Sight and Reflexivity: Theorizing Vision in Greek Vase-painting

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The link between sight and pictures needs no arguing: we see pictures. In the nineteenth century, Konrad Fielder even claimed that pictorial representation seamlessly continued the activity of vision. Creating an "expression that is independent of other sensual perception",[1] pictures are pure "visual objects" (*Sichtbarkeitsgebilde*). Such a view conflicts with more recent approaches by phenomenologists and neuro-scientists who instead emphasize that our response to pictures is bodily.[2] Seeing pictures, they try to show, involves our entire sensoriomotor system. Such qualifications notwithstanding, the eye remains the organ through which we access pictures.

Sight can also be represented *in* pictures.[3] Many figurative paintings feature characters that look at each other. Those who are not fully integrated into the pictorial action have been aptly labelled spectator figures. Figures may even look out of the picture and fix their gaze onto the external beholder. Given that sight is also the sense by which we perceive pictures, its pictorial representation always has the potential to be reflexive: the gaze of figures in a picture can reflect or refract the act of vision by which the beholder takes in the representation. In his investigation of *Absorption and Theatricality* in eighteenth-century painting, Michael Fried argues that the French painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin "found in the absorption of his figures both a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a proleptic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work".[4] The absorption, for example, of the young man regarding the bubble of the blowpipe and the boy watching him mirrors the response of the imagined "ideal" beholder to the painting (Figure 4.1).

In this chapter, I wish to explore how Archaic and Classical vase-painting engaged with the reflexivity encapsulated in representations of sight. My inquiry thus complements the analysis of vision in ancient philosophy and science tackled in the preceding chapters. It tries

[1] Fiedler (1991: 1.161).
[2] E.g. Sobchack (1992); O'Regan & Noë (2001).
[3] On the representation of vision in ancient vase-painting, see Vernant (1990b); Frontisi-Ducroux (1995); Mack (2002); Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006); Haug (forthcoming). On represented eyes, see Martens (1992: 284–363); Steinhart (1995); Moser von Filseck (1996); Rivière-Adonon (2011). On the trope of "pictorial reflexivity", cf. Lissarrague (1987); Martens (1992). More generally on vision and ancient art, see Berard (1984); Elsner (1995, 2007b); Fredrick (2002); special issue of *Helios* 40 (2013).
[4] Fried (1980: 51).

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to show that not only ancient texts, but also ancient pictures offer meditations on the act of viewing. By no means are these reflections strictly separated from each other. The symposium in particular was a place where verbal and visual reflections on sight could intersect. The painted reflections may have instigated and influenced discussions about sight and optics which would then have fed into professional treatises…

Painted pottery provides rich fodder for such an investigation. Wherever we look, we find Greek vase-painters showcasing an extraordinary sensitivity to the act of seeing. One need only think about the prominence of eye motifs on Greek vases. Eyes that are free-floating and unattached to a represented body, thereby oscillating between the realms of figure and ornament, can be traced back to the Bronze Age, but they become particularly pervasive in Attic black-figure pottery.[5] We find eyes emblazoned in the space that is encircled by the handles of various vessels. A good number of black-figured *olpai* also showcase two triangles on the reverse: the round black space in the centre of these triangles is now commonly identified as an eye (Figure 4.2).[6] Many black-figured cups from Athens and Chalcis surviving from the last third of the sixth century BCE likewise feature two large eyes on the exterior between their two handles, sometimes also on both sides (Figure 4.3). There are numerous other vessels with eyes including Rhodian jugs, Ionian bowls and Attic *skyphoi*.

The motif of the eye has been interpreted in various ways. Some scholars ascribe to it an apotropaic function,[7] while others are inclined to see (above all in eye-cups) depictions of masks.[8] The effect of animation – turning the vessel into a visage – is the subject of an important study by Didier-Martens.[9] The result is particularly striking in the case of eye-cups which become a mask in the context of their sympotic use: the cup covers the face of the drinker and shows the face painted on the exterior to fellow symposiasts. What has received considerably less attention is the fact that eyes represent the very organ by which the beholder perceives the picture. Besides their capacity to anthropomorphize the vessel, eyes are also always charged with the potential for reflexivity. When the beholder regards an eye regarding him, he is alerted to his own act of seeing. The motif of the eye itself visualizes – and reflects upon – the beholder's act of viewing.

[5] Cf. Martens (1992: 295–328), along with the chapters by Squire and Bielfeldt (this volume).
[6] Jacobsthal (1927: 16) was the first to make this argument.
[7] This interpretation seems to go back to Jahn (1885).
[8] E.g. Ferrari (1986); Kunisch (1990).
[9] Martens (1992: 284–363).

