

Words Alone Are Certain Good(s): Philology and Greek Material Culture

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SUMMARY: The relation between philology and the study of material culture within Classics has been long and complex. Where does it now stand? At the request of the editor of *TAPA*, in conjunction with the journal's recent focus on material culture, the author attempts to sum up some major trends. After an overview of historical developments, this article investigates the current practices and positions of those who are trying to bridge the divide between the "dirt" and the "word." A fourfold set of common methodological approaches is described, followed by a fourfold division of ways in which text and object might be seen as interacting.

LET US NOT AUTOMATICALLY DATE OURSELVES BY YIELDING TO THE FLATTERING supposition that we are brave discoverers on some sort of cutting edge. Edges certainly matter—whether of continents (the Pacific Rim being the new frontier for Classics) or the disciplinary divide (what is or are "Classics" anyway?).¹ But the latter sort of edges get so quickly abraded in the corporate entrepreneurial academy, where the "cross-inter-multi" tag is the best ticket to snagging a new program, that what feels razor-sharp today just will not cut it a year later. In Classics (shorthand here for study of Greek and Roman cultures), the tectonic plates of "text" and "object" have been clashing, grinding, and thrusting atop one another for the past two centuries. It is not particularly useful to try to pin down this week's coordinates. All that might remain edgy is the discipline's regular urge to re-tool and to sometimes sink subterranean cameras for calculating future seismic shifts. Like this.²

¹ On the latter, see recently Porter 2005: 1–65, especially his extended introduction. Segal 1993 provides a penetrating analysis of the more fundamental problem of defining "the classical," a dilemma that in turn shapes the discipline. See also Settis 2004, especially for the history of the term in the study of art and architecture.

² Most 1997: 360, also with reference to the subterranean, sees the tension between "classicist or historicist, imitative or antiquarian" orientations as defining the modern discipline of Classics. See also Porter 2003.

“Material culture” began to infiltrate the language in the nineteen seventies. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (draft revision of 2002) does not provide a first attestation but, noting its usage area as “anthropology and archaeology,” defines it as “the physical objects, such as tools, domestic articles, or religious objects, which give evidence of the type of culture developed by a society or group” (<http://dictionary.oed.com> s.v. *material* D). By the early nineteen eighties the phrase was being used by some writers in an expansive, even celebratory mode. Thomas Schlereth, for example, defines it as “the totality of artifacts in a culture, the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy, and to create symbols of meaning.”³ An obvious shortcoming for the term is that it conjoins two seemingly all-inclusive classes. What is not material? And what “material” is not or cannot be covered by the notorious word “culture”?⁴ After all, even bare rocks fit into an articulation of one’s place, already fenced about with meaning—the borders of culture, numinous territory, or liminal space.⁵ The only nature that exists outside of culture is that about which we cannot talk, discourse itself being a cultural emanation that, mist-like, descends over whatever we choose to discuss.

Motivating the new phrase was a growing sense among archaeologists that their trade, either in its traditional aesthetic or recent scientific phases, had become increasingly isolated from a variety of disciplines, new and old, that might help explain the past: anthropology, sociology, psychology, art history, even linguistics and literary studies. By re-orienting archaeology toward “culture,” those with an interest in the past (however recent) could bring it into conversation with humanities, rather than the natural sciences, toward which the technologizing and professionalization of the discipline had been threatening to sweep it since the nineteen sixties, with the rise of big-picture, hard-data, “systems” approaches. They could also force the field to consider questions that might illumine (or provide propaganda for) contemporary stances on class, gender, political structures, and the environment. The new alignment reflected broader disciplinary questions that still arise, ranging from whether anthropology should be part of humanities or science, to whether we can ever attain objective understanding. All this development properly belongs

³ Schlereth 1982: 2. He adds that the phrase functions as an abbreviation for “artifacts in a cultural context” and that it thus “entails cultural statements that can take the form of plowshares, hallstands, political campaign buttons, service stations, funerary art, electric washing machines, short gowns, or dog-trot houses.”

⁴ On the development of this term, see Manganaro 2002. Harris 1999: 19–29 reviews definitions and notes the defects of a purely ideational approach.

⁵ See for example Buxton 1992 on mountains in the Greek imagination.

to the history of modern archaeological thought, and its shift from “processual” to “postprocessual” modes. The primary lesson is that such thought can only flourish if it moves beyond merely digging up and cataloguing objects, whether for aesthetic or demographic purposes.⁶ Practitioners of the new material-culture analysis made this point on the level of communicative style, as well, restoring a sense of exploration to social and cultural explications by rewriting what Christopher Tilley (1991) has called “the deadening verbal and visual catalogue of the empiricist archaeological text.”⁷

At the same time as younger practitioners of archaeology brandished “material culture” as an holistic discipline in the face of (those they viewed as) object fetishists or positivists, another loosely affiliated group of scholars and antiquarians had been using it—probably longer—to counteract the introvert tendencies of those focused almost exclusively on texts. Folklorists led the way, as made sense, since their field, unlike archaeology, has always involved looking at culture as a kaleidoscope of synchronically active, verbal and non-verbal, remnants.⁸ While increasingly aware of the problematic terms that originally defined their discipline (nowadays who are the “folk?”), a generation of scholars brought the study of “folk” objects to the same level of importance and sophistication as that of the “folklore” texts that in the long shadow of Romanticism, had long been privileged as expressing the voice of submerged populations.⁹ For the contemporary folklorist, basket-weaving is as significant as tale-weaving—or even more so. Moreover, the realization that both of these artistic processes, and many more, are inextricable in the ways that they shape “culture” has meant new respect for materials previously relegated to the fringes of academic discourse. The career of Henry Glassie, whose book *Material Culture* (1999) has become a standard text, nicely illustrates the fruitful combination of concerns now valued by the discipline. With

⁶ Dyson 1981 was one of the first to point out how Classical archaeologists could benefit from the methods and concerns of “New Archaeology.” Renfrew and Bahn 1991: 9–40 offer a useful articulation of its principles. Shanks and Tilley 1992: 29–45 critique the positivist underpinnings of those principles. It should be noted that practitioners like Renfrew and Bahn 1991:9–11 make use of the phrase “material culture,” but not programmatically, unlike their critics: the term has marked and unmarked senses.

⁷ Tilley 1991: 7. For critical study of “material culture” within classical archaeology, see especially the series of works by Shanks 1995, 1996, 1999 and the essays in Alcock 2002

⁸ Schlereth 1982 offers an excellent introduction to this perspective.

⁹ Dorson 1972 remains useful as a compendium of areas and approaches. On the shared Romantic underpinnings of anthropology and folklore, see Stocking 1989 and von Hendy 2002. The expansion of the field to cover material remains led some scholars to prefer the term “folklife” study: see Schlereth 1982: 22.

a joint B.A. degree in English and Anthropology, and a Ph.D. in folklore, he has ranged from early work on American vernacular architecture and material culture to Irish oral histories and performance traditions, and more recently to traditional arts of Turkey, Bangladesh, and Japan.¹⁰ While the scholar of Classics cannot professionally hope to match such a global spread, she might well emulate the dovetailing of text and object, discourse and material that Glassie's work—and much modern folklore study—entails.

Given the scarcity of extant documents, historians of Greece naturally must pay attention to the latest findings of archaeology, so it is not surprising that many have begun to accommodate, or at least acknowledge, a material-culture viewpoint. Moreover, it is more common for historians to have worked on site, or at the various foreign archaeological schools in Athens, where daily contact with the world of ancient objects is inevitable.¹¹ For philologists, on the other hand, such contact has traditionally been rare. Nor do most Classical philologists sustain regular intellectual contact with modern folkloristics or anthropological linguistics, two fields that move the study of verbal productions closer to concrete practices. There has been less readiness to gesture toward, let alone incorporate, what can be learned from material culture studies. In this way, text-based scholars differ from the archaeologists, folklorists and historians. This might be for a number of good, and a few not so good, reasons.

Among the not-so-good is a kind of Platonic abstractedness—not to say snobbery. Material culture—“physical objects and structures from the past” as laconically defined by our sister organization the AIA—should interest text-oriented Classicists.¹² After all, only through the material world of carved inscriptions, clay tablets, papyri, codices, and coins do we even possess ancient words. That is to say, “material culture” in connection with the verbal products of ancient Greek civilization (the more privileged signs of its “culture”) comes into play well before most theorists even begin to problematize it.¹³ The editions of our texts are ultimately artifacts of intricate material and

¹⁰ His *curriculum vitae*: <http://www.indiana.edu/~folklore/cvglassie.htm>

¹¹ We are speaking here of Hellenists; much the same applies to Roman studies, although some would argue that Latinists have a slight edge when it comes to incorporating material culture into their textual analyses. How divergent practical methods and experiences affect the training of students in one or the other Classical culture deserves more investigation.

