INTRODUCTION: APPROACHING GENDER

On the interior of a Hellenistic bronze mirror cover, a man and a woman are having sex (Figure 1). Set in a domestic context with comfortable bed, footstool and discarded slippers, the spectacle appears to present a positive image of conjugal union.[1] Fashioned for female use, though, what does the mirror cover tell us about women's aspirations, identifications and desires in late fourth-century Greece? The woman here is represented bent forwards, her buttocks splayed. She reaches backwards to help the man's penis enter her vagina, but he is not fully erect. Despite the woman's contorted position, which facilitates easy penetration, her partner cannot penetrate her. Is this an image of ancient erectile dysfunction, and if so, what is the reaction of the woman who owned this mirror? Perhaps it is a playful indication that, even in patriarchal Greece, a woman can have a good laugh at a man's expense.

Although this book is largely concerned with sculptural images, I have chosen the mirror first to illustrate the complexities of bodily representation and its reception: a simple domestic object can lead to important questions surrounding male and female interactions and identities. *Gender, Identity and the Body in Greek and Roman Sculpture* seeks primarily to explore the construction of gender identity in ancient statuary, using the human body as its chief focus. As the body is a key tool in establishing gender, so the differences between male and female artistic representation relate to different social constructions of gender in the cultures in which such images were produced and consumed.

Acknowledgement that perceptions of the body are shaped by social, cultural and historical factors is, of course, a familiar feature of discourses of embodiment within anthropology, cultural studies and social theory. The

[1] Stewart (1997) 147–9 notes that the usual interpretation of the mirror-cover is that of hetaira and client, but suggests it could as likely be a depiction of husband and wife.

Figure 1 Bronze mirror cover (*c.* 320–300 BC): Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Inv. RES.08.32c.2). Photo © 2018 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: www.mfa.org/collections/object/mirror-cover-with-eros-and-erotic-scene-symplegma-375249. (See, further, Acknowledgements, p. xvii.)

body is socially constructed through a process of embodiment in which an individual both has and becomes his/her body. Here the body has a meaning central to personhood and an individual's place in society. Even though (*pace* many followers of Aristotle) the relationship between art and reality is never straightforward imitation, 'represented' as opposed to 'real' bodies also recall the cultural climate in which they are produced and have immense power both to reflect and to inform societal understandings of gender and identity. This book looks at Greece and Rome from the fifth century BC to the second century AD, a time when naturalistic renderings of the body have their fullest expression. Naturalism itself does not involve precise imitation of the human body;[2] rather, sculpture gives the appearance of human form,

[2] On the 'naturalistic illusion' of Classical sculpture, see Squire (2011) 59–61.

proportion and movement but produces bodies that are liable to be idealized versions of their real equivalents.

Patterns emerge in sculptural images of men and women through which gender ideology is mediated. In the Archaic period, sculptures of men and women are differentiated in terms of clothing and movement. Male kouroi are nude and female korai clothed, and while neither type is animated, the walking position of the male, with one foot in front of the other, contrasts with that of the female, who has her two feet placed together. By the fifth century BC, both male and female statues are often positioned in elegant contrapposto so that each weight-bearing limb is placed in diagonal opposition to a relaxed one. But in male statuary the pose is expanded, so that the male invariably takes an active position as opposed to the female's standing passivity. Body types are also contrasting: the man's musculature is highlighted, while the woman's body, originally covered in brightly coloured and decorated drapery, hints at the curves beneath. In general terms, male and female bodies are imagined around a set of opposites: the male body is hard and active, the female soft and passive. This dichotomy continues to be operative throughout the period under discussion, and yet, as we shall see, bodies do not always fall into easily identifiable categories and indeed sometimes defy gender categorization altogether.

Drawing critically on a range of theoretical approaches from art history, gender studies, film studies, body studies, social theory and queer theory, this book aims to enable new readings of ancient sculpture and to draw out revealing comparisons between past and present. It will be helpful here to briefly outline the theoretical background that facilitates the study of gender in ancient art in general, and my consideration of the gendered body in Greek and Roman sculpture in particular.

