



From common object to memory-object: The indiscernibility of Rapa Nui's historical archaeological heritage

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In this article, I suggest the indiscernible objects experiment proposed by Arthur Danto as an analogy for discussing the nature of historical archeological remains. I consider archeological vestiges of the Fundo Vaitea historical site on Rapa Nui (Easter Island) as material culture theoretically similar to works of art. Given this, I discuss the distinction, interpretation and transformation of common objects into archeological vestiges, proposing that the latter be understood as memory-objects. From this aesthetic dimension, I hope to offer another perspective to heritage policy discussions focused on the material culture of the recent past, while taking into account social practices and the particularities of the archeological time involved in this process.

Introduction¹

*Les objets cessaient de jouer leur rôle
d'accessoires utiles*

L'œuvre au noir

Marguerite Yourcenar

The political function and public relevance of the collective memory, as expressed in monuments and museums for example, has engendered a lively debate in the social sciences in recent years (Heinich, 2009; Smith, 2004). Historical archeology of the recent past, a relatively new area in the field in Chile, has also lately faced a series of methodological challenges from which the social dimension has not been exempt (Rivera & Lorca, 2010). Within this context, I seek to contribute to the debate about the conditions and criteria involved in the conservation and protection of historical-archeological vestiges and cultural goods, by discussing interpretation of material culture as a constitutive process that transforms common objects into *memory-objects*.

In the paragraphs below, I have chosen the term *memory-objects* (Olivier, 2008) to refer to those sets of material culture with multiple ambiguous temporalities, those objects that are constantly being interpreted and categorically transformed. Hence, I understand "vestiges" to be materialities (objects, artifacts, material debris, etc.) that have already been "interpreted" and differentiated from a common object, and I employ the concept of *memory-objects* to differentiate objects deemed "archeological vestiges" from everyday objects not included in that category, pointing out that an unconscious transformation occurs behind interpretations of material culture that seeks to categorize those common objects as "archeological vestiges" to ensure that they are protected under the legal framework.

Through a discussion of Arthur Danto's experiment on indiscernibles, and using Rapa Nui's Fundo Vaitea historic site as an example (Figure 1), I intend from an essentially theoretical stance to illustrate and highlight some points that appear important for the investigation, interpretation, and safeguarding of cultural

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resources, which in our case are archeological-industrial goods. The issue is immense, but by recognizing certain points of convergence between the theoretical fields of archeology and art history, I hope to open up these discussions to a richer perspective (Vilches, 2007; Wallace, 2004). However, my approach is essentially theoretical, not a case study. Fundo Vaitea only serves as an example to illustrate the problem that I am presenting here through the application of Arthur Danto's theory of indiscernibles.

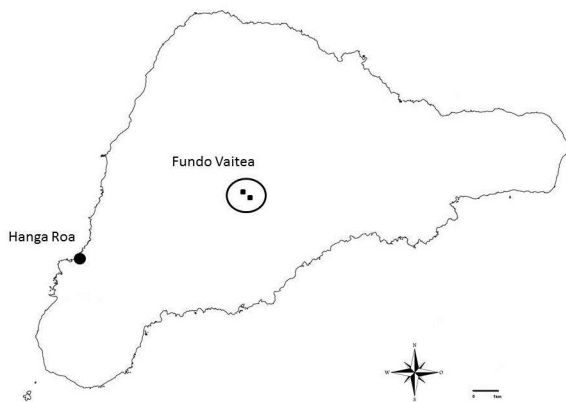


Figure 1. Location of Fundo Vaitea, Easter Island.

Disciplinary context, our research and some considerations on *memory-objects*

In Chile, the study of the material culture of historic periods was traditionally undertaken by professionals in fields other than archeology, such as architecture and art history, who become interested in historic issues that were relatively new at the time (mid-20th century) (Casassas, 1976). Because of this, archeologists in more recent times look to those disciplines for methodological solutions to problems of interpretation. Within this context of historical archeology, several different theoretical currents have emerged in Chile. One of these considered history the focus of investigation, with archeology complementing written texts with additional information (Casassas, 1976; Funari, 1997). Another perspective proposed that historical archeology pursue general anthropological objectives, to serve as a laboratory for experimenting with and testing models and concepts for use in prehistoric archeology (Orser, 2000). A final position proposed that historical

