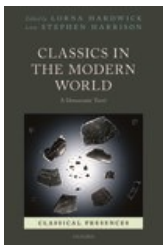

Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn?

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199673926.001.0001

Published: 31 October 2013 **Online ISBN:** 9780191760570 **Print ISBN:** 9780199673926

CHAPTER

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16 Aristophanic Performance as an All-inclusive Event: Audience Participation and Celebration in the Modern Staging of Aristophanic Comedy

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199673926.003.0016 Pages 213–225

Published: October 2013

Abstract

In addressing the issue of classical reception in modern performance, this chapter considers the way in which Greek director Karolos Koun has dealt with the systematic opportunities the Aristophanic plays provide for audience participation and improvization. These occur through the comic characters' frequent aside remarks, the parabasis, and recurrent celebratory rituals. The democratic principle of audience participation, which is inherent in Aristophanic comedy, seems particularly relevant to the entire notion of 'the democratic turn' in classical receptions by allowing both performers and audiences to take an active role in the performance experience of re-inventing the classical play. Although some may argue that in Aristophanic comedy many verbal remarks or ancient festive occasions seem far removed from the world of the spectator in order to prompt an exciting audience response, the reality of the performance might suggest otherwise. In the realm of performance, there are many parameters that shape the meaning of the play and the issue of updating topical references may in fact seem irrelevant when it comes to conveying something of Aristophanic comedy's vitality and cohesive function, which brings people together.

Keywords: Aristophanes, audience, participation, democratic, celebration

Subject: Classical Literature, Classical Philosophy, Classical Reception

Series: Classical Presences

Collection: Oxford Scholarship Online

1. Introduction

Max Reinhardt once stated that in the best theatre:

> ...the most important players are sitting in the auditorium...The moment when one who creates receives at the same time and the receiver becomes one who creates, is the moment when the precious and incomparable secret of theatre is born. (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 47)

In his attempt to realize a new people's theatre, a theatre for the masses, Reinhardt strove to look for audiences that would be able to join forces with the actors and, thus, create performance as a shared experience and festive event. At the beginning of the twentieth century Reinhardt experimented with Greek tragedy (*Oedipus Rex*, 1910; *Oresteia*, 1911) not only because of the high esteem shown to ancient Greek culture by all Europeans but most importantly because Greek theatre was what he defined as people's theatre, in which all citizens were allowed and expected to participate.

Reinhardt's festive concept of theatre embraces Athenian democracy's key principle of participation. Athens was a participatory, not representative democracy: its key characteristic was that citizens had direct access to political power on a day to day basis and were equal under the law (*isonomia*). One of its distinctive features was the systematic opportunities it offered for citizen participation and theatre was no exception to this. Like democracy, theatre was an embodied practice and a dynamic process subject to change in which all participants were actively engaged.

p. 214 To fully appreciate the participatory nature of Greek theatre it is essential to break down the distinction between dramatic text and ritual context and view the ancient theatrical performance as being part of a broader festival. The fact that the dramatic competitions were part of a wider religious and civic event that was dedicated to Dionysus meant that the function of actors and spectators was not only theatrical. They were also active participants in a religious and political ritual. More specifically, the competitive nature of the event, which allowed a selected body of spectators to cast a vote in order to support their favourite poet and at a later stage their favourite actor, turned theatre into a political affair. The theatrical plays were judged by ten citizens, each one selected from one of the ten tribes of Athens. These then would cast their votes into an urn, and five of the votes were drawn out at random to avoid corruption having an undue influence on the result. The whole process demonstrates how the democratic procedure of voting was implemented in theatre to secure the active involvement of the 'polis'. But the active involvement of the audience did not stop there. Theatre spectators would have also expressed their critical voice in a more spontaneous manner through cheering or voicing their disapproval during the performance. The shape and size of the theatrical space would have contributed towards the creation of an interactive environment. Spectators were able to view in broad daylight not only the stage action but also their fellow citizens' reaction to the play allowing for mass responses to emerge. Peter Arnott tells us how in the early days of theatre a favourite way of disapproval was for the audience to drum their heels against the benches drawing our attention to the effect this action would have had in a theatre with a large audience and excellent acoustics (Arnott 1991: 6). It is obvious that the temperament and habits of the audience helped shape the performance event.