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Instead of focussing solely on the painted motif of the eye, this chapter sets out to explore the representation of vision in the narrative scenes of Greek painted pottery. Spectator figures have already attracted a fair amount of attention here. Stansbury-O'Donnell, for example, has proposed a system of classification that is predicated on the degree of involvement of spectators in the represented action.[10] Perhaps more importantly, he has also explored how spectator figures guide the onlooker's eye: serving as models for social and gender identification, they help the viewer relate to the representation, mediating the viewer's own act of visual response in a given context. My approach in this chapter will differ from Stansbury-O'Donnell's in two important aspects. First, it is not spectator figures per se but rather figures fully involved in the action that will be the object of my inquiry. Second, I will touch on the socio-cultural contexts of viewing only in my conclusion. While one aspect of this chapter concerns the cultural particularities of Greek "visuality" (above all within the symposium), my main point is concerned with the workings of pictorial seeing across different visual cultures.

It is crucial to note that the gaze of the person beholding a picture, while potentially mirroring the gaze of figures depicted on it, ultimately works in a different sort of way. Pictorial seeing is distinct from ordinary seeing. To explain its peculiar nature, Richard Wollheim coined the concept of "seeing-in".[11] When we see pictures, we see simultaneously the represented object and the representation. While regarding, say, the shoes painted by van Gogh, we are aware not only of that represented object, but also of the canvas and the brush-strokes that let us see the shoes. We may either concentrate on the represented object as when we muse on the worn look of the shoes, or else, attending to the blots of colour on the canvas, focus on the means of its representation. Crucially, however, seeing something in a picture necessarily implies both aspects: this two-foldedness distinguishes the act of "seeing-in" from the everyday act of "seeing-as".

Wollheim's distinction provides a key conceptual backdrop to the present chapter. I will focus on two narrative scenes in which the presentation of sight throws into relief the detachment of "seeing-in", first the blinding of Polyphemus and second the beheading of the Gorgon Medusa. My discussion of these motifs on vases from different epochs, regions and contexts may perhaps be disconcerting to specialists in ancient iconography who, for good reasons, are used to paying close attention to such distinctions. And yet, such panoramic

[10] Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006).
[11] Wollheim (1980, 1987: 43–79).

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roaming across firmly established boundaries (perhaps the privilege of somebody approaching the field from outside its specific disciplinary remit) is, I hope, justified: it showcases something that is as intriguing as it is pervasive in ancient vase-painting. While many of the chapters in this book home in on verbal theories of vision, this chapter explores a theory in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense: a visually mediated reflection on vision.

Combining the motif of Polyphemus with that of Medusa, the Eleusis *amphora* provides an apt starting point for my argument. The chapter then examines further depictions of Polyphemus and Medusa: in both subjects, as we shall see, the representation of vision revealingly interacts with the beholder's own act of seeing. While "seeing-in" seems to be a transhistorical phenomenon, the reflexivity of the vases discussed gains a specific connotation from their contexts. This will be spelt out for *gorgoneion* motifs in the *tondo* of Attic drinking-cups which show how such visual reflexivity can feed into the negotiation of identities at the symposium.

The Eleusis *Amphora*: Seeing Beyond Death

The Eleusis *amphora* from the first half of the seventh century BCE (Figures 4.4 and 4.5) was used as a vessel for the corpse of a young boy. Because the body was too big to fit through the *amphora*'s mouth, the *amphora* evidently had to be cut into two halves before being put back together with the corpse inside. The three scenes painted on the pot are remarkable. The neck features the blinding of Polyphemus, the shoulder shows a boar fighting with a lion and the body depicts two Gorgons chasing Perseus who is protected by Athena while the headless Medusa is floating horizontally through the picture. The reverse of the *amphora* is ornamental, but it ought to be noted that the lower part of Medusa extends into it and that ornaments also permeate the pictorial space on the front. Figuration and ornament are thus interlaced with one other.[12]

The use of white and black colour sparks an intense and complex interconnection between the three images on the front: the white of Odysseus on the neck[13] is continued by the white head of the lion and, a little further to the right, by the white figure of Athena, the protector of Odysseus. The black colour aligns Polyphemus with the body of the lion and Perseus just as, on the left side, Odysseus' comrades correspond with the boar and the two

[12] On the ornaments decorating the vase, see Martens (1992: 258–64). On the blurred borderline between figuration and ornament in Archaic vase-painting, Himmelmann (1968) is still essential.

[13] Cf. Osborne (1988: 2); Martens (1992: 261–2).

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Gorgons. The links established through colour are reinforced through the repetition of forms:[14] the legs of the four figures on the belly form four triangles that, besides echoing the form of an ornamental band at the bottom of the vessel, are taken up by the legs of the animals on the shoulder and the legs of the men on the neck. The three pictures on the Eleusis *amphora* are thus formally related to each other in manifold ways that forgo a neat structuralist scheme and open up the space for various interpretations.

For the purposes of my argument, it is the dialogue between the assault against Polyphemus and the chase of Perseus that is most important. Both scenes feature an encounter of man with monster, albeit inversely: while three men attack Polyphemus, Perseus is pursued by two Gorgons, with the third one already dead. Strikingly, both motifs revolve around vision: where Odysseus and his comrades ram the spear into the open eye of Polyphemus, the Gorgons threaten to petrify their viewers with their gaze. As on most other ancient vases, the Gorgons are here represented *en face*: they direct their gaze at the beholder of the *amphora*. The petrifying look of the Gorgons therefore at once corresponds and contrasts with the blinding of Polyphemus: while the one scene exacerbates the power of the eye, the other reveals its vulnerability.