archeology have its own investigative agenda and develop a separate discipline that, while having elements in common with both history and anthropology, had its own unique characteristics as well (Funari, 1997; Orser, 2000; Rivera & Lorca, 2010). Traditional administration of the archeological heritage—such as funding for its investigation and conservation, for example—was therefore tied to two issues: the first was ‘ethnic’ considerations, which translated into official support for the study of so-called *prehistory*, and the second was the monumental nature of the historic buildings of local elites (Funari, 2007). It thus took many years for historical archeology to emerge in our country. But today the scenario is quite different, with new trends and rules for heritage administration emerging in part from agreements between archeologists and historians to foster research on the material remains left behind by ordinary people, anonymous protagonists of different post-colonial social, economic, and political processes (Funari, 2007).

This is the context in which the research project “El Fundo Vaitea. Patrimonio y Memoria en Rapa Nui durante el período de la Compañía Explotadora” (Fundo Vaitea. Heritage and Memory on Rapa Nui during the Compañía Explotadora period) was conducted. The Easter Island Development Company (Compañía Explotadora de Isla de Pascua, hereinafter CEDIP) was a livestock industry founded by Enrique y Numa Merlet in 1895 under the name of Merlet & Cia. It was later acquired in 1903 by Englishmen Williamson & Balfour (Cristino & Fuentes, 2011) functioning until 1953. In this project, our interest was to systematically record the now-abandoned material remains of the island’s sheep ranching industry, which covers both periods of ownership. The information obtained was also compared with the historical record and with oral accounts provided in interviews of residents who witnessed that process (Fuentes, 2013).

In this sense, Fundo Vaitea is a particularly interesting site for the theoretical exercise I propose. It is a place that has been ignored in favor of prehistoric sites (like the moai) that are more attractive for tourism on the island (Vilches, 2013). As such, it is particularly suited for reflections on the ways in which we understand

the material heritage of the island's recent history. It also presents a methodological challenge for the recovery of remains from their historic silence and public disregard. One of the objectives of the research conducted here was to determine which materials (artifacts, objects, debris, etc.) were associated with that industrial context, which of these needed to be recorded and therefore preserved, and which were not/did not. As we attempted to determine the scope of our research, we found ourselves without a methodological criterion that took that differentiation into account. Historical-industrial materiality was understood simply as elements that are part of "socio-technical systems and landscapes created by industry" (Hardesty, 2002, as cited in Casella, 2005, p.5). Within this scenario, we rely on several questions to guide this reflection, with the central ones focusing on criteria that could enable us to identify the archeological value of this historical-industrial materiality. Why, for instance, are certain objects considered "remains" or "vestiges"? And what is the difference between a common object and a vestige? Why are some objects considered within this category, while others are excluded? Why should we preserve a Witte diesel engine found on an industrial site? (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Witte diesel engine. Interior of shearing shed, Fundo Vaitea

In that regard, the lack of interest in historical-industrial remains on Rapa Nui has placed them in an ambiguous situation, and therefore also a precarious and perpetually risky position. Although the legislation clearly indicates that both

"places, ruins, constructions and historic and artistic objects, ...as well as burial grounds, cemeteries and other indigenous remains...are national monuments and fall under the purview and protection of the state" (Chilean National Monuments Act 17.288, T.I, Art.1), it also distinguishes between archeological and historic monuments, with the former being government property "by virtue of the law alone" (Chilean National Monuments Act 17.288, T.V, Art.21) while the latter must be of historic interest and have been declared as such, according to its status, by "Supreme Decree" (Chilean National Monuments Act 17.288, T.III, Art.9).

The difficulty and lack of clear criteria for defining what historic-industrial material culture should be considered in this process have led to some confusion. How do we differentiate a common industrial object from one with heritage value? When these elements are perceptually distinguishable from one another, it is relatively easy to justify their protection and preservation; but a problem arises when those differences are indiscernible, in which case our interpretations can be insufficient. Furthermore, if interpretations are based on the investigator's own criteria, then those materials always remain open to new interpretations. What makes one valid and the other invalid? Clearly, then, material heritage relies on rules and conventions, leaving the object itself subject to the investigator's perception and interpretive constructs, which themselves may vary over time. I propose that one of the most immediate and visible consequences of this issue is that objects in and of themselves, decontextualized and uncategorized within the "archeological world," remain outside of its sphere of legal protection. So, by transforming common objects into *memory-objects* and thus into archeological vestiges, we not only endow them with a quality that obliges us to investigate, preserve and protect them, but we also insert them into a new "archeological time" which in turn is arbitrarily determined by the investigator himself or herself (Olivier, 2008). In the paragraphs below, I intend to add to the current debate around the public function and political nature of the collective memory based in the historical-industrial heritage of Easter Island, given the

unique role that Fundo Vaitea plays in the context of contemporary ethics.