¹² *The Archaeological Institute of America*, at <http://www.archaeological.org/webinfo.php?page=10299#m>

¹³ Good efforts at self-reflection come in the volumes edited by Most 1997a, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002a; also Gumbrecht 2003.

cultural processes, ranging from ancient ink-production to modern word-processing, and affected by everything from pay scales for proofreaders and costs of purchasing papyri to the organization of slave-run copy-shops and tax laws affecting warehouse inventories. The propagation of new knowledge by way of a scholarly focus on materiality could constitute a nice ring, wedding ancient and modern text production. But an engagement with the materiality of texts has almost always yielded primacy in the field to interpretation of what the texts are saying. It is easier in criticism than in anatomy to extract the “heart” of a message from the “body” of a text. In the German idealist tradition inherited by Bruno Snell (1966) and Werner Jaeger (1966), two hugely influential Hellenists, dealing with the material world, whether at the level of text-production or discussion of objects in Greek culture, would have been inutterably banal.¹⁴ Ethical and didactic concerns (such as Jaeger’s 1966 “Third Humanism”), along with a weakness for overarching patterns in theology, psychology, and intellectual history, led Greek studies in Germany and the United States along a different path from the empiricist British or sociologically oriented French. Texts, instead of interacting with the real world, represented noetic and spiritual meanings and strivings, taking their place in a linear story of progress one could call the “discovery of the mind” or simply “paideia.” As a result, to a great extent, whatever material culture interests have emerged among American philologists are usually traceable to Cambridge, UK, and Paris, rather than Cambridge, Mass., and Berlin.

In the nineteenth century, as many have pointed out, the picture was different. The big tent of an ideal *Altertumswissenschaft* provided room for iconographers as well as textual critics, historians alongside archaeologists. It even once offered a unified method, in the form of August Boeckh’s hermeneutic approach. Boeckh (1785–1867) in his youth at Halle came under the dual influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and F. A. Wolf (1759–1824), who was fresh from his own struggles against the narrower conception of the field held by Gottfried Hermann (1772–1848).¹⁵ In some ways, Boeckh continued to blaze his master’s path, most apparently in the

¹⁴ I am aware that distinctions must be made between the goals of these two paradigmatic figures: see, for a start, Snell’s 1935 review of Jaeger’s *Paideia* (reprinted in Snell 1966). On Jaeger’s career, see Calder 1992; on his humanist interests: Jaeger 1966: 39–44; on the Third Humanism, see Irmscher 1991: 3–6; and most fully, on the social and political background of his thought, Marchand 1996: 319–29.

¹⁵ On Boeckh’s early years, see Schneider 1985: 9–30 and Irmscher 1986: 7–9. On Hermann’s early appreciation for the work of Wolf, see Wolf 1795: 28; on their differences, see Pfeiffer 1976: 178–82. For further nuanced views of the standpoints that they represented in early nineteenth-century scholarship, see Donohue 2005: 7–8 and Haug 2005: 51–53.

construction of an all-embracing *Philologie*, defined as the understanding (or better, “re-cognition”) of that which had once been known (*die Erkenntnis des Erkannten*), and taking the form of a series of lectures, the *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften*.¹⁶ The book embodying this represents a gradual development embracing the fifty-six years that Boeckh gave his course, to 1696 students. Although its title resembles that of a project long contemplated by Wolf, its scope is more capacious and its orientation different.¹⁷ Whereas Wolf (1975) sought to distinguish twenty-four subfields as part of *Altertumswissenschaft* (he was first to use the term), but did not order them systematically, Boeckh offered an organic, holistic configuration.¹⁸ Furthermore, he differed from Wolf in refusing to elevate the study of grammar and language over that of any other cultural expression. In fact, as has been pointed out recently, Wolf’s philosophical, *a priori* treatment of grammar allied him with his erstwhile rival Hermann, while Boeckh came to appreciate the new comparative grammar of Bopp and the early Indo-Europeanists.¹⁹ The view that true understanding of antiquity requires knowledge of the minute particulars of ancient life in all its manifestations inspired Boeckh’s ground-breaking work on the public economy of Athens as well as his massive project under the auspices of the Berlin Academy, to collect all known (i.e., published) Greek inscriptions (*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 1825–77).²⁰ Primed by a nasty review, the subsequent controversy between Boeckh and Hermann epitomized the struggle between antiquarian and idealizing approaches to the ancient world, with the former ultimately gaining the high ground.²¹

As Julia Sissa (1997) nicely sums it up, Boeckh’s *philologische Wissenschaften* “encompasses the entire field of competence possible for a given society: language, literature, and philosophy, but also institutions, rituals, myths. It includes social and cultural history” (Sissa 1997: 171). We will return to this notion below in a discussion of still-viable approaches. For now, it is worth

¹⁶ On the implications and problems of this definition, see Rodi 1979 and Klassen 1973: 20–27.

¹⁷ On the humanistic and classicizing roots of Wolf’s *Encyklopädie* see Irmischer 1986: 5–6; for the development of Wolf’s ideas about it, see Markner & Veltri 1999.

¹⁸ Boeckh 1877. Cf. Horstmann 1992: 70–72 on Wolf’s system.

¹⁹ On Wolf’s linguistic views, and differences with Boeckh, see Haug 2005.

²⁰ On the original 1815 proposal and its results, see Most 1997b: 353–54. Irmischer 1986 places Boeckh’s career in its intellectual context (from a Marxist perspective). On the fluctuations in Boeckh’s later influence at Berlin, see Jaeger 1966: 47–62.

²¹ On Boeckh vs. Hermann see Selden 1990:161–66; Horstmann 1992: 101–105, and Most 1997: 353–57

noting that the inward turn, toward the “spirit” of the Greeks rather than their institutions and physical remains, began already in the generation after Boeckh. Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Greeks and Greek Civilization* (1898–1902) published in its original form five years after Boeckh’s death, opens with an explicit contrast between the older scholar’s lectures on everything from geography to gymnastics—lectures characterized by his former student Burckhardt as “antiquarian”—and the student’s own attempt to write “the history of the Greek mind or spirit” (Burckhardt 1998: 1–2). One could speculate on the further causes for the fading of Boeckh’s encyclopedic approach, from the disruptions of post-1848 German history to the practical specialization required by the profusion of new materials for study, the allure of philosophy—especially in the seductions of the former Classicist Nietzsche—the magnetism of his quondam critic Wilamowitz, the search for spiritual refuge from a secularizing urban Europe, and the invention of depth psychology—all of which were to shape twentieth century Hellenic studies.²²

On the other hand, one of the good reasons why philologists have *not* flocked to the study of material culture is because the bundle of approaches that goes under that name, whether practiced by historians, archaeologists, or folklorists, is not really all that novel. Put another way, scholars of literature have already absorbed the same influences as those who shaped the post-processual, critical, interpretive moment. The canon is fairly closed, albeit varied: Adorno, Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Benjamin, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Marx loom large in any accounting of thinkers who have inspired recent work on materiality.²³ Whatever one thinks of the relevance of their contributions, it is not difficult to find exactly the same canon repeatedly cited over the past two decades in literary studies. Even the less commonly shared Bruno Latour and Arjun Appadurai have made recent appearances in the footnotes of philologists. This is to say that philology never felt the need to take on “theory” laterally: scholars of texts and materials alike sipped from the same streams flowing from Paris and Frankfurt. While various post-modern perspectives that challenged the “subject” on every level were being tried out by text-centered Classicists, some archaeologists were discovering that “objects” are subjects, too, and then carrying out a similar destabilization.²⁴

²² Selden 1990 traces how the “aberrant” traditions that later appeared opposed to Classics actually grew out of them. On Nietzsche’s influence in Classics, see especially Porter 2000a and 2000b.

²³ Tilley 1989 provides a convenient collection and analysis of key figures. For a good sample of theoretically informed essays, see Meskell 2005.

²⁴ On the object as subject, see the essays in Appadurai, especially those by Geary and Kopytoff.

And yet, there are interesting holes in this otherwise shared intellectual fabric. The work of Stephen Greenblatt (1997) and the New Historicists did not make headway with proponents of material culture analysis, although, in the form of “cultural poetics” (Greenblatt’s preferred term) it has had a major impact on treatments of Classical literature.²⁵ This could be because the New History, based on *Annales*-style social history, was already being incorporated by other routes into progressive archaeological study in the nineteen seventies.²⁶ Besides, the quite different New Historicism, with its focus on the datable and specific (albeit ordinary) contexts of historical actors, can either complement or run contrary to the study of invisible populations and the long durée.²⁷ It thrives in data-rich, polyvocal, literate environments. To put it telegraphically, New Historicism has served as the New History for literary types. Its fascination with issues of rhetoric, manipulation, and power is not incompatible with a study of material culture, provided that artifacts are primarily treated as “representations” of social strategies. Yet in the absence of textual evidence, the identification of signs of power, whether in grave goods or architecture, can be notoriously arbitrary: did the long-ago possessors have status or want it; were they flaunting or aping?

