Inhalt/Content

**Special Issue**
Rethinking the Mediterranean
Ed. by Simon Holdermann, Christoph Lange, Michaela Schäuble and Martin Zillinger

Simon Holdermann, Christoph Lange, Michaela Schäuble and Martin Zillinger: Introduction: Extending the Anthropological Laboratory Across Nested Mediterranean Zones

**Section 1: Rethinking Mediterranean Connectivities**
Peregrine Horden: ‘Knitting Together the Unconjoined’: Mediterranean Connectivity Revisited
Judith Scheele: Connectivity and its Discontents: The Sahara – Second Face of the Mediterranean?
Martin Zillinger: Hamid’s Travelogue: Mimetic Transformations and Spiritual Connectivities Across Mediterranean Topographies of Grace
Gerhild Perl: The Production of Illicit Lives: Racial Governmentality and Colonial Legacies Across the Strait of Gibraltar

**Section 2: Rethinking Mediterranean Ruralities**
Dionigi Albera: Mediterranean Ruralities: Towards a Comparative Approach
Sevi Bayraktar: Performing Resistance: Horon Dance and Chanted Poetry in Turkey’s Transregional Environmental Activism
Christoph Lange: How to Win Elections in the Eastern Delta of Egypt: Towards the Idea of a Strategic Tribalism
Konstantinos Kalantzis: Modernity as Cure and Poison: Photo-Ethnography and Ambiguous Stillness in Therasia, Greece
Thomas Hauschild: Epilogue – Mediterranean Survivals
Inhalt/Content

Introduction to the Special Issue

Holdermann, Simon, Christoph Lange, Michaela Schäuble, Martin Zillinger: Rethinking the Mediterranean: Extending the Anthropological Laboratory Across Nested Mediterranean Zones ................................................................................175

Section 1: Rethinking Mediterranean Connectivities

Horden, Peregrine: ‘Knitting Together the Unconjoined’: Mediterranean Connectivity Revisited ....................................................................................................197
Zillinger, Martin: Hamid’s Travelogue: Mimetic Transformations and Spiritual Connectivities Across Mediterranean Topographies of Grace ...........................................237
Perl, Gerhild: The Production of Illicit Lives: Racial Governmentality and Colonial Legacies Across the Strait of Gibraltar ..............................................................................255

Section 2: Rethinking Mediterranean Ruralities

Albera, Dionigi: Mediterranean Ruralities: Towards a Comparative Approach ..................275
Bayraktar, Sevi: Performing Resistance: Horon Dance and Chanted Poetry in Turkey’s Transregional Environmental Activism .............................................................295
Lange, Christoph: How to Win Elections in the Eastern Delta of Egypt: Towards the Idea of a Strategic Tribalism ..................................................................................................317
Kalantzis, Konstantinos: Modernity as Cure and Poison: Photo-Ethnography and Ambiguous Stillness in Therasia, Greece ......................................................................................343

Hauschild, Thomas: Epilogue – Mediterranean Survivals ......................................................371
Modernity as Cure and Poison: Photo-Ethnography and Ambiguous Stillness in Therasia, Greece

Konstantinos Kalantzis
University of Thessaly

Abstract. As Therasiotes – residents of Therasia, a sparsely populated island sitting to the west of the globally iconic tourist destination of Santorini – engage with their landscape, they are haunted by a sense of stillness, which contrasts with Santorini’s reverberating modernity. By combining text with photographic imagery, this essay explores how Therasiotes experience quietness and its perceived antithesis, modernity, as well as the ways in which both are entangled in conflicting dynamics of pleasure and aversion, a condition invoking Derrida’s discussion of Plato’s *pharmakon*, with its inherent vacillation between the categories of cure and poison. The article examines peoples’ material practices and modes of looking in order to understand how they experience time and place and how they rework the island’s position in national and global hierarchies of value. It also proposes a peripatetic narrative structure that mirrors my own physical movements on the island in pursuit of photos and thus explores the ethnographic role of photography as a narrative strategy, an object of study and a research method.

[modernity, ethnography, photography, tourism, material culture, landscape]

Acknowledgement:

My research in Therasia has been supported financially by the EU-funded Thales project ‘Diachronic island cultures: The case of Therasia’ (2011-2015) coordinated by Klairy Palyvou at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki [principal investigators include: Iris Tzachili (Crete), Kostas Sbonias (Ionian) and Apostolos Sarris (IMS)]. I am thankful to Iris Tzachili for inviting me to the project and providing insightful commentary throughout the years. My work has benefited enormously from the continuous conversation I have had with fellow anthropologist and ethnographer of Therasia Alexandra Bakalaki. I am also grateful to other project members for their feedback, including Klairy Palyvou, Angelos Boufalis, Kostas Sbonias, Kostas Athanasiou and Emeri Farinetti. My thanks also go to Chris Pinney, Ileana Selejan, Naluwembe Binaisa, Vindhya Buthpitiya and Sokphea Young who offered support and ideas while I worked for the ERC-funded PhotoDemos project at UCL (grant agreement no. 695283). Kostas Chritis offered immensely valuable help with editing the photos for which I am thankful. I am also very grateful for the guidance offered by Gabriele Alex as well as for the productive comments I received from the anonymous reviewers. I am indebted to Michaela Schäuble for inviting me to participate in this special issue and our conversations which started in 2016.
Introduction

Early one evening, after the scorching heat had receded, I was trekking up the steep route taken by the few dozen visitors who come to the small volcanic island of Therasia on daily cruises in the summer. On the island, inhabited by some three hundred people, almost a mile off the coast of the globally emblematic tourist destination of Santorini, commentaries abound about local quietness, which is conceived as the antithesis of Santorini. They are part of an anxious assessment of what the lack of sound and congestion, indexing exemption from a contemporary (busy, noisy) world, means and feels like. The route I was climbing features purposely made signs inviting passers-by to restaurants. Most of them would correspond to the urban idiom of joking about Greek (usually low-class) misuses of English that confirm Therasia’s marginality and exceptionality in respect of sophisticated tourist aesthetics to those who tell such jokes. I was thus feeling unsure about photographing them, as the act might seem to suggest I was partaking in the joke. Nonetheless my photographic search revealed a certain kinship between two signs located near to each other, which, I argue, cuts to the core of Therasiote social aesthetics (Figure 1). The first warns about the presence of pesticide, using the word ‘medicine’ \(\text{farmako}\). The second sign once advertised the Cavo Mare, a hotel run by a local man for a short period before it fell into debt and was forced to close. Against the sign’s original message the graffiti is now serving as a warning of the possible consequences of investing in tourism.

Occasionally in Therasia, tourism is described locally as a possible ‘medicine’ for the island’s ‘underdevelopment’. The failed hotel project, however, makes a link between medicine and another Greek word sharing the same root, \(\text{farmaki}, \) ‘poison’, with reference to the lives of those who invested in the project (see also Kalantzis 2015:261). Poison is also a word many Therasiotes use to describe the sensorial environment of chaotically busy tourist sites like Santorini or of polluted cities like Piraeus. The spatial coexistence captured in my image and the semantic ambiguity of the medicine that becomes a poison recalls Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the \(\text{pharmakon}\) in Plato’s \(\text{Phaedrus}\), a substance that vacillates between being a remedy and a poison (1981:71–72, 103). We can heuristically detach this discussion’s original focus on writing (see Pinney 2008:47–49) and consider it here by following Therasiotes’ own sensibilities, of which I became particularly aware by using a camera and thinking through images.

