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FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY IN RESIDENTIAL INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

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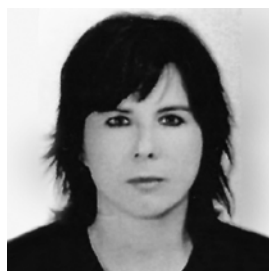
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ARTICLE

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MEMORY AS A COMPOSITIONAL TOOL
IN TAKIS MARTHAS' ARCHITECTURAL
WORK

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Her research covers a wide range of disciplines (Interior Architecture, Design, Set Design, Museography, and Visual Communication), focusing on the relationship between Architecture and Fine Arts at a conceptual, compositional and practical level. Her writings have been published in the proceedings of European, Greek, and international congresses, in which she has participated. She has written articles and essays for architecture exhibition catalogues, monographs, and architecture and design magazines.

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Abstract

The present paper tackles the concept of memory as a compositional tool employed in the architectural spatialization process. More specifically, it focuses on residential interior architecture in the work of Greek architect Takis Marthas, placing special emphasis on the conjunction of tradition and Modernism, a binary vividly captured in the architecture and visual arts of the 1930s, to which Marthas belongs. In Marthas' oeuvre, design and composition are locked in a dialectical relationship by way of cross-pollination, juxtaposition, complementarity, or the introduction of intact fragments of memory into space. Marthas' architectural style could thus be construed as an attempt of combining the past and the present in the form of a creative process whereby elements—mental or material—are drawn from diverse places and historical periods, only to be repurposed and integrated into a unified whole, retaining their autonomy and alluding to a hybrid architectural model. As far as the composition of the residence is concerned, memory is conveyed through images of the past rendered either as an integral spatial transfer or as mental and material architectural constructions, material elements, textures and colour.

These spatial elements evoke and restore images and sensations of the past. Within the architectural creation of the residence, compositional gestures linked with memory can be freely expressed, connecting the past and the present, architecture and place, as well as bringing together the space and users/residents' personal experiences.

Fraught with a number of tensions typical of the 1930s generation, such as the abovementioned attempt to bring together the past and the present, but also to pursue Greekness through both references to antiquity and references to Greek folklore tradition, Marthas' oeuvre is adumbrated by using residential works as well as written and oral testimonies dating from the 1930s-1960s as methodological tools.

Keywords

residential interior
architecture

memory

modern architecture

Greek vernacular
architecture

INTRODUCTION

Takis Marthas (1905-1965) was an architect, visual artist and professor at the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens. A versatile personality, he was seminal to the emergence of post-war architecture in Greece. He is regarded as one of the pioneers of visual abstraction, while his contributions to architectural education cannot be overstated. His architectural oeuvre, covering the years 1930-1965, encompasses private and public works, with residences (urban, suburban and vacation detached houses) and blocks of flats comprising the majority of his architectural production.

One should bear in mind that Takis Marthas belongs to the major representatives of the 1930s generation, in which the demand for a Greek identity or Greekness (Tziovas, 2011) as an entity “frozen in time” (Taylor & Wetherell, 1999) through a revival of the past, concurrently with international trends, primarily Modernism, was of paramount importance. Architecture and art were notable for their contradictory and conflicting trends: tradition, alongside Modernism, at the time dominating Europe through processes of cross-pollination, juxtaposition, complementarity, jointly forged a new national identity.

The perception of continuity and historical connection with the past, antiquity, the Byzantine era and Greek traditions as a means of evoking the Greek civilization are crucial questions in architecture, being conveyed through diverse processes: the introduction of integral structures and architectural aspects as well as a quest for encapsulating the spirit of each era thanks to mental processes and renditions. In architecture, memory is intrinsically linked with tradition. According to Pallasmaa, “what is more meaningful is the sense of tradition altogether, that we live rather than analyze and understand; we are historical beings; we are cultural beings; and we exist and live in the continuum of culture and it is our task to continue it – to maintain that sense of continuity” (Wall, 2009, p. 79).

Expressive/spatial gestures linked with memory have an avenue of expression through architectural creation, connecting humans and space, as we “understand and remember who we are through our constructions, both material and mental” (Treib, 2009, p. 17). In his article “Architecture as Memory”, Eleftherios Pavlides highlights three distinct fields of architectural memory: clients’ personal experiences and those of future users; the architect’s long-term experiential memory; the collective memory of architecture, i.e., “the codification and transmission of architectural principles, rules, and theories through apprenticeship, education, or literature”, which “are not hermetically separated or mutually exclusive” (Pavlides, 1990, pp. 28-29).

