Abstract

This chapter sketches out some of the features of the encounter between media theory and Greco-Roman antiquity in two complementary ways: as a field of knowledge awaiting further systematic exploration and analysis, but also as a set of methods that under the banner of ‘cultural transmission’ brings together practices for producing and processing knowledge that are fundamental to the way in which ancient cultures become ‘classical’. The discussion begins with the concept of the medium and the promise it holds for analytical work in the study of the past. It then moves on to the role of mediation in thinking about the cultural significance of communication across time and perception. It continues with a consideration of classical studies and media studies as disciplines, focusing on the kinds of research that can be pursued at their intersection. The chapter concludes with an overview of the contributions that follow.

Keywords

medium as a concept, media theory, Greco-Roman antiquity, the classical, cultural transmission
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Introduction

Classical Antiquity, Media Histories, Media Theories

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‘The realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture,’ writes German media theorist Friedrich Kittler.¹ The emergence since the 1970s of electronic and knowledge-based technologies, and more specifically of digital media, has brought to the fore the close link that exists between media, knowledge, and perception, a link generating both exhilaration and anxiety. However, the centrality of media to epistemological debates around the ways in which knowledge is produced, stored, and disseminated has a much longer history in Western thought. One of the most complex and multifaceted case studies in the history of media yet to receive systematic examination concerns ancient Greece and Rome, and their enduring presence in later cultures. What is the role of media (new and old, material and spiritual, perceptible and imperceptible) in the formation of Greco-Roman antiquity, and in its transmission as ‘classical’ and as ‘culture’? How do media shape the specificity, convergence, and transference of different types of cultural form and content? How do continuities and ruptures in cultural production and transmission manifest themselves? How have media been conceptualized in Greece and Rome? How have ideas, concepts, and practices related to Greco-Roman antiquity been interwoven in the history and culture of modern theoretical debates around media and information technology? And how have they been interwoven in broader discussions around the philosophical

¹ Kittler (1999: 13).
apparatus of technology, culture, and biology as they are played out against a critique of modernity?

The aim of this volume is to introduce a largely neglected area of existing interactions between Greco-Roman antiquity and media theory, addressing the question of why interactions in this area matter, and how they might be developed further. On the one hand, the volume seeks to promote more media attentiveness among scholars of Greece and Rome. On the other hand, it aims to create more awareness of the presence of the classics in media theory for media theorists and historians themselves. This is not a comprehensive handbook for the study of media in antiquity, nor a reader in classically inflected media theory. Its orientation is different from works devoted to specific media theorists (such as the publications in the International Journal of McLuhan Studies or the spate of publications on the work of Friedrich Kittler following his death in 2011). It is also different from the scholarship on, say, the history of the book in antiquity as an established field of knowledge with several decades of work behind it. Much as it is indebted to such types of scholarship, this volume does not so much seek to situate itself within them as to explore ways in which it can bring them into contact with one another. It foregrounds the persistency of Greco-Roman paradigms across the different strands of media theory. And it calls for a closer consideration of the conceptual underpinnings of the cultural (and scholarly) practices around the transformation of ancient Greece and Rome into ‘classics’.

This opening chapter sketches out some of the features of this encounter between media theory and Greco-Roman antiquity in two complementary ways: as a field of knowledge awaiting further systematic exploration and analysis, but also as a set of methods that under the banner of ‘cultural transmission’ brings together practices for producing and processing knowledge that are fundamental to the way in which ancient cultures become ‘classical’. The discussion begins with
the concept of the medium and the promise it holds for analytical work in the study of the past. It then moves on to the role of mediation in thinking about the cultural significance of perception and of communication across time. It continues with a consideration of classical studies and media studies as disciplines, focusing on the kinds of research that can be pursued at their intersection. The chapter concludes with an overview of the contributions that follow.

1.1. What Do Media Do

There is no consensus on what constitutes a medium beyond a basic understanding of the concept as “‘being in the middle’ in the most general sense’.²

Ask a sociologist or cultural critic to enumerate media, and he will answer: TV, radio, cinema, the Internet. An art critic may list: music, painting, sculpture, literature, drama, the opera, photography, architecture. A philosopher of the phenomenologist school would divide media into visual, auditory, verbal, and perhaps gustatory and olfactory [. . .] An artist’s list would begin with clay, bronze, oil, watercolor, fabrics, and it may end with exotic items used in so-called mixed media works, such as grasses, feathers, and beer can tabs. An information theorist or historian of writing will think of sound waves, papyrus scrolls, codex books, and silicon chips.³

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² Schröter (2016: 44).
The difficulty of defining media ontologically, as objects, is due to what might be called the ‘inherently polyvalent’ nature of the term (which, among other things, explains the dominance of the plural ‘media’ over the singular ‘medium’). How, then, can media be used as a useful analytical category?

The technological, semiotic, and cultural dimensions of the term call for a shift away from the question of what media are (a question associated with classificatory hierarchies at least as far back as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s distinction between spatial and temporal arts, if not further back, in Simonides’ distinction between poetry and painting) towards the question of what they do: how they have been conceptualized at different times and in different intellectual traditions, and what is involved in mediation as a process or activity. Such a shift makes it possible to connect contemporary debates around culture, materiality, and technology with those of the past. It also makes it possible to combine the properties of material and technical instruments and infrastructure (the ‘material hardware’ of culture) and recursive, often embodied, practices of different systems of mediation (the ‘discursive software’ of culture). For instance, scripts must be related to reading and writing, images to painting, drawing, and sculpting, and numbers to calculating. The reason and purpose of such skills have conventionally been considered in the context of educating the self. Yet reading and writing are not only technical competencies in the context of humanistic education. They are also chains of operations and assemblages that link things, humans, and the knowledge they produce as culture. The shift from what media are to what they do allows us to reflect, in a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary manner, on different phenomena of transition and transformation from ethics to epistemology. It also makes it possible to engage with a whole

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4 Ryan and Thon (2014: 5).
5 Ernst (2013b).
spectrum of interpretative possibilities, from media as processing agents that construct the past, to media as self-effacing tools that reveal or represent the past.\textsuperscript{6}

In contemporary usage, three metaphors prevail in discussions of the concept of the medium: media as conduits (i), media as languages (ii), and media as environments (iii).\textsuperscript{7} When used, each metaphor brings into focus different dimensions of what is ‘in the middle’ of the communication process, and in doing so facilitates the transition (in the literal sense of \textit{meta-pherein} as carrying over, transferring\textsuperscript{8}) from the specificity of digital, new, social, or mass media to a historically and conceptually broader reflection on the workings of mediation.

