Matthias Grawehr – Markus Kersten

A Second Gaze. Transient Meanings beyond Intertextuality and Iconography

Abstract This introduction provides an overview of the subsequent essays, first by delineating the overarching perspective of the volume and then by examining select fundamental concepts from both literary and visual culture studies, including intertextuality and iconography. In conclusion, the concept of 'epi-iconics' is presented as a new means for collectively addressing how meaning is ascribed to and transferred between texts and objects. To illustrate this process, an ambiguous poem by Ausonius and equally ambiguous images are provided as a basis for analysis.

A second gaze allows us to relive, reconsider, or reinforce an impression that has already passed. As an important means of intense perception, it serves the building of memory and functions as an elementary principle of culture. Not least, it is central to the cultural practice of imitation. In this context, two fundamental moments of secondary consideration can be assumed. Before, during, and after the receptional process recipients *re-call* their previous observations[1]. When we find something in a picture or in a text that is familiar to us from our own environment (or from other pictures or texts), or, conversely, when we find something in our environment that we have previously only known from narratives or images, we may have the same

1 The underlying findings of neuroscience in their historical and philosophical dimensions have been explained, e.g. in Breidbach 2000; Breidbach 2013; cf. Günther 2021. Activity in the human brain when looking at a picture does not just begin with the viewing process, but experiences and expectations are already transferred to the incoming impulses beforehand. This highlights the individuality of the viewing process, as every viewer has an individual stock of experiences against which incoming impulses are filtered and measured.

M. Grawehr – M. Kersten, A Second Gaze. Transient Meanings beyond Intertextuality and Iconography, in: M. Grawehr – M. Kersten (eds.), A Second Gaze. Intertextuality and Transient Meaning in Roman Texts and Objects (Heidelberg 2024) 1–32. https://doi.org/10.11588/propylaeum.1481.c21242

impression for a second time, though we do perceive different things, the imitated and the imitation. Similarly, when we look at a particular text or image, we may assume that we perceive the same thing as others, but inevitably we see with our own eyes and understand with our own experiences. However, such second gazes do not only occur on the part of the audience. It is a reasonable assumption that artists, for their part, *re-produce* what they have previously observed (be it visually or intellectually), albeit not necessarily in an exact or exclusive manner. Aristotle discusses the cognitive effect of repetition in his *Poetics* (1148b7–20, trans. by S. Halliwell, slightly adapted):

> τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας. […] μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἥδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτοῦ. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὁρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος. ἐπεὶ ἐὰν μὴ τύχῃ προεωρακώς, οὐχ ᾗ μίμημα ποιήσει τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν ἢ τὴν χροιὰν ἢ διὰ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἄλλην αἰτίαν.
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> For it is an instinct of human beings, from childhood, to engage in mimesis (indeed, this distinguishes them from other animals: man is the most mimetic of all, and it is through mimesis that he develops his earliest understanding); and equally natural that everyone enjoys mimetic objects. … The explanation of this too is that understanding gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but likewise to others too, though the latter have a smaller share in it. This is why people enjoy looking at images, because through contemplating them it comes about that they understand and infer what each element means, for instance that "this one" is "that one". For, if one happens not to have seen the subject before, the image will not give pleasure qua mimesis but because of its execution or colour, or for some other such reason.

When we refer to the *Poetics* as a starting point of this introduction, it is not because we consider it to be the definitive account of what Greco-Roman material and textual culture is and how it should be interpreted, but because the basic temporal relationship inherent in both production and reception is formulated here so succinctly and so broadly applicably. Even if Aristotle seems to be mainly concerned with the relation between art and 'reality', his remarks are also true for the relation between one work and another,

that is for the rhetorical practice of *imitatio*. In art, both visual and literary, cognition is essentially recognition[2]. Indeed, the nature of our recognition determines whether we consider something to be art. Beyond the emphasis of aesthetic judgements, however, the second gaze can also be understood quite fundamentally as a phenomenon of cultural and social practices.

Once there is a second gaze, a certain recursiveness is likely to be induced. There might also be a third and a fourth, there might be an alternating process of contemplation, so that meaning emerges not only from one direction. It is a fascinating observation, that, when we look back and forth between – to repeat Aristotle's terms – *οὗτος* (this) and *ἐκεῖνος* (that), the one seems to become clearer through the other. Obviously, we may see new features when focusing on the same thing for a second time. Information can be lost or changed during the blink of an eye. Paraphrasing one of Heraclitus' doctrines (DK 22 B 12), we could posit that it is no more possible to look at one object twice than it is to step into the same river again. This illustrates the intricate dialectics of every interpretation, but also a very simple issue: Even texts and objects that serve an everyday purpose can be imbued with a deeper significance through a second gaze. If meaning is realized on the part of the recipient, it follows our gaze and may therefore be transient. The question, then, is how many will realize a certain meaning, why and for how long.

In the nexus of reception and production of meaning lies the interest of this conference volume. We ask how texts and images that encapsulate certain ideas or even histories invite reinterpretation and reutilization when they are being perceived, read or looked at. And how, upon exposure to a second gaze, their original meaning may be retained or deliberately hinted at, or conversely, how they may lose their initial significance, finding themselves within entirely different contexts, thereby adopting unforeseen and novel connotations. Even if a statue or a text is a faithful copy of another, or even if we look twice at the same thing, in every gaze new meaning is created. As Classics and Archaeology have developed concepts and a terminology to describe and understand such processes, we want to bring these perspectives, stemming from literary and visual culture, together in order to further develop a common methodological framework.

In this introduction we will first look back at some basic terminology and concepts from both literary and visual culture studies (part 1). Secondly, we will sketch out some methodological considerations that lead beyond descriptive terms like intertextuality or iconography. Here, we stress the

2 See Schmitt 2008, 278–292 on epistemology, and Simpson 2003 on literary reference.

importance of considering the *interested gaze* as a descriptive term for the individual construction of (often transient) meaning, drawing on previous perceptions and understandings of an image or a text. And, we introduce the concept of epi-iconics to describe the layers of meaning that have accrued on images on a common cultural or individual level (part 2). Finally, by drawing on previous literary and iconographical sources, we will exemplify our methodological framework on a concrete example, the conception of a beautiful effeminate young male that transgresses boundaries of biological sex and unifies the often interchangeable mythological figures like Ganymed, Hylas, etc. in one intertextual and intervisual space. We thereby also demonstrate the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to grapple the 'transmedial' conception of this specific figure (part 3).

