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All correspondence to: V. Karalis / MGSAANZ
Department of Modern Greek, A18
University of Sydney NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: (+61 2)9351-7252
Fax: (+61 2)9351-3543
Email: vras@arts.usyd.edu.au

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INTRODUCTION

It is rather impossible to find a common thread that would link the extremely diverse studies included in this volume. They all began as papers presented at the international conference of the Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand which took place in Sydney in December 2004. Their common ground was the concept of cultural memory in the Greek world, from which starting point the contributors branched out into exploration of wider fields of study, employing various methodologies and divergent presuppositions. Thus the unifying concept of ‘cultural memory’ was transformed into both culture and memory, which in their turn took on multiple meanings indicating multiple realities. Memory is not simply the re-collection of past experiences or impressions; memory became the re-membering of past unities: reassembling, as it were, a lost coherent vision of vanished realities articulated through the needs of the present.

It can be said that the contributions to this volume endeavour to construct a macroscopic view of the recorded past in its various forms: literature, philosophy, history, politics, art etc. Most of the articles address crucial issues about the re-membering of culture, the practice and the discourse of remembering in all its variegated plurality and somehow chaotic multiplicity. Remembering culture means the foregrounding of its prismatic nature and of its multilayered structure. Yet in order to see or excavate the past, one must use the tools given by the present; in this process the tools themselves become essential parts of the enterprise. Today we don't dig into the past in order to learn 'what really happened' since we have problematised the concept of the real and we have lost the safety of all certain knowledge. Nineteenth century historians and cultural thinkers were in the extremely privileged position to believe that they were able to know what really happened, since their main work was that of reconstructing events through grand narratives with implied ideologies for nation-building. Today our imagination has been tainted by the ravages of global history; it has lost its monocentric innocence and has immersed itself into polycentric otherness and its strange multiplicity.

The Greek world and its discourses evolved oscillating between the innocence of home and the guilt of the infinite world. Its innocence was born from its introverted self-sufficiency and the vision of a nation bound by its history to continue the past, and yet living under its heavy shadow. Its guilt originates from the scholars of the Greek Diaspora who articulate their world in constant juxtaposition to the multiplicity of the other and its achievements. In that process the guilty Diaspora sees that the innocence of home is not sufficient to articulate a valid vision of being in contemporary reality and that it creates a rather deformed vision of its actual position in history. The studies in this volume address both the introverted, self-sufficient, innocent vision of a Greek world together with the multiple, polymorphous and remorseful vision of the Hellenic ecumenical vision constantly open to the challenges of history and the practices of the other.

Despite their diversity, all the contributions to this volume define a centre of references that belongs to contemporary problematics of identity, gender, history, morality and politics. The fact that these studies come from the margins of European cultural territory and indeed of the empire has its own significance also; it indicates the necessity to look at the centre from peripheral positions where criticism can be independent and new problematics can emerge through a process of osmosis with difference. Most of the essays see Greek culture from the perspective of a lost innocence; they address Greek themes from a vantage point external to those of tradition and attempt a drastic reconfiguration of their position within contemporary realities. The culture of memory can easily become the cult of memory in an oppressive and self-congratulatory manner. The memory of culture gives the perspective of depth to contemporary questions and situates them within a spectrum of current needs. This volume attempts to bring together disparate visions of research in the area of Greek studies and as such it simply claims to map out the territory. One has to look at the real territory in order to understand the dilemmas of contemporary Greek studies.

Vrasidas Karalis, Introduction

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Vrasidas Karalis
University of Sydney

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DEMOSTHENES AGRAFIOTIS is professor of Public Health at the University of Athens. He is also a creative artist, poet and essay writer. His works have been recognised worldwide and have been translated in many languages.

PAOLO BARTOLONI teaches Italian and Comparative Literature at the University of Sydney. He is the author of Interstitial Writing: Calvino, Caproni, Sereni and Svevo, (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2003), and The Cultures of Exile, Translation and Writing (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007).

EUGENIO BENITEZ teaches Classical Philosophy at the University of Sydney. He has published on Plato. He is the author of Forms in Plato's Philebus (Van Gorcum 1989) and the editor of Dialogues with Plato (Apeiron, vol 29, 1996).