(i) As conduits, media are channels with real or imagined possibilities and limitations for conveying information to the senses, and for bridging the gap between production and reception. In this sense media include materials for aesthetic expression such as clay, stone, or wax. They also include tools and devices, both real and imagined, from the actor’s mask and the sculptor’s chisel to the plough of didactic poetry and the automata of Hephaestus’ divine workshop. They can also include sensory organs, from the painter’s hand and the actor’s body to the eyes of the mind and the ears of the divinely inspired poet.

(ii) Media, however, can also be understood in a broader sense, as semiotic structures that require ‘reading’ or ‘translating’ competencies on the part of those who produce them and those who use them. In this definition, media refer to ‘modes’ of cultural production and reproduction such as images and words, or speaking, singing, and dancing. As such, they draw attention to the materiality of the signification codes on which different cultural forms are based. Signals are not

\textsuperscript{6} For an overview of these positions at the opposite ends of the interpretative spectrum of media theory, see Young (2017) and Heilmann, Chapter 2, this volume.

\textsuperscript{7} Meyrowitz (1993).

\textsuperscript{8} On the conceptualization of media through the literal sense of \textit{metapherein}, see Tholen (2002) and Mersch (2016).
simply encoded and decoded, but are inscribed and processed materially, making it possible to follow the traces they leave behind and the routes they travel between different points in space and time.

(iii) An even broader definition makes it possible to approach media as conceptual and perceptual environments; nurturing or adverse systems that condition, but are also the basis for, the very processes of what is understood as, say, art, expression, and reception. This includes media of perception such as space and time, but also topologies of media such as memory and dreams. What sustains the flight of Homer’s ‘winged/feathered words’, for instance, is not just their ‘wings/feathers’ (however one might imagine words equipped with such features), nor simply their path from a speaker to an addressee who ‘speaks the same language’. Even in face-to-face interactions, such words simultaneously traverse the ‘ether’ not only of heroic kleos but also of epic performance, technical bardic memory, cultural memory, and imagination. Conversely, without Homer’s winged words, such a complex environment would not simply be different; it would cease to exist.

To understand how media work as ‘concepts of the middle’, one needs to draw not only on prevalent metaphors in contemporary discussions of the concept, but also on the ‘long linguistic, semantic, and conceptual itinerary’ of the idea.9 Stefan Hoffmann has shown that the different uses of the term in the humanities, communication studies, and journalism result from their engagement with different aspects of its history.10 Looking back on historical usage of the relevant vocabulary opens up a number of different possibilities for thinking about media and the conditions in which

10 Hoffmann (2002).
culture emerges. In Greek and Latin, as in English, ‘being in the middle’ has a wide range of associations relevant to this discussion. As suggested by the semantic range of *mesos*, *metaxy*, and *medius*, the concept of media relates to (a) the qualities of being central, public, or moderate, but also to (b) the invisibility of being indeterminate, ordinary, or average. As suggested by *mesos* and *medius* as substantives to mean ‘mediator’, it is also associated with (c) the agency and skills of impartiality, neutrality, arbitration, and intervention. As suggested by the phrase ‘in medias res’, it can be associated (d) with what holds the key to power and control over ‘things’ and over the stories told about them; and finally, (e), as with *hule*, *ousia*, and *arche*, it can be associated with matter, essence, origins, and permanence.

As James Porter has shown in his analysis of the ‘classical’ and of ‘classicism’ (another set of terms with a complex history of relevance to this volume), it is not so much the words themselves and the concepts they name that matter in the mapping of such conceptual itineraries, as ‘the patterns of logic that underlie’ them.\textsuperscript{11} Like the new media of the early twenty-first century, the media of and around Greece and Rome can be situated discursively on a spectrum that covers the whole range from the emancipatory to the technophobic: they can be celebrated and demonized, fetishized and commodified, politicized and moralized, gendered, and infused with nostalgia. As such they are never fully invisible and transparent. Traces of technical acts of cultural production and reproduction can be sought in the cracks of medial operations: in techno-historical accidents, false starts, glitches, irregularities, and anachronisms. However, there is also a whole range of aesthetic strategies that might be productively employed to foreground technical acts of cultural production and reproduction, strategies that make it possible to speak of an aesthetics of what

\textsuperscript{11} Porter (2006: 13).
David Bolter and Richard Grusin call ‘hypermediacy’. Reflections on the multiplicity of media as channels, languages, or environments can be sought in the metaphors of poetic composition as craftsmanship that abound in Greco-Roman poetry; in the political, financial, and social networks for the reproduction and dissemination of artistic works and values as thematized in the performing and plastic arts; but also in the deeply ambivalent attitude towards new modes of information storage and retrieval found, for instance, in Platonic philosophy.

Media, however, can also shape the presence and enduring worth of different cultural forms and practices at levels and in ways that are not always foregrounded. Media are often perceived as performing their work most effectively when they go unnoticed, when they are used as unobtrusive instruments, as languages thought to be universal, or as environments in the background of cultural activity. This power of ‘immediacy’ is fundamental both to the instrumental use of media and to the way in which media are invested with the power of revealing, a power often demonstrated through the access they promise to the real or the beyond. In other words, there is a strong relation between the invisibility of media and the emergence of realism as an aesthetic category, as well as between the transparency of media and the foundational metaphysics that is most commonly associated with Plato but that can be traced back to the philosophical poetry of the Presocratics, the theology of tragedy, and the poetics of the epic poetry of Homer and Hesiod. ‘The obsession with an unmediated representation of the past is itself a media effect,’ argues Wolfgang Ernst. ‘The media archaeologist, with all his or her Nietzschean “passion of distance,” does not hallucinate life when he or she listens to recorded voices; the media-archaeological exercise is to

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14 Ernst (2005: 592).
be aware at each given moment that we are dealing with technical media, not humans, that we are not listening to the dead but rather that dead media operate.’

1.2. Transmission and Perception

All knowledge about Greece and Rome is mediated knowledge. It is based on the material remains of texts and artefacts and on the cultural practices and traditions with which those remains are interwoven and which have made their survival possible. How do we consider the complexities of cultural transmission in ways that allow us to account for what comes between long-dead senders and ever-changing receivers? The question of how our interaction with the past differs from face-to-face communication poses a major challenge to the dialogical and anthropocentric models of hermeneutics so prevalent in the humanities. A commonly held view is that we moderns *converse* with antiquity, and that in doing so we resume a dialogue with ancient wisdom that was interrupted with the emergence of Christianity, the Middle Ages, or some other dark period. The concept of transmission has been discussed primarily in historically and disciplinarily insular terms, primarily as a textual process concerning the changing fortunes of manuscripts and books. The search for more conceptually productive ways to describe our engagement with the past has led to concepts primarily associated with the continuities of the classical tradition (in which metaphors of ever-flowing streams, unbroken chains, or rights of inheritance often prevail), or more recently with the discontinuities in the agency of readers and spectators (through the concepts of reception or appropriation). Viewed in such ways, the process of the relay of content is often

15 Ernst (2015a: 100–1).
16 Osterkamp (2008).
17 See De Pourcq (2012) with relevant bibliography.
understood as being fraught with contingency and risk. At best, as seen in geological or archaeological terms, it is an accumulation of layers of meaning that, like layers of soil, can protect or otherwise enrich our understanding of what lies underneath. But, more often than not, it is seen as an obstacle or interference that needs to be eliminated or endured, as the logic of being ‘lost in translation’ (or in any other type of cultural transition, we might add) has it.

