

## CHAPTER 30

# Agency in Greek Art

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### 30.1 Introduction: Agency and Pausanias

The title of this chapter introduces two terms – agency and art – one familiar to the average reader, the other much less so. The first term – ‘agency’ – may seem rather strange to many readers, an unhelpful imposition of extraneous theory on the pure, aesthetic realm of classical art history. Art, on the other hand, is something that everybody understands (at least well enough to have views on). In brief, the first term is ‘theoretical’ (so this argument would run), the second simply a matter of common sense.

Well, no. Both terms – art and agency – are equally theoretical. Both are, in terms used in modern cultural anthropology, etc – that is to say, they are our concepts, which we have imposed on Greek material culture for our own purposes. Neither would have been understood, directly at least, by the Greeks themselves in any period before 300 BC (Tanner 2006). There are no Greek terms either for art (the Greek *techne* means ‘craft’ or ‘skill’, not ‘art’) or for agency. But it is the latter which is, in some way, closer to how the Greeks themselves understood their own material culture. Let me explain with reference to that most widely used of sources in the classical archaeology of Greece, Pausanias.

Now, of course, Pausanias is hardly a contemporary source for classical art. He was writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD, and the objects that interest him are principally Archaic and Classical. His approach is therefore already antiquarian. But he is a good source because he *looked* at things – he valued autopsy – and, where he can be checked (which is quite often), his observations can be verified. In this

respect he is quite different from Roman writers (such as the elder Pliny), whose compendia rely heavily on earlier written sources and whose notions fit more neatly into the (modern) conception of ‘classical art history’.

Pausanias begins in Attica and in Athens. His route through the Agora of Athens, starting from the Kerameikos, is notoriously hard to reconstruct – but one of the buildings Pausanias spends some time on (1.15) is the Painted Stoa, whose ancient foundations have been partially uncovered by American excavators (Shear 1984: 5–19). Here he first notes a trophy, before going on to describe Polygnotos’s, Mikon’s, and Panainos’s paintings on wooden panels, depicting the Battle of Oinoe, the Battle between Theseus and the Amazons, and the Athenian victory over the Persians at Marathon respectively. These paintings modern scholars would unquestionably classify as art, if, that is, they had actually survived. He goes on to note (1.15.4) a number of bronze hoplite shields captured by the Athenians after their victories over the Spartans at Pylos/Sphakteria in 425 BC and the Skionaioi in 421, which (he observes) have been preserved to his day (that is, for over five hundred years) by being coated in pitch. One of the shields captured from the Spartans has survived, and was recovered from a Roman cistern in the 1930s (Shear 1937), but this has not led it to being described by any modern scholar as a ‘work of art’. What seems to interest Pausanias here are not art objects in the modern sense (*objets d’art et de vertu*), but the various ways in which Athenians used objects in order to record and remember their victories, whether mythological or historical.

As with Athens, so with Olympia: it has often struck scholars as odd that Pausanias devotes so much time to the order of sacrifice at the various altars within the sanctuary, and does not simply guide us through by a clear route, showing what there is to see on the way. At the Heraion, he records several objects, including ‘Archaic’ statues of Zeus and Hera (5.17.1) and the Hesperides by Theokles (5.17.2), and he devotes much ink to a detailed description of the Chest of Kypselos, paying close attention to the inscriptions and noting the *boustrophedon* system of writing (5.17.5–19.10; see Snodgrass 2006: 422–442). He notes the marble statue of Hermes holding the infant Dionysos, ‘the work of Praxiteles’, only in passing (5.17.3; cf. Boardman 1995: fig. 25). He takes more trouble over the bronze statues commemorating athletic victories, particularly three chariot groups: those of Polypeithes, son of Kalliteles from Lakonia (6.16.6); Gelon, son of Deinomenes (6.9.4–5); and Kratisthenes of Cyrene (6.18.1). His interest in these groups is more in what and who they commemorate than in their form, their aesthetic value, or the sculptor who made them.

Here as elsewhere he takes some trouble with inscriptions, and records those that he can read. When he reaches the Nike of Paionios of Mende, he is struck by the contrast between the boldness of the setting on the one

hand and the coyness of the inscription on the other (5.26.1; see Treu 1897: 182–194 (sculpture); Dittenberger and Purgold 1896: 378–383, no. 259 (inscription)). It is only when he reaches the statue of Zeus in the Temple of Zeus that we get anything we could call an aesthetic response to any of the objects – only here does his prose turn purple (5.11.1–11). But is his description primarily ‘aesthetic’? This is, after all, a cult statue, in a sanctuary where Pausanias has been at pains to describe how, when, and in what order animals are sacrificed. It is only because most self-consciously rational, Western scholars of classical antiquity no longer worship idols but do regularly visit art galleries that we can mistake his response for what we call ‘aesthetic’. It is in fact religious – a key aspect of a religious system that Pausanias, the pious pagan, believes in and trusts will continue.

