

Visions of power: How to explain pictures to a dead hare

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Abstract

The opening and closing ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games manifested in visual terms the country's perception of cultural and national identity. Both ceremonies constituted eloquent evidence of the symbolic power myths, along with ritual representations and orchestrated spectacles, hold in fabricating and enhancing collective memory. The visualized collective pride deriving exclusively from the cultural capital of the past – interwoven with the heroic legacy – was the predominant conceptual element in the opening ceremony of the 2004 Games. Nevertheless, its starkly divergent approach from that of the closing ceremony – in terms of structure, aesthetics, context, iconological components and symbolisms –, was particularly revealing of the awkwardness with which current Greek society confronts its empirical disconnect from its ancestral past. The sterilized visual narration of the opening ritual, juxtaposed with the bodily engagement, the immediacy and the spontaneity of the closing spectacle, evoked the explicit message that contemporary Greece maintained a close, empirical relationship only with its folk cultural manifestations and manners. In any case, what characterizes Modern Greece seems to be the “introverted perception” (Fischer, 2012:27) of its own culture that has prohibited the exploring of the unknown ‘other’, and has contributed decisively to the elusive aspiration of a fictitious society.