This article therefore explores how people in Therasia engage with the island’s quietness and the prospect of economic development, two conditions that locally invoke the unstable complementarity between cure and poison. The article also examines how people engage with the landscape and negotiate the burden and pleasure of its stillness, as well as how this negotiation constructs and conceives modernity. Therasiotes do not use the scholarly Greek term for modernity, \(\text{neoterikotita}\), but their constant lament about the island being in a state of lack conjures up materialities and social structures that are held to index a superior form of political and social organization characteristic of the modern Euro-American nation state. I thus use modernity to speak of this imag-
inary entity (ascribed *par excellence* to ‘Europe’; Chakrabarty 1992:21) as encompassing a series of social relations and materialities, as well as fuelling ideologies of progress through economic ‘development’.

Telling of modernity’s role as a normative notion is the fact that Therasiotes’ bitterness about their exclusion from what is seen as necessary infrastructure, from a hospital to a supermarket, is expressed as a temporal anxiety about being left behind in time, of not being coeval (Fabian 1983:31) with Santorini and other tourist sites, a trope that permeates visitors’ impressions of the island too. These implications of power invoke a by-now classic problem in the anthropology of the Mediterranean, an area constructed historically as Europe’s pocket of rural ‘tradition’, with all the hierarchy this entails. I am referring to the role of modernity as hegemony, to the internalization and operation of a Eurocentric yardstick to measure inclusion in Western hierarchies of value (see Argyrou 2002; Herzfeld 2004, 2005; Buck-Morss 1987; Deltou 1996). Elsewhere I have tried to complicate this model by exploring the agentive capacity of a particular rural society (Sfakia, on Crete) that dwells on native criticism and the ambivalent cultural generativity of the concept of tradition (Kalantzis 2014, 2019; see also Sutton 2008). However, Sfakians’ agency seizes exactly on the idealization of tradition that infuses outsiders’ expectations with their own, an idealization absent from Therasia. Here, I am interested in exploring how Therasiotes, who occupy a marginal position in terms of access to capital and symbolic recognition, expect and desire modernity, yet enact a charged world of oscillation which becomes particularly apparent in their engagements with their material landscape.

My introductory juxtaposition of signs speaks to the centring of this article on photo-ethnography as a way of opening up theoretical questions. This is thus a modest echo of what Walter Benjamin described in the early twentieth century as photography’s ability to reveal aspects of the world that evade one’s daily gaze by capturing minute, tacit materialities (1999:511–512). I am interested in grasping Therasiote visual cul-

---

Figure 1 Graffiti signs in the hamlet of Manolas. The first (left) warns of poison. The second (right) once advertized the restaurant of now-derelict hotel ‘Cavo Mare’. Photos: Konstantinos Kalantzis
ture as ‘a repertoire of expectation and potentiality’ around vision (Pinney 2006:131) and as a dynamic configuration of materials in place. I examine how locals look at the Therasiote landscape in conjunction with how I visualize it. In this article the visual is an object of study, a mode of conveying the contested materiality of place and a way of problematizing the positionalities of ethnography (see also Fogarty-Valenzuela 2020). The article therefore argues for a photo-peripatetic narrative format that recreates visitors’ movements on the island. I compare this movement to that of an ethnographer (me) in search of social engagement and photographable sites, a search revealing ethical (im)possibilities and aspirations to understand social experience. Images connect different places and people, giving readers a sense of place and texture of ethnography while exploring questions of quietude, modernity and lack.

On Lack, Trash and Temporality

For me, the journey to Therasia has always been marked by a cloud of competing rumours circulating among the port authorities and bystanders once I set foot on Santorini. Ambiguity arises concerning which boat will be taking me across and when.
This can be compared to the assemblage of rumours I heard on Therasia about the opening hours of a petrol station that is usually shut. Such rumours are a source of bitterness for locals, as they remind them of one of the central themes of this article, namely the painful sense that Therasia lacks the sorts of amenities that characterize a properly functioning contemporary place. The ambiguity around my transport is masked by the neat timetable for the small motorboat that travels a few times a day from Santorini to Therasia (Figure 2). The poster describes Therasia as a ‘different’ Santorini, a red item distinct from the yellow island. The allusion to combustion made by means of these colours reminds me of a Therasiote middle-aged man who, conjuring up an evolutionist historical imaginary, resentfully remarked that ‘Therasia and Santorini were once one island, but then the volcano erupted and ever since Santorini has stormed ahead and Therasia has fallen behind’. He was referring to the geological event in Minoan times that separated Therasia from Santorini and seared the resulting material structures, which a research team of archaeologists and architects has been surveying in Therasia since 2010. I was hired by that programme, together with my colleague Alexandra Bakalaki, to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. What follows is a product of the research we carried out there between 2010 and 2015 (see Bakalaki 2015; 2020; Kalantzis 2015).

The map’s caption emphasizes Therasia’s ‘difference’, which is at the centre of local negotiations, tourists’ small talk and stories published in magazines, reflective of the ‘representational assemblages’ that Salazar and Graburn call ‘tourism imaginaries’ (2014:1). In fact, the rugged wooden door I captured in Figure 2 invokes how Therasia’s aspired tourism imaginaries are entangled in an idiom of attractive quaintness, corroded wooden doors being a standard feature in postcards of ‘traditional’ Greece (see also Kalantzis 2019:213). The density of the timetable underlines the popularity of the fast motorboat, rather than the ferry, for daily transport, but it also recalls that this preference is coupled with Therasiotes’ disdain for dependence on Santorini for supplies and tourists. In a conjectural gesture of a sort that is typical of Therasiote sensibilities, people often say that Therasia would have been better off if more ferries were to connect it to Santorini, other islands and mainland Greece. Locals do not pay for tickets on these vessels, as these are state-subsidized as part of the policy of supporting (and simultaneously defining) such areas as peripheral and poor (Bakalaki, personal communication).

(Figure 3) Once across, at Therasia’s coastal hamlet of Riva, I pause and photograph some old cars, now rusty and corroded by salt and mostly without license plates. This is a spectacle one hears about in Greek urbanites’ damning narrations of disorderly, illicit Therasiote aesthetics, which break with what is classified nationally as an attractive rurality. This is the other side of the desirable decay found on postcards. Old technological items here signify negatively charged abandonment and obsolescence. These would hardly be featured in Therasiotes’ own photographic images either unless they served some political cause, again entangled in their anxieties over exclusion from modernity, as in alerting authorities about the need to create infrastructures that would make the island conform to the norm (see below). For the ‘locals’—a term relativized in Therasia by
the fact that many people live in Athens for several months of the year and others’ lifelong work on merchant vessels travelling the oceans (Bakalaki 2015:244), this spectacle triggers uneasy laughter whenever they discuss it with me. One middle-aged man explains that ‘the police never come here, you see. Maybe it’s because no crimes ever happen’. The sense of apology and the negative form of his sentences can be traced in most Therasiotes’ self-presentations, marking the island as what Chakrabarty, writing about colonial and nationalist representations of Indian peasants, called ‘a figure of lack’ (1992:6). People say Therasia has ‘no port; no permanent gas station; no tourist infrastructure; no sandy beach to attract guests’ (see also Bakalaki 2015:248). For some teachers working on Therasia, local children ‘have no creative outlets.’ For archaeologists, it ‘lacks accommodation infrastructure’. While at Riva, a twenty-something woman from mainland Greece visiting Therasia from Santorini for the day tells me she is disappointed that the place is ‘like this’ [etsi]. ‘I see lots of cars, but I see no people,’ she remarks. Later on, she outlines her fascination with Greek modernity in the form of Santorini and other Greek destinations that are replete with sound, entertainment and young bodies in motion.

