Introduction

Time, Materiality and the Work of Memory

YANNIS HAMILAKIS AND JO LABANYI

One of us (Yannis Hamilakis) recently returned from a field season of ethnographic work, as part of a large archaeological project in Greece related to the excavation of the Sanctuary of Poseidon on the island of Poros (ancient Kalaureia) in the Saronic Gulf. Amid the ruins of the sanctuary there is an ancient stone block, part of the wall of one of the public buildings that used to surround the temple in ancient times (figure 1). The block has been in place since antiquity, but at the beginning of the twentieth century a large extended family settled amid the ruins, making the site their home until they were evicted by the archaeological service in 1978. The children of the family, who would play amongst the stones, inscribed their initials on this block (as they did on others at the site), often noting their age and the date—graffiti that are now clearly visible to visitors.¹ Not far away, at a much more celebrated locale, the Athenian Acropolis, there is another interesting architectural fragment (figure 2): a piece from the classical temple of Erechtheion, onto which an inscription in Arabic script was carved in 1805, when the Acropolis was under Ottoman rule and used as a fortress; the block was then embedded in one of the vaulted entrances to the Acropolis. The inscription praises the Ottoman governor of Athens and his achievement in fortifying the Acropolis.² These two artefacts can be examined from many different standpoints, but here we are primarily interested in their ability to invoke some of our central concerns in this issue, relating to memory, time, materiality and practice.

Henri Bergson has taught us that a fundamental property of material is its duration, its ability to defy linear, modernist conceptions of time, seen as irreversible movement and progression.³ His ideas find much more
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efficacy and acquire greater relevance when dealing with objects that were created at a certain point in time but have subsequently been reworked, reengaged with and reactivated through human social practice, like our examples here. These objects defy easy attempts at dating and chronological arrangement; they are, rather, multi-temporal, enacting and evoking different times simultaneously. They speak of time as coexistence rather than succession. And they embody, materially and physically, memory as duration. In the two cases cited above, this is memory of the classical past as invoked and recalled by post-classical human practices—be they antiquarian, archaeological or those of the nation-state in its attempt to produce national memory. But it is also the memory of the Ottoman presence, inscribed on the Acropolis, a memory that has resisted later attempts at erasure and ritual purification, and the memory of the children of the family that built its home amongst the ruins, inscribed on the fragment from the sanctuary of Poseidon. These more recent material memories can be also seen as mnemonic evocations and citations of the classical presence—after all, the Ottomans had transformed the temple of Parthenon on the Acropolis into a mosque, thus evoking its ancient character as a place of worship, and in the case of the graffiti at the sanctuary of Poseidon, the children who inscribed their initials and ages in the mid-twentieth century would have seen, only a few meters away, other blocks with ancient inscriptions on them. How do we date these two pieces, using our conventions of chronological, successive time? Is the fragment from the Acropolis classical or early-nineteenth-century? Is the fragment from Kalaureia classical or twentieth-century?

These examples illustrate how the concept of memory can make a fundamental contribution to historical study, through its ability to help us reconceptualize time, understand the multi-temporal character of human life and appreciate the capacity of matter and of materiality to embody this multi-temporal process. But it is human social practices—in this case, practices of inscription and recontextualization—that enable these multiple temporalities to find physical expression. And it is through other social practices, such as archaeological and scholarly work, that these multiple temporalities are disseminated to wider audiences. Memory in such cases is not only linked to materiality and multiple temporalities but also involves deliberate effort and human labor; it becomes memory-work. These are some of the concepts explored in this volume, concepts that we believe...
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Fig. 1. An ancient block from the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Poros, Greece with twentieth-century graffiti. Photo by Yannis Hamilakis.

Fig. 2. An ancient architectural fragment from the Erechtheion on the Acropolis of Athens, with a nineteenth-century inscription. Photo by Fotis Ifantidis; reproduced by the kind permission of the photographer.
have received insufficient attention to date. The volume also aims to offer a fresh look at certain other notions, such as forgetting and the interplay between autobiographical memories and national or official memories, and between tradition and modernity.

First, a word on our own specific interest in memory. Yannis Hamilakis is a trained archaeologist but with an explicitly anthropological and more broadly interdisciplinary approach. As should be obvious from the above, since archaeology deals with materiality and since materiality embodies memory through duration, to him, all archaeology is about memory, although it is only very recently that archaeologists have woken up to this idea and have started to explore it systematically, employing the vast array of material evidence at their disposal. His particular take on the topic concerns the production of remembering and forgetting through embodied social practices. More specifically, he is interested in the elicitation and evocation of memory through the bodily senses, in prehistoric and modern contexts, as in cases of commensal practices which, through taste and smell or the tactile experience of material culture, produce remembering sedimented in the body, or in cases where the material and sensory properties of material artefacts, monuments and archaeological sites generate national memories together with various countermemories.

