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# Sensorial Assemblages: Affect, Memory and Temporality in Assemblage Thinking

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*Archaeologists are familiar with the concept of assemblage, but in more recent years they have started problematizing it in interesting and innovative ways, beyond its common connotations of aggregation. Sociologists such as Manuel DeLanda and political philosophers such as Jane Bennett have been key influences in this move. These authors had adapted and modified the assemblage thinking of Deleuze and Guattari. In this article, an assemblage of sorts itself, I propose that we need to return to that original Deleuzian body of thinking and explore its richness further. Assemblages, temporary and deliberate heterogeneous arrangements of material and immaterial elements, are about the relationship of in-betweenness. I further suggest that sensoriality and affectivity, memory and multi-temporality are key features of assemblage thinking, and that assemblages also imply certain political effects. The omission of these features in the archaeological treatments of the concept may lead to mechanistic reincarnations of systems thinking, thus depriving the concept of its potential. Finally, I explore these ideas by considering communal eating and feasting events as powerful sensorial assemblages.*

In May 2014, a rather provocative and extremely interesting art installation was staged in Brooklyn, New York: a series of sugar sculptures, created by the artist Kara Walker and entitled 'A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby'. The main exhibit was a white, sugar-coated sculpture of a black woman on her knees, stretching 75 feet, and clearly imitating an Egyptian sphinx (Fig. 1). The woman was depicted completely naked apart from the headscarf, which identified her as a black, female manual worker. Around it, there were some smaller sugar sculptures of black children, carrying bananas and baskets (Fig. 2). The artist stated that the inspiration came from the miniature sugar sculptures that used to accompany royal and aristocratic medieval feasts (called 'subtleties') and which were consumed by the participants (Mintz 1985).

When the *New York Times* reported on this exhibit, they opened their story with the phrase '[T]he smell hits you first: sweet but with an acrid edge, like a thousand burned marshmallows'.<sup>1</sup> This is because the installation was staged at Domino's disused sugar refinery, on the Brooklyn waterfront. The factory, built

in 1927, was abandoned and out of use since 2004, and was to be demolished soon after the end of the exhibition. But the sensorial memory of its heyday was still very much present and strong, as the opening line from the *New York Times* article indicated. Indeed, before you even entered the building, you were engulfed by its olfactory history, and you could see inside it the molasses dripping from the walls. During the show, the small black sugar sculptures were slowly and gradually melting, leaving the sticky substance on the hands of the visitors.

This powerful art piece works at different registers: the sensorial and affective, the historical, the political. It is a statement about the histories of western taste, and their entanglement with the Caribbean plantations, with colonialism and slavery; it is also about the racial undertones of our desire for white, refined sugar. It evokes, in that sense, the work of anthropologists such as Sidney Mintz (1985), who, in his classic study on sugar, demonstrated the culinary and sensorial basis of western colonialism. At the same time, the whiteness of the sculpture plays with our



**Figure 1.** (Colour online) Kara Walker's 'A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby' at the Domino Sugar Factory, Brooklyn, 2014. (Photograph: Victoria L. Valentine, *culturetype.com*)

preconceived notions of high civilization as embodied in Greco-Roman white marble, adding, however, a further twist by shaping this piece as an Egyptian sphinx. And yet, walk around the sculpture and you realize that the artist wanted also to allude to the gender and sexual dimensions of slavery, colonialism and consumption, as well as the mythologization and the sexualized objectification of black women today (Fig. 1).

There is much more that can be said about this striking work, but I have referred to it here by way of introduction because it can be seen as a potent assemblage which at the same time evokes, with its forceful materiality, the central points of this article: that a fundamental property of all assemblages is their sensorial and affective import; that assemblages are arrangements of material and immaterial entities; and that they are also about material and sensorial memory, as well as about the engendering of diverse temporalities; and finally, that assemblages necessitate the deliberate agency and intervention of social actors. In the case of this installation, the assemblage was composed of the sugar sculptures, the building of the sugar refinery with its industrial texture, its

grand size, and above all its strong olfactory emissions, the black female artist, the visitors to the exhibition, but also the sensorially evoked memories of slavery, colonialism, and Euro-centrism, and of the various originary pasts, often cited and recalled in popular identity discourses and material landmarks: from the white marble of Greco-Roman civilization to the ambivalence of Egypt and Egyptomanias, to the white memorials in the Washington (DC) Mall. These materially induced evocations were deliberately assembled by the artist and her team, but undoubtedly in that assemblage several components would have emerged involuntarily, and would have become part of that temporary arrangement: the involuntary memories and associations of the people who worked for it, and the various memories of the audience, for example. And through the new memories of the experience, both the material (such as the photos taken) and the immaterial, this assemblage would have enabled new assemblages to emerge elsewhere, well after the original sculptures would have melted away, and the building been demolished. I will return to this work later on, but before that I will elaborate on the key features of assemblages mentioned above. Finally, I will



**Figure 2.** (Colour online) Kara Walker's 'A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby' at the Domino Sugar Factory, Brooklyn, 2014. (Photograph: Cat Laine, [paintedfoot.com](http://paintedfoot.com))

present a case study from Bronze Age Crete, showing how such an understanding of the concept can bear fruit.

