A. STEWART, Art, Desire and the Body in Ancient Greece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); xxii plus 272, with 12 colour plates, 159 black-and-white figures, 1 map; ISBN 0521 450640, $A44.95.

This important study by Andrew Stewart (S hereafter) stresses the central position occupied by the human body in the visual culture of ancient Greece and takes advantage of sociological and anthropological perspectives which perceive the body to be a reflection of society in microcosm. It is a stimulating, innovative and adventurous work, but its conclusions seem driven at times to less-than-cautious lengths.

There are three main divisions to the book (Parts I-III). The title to Part I (‘To Make This Art Seem Strange’) issues a challenge which is taken up in Chapters 1-3. They deal with what is often taken for granted, i.e. the Greeks’ (strange) preoccupation with nakedness in life and art. S covers recent work on the body and visuality in western culture, and examines the way that artistic technique filters our understanding of the subject.

In Chapter One (‘Perspectives’, 3-23) S introduces some of the methodological underpinnings of his study. He starts from the observation that Greek art is more a matter of ideology than reality (8, cf. 57) and emphasizes that representations of the human body in Greek art can tell us much about such things as patriarchy, gender relations, male insecurity, and so on. They relate in particular to the (male) citizen’s roving desire (10), the equality of homosociality between adult males, the homosexual pursuit of adolescent boys (eromenoi) by mature males (erastai), and to women as both ‘unfinished’ men (Laqueur’s ‘one sex/flesh’ theory, 6) and the opposite, the ‘Other’ of man (10). S has two main foci of interest: the Greek body in context and the Greek spectator’s reaction to it (7). Obviously, and excitingly, he has been influenced by Foucault’s idea of the male desiring subject, and also by notions such as the gaze and the glance, which rest ultimately on psychoanalytic studies of subject-formation by writers like Lacan. These kinds of ideas produced for both Greek men and women their own particular bodily hēxis or permanent disposition (11).

‘Visuality’, the social construction of vision or the way societies see, is a fundamental concern for S. To a great extent it constructs the body
REVIEWS

and the psyche (13). Current theory distinguishes two polarities in the way societies see: one is the glance, which emanates from the self, the other is the gaze, which issues from the Other (13). The Greek gaze was male and female, a composite, and more 'patriarchal' than simply 'male', i.e. it had notions of control and order (dike) at its heart, especially with respect to the behaviour of girls and women (15 ff.).

Chapter Two ('Nakedness', 24-42) starts from the basic observation that men in Greek art are often naked or partially naked, whereas women are usually clothed (24). S avoids the word 'nudity' because it is a charged term in English, implying the use of a naked body as an object. He prefers 'naked' as his basic term to distinguish between unclothed and clothed bodies (25). The main aim of this chapter is to uncover the relationship between nakedness in Greek life (26-34) and in early Greek art (34-42). Nakedness in life is linked to homoeroticism, pederasty and transition rites (the latter for both boys and girls, apparently beginning in Dorian communities). It may well have taken some time to catch on, 'especially given the Greek male's sensitivity to matters of honour and shame' (34, cf. 14-15). From the late 8th Century BC, nakedness in Athenian art becomes a differentiating device between men and women; it is the exclusive sign of the male, his 'default setting' (40). The naked male represents the 'natural' gender and the clothed female the one constructed (by men), so that a woman is a product of male shaping and looking. This 'manipulatively patriarchal gaze' henceforth underlies most Greek art (40).

A major claim has been made here. Greek art is strongly governed by male desire (often homoerotic), by an almost pathological drive for patriarchal control, and by male anxiety (41: 'This male supremacist ideology is shot through with anxiety'; cf. p. 86). It is difficult to imagine such an interpretation being offered a generation ago; it is difficult to imagine it not being accepted, to greater and lesser degrees, in the present one. As far as one's acceptance goes, clothing in Greek art becomes the index of the socialized, acculturated woman, the woman brought back under control, the 'normal' or at least 'normalized' woman. Naked or partially naked women, such as the hetairai (courtesans) who appear in symposium scenes, are liminal, lacking in or deprived of acculturation (41).
Chapter Three (‘Tooling the Body’, 43-60) is the last of the methodological chapters, but it is less theoretical and more technical than its predecessors. The point is that the material employed in representing the body affects the level of desire and the eroticized glance. There were severe limitations in this regard to the production of bodies in marble (45-6), bronze (47-55), and on painted pottery (56-60).

