Leslie Kurke and Richard Neer, Berkeley Book Chats, February 12, 2020

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the humanities. Book Chats showcase Berkeley faculty authors engaged in public conversation about their own recently completed books. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Leslie Kirk of the Classics and Comparative Literature Departments and coauthor Richard Neer of the Department of Art History at the University of Chicago discussing their 2019 book, Pindar, Song, and Space: Towards a Lyric Archeology.

They are joined by Mario Telò, also of the Classics Department.

Mario Telò: So, it's a great pleasure and honor to talk with Leslie and Richard about their extraordinary book, Pindar, Song, and Space: Towards a Lyric Archeology; it is, in all its radiance, splendor. Is an interpretive tour de force, which does not just provide a revolutionary picture of a difficult, elusive and often misunderstood Greek lyric poet, but models a radically new way of approaching the relationship between poetry, material culture, and the very idea of space in antiquity and beyond. I would first give a brief account of the book and sum off it's most provocative and challenging ideas and then I will ask our authors some questions that build on that summary. Pindar, active in the first half of the 5th Century BCE, is the master of choral lyric; poetry sung by an ensemble of dancing performers in celebration of the victories of athletes in their civic communities at the great festivals of the [Atlantic 00:02:04] world.

Mario Telò: Even in the act of reading these corporeal assemblage, the chorus, vibrantly manifests its absent presence through graphic remainders of choreographic designs, the [foreign language 00:02:19], the recursive, triadic metrical structure [foreign language 00:02:24], the partitions the page lay out with indentations and alignments of words. This is the partition of the sensible that shapes indirect verbal art. But in other regime of the sensible moves this poetry. It is the insider's perspective on spaces, landscapes, buildings, and artifacts that Pindar unceasingly provides in his odes. While scholarship on Pindar and archaic lyric poetry in general is traditionally divided between contextualist and anti-contextualist, those who situate meaning in the historical circumstances of the poetry's ancient production or productions and immediate reception, and those who strive to keep interpretation strictly within the textual frame as a self-contain world.

Mario Telò: Richard and Leslie demonstrate [inaudible 00:03:27] approaches can, and should, be brought together. They lay the foundation for a new kind of contextualism grounded in a unified vision of verbal and visual which is topographical, architectural and sculptural form. Formalist approaches have traditionally grappled with the imagistic syntactical and phonic complexities of Pindari poetry, which however constantly defies critics attempts to grasp and stabilize it's characteristic density and ambiguity. Leslie and Richard show that Pindar's verbal overdetermination is inseparable from the visual and spatial experiences that these epinicion songs perform in various locations of the Greek world

afforded to their audiences. They demonstrate the embeddedness of verbal texture and architectural art, revealing how the movement of choral bodies in performance enact the kinetic spectacle of sacred space, the natural and architectural landscapes where Pindari poetry was performed and reperformed. As scripted in the Pindaric text, choral circular movements become markers of virtual and actual tours through sites and landscape.

Mario Telò: This is the meaning of the lyric archeology in the title, the idea that the inside of Pindar's poetry, it's verbal form, is not simply animated by, but dynamically fused with, the notion of outside of the topographical imaginary. Such an immersive aesthetic experience blurs verbal and architectural surfaces, textual and topographical structures. Rereading Pindar in this manner becomes an opportunity for reconceptualizing, defamiliarizing, or estranging, as the authors put it, the very ideas of object, space, place and sight and for using historically determined case studies to build up a wide ranging theoretical picture; a politics of experience. When I say politics of experience, I mean politics broadly as the grammar or the syntax of experience, it's working as a flexible and open system, but we're also dealing with politics stricto sensu, which becomes in one of the books, most striking formulations, a formal orientation of citizenry in the landscape, a function of the ordering of bodies in space, bodies of characters and performers, and by extension, the bodies of an audience walking and touring on foot or with their physical or mental eyes as they listen or read.

Mario Telò: Pindar's choral lyric, as Richard and Leslie put it, intervenes in space and indeed constitutes it no less directly than a piece of bronze or marble may do. Light, radiance as we call it, is the fundamental aestheticized physical principle that creates relational spaciality, indeed what defines lyric archeology. This radiance is exemplified by this swiftfooted [Iliadic Achilles 00:07:16] who, more or less, when a character is a gleaming silhouette, a beacon or a luminous turning post like a statue. This is the phenomenology of radiance, just one of the books theoretically surprising contributions. This radiance turns artifacts into an iconic bundle of material energy, which the beholder aesthetically reflect back as wonder. Wonder is a kind of material in between this linking subject and object. Space, in this perspective, becomes what Richard and Leslie call the plastic medium of wonder.

