The Scenic performance mechanism in the Aristophanes' comedies: the prompter and the focalization

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ABSTRACT. In this article, we aimed to point two important mechanisms of scenic performance in the plays of the Greek comedy writer Aristophanes (V BC). Our start assumption is that it is possible to find in the text important marks for the scenic operationalization of those comedies. In the time when those comedies were composed, the author knew the material conditions of scenic performance and he used some interesting strategies, and we highlight two of them: (i) he inserted reminder-speech inside the sing of chorus to work as a prompter for the coreutas' choreography; (ii) he used the chorus' collective body to indicate to the spectator which scenic elements deserve the attention for being important for the progress of the plot. These two play composition strategies are similar, but not equal, to the contemporary concepts of prompter and focalization.

Keywords: Aristophanes, greek comedy, scenic performance.

Mecanismo de performance cênica nas comédias de Aristófanes: ponto e focalização

RESUMO. Este artigo objetiva evidenciar dois importantes mecanismos de performance cênica existentes nas peças de Aristófanes, autor de comédias gregas do século V a.C. Partimos do pressuposto de que é possível encontrar no texto elementos que são importantes para a operacionalização cênica das comédias daquela época. Neste artigo mostraremos que, no momento de composição, sabendo das condições materiais da realização cênica, o comediógrafo utilizava algumas interessantes estratégias, dentre as quais destacaremos duas: (i) ele inseria falas-lembrete nos cantos corais que serviam como um ponto para a coreografia dos coreutas, e (ii) ele usava o corpo coletivo do coro como um sinalizador que indicava ao espectador os elementos cênicos que são importantes para o desenvolvimento do enredo e que, por isso, mereciam atenção da plateia. Essas duas estratégias presentes na composição das peças são similares, não idênticas, aos conceitos atuais de ponto e focalização.

Palavras-chave: Aristófanes, comédia grega, performance cênica.

Introduction[1]

When we talk about ancient Greek comedy, we talk about a genre of only one author – Aristophanes – who lived in the 5th century B.C. in Athens. Not that he was the only author to write comedies at the time, but it is only from him that we have complete comedy plays. From other authors, we are left with a few names and text fragments.

There were only Aristophanes' comedies left, and only 11 out of the 40 he supposedly wrote, which could make us feel uncomfortable to claim something more definite about the comic theater at the time. However, this cannot be taken as an obstacle to conclusions on the genre, since this author was considered one of the most important

and prominent of his time. In addition, he won many of the theatrical competitions that he had taken part on, which shows the acknowledgement spectators and critics gave to the canonical characteristics of the playwright. That is why we can, from what is left of ancient Greek comedies, come to some conclusions.

In general, when we talk about the characteristics of ancient Greek comedy, we focus on its thematic, formal and political aspects. However, in this paper, our goal is to approach the aspects that make the scenic performance of the 5th century Greek comedy possible.

Current theater spectators or theatrical text readers put themselves in the position of receivers and wait for the esthetic experience provided by the fictional work. When we watch a theatrical performance, we can sympathize with or reject characters, we can have fun or get apprehensive with

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[1] This article was translated from Portuguese into English by the following undergraduate students of BA in Translation Studies at UEM: Fernando Bana Vreque and Mayara Stéphanie Barbieri. Revision was carried out by professors Fernanda Silveira Boito and Vera Helena Gomes Wielewicki.

the plot, we can like or hate what happens and, by the end of the play, we can comment or not before one feeling or another. All of those reactions, with which we are used to, derive from the very feeling of reality that we have from putting ourselves in contact with the literary art.

But what makes the spectator recognize something familiar in the fictional work is a consequence of artificiality in art and it comes from a process of building illusion, which is disguised and underlies the most superficial layer: the narrative layer of the text. Fictional illusion depends on a set that builds it. Even fictional manifestations that intend to uncover this set keep elements that guarantee its genre as being fictional.

Pavis defines illusion in the following manner:

> Illusion exists in theatre when we accept as real and true what is only fictional, the artistic creation of a reference world that is presented as a possible world that could be our own. Illusion is related to the reality effect produced on stage, and it is based on the psychological and ideological recognition of phenomena already familiar to the spectator (Pavis, 1998, p. 178).

But the supposed reality presented on stage is a figurative reality and it obeys a group of codes. "Illusion and mimesis are only the result of theatrical conventions." (Pavis, 1998, p. 179).