On a dramatic level, the comic *parabasis* illustrates the essence of participation and active spectatorship in Greek theatre by creating the opportunity for actors to engage the audience directly into the stage action, blurring in this way the distinction between stage and auditorium. In tragedy, although the fictive cosmos of the play may seem more closed, in performance practice there must have been many instances where the distinction between the dramatic and non-dramatic worlds would have also been blurred when viewing the ritual and political action of the play in relation to the wider festival context. When, for example, the Chorus in *Oedipus the King* asks after Jokasta's impiety 'Why should I dance and sing?' (lines 894–5) the spectators would have been able to discern the Chorus' dual status. The ancient theatrical Chorus were not only dancers with a dramatic purpose but also Athenian citizens who were selected by the *chorêgos* (leader of the Chorus) to dance in a dramatic competition in order to fulfil their religious and political duties. The *chorêgos* was a wealthy Athenian who sponsored and trained the Chorus as a form of taxation towards the city of Athens. It is most
p. 215 likely that he would have recruited the Chorus from his own local community (*demos*) based on ↳ their skills.

It is also possible that he was able to perform live on stage as Chorus leader. The presence of the Chorus reflects more than any other performance element the participatory nature of the theatrical event and also the group solidarity of the anonymous crowd, who despite their subtle differences are united through their identity and ritual means of expression (dance, song) on both a dramatic and non-dramatic level.

Greek theatre was a site that united through dividing, by displaying diverse political viewpoints through a common and familiar ritual language. The various philosophical viewpoints expressed by the dramatic characters created interesting formal debates (*agon*) that would challenge the minds of the audience in true democratic fashion and in line with the competitive nature of the event. At the same time, the theatrical event fostered a community spirit through performative means (ritual dances, songs, and so on) that were directly linked to the Athenian political and religious tradition. The democratic principles of diversity and equality go hand in hand in ancient Greek theatre, with the latter being deeply relevant to the ritual aspect of theatre and the opportunity it offers for audience participation. It is on this principle of equality through active audience participation that I shall focus my analysis when discussing the work of Greek theatre director Karolos Koun (1908–87). The latter appreciated the unifying power of Greek theatre making it one of his main targets in his performance of the comedy *Peace.*

2. Koun's Vision for a Festive and Live Aristophanes

Koun's performance of Aristophanes' *Peace* opened at the theatre of Herodes Atticus in Athens with the intention of recreating a real festival in the theatre for performers and audience alike. Having already staged four comedies and three tragedies, amongst them his monumental performances of Aristophanes' *Birds* (1959) and Aeschylus' *Persians* (1965), Greek director Koun mounted his production with a vast experience in the staging of Greek theatre and a clear vision on how this should happen. Koun was the founder of the Art Theatre in Greece and one of the country's most prominent and influential theatre directors. His repertoire of ancient Greek drama revivals includes a large range of plays starting with his early amateur productions at the American college in Athens (*Wealth* and *Birds*, 1936) and finishing with his last production of *Women at Thesmophoria* (1985). His productions have included *Wealth* (1956), the monumental performances of *Birds* (1959, 1962), *Frogs* (1966), *Lysistrata* (1969), *Oedipus* (1969), *Acharnians* (1976), *Peace* (1977), *Bacchae* (1977), and *Oresteia*
p. 216 (1981, 1982). Most of Koun's ↳ productions have been re-staged at numerous Greek and international festivals during his career as well as after his death.[1]

Aristophanes' theatre was of particular interest to Koun because of its celebratory spirit and it was this festive spirit he wished to revitalize in his modern Aristophanic productions. In Greece, the customary presentation of ancient drama in large ancient open-air theatres was not irrelevant to the director's priority to capture the atmosphere of a traditional celebration. As he characteristically noted:

> The open theatre demands the creation of an atmosphere…suitable for large spaces with the festive spirit of great festivals and celebrations. (Koun 1987: 29)

Koun trusted in the value of a live popular language that would revive the spirit of the ancient plays, producing an experience that could engage his present-day audience. In his view, the oral practices of the changeless rural environment would allow for the effective communication of the ritual dimension of the plays through the creative appropriation of folk customs, sounds, rhythms, colours, and songs. As he declared in the early stages of his career:

> Our aim is to create a stage with a Greek tradition…We shall be guided by the customs and images that one can still find in Greece as symbols of the spirit and life of modern times…Through these customs and images we shall approach Greek drama. (cited in Varakis 2007: 179)

