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The great summer of Greece

Summer 2004 was announced by the Greek media as 'the great summer of Greece'; on July the Greek national football team won unexpectedly the European Championship in Portugal, while few weeks later the 29th Olympic Games were hosted in Athens. Within a festal atmosphere and feeling really optimistic and self-confident, Greeks found themselves ready to 'host' or play a 'protagonist' role in some kind of global sport event. At the same time, the association with established worldwide sport publics¹ led also to a peculiar kind of 'uneasiness'. Thereafter, when Greek fans began to arrive increasingly in Portugal, as a result of the first unexpected victories of their team, the Greek TV-broadcaster was wondering:

Now that we are many in this stadium, we need desperately something to point out our ethnical identity. Look at the Scandinavians, they are all dressed up like Vikings; look at the Duchies, they are all in orange. *We* must also choose a concrete emblem. I don't know what this could be; it may be *tsolias* (evzone), or *Megalexandros* (Alexander the Great), or *chiton* (pallium). In any case, we must soon choose just *one* emblem.²

A few weeks later, the first feeling of 'uneasiness' born during Euro 2004 in Portugal was transformed to pure agony in Athens. During the Olympic Games, the public controversies were concentrated mainly on the opening and closing ceremonies; debating intensively on these two televisual phantasmagorias, Greek society seemed to worry much more about the successful or not visual transmission of the 'real' content of Greekness to the global audiences than the sport events themselves. In this way, internalizing the athletic events and perceiving them as 'national affairs', Greeks soon realized that, in the situation of an immense and globalized spectacle, the 'greatness' of 'the Greek summer' strongly depended on the successful visualization of the Greek past.

1 For a typology of the 'public', see **Michael Warner**, "Publics and Counterpublics", *Public Culture*, 14/1 (2002), 49-89.

2 Extract from TV broadcasting, football match Greece- France, ET (25/06/04). The emphasis is mine.

In fact, during summer 2004, the adaptability of the established visual tokens of Greekness was tested hard. The blue and white national flag, for example, became trendy t-shirt and flashing pin; the national anthem became ring tone for mobile phones or it remixed in midi format with new sounds and slogans, heard for the first time during the festivities.³ Thus, symbols and rituals originally connected to historically specific strategies of visualizing national identity, were then removed from their former contexts, in an attempt to construct a version of Greekness, visible by/through the trans-national, televisual gaze.⁴ It was this attempt that, last summer, turned Greece into a huge ‘dressing room’: each one of the already known visual signs of Greekness (flags, emblems, maps, colors etc) was ‘put on’ human bodies, pets, cars, apartments in order for the Greeks to chose the most suitable ‘outfit’ for their inevitable –still desirable- rendezvous with the Globe.

Yet, this carnivalesque -and at the same time anxious- revision of the *visual ethno-semiotics* must not be considered as an isolated, even accidental phenomenon. On the contrary, since the 19th century, Greece has been familiarized to a process of constantly recalling and consuming different images of the national past, according to the ever-changing demands of the present.⁵ As far as it concerns the most recent years, Greek society seems to have entered into a process of deconstructing the prevailing rituals of national self-representation. Especially in the 90’s, the integration of Greece as a full member into the European Union, the influx of immigrants as well as the advent of information technologies challenged former aspects of Greekness: the

3 A version of this remix can be heard at [http://www.imathia1.gr/multimedia/Nikites-george 20helakis 20mix.mp3](http://www.imathia1.gr/multimedia/Nikites-george%20helakis%20mix.mp3), accessed at 21/09/04.

4 The most characteristic example of this recontextualization was the decoration of buildings with flags during the summer 2004. After the seven-year military dictatorship (1967-1974) and the consequent enforcement of the civilians to hang flags during the national commemorations, the national flag had obtained specific ideological connotations till recently: the one who decorated with a flag his balcony was stigmatized as nationalist, conservative or rightist. However, in the last years, the connotations of the flag seemed quite different, as we can speculate by the often use of the national symbol. On ‘political civilization’ during the post-dictatorial era see **Christos Liritzis, Ilias Nikolakopoulos and Dimitris Sotiropoulos** (eds.), *Kinonia ke politiki. Opsis tis G’ Ellinikis Dimokratias. 1974-1994*, Athens: Themelio 1996; **Angelos Elefantis**, *Ston asterismo tou laikismou*, Athens: O Politis 1991; **Richard Clogg**, (ed.) *Greece 1981-89: the Populist Decade*, London: Macmillan 1993.

5 On the uses of the past and the construction of national time in different historical periods of Greek 19th and 20th centuries see **Keith Brown and Yiannis Hamilakis** (ed.), *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories*, Lanham and Oxford: Lexington Books 2003; **Artemis Leontis**, *Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland*, Cornell University Press 1995; **Antonis Liakos**, ‘Pros episkevin olomelias ke enotitos. I domisi tou ethnou chronou’ in Tr. Sklavenitis (ed.) *Epistimoniki sinantisi sti mnimi tou K.Th. Dimara*, Athens: KNE-EIE 1994, 171-199; **Pantelis Lekkas**, *To pechnidi me to chrono. Ethnikismos ke neoterikotita*, Athens: Ellinika Gramata 2001; **Dimitris Tziouvas**, *I metamorfosis tou ethnismou ke to ideologima tis ellinikotitas sto mesopolemo*, Athens: Odysseas 1989

dominant symbols and stereotypes of the Greek past was subjected to extensive social, political and intellectual negotiation;⁶ what was actually at stake behind those reconsiderations, was the successful translation of Greekness into the trans-national context of the post-coldwar period.