#### From 'assemblage theory' to assemblage thinking: back to Deleuze

As Hamilakis and Jones claim in the introduction to this thematic issue, many recent archaeological renderings and uses of the concept of assemblage follow mostly DeLanda's (e.g. 2006) 'assemblage theory' and Bennett's (2010) reincarnation of the idea. It will be worth, however, going back to the original discussion on the assemblage by Deleuze and Guattari (henceforth D&G). Obviously, this is my own, situated reading of their work, filtered through positions I have developed on sensoriality, affectivity and temporality over the years (see, in particular, Hamilakis 2013). Nowhere in D&G's oeuvre is there a very clear definition of the concept, and this is deliberate. Such an act would have been out of step with the overall message of their whole work, which, time and again, invites us to start from the middle and avoid easy and clear-cut answers. It is also important to remember that, in

D&G's work, the assemblage is closely linked to other concepts, such as the rhizome, which embodies non-genealogical, non-hierarchical thinking, juxtaposed to the arboreal mode of thought (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 3–28), or the idea of the event, the rupture that is brought about by the coexistence and articulation of heterogeneous elements. In other words, the assemblage was already in its inception, an assemblage of concepts. It is upon us to piece together a loose, provisional definition from several fragments, single-authored and co-authored books, interviews and so on, and explore the various evolving deployments of the idea, whether it is in studies on Kafka, in discussions of psychoanalysis, or in treatments on the becoming-animal: the immanent force, the potentiality, the drive (or, as I explain below, the desire) that enables a being to become a multiplicity, an assemblage, not by filiation nor by imitation, but by alliance (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 239; see also Viveiros de Castro 2014, 160–61).

Here are some relevant passages:

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across

ages, sexes and reigns—different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning ... It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind. Magicians are well aware of this. An animal is defined less by its genus, its species, its organs, and its functions, than by the assemblages into which it enters. Take an assemblage of the type man-animal-manufactured object: MAN-HORSE-STIRRUP. Technologies have explained that the stirrup made possible a new military unity in giving the knight lateral stability ... This is a new man-animal symbiosis, a new assemblage of war, defined by its degree of power or 'freedom', its affects, its circulations of affects: what a set of bodies is capable of. Man and the animal enter into a new relationship, one changes no less than the other, the battlefield is filled with a new type of affects ... In the case of the stirrup, it was the grant of land, linked to the beneficiary's obligation to serve on horseback, which was to impose the new cavalry and harness the tool in the complex assemblage of feudalism ... The feudal machine combines new relationships with earth, war, the animal, but also with culture and games (tournaments), with woman (courtly love); all sorts of fluxes enter into conjunction. How can the assemblage be refused the name it deserves, 'desire'? (Deleuze & Parnet 1987, 69–70)

The minimum real unit is not the idea, the concept or the signifier but the *assemblage*. It is always an assemblage which produces utterances ... The utterance is the product of an assemblage—which is always collective which brings into play within us and outside us, populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events ... The difficult part is making all the elements of a non-homogenous set converge, making them function together. Structures are linked to conditions of homogeneity, but assemblages are not. The assemblage is co-functioning, it is 'sympathy', symbiosis ... Sympathy is not a vague feeling of respect or of spiritual participation: on the contrary, it is the exertion or the penetration of bodies, hatred or love ... Bodies may be physical, biological, psychic, social, verbal: they are always bodies or corpora. (Deleuze & Parnet 1987, 51–2)

In assemblages you find states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodes; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs. The relations between the two are pretty complex. For example, a society is defined not by productive forces and ideology, but by 'hodgepodes' and 'verdicts'. Hodgepodes are combinations of interpenetrating bodies. (Deleuze 2007, 177)

There are two ways to suppress or attenuate the distinction between nature and culture. The first is to liken animal behavior to human behavior ... But what we are saying is that the idea of assemblages

can replace the idea of behavior, and thus with respect to the idea of assemblage, the nature-culture distinction no longer matters ... But an assemblage is first and foremost what keeps very heterogeneous elements together: e.g. a sound, a gesture, a position, etc., both natural and artificial elements. The problem is one of 'consistency' or 'coherence', and it is prior to the problem of behavior. How do things take on consistency? How do they **cohere**? Even among very different things, an intensive continuity can be found. (Deleuze 2007, 179)

Multiplicity and heterogeneity emerge as key features of assemblages, therefore. They are arrangements of interpenetrating bodies—variously conceived—that co-function and cohere: the pollinating insect and the flower, the wasp and the orchid, is an example that is often used by D&G to illustrate an assemblage. Their co-functioning is at least partly achieved because assemblages enact distinctive spatialities, plateaus of intensity (a term borrowed from Bateson: Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 21–2; Shaw 2015): self-vibrating entities that do not lead to a climactic end. For example, D&G describe their book as a rhizomatic structure that is composed of a 'thousand plateaus'.

I would argue, however, that there are three further features of assemblages which hold special importance, and which we have, especially in archaeology, mostly overlooked: the affective/sensorial, the mnemonic/temporal, and the political. These should not be seen as independent, but rather as interconnected. These are also the features that I consider essential for a reconfigured, relational archaeology. I will say a few words on each, below.

