The Jurassic Park of Historical Culture

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When German chancellor Angela Merkel visited Athens in October 2012, she was depicted in numerous cartoons and graffiti with a Hitler mustache. In the air was a clear comparison between current German politics and the time of the German occupation of Greece from 1941 to 1944, which was mirrored back in Germany. Indeed, for many Greeks the Second World War became a framework for thinking about the contemporary German policy toward their country during the crisis.

Not only cartoons in the media represented German officials in Second World War army uniforms; a large debate also started on the issue of war reparations and, particularly, on the return of the forced 1941 loan (Fleischer, 2015). With the exception of some experts on the history of the Second World War, few people in Greece were aware of this loan until recently. An almost forgotten topic suddenly became the subject of passionate discussion in official Greek–German meetings, in the parliaments of both countries and the national and international mass media, as well as in everyday discussions. How was this Second World War history reactivated and why? Indeed, stories related to the Second World War never disappeared from the contemporary cultural horizon in Greece or Europe in general. A steady stream of books, films, anniversaries and controversies regarding aspects of the experience of this war had generated intense debate at times. But the public debate on the causes of the economic crisis was not related to the war, and no one dared to compare the policy and the leadership of the Federal Republic of Germany with the Third Reich before

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the crisis. What happened in the meantime and why this specific move to the past?

Around the same time, another story exploded in the Russian Federation. On the eve of the 2014 presidential elections, state TV presented a documentary claiming to show the "secret truth" of the October Revolution. It was revealed that the revolution was a German plot against the Russian nation. The documentary claimed that the Kaiser's government helped Lenin to travel to Russia during the war on a special train, in order to undermine military discipline and enable an easy defeat. Although this story had been around since the time of the revolution, its most recent dissemination, accompanied by other films using the same register and broadcasting on state TV to a wide audience, aimed to convince Russians that the Soviet Union was the realization of a secret German plan and to infuriate their anti-western feelings.[1]

In 1993, who knew the name of the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6th 1945? The intention to include it in an exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, in Washington DC's Smithsonian Museum, gave rise to a fierce debate in the U.S.A. The *Enola Gay* controversy, acquired mass dimensions in the media and inaugurated the term "history wars" to describe disputes on memory and the past. Since then history wars have been a constant feature of historical culture worldwide (Erdmann et al., 2008/2009; Linenthal & Engelhardt, 1995; Nakou & Barca, 2010; Taylor & Guyver, 2012).

The general question we address in this chapter is how the past, and which past, comes back to the present with such a dynamism. The relationship between the present and the past is not preordained, not even predictable. Different pasts are reactivated in different circumstances. How are these pasts chosen and how do they behave in the present? Who decides which past to bring back to life? It is true that thinking in terms of historical analogies is a common way to understand new realities and metaphors. Comparisons and resemblances help us bring under our mental control unexpected situations, and new experiences become more familiar after being placed within the interpretative framework of old experiences. As large events shape and reshape the lives of people, they form identities and link future events to past precedents. But new events illuminate the past in a different way, shed light on different events or allow new interpretations of past events. The past has power and provides images and emotions that escape from the intentionality of its re-evocation. Which past and which event might be selected and used as a point of reference for the present could not have been anticipated. Historical analogies, in most cases, are explained post factum. But, even then, they are not fully understandable.

So, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the sudden reappearances of the past in the present, and the outbreak of smaller or larger disputes which dominate the public sphere, break the present and the temporal order, create unjustifiable tensions and construct particular senses of the past. We opt here for the term historical culture, because the topic we are about to explore is not how people remember, nor the representation of the past. Rather, it deals

with the handling of the past, or, rather, of fragments of the past. We refer to "fragments" because the past is not something which is easily definable in the present; it is not a coherent period of time. The past depends on how we understand it. It may be "closed" and without consequences for the present, as a mere object of curiosity, or it is open and demands justice or vengeance. For instance, the German war loan is a "closed" case, without legal consequences for the German part, but it remains "open" for the Greek part. What to place in the past and what to include in the present does not depend on the time of the events, but on their future expectancies. Past experiences, lived or transmitted, are hosted in these fragments of the past that we handle in the present. But the term "fragment" cannot express the self-energy, autonomous function and the power that the past acquires when it occupies the minds of people and circulates in their lines of communication. For this reason the core idea of this chapter is that the past is not, or not only, a past-toy of the present and a passive artifact. It has its own life and active role. By emphasizing the energetic, even the toxic role of the past, we will use the language of the cinema and the media that remediates the past–present relationship. After all, thinking history through cinema is not a mere side road to get to the past.