Pausanias then has no particular interest in ‘art’, that is in those objects that Roman writers and modern scholars have taken to be of primarily aesthetic interest. He is as interested in the captured linen corselets dedicated by Gelon of Syracuse and kept in the ‘Treasury of the Carthaginians’ (6.19.7), the bronze shield, helmet, and greaves dedicated by the ‘Myanians’ (from Lokris), and the ivory horn of Amaltheia dedicated by Miltiades – all of the latter to be found in the Sikyonian Treasury (6.19.4–6; see also Baitinger 2001: 248) – as he is in ‘Hermes of Praxiteles’; he is as taken by the Spartan shields captured from Pylos, which the Athenians set up in the Painted Stoa, as by the more ‘artistic’ form of commemoration that the Messenians chose to commemorate their share in this victory (i.e. the Nike of Paionios; see Hölscher 1974; Whitley 2006). In brief, Pausanias is not interested in ‘art’, but in agency – in the tangible remains of what his glorious forebears did and suffered, in the ‘visible knots’ that ‘span out in social space and social time’ (Gell 1998: 62) and connect him to the great deeds of the past.

## 30.2 Concepts of Agency

All very well, one might say, but that leaves several points unexamined. What does the term ‘agency’ actually mean? And what is its value when we apply it to Greek objects (whether or not these objects are ‘works of art’)? What do we gain by using the term, other than the dubious honor of demonstrating our familiarity with the latest jargon?

Agency has a range of meanings, of course. In origin, agency is (logically) opposed to structure. If structure is what lends a period, people, or culture coherence, agency is what enables that structure to change, and history to unfold. It is unfortunate that many attempts to apply this concept barely get beyond this unexceptionable platitude (e.g. papers in Dobres and Robb 2000). A more rigorous definition – with some very arresting examples – has

been provided by Alfred Gell, in one of those rare books that change everything: *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Gell 1998). This is a truly radical work, because it argues coherently and consistently against the two most deeply seated assumptions underlying all study of art and material culture. The first is the aesthetic – the idea that what distinguishes art from the general run of material objects is art's *quality*, its superior aesthetic interest. The second is the semiotic – the idea that our objective in looking at either material culture or art is to *understand* it as an 'expression' of some underlying code or logic (which is in turn understood by some kind of analogy with language). Instead of a largely semiotic or aesthetic theory of art/material culture, Gell proposes an entirely social one. Objects are always made and used for a purpose, they are always entangled within a social and historical web of largely human relations, and they can never be divorced from practical human interests. For Gell, what matters about objects (including art objects) is not what they mean, but what they do; not how beautiful they are, but how they 'work' on (or through) someone looking, using, or touching them.

The last line suggests that objects are, in themselves, animate – and that what Gell proposes is therefore immediately and demonstrably false. For one of the things we do know about objects in general and art-objects in particular is that they are *inanimate*. But while this may be true in physics, it is not true for society. As far as human societies are concerned, all objects are animate – either in themselves (having a kind of personality) or as extensions of human persons. This is as true of the present as it is of the past. While our head may be telling us that our car or our computer is 'just a thing', that is not actually how we treat either cars or computers. We habitually deal with objects as if they were animate – either, that is, as having an inherent spirit or soul, or as being extensions ('prosthetic limbs') of the spirit or agency of a person (often ourselves). Think first, if you are a driver, of the way in which you use your motor car, or motorcycle – consider its 'vehicular animism' (Gell 1998: 18–19). Do you not, at least occasionally, think of it as having a will of its own? Do you not, from time to time, address it as 'old girl', as my mother does? Or have you never felt that an affront to your car is, in a sense, an affront to yourself – an extension (not simply an expression) of Who You Are? If you are not a driver but just a scholar, do you not, on occasion, think of your computer as having a will of its own? Or, if not, have you not 'personalized' it in some way to make it more a part of yourself?

If you are not a motorist, but a parent, think of the ways in which your children play. We all know that dolls have personalities (assigned to them by manufacturers), but it is interesting to see how these personalities can be changed when two children (and here I am thinking of my daughters) get to work on them. Girls treat dolls as if they were real people – and while they themselves are perfectly clear about the distinction, they can sometimes

confuse their parents when they speak, not in their own, but in the doll's persona. More interesting to me is the way in which my daughters use objects to take on different personalities. Both my daughters regularly used to steal my shoes or glasses, put them on, and say, 'Daddy' – they were pretending to be me, and in a sense they used the shoes and glasses to *become* me (this is, after all, what *impersonation* means). More importantly, they did this before they had learnt to speak – certainly before they could construct coherent sentences; taking on the attributes of another person was their earliest form of communication. Agency (and the use of objects either to extend one's own agency, or to appropriate another's) therefore precedes language as a means of human interaction. Agency brackets meaning (and so iconography); it is agency, not meaning, that is truly primary.

This is one of the more appealing aspects of Gell's theory – it is a dad's theory, one that has been arrived at as much through careful observation of how objects are used in everyday life as in the 'scholarly' scrutiny of objects in museums or collections. And it makes much more sense if you read it as a parent of young children than if you don't. Gell allows us to compare, fruitfully, dolls with art. 'What is [Michelangelo's] *David* if it is not a big doll for grown ups? This is not really a matter of devaluing *David* so much as revaluing little girls' dolls, which are truly remarkable objects, all things considered. They are certainly social beings – "members of the family", for the time at any rate' (Gell 1998: 18).