Jo Labanyi is a cultural historian of modern Spain with a particular interest in popular culture and memory studies. She too has found anthropological approaches illuminating, and has directed an ethnographic project, based on oral history interviews. In recent work she has engaged with the debates on historical memory taking place in Spain around the Francoist repression during and after the Civil War, particularly those triggered by the current excavations of mass graves from the time. In this context, she has become aware of the hostility felt by some historians towards memory as a concept and practice, largely due to lack of familiarity with memory studies, which, over the past two decades, have helped us theorize memory as something that goes beyond autobiographical recollection to encompass the broader processes of generational transmission whereby the past continues to impact on the present (and future). What interests her about memory is the way it sensitizes us to the fact that the past is always viewed through the multiple accretions of subsequent experience and knowledge, allowing us to historicize subjectivity in terms of an intersection of different moments in time. Another key concern has been
with intersubjectivity, evident in the inevitable entanglement between personal memories and what is loosely called “collective” memory.\\(^{10}\)

We have chosen to explore these issues focusing on regions, at the western and eastern ends of the Mediterranean, that have attracted relatively little attention in memory studies and that are united by their self-perception, or castigation by others, as being situated on the periphery of Europe. What is meant by this is that they have not been central to the formation of the principal social, economic and political paradigms of Western modernity, although they have constructed their own diverse modernities. We do not claim some sort of exceptional status for the European south, nor do we subscribe to the allochronic idea that the area somehow partakes of another time, different from that of the rest of Europe.\\(^{11}\) But at the same time we are conscious of the opposite danger: that of homochronism—the assumption that perceptions of time and memory are homogeneous throughout the modern world, or the imposition by the scholar of his or her temporal framework upon the specific geographic area under study.\\(^{12}\) We have wanted to show how the specific social and historical conditions pertaining to the regions under focus, as well as the legacies of these histories and their mnemonic evocations and deployments today, have resulted in distinctive ways of dealing with time, history and materiality, some shared with many other areas of the world, some perhaps not.

We open this issue with two articles on Europe’s southwestern periphery, where the debates on the region’s alleged “insufficient modernity” have been particularly acute, given Portugal and Spain’s early modern empires encompassing the Americas, Asia and Africa. The humiliation felt in both countries at their sidelining within the European scenario from the mid-seventeenth century on, as capitalist development and imperial expansion took off in the nations to the north, was a major factor in triggering the prolonged dictatorships that Portugal and Spain endured from 1932 to 1974 and 1939 to 1975 respectively. The result has been a tendency to equate progressive politics with the need to break with the past, memory being associated with authoritarian and strongly nationalist regimes fixated on lost glory. Portugal’s case was, however, more complex in that the 1974 revolution that restored democracy also ended the protracted colonial wars in Angola and Mozambique, thus initiating a questioning of the imperial past—a topic addressed in Ellen Sapega’s article, which argues
that a desire to forget has nonetheless prevailed. Spain has barely begun to question its imperial past, the media having been monopolized by the memory debates centered on the Francoist repression, which became polarized around the Socialist government’s “Law of Historical Memory,” as it became known (approved October 2007). Since these memory debates have been signally marked by a lack of familiarity with memory studies, we have preferred to include an article, by Ángela Cenarro, which does work in the memory studies field, engaging in oral history—an undeveloped practice in Spain—with individuals who as children were institutionalized by the Francoist welfare system.

The remaining articles deal with Europe’s southeastern periphery—an area where Europe is currently defining and redefining its nature and identity as the European Union expands its borders. Cyprus, a country with a significant Muslim minority, recently became a member of the European Union (2004), while the prospect of Turkey, a primarily Muslim country, joining the EU in the near future continues to fuel debates, often with orientalist overtones, in European capitals. The character of this European periphery, together with its historical legacy and its official and popular memories, have thus become hotly debated issues and have once again started to exercise the European imagination, as they did when Western modernity was taking shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A common feature of this eastern Mediterranean geographical context is that the countries in question all resulted from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. They thus share a common legacy, although the way that this legacy is remembered and managed differs dramatically from one country to the other. These entangled histories and memories are reflected in each of these articles, whether through the shared experiences of Christian Greeks and Muslim Turks in Izmir/Smyrna (Leyla Neyzi), the construction of a modern Kalymniot identity not only in relation to west European modernity but also in opposition to the perceived backwardness of their eastern neighbours (David Sutton), the shared histories of Greek and Turkish Cypriots as told by school textbooks (Yiannis Papadakis) or the complicated ethnic-national and religious loyalties of the congregation of a Macedono-Bulgarian church in 1930s Pennsylvania (Keith Brown).