Jurassic Park I

Imagine a theme park, full of history and memory creatures, made and controlled by historians, archivists and memory guardians. Suddenly these creatures acquire life, become autonomous, uncontrollable, start to fight each other, and scare the humans. Yet, the humans are not innocent victims. They recruit the past phantoms for their power games, give them roles and often borrow their voices. The past acquires life, a second hybrid life. This second life of the past contaminates its first life. It is difficult, if not impossible, for humans to imagine these creatures in their original setting, outside their role in the park. Modern imagination contaminates the past and its images (as we will see further on in the second part).

This fairytale, drawn from the well-known 1993 science fiction film directed by Steven Spielberg, could be adapted to various circumstances. Dead memories or facts suddenly acquire new meaning and become alive, enter the public sphere and become part of political discourse, create strong sentiments of hate or love, colonize our mental geography of the world. It is difficult, and often impossible, to avoid or to escape from them.

The question is what to do and how to understand this Jurassic park of historical culture? We live in a world where, in most places, history and memory are present in every moment of our public and private lives. We enjoy a nostalgic sense of past times, or we suffer from a traumatic sense of the past. The past is used for questioning, resisting, or even transforming the present. But the presence of the past may prove deadly; dead memories are thirsty for blood, and there are many killer dinosaurs in the park. Nationalism is one of the bigger ones. The re-animation of past memories in the former Yugoslav

countries during the 1990s or in the post-Soviet countries turned one community of memories against the other, as they each retold stories of past atrocities and battles, despite years of peaceful coexistence (Dimou, 2009). Fascism is another dinosaur, which re-emerged in Europe more than 70 years after its collapse (Norris, 2005). The use of religion and the myth of the return to ancient, pure, and authentic origins have also created killer dinosaurs (Lapidus, 1997). Although philosophers advise societies to come to terms with their past, to *work through it*, and to forgive, the healing of past or imagined past wounds is an unfinished procedure, open to surprises, and full of cognitive and emotional gaps (Ricoeur, 1999). In Spain, years after a peaceful closing of the past, civil war memories erupted, graves started to be opened and old stories revived (Aguilar, 2002; Kovras, 2008). No one is safe from the past; no one knows when, under what conditions and which species of dinosaurs will awaken and start to revive past wars. The feeling of insecurity from unearthing a covered or unknown past, after decades of silence, has been the subject of many recent films. Examples are *The Company You Keep* (2012), directed by Robert Redford, on the uncovering of the past story of Weatherman activists and their imprisonment after 30 years of peaceful life as respected citizens, and *Ida* (2013), by Paweł Pawlikowski, on discovering a hidden past of family extermination during the Nazi occupation of Poland.

How can we study what happens in our Jurassic park? We are astonished at what we see, and we begin to realize that the linear relationship between the accumulation of "positive" knowledge of the past, and our moral and political preoccupations of the present, is a big delusion. As historians, we have the illusion that by telling the truth to our audiences we enlighten them and free them from their superstitions, or we assist them in elaborating rationally on their experiences. The disenchantment of the past from its myths and superstitions is one of the moral imperatives of our profession. Even though we criticize the teaching role of history, we are still captured in this role. But this "coming to terms with the past" is not a homogeneous and predictable procedure. There are gaps in the way history is used at an institutional level, in communities, and by individuals. The emergence of the concept of "public history", the multiplication of communities of memory and the increasing number of history wars are signs of these widening gaps (Morris-Suzuki, 2005). The thirst for history is related with the quest for stronger feelings and bigger passions through and from history. It resembles the creation of bigger, stronger and more ferocious dinosaurs in the 2015 sequel *Jurassic World*.

The Jurassic park metaphor explains that we come to terms with the past not only through representations of it. In most theoretical debates on historical theory since the final decades of the last century, history has been treated as a discipline and intellectual practice regarding its ability to represent the past. Yet, the mushrooming of heritage, the memory boom and history wars of recent decades have directed our attention to the public dimensions of historical practice. Although history since the nineteenth century was always something more than a discipline limited to a small community of specialists, this

external dimension was hardly recognized. The theory of history was oriented toward the epistemology of historical research or toward historical rhetoric (Eley, 2008; Ivanova & Hristov, 2014; Kellner, 2013). The public dimension of history was either neglected or considered to be additional to the main tasks of history and, in most cases, was seen as a landscape for staging historical dramas. The dichotomy between the uses and misuses of history has dominated the field for a long time, and public historians were ghettoized in museums and lay historical activities. The question of how history is written was rarely separated from the imperative of how history should be written. Normativity overcame analysis and overshadowed the image of what "really happens" in history beyond academia. Even when addressing big audiences, historians insisted on their professional rules of telling the truth and being objective, ignoring or neglecting the performativity of their reception.