Greek homepages and the global ‘web of nostalgia’

Considering the ‘great summer’ of Greece as an indication of critical resignifications of Greekness dating from the late 80’s, this article aims at investigating specific aspects of these processes through a sociocultural analysis of web-material, namely *personal homepages* developed between 1995 and 2003 by people living in Greece.⁷

At first, some clarifications need to be made about the choice of this particular material and its interrelation to the ideological process of reframing Greekness at the end of 20th century. 1990’s proved to be a critical decade not only for the rethinking of symbols concerning ‘ethnicity’ in Greece but also for the familiarization of Greek society with the Internet;⁸ thus, a chronological coincidence between the rise of neo-nationalist claims in the Greek public sphere and the increasing development of personal homepages in the ‘cyber-sphere’ could be observed.

However, as I will try to argue, this was not a matter of mere chronological coincidence; changes both in public and cyber-sphere must be rather understood as

and **Ioanna Laliotou**, ‘Nationalism in the era of the end of ideology; short stories; grand-narratives and Greek mythologies’, *Cultural Studies from Birmingham* 3: 1994, 49-79.

⁶ The use of the name ‘Macedonia’ by the newly established state in the north of Greece, the persistence of the Greek Orthodox Church on the recording of the religion in the new identity cards and finally the participation of immigrant pupils as color-bearer at the marches during the national commemorations, caused numerous political conflicts, rallies and protests in the Greek society by the turn of the century; See **Giannis Gianoulopoulos**, ‘*I evgenis mas tyflosis...*’ *Exoteriki politiki ke ‘ethnika themata’ apo tin ita tou 1897 eos ti Mikrasiatiki Katastrofi*, Athens: Vivliorama 1999 (especially the introduction) and **Vasilis Lambropoulos**, ‘I diekdikisi ton ikonon se mia ikoniki epoxi’, *To Vima tis Kyriakis*, 07-01-2001.

⁷ On personal homepages see among others: **Daniel Chandler**, *Personal Home Pages and the Construction of Identities on the Web*, 1998, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/webident.html>, accessed at 16/07/04; **Steven Rubio**, ‘Home Page’, *Bad Subjects* 24: 1996, <http://web.archive.org/web/19961018045800/http://english-www.hss.cmu.edu/bs/24/rubio.html>, accessed at 16/07/04; **Nicola Döring**, “Personal Home Pages on the Web: A Review of Research”, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Culture* 7/3: 2002, <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue3/doering.html>, accessed at 17/07/04; **Marcia J Bates** and Shaojun Lu, ‘An exploratory profile of personal home pages: Content, design, metaphors’, *Online & CD ROM Review*, 21/6: 1997, 331-340; **Hugh Miller**, *The hypertext home: Images and metaphors of home on World Wide Web Home pages*, 1999, <http://ess.ntu.ac.uk/miller/cyberpsych/homeWeb.htm>, accessed at 16/07/04.

⁸ On the familiarization of the Greek society with the Internet technologies (1995-1997) see **Mitsos Bilalis**, “The Internet as a Cultural Object. Perception of the New and the Technological in Greece during the ‘90s” in O. Spassov and C. Todorov (eds.) *New Media in South East Europe*, Sofia: SOEMZ 2003, 185-207.

supplementary procedures, each one testing from a different standpoint the limits of national hypostatization into a meta-national framework. In other words, my intention is to investigate the mechanisms of a double-layered cultural production:

- the production of an *extensive nostalgia* for the Greek past in the public sphere;
- the *intensive materialization* of the symbolic products of that nostalgia (images, sounds, discourses) in ‘private’ spaces created by the autobiographical technologies of the personal homepages.⁹

However, before proceeding into the examination of Greek personal homepages as discursive or visual topoi of rearrangements of the national fantasies, it would be necessary to point out some issues concerning the owners, the layout and the technological requirements of these webpages.

The research was based on the analysis of around 700 personal homepages, hosted by 17 providers in the period 1995-2003;¹⁰ 24% of them were available only in English, whereas 52% were offered in bilingual or even multilingual versions.¹¹ The 70% of the owners were male, while their age varied from 9 to 57 years old (at least as far as the age could be verified on a webpage). Co-estimating the age, the professional profile and the marital status, the owners could be classified in three basic categories:

- Pupils or students
- Young –mostly single– professionals
- Married with children, aged 35-55¹².

⁹ On personal webpages as autobiographical forms of narrating the nation see **Linda Leung**, “Where am I and who are ‘we’?: Self-representation and the intersection of gender and ethnicity on the Web” *First Monday*, 8/10: 2003, http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue8_10/leung/, accessed at 16/07/2004 and **Aida Hozic**, ‘Hello my name is...: articulating loneliness in a digital Diaspora’, *Afterimage* 28/4: 2001, 21-22.

