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Memory and Material Culture

Andrew Jones

2007. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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The main theme of this book focuses on how material forms come into being and the extent to which things are interstitial to the process of social production. Jones argues in this book that the material world offers a vital framework for the formation of collective memory. The concept of memory is used by the author to critique the interpretive archaeologists' treatment of the artefacts as symbols, and the treatment of the behavioural archaeologists of artefacts as units of information (or memes). He instead argues that the artefacts should be treated as forms of mnemonic that have an impact on the senses. He supported this argument by providing case studies from prehistoric Europe.

Chapter Summaries

There are 10 chapters in this book—four were allotted for the

fundamental ideas, five for case studies, and the last one for the conclusion. The book is also divided into two general sections, according to the author. The first part is the treatment of memory in the different disciplines and discourses and discusses ways that memory can be archaeologically studied. Then, through the different case studies, the discussion shifts to the study of the practices of remembrance in different settings, and to the process of how collective modes of remembrance frame the person/individual.

The first chapter is entitled *Memory and Material Culture*. This focuses on the common notions that memory is like a storehouse or container, and that the representations of the material world are objective. It is held in these common notions that the accuracy and authenticity of knowledge depends upon the clarity of recall. The mind according to the empirical thinkers accumulates information by reading the external environment, including the artefacts in there. It is just like a transaction between the mind and the external world. To counter this, the author proposed that remembrance is a process, which can be made apparent through the continual and dynamic encounter between the person and the material world. It is in this relationship between the people and objects that meaning and memory are produced rather than on the empirical concept of the information transfer theories of remembrance from object to person. He then introduced the term index, which means the reminders or association with something in the past.

The second chapter, entitled *From Memory to Commemoration*, opens the discussion through the concept of fetishism wherein things really do not reflect human intention but instead concentrate human experience and belief. The artefacts help us in remembering. Moreover, it is not just through memory and tradition alone that identity is created but through the routinised practices that incorporates these artefacts. It is more on the actions rather than just on the reading/decoding of the external environment. The people perceive their world because of their actions. The author proposes that the people remember things together (collectively) through social interactions. Then, this collective memory transformed into commemoration which acts as a connective process, through the participation and immersion of the people with other people and with the material culture (objects, places, and texts).

The third chapter is entitled *People, Time, and Remembrance*. The main proposition of this chapter is that history is created by the people and vice-versa. The material culture is experienced by the people and this

experience causes the registration of the importance of the artefacts that represents the past. Two explanations were provided on how people perceive “change”. The people can be aware of change, first if they were not able to change but the objects/artefacts change. Second, the people can change but the artefacts remain the same. Both ways illustrate the remembrance of the people of the past, of time, and of change. This also is true with places. This experience of the past is not just embodied in the materiality of the past rather it is on the interaction between the people and things that evokes remembrance. The author referred to this remembrance as material citation, wherein the past is continually referred to and reiterated. With this premise, the reiteration and referring to are directed towards future activities. Of course, the manner of using the objects (or citation of it) is also crucial in the process of remembrance. It is not just on the what but on the how, on how people and things interact. Finally, the chapter highlights the role of the human life span in the measurement of time and change in the material culture, and on how this lifespan influence the concept of change.

Chapter Four is entitled *Improvising Culture*. The author argues that if the concept of citation, explained above, is accepted and made into a premise about the relationship of the past and present activities then we can rethink on how we view culture as a whole. Culture is categorised into open and closed systems. Closed meaning is a substantive entity and open refers to culture as an analytical category. Several approaches in viewing culture are discussed including Ian Hodder’s contextual approach. By re-orienting this approach, the author proposed that artefacts are “situated in networks of referentiality” (p. 81). The use and manufacture of artefacts refer to the past and future events across time. Moreover, through repetitive practices, traditions are created. The author also discusses tradition and invention—arguing that these concepts undergo recurrence, which is the process of changing while staying the same. Finally, the improvisation of cultural practices is a continuous process within the constraints of the material residues of the people from the past, and a creative process of production, too.