1. A glossary of terms and topics

To begin this encounter of philological and archaeological gazing let us consider a simple case: Having heard a story, an artist produces a statue in order to visualise a crucial moment of the plot. The statue itself may afford a certain reaction by calling on human instinct – a representation of a child with large eyes, for instance, may seem cute to most of us. But beyond, the statue does not convey meaning. It is one of the foundational assumptions of contemporary hermeneutics, that meaning in the deeper sense of interpretive understanding is only created by ourselves, based on what we have experienced or known. So, if the story is well known to us and if the artist somehow refers to it (e.g. by giving the statue a name), we may immediately recognize the character who is depicted. Perhaps we will grasp, empathize and understand the crucial moment better if we see it in marble or bronze instead of just hearing and imagining it. If someone copies the statue, the new copy will probably have the same meaning to most of us. However, what if someone does not copy the statue exactly, but makes a new version that only alludes to the original statue or story? Or what if there are different accounts of the story that differ in some points so that the statue can be related to slightly different variants of the same character? Archaeology and philology have long been developing methods for such cases; traditionally, we apply *Kopienforschung* and *Quellenforschung,* more recent and more complex methods rely on concepts that start with "inter-" (intertextuality, -mediality, -disciplinarity etc.).

Yet meaning is not only created through knowledge about structures and traditions, but also through certain social and discursive conditions. If we

see the statue placed in a room, where e.g. conviviality is celebrated, this will condition our reception and influence the meaning we ascribe to the statue. Similarly, the loss of the original setting will have consequences as well. Along with everything around *(παρὰ)* and about *(μετὰ)* a work, paratextuality (-pictoriality, etc.) and metatextuality (-visuality, etc.) come into play. Any artefact depends on its framing and on its praxeology. While it is neither necessary nor even possible to provide an overview of the hermeneutic concepts currently in use in our disciplines, we would like to take a closer look at those terms that we have profitably brought closer together in the discussions that preceded this volume.

Reception, intertextuality, iconography, and the study of ekphrasis

For more than half a century, the question, how, why and for how long a certain meaning is realized was accentuated by various scholarly trends, the decisive effect of which has been a profound rethinking of *text* and *reception*[3]. Reception studies developed within literary theory in the late 1960s[4] and were brought into art history and archaeology in the 1980s and 1990s[5]. They aimed to understand literary texts and artworks in their time or geographical context, but they also laid the conceptual groundwork for more general historiographies of the reception of texts and images in different times or places.

In Classics, the works of Gian Biagio Conte, Gérard Genette, Richard Thomas and Stephen Hinds, though differing in detail and expression, have collectively led to a kind of consensus in terminology[6]. Although, after the extensive theoretical reflection from structuralism to postcolonialism (and beyond) a considerable ambiguity remains in the definition of concepts, it is apparent that the term intertextuality has proved to be unrivalled for describing the conditions of writing and reading. At least in the case of Roman culture, which was so dependent on the Greek and reflected this dependence in a conscious manner, the term has developed into a master instrument for elucidating the very nature of production and reception of text with greater comprehension than ever before. Now intertextuality is generally understood

3 See Most 2021.

4 Jauss 1967.

5 See, e.g., Kemp 1985; Zanker 2000.

6 See Conte 1974/1986; Genette 1982; Genette 1987; Hinds 1998; Thomas 1999; On the application of these concepts, see, e.g., Schmitz 2006; Jansen 2014; Reitz – Finkmann 2019; Coffee et al. 2020.

more or less strictly as the presence of one text in another, which the reader can use for interpretation, regardless of the author's intention.

The 'presence of text' can obviously be understood very broadly; intertextuality then describes an almost unmanageable network of literary references. In the practice of Classics, however, there seems to be a preference for relational models that are less complex[7]. A notorious example is the still popular "hunt for parallels"[8]. Even if it has been topical in academic writing for some decades now to polemicize against the optimism of positivist *Quellenforschung*, scholars quite often concentrate on the features with which one text refers or alludes to another (mostly, but not necessarily written in the same language)[9]. This approach is both linear, in that it concerns only two elements, and exclusive, in that it concerns the same medium or even the same genre. It is a reduction that tacitly re-simplifies the idea one might have of the origin of a text. Understandably, some perceive this interpretation of intertextuality as insufficient or even meaningless[10].

Dependencies manifest themselves more naturally with images than with texts. We refer to the interdependent forms of representation of the same theme as one particular iconography. The 'correct way' to study iconography in our contemporary sense was codified through seminal works by Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky in early-20th century Hamburg. Panofsky's interest lay in the acute description of, e.g., figures in an image, with the aim to detect different versions in the unfolding of a iconographic tradition through time, and to study and explain how each of these versions referred to earlier ones and how it can be interpreted in the context of their respective period[11]. In a wider approach, Aby Warburg, devoted his energy to the relations and dependencies between iconographies. Studying Renaissance paintings and the reuse of iconographies from antiquity, he became fascinated with the wide networks of relations between images. His concept of image vehicles *(Bilderfahrzeuge)* that transport ideas and images through time is particularly famous[12].

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7 On the problems of an idea of intertextuality that is too narrow, see e.g. Ambühl 2015, 1–45.

8 Augoustakis 2020, 184.

9 Although, of course, the adaptation of Greek models in Roman literature has been dealt with repeatedly, the opposite direction has attracted much less scrutiny, see Gärtner 2022.

10 Marco Formisano has frequently adressed this issue, see, e.g., Formisano 2016.

11 Locus classicus is Panofsky 1939.

12 On this initiative see now Wolf et al. 2020.

Interrelations in the styles of artworks, on the other hand, have long been a fundamental interest of art historical research. More recently, in opposing the idea that style is dictated by "some imaginary 'head office' which decrees" it[13], Alfred Gell in his ground-breaking work *Art and Agency* has conceptualized commonalities of style (as constitutive for a 'culture') as being exclusively created by inter-artefactual relationships, and in a recent effort to describe historical developments through material culture – objectscapes – John Miguel Versluys has drawn extensively on this inter-artefactual concept[14].