A similar asymmetry marks the reception of performance studies by those primarily concerned with the material remains of Greek civilization. Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson (2001), in studies on “theater archaeology,” have been the boldest innovators (Pearson and Shanks 2001). The somewhat belated recognition by mainstream Classicists of “performance” as a social act (rather than simply a theatrical phenomenon) is enshrined in essays from a King’s College, Cambridge conference of a decade ago. Of the fourteen contributions to the eventual publication of *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*, six deal in some way with material culture, but only two of those can be said to tackle the interpretation of actual texts in relation to the analysis of (other) material objects.²⁸ More recently, it has been art historians who have framed their work at least partially in terms of performance, explicitly bringing ancient Greek aesthetic objects into contact with philological interpreta-

²⁵ Dougherty and Kurke 1993 represents the first wave; the sequel collection, Dougherty and Kurke 2003, makes closer contact with material culture.

²⁶ The Argolid project provides a good example: see Jameson, Runnels, & van Andel 1994.

²⁷ On the New History, see the fine overview by Burke 1992.

²⁸ Goldhill and Osborne 1999. The six essays are those of Taplin, Wilson, Kavoulaki, Jameson, Osborne, and Lissarrague; the last two in the list systematically bring texts and artifacts together. On “performance” approaches to the material world, see especially Goldhill’s introduction, 1999: 15.

tion while considering the objects themselves as in some way “performative” rather than simply representational. Gloria Ferrari (2002) applies a model of linguistic performance derived from Roman Jakobson in her interpretation of male and female depictions on Attic vases (Ferrari 2002). And Mary Stieber’s (1994) bold attempt to “conTEXTualize” (*sic*) the archaic Acropolis *korai* by viewing them in relation to archaic poems is described by her as “an effort to put word and image together in a meaningful, mutually illuminating way that advances the discourse in both categories of evidence toward the common goal of illuminating the pre-Classical *mentalité*” (Stieber 2004: 114–15). Most refreshing about these (and similar art studies to be discussed below) is the recognition that material culture is neither subordinate to, nor merely illustrative of, the text. Philologists, one hopes, have begun to absorb that lesson.

The necessity for sustaining a scholarly imagination that prizes equally the vase and the poem, the graves and the funeral orations made over them, was expressed with typical elegance and wit by Emily Vermeule in her 1995 presidential address to the APA. Although not meant to be a methodological analysis or even a programmatic sketch, Vermeule’s plea for mutual recognition by the sometimes distant camps had a powerful resonance, not least for its acknowledgement that the finest field archaeology (the “dirt”) depends ultimately for its diffusion on compelling reconstruction through narrative and text (the “word”) (Vermeule 1996). A matching articulation by a senior figure, of philologists’ need for objects, has not been readily forthcoming. At the same time, tacit acknowledgment of the need has begun to surface in a more crucial sort of text, the job advertisement. As the archaeologist Sarah Morris noted a few years back, departments of Classics have more frequently sought candidates with experience in material culture. While that might constitute, in her view, “a discreet way of identifying a kind of research with which philologists feel comfortable,” which may even exclude or displace real field archaeologists, it does signal to the younger text-focused members of the profession that at least minimal exposure to archaeology is valuable (2003: 85). Another form of acknowledgement at the level of the profession came in the Presidential panel held at the 1998 meetings of the APA and AIA Washington, D.C., celebrating the latter organization’s centenary. Unfortunately, hopes raised by the staging of this event were not fully met by the papers that resulted. Despite then-President Helene Foley’s 1999 characterization of the panel’s aim to “honor the intellectual fertility of the relation between Classics and material culture,” the five papers (three Greek, two Roman) in all but one case treat texts non-philologically. That is to say, they derive information, in a precise but highly abstracting manner, from such things as the poetry of

Semonides (illustrating “gender attitudes”) or the works of Thucydides and Pausanias, and compare this with what archaeologists and historians have found, by other means, about the past. The words “source” and “evidence” recur constantly in reference to the verbal materials. Partly, the failure of the panel to come to grips with the problem stemmed from vagueness about what was to be examined: Classics was defined as covering ancient history, literature, philosophy, and philology (as opposed to AIA territory, staked out as art history and archaeology). Historians predominated, with solid, workmanlike papers, but seemed uninterested in the style, tropes, or idiosyncrasies of texts or objects. Of the five final papers printed in *TAPA*, it is one on Roman culture (Ann Kuttner’s 1999 work on Pompey’s portico-museum) that makes the clearest connections between texts and objects, while respecting the specificity of each. In a tour de force analysis of Catullus 55 and Propertius 2.32 and 4.8 using comparisons with Pompey’s sculptural and architectural program, she brilliantly demonstrates that the poems enable us to interpret concerns, attitudes, and tensions that worked to motivate the construction in the first place. Kuttner (1999) is further able to point to innovations in the re-making by Roman poets of Hellenistic habits of ekphrasis (Kuttner 1999). Once again, Roman studies seems to have the edge recently when it comes to conjoining artifacts with texts.²⁹

One APA panel, held nearly a decade ago, does not adequately represent the field. Yet a review of books and journals will indicate that not much new on this front has happened until now, beyond regular acknowledgement of a need for text-centered scholars to engage with objects. One rough gauge of the extent to which philologists (rather than Classical art historians) have attempted to integrate the material record can be derived from the pages of this journal. From 1991 to 2006, I find fewer than a dozen articles dealing with Greek antiquity that can by any stretch be interpreted as handling, even in a rough-and-ready way, the relationship between a text and an object, or a series of either. I exclude those pieces that bring into contact a text and

²⁹ In the current volume (138), the trend continues admirably with the articles of Tara Welch (on Horatian poetry as it moves within a landscape); Timothy Moore (on musical practices of the *tibicen*, Roman drama, and scribal protocols); and Anthony Corbeill (on interacting Roman notions of grammatical gender and biological sex). Don Lavigne’s *tour de force* reading of Martial as stylized rules for penetration, and Christopher van den Berg’s explication of the “ideologies of the couch” stake out new ground in taking the material world as a malleable extension of the notional (rather than a “real” confirmation of it). Rather than analyze the mix of methods behind each of these contributions, I draw attention to the broad and useful way in which they interpret the “material” world to extend beyond the artifact, into the realms of topography, gestures, sounds, and bodies.

an institution or event only as representatives of historical eras, or that use artifacts simply as evidence.³⁰

In this regard, *TAPA* is not much different from its sister journals in the US and Canada. In Europe, the divide seems even stronger, with journals focussed on text interpretation or intellectual history (*QUCC*, *Métis*, *Mnemosyne*, *Philologus*, *Eikasmos*, etc.) on one side, and on the other, periodicals primarily about historical and archaeological topics (*Chiron*, the publications of the foreign schools in Athens, *QS*, etc). *Classical Antiquity* and the venerable *Journal of Hellenic Studies* constitute distinguished exceptions. And a glance at the last decade's content of *AJA* and *Hesperia* shows that the outreach toward the textual by material culture specialists considerably outpaces any counter-contribution from the philological side.³¹

This brings us to Paul Allen Miller's laudable effort in the most recent volumes of *TAPA* (vols. 137.1–138.2) to foster, as editor, a dialogue between texts and material culture. The results, on topics of Greek culture (my focus) are highly encouraging. Through attention to the material aspects of war and the lived experience of warriors, the poetry of the *Iliad* is illuminated (in 137.1) in important ways through the articles of Jonathan Ready (on acquisition of spoils) and Brooke Holmes (on the "economy" of pain). Both show meticulously how a system of representations functions to foreground violations, thereby characterizing moments of crisis and the warriors involved. Robin Mitchell-Boyask's paper in the same cluster (on Archaic and Classical Greece) brilliantly suggests that the location of cult sites on the slopes of the Athenian acropolis is exploited by Sophocles in the stagecraft of his *Philoctetes* to create a series of meanings over and above the discourse of the text. The thematic segment on Hellenistic literature and material culture (137.2) ranges over the implications of an inscription, a statue, a set of epigrams describing a painting, and the topographical trope underlying an epigram book. Craige Champion examines the "discursive construction and performance of sovereignty" as found in an inscribed letter from Achaean Dyme (144/3 B.C.E.) and in complementary passages from Polybius. Patricia Rosenmeyer traces in Cicero's prose a powerful trope—statue as woman—used to criticize what the orator sees as a perverted Roman appropriation of Greek art and culture in Verres' theft of a statue of Sappho by the early Hellenistic sculptor Silanion. Another artwork mentioned by Cicero is at the core of Sean Gurd's article

³⁰ For the record, they are: Henderson 1991; Lateiner 1992; Lowenstam 1992 and 1997; Edwards 1993; Stieber 1994; Johnston 1995; Scodel 1996; Raubitschek 1998; and Collins 2003.