Robin Osborne, who seems to have been the first to comment on the prominence of vision on the vase, relates it to the use of the vessel as an urn:[15]

> The whole vase is a construal of death, a discussion of the nature of death as sensory deprivation. Death comes when the visual world closes in on you when you yourself are to be seen in a pot. To die is to enter Hades, and to enter Hades is, by the very name, to become unseeing and unseen.

The visual metaphor for dying permits us to connect the representation of vision to the vessel and its function. One of the objections raised against this interpretation is that the use of the Eleusis *amphora* as a coffin was only secondary.[16] While I do not reckon that this detracts from the interaction between the representation of the vase and its (secondary) use, I think that, more profoundly, the Eleusis *amphora* also furnishes an iconographic meditation on pictorial seeing. The eyes of the Gorgons meet the eyes of the viewer and invite him to relate

[14] Cf. Martens (1992: 261–2).
[15] Osborne (1988: 4).
[16] For a critique of Osborne's interpretation of the Eleusis *amphora* and its use for social history, see I. Morris (1993: 28–32); Whitley (1994: 63–5).

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the gaze depicted *on* the vase to his gaze *at* the vase. More specifically, the *en face* depiction of the Gorgons highlights that the beholder is immune to their visual threat. The petrification is even reversed: it is not the viewers of the vase, but rather the Gorgons who are petrified as figures on clay.[17] This inversion is highlighted by much later poets who refer to the victims of Medusa as pictures or statues (e.g. Ovid 5.198–9; 5.206; 5.226–9). The pictorial metaphor for petrification chiastically intersects with the metaphorical petrification effected by painting. Being petrified on a vase, Medusa cannot transform her onlookers into images anymore.

The pictorial discharging of Medusa's gaze here makes the peculiar quality of "seeing-in" palpable. We see not simply the represented object, but simultaneously the represented object and its representation. Something which would be lethal to see is here instead transformed into a harmless object to "see in" the picture.[18] As Hans Jonas aptly puts it in an essay on *homo pictor*, pictorial mimesis "can represent the dangerous without endangering, the harmful without harming, the desirable without satiating".[19] The *en face* depiction of the Gorgons thus drives home that pictures let the beholder engage in an act of viewing that is bracketed by the frame of "as-if". We see the Gorgon and at the same time know that what we see is only a representation, not the real Gorgon which would petrify us.

In this sense, the viewer's gaze makes for a striking contrast with the scene depicted on the vase's neck. While the viewer looks undisturbedly at the vase, Polyphemus is shown losing his eyesight. More pointedly, we might say that the beholder's eyes here look upon the very loss of seeing. The subject of representation thus throws into relief its own act of mediation. Better, perhaps, the depiction of the loss of the organ by which the beholder perceives the representation serves to highlight this act of perception. In viewing the blinding of Polyphemus, the beholder simultaneously experiences that safe distance which characterizes "seeing-in": the annihilation of eyesight illuminates the detachment of pictorial seeing.

This sort of self-referential interpretation is further supported by the play with the framing of the images, blurring the boundaries between representation and represented object: strikingly, all figures with the exception of the Medusa exceed the height of their framing friezes (stretching beyond both its lower and upper borders). Likewise, the spear rammed into Polyphemus' eye is identical with the upper parameter of the framed image: it is only between

[17] See also Turner (this volume).
[18] From alternative angles and with different nuances, Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 73) and Mack (2002: 589) argue that the depiction of Gorgo heralds the "naissance de l'image" or the "aetiology of the gaze".
[19] Jonas (1994: 111).

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Odysseus and Polyphemus, where it has been lowered to reach its target, that the spear within the picture distinguishes itself from its outer frame.[20] As Robin Osborne notes, "the stake which blinds the Cyclops is also the frame of the picture … As the beam is thrust into his eye the Cyclops' whole visual world collapses in on itself; as Polyphemus' sight is destroyed so also is the picture, and with it Polyphemus and his attackers."[21]

But is the picture actually destroyed? For external viewers, the depiction is not in fact impaired, as Osborne seems to propose; instead, it is fixed on the vase – as visible now as it was in the seventh century BCE. We might say that the partial convergence of external frame with figurative stake consequently emphasizes the distinction between represented subject and its representation. The instrument that extinguishes Polyphemus' eyesight simultaneously provides the frame that renders the picture stable as object of the beholder's gaze. Polyphemus' loss of vision does not so much question as throw into relief the gaze of the viewer, whom not even the frontal stare of the Gorgons can petrify. The Eleusis *amphora* presents the viewer with a visual reflection on the force and vulnerability of all seeing at one and the same time.

In combining two motifs centring on vision, the Eleusis *amphora* reinforces their reflexivity. Both the blinding of Polyphemus and the stare of the Gorgons relate to the beholder's act of viewing. While Polyphemus' loss of eyesight contrasts with the detachment of pictorial seeing, the frontal depiction of Gorgo iconographically highlights the two-foldedness of all pictorial perception. The Eleusis *amphora* homes in on the topic of viewing to reflect not only on death, but also on pictorial representation and its reception.