EDUARDO CADAVA teaches English at Princeton University. He specialises in American literature and culture, literary and political theory, comparative literature, media technologies, and theory of translation. He is the author of Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History (Princeton, 1997); Emerson and the Climates of History (Stanford, 1997); and co-editor of Who Comes After the Subject? (Routledge, 1991), Cities Without Citizens (Rosenbach Museum/Mlought Foundation, 2004), and a special issue of the South Atlantic Quarterly entitled And Justice for All: The Claims of Human Rights (Duke, 2004).

ANTHONY DRACOPOULOS is a senior lecturer with the Department of Modern Greek and Comparative Literature at the University of Sydney. He has published articles on George Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, C. P. Cavafy, Greek Modernism and the Avant-Garde. He is the author of G. Seferis and Criticism: The Reception of Seferis' Work, Athens: Plethron, 2002. He is currently working on a monograph on the work of C. P. Cavafy.


CHRISTOS N. FIFIS lectures in Modern Greek at La Trobe University, Melbourne. He has published a number of studies on Modern Greek and Cypriot literature.

STEVE GEORGAKIS lectures in Human Movement and Health Education at the University of Sydney. He is an active researcher in the history of sports and the politics of sport-culture in Australia and Greece.

JEN HARRISON received her doctorate on Nikos Kazantzakis and Patrick White from the University of Sydney. She has published on Modern Greek Studies and contemporary political morals.

LEONARD JANISZEWSKI & EFFY ALEXAKIS are research fellows with the Department of Modern History, Macquarie University. They have published many works on Greek-Australian historical and contemporary presence in Australia.

GEORGE KANARAKIS is Adjunct Professor in Greek Studies with Charles Sturt University. He has published on the history of Greek-Australian literature, on the history of Greek journalism in Australia and New Zealand, the history of Greek language. He has published several books which have been awarded prizes. In 1994 he was honoured by election to the International Academy for the Promulgation of Civilisation. In 1999 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by Charles Sturt University and around 2002 he was appointed a Professorial Fellow at that institution.

VRASIDAS KARALIS teaches Greek at the University of Sydney. He has published many studies on Nikos Kazantzakis and he is the editor of Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand).

ELIZABETH KEFALLINOS lectures in Modern Greek at Macquarie University. She has published studies on Modern Greek literature.

RICHARD LIGHT teaches Physical Education at the University of Sydney. His main fields of research include sociology and anthropology of sports. His is the Section Editor of "Pedagogy" for the Asian Journal for Research in Sport Science and sits on the review board for International Sports Studies and Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy.


PANAYIOTA NAZOU lectures in Modern Greek at the University of Sydney. She has published in the area of Modern Greek Women's' writing, language teaching and intertextuality.

TOULA NICOLACOPOULOS and GEORGE VASSILACOPOULOS teach Philosophy at La Trobe University. They have published co-jointly in various fields of philosophical history. Their main publications include Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love: An Essay on Sexualities, Family and the Law, Aldershot Ashgate 1999; and From Foreigner to Citizen: Greek Migrants and Social Change in White Australia (1900-2000), (in Greek) Eothinon Publications, 2005.

VICKY PANAYOTOPOULOU-DOUVALVERAS lectures in Modern Greek at the University of New South Wales. She has published on Medieval Greek literature.
ELIZABETH RECHNIEWSKI teaches French at the University of Sydney. She has published on French cultural history and has edited a collection of articles on Jean Paul Sartre's novel *La Nausée* (Rodopi, 2006).


ALCESTIS SOULOGIANNI completed her doctorate on the work of G. Heimonas at the University of Athens. She has written on Modern Greek literature and has published on cultural policy in contemporary Greece.

ANTHONY STEPHENS is Emeritus McCaughey Professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Sydney. He is the author of many books in English and German on the works of Rilke, Henrich Von Kleist, 20th century German poetry and the theory of literature.

LIANA THEODORATOU has taught Ancient and Modern Greek Literature in the Program in Hellenic Studies at New York University since 1994. She also is Director of the NYU in Athens summer program. She has written essays on Pindar and on several twentieth-century Greek poets, including Yannis Ritsos, Manolis Anagnostakis, Takis Sinopoulos, Thanassis Kostavaras, and Vyron Leondaris. She has translated several works by, among others, Foucault, Althusser, and Derrida into Modern Greek and she is currently working on a project on the politics of silence in post-war Greek poetry. She regularly teaches courses on a range of topics in the areas of Greek literature and culture, comparative literature, cinema, the politics of translation, and literary theory.

MIHALIS TSIANIKAS teaches Greek at Flinders University, Adelaide. He has published many book-length studies on Modern Greek literature, European comparative literature and Greek-Australian writers.