³¹ See, e.g. the recent pieces Tuck 2006 and Barringer 2005.

on the sophisticated literary reception accorded the unfinished Medea by the painter Timomachus. As Gurd shows, the epigrammatic tradition analogized hesitation on the part of the tragic figure to incompleteness in the interrelated arts of poetry and painting. Finally, Regina Höschle traces the stages by which real readers of epigraphic poems throughout the ancient landscape became imagined readers within the topography of the poetic book-scroll. In each of these fascinating pieces, scholars have taken seriously the dual task of explicating related artifacts—material and textual—within their own terms and only then—once contexts are carefully established—in relation to one another. These elegant articles are a world away from the old-style approach in which texts explained objects, objects confirmed texts, QED.

Let us be very clear at this point: there is no reason that we *should* either expect or welcome a wholesale turning of philologists and literary scholars toward material culture to the neglect of the fields in which they have been best trained. Editing texts, explicating passages, exploring meter, diction, metaphor and semantics, analyzing prose style, discovering intertexts, reconstructing ancient exegesis, writing literary history, and dozens of other language-specific tasks deserve broad understanding and financial as well as moral support. If anything, such difficult work demands *more* attention these days, when fewer scholars have the expertise for high-level linguistic and interpretive work and its value becomes harder to explain to the uninitiated, whether publishers, deans, or the general public. Archaeology makes headlines; textual emendation does not. A deeper appreciation of the nature and value of philology (in the narrower non-Boeckhian sense) can help Classics take the lead in advancing the three most promising new directions within literary studies themselves (now that we have collectively ridden over various postmodern ruts): rhetoric, aesthetics and the articulation of religious feeling.³² It is true that recent attachments to social issues and popular culture have helped raise the visibility of Classical studies, all to the good. But a devil's advocate for a self-aware philological method might even claim that Classics will ultimately *suffer* from too enthusiastic an embrace of material culture, since, done carelessly, it can lead to the excesses of cultural materialism or the vagueness of cultural studies. Once Classics takes up its intellectual lodgings with the latter, like every other language-based discipline that has slid in that direction, it loses intellectual ground, the finite territory that in its case must always be marked out by the demanding specificities of ancient and alien languages. Charles Segal's (1995) admonition (in another APA presidential address), that

³² Gumbrecht 2003 provides a refreshing vision of philology's value in conjuring "presence"—summoning up and even constituting somatic experience through words.

literary study of Classics must not be reduced to a matter of sociology, still speaks clearly and sympathetically to our present condition.³³

COMMON GROUND

It is not clear what metaphor to employ. Maybe the need facing philologists and their material-based colleagues resembles the recurrent technological problem of cross-platform standards. What operating system will allow us to communicate, if not seamlessly, then at least without unintelligible characters or unintended noise as we go back and forth between texts and objects? In the scholarly case—at least so it seems—it helps that one side of the debate is not backed by more engineers, state subsidies, or a bigger marketing budget. There are, however, entrenched positions, with scholars on either side of the text-object divide accustomed by training or taste, age or affiliation, to one or another mode of analysis. At the very least, I submit, the following four approaches, no one of them particularly revolutionary, should form a basis for shared understanding in moving forward investigations and presentations, whether of poems or pots. One could even imagine a semester-long pro-seminar for first-year graduate students devoted to mastering just these: cultural semiotics, “thick descriptive” ethnography, stylistics, and Boeckhian hermeneutics.³⁴

CULTURAL SEMIOTICS

Despite its brief vogue, somewhere in between structuralism and what followed, the study of Classical texts and ancient artifacts *together* from a semiotic perspective has still not flourished as it might. “Semiotics and Classical Studies,” a special issue of 1983 *Arethusa* edited by Nancy Felson, was a breakthrough in its time, especially in its bold pairings of non-Classicists (including Michael Herzfeld and Mieke Bal) as commentators on the work of philologists (*Arethusa* vol. 16 1983). The impressive list of contributions contains what

³³ Segal 1995. This is, of course, a larger problem faced by all language-and-culture disciplines. For a list of important literary questions (aesthetic value, literariness, symbolic dimensions) to which cultural studies cannot contribute, see Sarlo 2001. Unfortunately, reaction against the bleaching-out of specificity by cultural studies can easily be misread as support for a reactionary retention of old-fashioned Classics. Rather than stake out sides, it is more fruitful to analyze those deficiencies in the discipline to which each extreme may be reacting.

³⁴ I have in mind something like the seminar and workshop on “Words and Things” offered in the last few years by my Stanford colleague Giovanna Ceserani, which examines the eighteenth and nineteenth century roots of scholarly practices. A fifth area could be performance, but the term has grown so extravagantly unruly lately that a shared practical toolkit is more difficult to put together.

are now considered classic formulations by major figures, pieces regularly assigned in a variety of courses: John Peradotto's "Texts and Unrefracted Facts: Philology, Hermeneutics and Semiotics"; Gregory Nagy's "Sêma and Noêsis: Some Illustrations"; Ann Bergren's "Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought"; Marylin B. Arthur's "The Dream of a World Without Women: Poetics and the Circles of Order in the *Theogony* Prooemium"; Nancy Felson Rubin and William Merritt Sale's "Meleager and Odysseus: A Structural and Cultural Study of the Greek Hunting-Maturation Myth"; Charles Segal's "Greek Myth as a Semiotic and Structural System and the Problem of Tragedy"; and Bruce Rosenstock's "Rereading the Republic." But only one (Bernard Frischer's "A Socio-Psychological and Semiotic Analysis of Epicurus' Portrait") explicitly takes on the task of applying semiotics to *both* verbal and visual artifacts.

Among practitioners of material culture analysis, the relevance of semiotics became clear quite early as a way to transcend atomistic and positivist collecting. Its associations with linguistic thought linger in the usage of Tilley (1991: 11), among others, who resorts to metaphors of grammar and text in critiquing Hallström's monumental but inconclusive work on the rock carvings of Nämforsen in northern Sweden. The positivist archaeologist, claims Tilley, cannot "read" his material because all signifiers are treated exactly alike, as objects rather than elements with a "syntax" that connects these. Tilley's critique of a non-semiotic practice, whereby interpretation becomes confused with the process of identification, may recall for philologists similar criticisms of the non-reflective treatment of texts, in which two properly discrete aspects—saying *what* something is and saying *how* it connects with other items—are elided. Whether with texts or objects, mere (however massive) documentation, tends to put into effect an "embargo on finding meaning."³⁵ Hellenists might consider the goals of their book-length commentaries in this light.³⁶

³⁵Tilley 1991: 14. On the other hand, to assert meaning still requires control. Tilley proceeds to read the carvings as a sign-system related to social moieties through the systematic contrast of nature vs. culture markers. Yet it should be obvious that this sort of cryptography—investigating what signs co-occur or are in complementary distribution—cannot tell us anything about the long-dead "speakers" of the signs. His further move, to find parallels in myths recorded from eastern Siberia, is equally questionable in terms of method, although understandable given the closed nature of his corpus. Taking topographical similarities (river rapids and "ritual liminal space" of islands) as a kind of argument by analogy, he layers onto this even more speculative notions about dominance, exchange, and the incorporation of outsiders (allegedly visible in drawings of humans type), providing an unintended object lesson on the limitations of structuralist readings in the absence of ethnographic and discursive evidence.

³⁶For fresh examination of the practices of commentary, see the essays in Gibson and Kraus 2002, especially Kraus's introduction, 1–27. Also valuable: Most 1999.

More recently, the insufficiency for material studies of a purely language-oriented semiotics has been summarized by Robert Preucel and Alexander Bauer (2001). In an effort to bridge the gap between the different modes of interpretation in processualist and post-processualist archaeology, they appeal to the pre-Saussurean ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce. His notion of the triadic relation (sign-object-interpretant) allows one to study non-arbitrary relations between signs and their referents, as in iconic and indexical relationships (typical of objects), rather than simply the arbitrary relation-structures of signs-to-signifieds (typical of language). Furthermore, the incorporation of the “interpretant” in the triad enables the sort of self-reflexive, discursive, and pragmatic analysis otherwise missing from the brand of semiotics usually associated with structuralist linguistics. The interpretant in his or her relationship to the sign and object is equally time-bound, culturally defined and changing—as social anthropologists have long been at pains to tell us.³⁷

Another road toward appreciating the transient, the local and the limited, rather than general theories and static structures, starts from the so-called Moscow-Tartu School and its work on the semiotics of culture.³⁸ Associated primarily with Iurii Lotman (2001) and Boris Uspenskii (on whom see Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky 1985), and developed in a series of studies in *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, this approach grew out of various Russian Formalist concerns, but embraced the dynamics of change in history, literature, and the arts, taking them as a semiotic challenge. Physical spaces, housing types, clothing styles, utensils and adornments all figure into the “poetics of everyday behavior” (to use Lotman’s phrase) since social actors make use of these in conscious, signifying manners. Icons, town planning, carnivals, and a host of other phenomena are all ripe for semiotic analysis, since they are “secondary modelling systems,” webs of signification akin to the primary system of language itself. One can still see a number of possible applications within the study of Greek culture for this flexible and capacious method; in some ways, the anthropological study of “performance” converges with the work of the Tartu semioticians, while their interest in the specific signs embedded in particular places and eras illustrates how textured and context responsive semiotic work can become. The work of Michael Herzfeld (1985), from a slightly later period and place, but with a similarly overt semiotic slant

³⁷ For a fuller explication of semiotic anthropology—not specifically archaeological—see Parmentier 1994, an important source for Preucel and Bauer 2001.