Image and text studies and the theories applied in each of them perhaps come together most fruitfully where they overlap, that is to say, where the focus is on the *reading of images* and the *viewing of texts.* The symbol of such medial and theoretical overlap is the artefact ekphrasis.

Ancient ekphrasis provides a vivid example of the multiplicity of possible gazes inherent in the process of reception. This is not only because of the ekphrastic claim to place things 'before the eyes' *(ὑπ' ὄψιν)* of the reader or listener[15], but also because of the obvious figurality of this claim: ekphrases also show things that cannot be seen. The literary description of an artefact or a landscape not only places things in relation to a text. Ekphrases also stress the relation of different texts, media, genres, methods, recipients, etc. When the narrator in Virgil's *Aeneid* says of Aeneas' prophetic shield that it is of a *non enarrabile textum* (Aen. 8, 625), he paradoxically seems to describe an object as indescribable. But indescribable for whom? On the one hand, we have to accept that we readers see less than, within the fiction, the viewer Aeneas. On the other, however, we are compensated by the fact that we with our hindsight-knowledge understand more than the latter, who looks at what he is taking on his shoulders with pleasure but ignorance. Perhaps, if we are sensitised to the metaphor of the fabric *(textum),* we even understand more than some other readers and therefore accept that a literary *text* can never be explained completely. So, the description as a whole not only describes an artefact and the conditions of viewing, but also, reflexively, the mode of describing.

In view of this, it would seem necessary to resist the attempt to simplify the poetic shield and, as it were, to recreate it by means of illustration or

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13 Gell 1998, 216, cf. the *Strukturforschung* favoured in the mid-20th cent., Wimmer 1997.

14 Gell 1998, 155–220 esp. 216; Pitts – Versluys 2021, 370.

15 Cf. Theon prog. 118.6: *ἔκφρασίς ἐστι λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ἐναργῶς ὑπ' ὄψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον,* "Ekphrasis is a way of description by which that what is to be made clear is virtually set before the eyes".

even reconstruction. Insofar as the text presents us with the contingency and ambiguity of seeing, it cannot also show us an unambiguous shield. But where would be the point at which we could 'see' the ambiguousness of the image? Is it bound to the medium of text or could we translate into visual art? Another problem is the tension between natural and super-natural. If a familiar object like a *clipeus* with a diameter of approximately one metre *is said* to be made by a god and to be decorated with a variety of scenes (that is, with characters that are moving in time), is this already indicative of downright fictionality or impossibility? Were there really no artefacts that could have been praised for being like a divine shield? Was it impossible to imagine such precious weapons? What would it have meant to produce them?

There has been considerable debate surrounding the intricacies of description[16]. One general consequence is to accept, as it were, that someone sitting at a desk may only rarely look at real shields and probably only superficially so. So, from the intermedial question concerning the *description of depiction* arises an interdisciplinary one: whether, in regard to visualization, philologists are more inclined to abandon the endeavor sooner and with greater willingness than archaeologists.

Affordance

The term affordance is used to describe the characteristic potential for interaction that a given object offers to living beings, in particular to humans. The neologism was created by James J. Gibson in the 1960s to describe a fundamental principle of human's cognition, focusing on the direct and bodily perception of the environment[17]. With the material turn, the concept of affordance was not only enthusiastically received by design theorists[18] but it also proved a helpful tool to analyze archaeological objects and their (pictorial) design[19]. Elisabeth Günther has recently advocated to make the concept fruitful also to describe the potential for interpretation – *Deutungsangebot* – to a

16 On ancient Ekphrasis, see Webb 2009. Thein 2022, 1–26 gives an overview about recent research concerning the topic.

17 Gibson 1966, 285; Gibson 1979, 127–143; cf. Fox et al. 2015.

18 Norman 1988, 9–12; Norman 1999; M. Erlhoff – T. Marshall (eds.), Wörterbuch Design. Begriffliche Perspektiven des Design (2008) 12–14 s. v. Affordance (T. Rosenberg); cf. Swift 2017, 5–10.

19 Knappett 2004; Knappett 2005, 45–58; Hodder 2012, 48–50; Fox et al. 2015; Keßeler 2016; Swift 2017, 5–10; Dietrich 2021; Hielscher 2022, 32 f.

distinct viewer of (specifically ambiguous) images[20]. In a wider view – and always relating images to viewers that correspond to certain stereotypical cultural frameworks – one may think, e.g., of depictions of nude female bodies that have been designed to attract the lustful 'male gaze', or of grotesque bodies or scenes that have been designed to incite laughter, for example in Greek comedy and depictions thereof. In the same way, we also might speak of the affordance of texts[21].

Frames and framing, paratexts, praxeology, and parapictoriality

As reception studies were introduced after WW2 and the process of reception came more into focus, theories of framing were introduced in the 1950s as well as the 1970s[22]. They aimed to explain how cognitive markers can be regarded as a performative frame that impacts on the meaning of human interaction, images or texts. The concept of 'framing' than proved an important epistemological tool in different fields, like e.g. sociology or linguistics, and recently Elisabeth Günther initiated a series of conferences exploring this concept for archaeology[23]. By showing how in various ways meaning was created through reference to different contemporary 'frames', these initiatives highlight the subtext of images and evaluate their importance for the reconstruction of contemporary meaning. In art history, it is the concept of 'reframing' that has been employed since the 1990s to describe the medial processes of transcription through which artefacts originating in prior discursive conditions are de- and re-contextualised in new settings[24], especially on the transcultural level[25]. For antiquity, this is often explicitly linked to human practice[26]. As representative examples, one might consider several publications on the reception of Athenian vases and the images upon them in Etruria, which reconstruct the meanings of the images and vases beyond