An indiscernible historical archeology?

In 1917, at an exhibition organized by the Society of Independent Artists, Marcel Duchamp presented a landmark work in the theoretical development of art history in the 20th century. The work was entitled “The Fountain” and consisted of an everyday urinal, signed “R. Mutt” by the artist. Through this and other works, Duchamp introduced the concept of ‘readymade’ or ‘found’ art. Though having no clear definition, it can be understood as the art of using common objects, not considered artistic in themselves, to create works of art. The artist’s main objective was to demonstrate the impossibility of establishing a single definition of what is understood as art, and therefore the absence of universal criteria to distinguish what is and is not art, and it opened a discussion that would continue for many years (Dickie, 1969). Behind this kind of creation—which was based purely on creative will without the need for training, much less talent—is the idea that common, everyday objects, combined or arranged in different ways, become works of art through the simple desire of the artist. As mentioned, this notion brings up several problems. The first is that of identifying the criteria that define the artistic, and the second, that of the disparity between interpretations of the artist’s intention and those of the external observer (Carroll, 1995).

On this topic, Danto takes up the problem of defining what art is, based on Andy Warhol’s so-called “Brillo Box” (Danto, 1964). For the author, this work, which consists of two sets of identical boxes (one set made by the artist, the other common and mass-produced), exemplifies the same issue, which is that it is not possible to define art using merely perceptive criteria. In other words, a work of art and a common object may be perceptively indiscernible (Danto, 1981b). Following this line, I propose that the problem originally presented by Duchamp, and theoretically taken up by Danto, can be applied to the study of historical archeological materiality. Indeed, in more than one instance we have found ourselves faced with a series of objects whose

heritage value we do not know, objects we have not considered important and thus have ruled out as “non-archeological.” At such times, we cannot establish the informative potential or heritage priority of those materialities. Just like a work of art, what distinguishes an archeological-historical vestige from a common object should not be based on perceptive criteria such as its beauty, originality or even age. On the contrary, I propose that this distinction be based on the interpretation of the social practices involved in its identification as *memory-object*.

In order to delve into discernible historical archeology and problematize the materialities of Rapa Nui’s recent past, I look to Danto for a theoretical frame of reference for my reflection. I shall not take the time to undertake a comprehensive review of the author’s theses, nor do I wish to delve into the finer points, much less the critiques his proposal has received (Ankersmit, 1998; Carrier, 1998; Danto, 2001; Páez, 2008). For the moment, I am interested in the problem of demarcation as applied in other fields of investigation such as historical archeology, and not with the theory’s specific implications for art (such as the importance of mimesis in the emergence of vanguards, or his teleological conception of art history) (Páez, 2008). What I do intend to discuss, through an analogy applicable to historical archeology, is what Danto proposes and seeks to find—i.e. an imperceptible property of art works, a definitive relational element that solves the problem of demarcation.

Danto and indiscernible objects

For Danto, a work of art—unlike a mere object—is “about something”; “art is the kind of things that depends for its existence upon theories” (Danto, 1981b, p. 135). The primary trait that characterizes art is precisely its representational nature. However, this cannot be enough to characterize an artistic object as such, as in principle all types of representations (artistic and non-artistic) meet this criterion. What distinguishes works of art from other representations is the way in which the former are about their object; that is, they fulfill the condition of “incarnating what they signify.” A work of art, then, is something that incarnates that which it

represents (Danto, 1981b, p. 7). That is, the ontological differences are not resolved perceptively. Given that the category of art is an ontological category, that which defines it does not belong to the realm of perception.