#### *i) The affective/sensorial*

In D&G's thinking, every assemblage is 'simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage and an assemblage of enunciation' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 555). I read this to mean that, in addition to the material components that are brought together and arranged to produce a co-functioning entity, there are other components, which are seemingly immaterial, but which require materiality to be enacted: I am referring to discourses, memories and affects, not just linguistic utterances and signs. As the authors say elsewhere, 'there is no machinic assemblage that is not a social assemblage of desire, no social assemblage of desire that is not a collective assemblage of enunciation' (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, 82). And in one of the passages above they go so far as to say that 'desire' can be taken as the true name of the assemblage.

It is clear that desire is a key term in the constitution of assemblages; in fact, 'desiring machines' (machines in the sense of deliberate arrangements,

configurations) was the name that D&G gave to the concept in its initial formulation in *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1983). Their concept of desire is different from our contemporary, common-sense one, which emphasizes lack, longing for something missing; they rather see desire as production (cf. Buchanan 2011), as a drive, a force with real, actual effects in the world. This productive force of desire, a force that leads to becomings and emergences, is clearly connected with the Spinozan idea of affect, the ‘affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections’ (Spinoza 1996, 70). Spinoza lists desire (as drive) first in his ‘catalogue’ of affects, together with various emotions (1996, 104–12). Affect thus connects agency with sensorial and emotive impact.

The anti-Cartesian thought of Spinoza has been a key influence for Deleuze, who declared (1988, 17) that ‘Spinoza offers philosophers a new model: the body’. For him, in Spinoza’s thought, bodies and beings are defined primarily by their capacity to affect and be affected, not by any formal characteristics (Deleuze 1988, 45). I have argued elsewhere (Hamilakis 2013) that sensoriality cannot be separated from affectivity: in other words, that the primary role of the senses is not to allow the organic body to operate, but to enable affectivity, to establish affective connections, to allow us to be ‘touched’ by other bodies, by things, by the atmosphere, and by the world in general.

Sensoriality and sensorial archaeology, as I have suggested, go beyond interiority and exteriority, beyond external sensorial stimuli which are received and processed by the internal domain, by mind. They prioritize instead the sensorial field, a state in-between, between bodies, things, substances, elements, the atmosphere. And this is where sensoriality and Deleuzian assemblage thinking meet. Deleuze (in a dialogue with Parnet), for example, notes that ‘[i]t is not the elements or the sets which define the multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND—stammering’ (Deleuze & Parnet 1987, 34). It is clear here that what he considers as crucial in assemblages is not any constituent parts, nor the relationship between the parts and the whole, but the condition and the relationship of in-betweenness (cf. Ingold 2015, 147–53). Like desire, affectivity in general is a productive force which coheres the different elements of the assemblage; but such a force is put into motion by sensoriality, meant not as a mechanical biological process, nor as a set of stimuli, but as the affective condition of life, as the embodied and affective action that energizes the whole

experiential field. Needless to say that sensorial experience, perceived as an affective force, has been central to Deleuzian thinking, as testified by the unusual move for a philosopher to dedicate two volumes to the perceptual and affective/sensorial modality of cinema (Deleuze 1986; 1989).

#### ii) *The mnemonic/temporal*

Another key element of the assemblage in addition to affectivity and sensoriality is memory, and the temporal as mnemonic experience. Much has been written on social and material memory in archaeology recently, and there is no need to elaborate at length here (e.g. Hamilakis 2013; Jones 2007; Olivier 2011; van Dyke & Alcock 2003). My comments, however, will address memory as temporality, material remembering and forgetting as a way of conceptualizing time through materiality. More specifically, I want to ask: what kind of temporal relationships does the assemblage enact, and what does this mean for our own, archaeological notions of temporality?

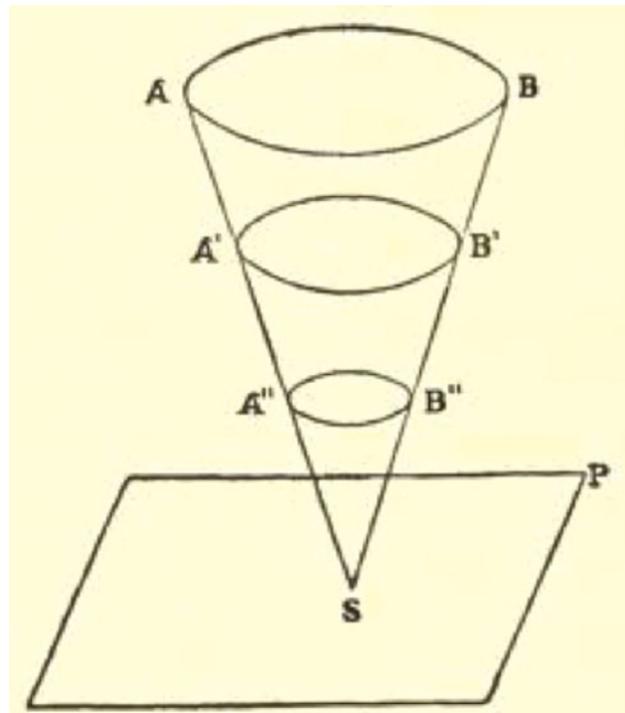
The discussion on archaeology and temporality has recently moved beyond our chronometric, linear time, beyond even the time perspectivism that some scholars have been advocating (e.g. Bailey 2007), and certainly beyond the linear-*versus*-cyclical time of some anthropological approaches (cf. Lucas 2005; 2015; Olivier 2011). It is my contention that assemblage thinking allows us to develop this thinking further and produce a temporal understanding which will be more attuned to the nature of matter and to our archaeological object of study. The assembling/arrangement of diverse bodies, things, affects, senses and memories involves by implication the commingling and the contingent co-presence of diverse temporal moments; this is a multiplicity of times, of various pasts and various presents, but also a multiplicity of temporal modalities: geological times, archaeological/historical times, human experiential times, non-human animal experiential times.