Chapters 4-6 form Part II: ‘Men and Women, Gods and Mortals’. Here the analysis shifts to selected constructions of gender in works ranging from the Parthenon Frieze to Spartan hand mirrors. Special attention is given to the ancient world’s most authoritative essays on body and gender: the Doryphoros by Polykleitos and the Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles. Beginning with Chapter Four (‘Three Attic Ideologies’, 63-85), S applies his theories to selected examples. The Anavysos Kouros, for instance, was created as a perfect object of male desire. Radiating beauty (kallos) and grace (charis), it attracts our attention like a magnet. We are the lovers (erasai) of this eromenos. Improvements in anatomy and detail make this kouros stand out for the scanning glance, but they also diminish the value of the genre as a sign of stability and aristocratic control (66-70).

The demos of Athens has been ‘knighted’ on the Parthenon Frieze (79) and also ‘youthened’ (80). Hence the preponderance of young, male cavalrymen, some of whom are naked or nearly so. They are meant to appeal to the ‘ideal’ Athenian spectator (inevitably gendered male), for whom images of beardless youths evoke ‘life’s jewelled springtime’ and potentially awaken his homoerotic desire as well (80). The motif of the youth lowering his head and eyes indicates deference to aidos (modesty, decorum, cf. 14); the youths are conscious of being watched and display the winning shyness which was expected of Athenian eromenoi (81). The relative infrequency of the nude youths focuses attention upon them (82). A potential problem for this thesis, recognized honestly by S is that these eromenoi slide into effeminate figures by the time of the Peloponnesian War, for instance on vases by the Meidias Painter (84, cf. 171).

The chief icons of the male and female body in ancient Greece, the Doryphoros and the Knidian Aphrodite respectively, are examined in Chapter Five (‘Of War and Love’, 86-107). Each statue set a new standard but together they illustrate a fundamental difference: men’s labour is war, women’s is procreation (86). By contrast with Riace
Warrior A, whose gaze and speech are directed elsewhere, the Doryphoros ‘is no primitive killer but the quintessence of disinterested male self-discipline’ (92). By contrast with the decorously draped norm for women, the Knidia is naked; but she overwhelms the eroticized glance with irresistible sexuality, acknowledges the protocols of female modesty laid down by the public eye, and manages simultaneously to maintain her distance and dignity as a goddess (101). The male’s ‘ocular gropings’ are avoided and frustrated (104); the Knidia refuses male desire and its consequences, the womanly ‘work’ of intercourse and thus of childbearing (107).

The socialization of parthenoi (unmarried girls) and the proper role of married women in both Sparta and Athens is the subject of Chapter Six (‘Womanufacture’, 108-29). Naked and topless bronze statuettes of girls from Sparta do not represent a local Spartan style in the traditional art-historical sense but a local preference for a certain female bodily hexis that is as distinctive in its own way as contemporary Boiotian or Samian tastes in kouroi. Placed on dressing tables in the gynaikeion (women’s quarters), the statuettes (which once served as handles for mirrors) were a source of pride, celebrating their owners’ brief moment in the limelight (108-16). Amazons in Athenian art represent polar opposites to customs, institutions and values governing the proper upbringing and behaviour of parthenoi. They embodied not only the threat that every adolescent girl poses to the patriarchy and the rule of dike, but her irresistible sexual allure as well. An Amazon symbolizes the untamed, unmarried, and potentially lustful female, the bestial in woman. Popular opinion in Athens saw Spartan girls in the same light (118-20). The perfect embodiment of chaste Athenian womanhood—stylishly dressed, demure, and ravishingly beautiful—can be seen in the stele of Hegeso (124-29).