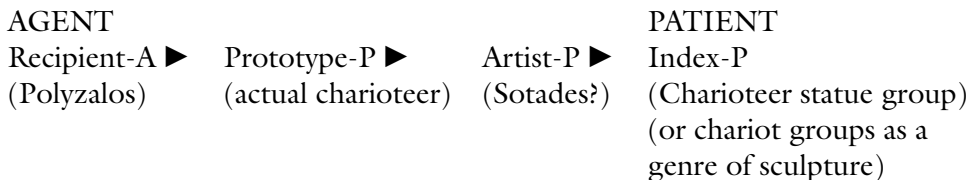
But how does all this apply to 'Greek art'? Well, despite classical archaeology's well-known resistance to theory, classical scholars have been in the forefront of exploring the implications of Gell's approach (e.g. papers in Osborne and Tanner 2007; Whitley 2007). And it is theory which is relatively easy to explain with reference to Greek examples. One area where there is an almost perfect fit is the phenomenon of *oggetti parlanti* – 'speaking objects', where the object has been *inscribed* with agency. Each of the *horos* stones that marks the boundary of the Athenian Agora does so by announcing that 'I am the boundary of the Agora' (Lalonde et al. 1991: 27, nos. H25, H26); early 8<sup>th</sup> c. cups from Rhodes and Athens announce that 'I am the cup (kylix) of Qorax' (Jeffery 1990: 347, 356.1) or 'I am the cup of Tharios' (Jeffery 1990: 69, 76.4). Such a form of words is also used in more elaborate examples, ones that better conform to our notion of 'art' (cf. Svenbro 1988).

One such is the Delphi Charioteer, a bronze statue representing a charioteer holding the reins from four horses (Chamoux 1955; Boardman 1985: fig. 34; Smith 2007: 126–130). Other bronze fragments found close by confirm that it formed part of a bronze chariot group, with a chariot and four horses. Nearby were two inscriptions, one certainly associated with the Charioteer (Chamoux 1955: 26–31; Jeffery 1990: 266, 275, no. 9). The second inscription gives the (possible) name of a sculptor, Sotades. The first gives the name



of the dedicator, and victor in the chariot race. This inscription reads *P]olyzalos m' anethek[e* – ‘Polyzalos dedicated me’ or ‘Polyzalos set me up’. Polyzalos was the son of the tyrant of Gela, Deinomenes (Diod. Sic. 11.48.3–6, 8), so the statue must date to either 478, 474, or (at the very latest) 470 BC (these being the years when the Pythian games took place at Delphi).

The very language of the inscription, the standard dedicatory formula of ‘*m' anetheke*’, – where the object ‘speaks’, and refers to itself as ‘me’ – confirms that the Greeks at least did indeed think of votive objects as having an identity *as an object* – that they possessed the ancient equivalent of the ‘vehicular animism’ we sense in cars. Moreover, Greek votive inscriptions, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense, ‘inscribe’ agency. They link the dedicator (principal agent) to the object (usually referred to as ‘me’) and the deity to whom the object is dedicated. Sometimes they also name the sculptor. So, whatever its status as a general social theory of material culture, agency theory seems particularly pertinent to the Greek case. The inscription also allows us to set out the ‘agency’ relations in some detail. It makes it plain that the principal *agent* here is Polyzalos. Polyzalos is, in Gell’s terms (Gell 1998: 19–27), the ‘Recipient’, or one of them. In graphic terms, the agency relationship is as follows:



This is not to state the actual sequence of events or causes, but the events which the Charioteer Group seeks to represent. Two further points should be noted. First, I have given priority to the ‘Prototype’ rather than the artist in the sequence of agency relations. This is because the sculptor was *obliged* to make a chariot group – he had no choice in the matter – what mattered were the requirements of the patron and victor, Polyzalos. The second point concerns the recipient, or recipients. One of these had to be Polyzalos (also the principal agent). But, of course, there must have been two further ‘recipients’ of the statue. First, there would be the god himself, Apollo, in whose sanctuary the statue was found and to whom the chariot group must have been dedicated. The second set of ‘recipients’ would be visitors to Delphi, who saw and then may have been impressed by the statue group, and might subsequently have read the inscription (assuming they could read).

‘Agency’ is also evident on other inscriptions that go with votive statues, regardless of whether the word ‘me’ is used. Take Antenor’s Kore (Payne and Mackworth Young 1950: 31–34; Boardman 1978: fig. 141) from the Athenian



Acropolis. The statue is of a young unmarried girl, wearing a chiton and himation, set upon an inscribed base above a column. The base (Raubitschek 1949: 232–233, no. 197 = IG I<sup>3</sup>, 628) reads:

*Nearchos anetheke[ n ho kerame  
us ergon aparchen t Ath[ enaiai  
Antenor ep[ oiesen  
O Eumaro t[ o agalma*

Roughly translated, this reads ‘Nearchos [the potter?/from the deme of Kerameikos?] dedicated this work as a “first fruit/tithe” to Athena. Antenor [son of] Eumaros made this agalma [work of art, or adornment]’.