Koun's vision must be seen as part of a wider tendency that was developing in Greece in the 1930s that strived to understand ancient Greek culture through live forms of the present instead of literary studies. Characteristic is the remark of Greek poet George Seferis:

> The Greek cultural heritage is so vast that no one really knows who is going to be called to carry out its designs in practice. Anyone who takes the trouble to look into this endless adventure will learn a lesson of great value. Our folk song can, in the sensitivity of one and the same person, throw fresh light on Homer and fill in the meaning of Aeschylus. (Seferis 1982: 8)

Seferis, who belonged to the Greek modernist movement that later would be recognized as the 'Generation of the Thirties', believed that there was a distinction to be made between people who wished to interpret ancient traditions through academic studies and foreign sources and those who looked within their own land and live traditions to discover the vitality of ancient culture.[2] These folk traditions were made by the people and for the people.

p. 217 Seferis' and Koun's approach to ancient Greek culture reflected a shift from textual analysis and individual study to performance practice and collective understanding. By appreciating Greek culture as an embodied practice instead of a collection of lifeless texts and dead artefacts, they were allowing themselves to see the past through live traditions of the present. All people were, thus, able to understand the past from an experiential and collective perspective.[3]

3. A Case Study: Koun's *Peace*

This shift is most evident in Koun's production of *Peace* that was brought to life through the recreation of a folk festival on stage. More than in any other of his Aristophanic productions, Koun sought to eliminate the barrier between the stage and the auditorium with the central character Trygaeus regularly moving back and forth from stage to auditorium.

As reviewer Varopoulou noted:

> The comic characters with their grotesque and overtly distorted appearances, revelry dances and loud voices break the barrier between the stage and the auditorium in order to include the audience in the celebration. (*Auge*, 29 July 1977)

Similarly to Reinhardt, Koun proceeded from the assumption that theatre as a festive event could only come into being when both parties, performers and spectators, joined forces. The Aristophanic plays provided a plethora of opportunities for this to happen through the comic character's frequent aside remarks, the *parabasis*, and recurrent celebratory rituals. Such theatrical occurrences affected the audience's perception of the comedy by making them an active ingredient of the performance.

As he stated with reference to his production of *Peace*:

> Our objective is to achieve the active involvement of the audience within the celebration that the poet brought to the stage, because that is how the people of Classical Greece perceived and staged their
> p. 218 plays. This is why we try to make use ↳ of all the appropriate situations of the text in order to create a direct contact between the performers and the audience. When the scene encourages something like this to happen, we 'spray' the spectators with wheat or water. And at the end of the play we throw sweets and cake to the audience. Just like Dario Fo and modern popular theatre I create an intimate relation with my audience. We also throw to the spectators small pieces of paper with the word Peace spelled on it in all languages. This is our objective. We wish to involve the audience in the creative

> process. This direct contact is essential in order for the spectators to receive the message of Peace. (cited in Varakis 2007: 190)

The play *Peace* was particularly appropriate for Koun's vision of a festive theatre, as audience participation and celebratory events were a frequent and an essential aspect of the comedy. As Niall Slater has argued in his study on metatheatre in Aristophanes' comedy, the play constantly seeks to focus attention on the here and now, meaning the theatre itself, which in ancient times would have included the broader festival and celebratory context (Slater 2002: 131). Gonda Van Steen also brings the participatory nature of Aristophanic comedy to the centre of her seminal study *Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece* by describing audiences as 'spect-actors', highlighting from the very beginning of her book the open-endedness of each modern Greek performance.[4]

In Koun's performance of *Peace*, the main protagonist, Trygaeus, continuously strived to include the audience. When, for example, Trygaeus hands Theoria over to a *prytanis* sitting in the first row, with clear instructions that Peace is then to be celebrated by Dionysiac sex after the performance, stage and audience are physically united. In Koun's re-staging of *Peace* in 1989 the members of the Chorus chose a famous Greek politician to bring into the performance. As the reviewer of the time, Katemertzi, describes:

> At some point in the performance and when according to the text the chorus was pulling the ropes to free Peace from the cave, one of the chorus members gave the rope to Antonis Tritsis, the only official who happened to be in the auditorium…in order to free Peace. The happening 'Tritsis' was continued when Theoria (Showtime), the daughter of Peace sat on the politician's lap. Trygaeus then found the opportunity to shout at him 'If you were to bring an issue to parliament you wouldn't have shown such eagerness.' (*Ta Nea*, 12 August 1989)