Seeing (And Not Seeing) the Blinding of Polyphemus[22]

Before proceeding, it is perhaps worth saying something here about my assumption that the Eleusis *amphora* and other vases actually depict the "Homeric" Polyphemus. The scepticism of so much recent scholarship about interpreting such Geometric and early Archaic scenes in relation to Homeric epic is of course legitimate.[23] But just as generations of earlier scholars had been rather uncritical of their "Homericizing" assumptions, so too is there now a danger

[20] Cf. Hurwit (1977: 24–5) and S. P. Morris (1984: 44–5), who also adduce parallels.
[21] Osborne (1988: 4).
[22] See the catalogues in Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 10–41; 1992: 956–7); Burgess (2001: 118–19) and the interpretations of Schefold (1993: 158–61); Andreae (1996); Giuliani (2003: 96–105, 159–67); Von Den Hoff (2009).
[23] E.g. Snodgrass (1998); Burgess (2001). See also Lowenstam (1992).

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of raising the bar too high. Michael Squire has argued compellingly that ancient narrative vase-painting ought not to be approached as illustrations of texts.[24] Picture and text instead offer two distinct working media. Differences between poetic and visual scenes may be due to the conventions of the medium and the liberty of the artist, who was of course not bound to reproduce every detail of the Homeric account. If, for example, the object rammed into the eye of the giant does not exactly conform to the stake of "burning" olive wood described by Homer, or if the number of protagonists deviates from that of the comrades said to accompany Odysseus, this does not necessarily mean that another story is depicted. Indeed, the drinking vessel held by the giant on the Eleusis *amphora* and other vases might suggest a specific connection with the Homeric Polyphemus: there is a rich tradition of stories narrating encounters with a one-eyed monster, but the narrative prerequisite of the Cyclops' drunkenness seems a distinctive feature of the *Odyssey*.[25] I will thus continue to speak of "Polyphemus" in what follows, although my overriding argument about sight and reflexivity does not hinge on the identification.

The reflexivity inherent in the blinding of Polyphemus on the Eleusis *amphora* is paralleled and further developed in other depictions of the same motif as two examples may illustrate. Paintings that show Polyphemus not in profile, but rather looking out of the image, underscore the correspondence between subject and medium of representation.[26] A *skyphos* from around 500 BCE shows three men driving a long stick into the right eye of Polyphemus who is lying with part of his upper body propped up to what seems to be the rock of his cave (Figure 4.6). Polyphemus' right hand touches the back of his head, while the left hand lies next to his body. The posture expresses the relaxed state of Polyphemus who is caught off-guard. The turning of the Cyclops' head away from the attackers emphasizes the surprise by which he is taken. The depiction of the Cyclops with two eyes may be owed not so much to an non-Homeric tradition of the saga as to the *schema* of the frontal face (as already witnessed in the context of the Eleusis *amphora* Gorgons).[27] For my interpretation, it is worth noting that the gaze of Polyphemus responds to the gaze of the viewer: our eyes meet the eyes of the Cyclops, the one blinded, the other seeing. The parallel between Polyphemus and external

[24] Squire (2009: 122–39, esp. 126) on "Polyphemus" scenes explicitly.
[25] Cf. Giuliani (2003: 111).
[26] On the effect of an *en-face* presentation of eyes, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 90–3); Moser von Filseck (1996: 259); Neer (2002b: 79–81).
[27] Giuliani (2003: 164–5). Andreae (1962: 193f.) argues that Polyphemus here is modelled on earlier representations of Alcyoneus.

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viewer is further highlighted by the *kantharos* next to Polyphemus, mirroring as it does the *skyphos* that we are viewing.[28]

A black-figured Pseudo-Chalcidian *amphora* dating from the last third of the sixth century BCE stresses the thematic of eyesight by a slightly different means (Figure 4.7). Here, we do not in fact see the eye of Polyphemus, occluded as it is by the stake that the Greeks ram into it. The invisibility of the eye makes Polyphemus' blinding tangible for the viewers: the Cyclops' loss of (active) sight is iconographically expressed through the viewers' loss of (passive) sight; the represented act of blinding is at once paralleled by and mediated through the representational occlusion of the organ for seeing. As if to underscore the point, the neck of the *amphora* features a Silen's mask with two large eyes staring frontally out at the viewer. Such masks recur on Chalcidian vases, adding a Dionysian theme.[29] On the vase under discussion, however, the Silen's mask takes on an additional significance: the prominent eyes lend emphasis to the sense of seeing and underscore that the organ which Polyphemus is about to lose on the *amphora*'s body is the one by which we perceive this scene. The negative representation of viewing *on* the vase throws into relief the safety of our gaze *at* the vase: it drives home the special mediations of pictorial seeing.