¹⁰ The research was based on the 674 addresses included in the Greek net-pointer ‘Pathfinder’, under the category ‘Users’ pages’, (<http://guide.pathfinder.gr/guide?category=177&parent=10>, last time accessed at 20/07/2004), as well as on 44 other personal webpages, not included in that pointer.

¹¹ Usually on Greek and English; however I found 2 cases on Greek and Albanian and 7 cases using three or more languages.

¹² The numbers fit in with the estimations of most researches regarding the profile of the ‘average net-user’ in Greece, realized during 1996-2002. See, for example, the two researches of Metron Analysis for 2000: “I christes tou Internet stin Elada” (26/9-4/10/2000, http://www.metronanalysis.gr/gr/polls/pub4351/index_files/frame.htm, accessed at 19/07/2004) and “Profil christon Internet” (21-27/6/2000, http://www.metronanalysis.gr/gr/polls/pub4321/index_files/frame.htm, accessed at 19/07/2004).

The motivations for developing a personal homepage were not the same for each one of these 700 cases; yet, after being hung on the Net, all of them had been standardized serving mainly one or more of the following purposes: entertainment, provision of information around a specific issue, exchange of electronic archives and curricula, publication of curriculum vitae or other personal/familial data, declaration of political and philosophical viewpoints and exposition of the owner's homeland.

Additionally, the content of the 'digital home' of each one of the owners was strongly depended on their varying programming skills or their overall 'electronic' experience; the majority of the personal homepages, developed by digitally 'illiterate' users, contained texts, simple graphics and just few images, usually copied from other sites. However, the more the owner worked on his personal page, the more he got obsessed and tried to improve the visual elements of his site;¹³ in this case, their first care was usually the digitalization of the existing family or personal photographic archives as well as the collection of new visual material.

Besides the numerous similarities (gender, age, social profile, aims, design), the most striking characteristic, omnipresent in almost all the pages I have studied, was the insistent 'presence of the past'. In particular, in the period 1995-2000, it was almost impossible to find even a single personal homepage without a textual or visual reference to a specific –personal, collective or even national– aspect of the past.

In addition, in 64% of the webpages, the owner included information and data about the particular geographical area where he/she was born, studied, lived, traveled to or even recently visited; in these cases, Geography was interwoven with Memory and History through constantly repeated narrative modules: descriptions of landscapes full of ethnoromantic comments; rough notes intending to claim the importance of a village or a town in the continuum of the national time; digital postcards reproducing the tourist stereotypes concerning Greek nature; photographs extracted from the family album and inserted in webpages where the national anthem was played as a background sound.

Thus, the first Greek 'homes' in cyberspace seemed trapped into the web of the same nostalgic aura that also prevailed at the 'offline' public sphere in Greece just

¹³ Changes through time and the consequently extension of 'digital literacy' of the user can be detected on about 140 personal pages. In these cases, the former versions of the sites has been studied through the search engine at www.archive.org.

before the turn of the 20th century. In this conjecture, the *pastness* of the Greek personal webpages seemed quite inevitable.

Furthermore, the nostalgic obsession with the past, confirmed in most Greek homepages, could also be inscribed into a broader, inter-national, context. Since 1970's *nostalgia* has been researched in depth from different disciplines (e.g. history, critical theory, cultural sociology, memory studies, post-communist studies),¹⁴ and has been considered as one of the principal cultural conditions of the late modernity. This interdisciplinary theoretical framing of nostalgia has already included the study of nostalgic yearning for the national past in cyberspace; according to some theorists, the longing for a 'homeland' –always *virtual* in modernity, always suspended between the actual and the imaginary–¹⁵ has already taken a *physical* shape in postmodern cyberspace, where "...desires and memories converge ... [and] an imagining community materializes through the ritualized performance of a handful of myths ..."¹⁶

Thus, the longing for a 'Greek' home in cyberspace could be conceived as a junction point of local as well as global cultural attitudes, prevailed during the last decades of the 20th century. In this context, the study of nostalgia on the Greek personal webpages, by interrelating the historical and cultural framework of the late modernity with Greek politics and ideology, contributes to a further understanding of the latter.

In any case, either national or trans-national, either Greek or global, nostalgia is primarily visual. According to many theoretical conceptualisations, nostalgia is nesting mainly into contemporary 'surface image', that is the product of other images, constantly pasted together through the cultural technology of the *pastiche*.¹⁷ Within

¹⁴ On cultural criticism and nostalgia see **Andrew Nestingen**, 'Nostalgias and Their Publics: The Finnish Film Boom, 1999-2001', *Scandinavian Studies*, 75/4, 553-54; On nostalgia from the standpoint of the sociology of culture see **Fred Davis**, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, New York: The Free Press, 1979 and, 'Nostalgia, identity and the current nostalgia wave', *Journal of Popular Culture*, II: 1977, 414-424; on memory and nostalgia in the post-coldwar period see among others **Istvan Rev**, 'Parallel Autopsies', *Representations*, 49: 1995, 15-40.

¹⁵ **Svetlana Boym**, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books 2001, xvi.

¹⁶ **Abril Trigo**, 'Cybernation (Or, La Patria Cibernetica)', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, v.12/1: 2003, 108.