Mario Telò: We see Pindar's poetry emblematically becoming a wondrous radiant artifact in Olympian seven, where [foreign language 00:08:12] of references to light, lyric becomes luminous matter, at once liquid and solid both gleaming wine and it's scintillating container. This is not simply a meta-poetic trope, it is a miniature imagistic reflection of anesthetic effect, an invitation to receive poetic narrative as a flowing sensation emanating from a radiant beacon. And in fact, we know that this ode was inscribed in gold letters on the temple of [Fatina Lindia 00:08:53], here it is, on Rhodes-

Richard Neer: The later one, [inaudible 00:08:57].

Mario Telò: ... whose remnants at the top of the promontory still refract sunlight today. The assemblages of flashing Greek letters, visible at a distance from the temple, were indistinguishable from architectural reliefs from non-signifying decorative motifs and iconic cuts on the stony surface. One of the big payoffs of the book lies in its interrogation of the very notions of proximity and distance as the common ground for the making of and the aesthetic engagement with lyric poetry and visual art alike. Pindar reinvents these core implicated notions manipulating or deterritorializing space, imaginatively placing remote locations close to each other as for example, Olympia and Syracuse in Olympia six, a wonderful case stadia which documents what Richard and Leslie call a Technology of Transport.

Their analysis makes us appreciate how these odes, narrative sequencing, together with its triadic movement, closely corresponds step by step, we can say, to the movements of visitors of tourists from the various components of the sanctuary of Olympia. The balletic itineraries and orchestic orientations that are scripted by the metrical outline of the Pindaric page coincide with the connected trajectories traced by the relational orientation of buildings and zones to each other.

Mario Telò: This is a kinetic but also tactile kind of viewing. Hearing or seeing gives us the impression of an intimate haptic encounter with the landscapes with which this spaces of Pindaric form merge themselves. Richard and Leslie took a trip together to Olympia and placed themselves in the position of the poems' visitor readers, as we can see in the sequence of pictures. This is not a purely antiquarian reconstructive exercise, the impossible resurrection of a performative [inaudible 00:11:34], the origin, but in immersion in an environment that is a sensorily, yet fascinatingly, spectral as the Pindaric ode, animated yet haunted by the traces of choral bodies. The spatial relations traced in this book are politically charged, materializing ideological programs and turning aesthetics into a seductive means of interpolation.

Mario Telò: The new effects of reading that are drawn from their interpretation of a number of Pindaric odes placed in a web of mutual illuminating relations with the epigraphic archeological and art historical archives continually dazzle the reader. But what the book most impressively achieves is a theory or phenomenological reading, that will condition interpretive strategies for many years to come. The call to see Pindaric odes as magnifying the potential energies residing in worldly thinks as we read in the coder, also provides a fundamental intervention in the current debates on materiality and the reconceptualization of formalism.

Mario Telò: Okay. So, now I'm going to ask a few questions to our authors. This is a book about Pindar, so let me ask you, why did you start chapter one with a discussion of maps and Greek metrology in general?

Leslie Kurke: Well, that's funny because that's one of the questions that one of our readers had. He was like, "Why is there all this stuff about [crosstalk 00:13:30] and sudden maps at the beginning of chapter one? So, I guess I would say we very intentionally put that there because in the process of writing the book, at least for me, maybe this was always clearer to Richard than it was to me, is that it's actually not a Pindar book, but it's a book about Greek spaciality; Greek conceptions of space.

Leslie Kurke: And so part of putting this thing about maps and metrology and measuring and stadia right at the beginning is also to defamiliarize and to estrange the whole system, to try to start from the get-go by forcing people to think about a world without maps. How do you function, how do you find your way around in a world almost entirely without maps? Which we know of the Greek world at least of the archaic and classical periods. And also in a world where you have no staple units of measure, it seems, where we know that the stadion, the a hundred meter race course at Olympia, I don't think we have [crosstalk 00:14:32], do we? [crosstalk 00:14:32]

Timothy Hampton: [crosstalk 00:14:33] 200 meters.

Leslie Kurke: Is it 200 meters? Okay, thank you. The 200 meters stadion course at Olympia is a radically different length from the one at Delphi.

Richard Neer: So, there's a variation of-

Leslie Kurke: It's a 30% difference, right?

Richard Neer: ... Up to 40% from one side to another.