As in the Delphi Charioteer, the inscription makes it plain that the ‘agency’ of the dedicator takes primacy over that of the sculptor, and that the sculptor had little choice as to subject – he had to make a kore and an agalma. Archaic dedicatory inscriptions from the Acropolis underscore the priority of the dedicant’s agency over that of the artist. All dedicatory inscriptions which can be associated with statue groups name the dedicant, but not all name the artist (e.g. Euthydikos’s Kore: Raubitschek 1949: 56–57, no. 56; Payne and Mackworth Young 1950: 40–41; Boardman 1978: fig. 160; or the double dedication of Lysias and Euarchis: Raubitschek 1949: 313–314, no. 292; Payne and Mackworth Young 1950: 34). It is very rare for the artist to be named before the dedicant (as in the Athena of Pythis: Raubitschek 1949: 313–314, no. 10; Payne and Mackworth Young 1950: 28–29) – in those cases where both the dedicant and the artist are named, the dedicant’s name usually comes first.

Here the statue does not refer to itself as ‘me’ (as in the Delphi Charioteer); but neither does it refer to itself as an *ergon technis* (‘work of art’). The names for sculptured dedications of Archaic and Classical date given on relevant inscriptions do not, in any sense, correspond to our word ‘art’. The korai from the Athenian Acropolis are variously described, as here, as *agalma* (adornment or delight) and/or *aparche* (first fruits); the only surviving piece of ancient Greek sculpture whose sculptor we know for sure (the Nike of Paionios of Mende; see above) is described as a *dekate*, or tithe. And in all these cases (Delphi Charioteer, Nike of Paionios, Antenor’s Kore), it is the agency of the dedicator and the god that is given priority over that of the sculptor.

In a sense, these examples are too easy. ‘Converted’ offerings of this kind (*sensu* Snodgrass 2006: 258–268) too readily meet the expectations of agency theory. To explore the value of the concept more thoroughly – to put it under greater strain – let us look at another class of object (usually thought of as ‘art’) where the agency relations are, at first glance, less obvious: painted pottery, particularly kraters.

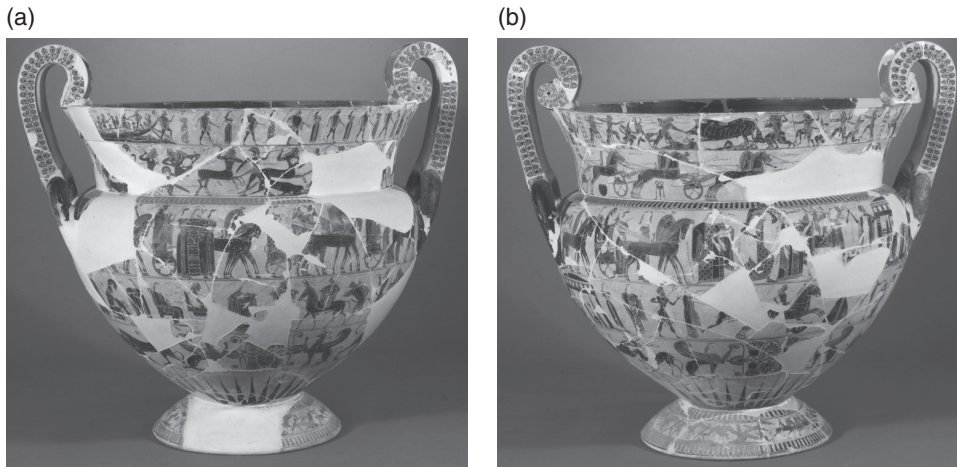
### 30.3 From the François Vase to the Euphronios Krater

The François Vase (so-named after its discoverer, Alessandro François) is an Athenian black-figure volute-krater, uncovered in an Etruscan tomb in Chiusi (ancient Clusium) in 1844, and now in the archaeological museum in Florence (Figure 30.1; Beazley 1956: 76.1; Torelli 2007). Stylistically, it is dated to around 570 BC. It figures in most standard works on Greek art as a particularly fine specimen of the potter's as of the painter's craft. More than this – it is seen as an early example of the sophistication achieved in the portrayal of narrative by Archaic Greek vase-painters. For it depicts, in several registers, a whole series of scenes, which must (in some sense) be related. What it portrays can best be shown by this diagram:

	SIDE A	SIDE B	HANDLE (both)
LIP	Hunt of Kalydonian Boar	Dance of those rescued by Theseus	Gorgons (Stheno and Euryale) Artemis (mistress of animals)
NECK	Chariot race, funeral games of Patroklos	Centauromachy (Lapiths and Centaurs)	Ajax carrying the dead Achilles
BELLY, main zone	Gods visiting the newly married (both sides)	Peleus and Thetis	
BELLY, lower zone	Achilles pursuing Troilos	The Return of Hephaistos (to Olympos)	
BELLY, near foot	Animals: sphinxes, panther attacking bull, lion attacking boar, griffins, lion attacking bull, panther attacking stag		
FOOT	Battle between Pygmies and Cranes		

Such a complex array of scenes invites various readings – that is, interpretations – which seek an analogy between the images and a single, authoritative text. This approach is often referred to by the German term *Bild und Lied*, where the *Bild* (the image) faithfully follows an original *Lied* (poem or song). Beazley's account





**Figure 30.1** Volute-krater ('François Vase') signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos. c. 570–565 BC (Florence, National Archaeological Museum 4209. By permission of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali – Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana).