¹⁷ The interrelation between image-technology-postmodernity-nostalgia was first conceptualized through the notion of pastiche by **Fredric Jameson** (*Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke UP 1991, 17-20). However, even when the hermeneutical approaches on nostalgia had been quite differentiated from the one of Jameson –like in the case of L. Hutcheon- the interweaving between image, technology and nostalgia remained crucial for the analysis: '... nostalgia requires the availability of evidence of the past, and it is precisely the electronic and mechanical reproduction of images of the past that plays such an important role in the structuring of the nostalgic

this 'surface image', the national past is disassociated from its historiographic connotations and is recontextualized as an individualized memory in order to be consumable by the new –yet trans-national- audiences.¹⁸

Consequently, if the Greek personal webpages of the last decade were developed within a globalized and mainly visual 'web of nostalgia', then the focus of the analysis should shift from the text to the images; if the first Greek cyber-homes indeed sheltered nostalgic attitudes, then these should be detected better behind the graphics, the image files, the 'gif's and the jpg's' than the paragraphs and the words.

Nostalgia between the background and the foreground

Dimitris R., '*...born in Argos, Peloponnese but living now in a beautiful island named Zakynthos*', middle-aged, hosted on his son's webpage, decorated the splash screen of his personal homepage with a big Greek flag placed between the initial letters of his full name. In the background, the national anthem was played every time a user visited his site.¹⁹

Konstantinos D.Z., inhabitant of Athens but born in the village Gorgopotamos, in Fthiotis, younger than Dimitris, also illustrated the splash screen of his website with a Greek flag situated beside the name of his village.²⁰ In the background a map of Greece was 'tiled', repeating itself until the entire screen to be covered.

Vangelis (Greek name) or Bledi (Albanian name) N. used in the splash screen two flags: an Albanian and a Greek one.²¹ Born in Permetit, South Albania, and grown up in Ierapetra, Crete, he was 17 years old when he first hung his page on the Net. The way Vangelis/Bledi welcomed the visitors at his virtual home modified according to the flag they choose to navigate into the site: at the Greek version, the music of *Zorba the Greek* was played; at the Albanian one, an eagle –the national emblem of Albania– covered the page while the national anthem of Albania was played.

imagination today, furnishing it with the possibility of "compelling vitality." Thanks to CD ROM technology and, before that, audio and video reproduction, nostalgia no longer has to rely on individual memory or desire: it can be fed forever by quick access to an infinitely recyclable past' (Linda Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern', University of Toronto English Library, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>, 1998, accessed at 16/07/2004).

¹⁸ Nestingen, 'Nostalgias and Their Publics: The Finnish Film Boom, 1999-2001', 558.

¹⁹ <http://angelos.joyhost.gr/dimrap/index.html>, accessed at 17/07/04.

²⁰ <http://gorgopotamos.batcave.net/index38.htm>, accessed at 17/07/04.

²¹ http://www.geocities.com/baggelis_natsos, accessed at 16/07/04.

Most of the personal homepages started in quite a similar way as the three examples mentioned above; the usage of national symbols on the front page was the typical entry into a Greek personal webpage in the period 1995-2000; yet, the similarities do not end here.

Beneath the development of these three webpages, like in hundreds others cases, underlay the owner's primary expectation: to 'speak' in cyberspace about another space; a space recalled by an anamnesis; a space of an exiled or a refugee or even a fugitive; a space, above all, which could help the developer to deal with the first –yet essential– challenge of cyberspace: the challenge of *becoming situated* at a new informational chronotope, where the canons established by Geography and History seemed to be ignored.²²

Thus, the concern of situating subjectivity into the new technological context was always two-dimensional: spatial as well as temporal. Almost in the totality of the personal pages studied here, time and space formed an inseparable entity; every reference to a particular place provided at once chronological coordinates, capturing this place in a specific Time. Yet, the understanding of time in these cases was a subjective one; partly historical, partly mythological, quasi-national and strongly local.²³ In that way, the nostalgic longing for an ideal 'Greek' home in cyberspace could be considered as an effort '...to obliterate history and turn it to private and collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition'.²⁴

The personification of national time and space constituted a common strategy in the development of most Greek personal homepages. This strategy formed the entire framework, within which each owner was choosing his own mnemonic material in order to construct his personal web-space. Furthermore, the setting of the various

²² For a survey of the main issues concerning the situation of subjectivity on cyberspace see **Athina Athanasiou**, 'Ethnografia sto Diadiktio I to Diadiktio os ethnografia: Psifiaki technologia, dinitiki/ikoniki pragmatikotita ke politismiki kritiki', *Epitheorisi Kinonikon Erevnon* (forthcoming).

²³ For example, the webpage of Z., owner of a souvenir shop in Mykonos, started with this text: 'I will try to write down some things I know about this island, my birthplace. Some time ago, a friend asked me why I recorded this info. By the time he asked me, I, honestly, could not have an answer; I suppose I wanted just to describe the way I see my place today, but starting from the unknown yesterday ...' in <http://www.zougas.com/index2.html>, accessed at 16/07/04; 57 years old Konstantinos E.G., agriculturalist, who tried to reconstruct on the Web the genealogy of his family since 1974, made the following statement: 'The development of a homepage concerning a typical petit bourgeois family of the Greek province, is inevitably useless for the broader audiences... However, I believe that it will be pleasant return to the past for my family, our relatives and friends ...' in <http://www.goumasfamily.gr/index.html>, accessed at 17/07/04.

