THE PAST AS ORAL HISTORY
towards an archaeology of the senses

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INTRODUCTION
Archaeologies minus the corpo-reality

The archaeology of Bronze Age Crete is a strange world. Inhabited by a mysterious ethnic group which was given the name, ‘Minoans’, it occupies an eminent position in the public imagination, where mythological elements are mixed with archaeological information and architectural and artistic representations, many of them created at the beginning of this century. Airports and tourist shops in the Mediterranean are full of books that have fictionalised the Europeanist, romanticised mythologies created mostly by Sir Arthur Evans but also by others who may not admit it, but have constructed a world, so familiar to their background and country of origins. Their Minoan constructions are full of palaces, kings, queens and aristocratic estates but also colonies, fleets and trade (cf. Bintliff 1984, MacEnroe 1995, MacGillivray 2000, Hamilakis, forthcoming, Hitchcock and Koudounaris forthcoming). In the 1970’s and most of the 1980’s, that strange world was filled in with redistributive centres, compassionate elites with amazing managerial powers and a spirit of public duty, specialist farmers with an amazing understanding of formalist microeconomics (e.g. Renfrew 1972, cf. Hamilakis 1995 for further bibliography). In the 1990’s, a few brave storytellers started rewriting some of the stories using terminology which bewildered many and passed by the rest of old and the not so old guard: structure and agency, semiotics, gender. The ‘Minoans’ are, to a large extent, still elusive, however, their materiality void, their experiential realm an empty space.

It is evident that this picture is not unique in the archaeological imagination and production. Despite the differences and the special tradition in which Minoan archaeology developed (classical archaeology, broadly
defined), this situation can be seen as paradigmatic for archaeology as a whole. Despite all the recent advances in archaeological thinking and practice, we are still missing maybe the most important aspects of human experience in the past, the corpo-reality, the condition of human embodiment. Many archaeologists would recognise the important contributions made by relatively recent theoretical discussions in archaeology, which have gone a long way towards bringing about the maturity of our craft. But some of us would maintain that most of the recent theoretical discussion, even when it talks about the human body, embodiment and corporeality, maintains abstract, mentalist notions and schemes, still works within Cartesian logocentric intellectual discourses (Kus 1992). Most discussions are about representations of the body, the body as a metaphor. While these attempts are very useful and sometimes quite interesting, I feel that they only constitute a part (and perhaps not the most important) of what the archaeology of embodiment should be about. The notion of embodiment is based on the idea that our subjectivity is defined by our sensory experiences. We exist in and attend to the world through our senses, our bodily encounters with the world. Individuals are not abstract social actors, de-personalised, disembodied agents, but embodied realities, incorporated and incorporating social relationships (cf. Ingold 2000).

These ideas, while partly accepted within the most recent archaeological thinking, do not seem to have been taken further. The textual analogy and the representationist paradigm have been heavily criticised recently, but we still seem to have a long way to go. Take the recent discourses on phenomenology, for example: while the trend itself is very encouraging and it offers more opportunity to discuss issues of embodiment than have other previous theoretical currents, it still privileges certain ways of thinking, and focuses on certain aspects of embodiment at the expense of others. For example, it seems to privilege what in western discourse are called, higher or distant senses such as sight (and to a lesser extent, hearing) (e.g. Thomas 1996, Tilley 1994, Tilley et al. 2000, cf. Hamilakis 2000), at the expense of close or so-called lower senses such as smell, taste and touch (cf. Classen 1997, Howes 1991, Stoller 1989, 1997, but see Ingold 2000:243–87 for a critique of this literature). In a recent thematic issue of the *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* on 'The Archaeology of Perception and the Senses' (15 (1): 1998), all papers focus on visual perception. More importantly, the phenomenological trend seems to favour the individual. I would suggest that a more fruitful approach for the archaeology of embodiment should have at its core the sense of engagement with the embodied presence and corporeality of others. To quote Csordas here: 'Somatic modes of attention are culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in