At a time when infusing Greece and Rome with universalizing authority can be used in ways that may have very real consequences in the present, we need to revisit the question of what is classical about Greece and Rome in relation not only to the different temporalities that come together in what we call the present, but also across time.\(^{18}\) For the purposes of this volume, the question that needs to be addressed is how to do justice to the complexities of that process of making contact across time in ways that move beyond the agency of long-dead senders and ever-changing receivers and beyond the conceptualization of temporal distance as an obstacle. How do we consider what comes in between, and how does it make accessible what it transmits in ways that allow us to shift our focus from proximity to distance, from space to time, and from reciprocity to unidirectionality? If, as the French philosopher Régis Debray has put it, culture is what is worth transmitting,\(^{19}\) the processes of storage, transmission, and retrieval of what is known and valued about Greece and Rome cannot be an obstacle for our accessing the ‘classical’ past but rather a condition for its possibility.

\(^{18}\) On the concept of the present as a disjunctive unity, see Osborne (2013). On the significance of the internet and social media as a cultural space where political debates around the role of Greco-Roman antiquity today are both polarized and broadened, see Zuckerberg (2018) and the online classics journal *Eidolon* (of which she is the editor-in-chief).

\(^{19}\) Debray (2000: 5).
Thinking analytically and critically about the limitations of the work performed by the concept of dialogue, and replacing dialogue by transmission, have profound implications for the conditions of sociality and communality. They raise issues of power and ethics that tend to be marginalized or even ignored altogether by an anthropocentric way of thinking about social systems based on values of interaction, reciprocity, and consensus. One possibility is to argue that both artefacts and embodied skills must be seen in the context of larger structures of power associated with the discipline of the self. This is the way in which the conditions for the possibility of thinking have been discussed in the context of Friedrich Kittler’s discourse networks and more recently in the field of ‘cultural techniques’, in the wake of Michel Foucault’s archaeology of thought (as discussed by some of the contributors in this volume). Both writing tools and practices such as reading and writing belong to a broader range of cultural techniques that involve ‘highly regulated networks of recursive operational chains that regulate in their turn the production and distribution of power and knowledge’.20 A second possibility is to move from the politics of discourse networks to the politics and ethics of alterity. Following Sybille Krämer’s ‘messenger principle’ and John Durham Peters’s historical take on the idea of communication (both indebted to Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophical work on alterity), it is possible to focus not on recognition or memory and their promise of overcoming distance, but on responding to ‘the otherness of the worlds between which a connection is to be established’;21 not on the decipherability of signs but on the opaqueness of traces in the context of irresolvable unfamiliarity and irreversible pastness. Media, as opposed to instruments, give us access to a presence that we cannot fully understand and control but can nevertheless engage with and experience.

20 Krajewski (2013: 94).
Mediation can help make a case for the centrality in community building and culture founding not only of communication across time but also of perception. Conventionally, perception is only marginal to dialogic, consensual forms of communication. However, at least as far back as Plato’s and especially Aristotle’s theory of sensory perception, media of perception are a condition for the possibility of perception, acting as an in-between space that is at once material and transparent (the metaxy or ‘diaphanous’). In this genealogy of media, perception is not only a mental process. Rather, it also concerns the construction and transmission of mental processes with the help of what makes things visible, audible, perceptible: ‘We do not hear vibrations in the atmosphere but rather the sound of a bell; we do not read letters but rather a story.’22 The interplay of recursive corporeal practices, material objects, and channels of perception and transmission that cannot themselves be thematized or observed but that make things perceptible produces cultural effects that span a broad range of experiences. It involves hermeneutically oriented understanding and, in the absence of direct perception, deductive reasoning. But it also involves other forms of appreciation of perception, including emotional and impulsive responses and an interest ‘in non-human bodies and objects, processes that escape direct and conscious human perception, intensity of matter of technological and biological kinds’.23

1.3. Classical Studies and Media Studies

Classical studies and media studies are two disciplines with very different trajectories and very different stakes in the present of the digital. Media studies is a relatively new discipline that has

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23 Parikka (2012c: 95).
gradually emancipated itself from literary studies and cultural studies, and which has a coming-of-age feel in the digital era. The general digitization of communication and information was initially heralded as the end of media, as the reduction of ‘sound and image, voice and text [...] to surface effects’, to an interface.24 But the focus of media studies shifted quickly and decisively away from this celebratory affirmation of the digital towards a longer view of media history and a more philosophical take on how mediation matters. Much scholarly work on media studies has turned away from the uniqueness of the digital era (in the manner of the end of history) towards reflections on the plurality and materiality of new and social media, the historicity of mass media, and other moments in the history of information technologies when old media were new, or when old and new media converged. In doing so, such work has attempted to situate the concept of media within different exchange systems, as ‘concepts of the middle, of connection, and of multitude—across diverse disciplines and theoretical perspectives’.25

By contrast to media studies, classical studies has entered the digital era with a long disciplinary history but also with the monumental task of a large-scale migration of its subject of study, undertaking to reconfigure knowledge of the ancient world through digital libraries and archives, online databases, commentaries, maps, and other tools and applications. This project of bringing Greco-Roman antiquity and its study into the digital era has been greeted with a renewed sense of purpose for the discipline, not least because of its double promise of efficient storage and easier, more democratic access. However, this project has made the discipline not only more accessible but also more invested in instrumental knowledge. Profound changes to scholarly practices of reading, writing, and teaching seem to have been accepted in broadly unreflective

24 Kittler (1999: 1).
ways. Whereas in media studies the digital age has called for a turn to history and philosophy and for an opening-up of its own disciplinary boundaries, in classical studies the digital age has marked a new era of encyclopedism and of reaffirming, rather than challenging, some of its long-standing operational practices. It is hardly surprising that, in this environment, ‘digital humanities’ has become the label of a niche field of technical knowledge rather than a description of what we all do anyway.