But before we inquire as to the temporal implications of the assemblage, we will need to reflect on the nature of time, beyond the linear and successive time which is often dominant in modernity. Elsewhere (e.g. Hamilakis 2013, 119–24), I have talked about an alternative ontology of time, based on the work of Bergson and on Deleuze’s *Bergsonism* (1991), but modifying it to account for the insights gained by working with materiality, with the socio-politics of the past and with archaeological ethnography (cf. Hamilakis 2011). This is time as co-existence rather than succession, whereby all pasts co-exist with—in a condensed and virtual form—and contained by the present moment. This is the Bergsonian, durational

time, which does not imply continuity, but rather co-presence. Past and present are both ‘modalities or dimensions of duration’, as Elizabeth Grosz (2004, 176) put it on her study on Bergson. Matter may be unstable and plastic, rather than fixed and unchanging, but at the same time one of its most fundamental properties is its ability to last, to endure. Durational time as memory is thus enacted and engendered through matter. For archaeologists, this is easier perhaps to understand, considering the complex and multiple lives of things: the diverse times in which they become the centre of sensorial attention, and the objects of use, modification, reuse, and so on.

To continue with another Deleuzogram, past, present, and future are not dots in the line of time, but rather inter-penetrating and commingled planes. In that sense, every given present carries with it all pasts, but, of course, through the selective process of memory, only specific pasts are conjured up at any specific present moment (cf. Al-Saji 2004, 214). This selective process can be both conscious and deliberate (the production of remembering and forgetting through materiality, engendered by social actors), as well as unconscious: the Proustian triggering effect, the sudden and involuntary resurfacing of experiential moments, enacted by materiality through the senses.

Bergson has illustrated this relationship with his famous cone (Fig. 3), where the apex of the cone, which stands for the present, condenses all pasts and co-exists with them. At the same time, as perception is coeval with memory (cf. Virno 2015, 11), and as every perception is full of memories (Bergson 1990), the present co-exists not only with all pasts but also with its own memory. Bergson, however, makes a distinction between virtual and actual co-existence. All pasts co-exist virtually with the present, but only certain pasts are actualized at specific occasions. As far as human experience is concerned, in this process of actualization, sensoriality and affectivity are crucial: at specific moments, certain planes of the past, or temporal occasions embedded in matter, voluntarily or involuntarily, acquire *sensorial intensity and affective weight*, and they thus become actual pasts. This is a process of inter-subjective, social memory whereby various rhythms of duration become attuned and synchronized. It is because of the multi-sensorial entanglement of humans with matter and of the affective import of such entanglement that we are able to actualize certain pasts. Alia al-Saji (2004, 223) uses a hearing metaphor to describe this process: durational time, he says, is polyphonic, as we are able to hear many different voices at the same time, but we need to select or tune in to a specific one, and give it our



**Figure 3.** (Colour online) Bergson's 'cone of memory' (Bergson 1990): *S* denotes the present moment, whereas *A-B*, *A'-B'*, *A''-B''* denote the various temporal planes of the past, all contained, in a condensed form, in the present.

sensorial and affective intense attention, to be able to hear it properly.

Given this ontology of multi-temporality described above, what are the temporal implications of the heterogeneous arrangement we encounter in an assemblage? Assemblages by definition will accentuate the multiplicity of times, resulting in a more complicated but perhaps more interesting temporality. In assemblages, we will expect to encounter many temporal moments, and, more importantly, many durational rhythms; think, for example, of the durational rhythm of a human body and that of a stone architectural block: how they enact different time scales (human/biological *versus* geological and archaeological time), how their processes of transformation follow different temporal patterns (relatively fast transformation of the human body, *versus* much slower transformation of the architectural block), how the assemblage of the human body after death gets transformed into another kind of assemblage much faster compared to an assemblage of an architectural block, and so on.

To continue with the theme of polyphony, assemblages are extremely large and diverse choirs, open to a vast range of possibilities. Their attempted harmony

may or may not be achieved, but in any case, the important is to understand which ‘voices’, that is, which temporal instances become sensorially and affectively dominant, and why. The political implications of such selection are also worth exploring, as I will be showing in the next section. Furthermore, given that the same constituent parts of an assemblage may engender and activate different modes of mnemonic time in different assemblages, it is important for us to understand why specific times are actualized in specific assemblages. Finally, the wider the range of temporal possibilities, the more open will be the field of emerging situations, events, new arrangements.