Leslie Kurke: Okay. So, [crosstalk 00:14:51] a stadion-

Richard Neer: It's as though the a hundred meter dash were a different length at Rio and at the London Olympics and at Los Angeles. And what's strange also is that the term stadion is the term for the unit of length. I mean, it is the term for the metrical unit. So, there's tremendous variation from place to place in those basic units. But it's even deeper than that. I mean, there's variation even within an individual author. So, author A [inaudible 00:15:22] will say it is X number of stadia from point A to point B, and it is Y number of stadia from point C to point D. And when you go and measure the distances, actually they don't-

Leslie Kurke: Work at all.

Richard Neer: ... work out that way. So, when they give definitions, they can't actually even test their definitions themselves because they don't have consistent concepts. Or you can find proportional systems underlying individual temples, but it's hard to find... It's not the case that more than one temple will use the same actual unit. So you might have a similar proportion in temple A and temple B, but what the unit of that proportion is will be tremendously flexible. And sometimes individual temples will have more than one unit. So there's this... As a [inaudible 00:16:07], all the rulers are made of rubber, and yet they're able to find the way around and build buildings. And so, there's some ways in which it's a system that's like our system; it's enough that we can recognize it, but it's also somehow importantly different.

Richard Neer: I mean, the example, which is perhaps a little facetious, is it's like the game of Calvinball. And the game, [crosstalk 00:16:32] as the last phrase says, the only permanent rule of Calvinball is that you can't play it the same way twice. And Hobbes is saying, the score is two to 12. I mean, there's a little bit of that in reading these texts where there's... I mean, it's a system that works. You can play the game, just as you can have a race, but the rules are enough like ours that we can recognize them as rules, but are somehow functioning in a slightly different way.

Leslie Kurke: Right-

Richard Neer: So, what happens to the concept of space when you inhabit a world like that?

Leslie Kurke: ... Exactly. And so the idea then, is that other technologies pick up the slack. So buildings, sculptures, boundary stones, lighthouses and beacons organize and order space and make place. They are landmarks. They help orient you and guide your way around. But the same is true of choral poetry and performance; it's measured speech meter, and music and song and bodies moving in measured ways is in itself a technology for organizing and ordering space, and one that works collaboratively with all these other elements in the landscape.

Richard Neer: One thing that... Actually it's nice to see [Ron Straad 00:17:50] here. One thing that Ron impressed on me when I was a graduate student here back actually in Athens, was the extreme, I guess fragmentation or balkanization, of both ancient

and to some extent modern Greece as well. And this a world in which every little town has its own name for the months of the year, the days of the week, the hours of the day. They have different festivals, they have different alphabets-

Leslie Kurke: They have different gods.

Richard Neer: ... they have different gods. I mean, it's extraordinarily fragmented, but what is actually consistent is poetic meter. So, the units of metrical length can vary from place to place, even if they had the same name, but the poem's going to scan. The poem's going to scan in much the same way regardless of where you're singing it. So when you key poetry to dance, and to, say, a procession through a town or a circle around an altar, and those movements are keyed to poetic meter, you have a kind of consistency that you don't have in other domains of early Greek life. So, poetry has the potential to have a particularly important function in the demarcation and organization of landscapes and cityscapes and so on.

Leslie Kurke: Right. The organization of space and the making of place.

Richard Neer: Yeah, exactly.

Leslie Kurke: So, we're thinking about these, then, as a suite of technologies that collaborate for space, and place-

Richard Neer: The poems, statues, buildings, race tracks, landscapes, all of these things have to be seen together. And these... There's disciplinary distinctions that make it hard to connect those different facts or data; those different pieces of information. For example, I mean, the arcana of Pindar is forbidding for an art historian or a classical archeologist. And in the same way, there's an equivalent kind of arcana around, say, classical architectural terminology. And each one has-

Leslie Kurke: ... We had to find a base and a collection on what CBA means, or where are those inscriptions really?

Richard Neer: ... Let alone that Pindar is just really hard. So, all of these things make it difficult to assemble the different data points, if I might call it that way; I don't mean to flatten everything, but to bring together different bibliographies and different sub-fields in ways that are difficult for us in some ways, but would have been inhabited by the Greeks themselves.

Mario Telò: So, I would say the book is a great example of how to read poetry and visual art together and bring them together. I wonder whether you can give us some examples of how you were able to combine the visual and textual archives within a unified frame of reading and bring out these [inaudible 00:20:48] poetic with space making [inaudible 00:20:53].

Leslie Kurke: Yeah. Well, maybe we'll do that in pieces for us to just do a couple of visual examples.