The art of memory, an invisible art, reflects real spaces. However, it concerns, not spaces themselves, but rather how the latter are problematized in the realm of imagination (Schultz, 2000, p. 48). Hence, the action of memory presupposes the act of imagination (Aristotle, 1912, chapter A, paragraphs 5-6), alluding to the term “image/imagery”; it is the layer upon which the mind acts in order for imagery which we cannot comprehend, namely time, movement, size, to be rendered as a mental image (Aristotle, 1912, chapter A, paragraph 8).

The quest for an expression of memory drawn from different eras, places and incidents is a recurring theme in Takis Marthas’ architectural residential composition. The various mechanisms thanks to which memory is conveyed and recalled give cause for research and reflection, while also serving as a source of inspiration, reinforcing the architect’s imagination and creativity. All these aspects affected Marthas’ architectural work, transforming it into a compositional tool.

THE EXPRESSION OF MEMORY THROUGH THE CONNECTION OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLACE: A COMPLETE TRANSCRIPTION OF TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE

As far as architectural structure is concerned, Takis Marthas draws on spatial structures, affinities and qualities of Greek traditional architecture. After transcribing them into the modern style, he incorporates them into his strikingly modern architectural plans in an absolutely rational manner. Therefore, even though his plans borrow from traditional architecture spatial structures, they do not betray any aspects of processes of addition.

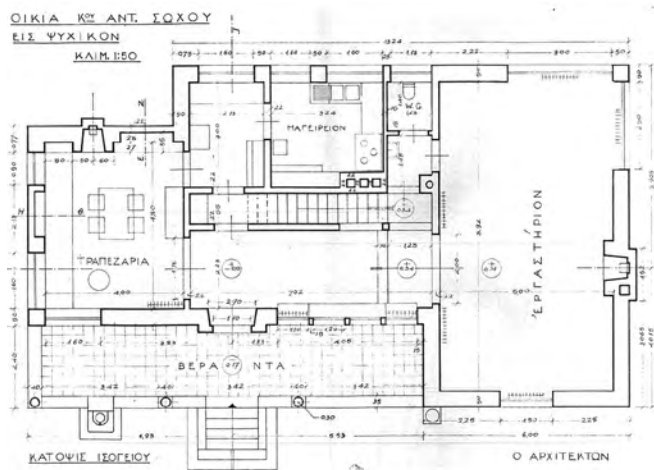


Figure 1. T. Marthas: ground floor plan of the A. Sochos residence-atelier in Psychiko. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



Figure 2. T. Marthas: Art work, "Tinos" oil on paper, 1935. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

Working on Antonios Sochos' residence in Psychiko (1937), a sculptor and professor at the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens, Marthas contributes to the transfer and expression of memory and, by extension, to the connection of architecture and place in the form of a dialectical relationship with tradition. More specifically, in an attempt to locate affinities with Greek traditional architecture, Marthas attempts a transcription of a typical, traditional Tinos residential structure, adjusted to the specific characteristics and needs of the client, instead of merely inserting integral traditional forms as 'constructs', a decision applauded by fellow architect A. Konstantinidis. (It bears mentioning that sculptor Antonios Sochos hailed from Tinos.

As such, the architect's references to the island are far from accidental. An antechamber is placed in lieu of the main hall of a typical Tinos residence. The main hall and bedrooms are reimagined as the uniform space of the studio. The entrance into the house is modelled after a Tinos residence, i.e., through a built-in courtyard complete with a roof.

At the same time, morphological aspects and architectural details such as the curved ends of the built-in guardrails and chimneys directly allude to the so-called *kapasos* found in Tinos medieval monasteries. The architectural composition of the Sochos house, with its striking geometry, exemplifies the rational austerity of Modernism, while also encompassing aspects of Greek Cycladic architecture directly referencing the sculptor's birthplace.

The same principles, namely the integration of traditional morphological aspects and structures of traditional Northern Greek architecture, also inform Georgios Vogiatzakis' two-storey residence in Psychiko (1957). In addition to a modernistic approach to the organization and solution of the architectural plans, direct correlations can be drawn with the morphological, typological and structural architectural models of the Epirus and Macedonia regions.

