

Book reviews

Charles Stone and Lucas Bietti (eds)

Contextualizing Human Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding How Individuals and Groups Remember the Past. New York: Routledge, 2016. 222 pp. £95.00

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The traditional story tells us that memory is just a passive capacity for internally storing information for later retrieval. According to the modularist approach in cognitive science, the subject has an inner storage space and a retrieval mechanism that works on the stored information. Thus, memory is just the working of an internal mechanism which is independent of external disturbances and other mental modules (such as perception, emotion, beliefs). This is what Koriart and Goldsmith (1996) have called the “storehouse metaphor” of memory. According to this view, in order to investigate memory, it is sufficient to ask the subject to study some information (normally a list of words) and, later on, provide him with a test on the studied information. The amount of information recalled constitutes a measure of the subject’s memory.

Luckily, this traditional story is just a caricature of how we used to understand and investigate memory. In fact, Stone and Bietti’s book illustrates how far away from that conception we have moved. All studies in the book have dropped the “storehouse” view of memory and, instead, have adopted a generative or reconstructive approach: memory is a reconstruction of the past mediated by context, culture, and society. But context is not a single factor. There are different kinds of contexts, and each of them may affect remembering in a different way: individual and social contexts, emotional and cultural contexts, scientific and historical contexts, communicative, learning, pathological, and conflictive contexts. This is perspicuously stated by Brescó and Wagoner’s chapter: “remembering is an activity distributed between individuals and those socially and historically inherited cultural artifacts that mediate the way people (re)construct and give sense to the past” (p. 81). Moreover, context is not only a factor that affects memory, but it also shapes and structures memory: “What is memorized and remembered changes as a function of the social context” (p. 210).

In order to provide an overview of the contents of the book, let me summarize the chapters. The book is divided into three parts. The first is composed of three chapters that rely on cognitive and psychological studies of memory. In chapter 2, Brown, Kouri, and Superka examine autobiographical remembering in pathological contexts, mainly after trauma and in relation to posttraumatic stress disorder. The text is somewhat short and sketchy; the subject merits a more thorough presentation and analysis. Chapter 3, by Charles Stone, investigates the effect of selective silence on the remembering and forgetting of information. Stone confronts us with the puzzling effect called *retrieval-induced forgetting*, which posits that total or selective silence about a given topic during a conversation modifies or shapes the remembering of the listener: “The rate of forgetting depends on the relation between what is not said and what is said: forgetting is worse when the two are related” (p. 25). Further, “[r]emaining selectively silent about the past will induce greater forgetting relative to remaining

completely silent” (p. 33). The puzzle becomes even more impressive when one realizes that the effect is stronger when the listener and the speaker belong to the same group, but it breaks down if the speaker is perceived as an expert. The chapter introduces the topic of retrieval-induced forgetting and develops interesting considerations about the interactions between selective silence, context, and trustworthiness. Chapter 4, by Dumas and Luminet, proposes a bridge between two previously unconnected research topics: eye-witness testimony memory and flashbulb memory. They show that it is possible to better understand some of the properties of eye-witness recall based on certain well-known factors that determine flashbulb memories, and vice versa. This chapter offers a very enlightening introduction both to eye-witness memory and flashbulb research: it presents the main aims and methods of each of these research domains and illustrates them with examples.

The second part of the book is composed of three chapters that explore the social and cultural contexts of remembering. In chapter 5, Brescó and Wagoner show how remembering is shaped by cultural and social factors by studying how subjects remembered the peace process of 2006 in the Basque Country. The authors carried out interviews and questionnaires that showed that in each case the remembering of past events was mediated by cultural artifacts, historical narratives, and national symbols. The chapter is not only clear in demonstrating this point, but it puts forward an interesting analysis of remembering as a voluntary act or cultural creation. Chapter 6, by Gudehus, examines the importance of three concepts that play a fundamental role in memory construction in social contexts: transmission, appropriation, and practices. The chapter highlights the reconstructive character of remembering, but it also attends to the biases that affect narrative construction and transmission, such as victimhood, justification, dissociation, fascination, and heroism. The author presents many interesting distinctions and relationships with other social concepts, but among all these distinctions and concepts the main claim of the text gets lost. The final chapter of this section, by Páez, Bobowik, Liu, and Basabe, presents a very ambitious study of collective memory for world history across 40 different countries. They studied the relationships between socio-economic development, cultural values, and lay beliefs individuals hold about world history. They found interesting regularities across societies with similar socio-economic development, but they also acknowledge that a subtler analysis is needed.