For the author, therefore, the distinction between a work of art and a common object should not reside in a perceptual property. On the contrary, that distinction must come from a relational property that is not perceptual, and what Danto proposes is the condition of belonging to an “artworld.” This notion fulfills two functions simultaneously: on the one hand, it serves as an ontological requirement for the existence of art, and on the other, it plays an epistemological role in identifying and interpreting works of art themselves. In that sense, what has been called the “artworld” has been understood as a group of individuals who are responsible for determining which objects may be considered and assessed artistically. The arbitrariness of this is evident. Nevertheless, “the artworld to which Danto attributes a central role in the problem of demarcation, should itself be considered a byproduct of the conditions that determine the nature of art in general” (Páez, 2008, p. 147). The term “artworld” can therefore be understood as a theoretical concept, but one that denotes primarily an institution and a series of social practices (Danto, 1987).

The theoretical atmosphere that constitutes an “artworld” enables Danto to mark out a distinction between some boxes and others. But, what does this theoretical atmosphere consist of and how does it relate to archeology? As I mentioned, an “artworld” can be understood as a set of theories or practices that determine what is to be considered art at a given time, as well as the types of value judgments relevant for judging a work. Here we face the problem of the relativity of interpretations, which in my opinion is linked to the problem of heritage protection and conservation in that these, too, are not subject to any pre-established or absolute criteria. I understand that this characterization of the problem may engender some resistance, as allowing it to be framed in these terms leads to a somewhat skeptical attitude toward our modes of identifying archeological materialities; in other

words, by accepting the experiment we are implicitly accepting the validity of a skeptical stance in relation to *memory-objects*.

Now, we could believe—and almost be right—that the fuzzy gap between common objects and *memory-objects* categorized as archeological vestiges could be explained by a cultural context in which theories determine the demarcation criteria. But this leads us to a greater problem, that of the interpretation of assemblages (Danto, 1981a). On this point, Danto proposes that it is interpretation that transforms common objects into works of art. In other words, artistic identification is the mechanism by which we transform objects into works of art, endowing them with a representational character, and interpretation is the lever that removes an object from the real world and situates it in the “artworld.” It is only in relation to an interpretation that an object *is* a work of art, which does not mean that what is converted into a work of art continues to be related to what it was before. As a result, the work of art into which the common object was converted can take on its own identity; it enters a new category (Danto, 1981b).

In Danto, therefore, the theory of interpretation is constitutive, meaning that an object is a vestige solely in relation to an interpretation. In that sense, interpretation is also transformative: “each interpretation constitutes a new work, even if the object...remains... invariant under transformation. An object *o* is then an artwork only under an interpretation *I*, where *I* is a sort of function that transfigures *o* into a work” (Danto, 1981b, p. 125). In our case, then, interpretation transforms common objects into *memory-objects*, and therefore depends on the “*is*” of artistic identification. The interpretation is therefore not something outside of the *memory-object*; object and interpretation emerge together in the aesthetic consciousness (Danto, 1981b). Hence, at least three things are being proposed: the material object, the interpretation, and the categorical transformation of the object. Still, we see here that there would be an important non-identity in the common object as *memory-object*, which therefore reformulates the question to ‘What is left of the common object once it is constituted through an interpretation?’ In regard to this, and to the

interpretation, another question arises: Is the *memory-object* equal to the interpretation? Is the pair $\{\textit{interpretation} : \textit{memory-object}\}$ inseparable?

If the formula $\{\textit{interpretation} : \textit{memory-object}\}$ is plausible, then all new interpretations that are imposed upon a common object would equal or result in a new object or *memory-object*. If, on the other hand, the pair $\{\textit{interpretation} : \textit{memory-object}\}$ suggests a constitutive originality, such as that associated, for example, with the artist-creator, then it would result in either an intentionalism, whereby the intention of the artist/creator is what constitutes the work, or in an identificationism, whereby the receiver/observer constitutes the 'text of the work', though that intervention could also exceed the limits of the object as new interpretations are added (Danto, 1981b). In short, Danto's vision is referring basically to the notion that constitution is ontology. For an object to be art, it has to have been produced with an artistic intention that materializes as the intention to produce an object that has to be interpreted (Danto, 1981b). In other words, an entity is placed, established, and a new object is created with each of its many possible interpretations. The ultimate question is how can vestiges be identified if the objects in question are perceptually indistinguishable? Basically, we are identifying the transformative interpretive function operating on the object.