To compose illusion, the playwright makes use of some resources that can cause, on the spectator, the feeling of watching a world transplanted from reality itself, but on stage. In order to do so, parts of the spectacle, such as fable and characters compose the reality effect by means of some techniques. The fable must be disposed in a logical manner, so the spectator can feel gripped to the planned illusion. However, besides this logical and understandable sequence from the fable, theater counts on what has been named as vertebral elements and what Pavis (1998) defines as theatrical machinery. That is all resources employed in the building of theatrical reality; a series of equipment and resources used on the building of the spectacle to ensure the action be carried out.

It is evident that both spheres, herein named as fiction/nonfiction, character/actor, plot/vertebral element, are always inferred by the spectator, or reader, in an integrated way. Therefore, we only notice the vertebral element through the plot or only notice nonfictional traces when we follow fictional steps, so on so forth.

For this reason, Bogatyrev (1977) claims the spectator perceives both actor and character at the same time. Ubersfeld (2005) clearly states that concerning theatrical texts, we have two distinct inseparable layers: dialogue and didascalia. Therefore, dramatic speech is two-folded: (a) the speech in which the speaker is the author and (b) the speech in which the speaker is the character. Thus, every performance is constituted of a doubled situation of communication: the theatrical, scenic situation, in which speakers are writers and theater participants (director, actors, etc.), and the situation built among characters. The author asserts the following:

> The fundamental distinction between dialogue and didascalia implies the subject of enunciation, that is, it implicates the question of who is speaking. In dialogue, we have a paper/writing creation (distinct from the author) that we call character. In didascalia, it is the author who (i) names the characters, indicates who is to speak at any given moment, and assigns to each character a place from which to speak and a share of the discourse; and (ii) gives directions, separate from the dialogue, as to the characters' gestures and actions. (Ubersfeld, 2005, p. 6, author griffin).

In this system, the function of didascalia is to determine the conditions of enunciation, both scenic and imaginary, to command the performance, as well as determine the conditions of communication and enunciation. Didascalia is characterized by being a message and also indicating the contextual conditions of another message (Ubersfeld, 2005).

But, on the Greek plays of the 5th century B.C., didascalia were not a paratext, as they are on modern theatrical plays. They are embeded in the text, and we only perceive the author's orientations when analyzing characters' lines, distribution of lines and structural organization of the text.

Then, when reading an ancient theatrical play, we have access to the plot, the general intrigue lines, the semantic signs of the text, and also to the elements that build the scenic performance, as well as to the indexes of organizational work of the play intended by the author. Reading ancient Greek comedy gives us access to the plot, but also to the indexes of scenic performance, even without the presence of external didascalia material.

Every theatrical text is doubled constituted – the plot told through characters' actions, and the conventions stablished (through machinery, the theatrical pact, and so on) – thus fiction can be accepted by the public. Our entrance door to this structural layer of the spectacle is the plot which will enable us to identify the aspects that allow us to point out the characteristics of play staging.

Thus, in theater, dramatic illusion comes from

artificial elements that build scenic conventions, and from the deal that was made between public and stage.

Our hypothesis is that in this genre, in which fantasy is part of the process of fictional creation, not only Aristophanes uses the actors and the chorus in his plays to make the plot work, but also gives them tasks regarding the technical organization of the play.

While reading Aristophanes' comedies, we can perceive the playwright's preoccupation to make performance or scenic fulfillment of the theatrical text possible. Being guided by the signs that, in the plot, may give us a glimpse of the processes of production and support of the play, we can identify signs of Aristophanes' writing logics in his comedies.

From this perspective, I write about two important aspects of scenic performance in Aristophanes' plays and which we can compare. Importantly, taking due proportions into account, to our contemporary concepts of "prompter" and "focalization," concepts presented by Pavis on the "Dictionary of The Theater" (1999).

We name the two strategies used by Aristophanes as:

1. Composition of chorus chants which enables members of the chorus' performance;

2. The use of chorus to direct spectators' attention.

Strategy of chorus composition that makes performance of its members possible

When we think about theatrical festivals in Athens from the 5th century, two words are constant in our minds: grandeur and competitiveness.