In practice, our regional focus is more cultural and historical than strictly geographical. Collective and personal memories and identities are rarely produced and enacted in conditions of geographical and spatial
fixity. Even if they appear to emerge and develop in a fixed locale, they assume, cite and reference, directly or indirectly, many other locales, some of a concrete nature, others imagined and ideational. The example of the Macedono-Bulgarian church congregation operating in Pennsylvania, but with constant reference to the relevant Balkan nation-states or states-to-be, is not the only one. The same translocality occurs in the references to colonial locales across the globe in Portuguese practices of commemoration, to the west European states perceived as modern in the imagination of Kalymniots, or to past Western colonizers (especially the British) plus the European Union as diverse aspects of the new political reality of Cyprus as a whole.

Indeed, as becomes apparent in the articles of this volume, the production of remembering and forgetting is a multi-sited affair and demands research in multiple loci, involving many and diverse types of materials: autobiographical experience, commemorative monuments and memorials, archival documents, cooking and eating practices, house furnishings, schoolbooks, novels, even cartoon strips. While our desire to explore marginal and rarely investigated mnemonic sites, and our insistence on paying attention to the minutiae of remembering and forgetting, have meant that this volume has acquired an anthropological and cultural historical tone, all authors have ventured into areas and have dealt with materials that are not traditionally the staple of their own respective disciplines: anthropologists are carrying out archival work or analyzing textbooks, and literary scholars and historians are conducting ethnography and interviews. In a sense, they have all adopted, even if not explicitly stated, what in social and anthropological research is called multi-sited ethnography. In other words, they have followed the story, the argument and the narrative, taking their work wherever these led them, and bringing to bear their own insights on the objects of study that emerged in the process.\(^{13}\)

But it is not only the material as such that makes the approach of this volume distinctive and, we believe, valuable. It is the way that these materials, or rather these materialities, are produced and then periodically resemanticized through human, social practices. Thus the essays that follow explore how autobiographical experiences are narrated to others (even if just to the ethnographer), vocalized and performed in public, reenacting the past vividly through images,\(^{14}\) sounds and smells that are sensed, embodied and reexperienced (Neyzi), or attempting to make sense in the
present of bodily experiences of humiliation and punishment that made no sense at the time (Cenarro). They examine how monuments become focal points for social gatherings and ceremonies, or arenas of political performance and social protest (Saşega). They document how archives are produced through the meticulous recording and preservation of the archival traces of popular organizations of national struggle, mimicking state practices (Brown). They study how food, with all its sensory effects of taste and smell, is prepared using recipes and raw materials that evoke tradition, and is then consumed, \textit{in-corporated}, in surroundings which, while thoroughly modern, cite a “traditional” material past that contributes to the production of a distinctive moral self (Sutton). This is a self that embraces modernity (or rather modernization) but at the same time chooses to recall the moral authority of another time, opting in other words for a multi-temporal, eclectic identity that rejects the homochrony and linearity that is commonly associated with Western modernity. Or they analyze how school textbooks become the public vehicles for classroom pedagogic experiences, which are at the same time public rituals for producing a new national memory and history (Papadakis). In short, this set of articles is not so much about memory, as about the work of memory: not in the Freudian sense of “working-through” past trauma, but in that of the conscious effort and labor that goes into producing mnemonic effects, into creating the material conditions for the sensory and bodily enactment involved in remembering, whether through daily routines and practices or through momentary, often staged performances.\textsuperscript{15} While the Proustian moments of involuntary recollection have excited many scholars and have haunted memory research for years, we focus here on the voluntary, conscious effort that has resulted in these reenactments.

