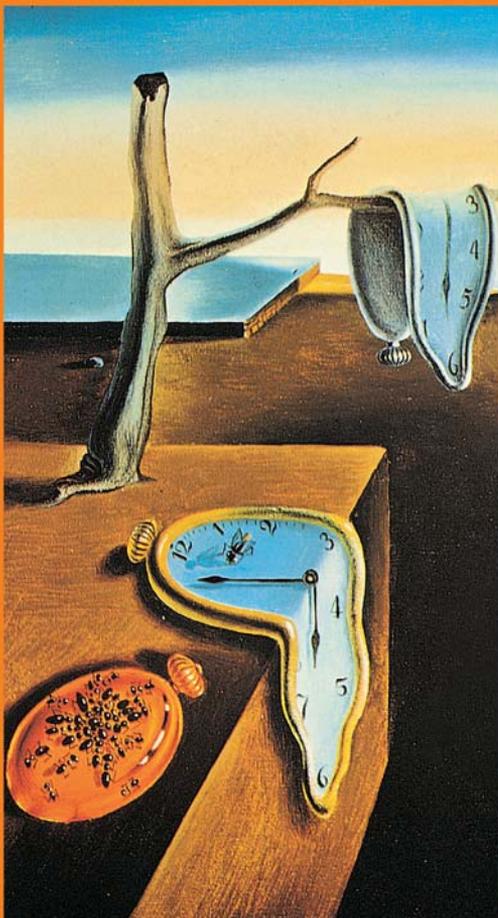


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editors

FABIO MUGNAINI
PÁDRAIG Ó HÉALAÍ
TOK THOMPSON

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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First Edition: may 2006
ISBN 88-89726-01-6
Printed in Italy

The past in the present /
editors Fabio Mugnaini,
Pádraig Ó Héalaí, Tok Thompson. -
Catania : ed.it, 2006. -
300 p. ; 21 cm
eBook version:
<http://www.editpress.it/0602.htm>
ISBN 88-89726-01-6
306.940 Cultural anthropology.
History of Europe

The book is produced
by the Culture, Arts and
Humanities Task Force
of the Coimbra Group

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The past in the present

A multidisciplinary approach

Editorial foreword

This book investigates the role that past events, facts, persons, and heritage are said to exert on the ongoing intellectual and working lives of individuals and communities. The title of this book is not altogether unique – variations on this phrase constitute titles of numerous volumes, essays, and philosophical reflections. This connection with other works articulates the widespread and long-standing importance in understanding the core concepts of the past and the present. It is our hope that this volume will further these discussions through its presentation of a wide range of case studies from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

Whoever approaches the dyadic polarity of past/present, regardless of the discipline of departure, knows from experience how difficult it is to draw lines or highlight continuities; how the responsibility for acknowledging the debt owed to previous generations is often onerous; and the importance of the role of the scholar investigating the claimed associations with the glories and tragedies of the past.

The fluid nature of the past/present relationship was particularly appealing to the research group which had come into existence due to a common interest in investigating European cultural tradition, within the Coimbra network of universities. This latter body was established in 1985 to foster a closer association and forge links for the reciprocal benefit of long established regional universities.

A club of old and prestigious universities? A circle of past glories? Not at all, or to put it better, at least not only so. The Coimbra group consists only of those old universities which are still young and to the fore in present-day academic life in their

respective countries while developing a higher profile on the wider European scene. They have brought their history and their abiding awareness of the role of higher education right to the core of the present, in public life, in whatever political configuration it is found.

Not surprisingly, when the Coimbra network decided in 2001 to bring together a special body of researchers devoted to humanistic activities, the most appealing theme to the various disciplinary areas present in the task-force was that of the past in the present.

It should be said, however, that there was another factor in the background which influenced that choice. Since 1999, the Coimbra Group had been supporting a working party on European Ethnology and Folklore, giving birth to an active research network which enjoyed disciplinary coherence and homogeneity. This group organised a conference on the topic of minorities, migration and compensation, held in Siena in May 2002, which gave rise to a publication of the same title. The working party then decided to focus its attention on tradition – that is, the modality of intergenerational transmission and also the content of such a cultural transmission. Tradition is a haunting concept for ethnologists and folklorists, so when the Coimbra Group decided to merge the working party on Ethnology and Folklore in the wider multidisciplinary group, devoted to the investigation of “Culture”, the members of the working party brought with them their topic.

The brand new group, established in 2004 (“Culture Task Force”, subsequently renamed “Culture, Arts and Humanities Task Force”), after a short appraisal, agreed that the persistence of the past in the present had a wider appeal than the concept of tradition, and notwithstanding the specific individual researcher’s interest (as historian, folklorist, anthropologist, philosopher, art expert or literary scholar), each one was committed to the inclusion of the second term of the dyad into his or her own research. The past in the present, with the further specification regarding the role of tradition in a changing world,

became then the conference title when the call for papers was issued, open to all the disciplinary areas covered by the label of “humanities”, or more generically, “culture”.

The National University of Ireland, Galway, generously offered to host the meeting, and an intrepid group of humanist specialists gathered in the Centre for Human Settlement and Historical Change, on that campus, on 23-25 September 2004 to present their research papers. Thus a multidisciplinary team met to share concerns and compare methods, as well as to demonstrate the bonding links between eras, between today and yesterday, which are embedded in the history, discourse, and rhetoric of each specific discipline.

Even if a close reading of the contents of this volume could bring to light other links and affinities between the diverse contributions, it seems to us that a useful way in which it is possible to engage with the frontier between past and present, might be to identify three basic modalities: a) renegotiation, b) continuity and c) heritage.