Reflecting (on) Medusa's petrified stare

We have seen that the Eleusis *amphora* pairs the blinding of Polyphemus with the frontal stare of the Gorgons. The annihilation of sight contrasts effectfully with a gaze that has the power to annihilate. The gaze of Medusa has invited a wide range of critical responses, among them prominent psychoanalytical and gender readings.[30] Mack has shown that the *en face* depiction of Medusa also features an aetiology of the gaze.[31] In this section, I shall approach the motif of Medusa from a slightly different angle, arguing that it provides a visual meditation on pictorial seeing.

In the form of the *gorgoneion*, the head of Medusa is ubiquitous in ancient Greek art. First monstrous, later also the face of a beautiful maiden, the *gorgoneion* serves as decoration on gems, roof tiles and shields as well as on vases and burial monuments. The fearsome mask

[28] On the self-referential effect of vases depicted on vases, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 97–9).
[29] Steinhart (1995: 62–3). See also Ferrari (1986: 11–20) and Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 100–3) on masks on vases.
[30] For a collection of texts on Medusa from Homer to Cixous, see Garber and Vicker (2003), for various artistic responses, see Conticelli (2008).
[31] Besides Mack (2002), see especially Howe (1954); Vernant (1990b: 115–17); Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 71–4). Cf. Turner (this volume) on the deadly gaze of the Gorgon Medusa in a variety of contexts. Further literature can be found in Neer (2002b: 43 n. 56).

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or face may have preceded the myth of Medea and Perseus, but already in the Archaic Age it was generally identified with the decapitated Medusa. Needless to say, it would make no sense to attribute to all occurrences of the *gorgoneion* the reflexivity to be detected in the loaded depiction of the Eleusis *amphora*. And yet, a reflection on pictorial seeing is encapsulated, if lying dormant, in any *gorgoneion*:[32] the beholder can face the depiction of something that would petrify her in nature. To complement my discussion of the Eleusis *amphora*, I shall focus here on a group of vases that make the reflection on seeing explicit by presenting the head of Medusa together with its reflection. Besides coming from the South of Italy, these vases are much later, mostly from the first third of the fourth century BCE, and yet they continue and develop further the visual meditation on sight that we have found in the Eleusis *amphora*. The pictorial reflexivity for which I argue here was not bound to a specific period or context, but pervades Greek vase-painting at large, if in different ways.

The Apulian vases I wish to discuss show Perseus regarding the reflection of Medusa's head in the presence of Athena.[33] There is significant variation among the surviving depictions: on some vases, the head is reflected in water, on others it is to be seen on Perseus' shield. Athena is shown holding the head on most but not all vases. The number of additional figures such as Silens and Hermes likewise varies. These differences notwithstanding, all of these pictures can be interpreted as *mise-en-abîme*: in each case, the reflection *in* the painting illustrates the power *of* the painting. The water or shield permits Perseus to regard Medusa just as the beholder can gaze at her on the vase. The represented object thus mirrors the very act of representation.

The vases that use the shield as mirroring device merit special attention here. Take a *krater* by the so-called Tarporley Painter in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which shows the reflection of Medusa's head right at the centre of the shield (Figure 4.8). Such depictions have been interpreted aetiologically, justifying "a posteriori the custom that is attested from the earliest period of representing Gorgo on warriors' shields in order to heighten their prestige, provoke terror in the foe, and consign them in advance to flight and death".[34] The link between reflection and shield device (*episema*) is compelling, but the situation is, I think, rather more complex than Vernant, Frontisi-Ducroux and Mack would have it. The reflection

[32] See Mack (2002) for the argument that the *gorgoneion* evokes the story of Medusa's decapitation.
[33] For a list and brief discussion of seven Apulian vases see Schauenburg (1960: 77–9) and Balensiefen (1990: 32–4), who adds the bell *krater* in Boston (MFA 1970.237; Balensiefen t. 15.2). More broadly, on mirrors and their semantics, see Taylor (2008).
[34] Vernant (1991: 148–9). Cf. Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 71–3); Mack (2002: 592). For shield devices, Chase (1902) is still key; for further bibliography, see Squire (2013b: 189, n.92).

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is centred and placed where we expect the *gorgoneion*, and yet the motif is simultaneously rendered upside-down: it is therefore markedly different from a *gorgoneion* shield device. Instead of merging into one and the same image (as seems to be the case with Caravaggio's Medusa),[35] reflection and *gorgoneion* each throw the other into relief: while the shield device uses the terror of Medusa's head for apotropaic purposes, the reflection inverts its lethal force. The upside-down representation of this reflection exploits a customary *episema* to highlight the "as-if" of pictorial seeing.

The idea of a shield in which Perseus can safely regard Medusa also resurfaces in the later literary tradition. Here, though, the shield is fully integrated into the course of the action: Ovid and Lucan have the protagonist (in Ovid it is Perseus, in Lucian Athena) hold a shield while engaged in beheading Medusa.[36] The shield is hence a device to guide Perseus' blow. There is an extensive debate in scholarship on the priority of either pictorial or textual tradition as well as on the relationship between the two versions.[37] No matter for which position one opts, the comparison with the literary tradition underscores the particular concerns of our Apulian vases: here the viewing of Medusa does not serve a narratological purpose taking place after the beheading; it is a purely contemplative motif.