20 Günther 2021, 16–18. Similarly, J.M. Versluys speaks of affordances of motifs, without further discussion, see, e.g., Pitts – Versluys 2021, 378.
21 See von Contzen 2017.
22 Ruesch – Bateson 1951; Bateson 1956; Goffman 1974.
23 Scheufele 2003; Wolf 2006; Günther – Fabricius 2021; Günther – Günther 2022; Günther – Günther 2023.
24 See e.g. Jäger 2013; Seeberg – Wittekind 2017.
25 Juneja 2015; Kern – Krüger 2019.
26 Forberg – Stockhammer 2017.

the intentions of their makers[27]. More case studies for the transfer and adaptation of classical imagery have been collected in two independent volumes edited by Dietrich Boschung and Ludwig Jäger in 2014 and by Johannes Lipps, Martin Dorka Moreno, and Jochen Griesbach in 2021[28]. Within the first of these volumes Ludwig Jäger, advocated for the use of Gérard Genettes *paratext* to describe the individual semantical and ideological setting that determined the meaning of a cultural artefact or text and that was substituted by a new paratext, when the artefact was transferred or copied into a new setting[29]. In taking a similar approach Adrian Stähli has recently elaborated on "Parapictoriality" to describe "the cultural discourses, psychologically and socially shaped cognitive preconditions, beholder expectations and experiences and so on"[30]. Indeed, also on a theoretical level, strong cases have been made recently to link the creation of meaning in art theory more directly to human practice[31].

However, while the aforementioned studies successfully do provide frameworks for studying the specific context of an image, they are less interested in developing concepts that describe the changing connotations of images and objects through human action from a diachronic perspective and the accretion of additional meanings that occurs as an object moves through space or time.

2. Beyond intertextuality and iconography

It is a remarkable observation that the terms that have emerged from the wave triggered by the idea of intertextuality (terms such as inter-artefactual[32], interfigurality[33], intermediality[34] or intervisuality[35]) all seem to refer – via their prefix *inter* – to the Latin verb *interesse,* "to be between" or, more succinctly in the modern sense, regarding human agency, "to be interested in".

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27 Isler-Kerenyi 1997; Reusser 2003; Schweizer 2003; Bentz – Reusser 2004; Puritani 2009; Bundrick 2019.

28 Boschung – Jäger 2014; Lipps et al. 2021. One could add more related case studies, like, e.g., Schreiber 2018; Reinhardt 2019; Friedrich 2023.

29 Jäger 2014.

30 Stähli 2022a, 112 (quote); Stähli 2022b.

31 Prinz 2014; cf. Stähli 2022a; Stähli 2022b.

32 Gell 1998, 216.

33 See Müller 1991.

34 See Dinter – Reitz-Joosse 2019.

35 See Capra – Floridi 2023.

Meaning, as it is created on the part of a recipient who is able to delve deeply into certain interrelated structures, depends on an *interested gaze.* Those who engage with different texts and objects simultaneously, while at the same time being entangled in their specific systems of experience and socialisation, can only make their individual interests fruitful for interpretation. The utterance of this fact may be banal, but its academic implementation is not. The observation that an absolute individuality of interpretation would be logically worthless (because it could only lead to the conclusion that everything is in the eye of the beholder) does not justify the denial of the multiplicity of perception and reproduction. Similarly, the apparent plurality within certain texts and objects cannot negate the necessity for a methodical search for the unifying. If interpretation is to render the implicit explicit, the question of the essence remains pertinent – in a manner analogous to the question of the author's intention, which cannot be entirely disregarded as a point of scholarly interest even if it is not accessible to us.

The contributions to our volume are organized around two key questions. The first concerns the interests pursued by certain recipients in history, while the second addresses the interests that we ourselves might pursue when gazing at Roman texts and objects.

Islème Sassi takes Apuleius' ekphrasis of a statue of Diana as an opportunity to examine not only the often problematic (or even dangerous) gaze of the characters within the literary fiction, but also the specific imagination and interest of the audience.

In his analysis of Roman astronomical poetry, **Matteo Rossetti** demonstrates that by focusing exclusively on the textual aspects of these poems, we fail to recognize a crucial dimension that pervades our scientific literature but was prevalent in antiquity under different conditions: namely, visualization.

Amy Miranda's contribution is centered on one particular Palmyrenian portrait and on the nine archive sheets that represent this sculpture in the archive of the Danish archaeologist Harald Ingholt. Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs' concept of collective memory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, she describes the institution of an archive not as a mere documentary source, but as a place of embodied practice of memory making. In this particular case, we glimpse on the thoughts and 'interested gazes' of Ingholt and other researchers through the numerous annotations that have accrued on the archive sheets. Photographs and annotations represent a state of research that aims at telling a story about the past, but the archive in its digitized state offers visitors also the possibility to create their own readings.

Elisa Dal Chiele devotes herself to a classic topic of philological research, namely the selection and adaptation of literary material by Cicero. In doing

so, she follows the interested (and sometimes biased) view of one of the most learned and influential readers of antiquity into Greek poetry.

Raphael Szeider presents his dissertation project, in which he applies methodologies of *Kopienforschung* to the field of Ancient architecture, namely the reception of Augustan architecture by the emperor Hadrian.

Chiara Ballestrazzi is committed to exploring intersections between philological and archaeological inquiry through a detailed examination of ekphrastic epigrams, encompassing their genesis, significance, and applications.

Ivan Foletti and Maria Okáčová take a closer look at mosaics and inscriptions in churches of Rome of the 4th–7th century. The visual imagery in these churches as well as the inscriptions alluded in various ways to traditional Roman culture, even in materiality and typographical style. Their fixed position and two-dimensionality conditioned a strictly controlled reception, deeply embedded also in liturgical performance. The authors demonstrate how all these layers of references as well as their performative framing contributed to the church's decorations as multi-layered 'open works', designed to enact individual and collective contemplation.

In a similar manner, **Rolf Sporleder** interprets the serial production and installation of terracotta reliefs in Roman houses as governed by different overlaying 'parapictorial' principles: The need to offer a pleasant repetition for a peripatetic gaze, the effort to introduce minor variations and surprises for a second closer look, and finally the patron's desire to find Roman values and role models illustrated.