The event was integrated in the play creating an instant response in the audience, who were attracted by the
p. 219 reactions and responses of their real-life ↳ politician. The fictional world of the play had now entered the sphere of reality, in the exact same way it would have happened when performed in its original context. The topical nature of the comedy was preserved not by updating the text but through allowing the performance to develop spontaneously in its natural surroundings.[5] It is noteworthy that in modern Greece officials normally sit in the front rows of the open-air theatre producing similar performance conditions to those that would have existed in the ancient performance. The spectator's involvement, as in an ancient Aristophanic performance, signalled the singularity but also vulnerability of the event. Similarly, for what the reviewer correctly characterized as a 'happening', the spectator was given a task, 'to pull the rope'. Key features of 'happenings', amongst others, are to give tasks to spectators in order to encourage them to join the action. This serves as a basis for generating unpredictable outcomes (Berghaus 2005: 87). This was also true for other natural and often unpredictable elements that could have been included in the performance event due to the outdoor nature of the theatre. In outdoor environments directors and actors are no longer in full control of the event, making it arguably much more 'democratic'. In such instances the traditional idea of theatre that assumes a closed fictive cosmos is challenged.

From a contemporary perspective, playing with the real has become a widespread practice of theatre. As Hans Lehmann tells us, in post-dramatic theatre this practice is used not only as a political provocation but also as a key theme of the theatrical performance, questioning in this way the role of ethics within it.[6] This is especially true for performances that include actions of a more violent nature.[7] One must assume that in Koun's performance the irruption of the real was never questioned on ethical grounds due to the festive nature of the event. For example, the action of throwing and sprinkling audience and Chorus members with grains of barley and water was a characteristic example of audience participation noted in the play and realized in Koun's performance. These natural elements not only surrounded the audience but also, in a way, invaded their body. The people who got wet were affected bodily making the spectator and performer much more aware of their
p. 220 physical presence by experiencing the performance through their senses. ↳ However, audience and

performers did not seem (or at least there is no recorded evidence of this) to object to such intrusive actions because of the wider celebratory context of the event.

In the finale of the comedy the invocation of food and wine was persistent and culminated in the final line, an invitation to the audience to join in the feasting and celebrations, as the Chorus dances off. This is the point of the comedy where audience and performers merge into one. In Koun's performance the festive atmosphere created in the finale dominated over any kind of symbolic meaning and spectators were asked to experience and contribute towards the creation of a celebration within a community spirit.[8] The so-called playtext had finished, the final line uttered, but the performance of Aristophanes continued until the celebration came to an end. This was no longer dependent on the text but on the gradual fading out of the celebratory atmosphere, which was brought about by the interplay of various performance elements, including the bodies of the participants. In Koun's production this was the climax and most powerful moment of the entire performance, and it is to this moment that most reviewers refer.

It is clear from the aforementioned examples that Koun's *Peace* was not perceived as an ancient text with a prescribed meaning to be communicated to a receiver, but as a festive event made up by all its participants in which meaning was constantly subject to change. The spectators were no longer conceived purely as distant or passive empathetic observers of the onstage actions, or as intellectual decipherers of a political message formulated by the actions of the performers. By appreciating Greek theatre as an embodied practice Koun realized that the text is only one element in the performance event and, if one is to judge from various critical reviews, not the most important. Eleni Varopoulou, a Greek reviewer and academic, who overall was favourable towards Koun's scenic choices, noted that the celebratory side of the play was overemphasized at the expense of the political aspect of the comedy whilst for another reviewer the noisy and highly physical approach, especially in the first part of the play, was frustrating as it disallowed him to follow the text and dialogue.[9] K.
p. 221 Gergosopoulos, a famous theatre reviewer ↳ and philologist, stated in dismay that 'Aristophanes was left in the background' (*To Vema*, 14 September 1977), by which he meant the text. The performance of Aristophanes was for most Greek reviewers of the time equated with the playtext, or at least had to serve the meaning of the text. They tended to question the production's relationship to the literary play and observed that the performance worked more on the senses of the spectators.