The contemplative character of the gaze at Medusa comes to the fore on a second Apulian *pelike* attributed to the Tarporley Painter (Figure 4.9). Perseus stands fully at ease: his left leg is slightly bent, the right straight, while the upper body leans on the left arm resting on a column, over which Perseus' clothes are draped. Perseus' pose is echoed and partly inverted by that of Hermes, the one holding a sickle, the other a sceptre: Hermes bends his left leg and leans on a column which is not in front but behind him. Like Perseus, Hermes looks downwards and directs his gaze at the shield, but given the perspective he is unable to see the reflection on it. The tranquillity of the scene is formally supported by the composition of the image: Perseus and Hermes frame the scene on the left and right; the shield in the lower left of the centre is balanced by Athena in its upper right. While their heads form a horizontal line above which Medusa's head appears, Medusa and her reflection on the shield establish a vertical axis, made explicit through the tree in the background.

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[35] Cf. Marin (1977: 161).
[36] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.782–3; Lucan 9.669–70; Lucian, *The Hall* 25; *Dialogs of the Sea-Gods* 14.2.323. Apollodorus 2.4.2 refers to the shield without mentioning who holds it. The motif of Perseus regarding Medusa while beheading her is rare in ancient visual art, see Balensiefen (1990: 120–24) for the scant evidence.
[37] For a survey, see Balensiefen (1990: 113–30).

Hermes' and Perseus' relaxed poses and their concentrated gazes are reminiscent, with all due qualifications, of the absorption that Fried detects in the paintings of Chardin and other classical French painters (Figure 4.1).[38] The absorption of the figures within the vase-painting in one sense prefigures the immersion experienced by the ideal external beholder of the vase. Likewise, the detachment of Perseus reinforces the self-referentiality of the depiction. Perseus' disinterested gaze aptly expresses the "as-if" of "seeing-in".

In addition to Medusa's head and its reflection on the shield, the Apulian *pelike* shows a *gorgoneion* on Athena's tasselled cloak. The vase thus provokes us to ponder the different status of different sorts of images within the visual field. It might be said to juxtapose at least two different modes of mimesis, reflection and representation. While the former is a natural form of mimesis, the latter is man-made and artificial. The shield-framed reflection of the Medusa's head is an inverted mirror-image, but otherwise appears an exact copy of its source. The *gorgoneion* on the cloak, on the other hand, is smaller than Medusa's "actual" head and highly stylized in appearance, lacking for example the neck that is still visible on the head. The depiction is all the more intriguing when seen against the backdrop of the tradition that Medusa's head itself forms the sign on Athena's aegis.[39] The fact that Athena is brandishing Medusa's head ostentatiously excludes the possibility that the sign on the aegis is the "original".[40]

While somewhat earlier in date, a *calyx-krater* by Euphronius corroborates the idea that the motif of the *gorgoneion* on the aegis could lend itself to reflection about originals and copies (Figure 4.10).[41] Heracles and Athena on the left are shown fighting Cycnus and Ares on the right. The real lionskin around Heracles' shoulder contrasts with the depiction of lions on Cycnus' armour and Ares' shield; likewise the head of Medusa on Athena's aegis is juxtaposed with the emblem of the Medusa's head as a sign on Ares' shield. Whereas Euphronius thus seems to play subtly with the tradition that Athena's aegis features the very head of Medusa, the Apulian *krater* discussed above abandons this tradition and casts the *gorgoneion* as pictorial representation: the juxtaposition with the reflection on the shield draws attention to the representational status of the present picture. The exact copy furnished by the reflection throws into relief the distance that separates pictorial representation from the

[38] Fried (1980).
[39] In Lucan 9.669, Athena's support of Perseus is even contingent on her receiving the head of Medusa.
[40] See also an Apulian Bell *krater* (St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, 637 (1723)), which shows Perseus putting on his winged shoes, that means before killing Medusa, opposite of Athena whose shield features a *gorgoneion*.
[41] Cf. Neer (2002b: 61–2).

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original. If even a reflection deprives Medusa of her lethal power, pictorial representations, not limited to but certainly including the depiction on our vase, *a fortiori* grant the beholder a safe mode of "seeing-in".

Toasting to Reflexivity: The *Gorgoneion* at the Symposium

This brief chapter has examined just some of the reflexive ways in which Greek vase-paintings explored the nature of vision. While the represented excision of Polyphemus' eye contrasts with the beholder's gaze at the vase and throws into relief the detachment of pictorial seeing, the frontal depiction of the Gorgon Medusa highlights that we are facing only a representation, thereby flagging the process of "seeing-in": we attend not only to the represented subject, but also to the act of representation. As conceptualized by Wollheim, the phenomenon of "seeing-in" is transhistorical and applies to all kinds of pictures in a wide range of visual cultures. Whether or not we accept this claim (which, I am sure, will make many scholars feel uncomfortable), it is illuminating to contextualize the pictorial reflections that I have discussed within their specific historical contexts.[42] Unlike modern paintings, ancient vases were not aesthetic objects, but commodity goods. We have already seen that the use of the Eleusis *amphora* as a coffin urn gives its represented themes a special twist: the meditation on the detachment of pictorial seeing contrasts starkly with the idea of death as the ultimate loss of sight. In this final section, I shall turn to another prominent context of vase-painting, that is the symposium. I will address the relation between this sympotic context and the vases' interest in visual reflexivity by focussing on one common motif: the *gorgoneion* in the *tondo* of Attic cups.