The disciplines of classical studies and media studies have little to show by way of direct and productive interaction. There are, of course, notable exceptions, such as the circle around Eric Havelock and Walter Ong, whose work on orality and literacy has been highly influential—and also much criticized—but such exceptions only serve to prove the rule. This is not only because of the different trajectories of the two disciplines. More fundamentally, media theory poses a challenge to dominant models of analysis in the humanities in which classical studies is heavily invested. As argued in the previous section, it poses a challenge to hermeneutics and to models of communication based on dialogue. Hermes is not only the god of hermeneutics but also the god of non-hermeneutic preoccupations and post-hermeneutic promises. Media draw attention not to the interiority or individuality of minds but to the exteriority of material conditions and embodied practices; not to the moral superiority of dialogue but to the politics and ethics of a unidirectional, asymmetrical, and non-reciprocal model of communication that bridges the different worlds of sender and addressee, not to a duality of absence and presence, or form and content, but to a triangulation involving the messenger as operator and as interference; not to the symbolic exchanges between humans but to the realities of communication, to the channel as a non-relating

entity, to the material conditions and protocols, the hardware and software of an interface that separates the symbolic from the real, and the signal from the noise.\textsuperscript{28}

One of the most common accusations levelled at media theory is that of technological determinism. But, as Alan Liu puts it:

\begin{quote}
Touch just one of the levers of media or technological determinism, and it soon becomes clear that they connect to the total machine of historical, material, and social determinism that is both the condition and dilemma of modernity. Once the Enlightenment desacralized God, modernity came to believe that things happen because they are caused by material-cum-historical determination. Nature and history were now the compound instrumentality that became overdetermined.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

The stakes for humanities disciplines such as classical studies could not be higher: if they provide a set of skills ‘needed for future life and work’,\textsuperscript{30} they run the risk of losing their specificity. If they move away from instrumentality, they run the risk of becoming marginal and irrelevant.\textsuperscript{31}

The challenge for such disciplines is how to move away from the ‘metaphysical comfort’ of keeping ‘in separate boxes’ subjects and objects, mind and matter, art and nature, form and content, rhetoric and epistemology.\textsuperscript{32} And how to ‘broaden the very idea of instrumentalism’,\textsuperscript{33} focusing on an understanding of its uses and methods ‘as a culture’.\textsuperscript{34} Can the humanities participate as an equal partner with the sciences in the production of knowledge? ‘Kittler puts it polemically: “for

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\textsuperscript{28} Siegert (2015a).
\textsuperscript{29} Liu (2012: 500).
\textsuperscript{30} Liu (2012 499).
\textsuperscript{31} Liu (2012: 499).
\textsuperscript{32} Peters (2015a: 88–9).
\textsuperscript{33} Liu (2012: 498).
\textsuperscript{34} Liu (2012: 502).
\end{flushright}
the humanities there is nothing nontechnical to teach and research.” The humanities help us to reflect on our technical conditioning. In addressing the question of how they do so, we need to go back to the engagement of the arts with ideas of communication, to arts as systems of communication, and to culture as a network of techniques and actors ‘bridging and maintaining differences between heterogeneous worlds’.

There are at least two ways in which research can be pursued at the intersection between classical studies and media studies. The first is to develop media-theoretically and media-historically inflected approaches to the study of Greece and Rome and their transformation into ‘classics’. This involves engagement with and willingness to put to the test a research and teaching toolkit that contains concepts such as cultural techniques, cultural transmission, media archaeology, intermediality, diagrammatology, and recursion. The second approach is to trace the functions of ancient Greece and Rome within media and information theory and to identify ways in which discussions of media genealogies and ecologies can continue their recursive interactions with Greece and Rome in the future. What follows cannot do justice to the complexity and multifaceted nature of these issues but aims to provide some pointers.

1.4. Classics in Media Theory

Examples of the role of ancient Greece and Rome in media and communication theory can be found across most of the key areas of this heterogenous and fast-changing field. For instance, they can be found on both sides of the divide between German-speaking and North American media

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36 Luhmann (2000a).
studies: both in the cultural-studies strand of scholars such as Harold Innis, Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Derrick de Kerckhove, and also in the more materialist approach of Friedrich Kittler, Siegfried Zielinski, and Wolfgang Ernst.\(^{38}\) Other strands of media theory that have engaged with Greece and Rome include the media philosophical orientations of Sybille Krämer and John Durham Peters, Bernhard Siegert and Cornelia Vismann’s cultural techniques,\(^{39}\) and much of the Francophone philosophy of technology and science, from Michel Serres’s preoccupation with communication and noise to Régis Debray’s cultural transmission, Bernard Stiegler’s history of technics, Paul Virilio’s transformation of perception, and Bruno Latour’s social mediators.\(^{40}\) Examples of the role of Greco-Roman antiquity in discussions around the philosophical apparatus of technology, culture, and biology have an even longer and more diffuse history, often played out against a critique of Western modernity. To consider this fully we would need to include other thinkers, from Jacques Derrida and his meditations on mediation to Michel Foucault and his ‘archaeology of thought’, the centrality of the machine in the thinking of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Roland Barthes’s focus on images, music, and texts, Jacques Lacan’s posthumanistic logic of the signifier, Martin Heidegger and his work on technicity, Sigmund Freud

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\(^{39}\) See, especially, Krämer (2015); Krämer and Ljungberg (2016); Peters (1999) and (2015a); Siegert (2015a); Vismann (2013).

and his technologies of memory and the unconscious, and Friedrich Nietzsche’s genealogy of media.\footnote{See, especially, Derrida (1978) and (1981); Foucault (1972) and (1994); Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and (2004); Barthes (1972); Heidegger (1982). On Lacan, see Matviyenko and Roof (2018); on Freud, see Elsaesser (2009); on Nietzsche, see Fietz (1992), Ernst (2008), and Rickels (2009).}

To my knowledge, the only Greeks and Romans of this rich tradition of thinking about mediality and technology to have received some critical attention are those of the late Friedrich Kittler.\footnote{On Kittler’s Greeks in the larger context of German philhellenism, see especially Breger (2006). See also Winthrop-Young (2011: 82–119; 2015); Powell (2012), Peters (2015b), Sale (2015), and Heilmann (2016).} The ancients of the other thinkers just mentioned and of many others that could have been added to this list are yet to be explored. Any attempt to map the functions of ancient Greece and Rome in media and communication theory needs to begin by addressing some rather basic but essential questions for how we account for that critical interest. First, in view of the porousness and heterogeneity of media studies and the lack of an overarching theory or programme of cultural technology research,\footnote{Schröter (2016).} how do we decide which thinkers to include and which to leave out? Second, which antiquity should we focus on? Which fields of knowledge, which authors, texts, artefacts, and debates have generated interest and why? Third, what is the appeal of premodern cultures and of questions of heritage, the canon, and aesthetics to a discipline most commonly associated with historical rupture, polemics against hermeneutics, and the rhetoric of the new? Fourth, why have the many traces of antiquity in media theory escaped critical attention thus far? And, finally, how can Greece and Rome continue to participate in the futures and pasts that media theory envisages for itself? Beginning to answer such questions requires systematic engagement with a large and heterogeneous body of theoretical work of the kind that this volume can only gesture towards.
Let me try to unpack one of these questions, about the diverse traces of antiquity in media theory. Thematically, the role of Greco-Roman classics in media theory revolves around a number of different areas. Among them, I would single out (a) the etymological origins of the word medium and the semantic range and trajectory of related Latin and Greek terms, (b) writing and notation systems, (c) orality and literacy, (d) the history of theorizing perception, and (e) art as *techne*, skill, craft, or technique. Arguably it is to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle that media theory has returned most persistently in search of fertile ground for thinking genealogically about its subject matter. The concept of inbetweenness crops up in numerous ways in early philosophical discussions around dichotomies such as those between thought (or reason) and its articulation, truth and representability, or nature and technicity. It is in Plato’s language of metaphysics (with its critique of writing and representation) and in Aristotle’s theory of perception in particular that we find the most theoretically informed ways of thinking about the concept of the ‘in-between’ in Greco-Roman thought (as Alloa and Haase show in this volume).