(Figure 3) Right next to the cars are some overflowing garbage bins, a frequent sight and topic of heated local commentary, especially in August. How exactly are Therasiotes, low-income pensioners, ex-seamen, farmers and people working in tourist businesses disturbed by that sight? In ways parallel to Argyrou’s argument for Cyprus (1997),
Bakalaki has stressed that exasperation about omnipresent trash reflects an educated, middle-class aesthetic rather than local sensibilities (forthcoming). The argument identifies local discontent with an external view of place, as became apparent when one local young woman told me, ‘If I were a tourist, I wouldn’t like seeing all this trash around’.

It is possible to dissect further local classifications of garbage. (Figure 4) On the one hand, objects that resemble those things left in storage rooms and household corners in order to be used again in the future, which can be linked to the notion that Therasia itself might be revived (Bakalaki ibid.). Such discarded but inoffensive objects also furnish narratives about once-meaningful lost worlds, as became apparent in one older interlocutor’s vivid narration of stories of lively community life when we visited his storage space in an abandoned village (see also Seremetakis 1994:10). On the other hand, garbage can also refer to materials disintegrating in hot metal bins producing dirt, odour and verbal indignation. This category evokes ex-seamen’s memories of non-Western places allegedly replete with flies and disease. Thus, a retired sailor called Riva, referring to its trash, an ‘Indian neighbourhood’, speaking to how such Eurocentric hierarchical classifications are operative on a daily level in Therasia, especially in dialogues with outsiders, who are perceived as expecting a normative (Western-derived) image, the absence of which prompts self-deprecation (see also Herzfeld 2005:134; Kalantzis 2015:257–258; Argyrou 2002).
The local woman’s statement that garbage would annoy her ‘if she were a tourist’ is significant, as it also indicates how people summon up the tourist’s perspective to make complaints about their own place. This underlines the merging and simultaneous tensions between tourists’ and local perceptions. This merging reminds us that Therasiotes partake in what Alneng calls the ‘worldview that renders the world “tourable”’ (2002: 124), not merely because some seek to utilize it as aspiring proprietors, but also because many of them tour the island (and other parts of Greece) as expats based in Athens. It also alerts us to the persistent tendency to imagine ‘locals’ as fixed in place and excluded from the tourist endeavour (ibid.:135). Yet, this same woman was adamant that she was not a tourist and emphasized, whenever I saw her on the launch carrying bags, that her movement was not like the leisurely trips her fellow passengers were making. As with Chio’s Chinese interlocutors, she distinguished the mobility of the tourists from that of locals (2011:566). Though local and tourist positionalities may at times overlap, people also seek to re-cast the boundaries between them.

The young visitor who had been disappointed by what she saw in Therasia further expressed her most pressing concern to me. She was worried she might miss the motorboat back to Santorini because that would mean she would be stuck [ksemeinei] on the island for the night. She is not the only person made anxious by this vessel’s temporality. A few metres away, a restaurateur is performing the Therasiote-specific anxiety of catering for Santorini-based customers when they visit Therasia on daily summer tours. In a sweat, he is rushing out to invite people stepping off the boat into his restaurant and exclaims his disappointment after luring only a couple. Like other restaurateurs, he describes this practice with reference to fishing, recalling how young Greek men in coastal southern Greece in the 1980s described their sexual engagement with non-Greek women as ‘harpooning’ (Zinovieff 1991). Though devoid of aggressive bravado and the undertones of symbolically countering the presence of powerful Westerners, Therasiote proprietors’ invitations share with harpooning a sense of success in luring people who are presented as unaware, as well as a rush to obtain consent before the tourists head back (see ibid.:209). That same rush to serve guests who only come to the island once is what an Athenian upper-class interlocutor held to be a reprehensible lack of ‘quality tourism’ on Therasia due to the absence of expensive local products and well-preserved architectural sites. His remarks are important as they underline the discrepancy that exists between local efforts to hastily attract tourists and the disdainful impressions created by that same effort among privileged visitors. Some of them, for instance, mock the replaying of the ‘Zorba the Greek’ theme through speakers and the ‘Disneyland-like’ pirate boats offering cruises elsewhere on Therasia as dowdy.

Moments later, I hear a middle-aged Therasiote bystander tease the proprietor: ‘How well you speak French!’ The joke is taken well because, unlike highland Crete where tourism serves as a metaphor of invasive modernity demanding slavishness (Kalantzis 2016:31; 2019:246–287) – Therasiotes declare that they appreciate locals’ efforts to safeguard their families’ economic survival by doing anything necessary, including bowing in broken English. Their subscription to the argument of economic
necessity does not create any social tensions in the absence of claims to resistance and autonomy.

(Figure 5) On the restaurant’s tables, one finds another map of Therasia, this time blending into the white and blue national colours that makes it indistinct from Santorini. Its coexistence with the map discussed earlier, which showed Therasia as a distinct red item (Figure 2), speaks to the perpetual oscillation Therasiotes express between being the same as or different from Santorini (see also Bakalaki 2015:249). Utterances in either direction are context-dependent and characterized by segmentary dynamics, which Herzfeld considers characteristic of Greek, but also more broadly European nationalism (e.g. 2005:80, 89). Vis-à-vis American co-workers, a Therasiote took pride in his children feeling ‘fanatical Santorinioi’. Here, the smaller island identifies with the larger ‘across’ a powerful outsider. Yet, when discussing the prospects of tourism or daily errands requiring one to commute ‘across’, proximity to Santorini is marked as the reason for Therasia’s plight, especially its economic and administrative dependence. In those utterances, ‘across’ [apenandi] denotes opposition. Green’s ethnography in Epirus, Greece, has also shown how proximity to an iconic area may create an undesirable sense of being ordinary among people in neighbouring regions (2005:6). Therasiotes want to define Therasia as distinct, but they also contextually express the desire to merge and be one with the emblematic Santorini.
Postcards and the Poetics of Place

In the shady interior of that restaurant, I am chatting with a middle-aged friend of the proprietor’s who spends most of the year at a lower middle-class part of the coast in Athens. The restaurant area in which he chose to sit manifests another endorsement of the Therasiote survival discourse, as it indicates that tables with a good view must be left to the tourists, as they are the ones that contribute to the restaurant’s profits. Proprietors value visibility, as is apparent in their pursuit of visual access to tourists’ routes (often using binoculars to estimate incoming numbers) or their request to me not to park in front of their businesses, as this would make their restaurants invisible and undermine their ability to see potential customers.