The massive dimensions that history consumption has acquired nowadays means that historians and historical theorists should place the mass perceptions of history at the center of their attention—not only as an additional and particular dimension of historical knowledge and not only from the point of view of a cognitive process. History should be seen also from the point of view of the feelings and the passions it creates (Athanasiou, Hantzaroula, & Yannakopoulos, 2008). Nostalgia, vengeance and expectations of recognition are transporters of interest for the past. In other words, history should not be seen as a cognitive process, as it used to be, but as a social and cultural practice. What matters is not only the information about past deeds, but the whole range of relations with the past. This assertion raises the more general problem of how to deal with the past in contemporary societies and shifts our attention from the question of what happened in the past to what's happening in the present regarding the past. This change marks a shift from theorizing history to theorizing historical culture. This shift is necessary for understanding the complexity and the reciprocity of our relations with the past.

The emotional dimensions of the relationships with the past are equally as important as the moral aspects of the past, as well as those aspects associated with our desire to explore its factual accuracy. From this point of view, we are interested not only in the representations of the past, but in the ways of thinking about the past. In our Jurassic park, there is an unstable sense of the past. The sequence of time is not irreversible, as we assume in academic history. This means that to explore our Jurassic park, we need to investigate what the past means in different cultures and epochs, how the past was invented, and when and how it becomes reversible or irreversible, revocable or irrevocable (Sahlins, 1985, 2004).

Historiography is one of the plausible ways of relating to the past, but by no means the only one (De Groot, 2009; Morris-Suzuki, 2005). We are related to the past through memory, rituals, art, identity-formation, our community ties and the generational memory that passes through our family. We can also select which past to visit. Psychoanalysis is also a form of relationship with the past, and particularly painful pasts. But through the different ways of approaching the

past, we are related not with a common and unique past, but with different pasts. Some of these pasts are welcome, others troubling. Or we are indifferent to them. There are pasts related to our national, regional, familiar or personal identity, or pasts that are external, temporary or contingent. The image of the relationship with the past is an assemblage of particular ways of confronting, avoiding or imagining past things. *Historical culture* is a name for this assemblage, which also comprises human and non-human agencies, ways of thinking and material culture, institutions and memories, public anniversaries and private remembrances.

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Does Jurassic park have a history? Is historical culture a new invention of mass society, or was it present, invisible but inherent, in the formation of the cultural and intellectual categories we use in coming to terms with the past? What was assigned to history in different epochs and cultural environments? When the foundations of history as literary genre were laid in the Greek–Roman world and China, two tasks were assigned to it. The first was to save the past from oblivion (Herodotus, Thucydides), and, at the same time, to teach using past experience (Confucius, Sima Qian, Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus). Both instances were represented by historical works, but also historical literature. Aristotle's phrase (1984) "Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (*Poetics*, IX, 1451b 5–8), in which he compares historiography and poetry, indicates that the past is encapsulated in literature, poetry, theater and art, but indicates also the differences in its use. While historiography was a frontal encounter with oblivion, aimed to save contingency (the "particular"), in literature contingency was outbalanced, or absorbed by regularity (the "universal") (Grethlein, 2010). The most common use of history, inspired by the Christian belief in the Last Judgment, was its relation with justice, and particularly the divine attribution of justice. Human acts were recognized from their consequences as conforming to or violating moral laws (Bultman, 1975). The neutralization of history toward ethics and morality was the result of turning history into a descriptive discipline in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Fasolt, 2004). Coming to the nineteenth century, when history was established as discipline, historicism was not confined to historiography. The turn to history was an essential part of the cultural reformation and the aesthetic education which shaped the modern nation and the national identity (Berger, 2006; Berger, Eriksonas, & Mycock, 2008; Berger & Lorenz, 2010; Toews, 2004). Historians in the nineteenth century were public figures and the histories they wrote were not intended for the academy and their colleagues but for the cultural communities which formed the backbone of European nations. The secession of historians from historical culture happened in parallel with the formation of a professional body of historians and an academic structure where they were educated and evaluated. Although it has changed over time, popular history still holds its position in relation to historical culture, but the

body of historians, even retaining its influence in shaping images of the past, has gradually acquired its own sub-culture, where the task was not simply to rescue the past but to historicize it. This means not to save events from oblivion, but to enhance it from its mythic perceptions, to scrutinize older approaches, to explain, contextualize and establish distance from the past (Torstendahl, 2015).