However, the engagement of media theory with Greece and Rome is not confined to Plato and Aristotle. Numerous other authors, texts, artefacts, concepts, and debates appear in media theory, from Greek mythology to Homer, tragedy, the Presocratics, Roman literature and philosophy, history of art, and early Christian theology. ‘What happens when waves are no longer oceanic matter (as in the *Odyssey*), but rather a matter of high-frequency technology?’⁴⁴ Or when ‘the technical siren as sound generator confronts its mythological object, the Homeric Sirens’?⁴⁵ Some of this can be dismissed as eclectic, idiosyncratic, lacking the rigour of specialized knowledge, or based on dubious or otherwise problematic grounds regarding ethnicity, gender, and religion. But

⁴⁴ Ernst (2013b: 139).
⁴⁵ Ernst (2014: 10).
as John Durham Peters argues in relation to Kittler’s work on ancient Greece, ‘retrograde politics and grandiose gestures’ are only part of a larger and more complex picture.\(^{46}\) That larger picture poses hermeneutic challenges and calls for the development of skills for reading not only critically, but also creatively and profitably. Consider, for instance, the ‘flamboyant vaticism’\(^ {47}\) of media theorists such as McLuhan (‘the medium is the message’\(^ {48}\) and Kittler (‘media determine our situation’\(^ {49}\)), with its mastery of the soundbite and resistance to easy systematization, and how deeply ingrained it is in classical rhetorical techniques of persuasion. Or the revisiting of philological skills displayed in Peters (‘media theorists think in the ablative case: “by means of which...”’\(^ {50}\)), Mersch (who conceptualizes media through reference to the Greek prefixes *meta-* and *dia-*\(^ {51}\)), or Vismann (who undertakes a critique of subjectivity and sovereignty by drawing on the medium verb form in Greek\(^ {52}\)). Such techniques do, of course, have a longer history in critical thinking (for example, aphorisms from Friedrich Nietzsche to Walter Benjamin and beyond\(^ {53}\)), but their use is particularly apposite in a body of thought so intensely preoccupied with knowledge as something transformative that revolves around techniques of concealing and events of revealing.\(^ {54}\)


\(^{47}\) Peters (2010: 6); see also Winthrop-Young (2011: 122).

\(^{48}\) Introduced in McLuhan (1964: 7).


\(^{50}\) Peters (2015a: 21), quoting from a letter by McLuhan to Walter Ong.

\(^{51}\) Mersch (2016).

\(^{52}\) Vismann (2013). See also her chapters in Kittler and Vismann (2001).

\(^{53}\) See Benjamin (1968); Cadava (1997); Hamacher (2010).

\(^{54}\) On rhetoric in Kittler, see Powell (2012) and Winthrop-Young (2011). On the broader issue of rhetoric and its relevance for thinking about the power of technology, see Bogost (2007: 1–64) and Hagen (2015).
1.5. Media Theory in Classics

Media theory is not the only critical approach to have transcended disciplinary boundaries in recent years. New materialism, posthumanism, cognitive studies, and the study of the senses have all made their presence dynamically felt in classical studies, as demonstrated by the emergence of relevant books, book series, and research projects.\(^5\) There is no doubt that such approaches have numerous points of contact and cross-fertilization, not least in their shared commitment to theoretically inflected ways of studying Greece and Rome in the absence of a dominant theoretical paradigm to replace poststructuralism; but also in their shared preoccupation with the role that classics can play in broader discussions about the future of the humanities and its ability to engage with today’s urgent cultural questions. But, while they may complement each other, such approaches have also emerged from different directions and have different types of thematic and methodological focus. While a more systematic discussion of the directions that ‘theory after theory’ has taken in classical studies in recent years requires more space than can be devoted to it here, it is useful to bear in mind some obvious differences between such directions. For instance, the anchoring of media theory in the material conditions for perception and knowledge sets it apart from cognitive studies, whereas its anchoring in the technical specificity of embodied practices and the transmission of ‘culture’ sets it apart from much of new materialism and the study of the senses.\(^6\) Similarly, for fields such as, say, biopolitics, ecology, and animal studies to be subjected


\(^6\) Parikka (2012c).
to media-theoretical analysis, it is necessary to approach specific forms of life, environment, and species relations as the products of cultural–technical systems.\textsuperscript{57}

It is of course obvious that the preoccupations of classical studies are never far away from discussions regarding the processes of canonization and dissemination of classical texts and artefacts. Issues such as orality and literacy, performance, memory, materiality, textual transmission, translation, archival practices, the history of the book, and more recently humanities computing are all implicated in the production, transmission, and reception of the Greco-Roman world that we now call ‘classical.’ However, much of the relevant work has been undertaken in a historically and disciplinary insular manner. With a few exceptions,\textsuperscript{58} there has been no systematic attempt to date to shift the focus away from issues of historical usage of individual media, towards more theoretical concerns that can link the media of the classical past with one another, with larger processes of cultural production and reception, and with contemporary debates around media, knowledge, and perception. Can the history of classical literature and art and the history of classical scholarship be mapped onto a history of media? What would the outcomes of such an exercise look like?

‘Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts,’ says Nietzsche in a remark often quoted in media-theoretical discussions.\textsuperscript{59} To respond to an antiquity that is thought to have an enduring

\textsuperscript{57}Geoghegan (2013: 78).