Richard Neer: Yeah. Maybe just to start off, just to emphasize again, Leslie brought up the term of a suite of technologies, and what we're trying to see is how these different kinds of artifacts, both verbal and material, could work together to make a larger system that could be improvised, that could be used on the fly and doesn't necessarily have one set unitary function, but to see them all together as a technology that gets something done as opposed to just as a series of functionless ornaments is, I think, an important aspect of all of this. So, Pindar's poetry is

occasional, so it's based on a particular event and has definite performance context although it can be reperformed in multiple areas. And often Pindar will refer to buildings and other features of the landscape in his poetry.

Richard Neer: And this is actually kind of precious, almost first person account, of what it's like to look at these buildings, what it's like to inhabit these landscapes. So, that's a kind of underutilized resource, we think. And so we've tried to do is to find ways and either ways in which we can look at the particular landscapes, cityscapes, that Pindar is talking about, or conversely, to find sometimes generic or thematic similarities between his poems on the one hand and other sorts of monuments. So, to give you an example of both, the poems are... The one on the one left is tiny and the one on the right is big; just to be clear, these are very different kinds of monuments, but it's over life-size.

Richard Neer: The one on the left is a little votive figurine that shows a person who would have had a shield on one arm, and he's preparing to run a race. And it's the kind of thing that one would give to the DAT in commemoration of victory. So with this one, we don't have the actual base that it stood on, but we do have other bases for small statues that were used for victory monuments. So, it's generically like the odes that Pindar's composing. Pindar composes a big, grand ode for somebody who's won a victory in a contest such as this one, and this little monument is a similar sort of thing. It's a victory type of gift. The one on the right, on the other hand, is probably a votive monument. It represents probably the god Zeus throwing a thunderbolt, and this shares some of the themes with Pindar poetry, although generically it doesn't have the same kind of tight as the one on the left.

Richard Neer: In each case, what both of them have is you have to imagine them being polished. I mean, really shiny; that's the radiance that Mario was talking about. In a world where most things are not bright and gleaming, these things shining in the Greek sunlight will have been really eye-catching and eye-popping. And in each case, there's a way in which the figure has a kind of incipient movement out towards you; either about to run or in the case of the Zeus, throwing a thunderbolt, a big piece of light at you. That's what it shows. So, there's a way in which the works are kind of... In their eye-catching, sort of dazzling brightness, are recapitulating what they show, what they narrate, right? It's bright and shiny, it hits your eye, and it shows a guy throwing a piece of lightning at you. And there are similar sorts of images, similar sorts of ways of relating to space very other in a very tight fit, this is actually the same kind of figure, or in looser, but nonetheless discernible, ways with the poems of Pindar.

Leslie Kurke: Yeah. I thought the example I would do, just talk about very quickly, is we analyze in one chapter; in chapter four, a fragment of a dithyramb which we argue was performed in the old Agora of Athens. To me, this was really big news. Archeologists have known this since the '80s, that actually there was an old Agora of Athens, a pre-classical Agora, in a different place from the classical Agora and they moved it all to the other side of the Acropolis, right?

Richard Neer: Pretty much. This was first Agora, actually even in the mid '70s and then an inscription was found in 1980 that-

Leslie Kurke: But the people were still in denial for a while, right. But anyway-

Richard Neer: ... Some people still think that it was not the case, but-

Leslie Kurke: ... In any case, there is-

Richard Neer: ... I think that the preponderance of the viewers.

Leslie Kurke: ... Yeah, there is an archaic Agora, and our argument is that this dithyramb fragment was performed by chorus dancing around in altar in the old Agora, and calling out, pointing to monuments in the vicinity as they circle around the altar, because they say, "We all start from Zeus." This has always been a problem for this poem because it shouldn't start from Zeus; it's a dithyramb, so it should be about [crosstalk 00:26:01] and nobody knows what that means, but there's a way in which they circle around and they call out, point to, as they circle all these various monuments.

Leslie Kurke: And the point is not just the positivist identification of these different monuments, but to argue that the poem, in performance, which is a circle and is obsessed with the imagery of circles-

Richard Neer: And wreaths [crosstalk 00:26:22].

Leslie Kurke: ... crowns and wreaths, blading of crowns and circles is organizing this very disorganized hodgepodge space of ancient Athens, which was built up in accreted very much piecemeal and making it into an order for the audience and for the performance through the performance of the dancing, while also thematizing its own circularity; the circular dancing, the circular crowns, the circuit of coherent cogent space that they're making through the dance and through the performance.