(Beazley 1986: 24–34) of the scenes is very much in this tradition – he derives the main scene (Peleus and Thetis) from a lost epic; Achilles and Troilos from the (lost) *Cypria*; the Kalydonian Boar Hunt from a 6<sup>th</sup> c. original, lost but transmitted through Euripides and Ovid to Swinburne; the funeral games of Patroklos from the *Iliad* (though the *dramatis personae* here are not the same as those in *Il.* 23: 261–538); and the Centauromachy again from the *Iliad* and the Hesiodic *Shield of Herakles*. Summarized thus, it might appear that Beazley is proposing that the scenes come from different sources, various *Lieder* brought together by the pot-painter. But this is clearly not what he meant – he is rather using literature to identify the scenes. Moreover, from his account, several themes emerge. First, a narrative thread links the early exploits of Peleus (Kalydonian Boar), his marriage to Thetis, and the exploits of their son Achilles during the Trojan War. Together, the Peleus/Achilles cycle connects at least five scenes – six if the (golden?) amphora (Hom. *Il.* 23.92; *Od.* 24.74) that Dionysos is holding when he visits Peleus and Thetis is to be identified with the one made by Hephaistos, who gives it to Dionysos, who gives it to Thetis, who gives it to her son, and which is at last used to inter the ashes of both Patroklos and Achilles (Rumpf 1953: 470). The significance of the amphora in the overall scheme of the vase is that it provides a narrative thread that explains the close association between Dionysos and Hephaistos – Dionysos helps Hephaistos to return to Olympos, and in return Hephaistos makes Dionysos this golden amphora. This narrative thread has led other scholars – notably Andrew Stewart (1983) – to suggest that all the scenes on the vase derive from one poem. Stewart suggests a (lost) lyric poem by



Stesichoros, originally commissioned to celebrate a marriage of some kind. In this interpretation of the scenes that do not quite fit in to the general theme of the deeds of Peleus and his son Achilles (Centauromachy, Theseus), some can be seen as digressions, others (Pygmies and Cranes, battling animals) as similes or allusions, in the best Homeric tradition.

Now, this is in many ways an attractive hypothesis. It explains the scenes. But I do not think it will quite do, for two reasons. There is first the basic implausibility of a series of scenes accurately transcribing a text, still less a transitory oral performance (the basic assumption of the *Bild und Lied* school of thought). This point has been reinforced by recent scholarship. The most popular mythological subject on vase-painting is the Trojan War cycle, but even here it is remarkable how rarely the scenes we can identify with incidents of the story correspond with the versions we have in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* (Snodgrass 1998). Such scenes do not then derive from texts. Rather, they arise from a range of story or epic cycles, transmitted orally, of which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the only versions we really know (see Burgess 2009). Texts therefore have no *authority* when it comes to imagery. Interpretations such as Stewart's expect that there can be some kind of set 'meaning' to the images, a meaning which, while not immutable, is rooted in literature. But, as the example of the funeral games of Patroklos shows here, this is plainly not the case.

This first objection is therefore at once both empirical and theoretical, as is the second. Stewart's interpretation won't do because it takes no account of context and little of agency. That is, it sidesteps one fundamental question: 'What is this object doing in Chiusi, in an Etruscan tomb?'; and provides a limited answer to the second: 'Who made it and for what purpose?'. Now, there is a standard response to this objection: interpreting the iconography is something we can do. We do not really know why it was made, or what for, or why it ended up in an Etruscan tomb (see Chapter 27). We have Beazley and the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (CVA). Let's do iconography!

This is not an answer that would satisfy Gell, or me. We can have a pretty good stab at what it was for. It is a krater, designed for mixing wine with water in the *symposion*, a form of 'diacritical feasting' about which we know quite a lot (Murray 2009). And we know who made it: the agency of the potter and painter has been painted on to the surface of the vase (twice!): KLEITIAS MEGRAPHSEN; ERGOTIMOSMEPOIESEN: 'Kleitias painted me' – 'Ergotimos made me'.

As we saw above, it is writing (in this case, painted labels) that inscribes agency. The two 'signatures' by Kleitias and Ergotimos then do more than identify the potter and painter. The same can be said of the painted labels that accompany the scenes, which are (by any account) excessive. We have over 130 painted labels from the François Vase (Wachter 1991), and they are doing



something very odd. First, they do not simply ‘identify’ persons depicted. Amphitrite, Poseidon, and Ares are present but not shown in the Marriage of Peleus and Thetis; they are not depicted, but their presence has been marked by painted labels. Care was taken to note not only the human hunters of the Kalydonian Boar (Peleus, Meleager) but the seven hounds as well; and in the Marriage of Peleus and Thetis, the Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs, and the scene where Achilles meets Troilos, objects are animated by their labels; for the labels (*bomos* – altar in the marriage scene; *lithos* – stone, held by a centaur; *krene* (spring) and (*h*)*ydria* (water) jar; and *thakos* – seat in death of Troilos) are, in purely *narrative* terms, redundant – the pictures are perfectly clear in themselves. It may be that ‘their purpose is not so much to clarify the scenes as to accompany them in an independent narrative’ (Immerwahr 1990: 24). More may be at work here. The inscriptions do not simply accompany a ‘narrative’ scene, or clarify the identity of the persons shown. Rather, they animate the *dramatis personae* – the agents in the story, agents which comprise ‘inanimate’ objects as much as persons.