\textsuperscript{58}I have found particularly stimulating Engell, Siegert & Vogl (2003); Villers (2005); Haase (2006), (2007), (2008), and (2009); Cuomo (2007); Osterkamp (2008); Willis (2011); Butler (2011) and (2015); Gibson (2005), (2011), and (2016); Roby (2016); Formisano and van der Eijk (2017); Starre (2017); Mayor (2018); Frampton (2019). For other media-theoretically informed publications in classical studies, a good starting point is the De Gruyter series ‘Transformationen der Antike’ which showcases work around the Collaborative Research Centre ‘Transformations of Antiquity’ and the ‘August Boeckh Centre of Antiquity’ at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

\textsuperscript{59}Nietzsche (1981a: 172). For the English translation and broader implications of this phrase, see Lecznar, Chapter 11, this volume.
worth from the perspective of the historical moment that we inhabit, a techno-cultural understanding of that moment is required. Such an understanding should, among other things, consider profound changes in scholarly practices of reading, writing, and thinking that, as already mentioned, have not received much critical attention. For instance, while classical studies, like much of the rest of the humanities, continues to privilege close reading as the essence of its disciplinary identity,\(^6\) it nevertheless relies on a whole range of other reading techniques associated with computer-assisted, screen-based operations that are missing from the vocabulary of who we are and what we do. We need to ask ourselves what shifts are underway today, as the coupling of human intuition and machine logic ‘leads to specificities quite different in their effect from those mobilized by print’.\(^6\) And how the disjunction between what we say we do and how we actually do it compares to other moments of profound epistemological rupture in the study of Greco-Roman antiquity in the past. We can argue with N. Katherine Hayles that digital media give us ‘the chance to see print with new eyes, and with it, the possibility of understanding how deeply literary theory and criticism have been imbued with assumptions specific to print’.\(^6\) As Matthew Kirschenbaum puts it, and as Lecznar illustrates in this volume with his study of typewriting and handwriting in the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger, ‘the seemingly ineffable act of writing is always grounded in particular instruments and media, from quills to keyboards’.\(^6\)

If classical studies is to play a role in broader discussions about the future of the humanities and its ability to engage with the urgent cultural questions of today, it can also begin by making a stronger case for the role of art in epistemological debates. For example, we might emphasize the

\(^6\) On close reading as an essential feature of the humanities, see Jay (2014: 115–42), with earlier bibliography.

\(^6\) Hayles (2002: 42).

\(^6\) Hayles (2002: 33).

\(^6\) Kirschenbaum (2016). See also Neef (2011).
role of artistic knowledge in creating an environment that shapes society rather than merely serves it.\textsuperscript{64} Art and aesthetic criticism provide a powerful case study for thinking about transmission not as a narrowly defined field of specialized knowledge about texts and artefacts, but more ambitiously as the long-term transposition, and endurance, of cultural meaning and value. To identify what is specific about art and aesthetics and why, according to the French philosopher Bruno Latour, they should be seen as a distinct domain of knowledge or, as he puts it, a distinct ‘mode of existence’, we need to focus not on categorical distinctions between aesthetic theory, artistic practice, and their histories, but on how they interconnect. A media-theoretical and media-historical focus on cultural transmission makes it possible to enrich current debates around aesthetic criticism with the help of a renewed interest in the rich history of concepts such as realism, and in the historical construction of categorical distinctions between different art forms. It also calls for a renewed interest in artistic practices, not only in terms of their thematic preoccupation with what is otherwise inaccessible (from the heroic past to the world of the gods and the world of imagination), but also in terms of \textit{techne}, in terms of the skills and tools that mediate between presence and absence, form and content, form and matter; between artistic objects, those that produce them, and those that perceive them.

Whether techniques of transmission and perception should be seen as functions of cultural processes, or, more polemically, whether culture should be seen as a function of techniques of transmission and perception, the interplay between culture and non-human agents is something to which all contributions to this volume return. One way to bring into focus the implications of the study of media for the study of culture is by mapping the history of media onto a history of

\textsuperscript{64} On the need to re-evaluate the notion of service as a cultural technique and on the media-theoretical potential of the role of the servant, see Krajewski (2018).
literature and art. Take, for instance, the history of archaic orality and how it can be related to media-historical change not only in antiquity, in relation to the Greek alphabet, embodied technologies of memory and performance, and the culture of the bookroll, but also in the world after the printing press, from so-called universal literacy around the time of the emergence of the Homeric Question (roughly corresponding to what Kittler identifies as ‘discourse network 1800’) to the new technologies of the phonograph and radio around the time of Milman Parry’s theory of oral-formulaic composition (Kittler’s ‘discourse network 1900’), and the ‘linked networks of potentials’ of the internet65 and return of orality in social media around the time of Gregory Nagy’s ‘Homer Multitext Project’ and John Miles Foley’s ‘Pathways Project’ (what one might call Kittler’s ‘discourse network 2000’66). Another history of Greco-Roman literature and art yet to be written has to do with all the intermediaries, mediators, and meddlers of classical narrative, who reveal an intense preoccupation with how communication can be informed and shaped not by proximity but by distance. Consider all the messengers and heralds, eyewitnesses and proxy-witnesses, prophets, witches, ghosts, souls, Muses, angels, choruses, slaves and other literary and theatrical parasites, or even the poetic personas that claim to mediate between mortals and gods, or between audiences and the construction of a communal cultural memory. In Plato’s philosophical dialogues alone, the concept of mediation between readers and the truth of beings takes a dizzying number of different shapes: from Socrates as a midwife to Eros as mediator, heroes as intermediaries between gods and mortals, thymos as a psychic function of valuation that mediates between the body and the soul and between reason and desire, philosophical method as a road for accessing the truth, and language itself as mediator to the truth of beings.

1.6. This Volume

To address some of the questions raised thus far, this volume brings together an international team of scholars with expertise in areas that range from classical literature to classical reception studies, art history, media theory and media history, film studies, philosophy, and cultural studies. Despite their differences in terms of disciplinary training and intellectual engagement, they all perform a constant back and forth between antiquity and modernity as well as between theory and practice, reflecting on the role of media and mediation in processes of knowledge storage, transmission, and perception, but also in the conceptualization of thinking itself. Each contribution engages with a different aspect of ‘classical’ Greece and Rome, revolving around issues of philosophy, cultural history, literature, aesthetics, and epistemology. And each of them provides a different definition of what constitutes mediality and how it operates, constructing different genealogies of the concept of the medium, and engaging with emergent fields within media studies that range from cultural techniques to media archaeology, diagrammatology, and intermediality.67 From discourse analysis and cultural studies to techno-cultural engineering, information technologies, communication theory, comparative anthropology, phenomenology, and a critique of Western metaphysics and modernity, the contributions to this volume offer a whole host of perspectives on the significance of the encounter between media studies and classical antiquity, and on the directions this encounter might take in the future.