Expressing the Therasiote-specific misgiving about (in)distinctiveness and marginality, the middle-aged man is telling me how disappointed he is because his quest for postcards of Therasiote landscapes captured from ‘high up’ [apo psila] has been unsuccessful. The only postcards he found on the island were taken on Santorini, not Therasia. An elderly woman who overhears him iterates the conviction that postcards secure a place’s position in the ‘global hierarchy of value’ (Herzfeld’s term, 2004) by saying that ‘they have neglected the island in everything!’ The man aims to have a postcard digitally enlarged and placed on his living room wall to ‘remind him’ of his deceased mother, whom he lost at a young age. His take on commercial photography as acting positively on his sense of place and the past is reminiscent of Sfakians’ de-commodification of postcards depicting deceased kin, which they reframe as domestic images (Kalantzis 2014:64–66; 2019:101–106). Yet, this man does not focus on the particularities of human figures, but envisages a landscape that could become a metonym of his mother’s body – a visual motherland. Furthermore, while photographs pursuing clarity and bird’s-eye views are historically identified with photography as an instrument of power, as with the classifications of the colonial state (Pinney 2008:28), here such a view informs a sentimental pursuit, linking landscape photography with familial affect, rather than with a dispassionate (imperial) instrumentality.

Other Therasiotes, like an elderly man called Giorgis who decorated his home with a municipal poster of Therasiote views from ‘the cliffs’, extolled the value of images of the island taken from ‘high up’, a modality that finds echoes in local appreciations of a particular hamlet in affording views from above. This is again an example of a tourist modality appearing indistinguishable from native aesthetics. It is important to ask what forces shape the aesthetics of place and how they take effect locally. I am offered an accidental, yet instructive hint by using photography as a documentation device. In one of the pictures I took from my meeting with the man looking for postcards, I had inadvertently captured a background picture framed by the restaurateur on the wall (Figure 5). This is an image taken by Greek commercial photographer George Meis, whose posters, photo-books and postcards have been dedicated to exporting palatable versions of Greece, often focused on Santorinioite views from ‘high up’, since the 1980s (see also Kalantzis 2019:72–73, 86–87). Though not verbalized by my interlocutor,
his spatial coexistence with this photograph can be taken to indicate how particular agents, such as this photographer, with a role in the creation of normative aesthetic values, affect indigenous understandings of place through the (omni)presence of their works on walls and postcard stands.

Another man, owner of a souvenir shop in Korfos, the small coastal strip crammed with restaurants, signs and windows displaying food (Figure 6), also used this motif in his postcards of the island. In fact, he was annoyed when I narrated the failed quest of the restaurant owner mentioned above, as he felt this was to ignore the postcards of Therasia he had produced and was selling in his shop (Figure 6). His annoyance can be linked to his discourse of the disappointed pioneer, given how he consistently described locals as consumed by petty envy that blocks ‘development.’ However, there is an interesting twist here, as his pictures were taken in Therasia, but were then published with the caption ‘Santorini’. Sensing my bewilderment at his choice, he forcefully asked ‘Why? Aren’t we (Therasia and Santorini) one?’ In discussing his unifying caption, I realized this again concerned perceptions of what Therasia lacked. ‘No one knows the name Therasia,’ he added, justifying the Santorini caption as necessary. To enhance the tension between image and text, a note on the stand wrote ‘Thirasias.’ Its handwritten form was likely to render it secondary compared to the printed caption, yet it marks the remnant of a desire to en-place the pictures in Therasia.

His photographic practice speaks again to the context-dependent merging of Therasia with Santorini, this time as a commercial strategy. I was reminded of a comment made by another local businessman that most tourists visiting Korfos don’t even know they are not on Santorini. In keeping with rural Greek attitudes, the comment presents tourists as ignorant, while also criticizing Santorini entrepreneurs, who, in collaboration with some Korfos restaurateurs, reportedly impede Therasia’s economic prospects.
by using it merely as an extension of Santorini – a half-day destination. While selling his postcards, the souvenir proprietor seemed to play into a geographical strategy that many locals recognize as denying Therasia the status of a properly autonomous destination.

Yet there also are local breaks, with the photographic motif of ‘high-up’ views. For instance, the hamlet that was admired for affording them was mockingly described to me more than once as inhabited by ‘aristocrats’ whose conceits were attributed exactly to people feeling ‘high-up’. Even more, such bird’s-eye images were presented to me by a young Therasiote woman as reflective of naïve émigré nostalgia, which she supposedly combats by presenting people with close-up photographs of absent or destroyed local infrastructure. In doing so she therefore expresses local scepticism of expat idealization, which has been noted in other parts of Greece (e.g. Panopoulos 2006), and she is intent on remedying it through her anti-picturesque photo-realism. The use of photography as a device that disenchant island life and exposes the difficulties of dwelling there has kinship with a photographic idiom that is found increasingly on Greek Facebook pages seeking to alert the authorities of infrastructural problems. The seeming lack of aesthetic pleasure in looking at these images works to enhance the moral claims to reality of this citizen journalism. It is this capacity to include and indexically display material elements that made photography’s ‘profane realism’, according to Chatterjee, unsuitable for the nationalist vision of India in the twentieth century (Pinney 2008:47). Unlike the expat in search of a visual motherland, my female interlocutor was drawing a distinction that Chakrabarty would describe as one between the poetic and the prosaic, where (prosaic) realism serves change and reform (2000:150). We will be able to understand her abandonment of an ‘adoring eye’ (ibid.:151) in favour of reformist photo-realism by investigating what modernity means for Therasiotes.

Modernity and Ambiguous Stillness: Cure and Poison

It is early evening in the village that provides ‘high-up’ views. I approach some senior women sitting on a balcony while gazing at the smooth blueness of the caldera. ‘You have a great view’, I suggest. One of them quickly retorts: ‘That’s all we got’ [mona afto ebume]. She then pauses and adds, ‘But we have grown old, and we still haven’t had enough of it!’ Her phrase succinctly weaves pleasure with lament, opening up the Therasiote ambivalence about the island’s sensation as a place. This ambivalence is especially pronounced when discussing isihia, the quietness all Therasiotes bring up in self-presentations, which also translates into a historical, existential and sensory stillness (see also Bakalaki 2015:248). I recall another elderly interlocutor on the island’s coast who had told me with chagrin that his business was empty, as was the entire village where he lived, ‘because they only bring people to Korfos.’ After a brief silence, he said, ‘But that’s the good thing; it’s quiet’.
The value of quietness is particularly evident when people juxtapose it to neighbouring Santorini, their descriptions of which signify it as a site of modernity *par excellence*. Santorini’s phantasmagoria is visible (car lights, camera flashes, buildings) and audible (reverberating summer concerts) from different Therasiote hamlets. Locals have a Benjaminian understanding of this modernity as a neurological experience centred on shock (Buck-Morss 1992:16, 22) and describe the flooding of the senses they experience when going on errands ‘across’. They enrol metaphors of temperature (heat), sound (noise) and illness (madness) to speak about the sensory overflowing that makes their heads spin and hurt and leaves them exhausted and numb when in Santorini. A similar phenomenology accompanies another representative of modernity, the city of Piraeus, where some Therasiotes live in wintertime, discussed with reference to cramped dwelling, heat and ‘poison’, meaning its suffocating air. Even Therasia’s own hamlet of Korfos is, in a segmentary imaginary, a proxy for that modernity. Locals emphasize its heat, congestion and daily shift from quiet emptiness to packed activity and back, which, as I noted earlier, fails to satisfy the demands of privileged visitors in search of a palatable rurality. At the same time, modernity’s sensory world is desirable, especially for younger Therasiotes, who point out that they greatly enjoy going out in Santorini at night, but add a caveat that its sensation would be intolerable daily, even though quietness can also feel too static to them. Another senior Therasiote sketched quietness as pleasing and yet as what deters young people from moving to the island, and hence as responsible for its depopulation, which he resented. The ambiguity of stillness/quietness is perennial in such Therasiote reflections, which combine celebration with mourning.