Writing and imaging are therefore complementary forms of magic used in the service of both extending and dividing agency; the story is, in a sense, fractal, divided into its component parts, which are not simply the scenes but the animate agents (human, divine, animal, and object). The François Vase then does not depict ‘stories’, but embodies persons and objects which (in turn) have their own agency. In this sense, it is rather like the statue of the ‘fractal god’ ‘A’ (Gell 1998: 137–140), an ‘assemblage of homunculi’, a being which incorporates a number of other deities in his person. Equally, the vase could be said to embody (in part) the ‘distributed person’ (Gell 1998: 96–154) of its makers, Kleitias and Ergotimos, distributed that is in the many other vessels found principally in Athens (Acropolis and Agora) and Naukratis (Beazley 1956: 76–78).

So much for the way in which the François Vase incorporates agency, or many agencies; but if agency (and personhood) is, in some sense, fractal (broken down into parts), it can also be cumulative. Nicholas Thomas (1991) has shown how objects can acquire ‘biographies’ through their entanglement with people and places. One such ‘entangled object’ has already been noted – the golden amphora that Dionysos holds on his return to Olympos (Hom. *Il.* 23.92; *Od.* 24.74). Elsewhere in Homer, kraters are often ‘entangled’ in this way; the silver krater that Menelaos gives Telemachos (*Od.* 4.611–55) was originally given to him by Phaidimos, King of Sidon; the silver krater that Achilles picks as a prize for the foot race in the funeral games of Patroklos (*Il.* 23. 740–749; see above) had a more extensive genealogy: made by Sidonian craftsmen, carried over the sea by Phoenician traders, given to Thoas of the Trojan royal house, and then to Patroklos by Euenos, son of Priam, as a ransom for Lykaon. The very fact that our krater, the François



**Figure 30.2** Athenian calyx-krater signed by Euphronios. c. 515–510 BC (Rome, Villa Giulia ex. Metropolitan Museum 1972.11.10. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali).

Vase, was found in Clusium, far from its place of manufacture in Attica, makes it highly likely that it too had accumulated (and incorporated) the agency of previous owners and persons in itself – this is what made it valuable in the first place. Indeed, the François Vase exhibits two complementary aspects of agency: cumulative and biographical, in the ‘entanglements’ which it had built up through its passage from Attica to Etruria; and fractal, in the many persons or ‘homunculi’ made present and animated in both image and inscription. Arguably, then, in depicting both the funeral games and the funerary amphora of Patroklos at an earlier stage of its biography, the vase itself is being doubly self-referential.

Much the same can be said of the red-figure calyx-krater signed by Euphronios (*Euphronios egraphsen*) and Euxitheos (*Euxitheos epoiesen*), once in New York (Figure 30.2; von Bothmer 1976; Immerwahr 1990: 64, 385). This shows two scenes; one, on side B, has four youths, arming, and a bearded warrior, accompanied by the painted labels *Hyperochos*, *Leagros kalos*, *Hippasos*, *Megon*, *Akastos*, *Axippos*; the other, on side A, the side with both ‘signatures’,

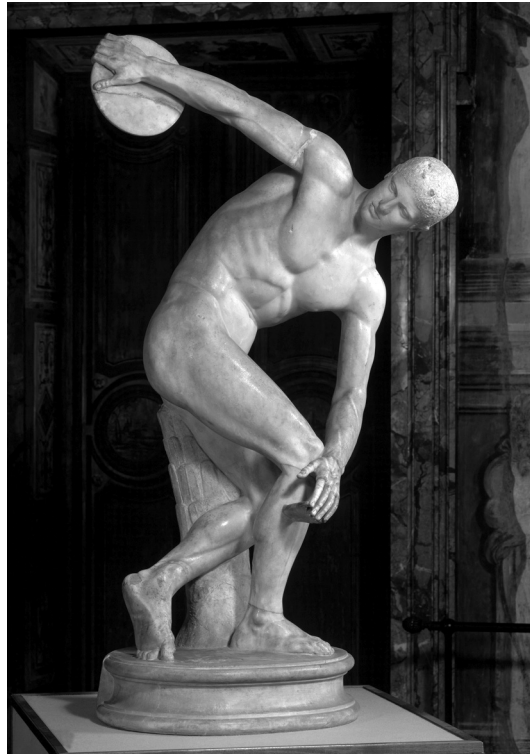
has a warrior (*Leodamas*), *Leagros kalos*, *Hypnos* (sleep) – presumably the first winged figure – *Hermes*, *Thanatos* (death) – the second winged figure – both carrying *Sarpedon*, then *Hippolytos*, another warrior at the right. This then is more than ‘Sleep and Death Carrying off Sarpedon’, still less a direct and literal transcription of the *Iliad* (16.676–683). As in the François Vase, the scenes incorporate through labels *personae* that are not shown – in this case the beautiful *Leagros*. Just as there is ‘fractal personhood’ in the figures, so there must have been cumulative agency in the entanglements which the krater must have gathered as it passed through many hands from its place of manufacture (Athens) to its final resting place – an Etruscan tomb in Cerveteri (ancient Caere; see Watson and Todeschini 2006; *ARV* 13–17).