But, for Koun, Aristophanic comedy was not only a representation or expression of something that exists in the text but something that is brought forth by the actions, perceptions, and responses of both actors and spectators alike. For this reason each performance had the potential to become a unique and important community-building event, highly democratic in its involvement of both spectator and performers. In fact Koun's inspiration, as already mentioned, came from live rural festivals, not academic studies. He turned towards the Greek people's common traditions and heritage, which in his view emerged from Greece's natural surroundings, in order to establish an emotional connection between Aristophanes and the modern Greek audiences but also as a way of bonding the participants. In this respect Aristophanes was experienced as an event that essentially belonged to and was created by the Greek people for the Greek people. The celebratory atmosphere created a community spirit in which all participants were engaged in the process of re-inventing Greek theatre.[10] The elements that contributed to this atmosphere, such as the sounds, voices, music, dances, masks, and costumes, worked on the senses rather than the intellect, binding performers and spectators together. The play's overt message about inclusiveness and peace was already implicit in Koun's performance, which was designed to equalize participants. Sharing in collective laughter and dancing and singing to the sound of folk tunes were of great importance in achieving this. Ian Ruffell, in his article on 'audience and emotion' with reference to comedy, highlights the social dimension to the experience of laughter noting how the phenomenon of laughter can be contagious and so allow for a cohesive audience response (2008: 48). The same could be argued for dancing and singing.

By shifting the emphasis from text to performance, the process of re-inventing the classical plays became much more inclusive as it allowed audiences and performers to contribute towards the creation of meaning

through their own imaginative power, collective identity, and personal experiences. Even though one could
p. 222 argue that Koun's Aristophanic performance was ↳ inclusive only for those who were immersed in modern Greek culture due to its culture-specific forms and images but also direct calls that are part of the text, such as 'Men of Greece' when Trygaeus calls the Chorus to help him rescue Peace, the impact was undoubtedly felt by all. It is noteworthy that the message of peace that was thrown to the audience in the finale via coloured leaflets was written in all languages reflecting the wider objective of the performance, which was for all audiences, no matter their gender or nationality, to receive the message of peace. The masks and costumes were also inspired by a variety of influences (folk festivals, folk reliefs, popular religious wooden sculptures, scarecrows, and puppets) that stressed the surreal atmosphere of the play without distancing it from its rural nature (Varakis 2003: 251). Through strong visual and aural elements such as bright colours, distorted images, and loud sounds, but also through inviting people to join in the final festive celebration of the performance, audiences entered what Fischer-Lichte calls 'a temporary theatrical community'. As Fischer-Lichte explains, such a community:

> exists throughout the course of the performance and dissolves at its latest at the very end…It is a community which is not based on common beliefs and shared ideologies—not even on shared meanings; it can do without them. For it comes into being through performative means. The performance does not force them [audiences] into a common confession; instead it allows for shared experiences. (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 58)

Although Koun's performance, unlike Fischer-Lichte's description, was formed, as it would have been in ancient Greece, on the basis of common beliefs and shared ideologies, it nonetheless achieved the creation of a performance community based on shared experiences through performative means. People who did not understand the translation, or fully appreciate the folk tunes and celebratory dances of the performance, could still experience the festive and uplifting atmosphere and were invited to participate in and contribute to the celebration in their own way. One must assume that in ancient Greek theatre the foreigners who were invited to see the performance would have also appreciated the dynamic elements of the ancient performance in a similar fashion.

As a Greek spectator who witnessed the re-staging of *Peace* in 1989, I would argue that the performance was all-inclusive for the reasons given here, but served an additional function for Greeks in that its community-building power lasted beyond the duration of the performance by strengthening a sense of cultural identity and belonging.

It is important at this stage to consider the wider political context of the performances in question. The issue of identity would have been a particularly pressing problem in *Peace*'s initial staging as it was presented in the
p. 223 difficult times of Greece's democratization process that followed the fall of the junta in ↳ 1974. When the comedy was performed, Koun had already staged his 1976 *Acharnians* in which he introduced his new aesthetic approach where rural images and folk traditions from the countryside were used to interpret Aristophanes' two comedies that had a Chorus of farmers (*Acharnians* and *Peace*). These, according to Koun, were Aristophanes' 'agricultural' comedies. His remarks in a 1978 interview, only a year after *Peace*'s initial staging and during its 1978 re-staging at Epidauros, are characteristic. In response to the question of whether that period of time created the appropriate conditions for unity amongst the Greek people Koun responded:

> Whilst we were united just after the fall of the junta, having gone through a common fight, we were full of hope. Today we are not. Collaboration is nearly impossible. People that should have been allies, are in conflict which makes you want to distance yourself. In such an atmosphere of conflict…it is difficult to create. Everything is controlled by certain circles of people. (Koun 1981: 73)