Uneasiness about stillness permeates the act of looking at the landscape, which becomes especially apparent when people speculate how quietness may play a role as a future tourist attraction. My interlocutors constantly practice a futurist gaze on the landscape. They look around and spot absences to be filled by future objects, such as coffee houses and hotels. That gaze is semantically framed by the sense that Therasia deviates from the norm. Take a senior urbanite from Santorini, who said ‘Therasia cannot remain behind (in time) for much longer’. The man iterated the Greek teleology whereby everything ought to be included by an expanding modernity that promises stability, health and higher incomes. Therasiotes also capture this normativity by frequently invoking *ekseliksi* or ‘progress, evolution’, as an inescapable and necessary step in human life.

Chakrabarty has persuasively described such historical imagination as the transition narrative, that is, as the evolutionist ideology that was shared by late nineteenth-century nationalists and colonialists in India suggesting the necessary steps that had to be taken in order for Indians to enter History (1992:13). This resulted in representations of Indians as perennially split between a present of disorder and a reformed future. In Therasia, a split is evident if one thinks of how, after looking at this empty quiet place (disorder), people conjure up a future in which absence is replaced by objects that are emblematic of modernity (reform). What deviates from Chakrabarty’s account is that
in Therasia the disorderly present and the disciplined future are implicated in contradictory dynamics of pleasure and aversion, where the remedy for stillness can simultaneously be a poison. Thus, half an hour later, while stuck in traffic, the man who asserted the inescapability of Therasia’s modernization turned in exasperation to his wife and reminisced about their previous night on the island, characterized by graciously cool quietness. The advocate of modernity’s promise was simultaneously vexed by the same process he presented as unavoidable and liberating. In a similar way, Therasiotes’ statements on progress insinuate that the backward past (e.g. lethal mining) had been replaced by a socially disruptive present (e.g. the migration of ex-miners, leaving empty villages behind them).

However, locals’ desire for modernity is powerfully present. It is instructive here to juxtapose the sensibilities of a seventy-something Therasiote man with the scholarly anti-modern nostalgia of anthropologist Marc Augé in his famous critique of ‘non-places’. For Augé, ‘a world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital’ (1995:78) is emblematic of loss and the emergence of a quantifiable, sterilized modality of being. By contrast, my Therasiote interlocutor repeatedly narrated with disgust how in the past women had to give birth ‘in the fields like animals’, an utterance which, like Therasiotes’ embittered memories of houses without a sewage system, embraces exactly the modern that Augé bemoans. A similar discrepancy, which opens up a problem of photographic/ethnographic ethics, emerges around the petrol station I referred to earlier. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was intrigued by its semi-ruinous state on an arid hill and its localized exemplification of a Hopperian derelict landscape, which I photographed. Yet I soon found out that the same place triggered great local discontent for its inconsistent supply of petrol, which indexed (unmodern) irregularity and made people travel to Santorini to carry back petrol manually. My own desire to photograph the filling station was in retrospect ethically problematic, for it sought aesthetic pleasure out of a site that negates the modernity my interlocutors sought on their island. That modern, however, is simultaneously replete with an uneasiness, as is evident in the poisonous sensory overload that occurs, for people, in urban centres. Their disdain of modernity is not phrased as an embrace of tradition, as among Sutton’s Kalymnians or my own Sfakian interlocutors (Sutton 2008; Kalantzis 2019). This may well have something to do with how Therasiotes were never signified in the national imagination as the bearers of a native tradition which would bestow on their discomfort the aura of rugged anti-modernism, thereby appealing to urban critics of modernity (anthropologists included). For Therasiotes, while an aspect of modernity’s poison is necessary for inclusion in the norm and for economic survival, its absence is also strangely pleasing. The same parameters that would cure the exclusion are also seen as poisoning the sensation of Therasia’s stillness.
A Life of Struggle

Along with other daily visitors, some riding on donkeys hired locally, I am walking up the steep steps from Korfos to the main Therasiote village of Manolas in intense heat and with the smell of kerosene and the sound of a hair dryer being used to start an outdoor grill. A man in his thirties standing behind the fire is inviting the heat-stricken hikers into his restaurant. I hear him say ‘Thank you, Sir [we] have a nice place’. Moments later, he and his father, who taught him how to run the business, explain how crucial their ‘fishing’ of visitors is for their daily economic survival. This is one of the many instances when Therasiotes speak of financial matters in a disarmingly pragmatic way. This attitude permeates public explanations of relatedness and affect, as in the case of a grandfather’s mourning, interpreted locally in light of the deceased grandson’s help to the old man in his agricultural work. It also extends to giving exact figures of household budgets and cracking jokes about holding feasts where it is the guests who provide the (expensive) meat, while the host merely offers coals for the grill. ‘Unlike in Piraeus, everything here is a struggle’, the senior proprietor adds. Consistent in his opinion down the years, his comment targets the amenities of an urban lifestyle and of course my own. This sensibility is encountered elsewhere in rural Greece, kindred to the agonistic labour ethos that Theodossopoulos notes in his Panamanian-Greek interlocutors’ condemnation of Greek anti-austerity protesters as ‘spoiled’ (2013:203–204).

Locals tie the Therasiote stance to an economic ‘struggle’ with the island’s stillness and its absence of modernity and evolution. I am reminded of an older woman from mainland Greece who married into Therasia and repeated the same jocular line to me whenever she saw me over the years: ‘How do you see Therasia? The same! No progress whatsoever, right? The experience of ‘no progress’ can be examined in light of ‘the Greek crisis’. For Therasiotes, concern with prices, scarcity and survival predates ‘the crisis’ (see also Placas 2016), a post-2010 historical phase characterized by Greece’s bail-out deal with the EU and IMF and related structural reforms, often read as a forced state of exception (Athanasiou 2011; but see Rakopoulos 2014:193). Unlike people in other parts of Greece, such as Thessaly, Therasiotes do not see ‘the crisis’ as a break with a period of affluence and insist that, with the exception of some post-2010 decline in construction, there have always been difficulties here. They question how new ‘the crisis’ is (see also Davis 2015) in ways that recall Benjamin’s oft-cited phrase that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule’ (2003:392). For some, such as a Greek-American pensioner, the constant scarcity prepared older Therasiotes especially for a worse future outcome, reminiscent of how people in Trikala invoke the 1940s famine, thus rendering the present juncture less threatening (Knight 2012:69).