The entanglements of the Euphronios krater continue to multiply. For, just like Achilles’s silver krater, it has passed on its way from Italy to New York and back again; for a time, it was alleged to have been found in a hat box in Beirut; it was ransomed, not for Lykaon, but for the Metropolitan Museum’s collection of coins; and, through the agency of Italian *tomboroli*, dealers in antiquities, and scholars such as Dietrich von Bothmer, it was transformed into a ‘work of art’; now, in its new setting in the Villa Giulia in Rome, it stands as a reminder of the intellectual and material consequences of the illicit trade in antiquities (Kimmelman 2009c; see Chapter 36).

So far, Gell’s approach has been used with regard to objects that are original Greek works whose context and purpose are known. The drift of the argument has been that the notion of agency undermines the object’s status as a ‘work of art’, and places it firmly in the context of Greek society, religion, and history. In this, agency is fully compatible with the aims of a social and contextual archaeology (*sensu* Whitley 1994). But ‘Greek art’, traditionally understood, does not simply comprise original works from known contexts. It also embraces that peculiar hybrid, the Roman copy. How does agency work here?

### 30.4 Myron’s Diskobolos

The marble sculpture we know as ‘Myron’s Diskobolos’ (Myron’s Discus Thrower) is known in five versions (Richter 1929: 205–206), of which the one in the Terme Museum in Rome is thought to be the best (Figure 30.3; see Chapter 5). We identify it as such, not from any surviving inscription, but because it corresponds to descriptions in Pliny (*HN* 34.57) and Lucian (*Philops.* 18; see Pollitt 1990: 48–49). Of course, none of these marble statues is an original – they are all, to varying degrees, copies (or versions), and their current and ancient context is Roman. The original, by the 5<sup>th</sup> c. Athenian sculptor Myron of Eleutherai, has been searched out, not through excavation,



**Figure 30.3** Marble statue of a discus-thrower. Roman copy of the ‘Diskobolos’ by Myron, c. 450 BC (Rome, Terme National Museum 126371. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali).

but through a branch of scholarship called *Kopienforschungen*, the comparison of copies with literary testimonia. Such studies provide a date on purely *stylistic* grounds for Myron’s original of c. 450 BC. The original is thought to be of bronze, not marble.

There are several reasons for thinking this. First, Pausanias describes a number of bronze statues of athletic victors by Myron in his tour of Olympia: Lykinos of Sparta (6.2.2), Timanthes of Kleonai (6.8.4), Philippos of Pellana (6.8.5), and Chionis the Lakedaimonian (6.13.2), and it is clear from Pausanias’s account that Myron had crafted a figure appropriate to each athlete’s victory (in the horse race, *pankration*, and boys’ boxing for the first three). Such effects are difficult to achieve in marble without recourse to struts. Moreover, though no complete bronze athlete statue survives from Olympia, the inscribed stone bases in which the bronze statues were set frequently do, and, like the Delphi Charioteer, give us a good idea of the agency relations (Smith 2007: 94–104). Two examples stand out: first the base of Kyniskos of Mantinea, victor in the boy boxing in 460 BC, whose

bronze statue was seen by Pausanias (6.4.11). On this, the epigram celebrating the boy's victory, 'winning in the boxing, Kyniskos from Mantinea, who has the name of his famous father, set this up' (Dittenberger and Purgold 1896: 255–258, no. 149), is prominently displayed around the base; the other inscription, naming Polykleitos as sculptor, was probably on a missing second step (Paus. 6.4.11). Similarly, the inscribed base for the bronze statue of Pythokles of Elis, victor in the pentathlon in 452 BC, had the victor's name prominently on the front of the base, and the sculptor (Polykleitos of Argos again), less obviously, on the side (Dittenberger and Purgold 1896: 281–284, no. 162; Paus. 6.7.10).

Two points deserve emphasis. First, the inscriptions show that, like both the Delphi Charioteer and Antenor's Kore, these objects are dedications, set up as thank-offerings in the sanctuary where the athletic victory was won. Second, they demonstrate that the bronze statues were commissioned by the athletic victor, whose name appears in large and prominent letters in the front; it is the victor who is the principal agent here. If there was a sculptor – even a sculptor as famous as Polykleitos of Argos – his name is given in smaller letters along the side of the base. Once Olympia and other sites for Panhellenic athletic festivals (Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea) must have been chock-a-block with such statues (Smith 2007).

Pausanias, writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD, provides some insight into the 'Romanization' of these Greek athletic statues. The statue of Pythokles is a good example of this process of Roman appropriation. Sometime between 50 BC and the end of the reign of Nero, the original statue was either removed (by Nero?) or damaged, and a second statue (with a different foot posture) inserted. A reinscription (Dittenberger and Purgold 1896: 281–284, no. 163) of the base mentions the athlete in passing, giving much more prominence to Polykleitos. Such was the fate that, in all likelihood, befell the original of Myron's Discobolos, where the name of the original athletic victor has been effaced, and the statue turned into a 'work of art', for Romans in a new Roman setting.