The residence is shaped as a Greek Π (pi) letter. The incorporation of ancillary spaces in the basement and the placement of the main spaces on the upper levels respectively reference the *katoi*, a space with secondary functions, and the *anoi*, the main space wherein the life of a family in a typical Northern Greek household takes place, thus connecting the traditional way of life with architectural space.



Figure 3. T. Marthas: View of the G. Vogiatzakis house in Psychiko. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



Figure 4. T. Marthas. Residential interior design. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

Along similar lines, the furniture, decorative aspects and objects completely harmonize with the rural style of the space and the morphological references to the traditional Northern Greek residence. Similar choices are also discernible in the interior space, namely in how the living room on the ground floor is shaped.

The space is divided into two levels, clearly referencing the closed hall, primarily a space of accommodation and reception. The hearth, a symbol of the traditional house, takes centre stage in this space, evincing common morphological aspects with the hearth prominent in traditional residences albeit in a more abstract approach, as a composition of geometric aspects, a simplified version without added decorative aspects and details. The architect boldly combines traditional and contemporary constructions, while refraining from superficial imitations. The aspects of decoration and architectural details provide a straight reference to mainland Greece and are seamlessly incorporated into the design (lintels, wooden guardrails) by being fully integrated into the geometric surfaces of the façades. Individual aspects, such as wooden door frames and doors, strongly evoke the mainland style, with wooden sheets being used for the doors of formal spaces; yet, this is achieved in a modernistic, abstract approach as a result of simplifying forms and proportions.

The rendition is achieved in a contemporary, abstract manner by use of simplified geometric surfaces sharply contrasted to the very “busy” surfaces typically found in traditional residences. The Vogiatzakis residence introduces a rather bold architectural language by weaving together the contemporary and traditional Northern Greek architecture to convey a form of spatialization. References to Northern Greek morphological aspects come as something of a paradox, given that the owners hailed from Crete. The architectural creation walks a fine line between modernity and tradition, past and present, by virtue of its various morphological as well as structural references; ultimately, though, the traditional style predominates. Here, the memory serves as an experience conveyed spatially by dint of the traditional aspects utilized both functionally as well as symbolically or decoratively. The two aforementioned residences can be considered as repositories of memories. They materialize time, maintain its flow and render it visible (McCarter and Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 229), concretize the memory of place and way of life by containing and bringing forth memories (Schultz 2000, pp. 47-48), and imply stories of human fate, real and imaginary alike, encouraging us to contemplate past civilizations and lives (McCarter and Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 229).

“ARCHITECTURE OF THE FRAGMENTS”: A PRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT TOPICS AND MATERIALS FROM THE PAST IN CONTEMPORARY DEPICTIONS

With regards to architectural form, Takis Marthas employs spolia and repurposes integral structural aspects (lintels and guardrails, to name but a few) that have survived the demolition of traditional residences. Moreover, he uses traditional forms after previously processing them on a morphological level and stylizing them. Marthas also introduces individual morphological aspects in his architectural composition, for instance doorsteps and partitions, treating them as stand-alone artworks often drawn intactly from the folklore repertoire. At any rate, these aspects are incorporated as if they were “citations” in the body of a contemporary composition, i.e., he incorporates the traditional vocabulary into the modern syntax. The traditional morphological aspects are usually self-contained and structural and their use is invested with an organic character. The inclusion of individual elements such as columns with decorative aspects and geometric capitals of traditional morphology (traditional and Post-Byzantine) in the interior space of the Paxinos residence in Psychiko (1950) underscore the architect’s intent to incorporate individual forms derived from traditional architecture albeit in a contemporary manner.

The use of contemporary materials, in combination with the abstract depiction of traditional forms, suggests a fertile dialogue between the past and the present. The introduction of an architectural polygonal protrusion in the living room directly alludes to the sachnisi bay window, with the hearth of traditional Epirus morphology symmetrically integrated into it. The traditional basia spaces, i.e., the permanent wooden sofas placed on either side of the hearth commonly found in traditional houses, are transcribed here into the interior space as wooden, stable constructions lending themselves to multiple uses. Decorative aspects and architectural details of the past are

organically assimilated into the design of the Rigos residence in Psychiko (1957), maintaining a direct dialogue with the modern. Morphological aspects and details from Tinos traditional architecture (lintels, marble guardrails) surviving building demolitions are transferred here and incorporated in their entirety into the geometric surfaces, thus retaining fragments of the owner's birthplace and masterfully bridging the past and the present. The experiential factor, i.e., memories linked to Tinos architecture and its idiosyncratic structural and decorative aspects, are instrumental to the design of this residence, investing the architectural work with a poetic quality.