Nowadays, thinking about an event as grand as the theatrical festivals is only possible when we remember enormous superstars' shows or main soccer league championships that gather thousands of people. The amount of people involved in the production and those watching the Athenian theatrical festivals are astonishing, as much as the physical space where the event happened. Some even affirm that theater used to admit up to thirty thousand spectators in a physical structure that counted on a space with a hundred meters in diameter for the performance to happen![2]

Thus, the grandeur of Greek theater spectacle demanded long time in preparation, mainly from the chorus, which was mostly composed of common citizens instead of professional actors, singers or dancers. Also, the competitiveness of the

occasion demanded that strategies were created so that success was assured, and, in this manner, the competitor could win good prizes. The work for theatrical festivals began eight months prior to its occurrence, with a previous competition that ensured the poet a chorus fully funded by the State.[3] After the chorus had been assigned to the poet, the process of rehearsing and preparing for the Dionysia (a very important international event in Athens) began.

We do not know much about preparation details of comedies: where rehearsals were, which professionals were involved, which techniques were used to prepare the actors. But a papyrus discovered in Egypt can be pointed as indication of the existence of modular rehearsals (Ravermann, 2006, p. 91-92). This is because the archeological discovery brings the lines spoken by the character Admetus, from the tragedy called "Alcestis," written by Euripides. That implies that modular rehearsals were practiced, in other words, they could rehearse only some excerpts of the play or just the section regarding one specific actor.

Supposing it was a common practice, modularization could be efficient for the chants of the chorus, since it was an amateur group. Furthermore, rehearsals lasted a long time, thus, we can suppose that not all people involved could be present in all of them,[4] given that exclusive dedication to theater was not a viable option to all play participants.

The complexity of theatrical event, which gathered activities such as acting, dancing and singing, added to the fine choragic system, which articulates a conceptual distinction between acting and chanting spheres, demanded both dedication and diligence from the participants and concern from the author.

This reality of scenic competition is manifested in the texts of Greek comedies from the 5th century B.C. that we have. We believe that, in the moment of play composition, Aristophanes inserted reminder-speeches to chorus participants. He was trying to assure that their amateurism and nervousness from the presentation did not interfere with men's good performance.

The parodos and exodos, the entrance and exit from the chorus scene, respectively, are two moments in the play to which chorus members have to pay very close attention, and the poet as well as the one leading the rehearsal must have dedicated a

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[2] Cf Wilson (2000).

[3] The selection process to the chorus keeps on being an obscure subject to ancient Greek theater scholars. For more information on the matter, check Wilson (2000) and Winkler and Zeitlin (1992).

[4] According to Wilson (2000).

certain investment to them. The exit, even with the chorus used to the public's eyes, was not less important because of that. Also, it is not only in those two sections that Aristophanes' comedies admit intense movement moments that must demand great care from the chorus.

We believe that, before such complexities of drama festivals, the comedy's playwright would calculate lines to direct the chorus on its performance, mainly on the important scenes in comedy, such as the ones in which some kind of choreography was demanded. This strategy used by Aristophanes when he composed his comedies we associate with the usage of the prompter, which, according to Pavis (1999), "helps actors when facing difficulties;" when someone recites, in low voice, the text the actor must say in scene.[5]

In ancient comedy, the speech given by the chorus produces a narrative effect. As when spoken in scene, it indicates the action being played out.

Based on modern experiences of theatrical plays, it is clear we can think that a play can choose to present polyphony in which speech and action are counterpointed. However, in ancient theatrical experience, particularly given all spatial and competitive characteristics of the theatrical event, we can deduce that speech and action do not diverge but reinforce one another. It is probable that the playwright had the constant concern of ensuring spectators understood the spectacle. Therefore the lines that reinforce the action are important because of that, mostly when we think about the size of the theater and the amount of people that used to go to festivals.

The search, in the text, for linguistic elements that could refer to the realization itself of performance has turned into a challenge for ancient-theater scholars in the last century. Among several published books about the subject, in the book "The Greek Chorus," by Webster (1970), the author makes his intention clear in the introduction: looking for possible feet movements in the rhythm of verses.

In the same search, Irigoin, in an article published in 1994, supports his arguments in a text written on the 1st century by Heliodorus. In this ancient text, the author studies the measure of verses from the comedy "Peace." Irigoin repeats Heliodorus' steps and checks the meters used in the parodos of "The Acharnians" and of "Thesmophoriazusae," looking for sound marks that

could divide the strophic system and call the public's attention to change in rhythm. This author concludes that the parodos from those comedies are divided into two equivalent parts or stanzas. Thus, "Aristophanes can build two stanzas that are rhythmically the same, that is, with the same number of feet, which allows him to ensure perfect equivalence to the chorus steps." (Irigoin, 1994, p. 31).