Gender Studies

Since the 1970s feminist scholars have tried to reclaim female experience in antiquity from male writings and have also explored non-canonical texts relating to women, such as letters, funerary inscriptions and graffiti.[3] Analysis of objects of material culture too has sought to uncover something of the lived reality of women's lives in the ancient world. So the bronze mirror cover engraved with an erotic scene may have given a Greek woman practical ideas on how to wear her hair as well as less specific recollections

[3] A concise and informative overview of the study of women and gender in antiquity is included in Skinner (2013).

of the realities of female experience, perhaps as wife and certainly as lover. Academic trends in the 1990s began to broaden the field of women's studies in order to look at gender, and, accordingly, codes and representations of male privilege and power here come under scrutiny. If we apply masculinity studies to ancient art, we can distinguish multiple visual images of manhood: in patriarchal fifth-century Athens alone we observe both the nude muscular hero and the clothed cerebral philosopher, with brains and brawn constituting opposed but equally valid markers of masculinity. Visual culture plays an important role in conveying identity, but there are complications; gender construction cannot be tied to one recognizable image that defines what it is to be a man or a woman in the ancient world. Instead, meanings of gender are dynamic and in a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation.

Likewise, sexual identity is subject to changing interpretation. Foucault's and subsequent studies of same-sex male desire have made it apparent that modern understandings of sexuality are inapplicable to the ancient world, because modernity tends to assume that the biological sex of an individual's sexual partner(s) can establish that individual's identity.[4] In antiquity, where the specifics of the sexual act are what matters, no such assumption is made. Conversely, Greek pederasty, involving relationships between men and boys, has no modern equivalent. In the wake of Kenneth Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), the pederastic sexual dynamic has been understood in terms of power, with the *erastēs* (older lover) dominant, active and penetrating, and the *erōmenos* (younger beloved) submissive, passive and penetrated. More recently, James Davidson's *The Greeks and Greek Love* (2007) challenges power-based understandings of pederasty, calling instead for a reconsideration of Greek male-to-male relationships in terms of a more neutral expression of love, sex and desire. Nevertheless, it is clear that in ancient Greece a definition of adult masculinity is one that penetrates; women fall into the other category, as do slaves (of any gender) and boys, even though masculinity changes throughout a person's life, and *erastēs* and *erōmenos* represent different stages of the life of a Greek male citizen rather than a fixed identity.

Deriving from the understanding of sexual identity as social construction, contemporary gender theory, influentially articulated in the work of Judith Butler, sees both sexuality and gender as complex and fluid rather than fixed and predetermined.[5] It is through the body that gender identity is produced

[4] Foucault (1986). Neo-Foucauldian studies include: Halperin (1990); Larmour, Miller and Platter (1990); Winkler (1990); Halperin, Winkler and Zeitlin (1990). For challenges to Foucault's understanding of ancient sexuality, see Richlin (1991); Habinek (1997); Foxall (2003); Davidson (2007).

[5] Butler (1990, 1993).

or performed. Butler insists that gender has a performative function whereby acts, gestures and appearances are performed to give the sense that gender is innate, whereas it is in actuality a sociocultural construction.[6] She challenges the notion that male and female bodies must inevitably subscribe to masculine and feminine genders and calls instead for an acknowledgement of differences from the norm. Queer theory embraces such differences, rejecting ideologies of heteronormativity and challenging the concept of a norm altogether. Not restricted to gay and lesbian experience alone, queer theory interests itself in other forms of gendered and sexual resistance to the status quo. It asks us to look beyond the familiar model of a two-sexed (male/female), two-gendered (masculine/feminine) human society based on a system of opposites. When such thinking is applied to the ancient world, we are forced to reassess the way that we view the past. Joyce's *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives: Sex, Gender, and Archaeology* (2008) uses the example of European Palaeolithic figurines – traditionally interpreted as emblems of female fertility representative of a single religion of the 'Mother Goddess' in a matriarchal society – to illustrate how considering ancient objects in a different way can impact on their meaning.[7] In this case, by simply turning representations of stylized women with large breasts upside down, we can show that the same objects become male genitals. Looking at the objects differently serves to challenge the assumption that women were defined by their fertility and allows the inference that male fertility was also important in Palaeolithic Europe. For Greek and Roman naturalistic depictions of the human body, we cannot, indeed, change the position of the objects that we are looking at, but we can shift our perceptions of them by interrogating oppositional categories, male and female and masculine and feminine.