For there are two successive sets of historical events here, and two corresponding sets of agency relations. First, there is the athletic victor, choosing the best means to perpetuate his fame, either in song or in statuary (or both). It is this, and the highly agonistic 'aristocratic' culture of 5<sup>th</sup> c. Greece, that is the driving force here (Fisher 2009; see also Duplouy 2006). Both the culture (in general) and the athletic victor (in particular) create a spiraling demand for ever more 'realistic' free-standing sculptures in a medium that can best capture the 'presence' of the victorious, male athletic body – namely, bronze using the lost-wax method. The sculpture (or victory image) 'not only honors and commemorates ... but actually does something as well, acting upon present and future audiences' (Steiner 1998: 146). Sculptors,

such as Myron, respond to this demand with varying degrees of success (success which increases their fame as sculptors). They cast appropriate statues, and set them up, either in the sanctuary where victory has been won, or in the victor's home town. At this stage, the statues are not treated primarily as aesthetic objects – they are extensions of the whole athletic competition in general and victorious athletes in particular.

Then come the Romans. One can debate to what extent Roman generals and aristocrats were intellectually indebted to a Hellenistic 'elite culture of viewing' (Tanner 2006: 205–276), which, if it emerged at all, did so no earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. What is undeniable is that it is the Romans who were the most effective looters of Greek sanctuaries and cities from 196 BC onwards. When they looted a sculpture or a panel painting, they sometimes rededicated it in a Roman sanctuary, but they also invariably detached any bronze statuary from its original setting (and stone base). But they also did something else. First, they set up some of the captured statues in Rome with new bases, effacing the name of the original dedicator and deity, but retaining and giving prominence to that of the sculptor, who now for the first time becomes an artist. They then commissioned copies (in marble) of these bronze originals, and set them up, not in sanctuaries, but in houses, villas, and palaces. Here they could be admired for 'aesthetic' reasons which bore little relation to the statues' original purposes. It was in this way that art was invented.

Greek art is still being invented. Objects are discovered, often looted. Art-historical scholarship confers on these newly-found objects a new 'aesthetic' status and identity, one that pays little regard to their *archaeological* context. Corinthian and Athenian painted pottery found in Italy is almost never considered in relation to its ultimate consumers – invariably Etruscans, or some other Italic peoples. Instead, images from Athenian pots and cups are taken into a surreal parallel universe where the necromancers of art history summon them up to speak to us about the politics of the early Athenian democracy (e.g. Neer 2002).

### 30.5 Conclusion

Agency is not something to be 'applied' to Greek art. Though the concept of agency is ours, it is also clearly congruent with the way in which the Greeks themselves, both in Archaic times and in Pausanias's day, thought about and used objects; and congruent too with the way in which objects 'describe themselves' in their inscriptions and painted labels. In this, it is quite unlike that other concept, 'art', whose application to Greek material culture can only mislead. The utility of the concept is most easily seen in the case of votives with accompanying inscriptions. More complex agency relations – both fractal



and cumulative – emerge when we examine the case of painted Athenian kraters, in scenes which have hitherto been thought of as ‘narrative’. From a Gellian perspective, ‘narrative’ art is not straightforwardly narrative; it does not simply tell a story in pictures. Rather, scenes and painted labels incorporate the agency of mythological figures (whether they be gods, heroes, nymphs, centaurs, hounds, or water jars), who form part of a story, yes, but also part of an ‘assemblage of homunculi’ that can act on past and present users in different ways. Agents can be both human and divine, mythological and real, persons and objects; and agency can be both cumulative (through a succession of entanglements) and fractal; that is, dispersed, on the vase, in the persons in the images, or in the space of the Mediterranean, through the objects bearing the inscriptions Kleitias and Ergotimos, Euphronios and Euxitheos.

Gell’s concept of agency is moreover a major challenge to two assumptions that have dominated the study of Greek art: the aesthetic and the semiotic. A social theory of material culture has no real need for art. And Gell’s concept of agency (though neither post-processualist prehistorians nor post-structuralist classical art historians seem to have realized this) is simply incompatible with the ‘linguistic turn’. Framing the Aphrodite of Praxiteles in the text of pseudo-Lucian, rather than as an idol in her Temple in Knidos, is a fatal epistemological and historical error. Material culture is not text; iconography cannot be ‘read’; and there is nothing at all radical about sprinkling postmodern fairy dust over the traditional objects of classical archaeology and calling the resulting *mélange* ‘classical art history’. Classical art history is archaeology or it is nothing.

## Acknowledgements

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## FURTHER READING

Gell (1998) remains the key work on agency. Osborne and Tanner (2007) contains many useful essays (particularly the Introduction) exploring the implications of Gell’s approach to (amongst other things) Archaic and Classical Greek art. Smith (2007) is the best contextual study of Classical statues, and explores both their genesis and their subsequent ‘Romanization’. Snodgrass (1998) is the best exposition of the relationship between poetry and imagery in Archaic Greek vase-painting.