Let us take, for example, common object "A" and archeological vestige "B," perceptually indiscernible but categorically different. The priority from an identificationist perspective will be to propose that *B is* and *A is not* a vestige. So, how do we determine the categorical identity of B as a vestige? Can we know it without knowing what the creator wanted to express (i.e., what his or her intention was, or the meaningful/enunciated content of the object/work)? I believe that the possible response lies in defining the pair $\{\textit{interpretation} : \textit{memory-object}\}$ as designating a specific causal history. Something was intentionally transformed categorically, meaning that the common object and the work/vestige are categories containing different entities—they have different modes of existence, or different types of properties, and as such, they contain different types of responses and therefore need different

explanatory principles (Bailey, 2007). As a result then, two perceptually indistinguishable objects can have two different causal histories. The argument, then, is that without knowing what a "vestige is" the interpretation cannot commence. One must first undertake an archeological identification or tentative interpretation. But, an identification also presumes the interpretation of the artist/creator, in effect, determining that *this X is Y and this X is not Y*.

Memory-objects, social practices and the interfaces of materiality during the time of the Easter Island Development Company (1895-1953)

As part of the Fundo Vaitea project, we have identified and recorded a series of objects and material remains related to the industrial operations of Easter Island Development Company, from both periods of ownership; that is, during the period of installation and expansion of a fledgling livestock industry on the island (Fuentes, 2013). This has led to our attempt to define the *memory-objects* of Fundo Vaitea using an approach that operates on three axes—the imperceptible properties of material culture, our theoretical interpretations, and the conventions in effect at a given moment that would validate an object as an "archeological vestige." As we have seen, a series of questions emerge from these considerations. Regarding an interpretive identification (such as a so-called "artistic identification") performed upon the initial object: does it transmit the intended interpretation? Is the initial distinction $\{\textit{common object} \Leftrightarrow \textit{interpretation} \Leftrightarrow \textit{memory-object}\}$ sufficient? As we recorded the material remains of Fundo Vaitea, we had, on the one hand, the interpretive identification and, on the other, the text/object distinction that incorporates the question of intentionalism. This led us to ask ourselves a question: is the enunciation (or material culture) of the artist/creator a determinant of the meaning of the object? Does the pair $\{\textit{interpretation} : \textit{memory-object}\}$ determine its meaning, or is its enunciation only an interpretation of its meaning?

Notwithstanding these rather abstract difficulties, what I am trying to do here is highlight the role that objects can play in the behavior of individuals

and in the construction of knowledge (Olsen, 2013). The reconstruction of the social on the basis of complex, embedded relations of thinking within the institution has left aside other elements, such as those that focus on an individual's ties with the materiality. I believe it is important to analyze the way in which an individual's knowledge is constructed and transformed through individual and/or collective action, situated amongst and working through *memory-objects*. In this way, I propose to avoid the exclusions associated with models that emphasize the role of the material dimensions and that of objects in the process of constructing knowledge (Latour & Lemonnier, 1994; Martin, 2005). From this point of view, it is not at all clear that the insertion of material dynamics into the construction of knowledge among individuals involved in given social practices solves the problem we want to answer. For example, we must be wary of the potential for reductionism that we can produce. In fact, by insisting on the involvement of a variety of actors (artist/creator - receiver/observer), the ambiguities of the processes that constitute the interpretation, and the complexity of collective mechanisms for interacting with those processes, we run the risk of distancing ourselves from local action (through heritage conservation policies, for example, as I will show below).

As I am attempting to show from a theoretical perspective, we can ultimately understand the relationship between the particular ways in which a society represents itself and how it acts upon the material world of its historical-industrial heritage by discussing the constitutive process by which material culture is interpreted. Hence, it is essential to identify, in broad terms, the representations that come into play when societies act upon the material world. In other words, there is a need to discuss the social means of appropriating objects, those "things" that surround us and transform us unconsciously through social practices, and that some authors have identified as active agents in the individual-object relation (Lemonnier, 1986; Olsen, Shanks, Webmoor, & Witmore, 2012; Olsen, 2013). In the context of Fundo Vaitea, I consider two of them that could be identified in the material record². On the one hand, we have *practices of incorporation*, which refer to an internal process through which social