What is contemporary in historical culture? In Jurassic park, the deadly confrontation of human and beast is associated with the park as a leisure activity and commercial venture. In contemporary historical culture, history wars and the marketing of activities related to history and the display of the past go hand in hand. In *Jurassic Park*, the time order separating dinosaurs and humans is overturned. Unsettledness, eventuality and randomness are the presuppositions of their coexistence. The modern subjects dispose a vast range of technical possibilities to visit different pasts and different histories, to dislocate histories from their place and time order, to combine them without regarding restrictions of provenience or compatibility. In historical games and TV series, such as *Game of Thrones* (HBO), prehistory and the medieval era are freely combined in an imagined timeless past. As a consequence, the past becomes contingent as much as the future.

The opposition between remembering and forgetting is another feature of contemporary historical culture. History and memory are still invested with a moral imperative, but at the same time, the psychoanalytic idea that the past disrupts the present, drives historical thinking in the opposite direction. On the one hand, "the past should be saved from the condescension or the prejudices of the present" (Thompson, 1981: 12) and, on the other, the present should be freed from the past. The voices demanding that attention be paid to the question of how to free the present from the troubling images of the past emanate mainly from the social sciences and psychology and have had an impact on historical pedagogy. The foundational convention of history-saving-the-past-from-oblivion has changed (Bevernage, 2012).

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How do historians behave in Jurassic park? Are they observers, partisans or peacekeepers? To understand historical culture, historians need to abdicate from their role as the rulers (and judges) of the history production process. They need to become objects of their research and to embark on a collective journey regarding the role of history in society and their role as historians, without implying a duality between academic history and lay historical culture. Notwithstanding differences, they should investigate their own historical culture, the academic protocol they use, the norms and rules defining their position as mediators of the past, and their public role as guardians of memory. Removing the duality between academic and lay history does not mean demolishing differences, but to investigate connections, common trends and common responses to changing cultural needs (Rüsen, 2011). After all, how do historians form their historical attitudes? Turning to the culture of historians, the old truism *Historia magistra vitae* becomes *Vita magistra historiae*, which

means giving priority to the experience of history as a prerequisite for knowing history (Ankersmit, 2012).

The next question is what passwords should be used to enter *Jurassic park*? In the theory of history, we encounter terms or *catchphrases* such as "all history is present history" (Croce, 1917), "reenactment of the past" (Collingwood, 1946), "narratives" and "tropes of discourse" (White, 1999), "historical/ practical past" (Oakeshott, 2010; White, 2010), the "presence of the past" (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998), all of which refer to the ways the past is conceived in the present. Terms like "social memory" (Halbwachs, 1992), "cultural/communicative memory" (Assman, 2008), "*lieux de mémoire*" (Nora, 1989, 1996), "theatres of memory" (Samuel, 1994), "post-memory" (Hirsch, 1997, 2001) and "public memory" come from sociology, history and memory studies. Social psychologists use terms like "social representations of the past" (Moscovici, 2000), and "lay historians" (Klein, 2013). Terms such as public history (Ashton & Kean, 2009; Jordanova, 2000), heritage and legacies (Lowenthal, 1996) have also been used to collectively describe museums, historical sites and representations of history but also practices of mass enjoyment of history. Moods of historical understanding are described by terms as "regimes of historicity" (Hartog, 2003), and the involvement of state institutions as "the invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), and in more general terms as "politics of history" (Beattie, 2008; Gillis, 1994). Finally, beliefs which contemporary people hold about past events are labeled "encapsulated history" (Hudson, 1966). This list is far from exhaustive. Most of these passwords refer to theories, and theories (Θεωρία) mean viewings, perspectives of observing historical culture not as a "thing", but as a constellation related with the positioning of the observers.

These theories correspond to two different approaches. The first refers to history as a system of signs, as a cultural practice or as a structure of representing the past (*Barthes, 1967*). The use of narrative as a universal form of representation is part of this conception of history. History epitomizes a range of relations with the past and represents the past itself. This is also the most common use of the term history in literature and philosophy. According to Michel de Certeau, "history is a system at the general locus of society", not only a subject for academic research. In his view, both private and shared ways of negotiating the world are based on this "system that organizes by means of 'histories' all social communication and everything that makes the present habitable" (De Certeau, 1986: 205). The works of Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit belong to a theory of history as *langue*.