The quality of the design effectively mirrors the fundamental experiences of the residence users, drawing parallels between their way of life and morphological references to tradition, ranging from handles and furniture to openings, nooks and walls, always closely connected with modernity. In Takis Marthas' work, the residence is reconfigured as a hybrid spatial artwork, a stage of action, wherein various elements, disparate or otherwise, collide and are organically linked, in the process generating a new architectural reality.

“ARCHITECTURE OF THE FRAGMENTS”: STRATIFICATION OF MEMORY IN THE COMPOSITION OF STRUCTURAL SURFACES – MATERIALS – COLOUR

During the compositional process, Takis Martha repurposes aspects and parts, mental or material, drawn from buildings of different eras and diverse qualities. With that in mind, he implements the stratification method to the composition of structural surfaces, during which aspects or rather “traces” of time emerge, producing strata of memory within a unified whole. Marthas composes wall surfaces by way of merging diverse aspects, materials, designs, colours and construction details retrieved from various eras and qualities.

These fragments serve as an infrastructure for ephemeral artistic installations, creating individual visual installations in the interior space and making references to the art of collage, with which the architect was quite familiar.

The composition of structural surfaces by use of different materials, contemporary and traditional alike, venturing for instance into the alternation of concrete and stonework, and the fact that the same constructional elements cross paths with a variety of other materials, such as concrete lintels or wooden guardrails, are all in dialogue with modern architecture, with the work often combining modern syntax and traditional vocabulary. In two-dimensional spatial compositions, the memory of the place participates organically through material and colour, directly or otherwise.

Materiality, colorations and textures allude to the distinct character of the place, connecting it with architecture by virtue of mental processes. The architecture primarily utilizes materials drawn from the landscape in which the residence lies, usually originating in excavations. In his personal

atelier residence in Kalamaki (1950), Marthas creates a surface – interior panels of decorated marble slabs – alongside ancient material unearthed in the building excavation (funerary pediment) or uses excised cylindrical pieces of marble from the opening of sinkholes in order to shape part of the surrounding space.

The architect enjoys an experiential relationship with his material. According to Walter Benjamin, “the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is [...] a craftsman's relationship, [...] his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 108).



Figure 5. T. Marthas: Art work, “Untitled”. Mixed technique, 40 x 50 cm, 1960. In the project, the use of concrete is identified with the use of mosaics that have resulted from the breakage of ceramic tiles used in construction. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

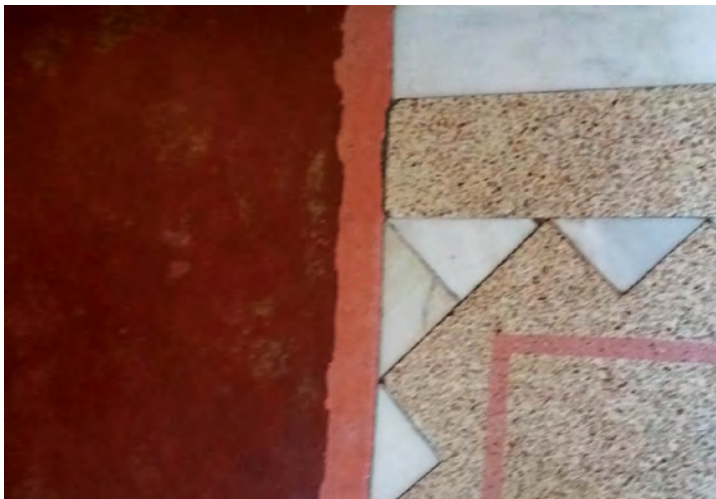


Figure 6. T. Marthas: Interior floor detail of the T. Marthas' residence-atelier in Kalamaki, Athens. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

Colour in Takis Marthas's oeuvre, an element that could have been used as a means of conveying memory, does not actually serve that purpose: via references to the colour chart of the Classical or even better Hellenistic period or Greek traditional architecture, it becomes a narrative medium that overall depicts the 'atmosphere' of the space instead of being relegated to just serving as a means of pursuing a Greek identity. Nevertheless, when such a pursuit is endeavoured, it is conducted through visual renditions of the space in Greek colours, deep red (red iron oxide deep) and ochre, combining raw, industrial materials and Béton brut (raw concrete) and expressing Marthas' stance on the Hellenization of the modern. This compositional methodology, consisting of weaving together fragments of memory, material and colour, evokes tangible, visual and mental associations, and stirs the five human senses (Olsberg, 1999), with residence functioning as a refuge of memory (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 69).