The issue was also important in the 1989 re-staging of the comedy. All opposition parties called for 'cleansing' in the June 1989 election, following a series of scandals and revelation of political corruption. As a result of the elections, Greece saw the first coalition government between two ideologically opposite political parties, the

Conservative Government of New Democracy and the two left-wing parties, the Communist Party of Greece and *Synaspismos*. The coalition led to another broader coalition between all parties. This was short-lived, proving that a government of national unity was an impossible task. In the summer of 1989, Greece was also holding the second European parliament election since its entrance into the then European Economic Community in 1981. The concept of the European community, let alone the notion of being a European, was still very fresh in Greeks' minds and it could be argued that the re-staging of Koun's *Peace* could also be seen as part of Greece's wider desire to preserve the Greek cultural identity in a changing world.

In this context, the performance of *Peace* could be seen as having a positive impact by attempting to create a democratic spirit amongst its participants supportive of democracy and unity in which all voices, however diverse, must be heard. In these periods of crisis, as in Aristophanes' time, the building of a community feeling was of high importance in order to cope with political and social unrest. David Wiles tells us how the play *Frogs* was performed twice (405 and 404) at a time when Athens was at the brink of political collapse. He explains the desire of the Athenians to revive the comedy as relevant to its power to unite the citizens:

> Comedy created group solidarity by excluding deviant individuals, and citizen Aristophanes was an active builder of that solidarity. In *The Frogs,* audience members were reminded that tragedy had provoked not only their collective tears, but also their shared intellectual ferment. (Wiles 2011: 41)

p. 224 When viewed in its wider political context, it is obvious that Koun's performance is politically charged. In this respect the performance could be seen as an attempt to manipulate the masses in a positive or negative manner. Either way, Koun's festive performance would have had a political impact and, therefore, the director faces the risk of being described as the key manipulator. The fact that his performance was inspired by popular festivities did not make it less political as it could be argued that carnival events and folk celebrations could also be politically motivated, forcing participants into a false sense of freedom and temporary release.

What is, however, undeniable, when focusing on the performative level of the production, is that the performance itself, in the 1977, 1978, and 1989 re-stagings, allowed for maximum audience participation, eliminating in the finale the usual distinction that exists in the theatre between actors and audience, between fiction and reality. In his important study on post-dramatic theatre, Lehmann highlights how the real in theatre 'inevitably adheres to theatre' (Lehmann 2006: 101). In Koun's performance finale, as in many post-dramatic performances, the director placed the real on equal footing with the fictive, with the final celebration dominating over any kind of symbolic meaning, limiting in this way the control the director and performer hold over the event.

Although conflict and division could be seen as a highly desirable and positive thing in a democratic performance that could bring about change, the importance of equality is also a prerequisite for its existence. It is from this perspective of equality and opportunity for audience participation that Koun's *Peace* can be described as 'democratic' with a community-building power that developed beyond the controlled area of the stage. As Fischer-Lichte convincingly argues, 'in post-industrial societies this type of community may be welcomed as the most suitable since it does not restrict the individual's freedom and yet serves his/her need for communal experience' (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 257).

4. Conclusion

Understanding theatrical performance as something that happens between actors and spectators, as a dynamic process, is not a new concept and is in fact the basis of theatre studies as an academic discipline. At the turn of the twentieth century the idea was widespread among theatre reformers and theoreticians who, inspired by past theatre traditions, sought to redefine the meaning and essence of theatre (Reinhardt, Nietzche, Meyerhold, and Copeau). In Greece, Koun reflected this wider modernist tendency, especially through his approach towards
p. 225 Greek theatre. Exploring how this concept of ↳ theatre links to the notion of the 'democratic turn' in classical reception is of particular relevance to the wider rationale of this volume as it shows how classical playtexts can become part of a dynamic negotiation between past and present, between performers and spectators. This is a process that is constantly engaged in renewal.