²⁴ **Boym**, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

chosen items into the different parts of a webpage formed finally concrete patterns, repeated in the majority of the cases. The common arrangement of the mnemonic materials constituted a key element in the study of Greek personal homepages. What was crucial for this structural uniformity was the setting of the visual (images, symbols and graphics) -more than any other (textual or acoustic)- genre of reference to the past; within the influx of information and data spared in hundreds of personal homepages, the optical material – classified and following concrete patterns – formed navigation plots within which a *visual web-topology of Greekness* could be detected.

The tendency of using main national symbols (flags, maps, etc) as background has already been mentioned. At this point, the situation of different and sometimes controversial visual politics on the past at the different layers of digital pages will be stressed.

On the webpages of Konstantinos D.Z., for example, almost all of the constituent elements of the site concerning v. Gorgopotamos' past were provided as images. Even the collected textual material (poems, folk stories, anecdotes, a list of folk object d' art, correspondences etc.) was digitalized as image files. These digital images, along with photos extracted from the personal archive of the owner or contributed by his fellow-villagers especially for the site, were huddled upon other images: maps, flags, romantic backdrops, graphics imitating traditional visual patterns, etc. Images and more images were taken up almost every pixel of Konstantinos' personal page reducing drastically even the slightest possibility of any textual reference to the '... numerous memories [or] the great History' of this village.²⁵

Even in the several pages dedicated to the most well known event of the village's history, namely the blowing up of Gorgopotamos viaduct in 1942,²⁶ the written text was limited to some comments on the enclosed images and graphics. For Konstantinos, written text seemed unnecessary even in a page entitled 'Documents-Records', where correspondence of that period was digitalized and exhibited actually

²⁵ <http://www.gorgopotamos.batcave.net/index38.htm>, accessed at 17/07/04.

²⁶ This event made the village of Gorgopotamos the par excellence symbolic place of the Greek Resistance during Second World War. On Greek Resistance see among others **Hagen Fleiser**, *Stemma ke Svastika. I Ellada tis Katochis ke tis Antistasis 1941-1944*, A-B, Athens: Papazisis; **Mark Mazower** *Stin Ellada tou Hitler, I empiria tis Katochis*, Athens: Alexandraia 1993 and **Giannis Iatridis** (ed.), *I Ellada sti dekaetia 1940-1950. Ena ethnos se krisi*, Athens: Themelio1984.

as image accompanied with brief explanatory texts.²⁷ The historical event which was recorded in the documents (the blowing up of Gorgopotamos viaduct during the Second World War), was already embedded in the official historical narrative: Numerous volumes and various studies on this topic had been composed; additionally, the commemoration of the event since the 80's had given an end to dramatic political conflicts and painful questions about the past.

Thus, when Konstantinos created his personal homepage, the history of Gorgopotamos during the years of Greek Resistance had already been written; for him, it was only the collection of different kind of images that was left –and this was the only possible way to disrupt the already solid meaning of History. The more images he could collect, the better he would intrude –with his own images – into the already definite iconography of 1942 provided by the official historiography; this would be his own way of *re-domesticating the past*,²⁸ this would be Konstantinos' way of extracting his village's past from the jurisdiction of History; of 'emancipating' it from an already monophonic narrative and relocating it into the polyphony of subjectivity and local memory.

Not all of Konstantinos collected images could finally function towards this emancipatory perspective; the ones that *could* were placed on the *foreground* of the electronic pages. These images did not serve as representations of some past event. On the contrary, like '... *stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven fabric of modern historical narratives*',²⁹ they attracted the gaze, provoking the visitor to discover inside them the 'hidden' and the 'unmemorized'. One example: a black-and-white photo supposedly representing the moment of the first executions was the focal point on a webpage referring to the Nazi's retaliation; on this webpage, there was no other textual reference to this important historical event in the exception of some words:

*An Italian officer took this photo. This officer gave the film for development to the photographer Koutsodontis, in Lamia. The photographer realized the value of the photo and kept a copy.*³⁰ (Original emphasis)

²⁷ <http://www.gorgopotamos.batcave.net/index49.htm>, accessed at 17/07/04.

²⁸ See also Elizabeth Franko, *Materializing the Absence After September 11th*, 2002, 8, <http://fargo.itp.tsoa.nyu.edu/~emf225/web/virtual.pdf>, accessed at 17/07/04.

²⁹ *Visualizing hidden pasts. History, heritage and the photography in the city*, Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), 2003, <http://www.ru.ac.za/institutes/iser/research/heritages/article1.htm>, accessed at 16/07/04.

³⁰ <http://www.gorgopotamos.batcave.net/index43.htm>, accessed at 17/07/04.

In the case of this webpage, what really *did* matter was neither the referent of the photograph nor the retaliation as a historical event but the photograph itself; a photograph that could restore the Past as a precious materiality –this time collectible and possessed by the individual. Thus, the focus has been shifted from the specific event and its ‘visible’ protagonists to those ‘hidden’, who had reproduced and turned the photo into a valuable mnemonic sign.