Richard Neer: And the ultimate self was the zero milestone for the city, which was more-

Leslie Kurke: The center point.

Richard Neer: ... Yes. Literally, it's the navel of the city [crosstalk 00:27:10]

Leslie Kurke: The navel of the town. So those are some examples. I think maybe we have to stop there... Nope.

Mario Telò: So, we've got time for another question on my part to them?

Richard Neer: Yeah.

Mario Telò: So maybe we can talk a little bit about this very enticing phrase, lyric archeology, and how you see it and especially how you think you can contribute to problematizing certain disciplinary boundaries. We think that the field of classics and...

Leslie Kurke: Well, lyric archeology was a phrase we came up with. We said, no, we can't call it an archeology of lyric because then again, people will think we're just giving you the positivist, he must have meant this monument when he said that. [crosstalk 00:28:07] We didn't want to be talking about the reality or saying that that's what we're doing; the archeology of lyric. So, lyric archeology was just our catch phrase to try to talk about putting together all these archives that are still very divided in the discipline that this is an essential thing. We have to bring together all these archives because for Pindar and for the audiences he's writing for and the people who are building these monuments and carving these sculptures, these disciplinary boundaries don't exist. That this is for them, as I said, a collaborative assemblage or a suite of technologies that all work together.

Leslie Kurke: So we wanted to put them back together, but that's actually very challenging for some of the reasons we've already said. There are so many barriers internal to the field, between different sub-fields, that are hard to get over. And I would say Richard has always been a fantastic reader of poetry. But for me, I didn't know all this archeology stuff. It was news to me that there was an old Agora. It was a very steep learning curve to learn all this stuff about archeology so that we could do these things together.

Richard Neer: The caviar here is Pindar is the most difficult poet and Leslie is the world's expert on it-

Male: She is.

Richard Neer: ... just to be very clear. But one other thing that I would add here it's both the archives, but it's also different ways of treating those archives; different, what you call, reading habits. So, there's ways in which a Pindar artist will read. There's ways in which... an epigrapher might read. There's ways in which art historians look at things. There's ways in which archeologists might look at the same kind of object. There's different methods that go along with different subdisciplines. And just as the archives are siloed, so too are the reading habits or the approaches, the way in which one looks at the object.

Richard Neer: And to cross those up as well, I think, is really useful and important. So to try to read, we read... If we get a Greek text and we find that between blue covers in an Oxford classical text, then we read it one way, and if we find it in a big book of epigraphy, then we read it another way. And so I've been struck, for example, there was an argument made some years ago that there's no independent discourse on early Greek art from the archaic and classical periods. Anyway, there's a big, fat book of all the verse inscriptions that accompany statues and sculptures in Greece and there are all poems about sculpture. There's a huge, huge discourse, but the disciplinary divide is such that one can actually just not see that if it doesn't take a particular form that you don't read it in a particular way, that; therefore, it doesn't exist. So, it's both the archives but also, I would say, the reading habits that go with them. So to, so to-

Leslie Kurke: And what you referred to briefly earlier of going flat, right? That we also were committed to a democracy of evidence, right? Usually, depending on which subfield you're in, there's background and there's foreground-

Richard Neer: One illustrates the other.

Leslie Kurke: ... there's context and there's poem, or there's the [Herandez's 00:31:11] history, so that's background for a statute. We wanted to say, "No, let's go flat. Everything is on the same level. Nothing is prior." Space itself is constituted by all of this stuff working together.

Richard Neer: Because there isn't in control, right? There isn't some sort of third term... I mean, there's the actual landscape, but there isn't a system, there isn't any system, there isn't an apparatus that they have for getting the kind of overviews that you can get in, say poetry. So, Pindar can talk about the relationship between, say an Island in the Aegean, a city in Libya, and the larger Greek world. And that's their way to envision that. That's the technology that they have to envision the cosmos, if we can call it that. So yes, we can't have this foreground/background distinction. Rather, what you're seeing is the poet and oftentimes important political figures trying to intervene into their landscape.

Leslie Kurke: And I think then the final thing about lyrical archeology, because we did try to come up with what's our methodology in the code and we were like... I guess there's one, two, three. Like one is combining archives, two is close reading of all the different material in the archives, and three is that it's not about just the stuff; this physical building, this monument. Again, in this sort of positivist we can identify it, but that it's about relations, relations among all these things in space and about the very criteria and presuppositions for constituting spaciality. That's what we're trying to get at through the analysis of all the different pieces.

