

**2020-21 Report on the ICLA Research Committee on Literature and Neuroscience
May 5, 2021**

Chair, Suzanne Nalbantian

Committee Members:

From Comparative Literature: Suzanne Nalbantian, Long Island University, NY; Donald Wehrs Auburn University, Alabama; John Burt Foster, George Mason University, Washington, D.C.; Peter Schneck, Osnabrück University, Germany; Peter Hanenberg, Catholic University of Portugal

From Neuroscience: Jean-Pierre Changeux, Kavli Institute (USCD) and Pasteur Institute (Paris); Paul Matthews, Imperial College, London; Robert Stickgold, Harvard University, MA

The main accomplishment of this committee this year, which has now reached its three-term limit, has been the acceptance for publication by Routledge Press of a volume to be entitled: *Cultural Memory: Neuroscience, Psychology and the Humanities*. Editors for this volume are the comparatists Donald Wehrs, Suzanne Nalbantian, and the neuropsychologist Don M. Tucker. Some of the chapters in this volume are written by members of this research committee, including Peter Hanenberg, Jean-Pierre Changeux, Suzanne Nalbantian and Donald Wehrs. This book builds upon work that began with a seed group of interdisciplinary scholars at two invaluable group sessions of this research committee in July 2016 directed by Suzanne Nalbantian for the 21st ICLA Congress in Vienna. Over time, the exploration of this topic developed further in scope, as new participants were added to the ongoing discussion. As a result, this next volume brings together humanists, neuroscientists, and social scientists in a cross-disciplinary exploration of the topic of cultural memory. It is significant in working against conceptually divided and fragmented approaches to understanding cultural memory. Because the subject of this volume is relevant to the study of cultures around the world, and to every era, it should reach an international audience in the ICLA--as reflected in the international range of contributors.

Interestingly, the topic had been partly addressed back in 1997 at the 15th ICLA congress in Leiden, which was devoted to the theme of “Literature as Cultural Memory,” focusing on “the role literature plays as a repository of culture.” But the topic has now been probed by the current ICLA research committee from a truly multidisciplinary perspective, enhanced by access to progress in the emerging field of cultural neuroscience. This outreach was not possible in the previous century. The international group of twenty contributors in various fields—including comparative literature, sociology, history, philosophy, neuroscience and neuropsychology—have now offered their views on this topic with fruitful disciplinary interchange.

This volume now follows the previous Oxford University Press volume, *Secrets of Creativity: What Neuroscience, the Arts and Our Minds Reveal*, which also emerged from work by this committee in the previous year. The paperback edition of that book appeared in 2020. These volumes are testimony to the tangible results of this research committee in bringing together comparative literature and neuroscience for the study of intricate topics that cannot be fully elucidated by any single discipline. This research committee has paved the way for future, highly productive interdisciplinary exchange.