Another category of these theories refers to memory. What matters here is neither the system nor general rules of the relations with the past, but how subjects memorize or forget, re-evoke the past or push it back. From history as a universal practice, we move to the subjects who are related to the past through memory. Through the theories of memory we shift from the system to the subject, from the rules of play to the players. History and memory matter from the point of view of constituting subjectivities. Both categories could be seen

from the perspective of the distinction made by structural linguistics between *langue* and *parole* (De Saussure, 1961). Langue is the system and the rules of the language; parole is the use of the language by speakers. Using this distinction as a model for approaching historical language, we should search for the equivalents of *phonemes* and *morphemes*. What is their equivalent in historical culture, if any?

Claude Lévi-Strauss, transporting Saussure's linguistic analysis to social anthropology, coined the term *mytheme*, a term for the minimal unit of the myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1995). The question is whether we could use such a concept to refer to the smallest segments of historical culture. These units should not be confounded with historical information, but with ways of comprising historical information and interpretation together. A common example of such a unit is the figure of Hitler as the personification of evil. We have seen numerous cases where the idea/image/symbol/metaphor of Hitler has been used by the mass media or in public discourse to characterize awkward persons in international politics. The use of "fascism" in a derogatory way is another sign, connecting what we consider to be dreadful politics with sad and hated historical memories. There are numerous such floating signs, which refer to every aspect of our life, connecting past and present, domesticating new experiences with older ones and attributing residual qualities to emerging realities. There are words and metaphors (barbaric, gothic, romantic, byzantine, enlightened) and units which attribute certain categories to collectivities (nation, westerners, Europeans), or to certain periods (archaic, medieval, traditional, classic, modern, post-modern). What do these units have in common? They circulate, are transmitted and are shared, and they adapt and transform themselves according to the environment. They combine with other units to form bigger narratives and attitudes. Historical information is conveyed through these units. They transfer facts and feelings, form complex structures and exchange information and attitudes from one narrative to the other, from one ideology to the other, from one language to the other. Ideologies and cultural dispositions as nationalisms are characterized by a multitude of such units, which migrate from one nationalism to the other, replicating themselves in the process and changing the political use of nationalism. Concluding this part, we wish to underline that historical culture is the way and the form in which actors (individuals, social groups and institutions) "handle" the raw material of their present experience, according to patterns existing in a sort of common and open historical reservoir. Their beliefs are "encapsulated" in the place they occupy and in the role they have in their societies, but the material used to construct these beliefs circulates and emigrates from one speaker to the next.

Jurassic Park II

The simulation of *langue* and *parole* or *phonemes* and *morphemes* presupposes the unquestionable presence of a *human* subject. However, in our Jurassic park not all the inhabitants are humans. New monsters (e.g. trolls, avatars, hoaxes, anonymous

profiles) introduce hybrid forms of subjectivity into the circuit of contemporary—mostly digital—historical culture. Codes and automations like text-feeding mechanisms and sharing applications replicate pieces of historical information within different texts and webpages, reducing the possibility of identifying a particular human subject (author, narrator or memory holder) behind any particular verbal, visual or sonic trace of the past. In the Jurassic park of contemporary historical culture, any attempt to draw clear-cut distinctions between the human and the non-human or the organic and the code is rendered peculiarly difficult.

Richard Dawkins, the author of the very influential *The Selfish Gene*, coined the term *meme*, which is the equivalent of the gene for cultural systems. According to him:

> Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation … memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. (Dawkins, 2006: 192)

So, in order to understand when and how dinosaurs acquire new life and become shadow creatures that live among us, we should enquire what molests old relics and living minds, what reactivates the dead, and obtains life from the living.

This is a post-humanist approach, which pays attention to the multitude of cultural bits and bytes and to *memetic* processes which form historical culture. These processes speed up or slow down the emigration of memes, and that depends on the historical condition societies inhabit. A historical crisis can break up consensus about the past, and open graves to allow historical memes to contaminate present conflicts (e.g. Spain and the debate on the civil war, Cyprus and the debate on the Turkish invasion of 1974 and the conflict between the two communities, see Kovras, 2008). Contemporary enmities acquire a historical dimension by attracting memes regarding the past. Historical culture is not at the margins of history. We experience history through historical culture and we obtain a variety of experiences of the past.