Chapters Five to Nine provide examples and case studies on the application of the concepts of index and citation that were presented in the previous chapters. Chapter Five is entitled *Continuous Houses, Perpetual Places—Commemoration and the lives of Neolithic Houses*. The three types/categories of culture during the Neolithic period in Europe were compared using the settlement and burial area features. These three are the Linear

Pottery Culture, Neolithic Scotland, and Neolithic Central Europe. The author related the houses to the perceptions of the humans of their future (and of their past also) through commemoration. The Linear Pottery Culture was more inclined to having things work in the natural cycle of human life wherein they just let their old structures decay naturally. On the other hand, the Neolithic Scotland and Central Europe cultures fast-tracked the tempo of the cycles in their culture by using fire (in burning their monuments to make way for new ones). It is proposed here that the durability of the houses is not the only basis why the idea of a house is commemorated rather that is on the repetitive performance of the practices of building and destruction. These are the means of reproducing the concept of a household or community, which then reflects the concept of individuality.

The next chapter is *Culture, Citation, and Categorisation: Regionality in Late Neolithic Britain*. The author presents the case studies of the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age Britain and Ireland. The Beaker and Groove Wave Cultures, with respect to the pottery tradition during that time, were presented to propose the idea that different citation results in different material culture. This chapter is actually a counter against the simplistic and overarching culture-historical approach which just catalogues differences and similarities in the material culture. Instead, each region or area must be viewed to having their own distinct historical trajectories related to their expression of distinct cultural practices and which will result in distinct identities.

Chapter Seven is entitled *Chains of Memory: The Aesthetics of Memory in Bronze Age Britain*. The chapter begins by discussing the approach to the relationship of humans and artefacts as being passive. Commonly, the artefacts are studied based on their morphology and decoration. Contrary to this, the people-artefact interaction should be viewed as a social activity, a dynamic one. The author illustrated the argument by using the examples from Bronze Age Britain. He compared the difference of repetitive activities from that period with the current one. He shows the difference in memory creation, wherein the present uses printing in the citation of the previous cultures while in the past artefacts the ones being used. The former a static process while the latter a dynamic one.

Chapter Eight—*The Art of Memory: Memory, Inscription, and Place*. Several case studies again were presented, which include the slate plaques of prehistoric Iberia and Irish Passage Tombs. The author now shifts his focus to the discussion of inscription as a form of commemorative practice.

He begins the discussion by citing the text as an externalised storage of memory and human history. Then, goes on to discuss art (in the Great Passage Tombs of the Boyne Valley) as a “technology of remembrance” (p. 188) wherein the structure causes remembrance through its external (visual) and internal (through the images inside the structure) sections. Finally, the author concludes that the inscription of texts and images, in any given time period, are not static. The act of inscription, itself, produces the mnemonic relationship between things and image.

Chapter Nine is entitled *Tracing the Past: Landscape, Lines, and Places*. This chapter again focuses on the concepts of inscription, place, and remembrance. The discussions centre on the open air rock art sites that include the rock arts of Northern Scandinavia/Russia and Prehistoric Britain. In contrast to the previous chapter, the process of citation are different because the former (Iberian slate plaques and passage tombs) are place-inflected relations or employ citation by using the materials from important places or depositing them in important places. On the other hand, the process of citation of the rock art is through the carving of the images. The act of doing this crystallises the relationship between places and images, and thus, remembrance.

The last chapter—*Coda*—provides the general themes discussed in the book. First, memory must be viewed not as a complex mental structure but a complex process that incorporates the interaction between the mind and the material culture. Furthermore, the social practices, to where the artefacts are engaged, determines how remembrance is experienced and distributed—temporally and spatially. Finally, the author highlights the importance of index in the study of material culture because each event, may it be the production of artefact or building of monuments, is an index related to other events within an indexical field (a network of indexes).