Judgements on the play *Peace* by philologists have ranged widely, although, as Slater informs us, few would list it amongst Aristophanes' best plays. For those who witnessed Koun's performance of the comedy this judgement would perhaps seem rather unfair, as the qualities of the comedy lie not only in its textual virtues but also in its inherent potential to build a community spirit by involving both performers and audience in the creative process. In doing so, all participants can help bring forth and experience the benefits of peace, an essential prerequisite for democracy to function. As already mentioned in Section 1, Greek theatre was a site that united through dividing, by displaying diverse political viewpoints through a common and familiar ritual language. Theatre was responsible for bringing the citizens of Athens not only intellectually but also experientially closer to the political values of participatory democracy. Wiles, in his insightful volume *Theatre and Citizenship* (2011), advises the historian to see Aristophanes as an active citizen, a builder of solidarity who through his comedies strives to unite his audience. From this perspective it could be argued that Koun was able to become the modern equivalent of the ancient poet by understanding the play's essence not only in terms of aesthetics but also in terms of political function. In modern Greece the unifying aspect of ancient Greek comedy, as realized in Koun' s *Peace*, appeared particularly beneficial for resolving, even if only for the duration of the performance, the strong political divisions of the country. In Koun's performance, the celebrations of the ancient play were seen as an opportunity for all to celebrate the benefits of peace and, by extension, the value of theatre as a site that brings people together in a creative and democratic exchange.

Notes

1 For more on Koun's theoretical views and his approach to ancient Greek theatre see the comprehensive edition entitled *Karolos Koun*, also the edited collections Koun 1981, 1987.

2 For more on the 'Generation of the Thirties' see Vitti 1989; Van Steen 2000: 153–4. On Greek modernism see also Tziovas 1997.

3 The modernist tendency to understand theatre as an embodied practice, placing emphasis on the performance over the literary text, was reflected through the writings and practice of key theoreticians (Nietzsche, Max Hermann) and theatre practitioners (V. Meyerhold, J. Copeau, and M. Reinhardt) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fischer-Lichte (2005) observes how this perception of performance, especially Max Hermann's idea of theatre as a participatory and all-inclusive event, where the particular atmosphere that develops in a given space amongst the bodies of spectators and performers is more important than the fixed text, corresponds to later theories of performativity by philosophers such as John L. Austin and feminist Judith Butler.

4 'As revival comedy moves about the fertile grounds of stage dialectics, role playing and exchange and self-referentiality, it asserts that the plays are never predetermined or closed; instead they constitute collaborative projects, not final products, of performers, public, and participatory environment. Aristophanes' verbal, paraverbal and visual language through time offers its many recipients perks of richness…it posits again and again the poet's centrality to multiple circuits of meaning' (Van Steen 2000: 6).

5 The translation of Kostas Varnales did not update any topical references, with the exception of a few expressions, but tried to remain true to the content of the original.

6 Post-dramatic theatre is a term coined by Lehmann in order to relate the newer developments in theatre (transformation of theatrical modes of expression) to the past of dramatic theatre. As Lehmann notes: 'In postdramtic forms of theatre, staged text (if text is staged) is merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc., total composition' (Lehmann 2006: 46).

7 An example of the furore caused by the irruption of the real in performance can be seen in the production of *US* (1966) on the Vietnam war, staged by Peter Brook, when an apparently live butterfly was burnt on stage in full view of the audience.

8 As reviewer Katemertzi characteristically describes: 'For the finale nothing better than a hymn to Hymen, God of marriage, which thanks to the music of Christos Leontis, developed a celebratory tone. Coloured leaflets with the word Peace written on them in all languages were thrown to the audience and the performers who led the celebration with flowers on their heads were inviting the audience to join the dance and wider celebration. Many people responded to the call, amongst them the director Giorgos Michaelidis' (*Ta Nea*, 12 August 1989).

9 'By stressing the celebratory theme of the comedy Koun pushed the Dionysiac revelry to the extreme overshadowing the individual conflicts of the play, and the differentiation of the characters. The translation was not used to its maximum potential…The celebratory theme was so dominant that any other meanings emerging from the episodes were left in the background. This choice was supported by the imaginative and improvisational skills of the performers and their grotesque appearances' (Varopoulou in *Auge*, 29 July 1977). 'My reservation is related to the extremely noisy delivery of the episodes with its recurrent collective screams and very loud singing, drowning the language and making it very difficult to hear the words of the play' (Klara in *Vradyne*, 25 July 1977).

10 As Varopoulou noted in a lecture she gave in honour of Karolos Koun, 'Koun's view on the modernization of ancient comedy…is honest and…designed on the basis of a vibrant artistic exchange between theatre practitioners and modern spectators' (*Mesimvrini*, 16 July 1982).