However, except the kind of images that has just been analyzed, there was also an amount of collected visual material that corresponded to the widespread symbolic forms of Greekness at the end of 20th century: flags, national symbols, Greek landscapes; this material, limited to the *background*, was serving as a digital ‘shadow’ to the ‘real’ images – those on the *foreground*, vehicles of a significant and contested past. In fact, two ‘nostalgias’ were fighting one another: a *restorative* one, concerning the recalling of an uncontested glorious national past through its main visual manifestations and a *reflective* one which ‘...tends toward the subjective, [and] does not aim at the reconstruction of the past but underscores memory, and ... accepts the contingency of subjects' relation to the past’.³¹ In other words, the structural division of the entire visual space of a website in background and foreground, helped, in this case, Konstantinos to differentiate his nostalgic yearning: the restorative elements, located at the backstage of his digital ‘home’, seemed finally to be subjected to a reflective version of nostalgia, committed rather to the Local than the National, to Memory than History.

In the case of Vangelis/Bledi N., the initial pretensions of his personal webpage were quite different. Having ‘two homelands’ (Albania and Greece), Vangelis/Bledi set up his virtual home in two lingual versions. Trying hard to make compatible the content of the two sections of his site, he attempted to deal electronically with his liminal ethnic experience; in both versions, he attempted to develop the same categories and design their content in a similar way. Thus, Vangelis/Bledi used analogous categories trying to present his controversial ethnic

³¹ Nestingen, ‘Nostalgias and Their Publics: The Finnish Film Boom, 1999-2001’, 555. On the distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia see **Boym**, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41-45. For a typology of nostalgia regarding in particular the analysis of images and graphics see **Tony Heward**, ‘Revivalism and Cultural Shift: British Graphic Design Since 1945’, *Design Issues* 15/3: 1999, 17-33 (here the main distinction is between ‘revival’ and ‘retro’).

experiences as parallel and supplementary: Cretan folk songs (*mantinada*) next to Albanic poetry; jokes concerning Greeks and Turks next to jokes concerning socialism and capitalism, etc.³² Ethnic symbols, sounds, texts and every kind of stereotypical tokens of the two nationalities filled to capacity –yet levelheaded – the corresponding pages. As a result, symbols that in everyday life were used to keep apart Greeks from Albanians, in Vangelis/Bledi’s webpages had lost their conflictual content becoming a mere décor made by material of a *passé* past– distant, thus harmless; this ‘very pastness of the past’³³ dissolved through its inaccessibility the slightest sense of historicity of the used ethnic material; as a consequence, Vangelis/Bledi seemed to obtain finally a virtual home, which provide a *trans-national locality* to his owner; a non-racist home, rearranging a xenophobic and racial present through a productive invention of an uncontested past;³⁴

Yet, if that kind of *cyber-nationality*³⁵, situated on the background of his personal homepage, seemed capable of ensuring a ‘harmonious hybridity’ for the nineteen-year old emigrant in the trans-national cyberspace, other images, situated on the foreground, threatened this harmony. One example: in the Albanian version, there was a webpage dedicated to the national football team of Albania; although the page started with general information about the Albanian football team, it was actually focused on the win against the Greek national team, on 11/10/2000.³⁶ Scrolling down the page, the initial moderate style of the presentation was giving place to a gradually increasing enthusiasm: more and more pictures capturing the goals of the Albanian team as well as the final triumphant celebrations were displayed. Additionally, in this specific part of the presentation, the page was devoid of any background or textual material. In this page, Vangelis/Bledi N. was becoming just Bledi N.: one of the hundred thousands Albanian immigrants in Greece, celebrating, through their football win, their own small victory against the xenophobic Greek society of the 90’s.

³² Compare, for example, http://www.geocities.com/baggelis_natsos/mandinades_index.html, accessed at 16/07/04 and http://www.geocities.com/baggelis_natsos/Poezia.html, accessed at 16/07/04.

³³ Hutcheon, ‘Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern’.

³⁴ See also Tamara S. Wagner, ‘Nostalgia, Historicity, Hybridity: Representations of Asian Identities in the Historical Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro and Catherine Lim’, *Atlantic Literary Review*, 2/4: 2001, 154-165.

³⁵ With the term cyber-nationality we refer to those performative aspects of digital spatiality, determined by the ability of the subject to collect and exhibit digitally the mnemonic materials of ethnicity. Similar is the approach of cybernation in Trigo, ‘Cybernation (Or, La Patria Cibernetica)’, especially pp. 99-100.

³⁶ http://www.geocities.com/baggelis_natsos/kombetarja.htm, accessed at 16/07/04.