Repetition is also a characteristic often found in curse tablets. In his examination of this specific type of text that, unlike poetry, is not intended for public consumption but should remain concealed, **Florian Sommer** shows that the vestiges of literary awareness and inclination are also discernible within Roman *defixiones*.

Elisabeth Günther and Sven Günther return to the phenomenon of images that offer small deviations, in this case of the standard iconography of Imperial coinage. In their case study it is the coinage of a client king on the fringes of the Roman and Parthian empire, who issued coins that at first glance looked Roman, but which on a second gaze offered a condensed and creative new imagery and message, possibly tailored to the interests of the local audience.

Nicole Berlin details how patrons in Roman Sicily retained selected older decorations when renovating their houses, and thus were able to reframe these decorations, but also to proudly present them as an incongruent piece of 'flotsam', that illustrated their old and venerated family tradition.

Again concerned with mechanisms of reuse and the recomposition of spolia, **Arne Reinhardt** presents collected cases, where late Republican/early Roman terracotta plaques were reused and re-framed in later contexts. Prudently, he also reminds us of the challenges associated with pursuing a systematic and accurate approach in specific instances.

Daniel Falkemback Ribeiro discusses actualizing interpretation, by asking whether ancient bucolics can be subjected to an ecologically sensitive reading. Although this is obviously a specific and quite contemporary interest, it is not an anachronistic approach per se. The vulnerability of nature is not a modern insight and the supposed primacy of human written culture can, as it turns out, also be questioned with the help of ancient discourses.

Michael Paschalis examines a famous trope that forces a second look, namely the *recusatio,* and explores the web of provoked literary references that result from this technique in the case of Horace's Ode 4, 15.

Finally, **Markus Kersten** turns to the relationship between intertext and interstice, discussing an ambiguous verse and the requirements and possibilities of its reading, drawing attention to the viewable nature of poetry.

These case studies give a small but very good impression of the wealth of interrelated phenomena of textuality and pictoriality in ancient Rome. The urgent question now is whether these various observations can be generally described by an overarching concept with which the various literary, visual, and cultural studies can concisely communicate. Even if we cannot attempt to give a substantial answer in a conference volume, we do not want to be content with merely stating the desideratum. For the time being, therefore, we propose a term that can be applied to the phenomena presented here by focusing on the intricate imagery – in the direct or figurative sense – of literary and visual culture: *epi-iconic.*

It is the interested gaze – the practices, feelings, and even the politics associated with texts and objects and their relations – that, without altering the very things we perceive, realizes a certain meaning. In a cyclical movement, interest creates the iconic which, in turn, attracts interest. Such interest on behalf of the beholder can be described as ephemeral accretions of connotation 'on top of' (Greek *ἐπί*) the creator's intended meaning. We, e.g., all care for certain images not for their iconographic contents, but most often for our personal stories attached to them. Nonetheless, art history in general and archaeology specifically have for a long time neglected such transient meanings, tacitly dismissing them as merely anecdotal. By focusing precisely on them, our intention is to move beyond traditional approaches in archaeology and philology that concentrate either on the maker or artist, or on an audience that, through being thought of as exemplary (or rather omniscient),

must remain notoriously vague. To concentrate on the wide array of connotations that come 'on top of' an icon, as something that attracts attention, we describe as seeking the epi-iconic.

This term 'epi-iconic' is modelled on the concept of epigenetics. In the 1980s, DNA had appeared to be a stable formula that determined the phenotypical appearance of all life. However, this notion was disproved with the discovery of mechanisms such as DNA methylation. The accretions of methyl groups to DNA have since been associated with processes such as the imprinting or repression of genomes, which lead to phenotypical changes that do not alter the DNA sequence[36]. Working on an analogous conceptual basis, epi-iconics describes how (phenotypical) meaning in art, literature, and daily life is not only determined by the content of a text or the material affordance and iconography of an image when created (this content we compare to the DNA), but also by their wider literary or iconographic background, by their use, the actions they witness, and the sentiments expressed towards them as they are read or handled. In practice, such meanings can usually not be described on an individual level, but through generalizations and as a multitude of potential readings. We introduce epi-iconics here not as a necessarily better alternative to other established, but more narrow terms like, for example, intertextuality or framing, but because we feel that it enables us to focus more precisely on the weight of personal experiences, the cumulated interests that a viewer or reader (or a group of viewers/readers) had and entertained during perception.

How this could work in action, is demonstrated in the following case study.

3. Who has not heard of Hylas (or Narcissus or Cyparissus or Endymion)? On gazing at young men

Cui non dictus Hylas?, asks Virgil (georg. 3, 6) in order to introduce a new, unexplored theme. Indeed, the young man loved by Hercules for his beauty and abducted by nymphs is a common motif. So common, in fact, that one can critically ask oneself whether one really knows the 'true' story or only the superficial, decorative outline. On a more positive note, however, we could also ask whether the interest we have in Hylas (because we pity him or, in our own way, desire him) could be felt in the same way in other scenes, with other persons.

36 Bird 2007.

The late antique author Ausonius helps to stimulate such thinking. Among his epigrams is the following (no. 107 in Green's edition):

> Furitis, procaces Naides
> amore saeuo et irrito:
> ephebus iste flos erit.
>
> You race, you greedy naiads, in cruel but futile desire. This youth will become a flower.

The three dimeters are presented as a kind of riddle. A mythical scene is depicted here in a nutshell. But which one? Everything is nameless: the naiads, the boy, the flower. Like a sketch, the poem still seems to be waiting to be realised. A young man is somewhere by the water, near the naiads. But he is unlikely to enter into their ambush, but instead will be transformed into a flower. The context of the text offers some help. The epigram is positioned between pieces that deal with similar topics, namely the stories of Hylas (epigram 106) and Narcissus (epigram 108). Moreover, a lengthy heading, probably not by Ausonius, is transmitted along with the poem (*Nymphis quae Hylan rapuerunt,* 'To the Nymphs that raped Hylas'). The arrangement of the epigrams is suggestive and may be authentic. The centre figure appears to be a superimposition of the two outer figures, without being identical to either of them. Hylas does not become a flower, Narcissus does not encounter the naiads.