Reactions to Memory and Material Culture

The concepts of memory and material culture (culture as a whole for that matter) are not that simple as they are. These concepts are discourses in the different academic disciplines. In this book, the author presented his own arguments that memory interacts with the material culture in a complex process. The following are some reactions to the overall structure of the book, and to the presentation of ideas.

The book is well-organised especially with regards to the flow of the ideas being proposed. It is like a step-by-step process for the first four

chapters where the author presented the basic/fundamental ideas of his book. First, the idea of index was presented until the author moved to citation and further modified it to material citation. Moreover, there are illustrations to show the gist of each chapter. Those drawings will really guide the reader, especially if she/he likes diagrams, in understanding concepts. Overall, the book ought to be read from the first chapter until the last one because of the cumulative approach in the presentation of the concepts.

The main theme of the book is on the interaction of memory and material culture in the formation of the individual's identity. The treatment of memory is vital in the study of past societies because based on the author's explanation, citation of previous cultures or any aspect of them creates and reinforces identity through commemoration. Moreover, memory is defined here not just a repository or storehouse of the human experience or observations of his environment but it is viewed as the result of the interaction (using the senses) of humans and things. It is a process, and not just something that is inside the head and viewed like an arranged set of encyclopaedia. Memory is viewed as dependent on the extent of interaction and on the context where the interaction between the people and things occur.

Jones is also arguing that material culture must be viewed from a different and deeper perspective. We commonly view the artefacts as just storage or repository of the ideas and aspects of culture of the past societies—parallel with memory. We normally view them as static and externalised. The author counters this and argues that the material culture is a result of social production, a dynamic one. However, we cannot just disregard the fact that these artefacts may seem to be static because these really halted in their functions and in the social processes that these were involved in the past especially when these were deposited and became part of the archaeological record. Moreover, the morphological identification of the artefacts is what we only have especially in dealing with past cultures. The author's perspective is a very vital one but the rigid identification and categorisation of the artefacts is still the starting point of an archaeological investigation. The inferences will follow if the empirical data is established. Moreover, the material culture is really not static at all because of the concept of formation processes wherein certain agents act on the artefacts after these were discarded.

Memory and Material Culture is a good reading structurally and argument-wise. It is quite a heavy reading especially for those who cannot

immediately relate to the monuments and artefacts in Europe but still general themes about humans, as a whole, surfaced. The idea of material citation from the past happens all the time and greatly affects the future of a society. In the practical sense, memory is vital in the development of a country in the current time context. Probably further discussions may arise from the fundamentals of this book, especially now that we are dealing with soft copies. Inscriptions may not always be in “hard copy” but may also be in “soft copy”. Finally, the discourse on memory may seem an ideal place for archaeologists because they still have the deepest understanding of the people -things interaction across time and space.

Kapwa: The Self in Others
Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-Bearers

Katrin De Guia, Ph.D.

2005. Pasig City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing

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Dr. Katrin De Guia’s pioneering research on Filipino Culture-Bearers has resulted to this very important book which serves as a significant contribution to the study of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology). Though born a German, De Guia has been, in more ways than one a Filipino, having been a resident of the Philippines for almost three decades now as the wife of famous filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik. Her book entitled *Kapwa: The Self in the Others* explores, as the subtitle reads, the *Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-Bearers*. In the process, she provides us with an in-depth view of Filipino core, surface, and societal values; *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* in various contexts; the comparative concepts of *Personhood vs Personality*; ancestral knowledge systems and practices; and most importantly, the Pinoy concept of KAPWA.

A word that according De Guia, combines the Self and the Other, is the concept of *Kapwa*. It is a Tagalog term “widely used when addressing another with the intention of establishing a connection” (p. 8). Such was De Guia’s objective: to establish a connection between and among people in order to link them rather than separate them from each other. The concept essentially looks for “the fundamental characteristics in people—as human beings” (p. 8). In exploring the definitions, interpretations, and manifestations of this Pinoy concept, De Guia hopes that it may, as an