First, however, a word on the symposium. The symposium was a ritualized drinking party attended only by male guests.[43] A *symposiarch* controlled the consumption of wine which was mixed with water. The entertainment at symposia embraced a wide range of activities: the participants would recite poetry and challenge each other in speech duels and through riddles. In a game called *kottabos*, often represented on vases, the guests shot wine-dregs from their cups, aiming at a metal-disk, which would fall from a lamp-like construction on a soundboard. Female and male slaves would play music and potentially provide sexual gratification which could of course also be sought from other guests. The symposium has

[42] See Grethlein (forthcoming a) for some thoughts about the tension between transhistorical and historicising approaches in aesthetics.

[43] The literature on the symposium is vast: see especially Lissarrague (1987); Schmitt-Pantel (1992); Murray (1990); Slater (1991); Vetta (1995); Catoni (2010).

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been aptly described as "a social activity of a ludic nature … a clearly demarcated cultural occasion, in which the social norms which regulate the public life of the wider civic community can even be ignored or disobeyed, but in which the members commit themselves to accepting and following the laws which the gathering itself imposes".[44] Through its ludic nature, the symposium was crucial for the formation and calibration of identities especially of elite citizens.[45] Experimenting with alternative personae through masquerade and the recitation of poems in the first person (not to mention the practice of indulging in flights of fantasy and challenging one's peers over riddlesome questions) all contributed to defining what it meant to be a member of a particular social group.

The self-referentiality that I have traced in Greek vase-painting obviously chimes with the playfulness pervading the symposium *tout court*. Eye-cups in particular lent themselves to the sympotic negotiation of identities, furnishing the visual equivalent to poems in which the speaker exploits the first-person voice to adopt a new persona. It has been argued that the eye-cup not only masked and transformed the person drinking from it, but also invited viewers to experiment with other personae linked to the one represented by the mask.[46] The eye-cups' play with identity has a further aspect that harks back to one of the motifs discussed earlier. For one of the most common interior motifs is that of the *gorgoneion*, placed right at the centre (Figure 4.11).[47] Whoever drinks from a cup not only holds up a mask to his fellows, but also faces a representation that uncannily interacts with his own. At the very moment of imbibing the cup's intoxicating liquor, the drinker encounters the face of Medusa – at first lurking underneath his own reflection in the wine, but then emerging in its own pictorial right. The process imposes an extreme form of the "other" onto the drinking "self"; it does so, however, through the layering of two representational media, namely reflection and mimetic painting. The beholder is made to see himself in the face of the otherly Gorgon – in the eyes of the mythical monster directing her lethal gaze at him. As I have argued above, the frontal representation of the Gorgon drives home the detachment of pictorial seeing: the *gorgoneion*'s positioning in the *tondo* enmeshes this reflection on "seeing-in" with the identity of the beholder.

[44] Pellitzer (1990: 178).
[45] Cf. Neer (2002b: 9–26).
[46] Hedreen (2007b).
[47] The *gorgoneion* in the *tondo* of black-figured cups is so widely spread that it tends to be bypassed both in studies of the *gorgoneion*, e.g. Besig (1937) and Floren (1977), and investigations of the pictures in *tondi*, T. B. L. Webster (1939); Van Der Grinten (1966).

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Such confrontation of the self with the other is given particular force in numerous cups where the *gorgoneion* is shown not perpendicular to the axis of the two handles, but instead shifted slightly clockwise.[48] Propped on the *kline* with his left arm, the symposiast would hold the cup with the left handle closer to his face. The asymmetry of the medusa-esque medallion would compensate for the anticlockwise rotation of the cup so that the user would face the *gorgoneion* face-on. But even the less numerous vases where the inner medallion is perpendicular to the axis of the handles (or else shifted anticlockwise), would allow for a face to face encounter with the *gorgoneion* which, due to its round form, is less affected by the angle of the perspective than other *tondo* motifs.

A *kylix* in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum offers a particularly sophisticated meditation on the "visual pragmatics" of the interior *gorgoneion* (Figure 4.12).[49] The two pairs of eyes on the exterior of this cup are filled with *gorgoneia* very similar to the *gorgoneion* emblazoned in its interior *tondo*. Scholars have not failed to comment on the vase's underlying visual-verbal pun. The Greek word for "pupil", *kore*, simultaneously signifies "maiden", and not least the ultimate "maiden" figure of Persephone – Hades' female consort in the Underworld, "with whom Gorgo has certain affinities".[50] The vase has thus been interpreted in light of Socrates' observation in Plato's *Alcibiades* (132e–133a): "And have you observed that the face of the person who looks into another's eye is shown in his pupil as in a mirror, and we call this the pupil/maiden (*koren*), for in a sort it is an image of the person looking?" The visual pun is reinforced by the figure of a young maiden painted between the two pairs of external eyes. Instead of seeing himself, the beholder faces Medusa in the eye of the other.[51] What I find most remarkable of all here is that the projection of the *gorgoneia* into the eye represents what the symposiast himself sees upon drinking from the cup: it shows Medusa in the reflection of an eye – just as in the act of drinking, the symposiast sees her in the reflection of his *own* eye. The exterior of the cup thus playfully relates to the uncanny visual experiencing of its interior: where the act of seeing the *tondo* lasts only for the

