

Arts & Humanities
Research Council*Culture and the Mind*

Artefacts and material culture

The third subproject, ran from October 2008 to October 2011 focused on the cognitive foundations of the design and use of artefacts and material culture.

Artefacts are perhaps the most obvious feature of culture, and it would be difficult to exaggerate their importance to our lives or our thought. Surprisingly, the cognitive basis of our creation, use, and reasoning about artefacts has only recently become the subject of serious theoretical and empirical work.

The project explored numerous ways in which work in a broad range of disciplines-including anthropology, archaeology, cognitive psychology, comparative psychology, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy - can be integrated, and how it can inform, and be informed by, cross-cultural studies of artefact cognition.

This subproject examined a cluster of philosophically interesting questions about the cognitive foundations for artefacts and material culture. Questions here include:

- How does artefact cognition relate to theory of mind?
- Which aspects of artefact cognition are uniquely human? How is cultural knowledge concerning artefacts transmitted?
- Given that some artefacts are embedded in norms and social institutions - money, parking tickets, wedding rings - how does artefact cognition relate to the psychology of norms?
- To what extent are these various components of artefact cognition universal?

Final project conference: Artefacts and material culture

15-17 April 2011

The conference for the final strand of the Culture and the Mind project was held at the Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield.

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