Visual Theories

For forty years or so, scholars of visual culture have analysed the ways that gender difference impacts on the viewing experience.[8] In *Ways of Seeing* (1973) John Berger considers the art-historical tradition of the female nude and traces its trajectory from Renaissance art to modern advertising. Within this tradition the woman is a passive physical presence; as the object of male gaze, her nude body becomes an eroticized spectacle. Berger contends that

[6] See esp. Butler (1990) 9–12.
[7] Joyce (2008) 9.
[8] For an overview of visual theories and an account of their impact on the study of classical art, see Brown (1997).

when a woman looks at images of other women, she takes on the male role as surveyor of herself. In a similar vein, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey drew on Lacanian psychoanalytical theory to formulate the concept of 'the gaze' in which viewing is a gendered activity, with the female the passive recipient of the active male look.[9] Mulvey scrutinizes, in particular, screen femininity in classic Hollywood cinema, where, instead of nudity, it is hair, make-up and clothing that serve as codes of female eroticization. Mulvey's argument sets up a series of polarities – male/female, active/passive, looking/being looked at – with marked gender alignments. Like Berger, Mulvey supposes that when women take on the active role of looking, they must be assuming a male role and thus entering into a cross-gender experience.

While the female nude has become an exemplar of passivity, the way that the modern world receives classical statuary – often damaged and fragmented – has certainly contributed to the perceived passivity of female nude statues. A Roman version of the Hellenistic Crouching Aphrodite in the Louvre is a case in point. Conscious of being looked at, she appears to hide her nakedness in a double pudica pose with arms shielding her exposed body.[10] Thighs pressed together and crouching pose indicate a defensive position,[11] and lacking a head, this particular statue is rendered doubly visionless and mute. However, in the photomontage *Untitled* (*Your Gaze Hits The Side Of My Face*) (1981–3), Barbara Kruger offers a striking challenge to Mulvey's model of the voyeuristic pleasure of the male viewer. The artist chooses a classicizing marble statue to represent the unseeing, unspeaking female object that unexpectedly returns the gaze with speech. While a text usually confirms a reading of an image, here it disrupts the image's conventional meaning. The statue's text/speech, addressed to the male viewer, exposes the violence of the voyeuristic male gaze.

In the field of ancient art, Mulvey's understanding of the viewing experience has been used in readings of Roman wall paintings. Koloski-Ostrow's study of mythological paintings in Pompeian houses interprets imagery of rape and abduction as reflective of Roman patriarchy, played out in the gaze of the *dominus* of the house.[12] Fredrick similarly looks at Pompeii's Ariadne paintings as epitomizing the female body as the object of scopophilia and voyeurism, and also reads feminized male bodies (Narcissus, Endymion, Hermaphroditus) as signs of the dominance of the male gaze in a domestic context.[13]

[9] Mulvey (1975).
[10] As reconstructed by Kunze (2002) 108–21.
[11] Zanker (2015) 59.
[12] Koloski-Ostrow (1997).
[13] Fredrick (1995).

Meanwhile, though, in the disciplines of film studies and art history, Mulvey's and Berger's ideas, while still influential, have been variously and insistently challenged. Berger's transhistorical approach, which ignores socio-historical context, medium and mode of production,[14] has been pointedly criticized, as has his premise of male viewership.[15] Work within film studies has demonstrated that Mulvey's deployment of Lacanian theory is imprecise: what she designates as the 'determining male gaze' is in fact what Lacan calls 'the eye' and what contemporary feminist film theory now calls the more nuanced 'look'. The gaze cannot be considered coterminous with any individual viewer; it necessarily exceeds the subject and his look. It is the look and not the gaze, then, that is emplaced within the spectacle of the body in the viewing scenarios of classical cinema that are Mulvey's concern.[16]