³⁸ A representative collection is Broms and Kauffmann 1988. Paradigmatic essays are in Nakhimovsky & Nakhimovsky 1985. For earlier bibliography see Shukman 1978.

(for instance *The Poetics of Manhood*, 1985) has already had an impact on ancient Greek studies.³⁹

The essays in two collections edited by Kurke and Dougherty (1993; 2003) might usefully be placed in relation to such semiotic study, as it provides the larger intellectual framework for the “cultural poetics” that has become associated, in some corners of the humanities, more with New Historicism. The study of symbolic economies, after all, is dependent on a notion of organized symbolization and representational strategies, affecting a range of discourse concerning public objects, from the bones of ancestors to graves at a city’s center, the cup of the Seven Sages, and victor statues to paintings of Panathenaic performers or epiphanic gods.⁴⁰ The editors’ reprise volume, published a decade later, acknowledges the semiotic background of analysis that had undergirded the first book by viewing the new volume as “an effort to historicize and politicize a structuralist approach” and by citing with approval Jonathan Hall’s definition of culture as a “reified semiotic code” (Dougherty and Kurke 2003: 6, 11). The welcome new emphasis is on substructures, counter-currents, and microcultures that lead one to question dominant systems. The intractable, fuzzy, messy and odd, all that does not seem to fit the system, can sometimes be unpacked to show that they validate the very systems they seem to subvert, or guide us into deeper, historical rejections of system (themselves significant) by people of the past. Greek studies, as seen in such volumes, have come to grips with the idea that agency, hegemony, contestation, negotiation, and conflict must be taken into the picture in order for us to understand the complex nature of ancient Greek life (Dougherty and Kurke 2003: 1–19). Whether one deals in texts or objects, this must be axiomatic.

THICK-DESCRIPTION ETHNOGRAPHY

It is clear that New Historicism, the semiotics of culture, and the related analysis of discourse and practice, inspired by Foucault and Bourdieu, share the urge to contextualize signifiers, rather than to uncover and plot out a total sign-system. *Parole* rather than *langue* is the object of study. Culture, to all these modes, comes as a complex net, not a neatly lined chart. This realization is a

³⁹ See Martin 1989 and Haft 1996, both influenced by Herzfeld 1985. Meticulous analysis of modern Greek realities and sophisticated self-reflexive anthropological method also mark the studies by Seremetakis 1991; Panourgia 1995; Gourgouris 1996; and Dubisch 1995 among others in this area of importance to Classicists.

⁴⁰ See the essays in Dougherty and Kurke 1993 by Antonaccio, Sinos, Kurke, Martin, Dougherty and Shapiro.

major step forward, but what are the practical consequences for research? The most influential mind-set (not so much a method) for interpreting such matted tangles of meaning was articulated by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983), who borrowed from the Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle the notion of “thick description”—the sort of observation that takes into account the intentions, frameworks, relations, behaviors and other stratified “structures of signification” surrounding social action. As with many useful notions, “thick description” in gaining broad currency has become worn down, so that one now often hears it applied where what is really meant is simply “rich in detail.” It is worth remembering, however, that Geertz thought about “thick description” in the immediate context of ethnographic writing. Although he viewed his enterprise as related to philology, and in his 1983 collection *Local Knowledge* cited approvingly the approach of Alton Becker (a specialist in Javanese puppet-theater performance texts), his originally intended audience was not literary critics (Geertz 1983: 31–33).⁴¹ Since the original formulation—more than three decades ago—other methods (like those mentioned above) have caught up with his work in various ways.⁴² It might, indeed, seem that Geertzian ethnography is just the philology of culture, or another form of literary description, in which case it would be tautological to recommend it as a model for twenty first century philology. As it is, “thick description” still merits differentiation from a semiotics of culture because it draws its energies from two practices that rarely have been employed by philologists or material culture specialists: fieldwork observation and cross-cultural analysis.

How can these practices contribute to the study of texts and objects from “dead” cultures, let alone bring them together? First of all, by providing access to ongoing cultural development. Even within a highly self-aware interpretive frame (one that is hyperconscious of its very framings and of the often impossibly skewed distances between cultures), the observer can nevertheless identify habits, attitudes and usages that offer suggestive hypotheses for exploring Greek and Roman cultural configurations. Traditional proverb use in Nigerian legal proceedings, or the social meanings of pig-feasts in New Guinea can not be mapped directly onto Athenian oratory or Homeric banquets;

⁴¹ On this connection, see Clark 2004: 145–46.

⁴² Greenblatt 1997:14 makes explicit his debt to Geertz; Kurke 1999: xi cites Bourdieu and Certeau as influences on her extended analysis of the “politics of meaning” embedded in texts and objects of the archaic period, but on the same page speaks of providing a “thick description” of certain material symbols. In the field of interpretive anthropology, “thick description” has taken many new directions, and should not be considered co-extensive with the discipline as a whole. On Geertz’s later ideas concerning the relationship between the two, see Panourgia 2002.

to argue for similarities in function from superficial formal aspects would be to repeat the errors of Victorian anthropologists, to relapse to explanations based on universalizing notions of “primitive” thought. On the other hand, to ignore the evidence when, as Classicists, we simply possess no other control for our intellectual experiment, is equally hazardous and probably more hubristic: it assumes a type of Classical exceptionalism that has long been bankrupt. Literary critics and students of religion, soured respectively by the dying controversies over the relevance of South Slavic oral poetics to Homer and by the excesses of the Cambridge ritualists, have shied away from sophisticated ethnographic comparison. Archaeologists and ancient historians are more comfortable with exploring contemporary ethnographic evidence.⁴³ What we could use now is, specifically, more information on how traditional societies in the modern world use objects, whether functional or symbolic, in their own worlds; how they plan political and private spaces (or whether they have such distinctions); how they incorporate into everyday life objects and talk about those objects, and many more problems. Such data, of course, would be all the more valuable once sifted through the fine-grained analysis of individual attitudes against the background of tradition.⁴⁴ The resulting views can provide excellent leading questions—not necessarily answers—for re-analysis of some ancient equivalents, whether it be varied Greek attitudes (Ionian, Athena, Spartan) toward luxury items, or evolving Roman understandings of time.⁴⁵ A Geertzian attentiveness to the performative and to rhetorical overlays in which such material comes wrapped actually fits nicely with the nature of our ancient remains—so often fragments, whether material or verbal, but still retaining traces of speakers and users, ordinary or elite.

This respect for fine-scale variation, for valuing attitudes toward a thing rather as much as (if not more than) the naked thing itself, requires the sort

⁴³ The Sphakia Survey led by Nixon, Price, Moody, and Rackham is exemplary in this regard, extending analysis of landscape use into the modern period: see on the work thus far: <http://sphakia.classics.ox.ac.uk>. The Argolid survey 1972–82 had pioneered the consistent use of ethnographic evidence: see Jameson et al. 1994.

⁴⁴ My own fieldwork in western Crete has led me to see how objects embed and prompt stories and poems, as well as how individuals create hierarchies of significant object-stories. The small but rich Polemiko Mouseio in Kares (community of Askifou), curated by Giorgios Hatzidakis seamlessly blends the stories of the eighteenth century revolt of Daskaloyannis with the Battle of Crete in 1941, just as the collection juxtaposes relics of those struggles and as his own poetic repertoire combines compositions from both periods.

⁴⁵ Notable works on precisely these topics—but without comparative framing—are Kurke 1992 and Feeney 2007.

of practice one best gets doing fieldwork. This second, increasingly contested aspect of the ethnographic enterprise was always held by Geertz to be of unique and overarching significance. It is what sets interpretive anthropology apart from second-tier analyses, as much as attendance at a live performance separates the drama critic from the literary analyst who reads the text of a play. The living observation of change that is denied to text-bound analysts is available to “deep hanging out.”⁴⁶ Once again, archaeologists hardly need preaching to about fieldwork (especially if it incorporates ethnographic observation); it is the text-bound who might be pushed to venture afield, if only in a professedly semi-amateur mode. Something of a middle ground is already being mapped out between the regions of fieldwork and the philologists’ comfort zone. Reception studies, whether of drama or any other genre, can accommodate the interrogation of live performance and performers in relation to the ancient originals that inspire them. The booming interest in the study of performances (as spearheaded, for example, by the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama) runs the dual risks of being under-theorized and of getting smothered in its own mass of thick detail (actors, venues, translations).⁴⁷ Yet, done right, it could be the “field” for the sort of engaged observation that Geertz and his ethnographer kin have brought to a high art. Once again, a comparative angle would help; advances would also require proper scrutiny of one’s own analyses and reactions in the theater, as part of the phenomenon to be described—a taboo thus far for almost all academic analyses of Classical culture.