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Recognizing the vagueness and the shapelessness of the field, there is a need to draw paths for mapping the *memetics* of historical culture, that is, to further elaborate on the morphology of historical memes as well as to test the mechanisms which enable the propagation of these minimal "units of (historical) culture". This requirement becomes even more of a challenge when the particularities of contemporary historical culture are taken into consideration. If historical culture could be seen in a broader sense as a Jurassic park, then contemporary digital historical culture looks more like the *Jurassic Park* sequel *The Lost World*.[2] In this second filmic version, the creatures of the past are no longer disassociated from the visitors' present through certain technologies

of separation and decontamination (borders, fences, gates, passwords, closed vehicles, uniforms and gloves, even chemical toilets). On the contrary, humans and non-humans were closely interlinked: twentieth-century men and women marched alongside prehistoric animals, canceling any possibility of a temporal distinction between them. Furthermore, it was established from the beginning of the film that the whole setting had become extremely aggressive: the theme park had already been commercialized and it was ready to host hunters from around the world in order to enjoy shooting the creatures of the past. Within this violent "regime of simultaneity", the past turned out to be the catch of the day. The resurrected species of the past were claimed by human creatures of the present, fully equipped with digitalized weaponry and participants in an aggressive, safari-like exploitation of the past.

Hence, what would memes in such an aggressive historical culture look like? How could we think of the tiny units through which the past is transported in a safari-like setting? What could be the constituent parts of our timeless, violent, deeply affective and intensively privatized digital historical culture?

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In order to deal with the abovementioned questions, we have to broaden our understanding of meme. The word *virus* could serve toward this end. Yet, what we are suggesting at this point is the employment of another metaphor, still stemming from biological *langue*. But, how could this second metaphor facilitate our investigation of digital historical culture?

Surprisingly, viruses and genes have a lot in common. In terms of biology, they could both be perceived as minimal living (or quasi-living) entities, aiming exclusively at their reproduction. But there are also essential differences. Viruses, for example, cannot replicate their own tiny biological content (DNA or RNA), unless they come into contact with other species. This contact is realized through a protein coat, properly designed to facilitate the injection of the biological material of the virus into the host body, forcing the latter to reproduce almost unconsciously the viral content. Moreover, viruses are more than "selfish". They are *ontologically* aggressive, since the aggressive invasion of alien bodies is their only survival strategy.

Not surprisingly, meaning is circulated within contemporary digital networks in a similar way. A simple click on the various sharing, commenting or embedding thumbnails (such as the textual or visual commands "share", "like", "comment", "embed" on a YouTube or Facebook account) "forces" an already existing digital page to automatically host and reproduce, within its own content, informational units from other pages in cyberspace.

This process of "viralization" was initiated in the last two decades of the twentieth century. More specifically, it was in the five years before the millennium that the virus metaphor began to circulate widely within different, non-biological discursive frameworks. Marketing was one of them, where the term signaled the advent of new advertising techniques, imitating virus propagation. During the first decade of the next century, the metaphor expanded

beyond marketing. Currently recognized under the broader term "viral sharing", the virus metaphor has already become the dominant paradigm for sharing information in the digital domain. Nowadays, "going viral" is a flashy catchphrase, indicating a very effective, virus-like mode of production, distribution and consumption of meaning. In a more general sense, virality seems to be able to alter the "politics of meaning" within extended areas of digital networks (Sampson, 2012). To put it differently, within contemporary digital culture substantial areas have already emerged where meaning is intensively produced, disseminated and perceived in a "viral" manner. It depends more and more on distribution technologies and digitalized practices of imitation.

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Therefore, virality could be perceived as a dominant cultural trend, enforcing significant mutations during the production of meaning in our digital present. Let us then try to focus on virality as a defining element of contemporary *historical* culture as well (Bilalis, 2014). In that manner, the minimal units constituting this particular historical culture would be better represented not as memes but rather as *viruses*: parasitic entities that aim to reproduce themselves in as many copies as possible within alien areas of content.