Some of the contributions can be viewed appropriately under the heading renegotiation.

Cecilia Panti and Caitríona Clear turn their attention to two diverse female intellectuals. Panti presents the Abbess Hildegard as a historical figure, reviewing the several periods of renewed interest in her music – including our own times. Panti demonstrates that the expression of tastes and needs of the day is inspired by the creativity of the past. Clear shows how a popular writer (Maura Laverty) has been received differently over time – particularly due to changes in society’s fickle attitudes towards sexuality and sensuality. López-Aparicio Pérez argues that modern technology makes the past an entirely different era from the present. He emphasizes that the new global images are largely just that: images, lacking the other sensory experiences that filled and continue to fill the world. Our primary means of perception emphasizes the visual in a way never known before, but we should not assume that the past did the same, nor underestimate the importance of the other sensory experiences. Tou-

ber's past is in the first two centuries AD and the present around 1600 AD. The discussion centers around the motif of Christian martyrdom, which had taken on renewed significance following the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The historical writings of Antonio Gallonio, a Roman priest, are examined and Touber points out that "an inherent quality of sanctity is its immutability through time." Ó Héalaí provides a case study in re-negotiating the past in relation to children's funerary rights. The past which in this instance is seen in a rather negative light, lives on in communal memory but can be atoned for. He concludes that contemporary attitudes are indicative of "an openness to engage with the past, and a willingness to compensate for its perceived shortcomings in ways which accord with present-day sensitivities."

Continuity is always the result of a choice, the effect of a policy of identification and inverse-recognition, as is now widely accepted. Subirats investigates music travelling through time and space in the Judeo-Sephardic diaspora, which continues to provide relevance to present communities, but also reveals the influence of the various historic events and contingencies. Hughes proposes a view of alternative medicines as belonging to a wider human heritage of extra-scientific belief, unchanging in the face of modern scientific advances. Surlis' article is essentially a report on an innovative new model for the promotion of cultural continuity, which seeks to adapt the more traditional advisory roles of the elders to the current school systems. This contribution reveals how new forms have been fashioned to recall and embrace intergenerational learning.

Eberhart discusses the evolution of modern pilgrimages in Europe, which he describes as follows:

"A cultural pattern, a mass phenomenon in the Middle Ages and during the late Baroque and which became practically insignificant since the 1950s and into the 1970s and was rediscovered in the late 1970s. Today, this pattern will serve as a classic example for the fact that traditions are very much alive in the present, and that people live these traditions." However, he also

points out that “About 75% of all pilgrimages developed within the past 30 years. Not even 10% can be referred to as traditional pilgrimages, which began before 1900.” Murphy explores the political manifestations of a siege inheritance for Northern Ireland’s Presbyterian community in particular on the island of Ireland. The genesis of such an inheritance is traced from the siege of Londonderry and its political imprint is explored in relation to the Home Rule Campaign, Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Furthermore, the author contends that the recent emergence of what is referred to as ‘New Unionism’ constitutes a potential re-alignment of the siege inheritance.

The third modality, heritage, is one which seems to be at the fore in the contemporary creation of cultural policies. Wolf-Knuts shows the inter-relations of heritage, folklorism, and nostalgia. While all are derived from the common ground of history, the three elements differ in their stance relating to historical truth, thus opening a need which can only be met by scholarly endeavour and objectivity. Thompson explores the past as a constituent part of the present in the realms of tradition and heritage. Tradition can be seen as the lived past, and heritage as the performance and/or marketing of tradition. Heritage is thus seen as the “conscious past,” necessarily eclectic and not entirely rational, but ultimately dependent on rationality, and on the actual past, for its formulations.

Giannelli’s article shows how traditional items (in his case, dialectical markers), can be maintained due to emerging cultural desires and formulations. He writes that, “A role is clearly played by the substantial difference, in the Italian shared basic culture, between *vecchio* ‘old’ and *antico* ‘ancient’” and he further states that these terms can be translated respectively, as ‘inadequate’ and ‘noble’.

Wmffre investigates the particular positioning of the heritage learners versus the native speakers of Celtic languages, an example of heritage in opposition to tradition. While for the native speakers the language is a lived, daily, mundane matter, for the heritage learners, their connection to the language is held to

be “innate” or “in the blood”, revealing an ethnically-charged conceptual system which the author describes as “hermetic”.

In her case study of a maritime town, Österlund-Pötzsch looks at heritage as a marketable product and identity symbol, tied up with vague historical experiences, and enmeshed with political organizations and ideas of local pride and commerce.

Mugnaini investigates certain Italian festivals that are now “more medieval than ever” in a heritage bid for tourism and local identity. But, as Mugnaini reveals, such festivals can become “traditional” again, over the course of years of their continuations. The *faux* blends with the *nouveaux*. These festivals are not only recreating past traditions but becoming current and future “authentic” ones as well.

This book represents the second in a series emanating from the Coimbra Group, the first link being the above-mentioned publication on minorities, migration and compensation. A digital version of the contents of this present volume, augmented by graphics and multimedial documents which could not be reproduced here, will be available on the web site of the Culture, Arts and Humanities Task force of the Coimbra Group.

This work is offered as a contribution to the ongoing debate on the role of tradition, in a wide sense, in the contemporary world, and it is our hope that it will help to further the investigation and understanding of the pervasive role the past plays in the present.

We gratefully acknowledge the sponsorship received for the Galway conference from the Irish Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Údarás na Gaeltachta, as well as funding from the Department of Philosophy and Social Science, of the University of Siena, which made the publication of this volume possible.