The text examines the intertextual relationship between the two myths to which its context refers. Similarly to Hylas, who is prevented from obtaining water by nymphs that draw him into their lake, and like Narcissus, who gazes at himself while leaning over the water's edge, eventually turning into a flower, the nameless *ephebus* is young. Moreover, the presence of naiads who gaze at him suggests that he is perceived as physically attractive. The initial line, which addresses them, refers to the topic of the preceding poem. In contrast, the concluding line, which predicts the transformation, is indicative of that of the subsequent. This transition from one myth (or epigram) to the next could be described as the "contextual function" of the poem. However, the epigram is, to some extent, also evidently incongruous in context due to its metrical disparity; 106 and 108 are composed of elegiac couplets. Just as 107 runs counter to the rules of dactylically codified mythology, it not only connects the myths, it also separates them.

The fact that the young boy cannot be clearly identified as the character of a distinctive myth may seem unsatisfactory. However, as is so often the

case, it is precisely the unsatisfactory that can be regarded in a constructive manner. Some scholars have corrected the penultimate word into *fons*. There is, to be sure, no valid reason to suspect the word *flos,* which has been handed down without a doubt[37]. Yet, the endeavour to clarify the poem, by pointing out that Hylas becomes a spring in Valerius (which, however, is not entirely accurate[38]), documents the actual effect of the poem. Through its brevity, the text creates an incomplete mythological scheme that needs to be reviewed. The poet points out to the nymphs that they are mistaken about the fate of the boy, who is presumably looking into the water, he is also pointing to the ignorance of the readers, who have to guess who the boy is and what is actually happening to him. An univocal answer is impossible. For a moment, all the beautiful youths pursued by nymphs are present before the reader's eyes: Hylas, Narcissus, Hermaphrodite, Thrasymennus etc.[39].

Paul Dräger identifies the boy with Hylas and comments on the deviation from the traditional myth by saying that one should not underestimate Ausonius' gift for invention[40]. The question of Ausonius' creativity, however, is somewhat misguided. On the one hand, authors undoubtedly have the capacity to invent anything they wish. On the other, they are of course constrained by the boundaries of tradition. In lieu of inquiring about the novel meaning coined by Ausonius, it is more illuminating to consider the interpretation that an observer of a conventional yet not explicitly delineated scene, as articulated through the text's narrative voice, might devise. In fact, the issue of coping with both unclear iconography and certain individual interests of gazing is one of the main affordances of the text. If we can imagine that 'another' Hylas, desired by the naiads, becomes a flower instead of being drowned, we may also ask ourselves, if we can, in turn, imagine that those canonical young men that were transformed into flowers according to myth – Crocus, Adonis, Hyacinthus, Narcissus, etc. – could also have been desired by naiads at a certain moment in their mythical biographies. The number of potential associations is in stark contrast with the concise nature of the epigram. The text appears to refer to a metamorphosis that never occurred, creating a juxtaposition of narratives that ultimately culminate in a disastrous end for a young man. The text or, respectively, the image evoked by the text reveals only the outline of a beautiful young man exposed to the

37 See Kay 2001 on Auson. epigr. 107.
38 Cf. Val. Fl. 1, 218–220; 4, 25–37. However, Hylas does not become a spring, but a water deity who lives with the nymphs.
39 Cf. Ov. met. 4, 287–388; Sil. 5, 15–23.
40 See Dräger 2012 on Auson. epigr. 107.

Fig. 1: Adonis and Eros kissing. Attic Lekythos, ca. 410 BC, Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. F2705
bpk/Antikensammlung, SMB/Johannes Laurentius

desiring gaze of the viewers (and readers). The nameless but seemingly well-known boy is revealed to be a multivalent ornament. The epigram can thus inspire reflection on Roman iconography.

In Greco-Roman visual culture, the iconography of the beautiful youth being watched or approached by gods or nymphs, was well established and it was used in variations for a number of different mythological figures like Hylas, Adonis, Endymion, Cyparissus, or Narcissus. It was created in the late 5th cent. BC, when artists started to depict gods from the younger generation that are related to well-being and arts, such as Apollo or Dionysus, as young men. The same appearance was chosen for demi-gods or other figures from myth such as Adonis (fig. 1). For our purpose here, in order to illustrate the numerous intervisual and intermedial connections between the individual depictions, we will just take the youths in Pompeian wall painting

into consideration. Depictions of **Hylas** are relatively rare[41]. He is usually shown approaching a pond, jug in hand, to fetch water, now surrounded by the nymphs who, enchanted by his beauty, try to get hold of him. Wounded **Adonis** is usually depicted seated, with spears, being tended to by Venus and Amor[42]. Sleeping **Endymion** lies or leans on a rock, spears in hand, as the hovering and glowing Selene timidly approaches[43]. The same seated or leaning position as for Endymion was also used for **Cyparissus**. In a well-known version from the House of the Vettii at Pompeii as in others, he can be identified through his spears, the stag and a tripod, Apollo or rarely a nymph is lingering in the background[44]. **Narcissus,** finally, is depicted most often, more than 50 times at Pompeii. He is shown in three iconographical schemes[45]: rarely as a standing figure (1), lying or half kneeling on the ground and leaning over the pond (2), or, as usually, in the same seated or leaning position as Adonis, Endymion, or Cyparissus (3). As they do, he also carries hunting spears. In the background a nymph, probably Echo (named only in Ovid), can make her appearance and often Amor is around. Most deciding for an identification with Narcissus is his mirror image in the pond, no matter if he is looking at it or not.

