monument. These passages were lengthened and further passage graves added during later episodes of construction (Scarre 2002, 36–9). The whole was eventually encapsulated in an immense long mound. Memory is embodied in the material *traces* of cycles of architectural alteration and repair.

ARTEFACTS AS INDICES OF THE PAST

I use the term *memory* in relation to objects, buildings, and such as a way of re-addressing the relationship between people and objects in the activity we call remembering. If we take on board the point that people and objects are conjoined through practice and that causation (the seat of action) is distributed between people and objects (I will discuss this point in more detail in the next chapter), then both people *and* objects are engaged in the process of remembering. This is not to say that objects *experience*, *contain*, or *store* memory; it is simply that objects provide the ground for humans to experience memory. Let us consider this point and the wider problem of how we

characterise memory by returning to Gell's discussion of the *oeuvre* of the artist.

Artworks provide a means of materialising the agency of the artist; artists are remembered by their works. However, if we can consider memory to be embodied in artworks then the subsequent reception or 'retrieval' of memory is not a simple matter of storage-access-retrieval in the sense described by Donald's notion of external symbolic storage. Rather the 'memory' of the agency of the artist embodied in artworks is a version of the artist transubstantiated in the form of paint, canvas, or whatever medium. The artwork is an index or sign of the artist's past agency. The reception of this sign is felt bodily and through the senses and is not simply an uncomplicated feedback loop of information storage and retrieval. But what is an index and how can thinking about indices help us consider the process of remembering with things?

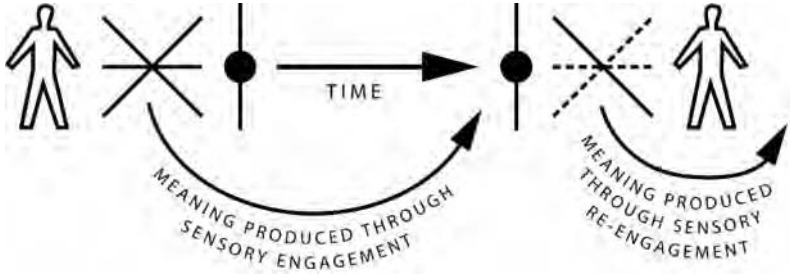
I want to consider the term *index* and the related term *abduction* in a little more detail. I find the notion of the index especially useful in the context of discussions of memory because it captures a sense of the way in which material traces or natural phenomena are perceived as signs of past events. By focussing on causation, the directive force of events, it also implies a sense of conjunction. Smoke equals fire because it is a product of fire. Hoofprints refer to the horse because they resemble the shape of its hooves. When dealing with material culture, this seems more useful than an approach to signification which treats meaning as arbitrary to the signifier. However, while there is contiguity, the sign is not identical to that to which it refers, smoke is not physically the same as fire and hoofprints do not look like horses. To use an example referred to earlier, the patina on Kula shells refers to the passing of time and the touch of many hands; it does not represent time or hands directly.

How are such relationships inferred? To consider this question we need to introduce a further term: *abduction*, also derived from the philosophy of Peirce. Abduction is a form of inferential reasoning which links perception and experience with semiotics. Essentially,

abduction is a process which involves inference from a given case to a hypothesised general rule (Peirce in Corrington 1993, 60); this is the form of reasoning Holmes conducted when reading James Mortimer's stick (see Eco 1984).

Abduction as a reasoning process relies on the unconscious perceptual judgement that comes with the habitual experience of the world. Abductive inferences are often made from indexical signs. For example, whilst out taking a walk we may understand that a paw-print in soft sand refers to the passage of a dog in the recent past. The print is therefore an index of the dog, and if we were to see the print we would abductively infer at an unconscious level that a dog had been in the vicinity. Such an inference would be confirmed were we to see a dog on our walk. Without the actual physical presence of the dog we cannot be absolutely certain that dog and print are linked, but in common experience the two are associated. The process of abduction describes the unconscious level at which we make these kinds of immediate and general hypotheses.

Gell (1998) uses both of these terms to describe the way in which artworks act as an index for the agency of the artist and how that agency is inferred. I want to adopt these concepts more broadly to think about the role of material culture in the process of remembering. The artwork acts as an index of the artist precisely because it is distanced from the artist spatially or temporally. It is this sense of temporal distance that is crucial here. In the examples I referred to earlier, artworks and buildings physically indexed past events. They do not simply represent past events directly; rather, past activities of production, construction, and wear are transformed in physical form – they simply refer to the past. But how are these past events recalled? Not through a process of information retrieval but through a process of sensory experience, by inferring the presence of past events through the senses. The key point here is that due to the physicality or *perdurance* (physical persistence) of material culture, things act as a means of presencing past events to the senses. If we treat objects as indices of past action, then we come to realise that objects do not so much preserve distinct memories in fidelity; rather,



2. The sensory relationship between people and objects.

they *evoke* remembrance (Kwint 1999). Material culture therefore actively precipitates remembrance (see Fig. 2).

At a basic level, Casey (1987) suggests we experience a distinction between primary and secondary remembering. Primary remembering relates as much to the experience of time and describes the way in which instances of experience are retained in the mind before they disappear from present consciousness. Without this basic form of remembering we would have no time consciousness (for a similar argument, see Gell 1992) and would effectively live in a series of unconnected present moments.

Secondary remembering is a twofold process, beginning with the retrieval of past experience and then the revival of that experience. As Casey notes, this is not so much a simple case of retrieving past experience but of reexperiencing past objects and events. By conceptualising objects as indices of past events we can begin to see how objects act as a means of underpinning the phenomenal world for people; they provide one means by which people are able to reexperience past activities. In Chapter 3, I expand upon this point to consider the significance that the tempo and periodicity of interaction between people and things has for the process of remembrance.

I suggest that this conceptualisation of the relationship between people and objects alters our traditional views of remembrance. Rather than treating recall as a process of abstract contemplation and reflection that occurs in the mind we can instead conceptualise remembrance as a dialogic encounter between the experiencing

person and the artefact. The dialogic encounter between person and artefact of course assumes a less distinct division between the internal subject and the external objective world, a dialogue in which objects impress themselves perceptually and sensually upon humans as much as humans impress themselves upon objects (Pels 1998). Remembrance is not a process internal to the human mind; rather, it is a process that occurs in the bodily encounter between people and things, as people do not remember in isolation, nor do objects. As material indices objects have the capacity to elicit remembrance. Remembrance is a process distributed between people and objects, and the process of evocation indexed by objects allows people to remember.

If we are to consider remembrance as a dialogue, we need to think differently about the role played by the senses. The senses are obviously crucial to the apprehension of the material world, and ordinarily we assume that the senses act as a vehicle for the conveyance of knowledge about that world. However, I believe we need to take on board Tim Ingold's (2000a, 243–89) argument that our emphasis needs to shift away from thinking of the body as a conduit for sensations (which are then ordered by the mind) to thinking of the body as the subject of sensations. Sensations change as the experiencing person moves within his or her lifeworld. Thomas (1996a, 19) puts the point neatly: 'the body is not a container we *live in*, it is an aspect of the self we live *through*' (original emphasis).

To reiterate, the central argument of this chapter is that remembrance is a process made apparent to the experiencing subject by the continual and dynamic encounter between the subject and the material world he or she inhabits rather than an abstract and dispassionate transaction between the external world and the mind. This opens up the possibility of thinking about memory differently. Rather than treating memory as a function of the internal processes of the human mind, we might consider memory to be produced through the encounter between people and the material world. In this sense it is useful to think of objects as indexes, or reminders, of the past. We take up these important points in the next chapter.