STYLISTICS

Both the practice of cultural semiotics and the method of “thick description” cherish particularities. Because the humanities have tacked again and begun to rediscover texture, idiosyncrasy, and individual agency (though rightly holding back on “genius”), it is finally time to re-introduce as a goal of both material culture and philology an approach that can bind them together—the study of style. As Richard Neer (2005) points out in a recent essay, “connoisseurship,” which has for the last few decades been a dirty word to both positivist and postmoderns, is due for a comeback. It is, as he points out, the ultimate basis of all material analysis. Now that archaeology and literary study can be liberated to pursue stylistic explorations, we might take stock of the undisputed successes of the past within either field and advance such close reading (another dirty word) with the aim of identifying common interests.

⁴⁶ See Geertz 2000: 7–10 for his spin on the phrasing he attributes to Clifford.

⁴⁷ See the APGRD site at: <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/>

Students of Hellenistic culture have always been most immersed in questions of style, a necessity given the aesthetics of those they study.⁴⁸ The burgeoning study of the Second Sophistic, during which style was for the elite as pressing a cultural demand as it was with Wilde and Pater, has made it all the more imperative for Hellenists to develop a sophisticated, unitary concept of style, and to cultivate once again the appreciation of verbal nuance once possessed by an older generation of critics.

Recognizing that “style” is a series of significant social gestures is one thing; being able to produce convincing demonstrations about where signification lies, what the producers of texts and objects thought about style, how minor changes in texture and emphasis affect meaning and so forth requires more work.⁴⁹ And yet this is the level at which the interpretive activity of archaeologists, art historians, and philologists can most clearly come together. A renewed respect for Beazely and Morelli, Spitzer and Norden is a start. The next step is to bring together stylisticians on both sides for shared investigations of such shared concerns as ornamentation, and foregrounding, repetition and elision. On the side of material culture, folkloristics and related fields can help expand the potential range of objects for analysis: we should take into consideration games, medicine, crafts, architecture, costume, and cookery. Dance, drama, festival, and religion more obviously overlap with surviving verbal and visual “texts,” but stylistics, with these, too, would offer a fresh focus on the somatic nature of the practices.⁵⁰ As with all the areas mentioned, the meticulous study of style may at first sight seem to conflict with the study of function or semiotic system. Robin Osborne (2004: 88) recently noted how the study of Greek vase iconography since 1980, as a system of images that “talk to one another” in social contexts, produced the impression that “artistic individuality is not to be looked for in these images.” Yet a balance can be achieved—which brings us to the final approach.

HERMENEUTICS

The problem with connoisseurship has always been in the tendency toward fetishization (not to mention using it as an elite weapon for bashing philistines). No longer can we afford it as a means of avoiding interpretation or to enact

⁴⁸ For recent stylistic analyses joined with sophisticated reading, see the essays of Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004.

⁴⁹ Starting points for a renewed literary stylistics, supplementing formalist and functionalist work, can be found in Weber 1996. Worman 2002 investigates notions of personal and verbal styles as they cluster around the figure of Helen.

⁵⁰ Compare the range of areas in Dorson 1972 and Schlereth 1982.

one-ups-manship. In this context, the work of August Boeckh (1886), mentioned earlier, provides an excellent antidote. Plunged into the controversies between *Sachphilologen* and *Wortphilologen*, with their attendant consequences for professional advancement, recognition, and reputation, Boeckh groped his way toward an overarching method that would afford each its due. His efforts to explicate Pindar were clearly formative. The method that he would later outline in the first part of his *Encyklopädie* (1886) is visible already in his lectures “Ueber die kritische Behandlung der Pindarischen Gedichte” of 1820–22.⁵¹ Here one finds condensed onto two pages the key distinction between the hermeneutic art, aimed at understanding, and criticism, aimed at making judgments; the differentiation of “grammatical” and “historical” *Kritik*; and most importantly, Boeckh’s notion of the hermeneutic circle.⁵² The more leisurely exposition in the posthumously published *Encyklopädie* explains in detail how the philologist must advance by a process of continual approximation, starting with the exploration of a particular object of study from the fourfold viewpoint of objective understanding (of words and of their relation to things) and subjective understanding (of individual and of genre-dependent characteristics), then moving outward to the criticism of the object by comparison with others.⁵³ The circular—or, if one is lucky—spiral movement that one makes depends on the recognition that a text’s language, style, references, and genre can only be established through careful comparison with other texts or objects, but those other phenomena must first be interpreted as the individual repositories of exactly such features. Exegesis requires a fund of information, which can only be acquired through exegesis. Yet this brings about no endless deferral of meaning: within Boeckh’s ideal is a vision of long-term progress and even a glimpse of sustainable historical truths.⁵⁴ And it is a method that, in its basic insistence on starting with

⁵¹ The lectures forming the basis of the *Encyklopädie* date back to 1809, but as the editor Bratuscheck points out in Boeckh 1886, it is extremely difficult to ascertain when any given passage might have been added to the total accretion left to the literary executor. Most 2002: 42, noting the deceptively uniform character of the final work, observes that the manuscript of the original lectures, now in the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, “looks much more like a tossed salad, with strips of paper pasted in, large sections crossed out and scribbled over, and loose pages floating without any clear point of attachment.”

⁵² Reprinted in Boeckh 1871: 248–396, see esp. 250–52. On the circle, see Strohschneider-Kohrs 1979.

⁵³ Boeckh 1886: 75–156. Pritchard 1968 unfortunately excises most of Boeckh’s specific illustrations from ancient texts. On the four-fold approach, see Horstmann 1992: 149–57.

⁵⁴ For extended analysis of Boeckh’s program, see Klassen 1973.

hermeneutics, remains valuable for our analytic practices. As Lowell Edmunds writes in his study of interpretive approaches to Horace *Odes* 1.9, "The manner in which the poem is read, or...the manner in which reading is avoided, determines the outcome of criticism and all scholarly activity with respect to the poem. Such an axiom, an alternative to the now prevailing axiology of philology, hardly needs contemporary literary theory; it is already there in Boeckh" (Edmunds 1992: 110).

Geertz's ethnography, brought to bear on texts and objects, offers a way to aim cultural semiotics beyond unattached signifiers toward lived experience observed from multiple directions (including the contemporary); just so, Boeckh's hermeneutics provides us, even two centuries later, with an ideal that can unite study of particulars with that of systems, stylistics with symbolic economies. What is needed—and what I can only begin to suggest, with later practice offering proof—is the will to insert into the hermeneutic circle the interpretation of objects alongside texts. This could take the form of a commitment by philologists (the only ones for whom I can speak) to always take account of material culture in making that outward leap from textual object to the horizon of comparison (which may or may not be the horizon of the original user's or producer's expectations). The commitment would extend to regular investigation of modern comparative evidence, whether it be how olive presses are constructed or how laments are sung, now or in the recent past, in Greece or in comparable cultural situations. And the commitment would require us to be self-aware, to be explicit about methods, to specify on what levels of interpretive activity we are operating and, analogously, what levels of comparison are legitimate in our analyses of text and object.

PARADIGMS AND GLOSSES

The preceding list of four approaches that can form the basis for cross-field discussion should not be taken as exhaustive or restrictive. It is compiled on the basis of practical utility, with an eye toward the increasingly limited time that young scholars have for training. Unfortunately, every hour spent conning yet another book about theory (the present essay included) is an hour taken from contact with primary texts and objects, from reading Greek prose or scrutinizing the Amasis painter's pots. A deep acquaintance with words and things—yes, let's call it *connoisseurship*—cannot be acquired in any other way; moreover, such an acquaintance is all that philologists or material culture experts can cling to in the face of that administrator's dream, a colorless, big-box Department of Culture (the intellectual equivalent of Wal-Mart).

Nor should this foundational list be taken as implying that we need brand-new foundations. Superb work has already been done by scholars on

both sides of the dirt/word divide; the more urgent task is to devise clearer means of communication between these sides, so that we can once more learn patiently from one another. And the goal is not to construct a grand edifice called “Greek culture,” into which we then attempt to lure paying visitors; it is to engage in the dialectic shuttling between ever-more careful observation of particulars and increasingly nuanced views of broader contexts to which these particulars adhere—a disconcerting experience, perhaps, more like a fun-house than a museum.