Several depictions of these mythological figures offer reflections on the reciprocal relationship between texts and images, of which we want to highlight only two:

1. The only one of these youthful beauties, who, in the older conventional version of his myth as well as iconography, did not carry hunting spears is Hylas. Starting from the Flavian period, he nevertheless became depicted with spears. Two such Pompeiian versions stem from the last decade before the AD 79 eruption. Both are closely related stucco reliefs, one from the tablinum of the Casa di Meleagro, the other from the Stabian baths[46]. Strikingly, Valerius Flaccus (Val Fl. 3, 552–553) was the first to give a version of the myth, where Hylas is in the entourage of Hercules and hunting, not fetching water. He expressly mentions the spears in his hand (fessaque minantem tela manu). In the 2nd century AD, the literal and iconographical motif became more widespread and it has been suggested that the iconography

41 Ling 1979; LIMC 5 (1991) 574–579 s. v. Hylas (J. H. Oakley).
42 LIMC 1 (1981) 222–229 s. v. Adonis (B. Servais-Soyez).
43 LIMC 3 (1986) 726–742 s. v. Endymion (H. Gabelmann).
44 LIMC 6 (1992) 165–166 s. v. Kyparissos (J.-R. Gisler).
45 LIMC 6 (1992) 703–711 s. v. Narkissos (B. Rafn); Colpo 2006; Prehn 2018.
46 Ling 1979, 780–782 nos. 8. 9; LIMC 5 (1991) 576 nos. 27. 28 s. v. Hylas (J. H. Oakley).

was inspired by Flaccus updated version of the myth[47]. Valerius must have composed his sole surviving work, the Argonautica, between ca. AD 70 and his death shortly before AD 96. The chronological relation between the Pompeiian stucco reliefs and the publication of Valerius' writing could therefore just as well have been the other way around. Hylas' iconography would then have been contaminated by the typical appearance of the other 'young beauties' first, and only subsequently turned into a new version of the myth. Whatever the exact relationship was, is not of prime importance, here. Either way, it is surmisable, that the artist was driven by his 'interested gaze', his personal knowledge of other 'hunting beauties', to the 'epi-iconical' connection of figure and spears, and this led to the creation of a new literary and pictorial motif.

2. When depicted in a lying position, Endymion has his left arm behind his neck and right arm huddled in his cloak (fig. 2). In Lucian's dialog between Venus and Selene, the latter vividly describes how the sleeping youth's posture irresistibly attracts her to tiptoe towards Endymion (Lucian, *Dialogi Deorum* 11). Given the author's education in sculpture and his versatility in painting, it is not farfetched to see this passage as inspired by the author's competent and 'interested gaze' in representations of Endymion[48]. Nevertheless the position was used for sleeping maenads being approached by satyrs already since ca. 500 BC[49]. It was petrified in the 'Sleeping Ariadne' (fig. 3), a Hellenistic statue of the 2nd cent. BC, copied fairly often in the Roman period[50]. The posture of the raised arm, folded behind the neck, can thus be described as a particularly alluring position, and its epi-iconical meaning was to attract and invite gaze and touch. Anyone who was attracted by such figures may have reacted on his biological instincts, but certainly also to his cultural upbringing and to having earlier looked at pictures where figures in this pose invited approach.

All these figures – Endymion, Adonis, Hylas, Cyparissus, Narcissus – can, as is clear by now, be quite easily confounded with each other[51], especially if no identifying attributes are present, as often is the case with their sculptural

47 Ling 1979, 795 f.; LIMC 5 (1991) 579 s. v. Hylas (J. H. Oakley).

48 LIMC 3 (1986) 738 s. v. Endymion (H. Gabelmann)

49 See, e.g., a hydria in the Musée des antiquités de la Seine-Maritime à Rouen, inv. no. 538.3 of ca. 500 BC, or the 4th-century bell krater in the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, inv. no. 1984.323.2.

50 For the sculpture see at latest Stähli 2022b, 426–429; on appropriation processes Dorka Moreno et al. 2021, 4–9.

51 Zanker 1966, 156 f. mit Anm. 12. 13; Prehn 2018, 56–60.

Fig. 2: Selene approaching sleeping Endymion. Pompeii, Casa del Ara massima (VI 16, 15, Room F)
photography: Johannes Eber, on concession of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompeii

Fig. 3: Sleeping Ariadne, ca. AD 150–175, Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. E000167
Museo del Prado Madrid/José Antonio

representations. But the artists who designed these images, in addition also borrowed from other, different figures:

1. Apollo and Torre Annunziata

The standing pose of Narcissus who figures on the cover of this volume was clearly inspired by the Apollon Sauroktonos[52] – a statue by the 4th-cent. Greek sculpture Praxiteles, one of the most copied statues in the repertoire of Roman sculptors – whose posture the painter at Torre Annunziata reproduced as a mirror image (fig. 4 and 5). Interestingly, the Narcissus was already related to Apollo by Ovid (met. 3, 419 *dignos Apolline crinos*)[53], and one might wonder if the painter had this specific verse in mind when depicting Narcissus in this unusual stance deviating from the youth's usual iconography in a most creative way. The artist thereby reproduced an image he had repeatedly seen and by which he was presumably impressed – and, furthermore, he transported some of the layers of meaning that had accrued on his mental image (the pose related to a youthful god, maybe some verses of Ovid) into a new image and meaning. Some archaeologists, in addition, have been reminded by Narcissus' body in this painting of Hermaphroditus[54].

2. In this painting from Torre Annunziata, as in several other depictions of these beauties, the body of the youth oscillates between male and female[55]. The seated or leaning pose used for Adonis, Endymion, Cyparissus, and Narcissus was also one of the typical postures of Venus in Pompeian painting. Their inviting homoerotical appearance, in addition, was often combined with images of Venus, compare e.g. Cyparissus and Venus on two opposite walls of room 12 of the Casa dei Capitelli colorati (VII 4, 31/51), or Adonis and Venus in the House of Apollo (VI 7, 23, tablinum). One of the most striking combinations is to be found in a cubiculum in the Casa di M. Lucretius. In a panel on the east wall, Venus is showing her body off in frontal view, and her pose is mirrored by a panel with Narcissus on the west wall, where Narcissus presents the viewer with a voluptuous backside. One wonders if the ancient viewer, when looking at the beautiful youth, did also associate characteristics of female beauty. Sometimes also for a modern viewer it is not possible to straighforwardly identify a figure's sex. In a panel painting from the inn I 14, 5 Narcissus is shown in the iconographical scheme kneeling at the pond (above no. 2), which is not known for any other figure. But due to the panel's moderate state of preservation, and the figure's curvaceous

52 Prehn 2018, 77 f. 206 f. cat. no. e3 with further bibliography.
53 Cf. Prehn 2018, 87 f. with further references to Mart. 6, 29, 5–6 and Petron. 109, 10.
54 Zanker 1966, 166; LIMC 6 (1992) 707 no. 49 s. v. Narkissos (B. Rafn).
55 Prehn 2018, 73–76. 90–95.