This division of equivalent metrical feet is important, so the chorus can perform choreography movements and have the same time to begin the dance, perform it and go back to initial position.

Recently, in Brazil, a scholar of Aeschylus's tragedy known as Marcus Mota, who is a professor at University of Brasilia (UNB), wrote that

> [...] the effectuation of dramatic space as an acoustic space was a foundation to the exploration of possibilities, impact and accuracy of performances. This is a fundamental operation to musical playwriting from Aeschylus: the acknowledgement that the sound band defines the visual band (Mota, 2005, p. 129)[6].

This demonstration of studies about Greek theater shows us it is possible to reach elements from ancient plays' choreography through text. Thus, we can also notice verbal registers from the chorus in Aristophanes' comedies, which can indicate the performed action. In "The Birds," we have a great example of this occurrence, which we can name as "The spoken choreography of the chorus."

In the prologue from this play, two men go around the orchestra and get to the *skene*. Then, the public is informed that they are Athenians and they are looking for a better city than Athens to live.

The men's main complaint about Athens is verbalized:

> It's not that we hate it;
> we recognize it to be great and rich, likewise that everyone has the right to ruin himself paying taxes;
> but the crickets only chirrup among the fig-trees for a month or two,
> whereas the Athenians spend their whole lives in chanting forth judgments from their law-courts.
> That is why we started off with a basket,
> a stew-pot and some myrtle boughs and have come to seek a quiet country in which to settle.
> We are going to Tereus, the Epops, to learn from him, whether,
> in his aerial flights, he has noticed
> some town of this kind.
> (Aristophanes, *The Birds*, 36-37).[7]

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[5] Patrice Pavis (1998) himself warns us that the function of the prompter, which was created in the 18th century, is falling into disuse in the modern theater. We repeat that the use of the prompter is not identical to the use of reminder-speech that Aristophanes admitted in the chorus performed by the chorus, yet we consider this comparison is a didactic resource in the explaining of this scenic function carried out by the chorus in the ancient Greek comedy.

[6] Our translation.
[7] The translation of The Birds we use here is by Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (1938) and can be found at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:

The thing for trials is ultimately what drives Pithetaerus and Euelpides to run away from Athens.

They find Tereu, a mythological character who was transformed into a bird as a punishment from the gods, and they ask for his help. Tereu suggests some cities, but the fugitives are demanding. They do not want a city bigger than Athens, or one with an aristocratic government, much less one that is close to the Red Sea, since that city could be an enemy of Athens. Since none of the birdman's suggestions pleases the migrants, one of the man has an idea and questions Tereu about the birds' lifestyle, and he finds out that among the birds no one needs a basket because they pick food from the gardens. That is when the man proposes: "Ha! I am beginning to see a great plan, / which will transfer the supreme power to the birds, if you will but take my advice." (Aristophanes, The Birds, 162-163).

Thus, Pithetaerus and Euelpides try to convince the birds to organize themselves in a city and accept new visitors as their compatriots and leaders.

This is the moment in which the chorus of birds enters the scene to defend their territory from both invaders. The chorus verses about the attack to the Athenians Pithetaerus and Euelpides bring details of scenic movements. It is as it follows:

> CHORUS:
> Io! Io!
> Forward to the attack, throw yourselves upon the foe, spill his blood; take to your wings and surround them on all sides. Woe to them!
> let us get to work with our beaks, let us devour them. Nothing can save them from our wrath, neither the mountain forests, nor the clouds that float in the sky, nor the foaming deep.
>
> LEADER OF THE CHORUS:
> Come, peck, tear to ribbons. .
> Where is the chief of the cohort? Let him engage the right wing. (Aristophanes, The Birds, 344-351).

This moment brings a description of the chorus posture and it indicates how attacking moves should be performed. In the fourth line, it is expressed to the chorus that they should use their garments in dance by showing their artificial wings. In the fifth line, we can notice that the attack should form a circle around the two men. And in the last line, it is evident that the chorus was divided in the orchestra into two halves.

At the ending part of the comedy, Pithetaerus marries Sovereignty, assuming the position of leader of birds, according to the metaphor. In this moment, the chorus sings the wedding march "Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!," and from verse 1720 to

the end of the play on verse 1765, we have some other examples of the choreography performed in the orchestra. After the herald announces the bride and groom, the chorus sings:

> Fall back! to the right! to the left! advance! Fly around this happy mortal, whom Fortune loads with her blessings. Oh! Oh! What grace! What beauty! Oh, marriage so auspicious for our city! (Aristophanes, The Birds, 1720-1724).