Richard Neer: And this is the apparatus and the apparatus... but it's not just a poem and it's not just a building, it's not just a statue. It's a set of things and the way in which you establish relationships between them. But it's like a giant gadget, that's how I describe it. Like we have our iPhones and we look... That's how... It's very hard to envision going from here to the Oakland Airport, as I will do later on today, without imagining that little blue dot going down the road, but they don't have that. They have another way of inhabiting space and visualizing it and we're arguing this is one of their key apparatuses.

Mario Telò: So maybe we can open it up to the audience now? Yeah, [inaudible 00:33:35].

Speaker 2: Richard Leslie, thanks very much. I haven't read the book, but I've heard a lot about it, obviously. You clearly added another dimension to the ancient audiences experience of Pindar's poetry. One of the things that has always bothered me about it is precisely how difficult and how dense and how compressed it is. It's also being sung and danced at the same time. And as a onetime singer, I know how hard it is to articulate language. And I listened to [Handon 00:34:15], for example on the radio, how much can you actually understand the words famous problems. So maybe you could speak a little bit to how far the audience would appreciate this other dimension. Would it just whizz past them so fast that it would be a wonderful, impressionistic blur, or were these poems sung slowly, repeated?

Leslie Kurke: Yeah. That's a tough question. This does get back to the whole thing about the distribution of the sensible, right? Because I do have my mood, where I'm like, "It's so damn hard. Nobody could understand it."

Richard Neer: [crosstalk 00:34:54] actually says that to me.

Leslie Kurke: Yeah.

Richard Neer: The crowd can't understand, yeah.

Leslie Kurke: We don't know anything about the music or the performance, honestly or, I mean, we think maybe we know that if it's triadic they dance in a circle in one direction, then they dance in a circle in the other direction and for the [inaudible 00:35:13] they stand. And work has been done to show that some of the most important parts of the poem happen in the stand when maybe you could hear a little better because they were just standing and singing and not dancing and singing at the same time. So that is a serious problem and we don't know, did they sing them slowly? But I do think they must have performed them over and over and over again. We're pretty sure there was reperformance.

Leslie Kurke: And also, I mean, the other kind of argument people make is that this is a culture which has a very high level of performative literacy. People dance and sing in courses, just like your average Joe citizens, right? Dancing, singing choruses all the time from the time they are children all the way through their lives. So maybe

that gives them more of an ability to actually understand and comprehend this stuff. And I guess I would say also the sort of mutual reinforcement between the language of the poem is a song and dance and the landscape might have actually helped make it somewhat more comprehensive. But-

Richard Neer: What's up with your-

Mario Telò: So, if I can say something?

Leslie Kurke: Yeah.

Mario Telò: One of the contribution of the book is also to push against the representation and making an argument for seeing these poetry as something that can be appreciated; a sensation even going beyond meaning. So, you can appreciate the sound or the specter calling itself, even if you don't understand everything. So, when you talk in the book about the aniconic dimension of Pindari poetry, which seems to me a great contribution precisely because the tendency has always been to try to identify everything. And in fact, then the question arises, well, to what an extent did people understand what he said? Well, seeing poetry, as sensation, as radiance, as even a beacon, in a sense brings out a new dimension that can take us outside of the conundrum of to what an extent did they understand this.

Leslie Kurke: Yes.

Richard Neer: And once that these things are on a spectrum, and they're on a spectrum in a number of different ways. On the one hand, one can talk about a spectrum in, say early Greek monuments from the aniconic to a sort of robustly iconic sort of monument. And once upon a time, it was thought that there was a kind of historical development that correlated to that. So like the early ones were aniconic, that's to say just sort of pillars. And then later on they became figural. And that's not the case. There're continuously available options all through archaic and classical and indeed Hellenistic periods. But you can also have images that we saw before, in which the image can thematize or otherwise reflect upon features that might not in themselves be depictive, for example, brightness and shininess.

Richard Neer: So, you can run all the way from being something that is truly aniconic and doesn't have any representational content, I suppose, [crosstalk 00:38:18]. Yeah, these are boundary stones or this, yeah, this is Greek sculpture. I mean, this is important. This is a kind of thing called a [goulash 00:38:25]. It's a cube. It's from a grave monument from the Island of [Thera 00:38:29]. Yeah, it looks like Donald Judd, but that's classical sculpture. And you can see [crosstalk 00:38:34] there's a hop, skip and a jump from something like that to these rows of seated figures from near [Maelitus 00:38:40], which are kind of cubic and blocky in the same way. So, it's a spectrum, not an absolute divide and there's going to be similar sorts of things with poetry.

