



The Visual Cultures of Classical Greece

Prof. Dimitris Plantzos

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- Introduction [3/10]
- What is “Greek” about Greek art [17/10]
- **Nemea – Olympia – Delphi field trip [20-21/10]**
- Narrativity and story-telling [24/10]
- Monumentality [25/10]
- The visual cultures of Greek pottery [31/10]
- **National Museum class [10/11]**
- **Midterms [14/11]**
- Materiality [21/11]
- Agency [28/11]
- *Mimesis* [5/12]
- Realism [12/12]
- **Acropolis Museum class [15/12; 15:00-17:00]**

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Materiality

Reading:

Whitley 2018: 579-595 (in Smith & Plantzos).

Plantzos 2016: ch. 3.

Materiality:

- “thingly” quality of artifacts
- an object’s **self-value as inanimate thing**, enabling it to act as animate agent
- the **physical properties** of a cultural artifact affect the way the object is used
- artifacts, a priori perceived as passive and inert ‘creations’ subject to human volition, **have the capacity to interact with their makers**, users, or viewers
- The extent to which human lives are allowed to be ***entangled*** with the life of artifacts

Materiality: artifacts to things

- artifacts – objects **imbued with meanings** supposedly created by the humans that made them
- things – material entities with the capacity to **transform human experience** by determining behavior and identity through the properties inherent in them from their own make
- “symmetrical archaeology”: ‘impartial’, **non-humanist** approach to scientific methodology, encourages cross-disciplinarity by questioning the coherence of the conventional archaeological paradigm

Hodder, I., and G. Lucas. 2017. “The symmetries and asymmetries of human-thing relations. A dialogue.” *Archaeological Dialogues* 24:119-37.

Materiality: artifacts to things

- **reverse** of the hitherto accepted cultural flow from maker to viewer
- epistemological **shift** from innate, stable, and 'dead' objects to enmeshed, engaged, and entangled things which create 'continual flows of matter, energy and information' (Hodder)
- from emphasis on *the* meaning of the object ascribed during production, **to multiple / contradictory meanings**, created in hitherto undetected ways: engendered, embodied, mnemonic, sensorial

Euripides, *Ion* (c. 419-418 BC):

[...] *Look!* come see, the son of Zeus is killing the Lernean Hydra with a golden sickle; my dear, *look* at it!

I see it. And another near him, who is raising a fiery torch [...]

I am glancing around everywhere. See the battle of the giants, on the stone walls.

I am looking at it, my friends.

Do you *see* the one brandishing her gorgon shield against Enceladus?

I see Pallas, my own goddess. [...]

vv 184-215

Materiality: artifacts to things

- material culture – agent of social interaction (memory and sensual experience), not merely the product of humans
- Raymond Prier (*Phenomenology of Sight*): scholars insist on reading pre-classical Greece through an anachronistic dichotomy between subject and object (signifier and signified)
- contrary to the Platonic distinction between ideal forms and their material manifestations, seventh- and sixth-century aesthetics seem to maintain that abstract ideas become present ‘through the emotional and experiential commitment of the participants *and* an affective appearance from without’
- sights are indeed wonders to behold (*thaumata idesthai*) and images are not mere copies of an essential truth, but true and essential in themselves

Before *mimesis*

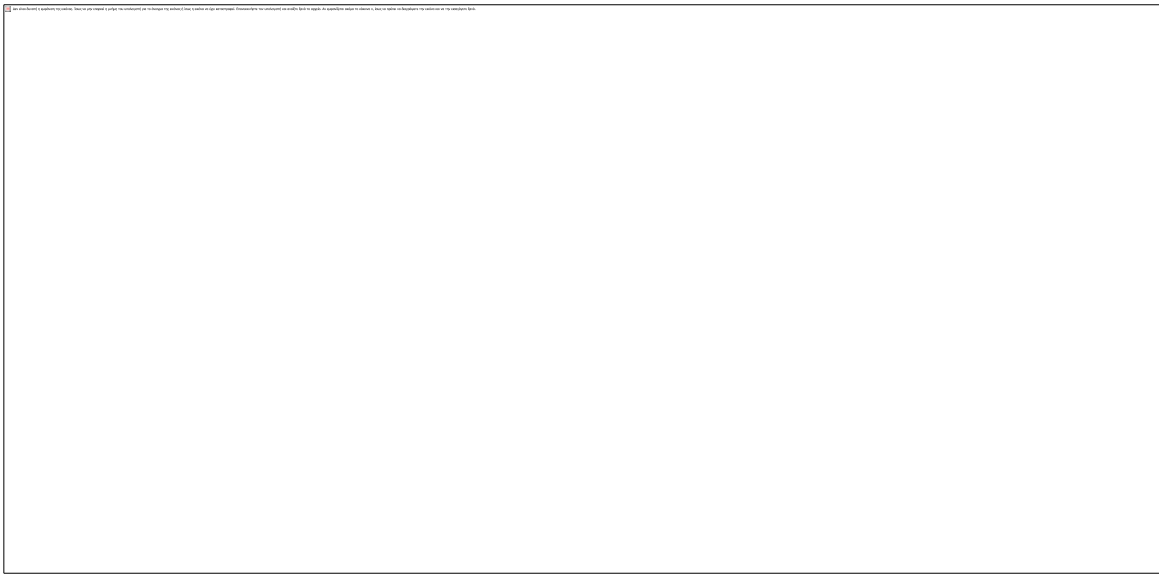
D. Plantzos, “Before mimesis: reflections on the early Greek technologies of looking”, *AURA* 2020.

Read paper [here](#).



ΜΙΚΑΝΔΡΩΝ ΜΑΜΕΘΕΚΕΜΕΚΕΚΟΓΟΠΠΟΧΕΑΙΡΒΙΡΟΡΒΔΕΙΜ
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ΗΣΟΧΟΛΑΔΟΣΔΑΒΘ

The dedication by Nikandre. c. 650 BCE





ΜΑΝΤΙΚΛΟΣ ΜΑΝΕΦΕΚΕΦΕΧ
ΛΑΜΑΥΙΟΙ ΑΒΙΕΛΛΑΥΙΟΙ
ΑΡΡΥΡΟΙΟΧΣΟΙΤΑΣ
ΒΙΟΦΑΟΥΤΣΑΤΑ
Δ

The dedication by Mantiklos. Early 7th c. BCE

Distributed person(hood):

- personhood is distributed through inanimate objects carrying a human subject's agency
- social, not biological ontologies
- neither spatially nor temporarily contained
- 'dividual' rather than individuals
- human agents: 'dehumanized' cultural biographies
- social persons, 'present, not just in their singular bodies, but in everything in their surroundings which bears witness to their existence, their attributes, and their agency' (Gell)
- material agencies interfere with human fields of vision in order to re-center social dynamics and cultural flows





**Dexileos stele.
c. 394 BCE**

Agents of social meaning

- separate entity
- forging social identity for their dedicant
- discriminatory tools
- mediators between their dedicants and the divinities they portray, in fact mediate their dedicants' social importance to their viewers, as it is them whom they are addressing
- vocal reading / performance on behalf of the viewer

Agency

Reading:

Whitley 2018: 579-595 (in Smith & Plantzos).

Plantzos 2020.