**Intervisuality: New Approaches to Greek Literature**

Intertextuality is a well-known tool in literary criticism and has been widely applied to ancient literature, with, perhaps surprisingly, classical scholarship being at the frontline in developing new theoretical approaches. By contrast, the seemingly parallel notion of intervisuality has only recently begun to appear in classical studies. In fact, intervisuality still lacks a clear definition and scope. Unlike intertextuality, which is consistently used with reference to the interrelationship between texts, the term ‘intervisuality’ is used not only to trace the interrelationship between images in the visual domain, but also to explore the complex interplay between the visual and the verbal. It is precisely this hybridity that interests us. As outlined below, intervisuality has proved extremely productive in fields such as art history and visual culture studies. By bringing together a diverse team of scholars, this project aims to bring intervisuality into sharper focus and turn it into a powerful tool to explore the research field traditionally referred to as ‘Greek literature’.

*Why intervisuality is especially relevant to ‘Greek literature’*

One of the most influential legacies of ‘Greek literature’ is theatre, a visual no less than a verbal art form. As noted by Antonis Petrides, ancient theatre is ‘a form of performance in which allusion was not necessarily achieved by virtue of verbal markers, but also by the ability of the visual element, too, to make references to various semiotic systems collaborating in the creation of theatrical meaning. Intertextuality, in the case of Menander, encompassed intervisuality as well’.

Yet this is not all: intervisuality is relevant to ‘Greek literature’ both *before* and *after* the ‘golden age’ of Attic theatre (5th-4th Century BCE). Not only is theatre less an invention *ex nihilo* than a development of (highly spectacular) epic and lyric performances addressing both local and pan-Hellenic audiences; even more importantly, what we call Greek ‘literature’, a word that has no equivalent in classical Greek, is by and large a form of verbal art inextricably linked with performative contexts, whether imaginary or real, from the archaic era down to the imperial period and beyond. These contexts, in turn, work as a repository of mental images shared by both authors and audiences. As a consequence, the importance of visual components is integral to the very process of producing and consuming ‘Greek literature’.

When it comes to the relationship between ‘images’ and ‘texts’, archaeologists rightly emphasize that the former should never be viewed as a mere illustration of the latter. However, the very conventionality of classical iconography makes it closer to verbal language proper: much closer, say, than modern or contemporary visual arts, which are intrinsically polysemous. Ancient iconography is based on meaningful patterns (*schemata*: cf. M.L. Catoni's book, bearing this very title) surfacing in theatre productions, narrative descriptions, statuary, paintings etc. These patterns form a visual code, whereby fairly univocal meanings are encoded into images: as an extreme example, it is worth mentioning pantomimes, which were expected to ‘translate’ into images every single word of a given myth. Building on this premise, intervisuality can help us grasp the somewhat parallel codes of images and texts.

*Potential contributions*

‘Literature’ in the modern sense is by and large a post-classical innovation, and it is no coincidence that Latinists, rather than Hellenists, should be credited with the most interesting contributions to the interdisciplinary debate devoted to intertextuality. However, in light of the specific features of ‘Greek literature’ as outlined above Hellenists can be just as audacious and original in shaping the notion of intervisuality. Building on the ways in which scholars from other fields have used intervisuality, we have identified four main research avenues that can provide a convenient starting point for potential contributors:

1. **Intervisual patterns**

Intertextuality should not be conceived of as a univocal process: a text will spark different associations, and thus different meanings, depending on the values, competence, disposition (and so forth) of different audiences or readers. Likewise, the twin term intervisuality can be described as a process in which images, as has been suggested, ‘are not the stable referents in some ideal iconographic dictionary … but work across and within different and even competing value-systems’ (Camille). Depending on the audience, an image, or, at a more general level, an archetypal image, i.e. the notion the Greeks referred to as *schema*, generates a multi-faceted and ever-shifting meaning.

1. **Intervisuality as interfigurativity**

Intervisuality is, in its strictest sense, the visual correspondent of intertextuality: if intertextuality is the allusion of a work of literature to another work of literature, intervisuality is the allusion of a work of art to another work of art (to put it in Nelsons’ words, ‘shifted (…) to visual imagery, the concept [of intertextuality] becomes intervisuality and can be generally applied, for all art is a communication between an addressor and an addressee and takes prior work into account’). In a more general sense, the concept of intervisuality, when applied to literature, can be intended as the allusion of a literary work to an image, be that a specific iconographic referent or, more generally, a *schema*.

1. **Intervisuality as interperformativity**

Intertextuality can work at different levels: readers of a given text can recognise, and trace to another text, a single term, a string of words, a turn of phrase and so on: from the smallest to the more general, and perhaps imperceptible, analogy. Likewise, intervisuality is not limited to individual images or even *schemata*, but can work at a broader level, and more specifically with reference to a *succession* of images, as found in theatrical, or otherwise visual, performances. As Cowan notes, there are ‘ways in which one dramatic performance can evoke recollections of another, not by means of verbal reminiscence, but through similarities in their visual dimension’.

1. **Intervisual reading**

The concept of intervisuality also encompasses the notion of *intervisual reading*. In medieval manuscripts ‘image and decoration […] functioned as a central component in a textuality that allowed the viewer access the materiality of written language’ (Desmond). In like manner, an image can function as a visual comment on a written text (see, for instance, the interaction between an image and its caption on Greek painted pottery or in illustrated papyri, or between a statue/a monument and the epigram inscribed upon it). In such cases, intervisuality is closely related to ‘intermediality’: a message is expressed through the combination of two different media, which are both under the eyes of the reader/viewer. Moreover, a competent audience can *visually supplement* images that are merely evoked through a description (a typical example is provided by *ekphrasis*).

Needless to say, these four areas are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they provide an example of how scholars can take into account the specificity of ‘Greek literature’. It is time make intervisuality integral to our understanding of ancient Greece, with at least three closely interrelated aims: first, to make better sense of individual Greek texts; second, to refine the notion of intervisuality, with a view to making a theoretical contribution to its definition from a classical perspective; third, to grasp the specificity of what we call, for want of a better phrase, ‘Greek literature’, by promoting a fresh dialogue between (the study of) verbal and visual arts. We hope and think that the project is timely and rewarding, and we welcome ‘intervisual’ contributions across the whole spectrum of ‘Greek literature’, including its Roman reception.