Indeed, change is immanent in the constitution and the temporality of the assemblage: for a start, the articulation and the alliance of heterogeneous elements that make up an assemblage enable new situations and possibilities to emerge, material, social and political. Furthermore, assemblages are contingent and temporary, and have the endless generative potential to lead to new configurations, new assemblages. Finally, as with the example of the human body and the architectural block above, change as endless transformation at different time scales is immanent to the constituent elements, and thus to the assemblage as a whole.

### *iii) The political*

It is worth remembering that the original intellectual context of the Deleuzian and Guattarian term of assemblages coincided with a politically intense moment for the authors, and for their social milieu (cf. Dosse 2010). D&G were both politically engaged intellectuals, strongly influenced by Marxist thinking, and with a clear desire (in the Deleuzian sense) to rejuvenate that body of thought. The subtitle of their major works, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, also betrays their anti-capitalist spirit. Their writings aimed at deconstructing and theoretically undermining totalizing political regimes and ideologies, from fascism to capitalism. Their thought on the assemblage developed against the background of late 1960s Paris, with the student and popular uprising of May 1968 as the key defining event. D&G were thus aiming, amongst other things, not to only understand the workings of capitalism and its production of subjectivities, but also to come up with ideas and schemes which can counter the static and totalizing logic of both the capitalist State and the bureaucracy of the traditional left-wing parties. Their assemblage thus was not simply an attempt to understand how temporary material and immaterial arrangements create political effects, but also how we can produce novel arrange-

ments, including a new political subject, which can bring about liberation (cf. Tambio 2009).

But the political implications of the assemblage are not only to do with the biography and the political hopes of its proponents, nor solely with the social climate in which they worked. They are also immanent to the concept itself; they emerge from its defining features and elements. Firstly, the assemblage/arrangement is political in the sense that it is a *deliberate* (but not necessarily always intentional) co-presence of multiplicities, albeit one which can engender and activate involuntary processes, memories, and affects. Let us recall that D&G used the term *agencement* to define assemblages (Philips 2006), which evokes deliberate arrangement, not an accidental co-presence. That deliberate act of bringing together assumes the ability and power of a social agent to do so, it entails certain prerogatives, but it also brings about certain social and political consequences.

Secondly, affectivity, sensoriality, or desire as a productive force (all key elements of the assemblage) are political, in the sense of biopolitics and biopower, initially discussed by Foucault (e.g. 2010), but elaborated upon by a number of more recent theoreticians, including Agamben (e.g. 1998) and Esposito (e.g. 2013). This is power operating in the arena of the sensing and sensed, affecting and affected human body. It is both constraining (through institutions and apparatuses), as well as enabling, affirmative biopolitical power (cf. Esposito 2013). It is no coincidence that some scholars find certain affinities between the assemblage and the Foucaultian concept of the apparatus (e.g. Legg 2011).

Thirdly, assemblages are political since their sensorial and affective force is subject to the rules of what J. Rancière (2004) has called ‘the distribution of the sensible’: the rules that govern what is allowed to be sensed and what not, and what is determined as worth perceiving sensorially and recalling mnemonically, and what not. Finally, the actualization of distinctive modes of time, the mnemonic selection of certain instances and the forgetting of others will produce political effects, as distinctive times can operate instrumentally to valorize events, ancestors and situations past and present, whereas the forgetting of others can erase difficult or inconvenient truths. The selection of the components that can form an assemblage thus will result in specific sensorial/affective and temporal affordances and engender distinctive political effects: it can enable certain futures to emerge and others to disappear. Yet, sensorial memories and affectivities are not easy to tame and subjugate entirely, due to the anarchic nature of the sensorial and the involuntary power of memory. It is no

coincidence that Deleuzian assemblage thinking has inspired a number of recent political treatises, including Hardt and Negri's work on the multitude as the heterogeneous, nomadic political force of our times (e.g. see Hardt & Negri 2009, 187–8; cf. Tambio 2009), or Judith Butler's recent theorizing of the assembly as a plural and diverse, embodied and performative collectivity (Butler 2015).

Assemblages and assemblage thinking thus allow us to re-conceptualize the social, moving away from tired dichotomies such as the individual and the collective or structure and agency, being at the same time much more sophisticated and inclusive than structuration theory or Bourdieu's habitus. They also allow us to explore both the material and the immaterial, and talk about the condition of the in-between, of the processes that happen, the relationships that are forged and the possibilities that emerge in the midst of things, senses, memories and affects. More importantly, they are broad enough to allow their combination with other bodies of thinking, although we should be aware of the danger of treating them as extremely generic concepts that can be applied to everything and anything, depriving them thus of any interpretative and critical power.