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67 On cultural techniques, see Siegert (2015a), Krämer (2003), Geoghegan (2013), Vismann (2013), Winthrop-Young (2015b), Krajewski (2018); on media archaeology, see Huhtamo and Parikka (2011b), Parikka (2012b) and (2012d), Zielinski (2006a) and (2015); on diagrammatology, see Pombo and Gerner (2010), Krämer (2014); Krämer and Ljungberg (2016); on intermediality, see Rajewsky (2002) and (2005), Schröter (2010) and (2011), Bruhn (2016). More bibliography on these fields can be found in the rest of the volume.
In ‘Friedrich Kittler’s Alphabetic Realism’ (Chapter 2), Till Heilmann examines the role of the Greek alphabet in the media theory of the late Friedrich Kittler. Heilmann argues that the position of the Greek alphabet in the last phase of Kittler’s work challenges key assumptions around the broader tenets of Kittler’s theory and his central position within German media theory. In late Kittler, the Greek alphabet and its letters unify writing, the sounds of spoken language, musical notes, and mathematical numbers. As such, the alphabet becomes a self-effacing yet all-powerful channel for the transmission of all aspects of Greek culture, from poetry to music and mathematics and from the arts to science and the senses. For Kittler, the Greek alphabet becomes an exemplary medium at the centre of a logic to which all technological innovation returns, including the universal code of digital computing. It is less a symbolic system preoccupied with meaning and more an indexical medium that, like phonography and photography, records forms. By relating writing to spoken language, and by situating the Greek alphabet at the origins of a history for the realistic, accurate reproduction of sound, Kittler turns it into a system whose significance lies in its ability to transmit impressions from the outside world: not to construct reality or represent reality, but to present it, giving direct access to it.

Verity Platt (Chapter 3: ‘The Seal of Polycrates: A Discourse on Discourse Channel Conditions’) argues for the centrality in Greek culture of seals and the act of impressing, discussing numerous examples among which Herodotus’ story of the seal of Polycrates occupies a central position. For Platt, seals and the act of impressing can be considered to be precursors of modern analogue technologies that operate by means of the stamp, imprint, or trace: printing, sound recording, photography, and film. Platt argues for the significance of seals and the act of impressing in Greek culture in two distinct but complementary ways. First, they are a widespread technology whose processing power helps perform a wide range of practices of transmission and
communication, linking media as diverse as stone, metal, wax, clay, and plaster. Second, they foreground such practices and invite reflection on them, as is made evident by the role seals play in the mediation between material phenomena and abstract mental operations, most notably in the conceptualization of memory and the psyche, in models of sense perception, and in the aesthetics of ekphrasis. Taken together, Platt argues, these two approaches demonstrate how technologies of impressed images need to be placed alongside writing technologies and the Greek alphabet among the archetypal techniques of Greek culture.

In Chapter 4 (‘Metaphysics and the Mathematical Diagram: Geometry between History and Philosophy’), Duncan Kennedy turns from seals to diagrams and from cultural techniques to the field of media theory known as diagrammatology. If two-dimensional inscribed surfaces are a tool for thinking that connects the hand, the eye, and the brain, the flattening-out they perform can point not only to powerful links but also to hierarchical separations between empirical description and abstract form, sight and insight, practice and theory. Are Greek mathematical diagrams universal, or historically specific? How far back in Greek culture are we prepared to situate their emergence? Should they be transmitted as conveying true knowledge, or as practical techniques? Kennedy argues that whereas, in Greek mathematics, the diagram has the power of demonstrative proof (associated with the skills and effects of epideictic persuasion), in Plato’s philosophical thought it acquires the power of apodeictic proof, giving access to the abstraction of geometrical objects and the metaphysical hierarchies between different realms of existence. Kennedy situates the diagram in between the sheer variety of cultural techniques and historical modes of thinking ‘practically’, on the one hand, and the applied metaphysics of scientific study, on the other hand, where thinking ‘theoretically’ is invested in scientific ‘objects’ and in the plotting of ‘firsts’ and ‘outcomes’. The
tendency to entangle the temporal parameters of the stories they emplot with ontological claims is no greater for philosophy than it is for a history of mathematics or for media theory.

Frank Haase (Chapter 5: ‘On the Beginnings of Media Theory in Hesiod and Plato’) argues that Greek poetry and philosophy are grounded in writing not only as a signifying and semantic practice but also as a computational practice to be linked to programming. Hesiod’s divinely inspired poetry and Plato’s philosophical dialogues may be profoundly different, but they nevertheless share a common preoccupation with accessing the truth. And they both feature a similar sequence of steps that make this access possible, a sequence based on creation or invention through self-referencing. In Hesiod, it is the poet that has a mediating function between the world of gods and the world of humans. The production of poetry is founded on the memory and repeatability of signs that are associated not only with the divine but also with writing and reading. In Plato, it is thinking itself that occupies a mediating position between the world of the senses and the world of ideas. Language is constituted as a medium in the sense that it empowers the production of thinking by executing repetitive operations based on movement and interruption, deferral and supplement. Haase links these two moments in the history of thought with a third one, associated with Alan Turing’s Universal Discrete Machine, the prototype of the modern computer. The bold leap from Plato to Turing is made possible by similarities in their symbol-processing operations based on exchangeability and replaceability. Turing’s Machine processes symbols by working through an inscription on a computational tape. This involves the execution of sequential steps of movement and interruption, as well as of reading and writing/deleting, that are analogous to those in Plato.

In ‘Metaxy: Aristotle on Mediacy’ (Chapter 6), Emmanuel Alloa shows that modern debates about the polyvalence of media have a history that must be traced back to Aristotle and his
exploration of a range of relevant terms across different aspects of his work: the golden mean or middle way (*mesotes*) in ethics, the intermediate or middle term (*meson*) in logic, and the in between (*metaxy*) in sensory perception. Alloa argues that the frequency of the terms in question calls for a closer inspection of the correlations they open up across different aspects of Aristotle’s work. From ethics to logic and perception, Aristotle scrutinizes and problematizes the concept of mediacy in ways that revolve around the issues of commonality and difference. The capacity of media to take on the form of different things without taking on their matter shows how their operation involves both mediation and transformation. In other words, Alloa suggests, Aristotle’s preoccupation with appearance might be seen as taking precedence over his preoccupation with ontology.