Richard Neer: Sometimes, you'll catch a word, sometimes you won't. It's like following music in any other context. You might be listening and following saying, a motivic development and then you get distracted and then you come back and you hear it. And that's, I think, an ordinary part of reading and listening. But I think probably the key point is that the poems, like the statues, can, what we would call thematize, or otherwise make prominent some of these features and integrate them into larger discursive or narrative systems. And that's part of the ideological work. Part of the ideological work is this process of ordering that Leslie was describing. And this can... When these things are sponsored by states

or rulers or tyrants, there's often something fairly obviously political and ideological in that operation.

Leslie Kurke: The question?

Richard Neer: I thought so.

Mario Telò: So, maybe I can ask, what was it like to write a book together? Not many books in the humanities are co-written, co-authored, so-

Leslie Kurke: Well, it was a total pleasure, actually.

Richard Neer: Absolutely.

Leslie Kurke: Really, just a joy. But we always get this question, people are fascinated. Like how do you do it? How do you write together? I have a pap answer like, "Well, some of the things Richard already had a whole cool argument about [Syrini 00:40:14] and I took over a bunch of stuff and then wrote a chapter about digging into the Syrini odes, the three Syrini odes that responds to his chapter or like with chapters two and three where you wrote this whole fantastic thing about going from archaic individual singleton sculpture to multi-figure monuments that incorporate narrative.

Leslie Kurke: And then I wrote chapter three in responsion to that, like Pindar tracing the same set of effects through Pindar or analogous that of his aesthetic effects in Pindar. And then in other chapters, I think I spent one or two weeks in Chicago. One summer, I can't remember-

Richard Neer: We taught a seminar.

Leslie Kurke: ... Well, we taught seminar together in spring 2013, but then remember I was back in summer 2015, and we met every day and we talked for several hours about Olympia six. And you don't have to say, this the great thing that Richard gave me, because at a certain point as a Pinderist I'm like, "Okay I get this poem. Or possibly there's still poem where I'm like, "Okay, I'm never going to get this poem." But with certain poems where I was like, "Yeah, I got this one. I got it figured out what's going on here."

Leslie Kurke: And Richard was relentless. With Richard, it was like there was no stopping, there was no boredom every word. We are going to have to just keep at it for hours. And that was great for me and was totally mind-expanding. So, we spent like several hours-

Richard Neer: That was fun.

Leslie Kurke: ... every day for a couple of weeks talking about Olympian six and then I went home and wrote this maddened, crazy, 50 page thing about Olympian six. And then Richard, took a blue pencil to it, said, "Okay, you're really done."

Richard Neer: Guess [crosstalk 00:41:51] the other way around though. That was good.

Leslie Kurke: So, that's how we did it. I mean, some parts are written by individuals, but a lot of it, totally worked over together.

Richard Neer: But it's also true that we've... I mean, I was Leslie's student, so we've been talking about this on and off for like 20 years.

Leslie Kurke: Yes.

Richard Neer: So, there was a lot of agreement, I think, already about the kind of basic shape of the terrain. As I have said, I've never had a thought about Pindar that didn't come from Leslie, so we agree on everything. It was really very convenient. But it was... I think it's good to have two separate areas of competence. I can say without chain that I don't understand this line; I can't figure out what he's saying, but Leslie can.

Leslie Kurke: Right. Or I will say to Richard, "I have no idea what this argument is about [Phildein Wells 00:42:50] and in the old Agora, what the hell is that about, or this pot sherd being here. What does that mean?

Richard Neer: But I think that one thing that was most striking is that for all of that, nonetheless, it really is striking how on the one hand, I feel the classics and classical archeology and classical art history have a kind of wholism that is actually somewhat unusual within humanities departments. There isn't, I think, the same kind of tight connection between, say other areas in which I work, say French art and romance language and literature departments. There's not that kind of presupposition of familiarity that one has in the classical archeology. On the other hand, there are really, really surprising and striking divisions of the sort that we were talking about earlier. Just how to read the citations, what a complete citation looks like. I mean there's a lot of protocols that are formal in this field. It's one of our glories. But it does mean that it's actually harder in some ways in the technical details that I had suspected it would be.

Leslie Kurke: Yeah, I agree it shuts people out in-

Richard Neer: Yeah, shut people out.

Leslie Kurke: ... the structures and protocols of the sub-fields really exclude people and make it harder to do this kind of work. And I also think we could do this kind of work because we're both established, Richard has written four or five books. And this is my fourth book. It's much harder for younger people to do it, sadly.