Figure 7. T. Marthas: Interior design. Sketch. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

EXPRESSION OF MEMORY AS AN EXPERIENTIAL FACTOR IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

For Takis Marthas, the design process is a narrative medium depicting not only his compositional intentions but also facts and desires, the past and also the future, drawing a direct line between architectural form and experience. He employs a visual/abstract style to design not just the architectural space but also potential incidents embedded within it, treating it as an active field of action, an experiential space of memory, dream, or imagination.

The narrative representation, continuously reinterpreted by the users/residents, aims at a "plural reading as a work on memory" (Terzoglou, 2017, pp. 93-102) in the construction process.

Through architectural/compositional gestures, the architect detects a significant reservoir of visual and architectural experimentations, approached through their contribution to the experiential relationship with the space, in which senses play a pivotal role. Through editing processes,

fabric is also prominent, as emphasis is given to various threads, weaving methods and technological processing possibilities.

The visual and haptic gradations, so invaluable for exploring the depiction of specific characteristics of the interior space, are showcased through contrasts in texture: transparent/opaque, smooth/rough, dull/shiny. This pursuit of texture sensations vividly conveys the atmosphere of the traditional Greek residence: felt, threads, flokates (woollen rugs), thick woollen fabric reminiscent of shepherds' cloaks, psathia (straw matting), alongside a selection of specific colours (deep red, brown, blue and ochre) and the abstract depiction of decorative aspects drawn from Greek traditional garments all work towards activating the memory of the place.



Figure 8. T. Marthas: Art work, "Untitled". Watercolour painting. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



Figure 9. T. Marthas: Art work, "Untitled". Mixed composition-collage 42x51.5 cm. 1957. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of memory throughout the design process, the construction of the architectural work and the creation of the spatial experience are key goals in Takis Marthas' residential interior architecture. The addition of memory as an intangible ingredient, directly correlated with material, could be expounded as the "active memory" of the space. In his personal style, Martha redefines his personal memories and experiences, transforms spatial elements into new forms, and combines tradition, as a source of inspiration, with contemporary means of expression. Marthas' architecture aspires to build a lasting bond with a specific place, connecting past, present and future through a confrontation between spatial experience and memory. He connects space with both place and time via references to the past and also the environment, bringing about an experience of temporal continuity.

Far from being one-sided and championing a return to folklore or antiquity in terms of how Greekness is conveyed in his work, Marthas responds to these burning questions by seeking timelessness. He effectively rises to

this challenge using geometry and the embedding of traditional forms into modern structures as his instruments. His quest of geometry directly links him with and references antiquity. Meanwhile, the use of traditional forms as 'citations' in his architectural projects connects him with folklore. Ultimately, the combination of the above elements is tantamount to a quest of diachrony albeit in a modern vein.

Marthas conveys memory through indirect references to antiquity, with geometry as the starting point, aiming to achieve the peace of symmetry, invariably through a Modernist viewpoint. When he resorts to tradition, he performs this in a twofold manner: either he refers to tradition in morphological terms and retrieves intact forms which he then embeds as 'citations' in modern architectural plans resulting from clear geometric shapes or he refers to tradition in terms of spatial structure, transcribing traditional spatial structures into the contemporary model, once again utilizing geometry as his principal instrument.

Memory in Takis Marthas' work is expressed through the unbreakable bond between body and space, that is through the manual process of producing a space. This *modus operandi* brings to mind Heidegger's (1978) concept of being ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*): not as a simplistic or poor quality of objects, but as a condition of a direct relationship with the body that ends up being both practically and symbolically important. At the same time, this process forges close emotional ties between the architect and his work, evolves into an acutely experiential relationship and contributes to the creation of a personal poetics of daily life.

For Takis Marthas, the space of memory is a space of myth; a myth that had an emotional effect on him, laden with the residues of his childhood and nostalgia, replacing the conceptual content with an emotional one and transforming "everyday and vulgar objects into worlds of beauty and poetry" (Prokopiou, 1965). The architectural creation strives to activate imagination and emotion, both of which are prerequisites for memory. The activated emotion serves as a driving force throughout the creative spatialization process, as Marthas used to teach his students at the National Technical University of Athens: "I believe that the expression of human emotions, along with the responsible perusal of the various pertinent issues, is something to which one should devote one's life".

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