Karin Harrasser (Chapter 7: ‘The Fable of Arachne: Underweavings of Tactile Mediality’) explores the sense of touch and the challenges it poses to conceptual systems around sensory qualities and perception since Aristotle. Touch, in Aristotle, can be seen as being different from the other senses in that the medium and the organ of perception cannot be kept clearly separate. The skin is a threshold space of pleasure and pain, and as such is not subordinated to conceptual understanding as easily as other sensory media and organs. By separating inside and outside while also establishing links between them, the sense of touch serves as a medium of thought in ways that expose sensory perception as being socially constituted. Harrasser argues that, alongside the normative and essentializing history of the haptic, which is tied to human consciousness, we must account for another history around the experimental and multimodal promises of the tactile. Such a history links Aristotle to psycho-physiological investigations of the nineteenth century, gestalt theory, media theory, computer sciences, and contemporary media–ecological perspectives on prosthetic technology and on non-human types of agency.
In Chapter 8 (‘The Shards of Zadar: A (Meta-)Archaeology of Cinema’), Ulrich Meurer focuses on the subdiscipline of media studies called media archaeology, exploring it from two separate perspectives. First, he discusses it in relation to the discipline of archaeology and to Michel Foucault’s concept of archéologie. Second, he situates its logic within a broader and more political context of contemporary investments in embodied rationality. The chapter revolves around a paradigmatic project at the threshold between art-based media research and fictitious cinema history. Meurer demonstrates how imagining a Greco-Roman film projector as the new founding myth of cinema exemplifies how media archaeology brings together the non-discursive materiality of artefacts, temporal incongruity, and the unpredictable surfacing of alternative pasts. This combination, he shows, turns towards a decidedly political critique of media historiography. It challenges the historical demarcations of scientific reason, countering dominant models of teleological progress in modern, industrialized societies. It also exposes how modern narratives of technical invention are organized around a clandestine nucleus of the unforeseen, unreasonable, and contingent.

Patrick Crowley (Chapter 9: ‘Parrhasius’ Curtain, or a Media Archaeology of a Metapainting’) examines one of the best-known cases of trompe l’œil in the history of art, the legendary competition between the classical Greek painters Parrhasius and Zeuxis as recounted a few centuries later by Roman author Pliny the Elder. Crowley argues that to appreciate the power of trompe l’œil pictures in Greco-Roman art and visual culture, we need to set aside ontological questions of what painting is, and Western assumptions about vision and representation. We must focus instead on how issues of subject matter and form interact with broader questions: the culturally and ethically shifting criteria for what constitutes verisimilitude; the function of the field of the spectator’s vision and how it can be facilitated, disrupted, or exploited; and, finally, the role
of the material support and display of artworks. Parrhasius’ curtain should be seen as the effect of a whole system of artistic techniques, technologies of vision, institutional frameworks, and social practices. Like Meurer, Crowley calls for a media–archaeological approach concerned with the epistemological question of how media constitute relations of power and knowledge. And, like Meurer, he critiques Western investments in historical continuity. Unlike Meurer, however, Crowley focuses on the similarities, rather than the differences, between such an approach and the system of heterogenous forces and relations of power that Michel Foucault calls a ‘dispositif’.

In ‘White Noise: Transmitting and Receiving Ancient Elegy’ (Chapter 10), Genevieve Liveley explores the ways in which the elegy of modern poets such as Anne Carson and Ted Hughes, and of Roman poets such as Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid, reflects on the medial properties and operations of elegy as a poetic genre. In their thematic and formalist preoccupation with the communication between the living and the dead, and also in their self-positioning within a tradition of classical elegy that is at once long, lacunose, and debatable, these poems offer intense reflections on the concept and workings of transmission. Drawing on Wolfgang Ernst’s media archaeology and on Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver’s model of (tele)communication, Liveley argues that elegy has always revolved around transmission and communication channels and apparatuses: from inarticulate cries of sorrow to songs of lament, stone inscriptions, handwritten poems on papyrus pages or little books, and poems performed or otherwise embodied. The reader needs to listen not only to the messages carried across time, but also to the noise of the channels through which those messages are transmitted. The less invested one is in the fixity and reproducibility of what constitutes the meaning of elegy, the more likely it is one will tune into elegy as a more complex and ongoing transmission event. The more tuned in the reader becomes, the more she or he operates as a device participating in its operations. To think of literary or artistic genres and
traditions as transmission events is to revisit and repurpose familiar debates in genre criticism with the help of a media archaeology that invites us to analyse signs as signals.

Adam Lecznar (Chapter 11: ‘Parmenides at his Typewriter: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Media of Philosophy’) examines the return to the Presocratics of Nietzsche and Heidegger, two modern philosophers who feature prominently in media theory because of their engagement with technology as a philosophical issue. ‘It could justifiably be asked what in the world [a disquisition on the typewriter] has to do with Parmenides,’ says Heidegger in his 1942–3 lecture course on the Presocratic philosopher. Lecznar answers the question by drawing attention to how, for both Heidegger and Nietzsche, conceptual metaphors and embodied cultural techniques can shape the conceptualization of philosophical insight and their understanding of the philosophical tradition. In the work of both, the Presocratics emerge as embodied writers of philosophy: potential interlocutors of flesh and blood in Nietzsche, and offering direct access to unmediated philosophical concerns and modes of expression in Heidegger. Lecznar argues that the hand of the philosopher links two cultural practices that can be taught and learned, handwriting and typewriting, and pushes Nietzsche and Heidegger in different directions in their consideration of how philosophy is constituted by the mediation of thought in writing. The path of the typewriter helps Nietzsche to achieve clarity and strength in his writing, just as the goddess that clasps the hand of the narrator in Parmenides helps him to think. In the work of Heidegger, on the other hand, it is through his encounter with the typewriter that he reflects on handwriting and its contribution to immediacy and presence in a philosophical tradition that stretches back to the Presocratics.

In the final chapter, Maria Oikonomou (‘Manteia, Mediality, Migration’) focuses on the close interrelation of processes of mediation and movements of migration across the Greek world, considering the role of the oracles at Dodona and Delphi in the context of colonization, Odysseus’
travels in Homer, and the role of the crossroads and the arrival at Colonus in the case of Sophocles’ Oedipus. As in the age of global positioning systems and smartphones, the migratory movements of Greek culture are based on the collection, processing, and transmission of knowledge. The concepts of departure, direction, diversion, and arrival all revolve around decision-making processes that have profoundly medial dimensions. To create a path across an undifferentiated terrain, people on the move need human, divine, or technological agents to help them identify critical juncture points and to distinguish and select between different ways forward. Mediation transforms unconnected and disparate physical spaces into a diagrammatic field of nodal points and switch mechanisms, but it also comes with risk, accidents, crisis, catastrophe, and responsibility. This is seen most clearly when we turn to the medial function of the migrant body itself, as in the case of Sophocles’ Oedipus. The body of the migrant can be viewed as an embodiment of decisions and bifurcations, as a field of possibilities around which new types of knowledge and new connections can be made and communicated.

Taken together, these encounters between classical antiquity and media theory contribute to three broad questions as played out in the context of modern theories of media and ancient histories and theories of perception, epistemology, art, poetics, and aesthetics. The first question relates to how processes of cultural production and reception are conditioned by processes of cultural transmission. The second question concerns how the issues of thought and technology mutually define but are also in tension with each other; in other words, how judgements of value, material conditions, and technical and technological practices are all involved in the constructedness, facticity, and transformative or normative power of knowledge. The third and final question is about the implications for humanistic classics today of a cultural history of the subject that centres
not only on humans, but also on cultural operations in relation to which human experiences and forms of knowledge become connected, archived, and monumentalized.

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