Mario Telò: There's a question there.

Speaker 3: The introduction referred to the Pindar's page, I wonder if you could tell us what textual format the odes would have taken originally.

Leslie Kurke: Yeah. Well, presumably written on papyrus. Probably not with metrical breaks as far as we know, this is all guesswork. We don't have any early things preserved and we have papyri that are much later. But that's what we assume, because they have to have been actors... There had to be a text to teach the chorus from, and the text had to have been sent and way back in the 1950s, in this sort of great book on the transmission of the Pindaric text, [inaudible 00:45:07] was already saying, "Well..." and they must have written a copy for the patron. The guy who commissioned the ode probably got a copy and that's what you would use as the basis or the script for reperformances. So, that's about all we know, none of those are preserved. But that's what we mean by the pindaric page. I mean, I think Mario was referring to the modern Pindaric page, which is the [inaudible 00:45:30] edition with all the-

Mario Telò: What, this? There's our way approach-

Leslie Kurke: ... metrical apparatus and the breakup of the text on the page... Yes, absolutely. This is how we approach Pindar. Yes. Other questions? Yeah, Tim.

Timothy Hampton: So, can you talk about the transferability of this project? I mean, is this [inaudible 00:45:50] kind of stuff or were there Greek...

Richard Neer: I mean, I would hope that there's ways [crosstalk 00:46:02] in which is transferable. I mean, I think the one article for example, the both of us were inspired by is an early piece by Anne Carson on [Bachilletes 00:46:11] and on the way in which Bachilletes describes two monuments at Delphi, these tall columns with tripods on them. And you can see there's a whole way in which his language is mobilizing many of the themes that we're talking about. So, a lot of the poems are mobile. I mean, one of the features of poetry, and that Greek poets talk about, is precisely it's mobility.

Leslie Kurke: Yeah, but I mean, it's a fair question, Tim. One of the reasons we did Pindar is because Pindar, more than any other, I would say Greek lyric poet, has all this stuff in him, both of typography, landscape buildings, a gal matter, which are sort of shiny dedications, things like that. But it's also because Pindar is the best preserved of all the Greek lyric poets and the only poet for whom we have a sizable corpus of whole poems, right? All the rest is fragmentary. Even most of Bachilletes. But that doesn't mean that this is not transferable. I mean, you were just saying to me, "This stuff is all over a tragedy. What about [crosstalk 00:47:22] the Oedipus at Colonus?"

Leslie Kurke: All those inscriptions on statues, verse inscriptions on statues are just begging to be read this way. Much more integrated with the monuments, but even outside of Greece I think, for lots of other cultures that are performative cultures. Like it'd be super interesting to look at whatever texts we have in Venice and put them together with ritual processions or stuff like that and monuments, right? I would imagine in the pre-modern period all over the place there'd be lot to do. I don't know if that answers your question?

Richard Neer: And the one thing I think is particularly significant in this case though, is its relationship to maps and metrology, because that is something that is... It changes even in the Greek situation. I mean, later on, they do develop different technologies. They develop different... I mean, this is a period in which basic discoveries are being made in math, like irrational numbers are being... Problems about the square root of two. I mean, there's issues and those actually do become relevant. Plato writes dialogues on these topics. So, there is a particular way in which this case puts space at issue in ways that are particularly important and prominent. You can import it, yes, but there's going to be changes that will occur.

Richard Neer: Another thing though, that was really, I think, important for us and thinking about it, it was a book about Polynesian navigation and how one navigates across vast oceans where there's no landmarks. And what kind of conception of space people have in those sorts of situations. Which has to do with stars and different ways of imagining their horizon.

Leslie Kurke: By lying perpendicular to the wave in the bottom of the boat and feeling it.

Richard Neer: Yeah. All kinds of different-

Leslie Kurke: That's how you get from one crazy [crosstalk 00:49:15].

Richard Neer: But in this case, we have the narrative poetry that is sort of about those things, if I can. So, we have a kind of richness of primary material that's not unique, but it's distinctive.

Leslie Kurke: Yeah. Yeah.

Timothy Hampton: Thank you again.

Richard Neer: Thank you.

Male: Thank you.

Richard Neer: I just want to thank you, but I also want to thank Mario and the Townsend Center as well for being such a great host.

Mario Telò: Thank you.

Leslie Kurke: And we should also do a shout out to [Emily Mako 00:49:46], who's already gone but was one of the co-editors of our series.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs and series.