In the verses, there is the description of choreography performed by actors and the chorus. The first verse shows that the chorus opens a path so the bride and groom can pass through, parading through the orchestra while the chorus, half on each side, dances. In the second verse, the lines from the chorus depict the moment when bride and groom are in the middle of the orchestra and the chorus members move to form a circle around them.

Still on verse 1760, the chorus sings:

> Stretch forth your hands, my dear wife! Take hold of me by my wings
> and let us dance;
> I am going to lift you up and carry you through the air. (Aristophanes, The Birds, 1760-1763).

Those lines indicate that a member from the chorus dances with the bride and executes aerial moves.

The lines from the chorus with this characteristic must have had the mnemonic function of guiding the chorus in acting in the performance. It is evident that the chorus performed with actions, chants, lines and dancing rehearsed, but those verses could avoid possible mistakes from only one chorister or it could highlight the sequence of the text to give more confidence to chorus members. On the other side, the register on text of the moment the chorus does the choreography represents the possibility of retrieving scenic movements.

On the chorus voice, this kind of speech is common and appears in other comedies, as it can be seen in the following examples.

In the comedy "Peace," by Aristophanes, it is proposed by the plot that the Peloponnesian War was happening because the deity called Peace was imprisoned, while the personified War was leading. Trygaeus, the comic hero, feeds a giant dung beetle with excrement, intending on flying on it to Olympus, so as to ask the gods to account for their situation. After many occurrences, the chorus is summoned to help freeing the goddess Peace. When the chorus enters the scene, the sung verbs indicate the choreography to be performed[8]: "Come hither

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1999.01.0026> (Available on August, 2017).

[8] The translation of Peace we use here are from Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (1938) and

all! (χώρει) – quick, quick! hasten to the rescue! All peoples of Greece, now is the time or never, for you to help each other. (Aristophanes, Peace, 301-302).

The chorus directs their own entering movement. The use of χώρει in the present and in the imperative indicates the orienting tone to scenic movements.

By the end of the play, Trygaeus frees Peace, marries Opora, who symbolizes abundant harvest, and re-establishes idyllic order in town.

After Trygaeus and Opora's wedding, on the exiting scene, the chorus says: "But come, comrades, we who are in the first row, let us pick up the bridegroom and carry him in triumph [...]" (Aristophanes, Peace, 1340-1344) which indicates a forthcoming action. The text in Greek even includes an onomatopoeia, ὕὕὕὕ, indicating the effort that the chorus had to make to lift Trygaeus, as shown in the second line of the Greek text: "ἀλλ᾽ ἀράμενοι φέρωμεν/ ὕὕὕὕ οἱ προτεταγμένοι/ τὸν νυμφίον ὦνδρες." (Aristophanes, Peace, 1340-1344).

Another example can be found in "Lysistrata," which we believe to be one of the most well-known of Aristophanes' plays. In this piece of comedy, women from all over Greece go on a sex strike so their husbands vote for peace on the deliberative assemblies.

By the end of the play, we have a bustling dancing scene that satirizes a Laconian dance. The Laconian Ambassador and the Athenian Ambassador, together with the chorus, dance. In that moment, the chant of the chorus refers to the performed moves:

> Io Paieon, Io, cry—
> For victory, leap! Attained by me, leap! Euoi Euoi Euai Euai! (Aristophanes, Lysistrata, 1291-1294).[9]

The last example I offer is in "The Frogs."

The chorus of initiates in "The Frogs" also produces lines that indicate the performed action in the orchestra by saying:

> Each one boldly marches to the flowery meadows and glens,
> stamping in time, jesting, joking and mocking;
> we've breakfasted enough.
> But onward now and nobly extol The Saving goddess,
> as you chant the melody,
> she who claims to save our land as the seasons pass,
> even against Thorycion's will. (Aristophanes, The Frogs, 372-383).[10]

While singing, the chorus narrates the action performed in scene.