This volume is also about forgetting, or rather oblivion, a crucial if often sidelined aspect of memory work. In a sense, all commemoration is about forgetting. While the material trace of past human practices evokes and elicits remembering, it could be argued that this is so precisely because it is a trace: a fragment evoking absence and loss. The architectural block from the sanctuary of Poseidon in Kalaureia, inscribed with twentieth-century graffiti, becomes a poignant mnemonic trace because it cites the absence of the farmstead that the family built among the ancient ruins, a presence that is no more, the material evidence of its existence having been almost entirely erased. This empty space allows us,
through ethnography, photography and other practices, to re-collect the fragments of that presence. In the case of the monuments discussed by Sapega, the principal function of their imposing material presence and their triumphant iconography and sculpture proves to be that of eliciting a forgetting of the brutality and human exploitation at the core of the colonial experience.\textsuperscript{16}

Forgetting of course, takes various forms. These Portuguese monuments evoke state-directed attempts to erase painful memories and produce national memory as oblivion, illustrating the political economy of remembering and forgetting—that is, remembering and forgetting as a strategy of power. In a very different way, the selective remembering of the inhabitants of Kalymnos in Sutton’s article, who choose to recite and materially recall aspects of the past that they consider key for identity production, while forgetting others, speaks of remembering and forgetting as philosophical stance and as moral conduct. The stories of the Spanish children institutionalized by Auxilio Social, discussed by Cenarro, have been forgotten by a society wanting to move on, and by historians concerned with the public political dimensions of history; and have also been remembered selectively by the subjects of those stories, reluctant to admit to former destitution. A key issue here is how the recollection of these experiences, which have remained unnarrated for sixty odd years, has been made possible by the current memory debates and particularly by a famous cartoon strip, both of which have constructed a narrative frame centered on the subject as victim, in the process silencing some of the complexity of these personal stories, which nonetheless surfaces in their contradictions and interstices. We have another example of childhood memories with the life story of Gülşem Iren presented by Neyzi: the fact that she is, in her late eighties, recounting memories from early childhood (aged 4–7) necessarily means that we have a series of fragmentary snapshots, but her account is able to show the complexity and interconnectedness of relationships in multi-ethnic Smyrna/Izmir that, after the Greek occupation (1919–22), was erased from historical accounts in both Turkey and Greece. As Papadakis shows, present-day Turkish-Cypriot history textbooks provide an example of an attempt, at an official level, to restore this complexity and interconnectedness after decades of rival partisan accounts of the history of the island. Conversely, the Pennsylvania court case examined by Brown depicts a struggle within a Macedono-Bulgarian immigrant community to define
itself in terms of competing transnational loyalties, whose legal outcome necessarily involves the consecration of one claim over others that are pronounced illegitimate.

One kind of forgetting that this issue does not tackle is the involuntary erasure produced by trauma. One of our reasons for focusing on memory as voluntary effort is the disproportionate attention that has been given to trauma in memory studies, as a result of the compelling work on the topic undertaken by scholars of the Holocaust. While paying homage to this pioneering work and recognizing the importance of acknowledging the experience of victims of atrocity, we have wanted to stress other models of memory in which agency is paramount. Thus even in Cenarro’s article, which deals with victim narratives, the stress is on how the subjects position themselves strategically as victims. We hope that what emerges from this issue is an understanding of the strategic nature of memory, which is not a passive repository (the “wax tablet” model) but an active intervention—that is, a practice. For this reason memory is always a site of struggle, not only between official and personal memories, but between competing official memories and competing personal memories as well. We hope that this issue gets beyond notions of official memory as “bad” and personal memory as “good”—see, for example, the rewriting of the past in recent Turkish-Cypriot textbooks and the addition in 1994 of a new memorial to the Belém memory site to “correct” previous versions of Portuguese national history. The fact that the past is changed when it is remembered—both by institutions and by individuals—appears to be a weakness only if we conceive of memory as a repository. If, instead, we think of memory as a practice (work in the sense of reworking), the fact that it changes the past can be seen as its strength. The articles in this issue are intended to show how memory, while it can be used to rewrite the past in order to justify violence and repression, can also be used strategically to rework the past in ways that are enabling.

NOTES

1. On this field project, and on its ethnographic strand, see www.kalaureia.org, and Yannis Hamilakis and Aris Anagnostopoulos, “Helgedomen i Dagens Samhälle: Alternativa Arkeologier” (The sanctuary and present-day society), Medusa 2008(1): 36–39; on the historical and archaeological background, see reports in


6. See, for example, the photo-blog project, http://theotheracropolis.com, the aim of which is to bring into the fore the multiple material memories of the Acropolis, beyond the classical. See also, Yannis Hamilakis, “The Other Acropolis Project,” Archaeolog (2008), http://traumwerk.stanford.edu/archaeolog/2008/04/the_other_acropolis_project.html.


10. The classic texts on collective memory are Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), and Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). The concept of intersubjectivity has been central to the work of Luisa Passerini; see, for example, Europe in Love, Love in Europe (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

11. On the power/hegemonic connotations and effects of this allochronism, see Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).