The customers who succumbed to the restaurateurs’ ‘fishing’ also have stillness in mind. They are enjoying the view of the caldera and in our discussions repeat the view of how Therasia brings them a welcome breeze of calm compared to the crowds and noise of Santorini. Stillness here is entwined in fantasies Rupert Stasch calls ‘primitivist tourism’ (2014), as with a Swiss man who expressed disappointment after I failed to
affirm that the island is indeed ‘isolated’ and cut off from the rest of Greece, or a Greek middle-class woman with a summer house in Santorini who even used the term ‘primitive’ to explain what she is looking for in Therasia.

This discussion took place close to the material site at which I began this essay with, the hotel carcass – the cure that turned into poison. I frequently witnessed locals’ discourses of mourning whenever I passed in front of the structure (Figure 7). This was particularly the case for my octogenarian interlocutor Giorgis, who always condemned the waste of materials used at the site, abandoned to corrosion and theft. In keeping with Therasiote pragmatism, he mentioned exact figures, some of which he knew from his nephew, who had lost money investing in the project. Conversations about ‘what went wrong with Cavo Mare’ often prevailed when first meeting Therasiotes, and the hotel acted as a metaphor for what was assumed to be the wrong course the island itself had taken. There is a specific understanding of landscape agency and teleology at work here, as Therasiotes always pointed to the surrounding environment as flagging a self-evident problem (see also Bakalaki 2015:247). This may have been enhanced by the presence of the urban, university research team, who were seen as the agents of a normative (urban) gaze, but it was also enacted regardless in interactions among people. With reference to the hotel, people spoke of external interests that never allowed it to operate, as well as the local owner’s mismanagement.
This etiology replays a dynamic pertaining to the question of blame in the ‘Greek crisis’, whereby callous Western creditors (outsiders) and immature natives (insiders) are the two subject positions alternating as the causes of the trouble. At other times, the island’s underdevelopment was blamed on particular Santorini-based and Therasiote businessmen who were allegedly blocking its economic prospects. One thing that everyone agrees on is that if the hotel had been in Santorini it would have been successful, implying again a sense of spatial agency – that is, there is something inherent in Therasia that results in decay. Giorgis’ conclusion about the hotel is further instructive about senior male Therasiote attitudes to labour. The banks took everything away, and the only thing the local investor was left with was his seaman’s pension. Involving notorious toil and emotional hardship, the profession of seaman is still for many senior Therasiotes the only trustworthy source of income, especially compared to the promises of tourism.

Photography as Ethnographic Consolation

The chat with the women in the balcony, like other such interactions, is difficult for me, as it demands that I forcefully invite myself in. I experienced something similar while chatting with the restaurateur father and son, whose demeanour reminded me subtly that my time for questions was running out and that I was becoming an obstacle to their ‘fishing’ and economic survival. Without dynamics that easily become the loci for initial ethnographic exchanges – that is, a proud nativist sense of cultural difference vis-à-vis an ‘Athenian’ – Therasiotes are quite indifferent to my presence and indeed to that of the archaeologists and architects surveying their island. Like other rural Greeks, they question whether academia is a ‘real’ profession (and appear shocked about some of its political economies, e.g. deferred or low salaries), but remain broadly uninterested in it. One reading of their stance could be that it constitutes ‘resistance’, but this would mean attempting to safeguard one’s sense of significance by positing that locals are engaging the researcher/outsider even in the negative. But this Therasiote attitude is a sharper blow to scholarly narcissism, exactly because it rejects cultural and emotional investment in the research endeavour, and it expects little from it. From a Bourdieuan perspective (1984), Therasiotes are declaring their distance from middle-class discourses on the island, even while simultaneously lamenting the place’s unmodern sense of decay, which partly stems from a middle-class, Western-derived understanding of modernity. Their indifference surprised some members of the research team, whose comments revealed their expectation of the locals showing them gratitude because, the argument goes, ‘a scientific survey’ singles out their island and enhances their visibility nationally. Of course, Therasiotes partake in the Greek discourse about the material past as cultural capital (which may be translated into economic capital; see Hamilakis and Yalouri 1996), which is why, when asked, some people occasionally said it might
be ‘good’ if archaeologists found ‘something’ for ‘tourists to come and see.’ However, indifference to the scholarly project prevailed overall.

That experience was starkly different from that emerging from ethnography in highland Crete, where containment through hospitality (and my treatment as a younger relative needing to be fed and accommodated; see also Herzfeld 1991:81, 83), as well as jocular threats against my note-keeping, guaranteed engagement and a sense of significance of one’s place as worthy of being studied and simultaneously of being protected from the ethnographer’s prying gaze (Kalantzis 2019:14–20). Crete stands as a contrast, given also how the idiom of ‘hospitality,’ though still characterized by asymmetry, denies the pragmatic expectations of material return and temporal finitude of social engagements – unlike my encounter, say, with the restaurateurs, whose analysis of reciprocity can be taken to mean that I am expected to return something and that I have limited time with them.

As a result, particularly at the start of my research, I used photography as a tool to make me feel I had a professional role, as something that would publicly afford me the identity of a researcher, despite the absence of verbal engagement with people. I originally had aspirations to establish reciprocities (e.g. filming events for locals) and to mitigate my externality through the camera, as other ethnographers have noted.

Figure 8 Images of closed doors. Note the ‘soft boundary’ at the lower right. Photos: Konstantinos Kalantzis
(e.g. Jackson 2004:39), but in light of the lack of curiosity about me, these hardly transpired. I would thus walk around and systematically record places, architectural structures and objects (Figure 8). Photography here has little to do with experimental ethnography, elicitation and evocation, or even just documentation; here it is a form of self-consolation. Despite my interest in theories of the agency of things (Gell 1998), it was the deadness and apparent passivity of objects that appealed to me. It was the fact that I could turn my camera on these things without objection and without the need to stimulate short-lived small talk. The consolation pertained especially to photography’s quality of supplying me with the undeniable presence of something – in Barthes’ words, it could not ‘deny the thing has been there’ (2000:76) – which contrasted with the perennial lack or absence that people invoked about their lifeworld, a lack that I felt was possibly being transformed into information I was not eliciting. One thing that the camera did make possible, however, was to prompt the question of its relationship to anthropology’s notoriously feared cousin, the tourist, whose inability to understand and whose profile as a representative of normative modernity seemed applicable to my positionality.