I have claimed above that the immaterial, sensorial, affective and temporal/mnemonic dimension of the assemblages and their political impact and nature are key, defining features. Without them, assemblages are aggregations of material or information, similar to the ones envisaged by systemic thinking in the 1970s. These key features are often missing from many archaeological writings on the topic, although the present special section goes a long way to rectify the situation (see also Harris 2014, on assemblages and affect). Tim Pauketat, reviewing recently for this journal a spate of books on archaeological theory, lamented the fact that our ontological turn does not go far enough, and that we often produce homogenizing and ahistorical narratives. He concludes that

The solution to this persistent problem, on one hand, is to open up the discussion to include more than things. We need to make an *affective turn* toward theorizing the qualities of things, moments and experiences as well, thinking more about the *memory-work* and affordance inherent to certain qualities of materials than these four volumes do. (Pauketat 2015, 911, emphasis added)

In archaeology, we often tend to think of the assemblage as purely a machinic arrangement, and an aggregation of heterogeneous components with agentic power, within a flat ontology. In other words, we tend to consider them as similar to networks, often devoid of affect and political import. Indeed, it is com-

mon to see researchers linking them to the Latourian ANT (Actor Network Theory), the problems of which, especially its at times apolitical or conservative nature (cf. Skirbekk 2015), its difficulty or inability to explain change, and its often mechanistic tendencies, have been well rehearsed by a number of scholars, including Tim Ingold (see 2011, esp. chapter 7), and Graham Harman (2009), among others. It is my contention here that such deployment of the concept, devoid of sensoriality, affectivity, memory/time and the political, is an impoverished understanding of it. Assemblages as temporary co-presences, deliberate arrangements, and articulations of things, beings, enunciations, memories and affects, brought together and enacted as such by sensoriality, can in fact provide a more valid alternative to the most mechanistic uses of ANT, and network thinking in general.

To return to the example with which I opened this article, Kara Walker's installation became an assemblage of things and beings, as well as one of multiple memories, enunciations and citations. As all assemblages, this was a temporary arrangement, a contingent co-presence. The exhibition ended in July 2014 and the refinery building has since been demolished, to make space for prime, riverside real estate. The immense publicity it received and the huge impression it made internationally, in other words its powerful affectivity, are due to the sensorial field it created, and the political effects it engendered. The installation would not have worked in the same way in another building. The history of the sugar refinery, its living, vibrant, sensorial presence, with the molasses dripping from its walls and the scent of sugar engulfing the bodies of the visitors as well as the bodies of the sugar sculptures, reinforced the affective impact of the sugar sculptures themselves. At the same time, the coupling of taste and eating with sexual exploitation and violence, and the uncomfortable histories of slavery and colonialism that this assemblage materially evoked, gave it a rare political efficacy; it made it such a powerful intervention in the contemporary moment. This sensorial and affective assemblage actualized several temporal planes and evoked many centuries of exploitation of black people: it gathered together in the factory space Africa, the Caribbean, British Empire and the USA, while the ripples it generated, both in the art world and in the public sphere, were felt globally, in this article, for example. Part of its political efficacy resulted from its ability to engender and bring side by side the time of Pharaonic Egypt, the time of Greco-Roman antiquity (evoking the white marble sculptures), the time of slavery and colonialism, and the contemporary moment. This arrangement of temporal planes destabilized the

current consensus over race and questioned the perception of time past as gone, lapsed, forgotten. Yet this was not only a temporary assemblage, but a constantly flowing, evolving and unstable one. Not only were some sculptures (the smaller, black ones) melting during the exhibition, but some visitors' responses, in taking provocative, sexualized selfies with the main sculpture, for example, re-enacted the centuries-old link between sugar, race, bodily desire and exploitation. These could be read as undermining the artist's political message, or alternatively, as popular challenges to the seriousness of contemporary art. This being a socially and historically situated art intervention, however, constitutes a specific kind of assemblage, and it is not meant here as a blueprint, a generic model for all assemblages. Assemblages are unique and singular configurations.

### Feasting as a sensorial assemblage

Kara Walker's installation was also about food and its sensorial dimension. In this final section, I will explore further the sensoriality of the assemblage by discussing the social practice of eating and drinking, and their archaeological manifestations. My archaeological reference-point is a feature excavated in West Crete (at Nopigeia, Drapanias) with material dated to the Late Bronze Age (Late 'Minoan' IA, c. 1500 BCE),<sup>2</sup> such as tens of thousands of plain conical cups, cooking pots, a few quern stones, 'incense burners' and animal bones and shell, apparently remnants of a series of feasting episodes, all gathered and hoarded in a linear ditch feature in the countryside (Fig. 4): a deliberately dug ditch, at least 35 m in length, c. 60 cm in width and 1–1.5 m in depth. This is the period in the Bronze Age of Crete which is often called 'Neopalatial', and one which is characterized by large-scale events of feasting and drinking, possibly linked to intense factionalism (cf. Hamilakis 1999; 2002). The area around this deposit is not really known archaeologically, and it is not clear where the people who are responsible for this deposition came from.