practices are remembered (Lane, 2005); these have been defined within the much-celebrated concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977). On the other hand, we have *practices of inscription*, external to the individual, which consist in the manipulation of the physical world through such processes as the monumentalization of spaces, the building of memorials and even historiographic narration itself (Lane, 2005). In that regard, and continuing along this line with regard to the remains of Fundo Vaitea, we asked ourselves, *why do we seek to interpret two things—the initial 'text' of the common object and the transformative interface of the memory-object—instead of only one?* For some authors, the answer lies in the fact that the text is indeterminate and calls out to be materialized (concretized) (Davidson, 2001). They consider that materializations are similar to constitutive interpretations, but differ from the work of the artist-creator, such that the object remains "open."

Finally, then, we arrive at some considerations that should be taken into account—the cultural situation of the creator-user and the cultural situation of the receiver-interpreter. So, would the contextualization of the reception of the object suppose new possible interpretations? What type of relationship can be established between historic "authenticity" (intentionalism) and historic relativization (reception)? I believe that the difficulties implied by these questions will diminish as our perspective expands beyond the limits of our discipline's theoretical development and incorporates new lenses that question the limits of a temporally static materiality.

Heritage conservation. But, of which relics?

Based on this exploration "in the interfaces" and motivated by our look at *memory-objects*, I wish to extend the problem of demarcation to a contemporary and very practical issue—the conservation of historical-archeological cultural goods, and Fundo Vaitea in particular. An attentive reader will no doubt have guessed the kinds of problems that preservation of cultural goods poses in relation to the above discussion. Put simply, what type of materiality are we ultimately going to protect and conserve? We have seen that the theory of interpretation is not

only constitutive, but that it also brings into play a series of stages of translation or interventions that ultimately relativize *memory-objects*. I show four of them:

1. Production, use and discarding, in the traditional framework of object analysis.
2. Recording, collection and integration, in which common objects renounce their status as static remains and are transformed into dynamic and interpretable *memory-objects* of scientific interest.
3. Re-use, for example through the analysis that is performed upon them.
4. Lastly (and most interestingly here), their storage, in warehouses or museums for example.

Within this framework, we understand conservation and preservation policies under richer theoretical guidelines. What we see as ruins from our present-day position do not constitute the past of Fundo Vaitea “as such,” but are the result of the lengthy work of time on the site—the sum of the multi-stage translation of what we call “Fundo Vaitea” from our relative present-day and constitutive perspective. In effect, the site has become a reservoir of interpretations in which objects have accumulated and now present themselves to us after having lost their chronological order; the past is embedded in the present, giving rise to phenomena of nesting rather than succession (Olivier, 2008). It seems that this new *multi-temporality* of Fundo Vaitea necessarily leads us to a new way of understanding industrial materiality—and archeological time—and thus to a new relationship between past and present. The past is no longer distant and inaccessible but is now very close to us in a palimpsest of *memory-objects* (Olivier, 2001). In that sense, we find ourselves with the same questions as those raised in relation to Western policies for the Rapa Nui people—policies underpinned by state-sponsored violence and the perpetuation of neocolonial forms of domination (Cristino & Fuentes, 2011; Fuentes, Moreno Pakarati, & Montecinos, 2011) and often transmitted through those very same materials—and see that these can also exist within heritage conservation procedures. As Lane so rightly outlines (2005):

The manner in which history is produced in any society can involve the selective conservation and destruction of physical traces. This not only creates the conditions for certain 'silences' and 'mentions' in the present, but also has the potential to reproduce the same patterns of 'silences' and 'mentions' in the future. (p. 31).