Looking at my images from that phase, although photography is commonly understood as an invasive tool, I realize that they often captured my own externality...
These images depict boundaries which, though perhaps materially soft, possess rigidity and mark the household’s context-dependent closedness to bystanders and neighbours (courtyards become at other times spaces of displaying household accomplishments, Bakalaki 2020:75; see also Hirschon 1998:171). These photographs further prompt exploration of the position of ‘closed doors’ in the Therasiote social experience. Closed doors stand for desertion and depopulation. They are embedded in particular social pasts, like the deserted village with rows of abandoned cave houses, whose residents, my interlocutors stress, left for other hamlets or migrated to Athens to work as miners or seamen. Narrations of this movement occasionally hint at locals’ dependence on employment offered by wealthier Santorinioi, as well as the fact that mining resulted in deaths. The desertion has some affinity with the current practice of Therasiotes sealing up their properties with wooden doors to protect them from decay before the seasonal movement from the island to Athens. Similarly, when they visited abandoned houses that belonged to them, they ended their visit by blocking off the entrance to protect it from animals and decay (Figure 9).

Sometime after I took a picture of a man helping an older woman seal up her house for the winter, I met him again in Korfos. The material sealing was followed by a chat that animated hopes for a promising future. He was standing outside an abandoned boat storehouse and outlined to me his plans to convert it into a cafeteria and fast-food establishment. His aim was for his son to take over the business in the future so he can leave his low-paying job as a security guard in Athens to enjoy a better income and pension prospects. While he bitterly described the past as an era without progress, tourists stopped and took pictures of the decaying store’s windows, a moment again encapsulating the divergence between my interlocutor’s desire for the modern and visitors’ veneration of the palatably old. For the upper-class interlocutor and critic of Korfos I mentioned earlier, fast-food establishments are opposed to his vision of a technocratic, tradition-centred ‘development’ that offers services to privileged guests. For local men and women, though, Korfos offers promises of attaining financial security, even if not through polished traditionalism. This is also a place Therasiotes describe as ‘keeping’ people, a saying that is double-edged. By ‘keeping’ tourists there, the argument goes, the rest of the island is not allowed to enjoy financial activity, while at the same time by offering jobs, it ‘keeps’ Therasiotes on the island, at least during the summer months.

**Difference and Gazing the Past**

‘What about the other months of the year? We will be smoking dung so as to endure,’ I overhear a thirty-year-old man who works as a chef in Korfos joking about what lies ahead for him and his peers in the winter. They are sitting at a cafeteria-cum-souvlaki place in a hamlet overlooking the caldera. The establishment is called ‘Different.’ The claim to difference pertains to multiple social engagements in Therasia. Despite the
seeming uniformity of the few establishments, locals often say that a restaurant must be ‘different’ if it’s going to be successful. Recall also that Therasiotes oscillate between claiming and downplaying their difference from Santorini. Many visitors who decide to stay overnight on Therasia at its single hotel also told me that it was the island’s ‘difference’ from crowded Santorini that drew them. These visitors further claim to be different from tourists in search of cheaper pleasures, such as night-clubbing and the beach. Difference is also what a middle-aged man from Santorini had in mind when mocking Therasia’s underdevelopment to his friends while sitting on recently installed beach beds through which the establishment’s proprietor who had been ‘harpooning’ tourists earlier in this text was trying to emulate the standard Greek beach pattern. His mockery replicated locals’ own visual search for absent infrastructure in the landscape, which is supposed to indicate the island’s deviation from a (modern) tourist economy.

The gaze that spots a lack is complemented by another visual idiom that compares the past to an empty present. As with other parts of rural Greece (e.g. Green 2005:7), older Therasiotes especially often speak about the decay of the farms, as is evident from the yellow-brown colours of the late summer landscape (Figure 10). They conjure up an image of past liveliness, replete with children’s shouts in bustling classrooms, bodies
working the land and people socializing in now abandoned houses. This is not merely an idealized past, as locals point out how their ancestors toiled in hard, dangerous work in the mines and were exploited by Santoriniote vendors and businessmen. For local commentators, present-day children’s shouts heard during the summer months cannot make up for the depopulation. These screams, locals point out, only happen over the summer when children stay with their grandparents and compensate for the oppression of living in apartments during the rest of the year.

The gaze into the past is further entwined with a critique of labour, as exemplified by a middle-aged man’s statement after looking around: ‘We once lived off this land; now we have grown lazy’. He went on to condemn locals’ dependence on imported goods, as well as the preference of younger generations for jobs in tourist services. For him, this historical shift impoverished Therasiotes’ knowledge of older farming techniques and properties of place (e.g. knowing what crops to plant where). His views are echoed in sensibilities expressed in ‘the crisis’, for instance, by centrist liberal commentators dismissive of the post-January 2015 coalition government, with its anti-colonial, anti-austerity rhetoric. They condemn the putative clientelism of both left and right and consider the Greek economy’s reliance on consumption (instead of on rural or artisanal production), fuelled by public-sector jobs and state loans, as being responsible for ‘the debt crisis’. Some Therasiotes’ visions of labour (see also Theodossopoulos 2013:203–204; Kalantzis 2019:220–222) may therefore appear to match the veneration of rurality endorsed by centrists promoting (neo)liberal reforms, though hardly any other conversation or alliance exists between these two voices. The interactions
between an Athenian middle-class centrist author and Therasiotes that I observed are telling. He often described locals to me as charmingly ignorant, while Therasiotes often expressed their suspicious bemusement about his intentions when he visited their farms.

‘What’s there to show in Therasia? There’s no history; There isn’t anything’. Thus said a man sitting on a church balcony while waiting for an evening service to start. Therasiotes commonly speak of a certain ‘something’ they are waiting for so that the stillness is shaken. A few hours earlier, one of his peers told me that Therasiotes have failed to ‘sell their history’ and attract people, ‘like Santorinioi do’. Both statements treat ‘history’ as an indicator of worth (see also Stewart 2003:489) and reflect a conviction that marketing this history may enhance one’s position in the global hierarchy of value (see also Sutton 1997:421). These comments partake in the diffusion of a certain heritage logic whereby distinctiveness becomes a tool of development (see also MacDonald 2018:9), one that might approximate to privileged visitors’ expectations. The drive to market local distinctiveness exists in parallel with and further shapes the pride that locals express in their landscape: the island’s unique black and red rocks, the waterless fruits and vegetables scorched by the sun and the volcanic soil that allegedly makes them tastier than anywhere else in the world (Figure 11). In some cases, as for a senior builder who is proud of Therasiote cave-house architecture, it becomes clear that such pride has been historically shaped by institutional forces. This man had worked on post-1970s state-funded renovations in Santorini, which involved the official marketing of demotic architecture as a desirable element. But pride in Therasiote architecture was also apparent among those who were unrelated to official projects. For instance, Giorgis the octogenarian farmer, who often offered to show me the cave-houses in an abandoned village, always invited me to admire the depth and coolness inside these structures and presented them as signs of a superior indigenous technology. Giorgis’ daughter decorated the external walls of her home with vines that had been trimmed to a rounded shape, allegedly following an old, superior pruning method (Figure 11). In hers and her father’s veneration of their ancestors there is a reversal of the otherwise dominant evolutionism. Both father and daughter thought of the artisans and farmers of the past as superior to their descendants. This pride can also entail claims of uniqueness vis-à-vis Santorini, as with those who argued that Therasia’ volcanic soil is superior to that of Santorini as a building material and that its antiquities are older.