Fig. 4: Apollo Sauroktonos, 4th cent. BC, Claudian copy, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. Ma 441

body, doubt has arisen, if it is not rather Pyramus and Thisbe or an unidentified female beauty usurping Narcissus' stance[56]. Furthermore, as already has been described, Endymion in Roman wall painting inherited his sleeping pose from 'Sleeping Ariadne', attested in sculpture, but also in Pompeian painting. And, in the Casa dell'Ara Massima (VI 16, 15, fig. 2) Endymion's body, in addition to his pose, appears rather effeminate, with breasts just as swelling as those of Selene, approaching him. In the Casa di Octavius Quartio,

56 Prehn 2018, 187 f. cat. no. D1; Catoni – Zuchtriegel, 230 f. with further bibliography.

Fig. 5: Narcissus, from Torre Annunziata, Villa of C. Siculius, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 9385
photography: archivio dell'arte | pedicini fotografi MN0597, on concession of the Ministero della Cultura – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

from where a famous painting of Narcissus is known, a garden sculpture was found that is usually described as depicting Hermaphroditus (fig. 6), but seen on the background of other strongly effeminate depictions like the one in the Casa dell'Ara massima, and lacking clear iconographical markers, one might wonder if it was not rather meant to depict one of these effeminate youths, for example sleeping Endymion, or at least if the sculpture was not intended as being ambiguous.

On a more general level, we might then ask why these youths were depicted in such a clearly effeminate manner at all, and why male and female beauty were linked. In Roman society a discourse on homosexuality, as well as a

Fig. 6: Endymion or Hermaphroditus? Pompeii, Casa di Octavius Quartio, garden photography: Shutterstock/Vincenzo Iozzo, on concession of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompeii

practice of decidedly asymmetrical homoerotical relationsships between boys and men certainly existed[57]. The young capricious and effeminate lover as the passive part in a relationship with an adult man, was extensively described by various authors[58]. A short profile description is given by Petronius: "ca. 16 years old, hair curly, soft, beautiful" (Petron. 97, 1: *annorum circa XVI, crispus, mollis, formosus*). Often, the descriptions of such worldly lovers and of mythological figures are interchangeable, as in two passages in Ovid and Martial. The boy Amazonicus, whom Martial presents to his readers as an object of desire in an epigram that ultimately turns out to be an epitaph, looks like Ovid's Narcissus. He has light eyes (Ov. met. 3, 420: *geminum sua lumina sidus,* Mart. 4, 42, *lumina sideribus certent*) and beautiful hair and white skin. The intertextuality between both passages is not referential in a strict sense. Rather, it makes both boys look like any ideal image – male or female – in which the white of the skin contrasts with the red of the lips to be kissed.

57 Cf. e.g. Obermayer 1998; Hubbard 2003; Pollini 2003.
58 Hubbard 2003, 344–442.

In the paintings, the effeminate male offered a panopticum of bodily delights to the eyes of a patron (male or female)[59]. And the patron's gaze may have been interested just as much in the allusion to worldly love as in mythology. Depending on personal background, preferences, and expectations, white flesh and curly hair were indices that drew their epi-iconical meaning from a range of incorporated cultural practices, from viewing and reading habits alike.

According to this perspective, what happens if an image is transferred from one context to another, from worldly love to mythology, or from one mythological figure to another? To stay within the epigenetic model, the different settings that define a specific meaning build-up accretions on iconography or literary motif. Some meanings could be suppressed, if needed, for example the spears identifying a hunter, others could be emphasized, as for example the attractiveness of an effeminate male.

But those who saw these images, who compared them and were aware of their different meanings, could also think of Hermaphroditus or Hylas, when looking at Narcissus. Only if knowledge about one or the other interpretations was lost, the image becomes that of a nameless youth again.

4. Conclusion

In the passage quoted at the beginning of this introduction, Aristotle describes how the recognition of familiar elements in a painting provides pleasure to the viewer. This observation addresses fundamental mechanisms of cognition. Referencing images or literary passages to mental images that are pre-conceived (through texts, images, education, or actions) is a basic way in which meaning is generated, as well as through which creative processes unfold. At the same time, cognition is related to framing and influenced by states of being at the moment of cognition. How such referentiality – or second gazes – can work in practice is exemplified and analyzed in the contributions in this volume: poetic descriptions of celestial phenomena refer to established astronomical iconographies; photographs and annotations on archive sheets document contemporary approaches to a subject instead of being mere information storages; the use of a literary trope (like a *recusatio*) at the beginning of a poem offered the authors a possibility to enter into a differentiated dialogue with their predecessors.

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59 For Narcissus in the context of pederasty see Prehn 2018, 95–100.

A second gaze, taking an inclusive disciplinary perspective, is too rarely applied in the study of antiquity. What does this perspective on the relationality of texts and images offer to us? It helps us to move away from a too narrow study of iconographies or literary genres towards a broader understanding of how images and texts were perceived in their respective times, how they reacted to and interacted with each other, and how they provoked thought in the minds of their recipients. And of course, all kinds of other texts, images, and much more, waited in the minds of creators and perceivers to be activated. In this sense, the depictions or descriptions of mythological figures like Hylas or Narcissus could not only refer to the education and refinement of a patron or reader, but also enact a broad range of further sentiments and thoughts.

In this introduction, we suggest to define such manifold layers of meaning, as epi-iconic, as laying 'on top of' the specific configurations of words or coloured shapes. We are convinced that paying more attention to such epi-iconic layers of meaning will put us in a better position to demystify processes of creativity and reception in both texts and images. Searching for such wider meanings is a commitment to a comprehensive *Altertumswissenschaft* that is critical in the traditional sense and inclusive in an innovative way.

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