

Researching the Other, Transfers of Self.

Ego-Histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia

International Conference

8-9 December 2011

University Paris XIII

This conference seeks to bring together the 'ego-histoires' of Indigenous scholars working on Australian and European studies as well as those of settler and European scholars engaged in the field of Australian Indigenous Studies. 'Ego-histoire', a term introduced by French historian Pierre Nora in the 1987 collection *Essais d'ego Histoire*, draws on studies of personal memory and its relationship to public history. In recent years there has been a growth of interest in life story research within a wide range of academic disciplines and contexts (eg the Auto/Biography network of the British Sociological Association; oral history, historical anthropology). This work in turn reflects the concerns of critical historiography since the 1980s that emphasizes the ambiguous relationship between the past and the writing of history and draws on some of the productive exchanges between the fields of history, literary studies and anthropology in the 1990s and 2000s.

Nora claimed ego-histoire as a 'new genre, for a new age of historical consciousness'. Major figures such as Georges Duby, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Mona Ozouf, Maurice Agulhon and Annie Kriegel are among the twenty or more prominent French scholars to engage in book length projects in this area. The works of key thinkers including Bourdieu and Lacan draw in different ways from this approach. The 2001 collection 'European Ego-histoires: Historiography and the Self, 1970-2000', edited by Luisa Passerini and Alexander Geppert (special issue of *Historien: A Review of the Past and other Stories*) established ego-histoire as a 'new' European tradition.

Ego-histoire differs from conventional autobiography in that different life histories are printed and read side by side forming a series analogous to the serial data featured in many Annales school monographs for example. Whereas autobiography highlights the unique and personal, the essays from Nora's ego-histoire collection invite comparisons and stress the relationship between the personal and collective identity. Works in the area of ego-histoire demonstrate the close connection between individual and national identity and the inextricable intertwining of both objective and subjective evidence, understood to be of different but equal value. At its best the collective exploration of life history can recognise and value experiences that have been silenced or help come to terms with difficult individual and national aspects of the past.

In Australia there is something of a tradition of Indigenous Australians telling about their lives to convey history. This has resulted in a double-sided effect: on the one hand, these life histories provide valuable Indigenous perspectives on Australian history; on the other hand, they expose Indigenous lives to an extent that is hardly comparable to that of non-Indigenous scholars. Yet the life experiences and social background of non-Indigenous scholars in Australia exert an important influence on

scholarship—what has driven them to practice Indigenous Studies and how do they relate their ‘selves’ to their studies?

Moreover, the pressure on Indigenous scholars to tell about their lives has led to the paradox of them being thought to write only about ‘Indigenous’ issues. Indigenous perceptions on European history have thereby often been neglected—what motivates Indigenous intellectuals to write about Europe and how do they relate their ‘selves’ to such studies? Finally, there are some European scholars who, with considerable geographical distance, have been working on Australian Indigenous Studies—what is their incentive to research in Indigenous Studies and how do they relate their ‘selves’ to their studies?

Increasingly Australian Indigenous Studies are practised beyond Australian shores, particularly so in Europe. The focus on writing the self and other provides a methodologically innovative tool to understand the mechanisms and different power-relations in scholarship and throws light on the motivations of researchers to engage in Australian Indigenous Studies both in Europe and in Australia.

This conference provides researchers with an opportunity to present their reflections on their selves in relation to their studies in a supportive and respectful environment and involves three major areas: non-Indigenous Australian and European researchers of Indigenous Studies as well as Indigenous researchers of Australian and European Studies.

Please submit abstract of approximately 200-250 words and a short bio line by 30 September 2011 to all of the conference organisers:

Vanessa Castejon: castejon.vanessa@wanadoo.fr

Anna Cole: annacole.uk@gmail.com

Oliver Haag: oliver.haag@transcultural-studies.org

Karen Hughes: Karen.Hughes@monash.edu