Whereas often in archaeological discourses food is instrumentalized as fuel, or, in the more charitable versions, as both biological and symbolic *resource*, what in fact defines eating is a *participatory relationship* between humans and food substances. Let us consider the assemblage of eating: for a start(er), every human is not one entity, but an assemblage on her own, an arrangement of flesh and bones, various organisms, microbes and bacteria, as well as memories and experiences, not to mention the various material/sensorial prostheses. The transformation and ingestion of substances, which involves assemblages of organic and

inorganic matter, is an intensely multi-sensorial affair. We often think of eating as a matter of taste, or taste and smell, or taste, smell and touch. Contrary to the paradigm of the five senses, however, sensorial modalities are in fact infinite, and inherently synaesthetic; they work in unison, not in an individuated manner (Hamilakis 2013). During cooking and eating, several recognized and unrecognized senses are involved, combined and commingled: from the various kinds of vision, to hearing, and to a whole range of other modalities such as temperature, kinaesthesia, the sense of place and locality and the meta-sense of embodied and sensorial memory: memories of previous occasions of commensality and conviviality, as well as the prospective remembering which is generated through eating and can be recalled at a future occasion (cf. Seremetakis 1994; Sutton 2001; 2010).

The sensorial assemblages of eating are defined by the flow of substances, memories and affects through bodies of various kinds. And through that flow, two further fundamental processes are at play. The first is the process of mutual transformation: both food substances and bodies are transformed, become something else. As Jane Bennett put it (2010, 49): 'eating appears as a series of mutual transformations in which the border between inside and outside becomes blurry: my meal both is and is not mine; you both are and not what you eat'. The second process is to do with the blurring of boundaries between subject and object, between the eating human and the eaten substance. As food substances flow in and out of bodies, and as food becomes us, transforming itself and transforming us at the same time, not only does the boundary between inside and outside become blurry, but also the binarisms of the subject and object, and of an active human and the passive and inert food substance, fall apart. This is a human-food assemblage, a process of becoming-food, which in its turn contributes to the production of further, broader assemblages. Both food and humans are living assemblages to start with, but through this nesting process of assemblage making, bodies and their individual organs, separate food and drink substances, material culture and space, cease to exist as autonomous, bounded entities and become part of a unified affective and sensorial field. That is why the sensorial assemblage of eating encourages us to shift from corporeality to sensoriality, or better to a trans-corporeal sensoriality, the sensoriality of the 'in-between'. Such a sensorial assemblage thus enacts a trans-corporeal landscape, an accumulation and arrangement of collective and temporary individuations, as noted by Gilbert Simondon, a key influence on Deleuzian assemblage thinking (cf. Combes 2013, xxi).



**Figure 4.** (Colour online) *The feasting deposit at Nopigeia, Drapanias, West Crete. (Photograph: Author, 2004.)*

The material gathered by archaeologists from this ditch seems to have been accumulated during distinct feasting events, several of them it seems, since soil micromorphology has shown that the ditch was filled in gradually, not in one go (MacPhail 2005). Eating and drinking, as we know, are primarily social practices, and in each assemblage of feasting various embodied beings and entities participated: bodies of several humans (each an assemblage of its own), bodies of animals to be sacrificed and consumed, bodies of food which had been assembled by combining organic and inorganic matter, and of course bodies of

other material culture, from cooking vessels to space and to the natural and anthropogenic environment. But these are not the only participants in the assemblage of eating: the affectivity and conviviality of collective consumption, the memories that come with it, the utterances that are expressed and exchanged, are some others.

This assemblage evokes and materializes in the arena of consumption the various locales from which plants, animals and the associated substances originate, the places where the other participants were coming from and the previous memories and

experiences that were cited and recalled in each specific eating occasion. The affective outcomes and the memories created at each temporary eating assemblage can subsequently be dispersed elsewhere, but not before they imbue the specific locale with the intense, experiential effect of the occasion. Such locales thus will harbour the memories of these occasions, which can be cited and re-enacted in the future. These memories, materialized through the hoarded feasting remnants, would have constituted an important component of the feasting assemblage. Place-memories and material memories, along with people's embodied memories, would have produced a place-specific polychronic temporality and would have made this assemblage distinctive, compared to other feasting sensorial assemblages.

It should have become obvious from the above that every assemblage may be ephemeral, but its enactment of temporality is more complex. For a start, since every sensorial perception is replete with the memories of previous perceptions, all sensorial modalities are multi-temporal. Moreover, in assemblages, the actualization and re-enactment of specific past affective and mnemonic occasions produce a new affective experience in the present, an experience which is not mono-chronic, nor linear and successive, but simultaneously polychronic, enacting time as co-existence. What temporal planes were actualized in these feasting occasions? The previous feasting events in this locality would, no doubt, have been evoked and mnemonically enacted, opening up the sensorial/mnemonic field to the political economy of remembering and forgetting: memorable events involving many humans and many animals to be sacrificed and cooked, including some rare and highly valued ones, such as the wild goat of Crete (*Capra aegagrus cretica*), remnants of which were found in this ditch, including part of a skull preserving a set of impressive horn cores, and which was deposited at the bottom of the ditch (cf. Hamilakis & Harris 2011); excessive quantities of food and alcoholic drinks to be consumed; and possibly legendary speeches and performances. Comparisons between past and present events would have been inevitable. The mnemonic planes of the past would have been reshuffled, rearranged and recreated, now coalescing with the new memories of the present and future.

