**Media and Classics**

26-27 November 2016

Watershed, Bristol

Organized by the Institute of Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition, University of Bristol

‘The realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture,’ writes the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (originally published in 1986). 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. The centrality of media, however, to epistemological debates around the ways in which knowledge is produced, stored, and disseminated has a long history in Western thought. Under the banners of media history, media archaeology, and cultural transmission, important work has been undertaken in recent years on the history of media since the Renaissance and on persistent tropes in media discourse that make it possible to set current debates about digital media in a broader historical and theoretical context. One of the most complex and multifaceted case studies in the history of media in the West yet to receive systematic examination has to do with the arts of ancient Greece and Rome. What is the role of media (new and old, material and spiritual, perceptible and imperceptible) in the formation and reproduction of Greco-Roman arts and more broadly in what might be called the transmission of ‘classical’ culture?

Certain aspects of this topic have been touched on by media theorists (on both sides of the Atlantic) in suggestive but highly selective and often problematic ways. Other aspects have been approached by classical scholars in more careful but historically and disciplinary insular manners. Issues such as orality, literacy, performance, memory, materiality, the senses, 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 literary, performing, and plastic arts that we now call classical. However, there has been no systematic attempt to date to shift the focus away from issues of historical usage of media towards more theoretical concerns that can link the media of the classical past with one another, with larger processes of artistic production and reception, and with contemporary debates around media, knowledge, and perception. As a result, the processes of production and reception of the arts of Greece and Rome are still perceived in ways that remain at once too narrow and too broad: on the one hand they are dominated by the agency of long-dead artists or ever-changing audiences; on the other hand they are dominated by abstract ideas – the continuities of the Classical Tradition, the discontinuities of Reception, the cosiness of ‘conversing’ with the past, or the rather nebulous qualities of textuality and visuality.

Revisiting Martin Heidegger’s provocative claim that ‘the more questioningly we ponder the essence of technology, the more mysterious the essence of art becomes’ (in his seminal essay ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ originally published in 1954), this conference focuses attention on the cultural history of the material conditions and technical and technological practices that give shape to artistic creativity and make possible its transmission as ‘classical’ and as ‘culture.’ How are media conceptualized by artistic works and their users in Greece and Rome? How do media shape the specificity, convergence, and/or transference of different artistic forms and contents? How do continuities and ruptures in artistic production and transmission manifest themselves? How are artworks, artists, and audiences networked through material and embodied structures of media technology? How are ideas, concepts, and practices related to the classical arts implicated in the history and culture of modern theoretical debates around media and information technology? And how are they implicated in broader discussions around the philosophical apparatus of technology, culture, and biology as they are played out against a critique of modernity?

Papers will be on topics in areas such as the following:

* cultural transmission as reproduction and/or as transformation
* art as techne between historicity and metaphysics
* fantasies of communication and horizons of incommunicability
* technologies of writing systems and scripts
* media as conduits, languages, and/or environments
* medium specificity and convergence
* media and non-human agency
* the body as a medium
* humanism and anti-technological bias
* Greece and Rome in debates in media theory
* Greco-Roman arts in an age of media convergence, networks and computation

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