Besides this indication of movement, the parodos from "The Frogs" predicts lines that announce what is going to be sung next. The leader of the chorus says: "Come now, sing a different strain of hymn to the harvest queen, the goddess Demeter, gracing her with sacred airs" (Aristophanes, The Frogs, 382-384) and, by doing so, the chant about the goddess is anticipated. Again, on verse 395, the leader of the chorus indicates the verses that should be sung next: "Now then! Summon the god of the hour with your songs, the partner of this dance of ours" (Aristophanes, The Frogs, 395-396) and, soon after this line, the chorus sings to Iacchus.

This kind of prediction seems to be a mnemonic help to the chorus itself about the sequence of verses that will be sung.

When we read those verses, they make us imagine how the chorus was moved by them. However, at the moment of performance, when the audience understands the play by visual and auditory registers, the lines serve two purposes: to indicate to the chorus their actions and to indicate to the public the actions performed in the orchestra.

The importance of these kinds of lines at the moment of action, in the relation between audience and performers, resides on the fact that such an extensive audience needs narrative indications to follow the orchestra's movements. When the leader of the chorus from "The Frogs" announces, for example, that the chorus will sing in honor of Demeter, it gives a chance to a possible careless spectator to pay attention to what will be sung, and enjoy the esthetic experience that is being offered.

There are many different elements in a performance that can be inferred from comedy texts. The excerpts from these comedies were examples of one element out of many. However, many other performance contents can be quoted.

Another performative element, which we will explore now, is also of extreme importance to warrant audience's reception.

The use of the choir to direct spectators' attention

Comparison between theatrical events in ancient Greece and huge pop concerts or sport competitions is justified due to the enormousness of the theatrical feasts in Athens in the 5th century B.C. Below, taken from the book "Greek Architecture" (Lawrence, 1998, p. 207) is the panoramic picture of the theater

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can be found at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text: 1999.01.0038> (Available on August, 2017).

[9] Translation of Lysistrata by Jack Lindsay (1926), found at <http://www.perseus. tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0242> (Available on August, 2017).

[10] Translation of The Frogs by Matthew Dillon, found at <

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http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1919.01.0032> (Available on August, 2017).

Epidaurus, the most preserved antique. It gives us an idea of the dimension of the building and makes it evident how spectators' perception might vary according to the place occupied by them on the bleachers or *theatron*.

By observing Figure 1, it is clearly seen that the elements presented in the orchestra are not perceived with details by spectators. An actor alone in play becomes tiny from the perspective of a spectator who watches the play at a distance. Besides this, the panoramic view not only of the orchestra, but from the whole landscape that surrounds the theater is really dispersive, for there are many visual elements competing for attention. In this spatial dimension and profusion of elements that visually compete with the scene presented by the tragedy or comedy, it is really important to use some big resources, such as masks and attention-calling clothing. The chorus, in a genre that presents such spatial condition, has an inconstant value, because the quantity of people integrated in the chorus is also one of the elements of capital importance to draw the attention of spectators. That is because the chorus' body, composed by 15 people (in the case of tragedy) or 24 (in the case of comedy), will hardly ever go unnoticed, regardless of the place from which the spectator is watching the performance.

Figure 1. Epidauro's Theater (Lawrence, 1998, p. 207).

Concerning the choir of Aristophanes' comedies, besides the number of choir members, visual characterization is an outstanding factor that attracts spectators' attention. Choir's descriptions in "The Clouds", "The Birds", or "The Wasps", indicate how ostentatious those pieces of clothing were.

Figure 2 of Epidauro's Theater, published in "Images of the Greek Theatre" (Green & Handley, 1995, p. 59), lets us take as reference the photographer's point of view. From the photographer's perspective, we can affirm that observing small details of the actors in the center of the orchestra was improbable; it is only possible to

see one of the two parodos. That indicates that each spectator had a partial view of the orchestra.

Figure 2. Epidaurus's Theater (Green & Handley, 1995, p. 59).

The affirmations do not change in view of Figure 3, depicting Dionysus' Theater, in Athens. Even though this building is not as preserved as the last one, we can easily spot its enormous dimension, as it can be observed on the photo published by Grenn and Handley (1995, p. 35)[11]:

Figure 3. Dionysus' Theater in Athens (Green & Handley, 1995, p. 35).

Besides, despite any perfection related to acoustics, the distance between spectators and the orchestra, the 15,000 people or more crowded in the same place, natural sounds, possible movements of trees, and the passaging of birds disturb the decoding of sounds coming from the orchestra. For this reason, we agree
with Wiles (2000) when while dealing with the scale problems of Dionysus' theater he says there should be voice preparation for actors and choir to speak and sing.