Not just for the sake of symmetry, I offer in conclusion another four-fold division to frame a few paradigmatic pieces of work within Greek studies that mediate between words and things. I will not try to paste this tetrahedron onto the methodological description just given, although it would be instructive to analyze theoretical underpinnings author by author. Instead, starting from things themselves, let me classify, very selectively though not arbitrarily, some articles and books as being engaged with words that exist *on*; *about*; *parallel to*; or *as* objects.

ON

Semiotic approaches have already elevated the visual to the level of the verbal, each mode encoding meaning within systems, each system cross-connected with many others, and to some degree raggedly open-ended. That is to say, in the past few decades, the main obstacle left from the positivist treatment of objects has been overcome: the idea of “illustration,” with its smug assurance that interpreters of texts only need the material world to confirm and set off, like interleaved plates in old encyclopedias, the (naturally more important) verbal artifacts. Epigraphers have been in a privileged—albeit ambiguous—position when it comes to dealing with the text-object relationship. Are they archaeologists or philologists, both or neither? Several have concerned themselves with the theoretical questions latent in their specialization. Joseph Day for instance, analyzes the relationship between rituals and dedicatory offerings, bringing together text, behavior, and monument in order to understand the process an ancient viewer might have employed in “reading” poems on these inscribed objects (1994; see also Day 1989). The analysis opens up questions about competitive display, the nature of dedication as a speech-act, and the economy, real and symbolic, in which such objects featured. Day’s explication of the deployment of *kharis* and related words shows how the overarching concept (which we might call *pleasure-with-reciprocity*) can best be reconstructed from the *combination* of object and text in a ritual setting. This reconstruction, in turn, sheds further light on non-inscribed texts in which the semantic complex appears (Day 1994: 57–60).

Such a method might be extended to the entire range of objects bearing texts, from coins to vases to buildings. *Phrasikleia*, the 1993 tour de force book by Jesper Svenbro, unites a series of studies concerning interrelated acts of storing information, viewing objects, and reading aloud, with objects as diverse as the tattooed corpse of Epimenides and the *korê* whose name is enshrined in the volume's title. Another fruitful approach analyzes the nexus between texts and Athenian vases. Allison Glazebrook (2005), in a theoretically informed recent article involving the *visualization* of texts, looks at how women are represented, in contrast with men, as readers of book rolls. This perspective, somewhat like the literary analysis of "readers in the text" opens further horizons concerning the symbolic role of material objects in establishing cultural and gender norms. At yet another level, the extended notion of "inscription" can be investigated more broadly in ancient Greek contexts to sensitize us to cultural shifts. This line of approach would attempt to stretch beyond the fine work done so far on the relationships among writing, law, oral tradition, and education.⁵⁵ We might, for example, take as a model Bruno Latour's (1986) analysis of watershed moments in modernization as dependent on the mobilization of "inscription." Such moments, rather than stemming from one-time cognitive leaps, depend on the steady diffusion of texts, diagrams, figures, anatomical plates, etchings, and so forth. In Latour's view, these "inscriptions" enabled competitive work and thus rapid scientific advances from the fifteenth century onward. The trend that he observes, "toward simpler and simpler inscriptions that mobilize larger and larger numbers of events in one spot" can, without much adjustment, be applied to Athenian democratic practices and even state-run drama (Latour 1986: 18). We are not talking merely about the textualization of formerly oral performances (although that, wrapped up with various Homeric questions, is no doubt related to developments in Athens). Before the mid sixth century, where could one find in Athens or anywhere a mechanism that would require a cascade of scripts, a dozen at the Dionysia alone, "mobilizing" the data of Greek life, past or contemporary, for spectators to watch and think about? Like the new-fangled map that Strepsiades views, with disbelief and trepidation, in the *Clouds* (206–17), Athenian drama itself inscribes in the unique and brief space of the theater, practices and problems that are otherwise far-flung, as wide apart as Athens and Sparta in real space. Maps and plays both concentrate the mind, centering what were once peripheries. Drama, this new visual instrument for the mobilization of allies and audiences is, like the geometry that produced maps, a *sophisma dêmotikon kai khrêsimon* (*Clouds* 205)—"clever and useful public-minded invention."

⁵⁵ For which Thomas 1989 and 1992, and Robb 1994 remain essential antidotes to the ungrounded speculations of Havelock 1986 and Ong 1982.

ABOUT

The analysis of words directly written onto objects can go as far as archaeological discovery, and the relevant material-culture disciplines allow. A wider field is opened up when we take account of all those texts (once inscribed, to be sure, then energetically recopied) that speak, at a second remove, *about* other objects (some of which, in turn, might also be pictured as inscribed). Deborah Steiner's books (1994, 2001) draw attention toward two aspects of this problematic: texts that talk of writing (in particular, writing by tyrants) and texts that talk of statues. Karen Bassi's (2005) ongoing project to consider texts as they relate to objects in the past has yielded fascinating results, as in her explication of ways by which objects embed time within Greek narratives constructed by Hesiod, Thucydides, and Aristophanes. By asking how physical remains "as objects of verbal description and emplotment create and mediate the ancient past," Bassi (2005: 1) addresses, of course, the latent and related problem: how our own "inscriptions" as scholars of the past carry out the same task.⁵⁶

Bodies, too, as material, can be inscribed or subjects of inscription. Claude Calame, among many Hellenists whose interests turned to ancient erotics (especially after Foucault), nicely configures the graphic (in several senses) representation of Eros through poetry and painting. In both of these sign-systems, we are confronted with elaborately designed objects (songs or pots), things that necessitate interpretation and distance, no matter how immediate seem the emotions thereby displayed. Furthermore, the words and pictures coupled on vases of an erotic cast must be interpreted in terms of audience and function; in Calame's view, "pederastic acclamations," for example, inscribed on vases can function like speech-acts to bring about persuasion, or group solidarity (1999: 85–88). The homology that he traces between pots and poems, further enabled by the device of text inscribed on the vase, teeters on the line between words *on* (physical) objects and words *about* (depicted) objects, and therefore provides a good way to think about other, purely verbal texts that describe bodies: the well-known lyric, novelistic, and dramatic examples, but also medical, legal, and philosophical depictions, textual practices for which the claim to belong to an authoritative *corpus* ranks high. Helen King's study of the constructions found in gynecological texts explores the levels of reading implicated in such fraught situations (1998: 40–53). Like the gradual exchange of characteristics between man and bicycle in Flann O'Brien's 1968 comic novel, bodies in texts can come to influence the shape of textual bodies.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Bassi 2005, with especially relevant further bibliography. The quotation is from page 1.

⁵⁷ The long ancient tradition of text-as-body, at least as old as Plato's *Phaedrus*, may further be related to such material practices as sacrificial meat-division: see Svenbro 1984.

It is worth listing under this category the sophisticated recent attempts to deal with the depiction of bodies in performance, whether dancing, playing music, or acting on stage. Once again, the central task these face is to advance beyond pumping objects for information, to see them rather (usually, vase paintings) as in dialogue with literary and historical representations. Shapiro's studies of rhapsodes (1993, 1995), Stansbury-O'Donnell's work on spectatorship (2006), Ceccarelli's on the warrior dance (1998), and Hedreen's on the "myth and performance" of Silen figures must be counted as important guides. Now that the groundwork has been laid, a single comprehensive treatment of Athenian performance practices (including oratory, drama, and gesture) would be desirable.⁵⁸

Objects have histories—a fact it did not require the apparatus of material culture study to tell us. But they can also have biographies, hidden stories that connect them, in all their distinctive individuality, with a living past and particular persons. They can preserve and evoke attitudes and emotions. An object once cared for in a certain way may even exhibit differences from one that was "immaterial"—so to speak—to any owner or creator.⁵⁹ Imagining object biographies involves the reconstruction or projection of ideas and ideologies, as opposed to the functionalist approach, for which objects are means, not ends. "The most seductive aspect of the biographical approach," in the words of Felipe Ammann, "appears to be the opportunity it gives us to link the material world as thought and the object world as lived in a succession of singular social settings" (Ammann 2005: 78). We might follow this Siren-like seduction into the "Homeric world," that artifact (or invention) left to us by epic poetry from the archaic period. What strikes one most is that "Homer" (my shorthand for the totality of our epics) already knows, and places poetic value upon, "the social life of things." Probably the most famous "Mycenaean" object in Homer—the boar's tusk helmet—surfaces in what some scholars have condemned as the "un-Homeric" Book 10 of the *Iliad* (257–71). Whatever we might think of the actual provenance of this unique object, the poetic setting compels us to treat it as something extraordinary (as befits the highly unusual episode in which it occurs).⁶⁰ The sacral cups of Achilles and Nestor, the scepter of Agamemnon, the

⁵⁸ Easterling and Hall 2002 is a welcome addition, focusing as it does on the reality of the bodies (individual and corporate) that performed dramatic texts.

⁵⁹ Certain well-loved stuffed animals come to mind. Will archeologists of the future be able to reconstruct the processes whereby some Beanie Babies® stay in pristine condition (as collectibles in adult hands) while others (cherished by children) survive in tatters?