Chapters 7-9 (Part III: ‘Social and Antisocial Bodies’) investigate figurations of the Athenian body politic, erotica, homosociality and the gynaikeion. Selected representations of the Other are also studied: Gorgons, Satyrs, Centaurs and Amazons. In Chapter Seven (‘The Athenian Body Politic’, 133-55) S argues that no one symbol of Athens’ body politic became definitive: ‘no metaphor is ever more than partial’ (134). Athens could be seen in Athena (Polias, Parthenos, Promachos, Nike), Herakles, owls, herms, the ten Eponymoi, Theseus, ‘departing warrior’ scenes, the frescoes of the Painted Stoa, and in other symbols. Images of women are often prominent. In the 6th Century Athena was
joined on the Acropolis by images of Athens’ aristocratic daughters, the *korai*. Like *kouroi*, *korai* do not mirror the spectator’s gaze. For the most part, given that they were located on high bases or even on columns, they literally overlook him. Yet a *kore* maintained class distinctions and was therefore as divisive as the *kouros* (137). Pandora appears on the base of the Athena Parthenos. Like Pandora, Athenian women were Athena’s creations, all *parthenoi*, to be controlled by men (148). A growing anxiety can be detected in the latter part of the 5th Century. The diaphanous clothing of the various Nikai of the period seduces the viewer insistently to fall in love with Nike— with Victory, Victory, Victory! — at a time of growing military pressure (148). Defeat produced a situation in which Athena was identified with the imperial past, so that attention was turned to personifications of Eirene and Ploutos (Peace and Wealth), to Demokratia, Demos and Boule, to portraits of victorious generals, beginning with Konon in 394, to Macedonian kings, and finally to a second century cult of Roma (‘the last in a long line of Athenian experiments in political self-fashioning’, 155).

From the public sphere, dominated by Athena, S moves next to the private sphere and to erotica for both men and women (Chapter Eight: ‘Erotica’, 156-81). Scenes of courtship, explicit sex, pursuits and abductions on vases used at the symposium present the circulation of women as the basic mechanism for defining men as the true embodiments of the social field— what Jack Winkler calls the *phallos politikos* (156). Such scenes betray an understanding that erotic desire (the power of Eros over men) is a serious threat to the stability of the *polis*, but S prefers to see them as metaphorical statements of homosociality (‘projections of male bonding onto the sexual landscape’, 161). Men compel female submission to their will and that of the patriarchy. The women, stripped of their covering of *aidos*, are willing receptacles for the men’s desire (162). The city and its microcosm, the symposium, require women who are submissive or who are disciplined into submission (165). On the other hand, S finds in a corpus of mirrors, especially an example in Boston (177), the possibility that a woman could take the initiative in lovemaking in a way which directly challenges the traditional assumptions of the patriarchy about women being passive and penetrated and naturally inferior. He postulates that such scenes were intended for a woman’s eye, not a man’s (177-81).
In Chapter Nine (‘Beyond the Walls’, 182-202) S adopts the perspective of a teichoskopos (a viewer from the walls) and looks at the world beyond and before the polis: a world of wild beasts, satyrs, monsters, barbarians, and so on. Creatures from this world situate and define the polis and its model inhabitant, the adult citizen-warrior. The Gorgon is death personified and is gendered female; her stare is a ghastly perversion of the gaze; like death, it freezes my glance (182-87). A satyr is natural desire personified and is gendered male; his world is more a bizarre distortion of city life than a simple inversion of it; he both presupposes and simultaneously ignores the moderating gaze of the public eye, enthroning the libidinous glance in its stead. Yet by ‘constantly inverting and deforming the rules of culture, he helps to reaffirm its value’ (191). Centaurs, from the liminal state of Thessaly, provoke beholders at Olympia to examine their motivations and behaviour in order to sharpen their own awareness of right and wrong, and of the eternal battle between culture and nature (193). S notes that Amazon scenes more than double on Athenian vases of the mid 5th Century and connects this with the immigration crisis that brought forth Perikles’ Citizenship Law of 451 (196-97). Perikles didn’t want Athenian men marrying metic women, whose numbers were rising markedly. Foreign parthenoi, in an age of intense debate over Athenian identity and the city’s imperial mission, had become the kind of threat that Amazons likewise represented (198). In the fourth century Praxiteles tamed the satyr, making him prepubescent and distinguishable from humans only by his pointed ears. Thus, satyrs became eromenoi rather than erastai. The rigid conceptual categories of the polis were in dissolution as the brash new world of Alexander approached (199-202).