In Vangelis/Bledi's personal webpage, therefore, foreground and background constituted the topological limits of an extremely intensive *visual dialectic on cyber-nationality*: On the background, symbols of different national pasts, sharpened by a peculiar kind of trans-national amnesia, were striving to be accommodated into the same cyber-home. On the foreground, the same symbols, penetrating into images of the present, were attempting to confirm a neo-nationalistic claim, a 'trojan nationalism'. According to A. Appadurai, this 'trojan nationalism' being '... the product of forced as well as voluntary diasporas, of mobile intellectuals as well as manual workers, of dialogues with hostile as well as hospitable states', can hardly 'be separated from the anguish of displacement, the nostalgia of exile...'³⁷

In the third example, the personal homepage of Dimitris R., the dialectics of cyber-nationality had reached their limits. Dimitris R. wanted to develop a webpage dedicated to the island of Zakynthos, where he lived with his family; he also started his site, filling the background with roughly-reproduced Greek flags, ancient coins, the sound of national anthem, etc. However, the images put on the foreground were far from trivial; on the contrary, most of them were professional snapshots of streets, villages, beaches, historical monuments or buildings of Zakynthos, accessible through detailed clickable maps. Hence, in a special unit named 'Zante photos' he mentioned that all the pictures came either from his personal collection or were offered by a friend of him, whom he constantly thanked, stressing her photographic skills as well as her competency in digital imaging.³⁸

Dimitris tried hard to deliver accurate representations of the island offering to the visitor a large number of shots taken from different angles –even photos taken from satellite could be found. As on the majority of Greek personal webpages characterized by the abundance of pictures of Greek landscapes, in this site too, time, or the historical past of the island, functioned just as an alternative angle to 'look at' Zakynthos: imaging the relics of a past time contributed to the overall scopophilic consumption of the island.³⁹ Thus, the few textual information concerning Zakynthos'

³⁷ Arjun Appadurai, 'Patriotism and Its Futures', *Public Culture* 5/3: 1993, 417.

³⁸ <http://angelos.joyhost.gr/dimrap/collection.htm>, accessed at 17/07/04. The only text written on this page was limited to the following paragraph: 'My good friend Eva K. from Duesseldorf has taken these photos on her last visit to Zakynthos and was kind enough to scan them for my web site. She is a really fancy photographer. Thank you very much Eva!'

³⁹ For example, the same scopophilic desire can be traced clearly in the textual introduction of a webpage about the island of Samos; there, the owner explains why he included into his personal homepage so many images from the island: 'Is not easy to be familiar with Samos, ... it is an

history that Dimitris decided to include in his site, banished from the foreground to the background; history as a nostalgic, written or official narrative became ‘General Info’ exposed on the same page with categories such as ‘Entertainment’, ‘Transportation’, ‘Accommodations’.⁴⁰

Yet, another ‘history’, much more critical for the construction of the subjectivity, laid on the foreground. On a section of his website, entitled ‘Family Album’, Dimitris lamented his past youth; here, the owner exhibited family photos, juxtaposing the past to the present: snapshots of Dimitris youth were placed next to some contemporary photos, his baby son next to his adult son, or photos of his parents who died ‘without having seen this electronic album’; in other words, the owner expended his nostalgic mood on the foreground of his personal page tempting to recreate a more personal, intimate, version of the past. Moreover, in another section named ‘Slide show’, the same pictures were exhibited again, this time in a more elaborated form, using advanced electronic technologies;⁴¹ the show was accompanied by the sound of an old Greek song yearning for previous –yet lost– loves.

Thus, Dimitris R. has constructed his personal webpage as a ‘grave site’ of his lost youth.⁴² Attempting to build such a monument, he tried to use visual material deriving from different pasts: national, local and personal. However, this visual material was classified and hosted in different layers of his webpages: symbols and images deriving from the prevailing national narrative were gradually expelled from the foreground; their post has been occupied by other images indicating a subjective perception of time and space. The narrative power stemmed from the latter would force the owner to admit the banality of the first. The confrontation of the images on background with the images on foreground left no place for a dialectic synthesis: confronting the scopophilic pleasure of the subjectively experienced time in cyberspace, ‘patriotism’ and its images seemed insufficient even to the developer of

extraordinary place. There is not enough time to discover visually the island, not enough time to be satisfied. A glance into this earthly Paradise... is enough to capture your heart...’ See <http://homepages.pathfinder.gr/vondik/>, accessed at 17/07/04.

⁴⁰ <http://angelos.joyhost.gr/dimrap/zante.html>, accessed at 17/07/04.

⁴¹ Experiments with technologies of imaging (e.g. slide-show softwares, video applications or special software–like Macromedia Flash- for a visualized web development) characterized a great number of the personal homepages, I have studied.

⁴² On personal homepages as ‘pacifiers’ or ‘grave sites’, see also **Hozic**, ‘*Hello my name is ...*: articulating loneliness in a digital Diaspora’, 22.

this personal homepage: Beneath the dreadful graphic of the Greek flag on the splash screen of his virtual home, Dimitris would be enforced to mention:

*'Dear visitor. You are kindly requested to forgive my patriotism to start my homepage with the flag and the National Anthem of my county ...'*⁴³

Conclusion

This article dealt with the Greek personal homepages of the period 1995-2003 as materialities produced in a concrete historical and cultural context. Greek personal webpages have been materialized as a 'glocal' phenomenon within the context of two crucial historical processes; the first is the important differentiation of visual semantics of the national self-representation during the last years of the twentieth century in Greece; the second is the 'return of nostalgia' as a dominant form of historical consciousness at a global level during the post-coldwar period.