⁶⁰ It does not matter whether or not the poem's composers ever viewed such an object; the treatment accorded it makes one think we have here a mix of fantasy and reminiscence. Carpenter 1959 is still worth reading on the "fallacy of discrepant reference" that so often attaches itself to this renowned cup.

spear of Peleus, and the infamous wall of the Achaeans thrust their materiality into the epic, competing for airtime with the rhetoric of heroes and gods. In the world of the narrator, they form a third discourse, separate from the character or composer voices, echoed from the past. A similar list of goods with genealogies attached could be made from the *Odyssey*, starting with the famous bow of the hero, but also including the marriage bed, the oar (*aka* winnowing-fan) that will mark the goal of the hero's final journey, the cloak given by Helen to Telemachus, and even the seat Odysseus used to occupy in the assembly-place of Ithaca. The poetic tradition is sensitive to the human aura adhering to these objects. From such highlighting, we see not only "monuments" in Homer, but the act of epic monumentalizing, that habit of mind and emotion that draws objects into a sphere of heightened significance.

PARALLEL TO

I have already mentioned several studies that consider objects and texts in terms of their shared semiotic systems, with the best work stemming from the side of art historians. From the philologist's side, one less often finds attempts to match (or counter) textual patterns with the material instantiations of meaningful systems. Kurke's magisterial study of "the politics of meaning" sums up in its title (*Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold*, 1999) the artifactual fields that she investigates in order to explicate and think beyond the texts of lyric poetry and Herodotus. The subtlety of her analyses has not been matched; methodologically, what matters equally is her refusal to simplify the picture: instead we get a look at the multiple, overlapping, sometimes distorted pictures produced by the actors and observers within her episodes in cultural history. This study is as close as one can get to the "thick description" that can unite objects and texts (albeit without the contemporary ethnography). A key chapter in Kurke's 1999 book, on "Kroisos and the Oracular Economy," conjoins with earlier work by Carol Dougherty (1993) and Lisa Maurizio (1997) on Delphic oracles. This centerpiece of Greek cultural life might also be described as, in itself, an institution for coordinating parallel systems of verbal and material activity. The *omphalos*-stone marking Delphi as cosmocentric can in turn be seen as part of a physically instantiated series of verbal markers. Like the boundary stones that in Josh Ober's (1995) view, enunciated declarative speech-acts on the land of Attica, the *omphalos*-stone orients its viewers in space; even more so, it directs them toward past *time*, and by implication (for the stone is a "declaration" by Zeus) the eternal nature of the oracle site over which his son presides.⁶¹

⁶¹ On the evocation of the past in this manner, see Bassi (forthcoming); on the Attic *horoi*, see Ober 1995; on the *horos*-stones as symbolic objects in another verbal and material system that parallels Athenian conceptions of choral function, see Martin 2007.

Another subcategory worth mention is the abiding concern to make parallel the forms of Homeric poetry and archaic art. Cedric Whitman (1958) made this a conspicuous notion in his book on the *Iliad*, fittingly, since that study of four decades ago was gracefully New Critical in its essence. For Whitman, the shape of the entire *Iliad* (elaborately graphed in the volume as also on the inside of the dust jacket) matched the intricate patterning of Geometric vase design. In Whitman's wake, the comparison has been taken up with further discriminations by Stephen Lowenstam (1992) and others. Snodgrass (1998) has effectively ended the persistent claims that early Greek vase painting somehow "illustrates" Homer, or that one can pinpoint the time-line of epic development and relate it to that of artistic representations. But it could be that more refined work at a higher level of abstraction (like the formal qualities of Geometric pots) is still suggestive and partially valid (if one leaves room for the possibility of lag-times in artistic imitation). Surprisingly, the last book by the late anthropologist Mary Douglas (2007) now returns us to the question of the deep-seated nature of such formal tendencies as ring-composition, evident in art and text. Her centerpiece is the *Iliad*, and her general claim is that Western culture is less attuned than others to the phenomenon. Yet another avenue thus opens for Classicists: ethnographic comparison in the styles of parallel media.⁶²

AS

The New Critics spoke of texts as objects: verbal icons, well-crafted urns. But for Wimsatt, Brooks, and others, such talk did not prompt further work on the implications of the metaphor. If the attention to verbal *form* struck some as new, that was because previous generations had been lulled (whether by Romantic or Enlightenment views of rhetoric) into treating texts as essentially mental phenomena, messages from minds and souls. That texts should be compared with *actual* objects in terms of style and circulation seems not to have occurred to the New Critics. As usual with advances in literary criticism, other fields provided a catalyst. The study of reciprocity as a total social system, an early object of scrutiny in the French sociological tradition, infiltrated Greek studies in the work of the Paris school, especially its *genius loci* Louis Gernet, whose seminal article on value in Greek myth is a classic in its own right.⁶³ British and American classicists came around eventually, so that there is now rich material and theoretically sophisticated method for the

⁶² Whitman 1958; Lowenstam 1992; Andrae & Flashar 1977; Snodgrass 1998; Douglas 2007.

⁶³ For a re-evaluation of Gernet's work in this area see von Reden 1999.

consideration of all kinds of interplay between economic object and verbal exchange.⁶⁴ Austin and Searle's work on speech-act theory, and the ethnography of speaking (a subset of linguistic anthropology) contributed further to the view that many cultures conceptualize speech and texts in more material terms. Comparatists have long been aware that praise and blame function as "real" objects of exchange, in societies ranging from medieval Ireland to modern West Africa, just as anthropologists of modern Greece know that rural lamenters of the twentieth century could "kill" with their words.⁶⁵ Within Hellenic studies, the adoption of a more materialist analysis of speech events can clarify the elaborateness and size of Homeric epics, as well as the dynamics of Aeschylean tragedy.⁶⁶ The linked institutions of patronage and traveling poets depend on the notion that special speech confers prestige and power in ways that merit compensation.⁶⁷ Pindaric poetry—what Leslie Kurke (1991) in her brilliant study of it aptly called the "traffic in praise"—is a prime example.⁶⁸ Many more such explorations have potential, and whole areas of Greek discourse (historiography, philosophy, rhetoric, the novel, Hellenistic poems) have yet to be investigated fully in terms of speech-acts as object of exchange and power.⁶⁹ Beyond this goal, the even more enticing possibility that material objects *function as speech-acts* has only begun to be explored, as few can muster the requisite knowledge of artifacts and texts. Nassos Papalexandrou (2005) (one who has) makes the highly persuasive argument that archaic Greek tripod dedications, in their distinctive iconography, instantiate and allude to Homeric-style *muthoi* (understood as "authoritative utterances"). The work of Sarah Harrell (2002) and David Smith (2003) on another set of dedications (the Deinomenid monuments at Delphi and Olympia) similarly views the act of inscription as synergistic with the crafting of visual statements concerning status, power, and placement (Harrell 2002; Smith 2003). In sum,

⁶⁴ On archaic poetics and exchange systems, see especially von Reden 1995; see also Morris 1986 for earlier examples of work with these concepts, and the wide-ranging volume edited by Scheidel and von Reden 2002.

⁶⁵ For comparative readings of the material force of lament, see Martin 2003, and for modern Greek lament specifically, Seremetakis 1991.

⁶⁶ On Homer, see Martin 1989, and on Aeschylus, Prins 1991.

⁶⁷ On the phenomenon see the essays in Hunter and Rutherford (forthcoming).

⁶⁸ Kurke 1991. The poetry of Pindar also fits the description of high-prestige goods. Like luxury items, it carries social messages, assumes specialized knowledge for its proper consumption, and is specifically tailored to individual tastes. For these characteristics of certain commodities, see Appadurai 1986: 38.

⁶⁹ Promising directions in these areas are mapped out, respectively, in Munson 2005, Nightingale 1995, Worthington 1994, Rimell 2007, and Meyer 2005.

if one were to predict that a single aspect of the four-fold array I have been outlining would become most productive of new work in the new century, a good bet would be the realization that in ancient Greece (and Rome) “words alone are certain good(s).”⁷⁰

A conclusion is out of character for this overview, half-diagnostic, half-protreptic as it is. Celebration, as I said at the outset, is not yet in order. Structural engineering, at the intellectual level, is the more immediate need. When philologists begin to work through the implications of the objects in, beneath, or adjacent to their texts, to explicate more fully the materiality of words *themselves* within the ancient Greek imaginary, and to seek words to communicate with colleagues less bound to the texts, we might hope to bridge the currents of the discipline.

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⁷⁰ The Yeats poem from which I derive the title for this piece (*The Song of the Happy Shepherd*, from *Crossways*, 1889) begins elegiacally “The woods of Arcady are dead, And over is their antique joy,” going on to develop a contrast between ancient landscapes and the words that survive their loss. I have tried to argue that the verbal—particularly words stemming from that lost Mediterranean world—was and is every bit as material as Arcady.

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