[48] The asymmetry of the medallions in Greek cups has been explained along the lines of production, reception and aesthetics: while some have argued that it is due to the way in which the painters held the cups (e.g. Houssay 1912), others like Hampe & Gropengiesser (1967) see it in light of the position in which cups were held. Compositional reasons were adduced for example by Neutsch (1949) and E. Simon (1976). For a survey see Martens (1992: 179–234), who sees the asymmetry as a device of animation that goes against the strict symmetry defining vase painting otherwise.
[49] Beazley (ABV, p. 202; CVA Cambridge 1, pl. 18.2 and 20.4).
[50] Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 102). See also Lissarrague (1987: 136).
[51] Frontisi-Ducroux (1995: 102).

duration of drinking, the exterior images emblazons that internal, subjective and ephemeral moment for all to see.

Although the motif of two eyes on the exterior of the cup cannot be derived from the *gorgoneion per se*, it has been noted that "the two visual motifs or decorative schemes, eye cup and *gorgoneion*, were understood to be intrinsically related in some important way".[52] If we again consider the use of the cup, the connection becomes more precise: the external mask shown to the drinking companions can be seen as the petrification effected by the internal *gorgoneion* when faced by the user of the cup. The petrification lasts only as long as he is drinking and facing Gorgo. As soon as the vase is put down, the *gorgoneion* is covered by wine once more, so that the symposiast reverts to wearing his own face.[53]

What to make of such visual reflexive games? My argument here is not of course that every time a symposiast took a sip he would meditate on the "as-if" of pictorial seeing, racking his brain over the relation between self and other. As we have said, the *gorgoneion* is a very common *tondo*-motif; it might also have provoked all manner of jesting remarks – that the *oinarches* ought to hurry up with the refill before Medusa sends out her lethal rays, for example. That said, it is worth noting that such reflections about sight and seeing feature on objects intended as everyday commodities. In this sense, the case of vase-painting drives home the fact that reflexivity is not confined to "Art" in the modern sense: far from being aesthetic objects in their own right, the vases discussed here had a very practical purpose as drinking vessels. Part of their reflexivity even hinges on their practical use: the cup needs to be lifted to one's lips in order to be transformed into a mask; indeed, it is only the person who drinks from the cup who will see the face of the Gorgo in his own reflection.

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I am aware that my argument in this short chapter risks going against the grain of some deeply entrenched assumptions about Greek vase-painting. Art historians will wonder whether the reflexivity for which I have argued is compatible with the horizon of expectations, not least in the Archaic Greek world, from which for example my touching point, the Eleusis *amphora*, stems.[54] Does my approach not project a Hellenistic or Imperial framework back onto a time that was less invested in plays with medium and self-reference? The prominence of the eye-motif mentioned at the beginning of this essay should perhaps

[52] Hedreen (2007b: 222).
[53] Cf. Neer (2002b: 43).
[54] Cf. Grethlein (forthcoming b) on reflexivity in visual and verbal art of the Archaic Age.

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help to allay such qualms; likewise, those vases that combine different scenes centred around the thematics of vision in one and the same field or complement such scenes with ornamental eyes (e.g. Figure 4.7) underscore the fact that sight was a salient subject of vase-painting in and of itself.

No less important is the high degree of self-reference found in poetry, corroborating as it does an interest in reflexivity across media in the Archaic age. One thinks here for example of the Homeric description of the shield of Achilles, with its playful collapsing – right at the beginning of the Greek literary tradition – of relations between representation and represented objects.[55] While the shield of Achilles attests a keen sense of the issue of representational medium, the meta-poetic significance of bards in Homer provides a close parallel for my argument about the reflexivity of vase-painting: it is widely acknowledged that the singing embedded in epic mirrors the recital of the epic itself.[56] Just as the Homeric audience is invited to compare their response to the reactions elicited by Demodocus' song, the vase-paintings explored in this chapter prompt the beholder to relate his vision to that of the represented figures. As the sense by which we perceive pictures, sight was an object of pictorial representation that appealed to a broader fascination with reflexivity – as both the object, and subject, of visual inquiry.[57]

[55] See especially Becker (1990, 1995) and, more recently, Squire (2013b).
[56] E.g. Macleod (1983); Ford (1992); Segal (1994).
[57] I wish to thank Nikolaus Dietrich, Tonio Hölscher and Matthias Steinhart for thought-provoking comments. Most of all, I am indebted to Michael Squire for his incisive suggestions as well as for long discussions about visual art in antiquity and beyond.

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