At the same time, art historians and film theorists insist that gender alone does not connote meaning, because other factors also impact on the viewing experience. Innovatively, Llewellyn-Jones has used reception studies of the Hollywood 'Woman's Picture' in order to explain how women's self-image functions in the medium of Greek vase painting.[17] But though women have certainly looked to such images for self-identification, Llewellyn-Jones tends to position 'woman' as a distinct and comprehensive category rather than as the multiple individuals of differing age and status that are now generally acknowledged by visual theorists. That is: women's clothing, hairstyle and activity represented on vases are not just signs of gender but also of status. Thus, imagery of finely dressed women, neatly coiffured and engaged in domestic tasks of spinning and weaving, can be viewed in terms of self-recognition or emulation and aspiration depending on the status of those doing the viewing. Roman sex scenes in a Pompeian brothel can likewise be read in terms of class as well as gender. Outside the small rooms in the *lupanaria* in insula VII are wall paintings of couples having sex in different positions. Rather than showing the actual brothel rooms with their narrow masonry beds, these are idealized constructions depicting ornate disk-legged couches. The images imitate the furnishings of wall paintings found in elite houses as well as reproducing sexual positions found in wall paintings in these same houses.[18] Brothel wall paintings may have been advertisements for male clients, but they may also point to aspects of female emulation and aspiration for the working women who saw them on a daily basis.

[14] Nead (1992) 15.
[15] Pointon (1990, 1993); Leppert (2007) 9–10.
[16] Silverman (1996) 163–93.
[17] Llewellyn-Jones (2002).
[18] For a discussion of erotic wall paintings in Roman domestic houses, see Clarke (1998) 145–94.

Other relevant arguments concerning viewership have been developed within discourses of cultural studies on the premise that meaning is not eternally fixed but is dependent on the viewer's own gendered, ethnic and sexual allegiance and experience. In the 1970s Stuart Hall influentially proposed three positions that viewers may take as decoders of cultural images and artefacts: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional.[19] Negotiated and oppositional readings can inform a text or image with positive meanings even if the spectator is marginalized or excluded from the text itself. Take Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' on the Sistine Chapel ceiling (*c.* 1511–12). A dominant-hegemonic reading acknowledges this as one of the most famous images in Western art. Depicting the creation of Adam by God, it represents a unique religious moment illustrated in terms of ideal beauty. A negotiated reading might question the iconography: is God really an old white man with a beard? was the first being, Adam, really a good-looking white boy with a big, broad chest? For an oppositional reading, ponder what happens if we exclude the image of God. In this spirit, Matthew Stradling's painting *The Mirror* (1991: private collection) has presented its own oppositional reworking by depicting Adam on his own as a sexually desirable man. From religious and art-historical icon, Adam becomes a homage to homosexual desire.

In ancient cultures where objects are centred primarily on male reception, the dominant-hegemonic position is male, but it is still possible for viewers to make meanings that contravene patriarchal norms. Elsner addresses the issue of female viewership through an examination of the 'Projecta Casket', a fourth-century AD Roman silver cosmetics case.[20] Although presumably produced by a male craftsman, it is designed for female use. Accordingly, its depiction of Venus and a woman at her toilette shows a male-constructed femininity, but then again, the imagery is open to reinterpretation in terms of female 'identification, desire and subjective self-affirmation'.[21] Similarly, the Hellenistic mirror-cover (Figure 1) may be read as a pornographic scene that objectifies a woman for the pleasure of a male gaze, whereas a woman looking at the same image may have negotiated the viewing experience. The woman depicted wears bracelets and a hair wrap, and she is positioned on an elaborate and well-cushioned bed, all of which signifies high status. She is youthful and has attractive regular features, while her male companion has an ideal muscular physique. Such an image of a young, good-looking and apparently wealthy couple may certainly function on an aspirational level for

[19] Hall (1980).
[20] Elsner (2007) 200–24.
[21] Ibid. 219.

the woman the mirror belonged to. It may also have shown her an ideal version of herself. It portrays a woman who is desirable and desiring and, as such, is a positive image of female sexuality and perhaps, at the same time, even offers a wry look at the shortcomings of being a man.