From this point of the view, the Jurassic park of our digital historical culture appears different. The most aggressive creatures are no longer the huge dinosaurs but some rather tiny, invisible microorganisms. They constantly attempt to hijack the bodies of different species and to replicate themselves, taking control of the host "genetic" material and finally manipulating the gigantic creatures of the past. As we have already mentioned, these tiny units should not be confounded with historical information. Following Henry Jenkins et al., they would rather be perceived as *producerly* or *spreadable texts*, that is, texts which:

> ha[ve] an intent and a set of preferred meanings, but in the end [they are] left ambiguous enough, with enough open-ended details, that it could be interpreted in a number of ways, depending on the contexts into which [they are] spread and the ways [they are] deployed. (Jenkins, Xiaochang, Domb Krauskopf, & Green, 2008: 81–82)

The minimal constituents of contemporary historical culture would literally be *texts*, even reduced, as we have already seen, to a simple word. Furthermore, they could be set out in a visual or audible form (images, poems, scientific terms as well as technologies, buildings, systems of thought, lyrics, flags, catchphrases, etc.) (Rushkoff, 1994). They circulate through the multilayered surfaces of contemporary historical culture (papers, books, screens, video game consoles, webpages, virtual reality and augmented reality installations, exhibitions, etc.). By being disseminated, they articulate different pieces of historical information in different constellations of meaning. Nevertheless, what they all have in common is their *repetitive ontology*: in order to be *spreadable*, these tiny vehicles of the past have to generate copies of themselves in as many pages, screens or pixels as possible.

In our digital historical culture, *repetition* seems to be a more urgent priority than *definition*. Terms like "nationalism" or figural entities like "Hitler" *go viral* when they manage to disassociate themselves from certain historiographical definitions and are repeated within many different and even contradictory contexts. This imperative for endless repetition seems to alter contemporary politics of the past. It highlights the emergence of a *viral* historical culture no longer based on a "performative repetition with a difference" but rather on a "replication without reproduction, without fidelity, without durability" (Clough & Puar, 2012: 14).

Furthermore, increasing the historiographical indeterminacy of a certain carrier of the past also increases its chances of becoming a viral "unit" of contemporary historical culture. Let us return to the example of the "resurrection" of the Second World War during the Greek financial crisis. In August 2013, a set of photographs appeared in the printed Sunday edition of *Proto Thema*.[3] They captured Ilias Kasidiaris, spokesman for the Golden Dawn party, in a swimming suit, enjoying an intimate moment with his partner. The photographs were clear enough to show the large swastika tattoo on his left shoulder.

They were posted online and soon they went viral. In the course of the following weeks, the still images of this photo with the Nazi symbol spread across innumerous Greek webpages. By the end of the summer, digital screens had become inundated with statements, critiques, comments and even parodies, but primarily with swastikas. This particular symbol stemming from Germany's Nazi past found a way to occupy the cyberspace of a country where the presence of visual manifestations of the Nazi past was extremely marginal from 1950 to 2000.

Yet, the most striking issue raised during the heated debates on the swastika tattoo was the *figural ambiguity* of the spreadable images. After the photos went viral, most discussions focused on whether the tattoo actually represented a trace of the Nazi past. It was stated—mostly by Golden Dawn followers—that the tattoo did not depict a German swastika but some sort of ancient Greek meander. Internet followers of Nazism and racism emphatically rejected the accusations that the tattoo had a Nazi genealogy. At the same time, their "opponents" accused them of ideological inconsistency.

Nevertheless, the case of the swastika tattoo was indeed a matter of inconsistency, but a *viral* rather than an ideological one. It was exactly this sort of ambiguity about the "real" meaning of a fragment of the past, accumulated during its countless repetitions within contemporary networks, which "encourages people to seek out further information … This search for authenticity, origins, or purpose can be seen as yet another way of actively constructing the meaning of content, another type of gap that encourages … engagement" with the past (Jenkins et al., 2008, 93–94).

To put it differently, in order for a trace of the past to become a meme in contemporary historical culture, the restoration of its figural as well as its historiographical consistency is no longer an issue. Quite the contrary: what seems to be critical is to expose its content to even more contradictory interpretations, to deny already given historiographical accounts and to endlessly repeat these through

digital automations. In such a viral conceptualization of contemporary historical culture, what really matters is to speed up the dissemination of past materialities; to turn these materialities into spreadable or viral memes; to secure their mobility as well as their access to different discursive systems (public history, academic literature, journalism and even lifestyle and entertainment); to replicate these tiny units in any possible textual or visual form (article, statement, comment, gossip, still image, graffiti, caricature, video, etc.); to criticize, reject, deconstruct or even ridicule them, further increasing, in this way, their spreadability.