The fact is that considerations about distance are

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[11] It is known that the theatrical feasts did not happen in this same building. It is inferred that in Aristophanes' time the structure was made of wood. But we are considering that the spatial shape of the theater of the V century was not so different from the one pictured on Figure 2.

fundamental for us when analyzing the imagery and use of the body (Wiles, 2000). In order to be perceived, every movement should be clear, simple and rigorous. Therefore, we can conclude that the relation between orchestra, with its extensive space, and the *theatron,* implies some specificities on play construction.

Considering the gigantic space where tragedy and comedy were performed, the choir has its importance reaffirmed, for it works as an element which directs the spectators' vision to one or another side of the orchestra.

> The group of the chorus is an ingenious instrument to direct attention to different parts of an empty space, and had a similar function to modern scenic lightning. (Wiles, 2000, p. 110-112).

Dionysus Theater's spatial shape implies the entrance of a character can be seen in different moments by spectators.

In the parodo of "The Clouds," there is a comic exploration of this spatial characteristic of ancient theaters. The cloud chorus comes in the direction of Estrepisiades and, even though the chorus' lines announcing the coming of the clouds are being sang, he does not see it. Socrates indicates the places Estrepisiades has to look at, and says the presence of the clouds were obvious.
Let us take a look at the scene:

> CHORUS singing: Eternal Clouds, let us appear; let us arise from the roaring depths of Ocean, our father; let us fly towards the lofty mountains, spread our damp wings over their forest-laden summits, whence we will dominate the distant valleys, the harvest fed by the sacred earth, the murmur of the divine streams and the resounding waves of the sea, which the unwearying orb lights up with its glittering beams. But let us shake off the rainy fogs, which hide our immortal beauty and sweep the earth from afar with our gaze.
> SOCRATES: Oh, venerated goddesses, yes, you are answering my call!
> To STREPSIADES. Did you hear their voices mingling with the awful growling of the thunder?
> STREPSIADES: Oh! adorable Clouds, I revere you and I too am going to let off my thunder, so greatly has your own affrighted me.
> He farts.
> Faith! whether permitted or not, I must, I must crap!
> SOCRATES: No scoffing; do not copy those damned comic poets. Come, silence! a numerous host of goddesses approaches with songs.
> CHORUS singing: Virgins, who pour forth the rains, let us move toward Attica, the rich country of Pallas, the home of the brave; let us visit the dear land of Cecrops, where the secret rites are celebrated, where the mysterious sanctuary flies open to the initiate.... What victims are offered there to the deities of heaven! What glorious temples! What statues! What holy prayers to the rulers of Olympus! At every season nothing but sacred festivals, garlanded victims, is to be seen. Then Spring brings round again the joyous feasts of Dionysus, the harmonious contests of the choruses and

the serious melodies of the flute.
> STREPSIADES: By Zeus! Tell me, Socrates, I pray you, who are these women, whose language is so solemn; can they be demi-goddesses?
> SOCRATES: Not at all. They are the Clouds of heaven, great goddesses for the lazy; to them we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity.
> STREPSIADES: Ah! that was why, as I listened to them, my mind spread out its wings; it burns to babble about trifles, to maintain worthless arguments, to voice its petty reasons, to contradict, to tease some opponent. But are they not going to show themselves? I should like to see them, were it possible.
> SOCRATES: Well, look this way in the direction of Parnes; I already see those who are slowly descending.
> STREPSIADES: But where, where? Show them to me.
> SOCRATES: They are advancing in a throng, following an oblique path across the dales and thickets.
> STREPSIADES: Strange! I can see nothing.
> SOCRATES: There, close to the entrance.
> STREPSIADES: Hardly, if at all, can I distinguish them.
> SOCRATES: You must see them clearly now, unless your eyes are filled with gum as thick as pumpkins.
> STREPSIADES: Aye, undoubtedly! Oh! the venerable goddesses! Why, they fill up the entire stage.
> (Aristophanes, "The Clouds," 275-328)[12]

This scene is a comic exploration of an event that used to frequently happen between spectators. It is probable that people listened to the chants but could not see where they came from.

Thus, at this ample space, it was necessary the comediographer used a mechanism that would enable the reception of the plot by spectators.

The Acharnians' parado is also an example of how the chorus can direct audience's attention to the action of a character.