If women are subjects as well as objects, then the male body (like the female) can also be erotically objectified.[22] The dominant gaze is dependent on societal and cultural norms, and today it is white, male and heterosexual; but in fifth-century Athens it is the male rather than the female body that would have provided eroticized spectacle for the pederastic gaze. Homoerotic male reception in fifth-century Athenian culture has long been acknowledged, but what about female responses to the male nude? The traditional notion of the Athenian woman as relegated to private quarters of the domestic home has been significantly revised. Archaeological studies of the Greek house have determined that in many cases the notion of female sequestration was not a reality,[23] while social historians now see class and age differences as determinants of female visibility outside the domestic sphere, with older women, working women and slaves frequently finding themselves in the public domain.[24] Situating such knowledge in an art-historical context strengthens the case for supposing that women in antiquity could be active viewers who were able to create oppositional readings of dominant images. Osborne has argued that representations of the Dawn goddess Eos chasing her lovers on Greek vases act as a visible rendition of female desire,[25] but while he sees them as a warning against female sexual aggression for male viewers, Toscano more plausibly interprets vase renderings of Eos and Aphrodite pursuing male lovers as showing mutual desire between men and women.[26] Alongside vase images, literary references, too, hint at the desiring female gaze. In Theocritus' *Idyll* 2, Simaetha describes her first glimpse of Delphis when she goes with a female companion to watch a festival in honour of Artemis:

> Half-way down the road, where Lycon's house is,
> I saw Delphis walking with Eudamippus
> Back from the gymnasium, fresh from honest
> Exercise: beards more golden than cassidony,
> Chests more glistening than you, moon goddess.[27]

[22] For a summary of critical positions on the male body as recipient of the female gaze, see Lehman (1993) 1–36.
[23] Goldberg (1999).
[24] Murnaghan (2001).
[25] Osborne (1996).
[26] Toscano (2013).
[27] Theoc. *Id.* 2.76–80.

It is the physical presence of the two young men that attracts Simaetha, and later she singles out Delphis as the object of her desire. Perhaps her reaction to the physical beauty of the young athlete may be claimed as a literary equivalent to real women's responses to the nude male body in sculpture.

But how does affirmation of the male body as a site of erotic pleasure fit in with the concept of a muscular, active male body as opposed to a soft, passive female one? Lost in drunken sleep, the Barberini Faun (Figures 2a and 2b) seems unaware of the powerful eroticism that he exudes. An almost totally human figure, he has only horns and tail to identify him as a half-goat, half-man follower of Dionysus. The faun was probably part of a *symplegma* or sculptural group including satyr and nymph or maenad. Osborne points out that, on Greek vases, it is sleeping maenads who are desired by predatory satyrs,[28] whereas here it is a male sleeper who is a passive object of erotic attention.[29] As a male figure, the Barberini Faun disrupts the stereotypical dichotomy of male/female, active/passive, looking/being looked at. Even so, as Dyer's analysis of the modern male pin-up indicates, the male body resists a passive position even when in a state of being looked at: 'Even in an apparently relaxed, supine pose, the model tightens and tautens his body so that the muscles are emphasised, hence drawing attention to the body's potential for action.'[30]

The faun is not just relaxed and reclining; he is asleep and completely exposed to the voyeuristic gaze; but it is his exaggerated musculature, tensed, ready for action and at odds with his recumbent position, that resists feminization.

Our own readings of ancient art objects dislocated from their primary positions and contexts are inevitably far removed from those of their original viewers. Nevertheless, modern visual theories can still contribute ways of uncovering meanings relevant to Greek and Roman perspectives. Contemporary theory challenges patriarchal and heteronormative conceptions and questions the privileging of normative bodies. Greece and Rome had their own social categories of the sexed and gendered body, but as we shall see, social norms were not only enforced but also challenged. In antiquity, as today, gender is not fixed, and meaning attached to an image is not immovable.

[28] Osborne (1996) 73.
[29] For further discussion of the Barberini Faun, see Barrow (2015) 103–5.
[30] Dyer (1982) 66.