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In this chapter, we had attempted to put forward an understanding of historical culture as Jurassic park. We employed this particular metaphor in order to describe the interrelation between the academic and the public dimension of history as an open-ended process, during which a whole set of dualistic constellations are problematized. Our attempt was to investigate how clearcut distinctions such as, for example, professional historian/ "the public", history/memory, past/present, use/misuse, human/non-human, code/matter, langue/parole, structure/subjectivity, humanities/sciences of life, et cetera, are blurred. The Jurassic park metaphor represents the need for a critical reassemblage of the diversity concerning the possibilities to confront, avoid or imagine the past. It describes historical culture as a liminal equilibrium: human subjects, material links to the past, ways of historical thinking and reasoning, disciplines, emotions, affects, values, codes as well as dynamic arrangements of historical time are engaged in unstable interaction. Furthermore, imaging a theme park full of dangerous creatures, mutated networks and timeless phantoms suggests a post-humanist approach to historical culture. This approach is more committed to mimetic processes and intermediations than to normative, deeply anthropocentric interpretations of historical culture.

Moreover, we stated that Jurassic park has its own history. Since antiquity, different historical cultures have been inherent in the formation of different cultural and intellectual categories. During this long "history of historical culture", different "passwords" were developed in order to regulate access to the Jurassic park(s). Nevertheless, as we have attempted to show in this chapter, the "passwords" we use to unlock contemporary historical culture still reinforce established modern dichotomies (structure vs. performativity, langue vs. parole, human subject vs. materialities of the past, etc.). At this point, we tried to think about contemporary historical culture beyond dualistic limitations. We suggested that overcoming the abovementioned dichotomies represents an urgent priority. Within the Jurassic areas of contemporary digital historical culture, no one can afford to avoid the coexistence of human and non-human, monstrous hybridities, that have emerged in the liminal spaces between the analogue and the digital, the past and the present, between generated codes and affective desires for consuming history.

In an attempt to come to terms with post-anthropocentric contemporary historical (techno)culture, in the last part of our chapter we focused on the

tiny entities through which this culture is constructed. In search of a metaphor capable of describing these material structures, we turned to *memes* and *viruses*. This choice was not arbitrary. Both metaphors, with their origins in the natural sciences, could represent critical transformations in contemporary historical culture that occurred in recent decades: the emergence of passionate and even aggressive practices for claiming the past, interpretations of the past based on the spreadability of historical information, and the transformation of certain traces of the past into viral informational units.

The virus, in particular, could prove to be a very efficient conceptual tool, depicting the multiple ways in which the past is conceptualized by our networked present. Comprising the most tiny surface on which affective potentialities could be traced, situated at the frontier between life and inorganic presence, capable of intruding into different (and even hostile) living networks, mocking our modern, anthropocentric dualisms and being extremely aggressive and unpredictably repetitive, the virus could be a key metaphor in understanding contemporary historical culture, that is, a culture becoming more and more affective, post-human, repetitive, passionate and networked; an aggressive historical culture, constituted not exclusively by human subjects and material traces of the past but also by generic computational functions and mechanisms for endless repetition of historical information; a *viral* historical culture where the past (as well as the present) tends to be perceived in terms of its own interconnectivity, mediality and spreadability.

In sum, we would like to suggest that if the layers of our identities are formed through a relationship with the past, this relationship is conditioned not only by the burden of history on the living people, from the past within us, or from our curiosity and joy from exploration. Usually it has to do with an unstable environment where the dead could resurrect and the living could associate with the dead, and where the players are not only humans, but also non-human entities. What we would like to highlight is the contingency and the unpredictability of historical culture, of history conflicts and wars. The past, more than a geological stratigraphy resembles boiling water. You cannot predict what past will prevail in the future, but you can learn how to be resilient, by understanding historical culture not as a depiction of historical knowledge and representation of the past, but on the basis of its own terms and complexity.

NOTES

1. G. Ogurnaya and E. Chavchavadze: "Lev Trotsky: Taina mirovoy revolutsii (Leo Trotsky: Secret of a World Revolution)" https://youtu.be/WiPmqChQZoM; "Kto zaplatil Leninu? (Who paid Lenin?)" https://youtu.be/YFM9SbV2qtk (accessed on 20–9–2015).
2. G.R. Molen & C. Wilson (producers), S. Spielberg (director) (1997), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*. Amblin Entertainment.
3. See *Proto Thema*, 4 August 2013 www.frontpages.gr/d/20130804/15/%CE%A0%CF%81%CF%8E%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%98%CE%AD%CE%BC%CE%B1 (accessed on 29–11–2015).

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