The third part of the book is composed of three chapters that explore the linguistic and philosophical dimensions of social and technological contexts in remembering. Bietti's chapter develops a micro-qualitative analysis of some instances of individual and group autobiographical remembering of the same event. The focus of the analysis is on the effects of bodily gestures (manual gestures, eye-gaze direction, and bodily posture) and the contextual presence of mnemonic artifacts (e.g., pictures of the event) in autobiographical remembering. In chapter 9, Gordon and Theiner put forward a scaffolded joint action model of organizational learning. Their micro-foundational analysis goes from individual intentionality to joint intentionality and from joint intentionality to collective intentionality, ending with technological and social scaffolds. Their main point is that complex forms of social interactions require complex cognitive structures. The last chapter of the third part of the book very nicely complements Gordon and Theiner's chapter. Here, Sutton assesses the concept of memory scaffolding in cultural and developmental psychology. After reconstructing the history of the concept (passing through the ideas of Vygostsky, Bruner, and Clark), the author confronts two puzzles that shed light on the concept. The first concerns the principle distinction between internal memory and external scaffolds. Sutton shows that insisting in tracing this distinction is unnecessary because “adult memory capacities and processes too [are] [...] enabled by the mechanisms of our neural systems but also fundamentally entangled with and reliant on social, environmental and cultural resources” (p. 197). The second puzzle concerns the influence of culture on autobiographical remembering. The puzzle then is how exactly to measure this influence.

The book undertakes the ambitious enterprise of reconstructing a holistic picture of how individuals and groups remember the past given the many factors and contexts that shape and influence memory. This kind of endeavor is of vital importance for the development of memory studies, yet it always entails the risk of confusion, that is, involving too many elements, too many distinctions, and too many approaches. The reader would also have benefitted from the inclusion of a chapter on the implications of the inclusion of context (e.g., social, cultural, technological contexts) for the study of the neural machinery of remembering.

By way of conclusion, I would like to highlight the brilliant editorial work done by Stone and Bietti. The selection of authors was very appropriate: all authors were specialists in the subject, and they were aware of the aim of the book and wrote their chapter accordingly. Moreover, Stone and Bietti have provided a brief and illuminating introduction that prepares the reader for the main topics and discussions of the book. It is also worth highlighting that the concluding chapter of the book, by Hirst, makes a valuable contribution to the coherence and comprehensiveness of the book. *Contextualizing Human Memory* will be mandatory reading for researchers and scholars working on memory.

Reference

Koriat A and Goldsmith M (1996) Memory metaphors and the real-life/laboratory controversy: correspondence versus storehouse conceptions of memory. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 19: 167–188.

Akiko Hashimoto

The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 208 pp. \$99.00/\$24.95.

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Akiko Hashimoto's *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan* is a *tour de force* that offers new insights into the issue of war memory in Japan. It serves as a significant addition to the field of memory studies by particularly focusing on how war memory impacts the societies of *defeated* nations and through a methodological approach that focuses on how memory transmission at the micro-level impacts society on the macro-level. The text will be significantly useful to both scholars of Japanese society, culture, and history, as well as to those primarily interested in the way in which war memory functions, impacts social and political culture, and is transmitted.

The Long Defeat has a unique methodological approach; instead of focusing on formal speeches made by the state, Hashimoto digs deeply into everyday discourse regarding the Asia-Pacific War that takes place in more personal spaces such as the home and school, as well as in the public sphere by focusing on editorials and letters in newspapers and by analyzing popular and academic *manga* (a Japanese form of comics). While she does not broadly study nonfiction books that the public may also be reading and could be additionally informed by studying actual classroom discourse, her methodological approach covers much new ground and offers unique insights into the impact of war memory in Japan. Specifically, Hashimoto argues that there is a lack of consensus about memories of the war in Japan, that war memory is passed down through much more personal means than typically thought or studied, and that Japan's future is heavily dependent on the ways in which war memory is framed and used.

Hashimoto's text aims to completely dispel the notion that Japanese society is filled with amnesia about the Asia-Pacific War or that the country has come to a consensus about war memory. Right at the outset, *The Long Defeat* argues that even after 70 years, cleavages over war memory