**Epilogue: Stillness and the Future**

Since the mid-2010s, monetized admiration of Therasiote idioms has been undergoing systematization by agents organizing tourist excursions from Santorini to Therasia. This systematization encapsulates aspirations about place, modernity and the future that have been described in this article. In one of these tours, which I have been recording
at an abandoned Therasiote village, the locals and other agents participate asymmetrically. The tour is discussed locally as a site where interests clash. Some locals speak again about their marginalization by Santorini-based entrepreneurs who cooperate with particular Therasiote insiders, thereby limiting the number of people who benefit from the transaction. The tour takes tourists from Santorini for the day and offers them a meal inside a cave house. It is planned by Santorini-based businesspeople and employs a chain of Therasiotes as drivers, cooks and waiters. The tour revolves around notions that are key to local aspirations about the commercial transformation of place. They include ideas of the attractive vernacular, visions of Therasia as a premodern Santorini and, of course, stillness and quietness.

During one of the tours, I accompany a middle-aged woman and a male friend of hers. We drive to the empty, quiet village before the tourists arrive. The meal requires practical preparations (e.g. sweeping) and meticulous decoration of the area. The careful placing of bottles of wine (to be later sold to tourists), starting a fire in the old external oven and decorating the table with vine leaves are done with enjoyment and a disarming awareness that what is being prepared is a sphere MacCannell would describe as staged authenticity (1999:91–107). These Therasiotes are partly acting at the behest of the Santorini-based entrepreneurs and partly of their own accord, as when the woman proudly told me the vine leaves on the table were her idea of recreating ‘the old style’. Locals communicate a Goffmanesque perspective in describing the place as a stage to be transformed through props into a site that will appeal to tourists by evoking concepts of the natural, the authentic and the traditional. For example, she explained to me that the fire would give the impression that the meat had been cooked there, not in her professional kitchen away from the village. They are aware that the setting may be seen as fictional, and this adds a sense of amusement, but also a sense that they are serving a necessary convention.

Outside the cave, I am chatting with its owner, a priest and landowner who has a more powerful position than others at the Therasiote end of the tour chain. He is exercising the futurist gaze I explored earlier and is showing me where the tables in the restaurant he is planning to open are going to be. A few minutes later, we hear steps and shouts. The tourist group has arrived, heat-stricken and tired, but exclaiming enthusiastic remarks about their ‘beautiful trek’. Among them, a middle-aged Polish woman is insistently asking me to take her picture in a way that would include the church, the sea and the priest. The staging of the picture becomes an entry point into her vision of place-as-entertainment.

Inside, the table is ready, and the meal is served. The locals are sitting in the corner observing the tour guide encouraging the German guests to buy the owner’s wine by emphasizing its ‘natural’ purity. The locals don’t speak German but sense what is going on and offer to explain the dialogue to me. They present the moment as an economic affair, but these same ideas expressed during the encounter are also shaping their own sense of place. Some days later, one of these local men encouraged some American tourists to go to another Therasiote hamlet by describing it, in English, as a ‘traditional
Another local woman from this same village told me that tourists enthusiastically photograph her while she is grinding split peas, which she interpreted as showing admiration of local artisanship. These are asymmetrical encounters, of course. The woman added that another tourist told her she would put her picture up on the web and pay her royalties, but then claimed to know nothing about where and how this might happen.

The tour engages with the idiom of attractive underdevelopment, which in Therasia is still in the making, as local idioms have not yet been fully translated into commodities or services capable of appreciation by middle classes with the power to determine who belongs to modernity. The disappointment of such privileged guests in certain Therasiote sites resembles what Buck-Morss described as the effects of the ‘tacky’ hotel in 1980s rural eastern Crete – locals’ mimetic response to Western visitors’ flocking to a village that is destined to dissatisfy them (1987:230). Today this desire for underdevelopment is accompanied by a request that the underdevelopment comes in a slick package that downplays unpalatable modern elements in favour of tradition as a pleasing commodity. The village cannot smell of sewage; its restaurants cannot feature imitation crab or play the Zorba the Greek theme. Buck-Morss retained her own utopian hope that her Cretan interlocutors would resist modernity, which she presented as a totalizing system of commodification and conformism that operates via seduction (1987:223, 233). The crucial question regarding modernity for her is not change per se, but under whose terms such change will happen (ibid.:232). The presence of a consistent, critical vision of development which would evaluate the terms of change is not something that is articulated in Therasia. As this article has argued, Therasiotes who do not satisfy urban fantasies of either a pleasantly manicured or a ruggedly resistant rurality engage in a struggle for sustenance in small-scale, perhaps hurried efforts. They constantly bemoan the present as a landscape of lack and imagine a future where things (have to) change. Their marginal socio-political position does not guarantee them access to the financial and cultural resources necessary to transfigure their pride in their produce into commodified notions of ‘terroir’. Even more so, change for them brings with it the worrying prospect of approximating unattractively loud Santorini or exacerbating internal clashes. The present troubles them with its stillness, which is nevertheless a source of pleasure. The development of the future is suspected of being a cure that can swiftly turn into poison.

The meal ends, as the tourists need to get quickly into the locals’ pick-up trucks (‘taxis’) and catch the launch to Santorini. The woman preparing the tables is relieved, as she kept saying how much under pressure she was from this tight schedule. She later got into a heated discussion with her husband, who was concerned that their part in the enterprise wasn’t as beneficial to them and was voicing the suspicion that the profits were not being distributed fairly. The guides and tourists leave the village following fond embraces with locals. They are excited by the place, which for an hour was filled with shouts, footsteps and the sounds of feasting. The sun begins to set over the prickly pears, which locals say have taken over what was once the village thoroughfare. What
I am left with is my camera and an overwhelming sense of stillness, both of which feel strangely comforting.

References


Inhalt/Content

Special Issue
Rethinking the Mediterranean
Ed. by Simon Holdermann, Christoph Lange, Michaela Schäuble and Martin Zillinger
Simon Holdermann, Christoph Lange, Michaela Schäuble and Martin Zillinger: Introduction: Extending the Anthropological Laboratory Across Nested Mediterranean Zones

Section 1: Rethinking Mediterranean Connectivities
Peregrine Horden: ‘Knitting Together the Unconjoined’: Mediterranean Connectivity Revisited
Judith Scheele: Connectivity and its Discontents: The Sahara – Second Face of the Mediterranean?
Martin Zillinger: Hamid’s Travelogue: Mimetic Transformations and Spiritual Connectivities Across Mediterranean Topographies of Grace
Gerhild Perl: The Production of Illicit Lives: Racial Governmentality and Colonial Legacies Across the Strait of Gibraltar

Section 2: Rethinking Mediterranean Ruralities
Dionigi Albera: Mediterranean Ruralities: Towards a Comparative Approach
Sevi Bayraktar: Performing Resistance: Horon Dance and Chanted Poetry in Turkey’s Transregional Environmental Activism
Christoph Lange: How to Win Elections in the Eastern Delta of Egypt: Towards the Idea of a Strategic Tribalism
Konstantinos Kalantzis: Modernity as Cure and Poison: Photo-Ethnography and Ambiguous Stillness in Therasia, Greece
Thomas Hauschild: Epilogue – Mediterranean Survivals