I think we should first consider that the logical temporal pathway is the erosion of remains and the elimination of memory, that a large part of the physical world that surrounds us is condemned to the past, to destruction and obscurity. If one accepts this (non)existence in the long term, then the preservation of relics of the past must inevitably be conceived of as an anomaly (Olivier, 2008). I believe, however, that relics are not representative of the Fundo’s past, but they *are* representative of *one of the pasts* that ultimately managed to be preserved (Olivier, 2008), and that past is often insignificant in comparison to what existed before. Essentially interpretive, our work is thus carried out in a situation of discontinuity and absence. What is more, if we accept the above, then we must admit not only the exceptional status of heritage conservation, but also the paradoxes encompassed therein. Far from pretensions of totality, we find ourselves always arriving late and faced with a record that is fragmentary and accidental (Olivier, 2008). In that sense, authors such as Lucas (1997, 2005) insist on the overlapping relationship between remembering and forgetting, while others focus on the vacuum that characterizes the conservation of relics (Olivier, 2008). We are aware (but not critical) of the fact that a relic has been able to reach us by traversing dozens, hundreds or even thousands of years, remaining legible to the eyes of any observer, only because the space (layer, stratum or even geographic location) in which it was found had the particular conditions of a virgin space without any natural or anthropic intervention. Indeed, it is this very vacuum that ensures the effective preservation of such remains. The difficulty of this situation, however, is this: if the conservation of cultural goods occurs only by virtue of the “vacuum” created around those goods—the elimination of any kind of

intervention (including the constitutive process of interpretation)—then is the path the same for all traces of memory? Must they also remain unique and isolated? Museums function this way, they are filled solely with reused objects that are permanently translated in a vacuum that preserves them. Given this, I believe that it is crucial—and urgent—to add to the time reconstructed by history, built by sequentially ordered events, a particular analysis of archeological time (Olivier, 2008) based on the constitutive and interpretive process of *memory-objects*.

Final considerations

Thus far, I have sought merely to present some ideas to nourish potential future theoretical discussions, on a broader scale, about the paradoxes and difficulties of conservation under the terms outlined herein. We have seen that the concept of *memory-object* can be developed infinitely and extends beyond an object's production, use and disposal. How should we look at objects, then? What will I inscribe, ultimately, on the object (or vice versa)? In this discussion about the historical archeological context of Fundo Vaitea, I have sought to reflect upon the interfaces in which *memory-objects* flow dynamically from one static state to another, in which they are interpreted, transformed and categorically differentiated.

As a historical archeological site and a public space, Fundo Vaitea has been endowed from the beginning with certain particularities, including a well-defined space, a social-historic context and, as we have seen, a legal character. We visit the site, we record the material culture, perhaps collect some things, perhaps dig, but that does not imply that everything we find is a *memory-object*. To paraphrase Páez (2008), a Witte diesel engine in an industrial site can be simply a Witte diesel engine in an industrial site. The theory of the "archeological world" derived from Danto's "artworld" reveals to us that a critical approach to objects as vestiges cannot in itself lead us to a criterion that can be deemed to solve the problem of demarcation. In that regard, I believe that the problem of demarcation can only be resolved if we situate the *memory-objects*—as those of the

Fundo Vaitea—along with their formal and symbolic characteristics, within the context of their imperceptible properties, necessarily analyzing the relationship between the visible form and the economic, political and cultural context in which the practices of incorporation and inscription of local society are inserted.

Lastly, I have attempted to understand some of the ways we use material culture in order to expand our understanding of the historic values and meanings that are linked to these material remains. In other words, I am interested in seeing how society assigns historic values and particular meanings to the physical world, and how it can use those vestiges, in this case from the recent past, to construct its own individual and collective memory and therefore its own representation of the past (Olsen, 2007). Above all, I have attempted to discuss those aspects that link together memory, social practices and material culture. It is clear to us, then, that there are no universal criteria that will allow us to define the problem of the demarcation and interpretation of historical-industrial materiality, much less the issue of how to recognize the selective ways in which society's memory practices operate on the objects we seek to preserve.

What is more, the history of archeology has demonstrated that the term "archeological vestige" has evolved in a way that reveals a certain flexibility about the types of objects that can be included under that category, and their meanings (Lucas, 2005). In effect, the concept of vestige remains open, and because that flexibility has occurred in the past, we cannot now rule out the possibility that objects that we do not consider archeological today will eventually become part of that category in future. Following Olivier (2008), we live among relics of the past and we ourselves produce remains that could constitute the relics of our own time, through use and interpretation. What is our role, then? There are many possible answers to this question. In these pages I have sought to discuss one of them, which involves historical-industrial material culture and their transformation over time into categories such as *memory-objects* as a result of interpretive interventions. The perspective of a discernible

historical archeology, therefore, far from being in vain, calls us to a deeper and broader discussion that goes beyond analogies.

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Notes

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²For a complete description of the methodology used for this research project, see Fuentes, 2013.

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