Chapter Ten forms a ‘Coda’ and sketches selected aspects of the story as it developed after Alexander (‘Looking Forward: After Alexander’, 203-30). S argues that the classical body presented at least a façade of unity, whereas the hellenistic body was openly decentred. Theama, the ‘spectacle’ that excites the glance of wonder, increasingly becomes the artist’s primary goal (206). New types of bodies and new problems appeared. The ruler’s body had to excite the homoerotic glance (which is essential to a personal, charismatic monarchy’s appeal), but it could never appear to yield to it (207-12). A philosopher was a kind of erastes of his followers’ minds (212-14). The frieze of the Great Altar at Pergamon exhibits bodies which ‘in size, strength, and implied phallic potency metaphorize the strident hellenism, hugely increased power, and thrusting
ambition of the institution that had subsumed it: the hellenistic kingdom’ (217). Changes are evident in depictions of a variety of other bodies, including Celts, women and Aphrodite. Studies of ‘lowlife’ types or ‘grotesques’ developed from, or acted as, good-luck charms or talismans against the Evil Eye (224-27).

Finally, S looks at the increasing effeminacy of Apollo, Dionysos, Herakles and others from the late 5th Century. He believes that late classical and hellenistic images were trying to redefine women, not reassimilate women to men (228). The ambivalent sexuality of figures like Apollo, Dionysos and Herakles is precisely reflected and intensified in hellenistic representations of hermaphrodites, the best-known of which is a very feminine one caught in troubled sleep (230). The male glance discovers a defenceless, naked woman—the discovery of the penis comes as a shock to the potential rapist. It is a final statement of the sensitivity of Greek art to gender, body and desire.

There is no doubt that this is a brave, insightful and important book. Future scholars will have to acknowledge the influence of male desire and the importance of the symbolic or metaphorical dimension. But how far does one credit these factors before admitting inevitable subjectivity in interpretation? To what degree can we now say that a particular statue was an object of desire for a Greek male? To what degree did an Amazon stand for the dangers presented by non-citizen *parthenoi* (cf. 196-98)? Amazons might also be *parthenoi* in general, women in general, the Persians, the East, barbarism, Athenian enemies, and so on. At what point can a modern commentator draw the line between an ancient reality and his or her own (reasonable) conjecture? There seems no easy answer and this must be why the question is seldom addressed, either in literature or in art. My own feeling is that Greek art does owe much to factors like male desire, ideology and metaphor, and it is certainly permissible to speculate about effects beyond an artist’s original intentions, but S seems to go too far in places.

For instance: Does the prominence of the Tyrannicides group mean that the homoerotic bond was placed at the core of Athenian political freedom, along with ‘the manly virtues (*aretai*) of courage, boldness and self-sacrifice that it generated’ (73). Is it overly metaphorical to say that ‘the Doryphoros’ close-knit, apparently impenetrable muscles symbolize the robustness and physical inviolability of the citizen body and therefore
of the *polis* as well’ (95)? Is the smile of the Knidian Aphrodite a concession to Greek patriarchal notions, given that

‘all Greeks knew that a woman’s mouth was but one end of a conduit that led eventually to her vagina, the mouth of her womb. ... each orifice implies and implicates the other, and a naked woman’s open, smiling mouth, then as now, is a quite unambiguous invitation’ (107).

And further: How applicable is the association between phallus / plough and woman / furrow, first mapped by Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*? Do the deep folds of diaphanous drapery become ‘a classic case of wish fulfillment’ (128), resembling the female vulva and inviting sex as phallic irrigation? To what degree do such ideas in fact relate to images as demure and serene as Hegeso (128) or Eirene (152)? A certain doubt might be entertained before accepting (with Freud and Ferenczi) the alignment between a Medusa mask and a *vagina dentata* (182). The section on female erotica (172-81) left this male reader concerned about subjective interpretation yet again.

It is not my intention to deny the validity of the approach or the direction in which many of the conclusions go. Instead, the concern is whether there is somewhat less here than has met S’s eye (or indeed whether there really is more here than has met my eye). His reply might be that I am not sufficiently in touch with my psychological or sexual states. In the absence of objective means of measurement, reply would be difficult. Debate, on the other hand, would be stimulated—just as one would expect from an important book.

Proofreading is of the highest order, though ‘3. Painted Pottery’ should perhaps be ‘4. Painted Pottery’ on page 56. Footnotes are collected at the back and are less than systematically linked to specific sentences in the text—apparently for the sake of readability, but it is less precise than many will be used to. S’s enthusiasm for his subject and for metaphor can be noted from the number of times he employs the verb ‘bodies forth’ (13, 25, 67, 83, 100, 107, 148, 214).

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