Diceopolis, hero of the comedy, makes a particular peace agreement with the Spartans. The chorus, playing the role of citizens of Arcane who had fought the Battle of Marathon, when realized this attitude, enters the scene looking for the traitor of Athens' people. After performing his entrance, the coryphaeus says:

> Quiet everyone. You are here to listen, my lords, this invitation to silence? There is the one we are looking for, there he is. Let us go, go away from here. It is to make a sacrifice, to the wealthy, sacrifices full of crowns, feasts in every season, and, when it comes to everyone here. It is to make a sacrifice, as it seems, that it is worth to go out our homes. (Aristophanes, Acarnenses, p. 239-241).

If we have just seen the group of Acharnians enter the scene looking for someone considered to be a fugitive, and the chorus finds that person, shouldn't the approach be immediate? In our opinion, it should. But the chorus transfers the focus of attention, which was centered on itself due

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[12] Translation of The Frogs by Thomas Bushnell, BSG, found at http://classics.mit.edu/Aristophanes/clouds.html; (Available on October, 2017).

to its movement when entering the scene and due to the huge collective body of the chorus, to Diceopolis and his family that comes back to the orchestra in procession.

Therefore, the chorus works indicating the focus of the comedy. That is, indicating to spectators that, at a certain moment of the plot, it is important to pay attention to a specific character or line.

Not only in the *agon* or *parodo* is necessary to direct the attention of spectators. In other sections of comedy, the chorus also performs this function. The drawing effect that the chorus causes when making spectators look at a specific part of the scene is essential to the balance and building of the general meaning of the comedy. This is because it prevents the key action steps from being unnoticed by the public.

On verses 566 and 567 of "Acarnenses," the chorus evokes a character to enter the scene: "Oh! Lamachus, whose glance flashes lightning, whose plume petrifies thy foes, help!" (Aristophanes, Acarnenses, 566-567).[13] By summoning Lamachus, the public is prevented from an important element to occupy a place in the orchestra.

Those lines of the chorus show us that spectators of ancient theater needed, due to the size of the orchestra (100 meters, according to Wiles, 2000, p. 109), something to indicate them where the facts that are most important to the comprehension of the play are. The chorus often plays this role.

In the beginning of this article, we compared this device used by Aristophanes in his 5th century B.C. comedies to the device of focalization, defined by Pavis as "the perseverance of the author on an action through a certain point of view to emphasize its importance." (Pavis, 1999, p. 170-171)[14]. Pavis also points out that focalization elects a point of view and subordinates the other elements that were not focalized, influencing the points of view of some characters, the author and spectators.

The use of this Aristophanes' device such as 'The use of the chorus to direct spectators' attention" seems to us very similar to focalization in modern theater. The transcription of part of an entry from "The Dictionary of Theater" by Patrice Pavis may reinforce this similarity:

> [...] On scene, focalization is often performed consciously by using a floodlight directed to a character or a place to call the attention by a closing effect. This closing, a technique borrowed from cinema, is not necessarily performed by a lighting effect. The glazing game between actors or a scenic element, or the effect of "evincing", also produces this effect. It is the enunciation of staging that ensures the value of a moment or place of the

representation. (Pavis, 1999, p. 171)[15]

Therefore, we consider that in Greek comedies, on scenes as the ones quoted above, for example, the comedy "Acarnenses," the chorus performs the function of focalization through enunciation and staging of entrance or exit of a character, or even by pointing out a scenic element.

In cinema, this targeting is known as frame, an English term that indicates a fixed, still picture that is part of a sequence of other pictures that played together in a roll gives the impression of movement, a strategy used so that spectators only see what the director wants them to see. In theater, complete isolation is not possible, it does not matter how hard the chorus tries to direct the look of the public ant tries to focus it on a specific point. The spectator has all the orchestra, and landscape surrounding him or her, so attention wanders are normal.

But we cannot ignore that there is an effort by Aristophanes to ensure the reception of the play by spectators through this strategy. The chorus is used as a tool to focalize the public's attention to important frames of the comedy.

Final considerations

Those two strategies used by Aristophanes in his comedies are only examples of how we can approach his comedies through the theory of scenic performance.

When we observe Aristophanes' comedies, paying attention to the structural elements that enable scenic realization, we notice how Aristophanes foresaw, while working on the production of the play, strategies to ensure the perfect work of the play of that time. Nowadays, they are seen by us as generic characteristics of ancient Greek comedy.

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