The marks of these historical processes were apparent in almost every one of the 700 digital Greek 'homes' that have been visited; thus it became possible to distinguish –within this heterogeneous informative space– shared priorities, tensions and needs. In these webpages, the concept of Greekness was constructed, almost exclusively, as a visual and not textual narrative. Becoming *ontologically* visual, these contemporary forms of narrating the nation stress the possibility that we are no longer in front of an intersection between history and heritage;⁴⁴ on the contrary, 'what we are witnessing, is the entry of the domain of visibility into the traditionally verbal and written arena of history'.⁴⁵ At the turn of the century, the Greek nation, reorganized in order to confront the challenges of trans-nationality, seemed to desire to

'...delete history and memory from its hard drive as hangovers from the old world orders ...[Yet] history and memory, always incomplete and unfinished, circling around each other, refuse to be

⁴³ <http://angelos.joyhost.gr/dimrap/index.html>, accessed at 17/07/04.

⁴⁴ The interrelation between history and heritage was researched in depth during the 'heritage debate', see among others: **David Lowenthal**, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, London: Viking 1996 and **Robert Hewison**, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, London: Methuen 1987. An echo of the debate could be traced also in recent literature, concerning electronic media and contemporary forms of historical consciousness see, for example, **Karen Strassler**, 'Stories of Culture: Difference, Nation and Childhood in "Children of a Thousand Islands", an Indonesian Television Series', paper presented at the *Transcultural Images and Visual Anthropology Workshop*, Australian National University, 1999, <http://cc.joensuu.fi/sights/karens.htm> accessed at 16/07/2004.

⁴⁵ *Visualizing hidden pasts. History, heritage and the photography in the city*, <http://www.ru.ac.za/institutes/iser/research/heritages/article1.htm>, accessed at 16/07/04.

expunged. They appear in new forms with new faces and interfaces, as digital imaginaries... [Such a digital/visual entity seems] part history, part future, always provisional, always nomadic, constantly changing to meet the political exigencies of the present, which then becomes a nodal point, a confluence of the past and the future.’⁴⁶

However, since the images of Greekness on personal homepages functioned as nodal points, their power was not consisted in the capacity to point out similarities, but rather in their ability to stress crucial *differences*. The analysis of the Greek personal webpages reminds us that, just as a nation constitutes a plural and not a singular or monophonic terrain of meaning, the images of the nation –no matter if they have been digital, analogical, or simply imagined, no matter if they have been produced in a stadium, on the TV screen or in a digitalized version of the Home–constitute multilayered spaces, within which nation becomes an object of claim and not a mere representation.

The attitude towards the Greek past, as it emerged from the analysis of the personal webpages, proved also to be multileveled, constituted by different tropes of imaging the ‘Greek’: restorative and reflective aspects of nostalgia, ‘trojan’ versions of neo-nationalism, regressive forms of trans-national amnesias, scopophilic localisms, mnemonic romanticisms, etc. However, despite the numerous and different attitudes towards the past, the struggle for the meaning of Greekness in personal webpages proved to have common topological limits: the widespread visual settings of Greekness were mainly located in the backdrop of the electronic pages; on the other hand, images related mainly to a subjective –thus critically regarding the established national narratives– notion of the past, were located on the foreground of the pages. Neither the developers nor the narratives about the past, but the digital image itself had finally posed these limits; since the battle took place between the background and the foreground of a personal webpage, it had to compromise with the *dialectics of contemporary imaging*.

Thus, what proved to be a common feature of the personal webpages, was that, testing the limits of old *and* new forms of Greekness, their owners were simultaneously discovering the power *and* the limits of the contemporary visual culture. Experimenting with images, they were gradually discovering that the

⁴⁶ **John Hess and Patricia R. Zimmermann**, ‘Transnational/National Digital Imaginaries: CD-ROMs, Web Sites and Digital Video’, *Mesh: A Journal of Electronic Culture*, “Cyberbully”, 13: 1999-2000, 2, 4, http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh_1999/articles/transnational.pdf, accessed at 16/07/2004.

stereotyped images of Greekness –the ones that have been continuously circulated and exchanged during the '90s– could only function as a background of their identity. Within a trans-national space like Internet –but also like the stadiums that hosted the sport events of the ‘great summer’ 2004– flags, pins, maps, t-shirts, in other words all those visual signs of an uncontested Greekness, located on the background, could only offer *indexical services* to their owner; the old images of nationality could not anymore function as an actual location, but rather as ‘a type of location’.⁴⁷

The real location where identity could be constructed is now defined by the ability of the subject to produce new images consumable by ‘intermediate’ forms of trans-national identity (sport publics, internet communities, etc.).⁴⁸ These images would not point out to a unique Greekness anymore; on the contrary, their power lied in their ability to translate the content of Greekness into so many ‘languages’ as the number of subjects that were claiming it; on their ability to ‘... consume an indefinite, subjective version of a past, ... a memory of the past that is significant in that it is a new way of remembering ... in a world of global interaction’.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ On photographic backdrop as indexical system for contemporary forms of identity see **Appadurai**, ‘The colonial backdrop’, *Afterimage* 24/5: 1997, 4-7.

⁴⁸ On public as an ‘intermediate’ zone of identity between the individual and the nation, see **Warner**, “Publics and Counterpublics”.

⁴⁹ **Nestingén**, ‘Nostalgias and Their Publics: The Finnish Film Boom, 1999-2001’, 557.