

## THE ATHENS DIALOGUES

The *Athens Dialogues*, the international interdisciplinary symposium which concluded on Saturday November 27, was a great success. Staged by the Onassis Foundation, the conference was the opening event of the Onassis Cultural Centre, the new cultural space which is to be officially inaugurated in early December.

The *Athens Dialogues* were held on November 24-27 and brought leading academics, researchers and intellectuals to Greece from around the world to engage in an open, public, multifaceted and creative dialogue on the ways in which Greek thought can contribute to the solution of the problems facing contemporary humanity, and on the place of Greek civilization in the societies of today. The *Dialogues* were conceived of and implemented as an interdisciplinary and diachronic event, which is how 80 distinguished speakers came to discuss a host of questions from different academic perspectives, and to come up with answers relating to contemporary problems like democracy and governance, identity and difference, quality of life, science and ethics, word and art, stories and histories.

The symposium was attended by over 1,700 people at the Onassis Cultural Centre itself, while another 11,000 watched proceedings unfold online as individuals users. The conference's live Web-link was visited 55,000 times over the four days, while the event was also relayed over the Internet in real time to 50 universities, museums and other venues around the world, from Mexico and Vancouver to Paris and the most far-flung corners of Greece.

Furthermore, over 1,500 written questions were received from the public—real and virtual—via e-mail, facebook and twitter, a significant number of which reached the section chairs, who incorporated them into the dialogues. The

questions that remain unanswered will be posted online and addressed in the ongoing electronic dialogue.

During the symposium's opening session, the President of the Organizing Committee, Professor George Babinotis, explained just how innovative the Onassis Foundation had been in organizing a conference of this sort, and how important its fresh and interdisciplinary approach to the most pressing issues of contemporary humanity is as a means of transcending the fragmentation of knowledge which is now the norm.

The closing session attempted a synthetic evaluation of the issues posed during the conference, with a constructive dialogue between the chairpersons of the thematic sections which also featured the participation of the celebrated philosopher and intellectual, Simon Critchley, on the prospects opening up for the future.

As the President of the Onassis Foundation, Dr Anthony S. Papadimitriou, whose personal vision the symposium is, said in his closing address, the *Athens Dialogues* surpassed its organizers' expectations and will be repeated in the future.

Dr Papadimitriou also said that: "the conference was a genuine success because it focused on the present and the future and not the past. That was the goal of the *Athens Dialogues* in 2010, and that will be the goal of the next *Dialogues* which—since as so many people have remarked, the *Athens Dialogues* could be called an Olympic Games for the intellect—will be held in four years' time and focus on "Greek civilization in an open dialogue with other cultures". This symposium succeeded, because it put the Internet to creative use, not as a source of information but as a means of networking academics involved with Greek culture, and of allowing literally thousands of people around the world to take an active part in its proceedings. Another reason we consider the *Dialogues* a success is that they successfully involved the different generations in an active and creative dialogue".



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