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David J. Gunkel

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Ancient Incorporations

David J. Gunkel

Hawhee, D. (2004). *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 240 pp. ISBN: 0292705840. \$40.00 (hardcover).

Debra Hawhee's *Bodily Arts* advances what appears to be a rather simple premise: rhetoric and athletics were, for the ancient Greeks, indissolubly connected. Stating this, however, is like saying that all there is to wrestling is pinning your opponent, all there is to soccer is kicking a round ball, or all there is to gymnastics is executing a sequence of complex maneuvers without perceptible error. In other words, it's all easier said than done. And this is precisely the strength and sophistication of Hawhee's analysis—it is not so much what she advances in her thesis but how she pursues it that matters.

The book begins with a piece of sculpture, a large bronze statue of a nude youth recovered from a shipwreck just off the island of Antikythera. The identity of this artifact constitutes a bit of a conundrum for archeologists and classical scholars. Some speculate that it is the image of an athlete involved in a contest of skill, while others argue that it may represent an orator addressing an assembly. For Hawhee what matters is not one or the other explanation, but the fact that the body of this statue facilitates a convergence of these two apparently different and, at least for those of us who dwell in the shadow of Cartesian dualism, opposed activities. Hawhee takes this material as her point of departure: "The cultural, conceptual, and corporeal connections between the arts of rhetoric and athletic, not unlike the shipwrecked statue, have been more or less submerged since ancient times" (p. 4). And *Bodily Arts* is dedicated to the recovery and exposition of this crucial but lost connection. In this endeavor, Hawhee undertakes an impressive reading of ancient Greek literature, philosophy, architecture, art, music, and archeology. She shows how rhetoric and athletics (or, more generally, mind and body) necessarily converged at various sites in the ancient world, the conditions that made these particular convergences possible, and why all this mattered for the Greeks and how it still matters for us.

The demonstration is organized into seven chapters. The first investigates the Greek concepts of virtuosity [*aretē*] and contest [*agon*], tracking how these two values came to be expressed and embodied in both athletic displays and rhetorical practices.

David J. Gunkel is Professor of Communication at Northern Illinois University. Correspondence to: Northern Illinois University, Communication, DeKalb, IL 60115, USA. Email: dgunkel@niu.edu

In this initial chapter, Hawhee shows, through a careful reading of Pinder, Hesiod, and the works of various orators like Aeschines and Demosthenes, that the ancient Greek understanding of virtuosity, whether it involved displays of prowess in words or in physical dexterity, was something that required active demonstration in competitive contests. These contests, Hawhee argues, were not conceptualized as an antagonistic conflict but consisted in a productive struggle, or agonism, which offered appropriate occasions for the demonstration and reproduction of virtuosity.

The second and third chapters consider the competitive aspect of both rhetoric and athletics and trace it to a particular modality of knowledge production—one that is situated in and by bodies. In Chapter 2, Hawhee pursues this analysis by focusing attention on the concept of *mētis*, which she argues comprises a form of bodily knowledge production that is as much about athletic virtuosity as it is involved in sophisticated rhetorical maneuvers. Toward this end, the chapter considers various figures that came to embody the concept, including the goddess Metis and her progeny, the cunning octopus and wily fox, and the slippery sophist, who, it appears, can never be pinned down. Chapter 3 extends this treatment of an embodied form of “cunning intelligence” by considering its proper time and the importance of timing as it applies to both physical contests and discursive engagements. In this particular investigation, Hawhee tracks the concept of *kairos* as it makes its appearance in ancient texts of athletics and rhetoric. In doing so, she not only connects the conceptual dots, showing how *kairos* plays similar roles in these two endeavors, but investigates what new opportunities a particularly athletic notion of time and timing might occasion for our understanding of argument and debate.

The fourth chapter follows logically from the preceding ones and considers the manner in which these different skills came to be transmitted and developed in successive generations. In other words, it addresses pedagogy and looks at the various training practices that were employed by teachers of both arts. This chapter is organized around something Hawhee calls *phusiopoiesis*, a term she borrows from a Democritean fragment and uses to indicate “a dynamics of stylization that emerges between teacher and student” (p. 99). In pursuing an analysis of this dynamic relationship, Hawhee turns her attention to three distinct but related features—friendship, pain, and erotics—all of which necessarily involve and incorporate the body. Hawhee’s conclusions not only help to elucidate ancient practices but provide an interesting and important point of comparison for understanding recent innovations and crises in contemporary education, especially the disembodied interactions that characterize distance education and web-based instruction.

The fifth and sixth chapters continue the analysis of training by looking at its particular situation. Chapter 5 considers the space of such pedagogy by investigating the physical structure of the ancient gymnasium. Through a careful reading of archeological records and ancient architectural documents, Hawhee shows how the spatial distribution of the gymnasium not only facilitated the dynamics of *phusiopoiesis* but provided the right environment for an eventual infiltration by sophists and philosophers—one which would transform the gymnasium into those ancient schools so commonly associated with Plato and Aristotle. There is, as Hawhee

shows us, something in the very physical arrangement of the structure that fostered, if not necessitated, the convergence of athletics and rhetoric. Chapter 6 extends this demonstration by considering not just the spatial distribution of the gymnasium but the activities that came to be situated within it. The chapter, therefore, considers what Hawhee calls the three Rs of sophistic education—rhythm, repetition, and response. For this reason, the chapter is not so much concerned with architecture as it is interested in music and movement. As Hawhee demonstrates, training in both athletics and rhetoric involved repetitive activities that had their own rhythm and sought to develop agile bodies capable of responding to ever-changing circumstances.

The final chapter addresses the other site for the exhibition of both athletic and rhetorical skill: the Athenian festivals. Here Hawhee not only considers the importance of athletic contests and rhetorical displays in the functioning of the festivals but investigates what she calls “the economy of appearances” that was made possible by such events. “Within the festival context,” Hawhee writes, “athletics and rhetoric inhabit distinctive modalities of appearances: athletics reside more in the realm of the visual, while rhetoric, of course, deals with words” (p. 163). Of greatest interest, however, are the points of contact between these two modalities, those places, as can be seen for example in the works of Isocrates and Demosthenes, where the production of honor in one activity had been extended to and incorporated by the other. This interaction, Hawhee demonstrates, sets up a complex exchange that both characterizes ancient Greek culture and informs contemporary understanding.

The book’s Conclusion, like its Introduction, is oriented by the reading of an artifact. In this case, however, it is not an ancient statute but a well-known, if not iconic, sixteenth-century European painting—Raphael’s “School of Athens.” For Hawhee, this image gathers together and renders visible what is assumed to be the proper legacy of the ancient Greeks—a life of cerebral activity “where civilized inquiry and enlightened discourse take place in a setting of appropriate grandeur and decorum” (p. 190). She contrasts this image to the statue in the book’s Introduction, which exhibits evidence of a much more somatic-centric culture. Consequently, what is pictured in the painting, according to Hawhee’s analysis, is the modern propensity to forget the body (if not, as Friedrich Nietzsche once described it, an active despising of the body) that was, for better or worse, retroactively superimposed on the ancient world. *Bodily Arts* contests this misconstrued “tradition” by recovering a submerged connection of mind and body, and demonstrates that even the most cerebral of ancient practices, rhetoric, was originally understood and developed alongside athletics as a bodily art.