

## Lyre, Loom, Typewriter? Women, Digital Media, and Poetic Anxiety

This paper considers music- and textile-making as forms of skilled labor and as modes of communication. Surveying both visual and textual representations of the practices and materials of these productions (and reproductions), I argue that music and textile production are thoroughly entangled enterprises. Drawing on practice theory, materiality and Ingoldian “taskscape” (Dobres 1991; Malafouris 2008; Ingold 1993), which may be more immediately familiar to the archaeologist, I also attend to the insights afforded by work in the field of Media Studies (Kittler 1999 [1986]). I suggest that a reconsideration of these activities as communicative media generate new ways of thinking of technologies and practices of cultural reproduction and change in the ancient world.

Andromache Karanika has demonstrated that surviving fragments of women’s work songs and girl’s play songs can give us limited access to women’s voices, and can evince the sociological contexts in which women learned to perform their gender (Karanika 2014). I put Karanika’s synthesis in dialogue with practice theory, including the bodily and sensorial connections between music- and cloth-making. This is intimately tied to the properties shared by various materials of women’s labor, such as the formal similarities between loom and lyre. Women’s bodies were entrained to perform work that was repetitive, pattern-based, attuned to texture, and primarily *digital* in nature; the rhythms of aural and visual patterning reinforced each other in the education of a skilled worker, and the muscle memory entrained in nimble fingers enabled them to move easily between finely spun wool and taught gut strings.

In ancient representations of music-making, objects associated with performance in the male sphere are often markers of excellence, prizes won in agonistic contexts—rewards earned but not made by their songs; but singing women are portrayed as surrounded by the raw

materials and productions of their song-works. Women's musical production is so entangled with the actions and soundscapes of cloth-making that looms themselves become *kalliphthongi* (Eur. *Iph. Tau.* 222). Music-making women are also seen to *reproduce* the works of male poets (see, for example, *Verg. Georg.* IV. 333-349). In the descriptions of female labor given by male authors we can read an anxiety about the role women played as skilled workers and transmitters of *poiesis*. Instead of craftspersons women become purely instrumental. Aristotle writes in the *Politics* that "if shuttles could weave by themselves and plectra play kitharas, then craftsmen would have no need of assistants, nor masters of slaves" (1.2.5), either consciously or unconsciously linking the two activities, as well as explicitly categorizing both as forms of production requiring human tools. In the *Hymn to Hermes* the god of communication disembowels the tortoise whom he calls *daitos hetaira*, and turns her into a literal instrument.

I end with a comparison to the advent in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries of the typewriter and its counterpart, the female secretary, as laid out in Friedrich Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Kittler explores both the societal conditions that made this possible (suggesting the entrained dexterity of many middle-class young women who had been subjected to years of piano lessons, no less), as well as the male anxieties that surrounded the idea of women working and particularly women interfering with the project of artistic creation. Media Studies grew out of the recognition of—and apprehension about—the swiftness with which new technologies of communication were emerging and changing the terms of art and society. Some may object that modern media are fundamentally different phenomena, that the ancient world can furnish no invention whose novelty compares with the radio's, or the typewriter's. But we should consider seriously Shane Butler's claim, that the invention of the Greek alphabet was a recording revolution on par with the phonograph (Butler 2015), and should

also consider how the material contingencies of the ancient world shaped what was communicated—and how—beyond the written word.

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