But the trans-corporeal landscape which is being enacted and materialized by the sensoriality of eating is also an assemblage shaped by bio-politics: food substances possess agency on their own; they often determine and elicit our responses. But the affective and mnemonic bonds produced in the sen-

social assemblage of eating can generate further biopolitical power. We are aware of feasting as a biopolitical means in prehistory, but there is also the liberating, affirmative biopolitics, beyond the biopolitics of domination, and the suppression of the human body by an apparatus. The various collective and community kitchens that have sprung up in the UK and in Europe in the past few years of severe austerity is one such example of affirmative power, generated in the biopolitical arena of eating. They are temporary assemblages, but their effects are long lasting: they affirm not only the biological survival of people in need, but also the production, at least potentially, of a new collective subjectivity: an assemblage of political agents which operates beyond and against neoliberal capitalism.

The sensorial assemblages generated by the series of feasting events in that Cretan locality around 1500 BCE would have had far-reaching implications for the communities living in the area and beyond, such as the forging of alliances, the negotiations of social roles and power relations (the potential aggrandizing of certain individuals who would have performed the role of hosts and providers, for example), the exchange of things, information, memories and partners, the creation of affective bonds. These assemblages would have generated other events, other assemblages, no doubt with lasting social and material effects. The political landscape of Crete at that time was particularly dynamic and turbulent, with vast expenditure of material resources in building projects, in material culture and art, and in the hosting of large-scale feasting events, but also frequent and rapid destructions pointing to intense factionalism and 'material wars'. In this landscape, it was the locales that had a long history of communal gatherings and consumption events which became the architecturally and materially elaborate 'palatial' centres, that is, ceremonially 'central places' (Hamilakis 2013). In this political process, the sensorial assemblages of communal feasting events which enabled the coherence of mnemonically loaded places with the affectivity produced during eating and drinking would have been of crucial importance. The articulation of place, memory, and trans-corporeal sensoriality would have led to new emergences, new becomings, including the establishment of the 'neopalatial' material and social formations.

Note, however, that the human actors who partook each time of these sensorial assemblages had decided, before they dispersed, to hoard some of their material memories in the ground: deliberately and carefully to bury in a ditch some of the paraphernalia of the feasting events, thus producing another

assemblage. In so doing, they would have encountered the remnants of previous feasting episodes, the material memories of previous events. That polychronic, cumulative, buried assemblage of c. 1500 BCE, composed of material and immaterial elements, gave rise to another assemblage today, produced at the time of excavation. In addition to the buried components, it included us as excavators, our own material and instrumental apparatus such as the scale and the north sign, and the various archaeological aspirations and affective bonds and investments around this archaeological project. Even that assemblage is no longer. Some of the material has been moved to archaeological storerooms, and is subject to processes of bureaucratic logic, research routines, and to the continually accumulating dust. Yet every assemblage leads to multiple new emergences, and to new assemblages, not only in archaeological storerooms, but also in various publications, including this one. And through them, the material memories of the Bronze Age moments I evoked here, their durational qualities, the affective impact of these intense, convivial, eating, drinking, and intoxicating occasions are still with us, and they will be for some time.

## Conclusion

This article has assembled a series of multi-temporal occasions, vignettes, examples and thoughts, aiming not only at demonstrating the efficacy and potential of assemblage thinking for archaeology as both a descriptive/analytical *and* an interpretative approach, but also at stressing the need to consider the sensorial/affective, the mnemonic/temporal, and the political nature of assemblages, features which contribute to the immense power of the concept. I am not advocating here an 'orthodox' and 'correct' way of conceptualizing assemblages, quite the opposite: experimentation and creative mingling with other ideas are at the core of assemblage thinking. I have done so myself, by integrating, for example, assemblage thinking with Bergsonian ideas on duration and multi-temporality, bio-political thinking, and my own work on multi-sensoriality. Rather than returning to an assumed originary state, I have tried instead to retrieve some of the initial and extremely important elements of Deleuzian understanding of assemblages, elements which we seem to have mostly overlooked. At the same time, I have attempted to show how these can be combined with other contemporary thinking on affectivity, time, and the political. A thematic thread that runs through this article-assemblage is that of eating, especially communal-convivial eating, as a powerful sensorial assemblage. All assemblages are sen-

social assemblages, all are unique configurations, but with variable affective intensity, and the sensorial assemblages of communal consumption are some of the most affectively intense and efficacious.

## Notes

1. See [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/arts/design/kara-walker-creates-a-confection-at-the-domino-refinery.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/arts/design/kara-walker-creates-a-confection-at-the-domino-refinery.html?_r=0) (accessed 1 November 2016).
2. The excavation was carried out by the Ephorate of Antiquities of West Crete under the direction of Dr Maria Vlazaki. In 2004, a team of staff and students from the University of Southampton participated in the excavation and carried out a series of analytical procedures, including sampling for soil micromorphology and organic residue analysis, as well as extensive sampling for archaeobotanical and other organic material: see Andreadaki-Vlazaki (2011); Hamilakis & Harris (2011).

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