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## ΠΕΡΙΕΧΟΜΕΝΑ / CONTENTS

IOANNIS M. KONSTANTAKOS Ancient Comedy and Iambic Poetry: Generic Relations and Character Depiction .....	1-45
ΜΙΧΑΛΗΣ ΚΑΡΔΑΜΙΤΣΗΣ Αίσχύλος, ἀναγνώστης τοῦ Ὀμήρου: Ἀπὸ τὴν ὀλολογὴ τῆς Εὐρύκλειας στὸ εἶχος τῆς Κλυταιμΐστρας .....	46-102
EDITH HALL Tragic Temporalities in Euripides' <i>Trojan Women</i> .....	103-117
DAVID KONSTAN Emotion and Abjection: Voices of Despair .....	118-126
ΑΓΙΣ ΜΑΡΙΝΗΣ Ἡ σκηνὴ τῆς Κασσάνδρας στις <i>Τρωάδες</i> : Τελετουργικὴ ἐπιτέλεση καὶ πολιτικὸ ὑπόβαθρο .....	127-150
C. W. MARSHALL Euripides' <i>Trojan Women</i> and the Stagecraft of Memory .....	151-180
ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ Ι. ΧΑΣΚΗΣ Οἱ θηβαϊκοὶ μῦθοι στὴν τραγωδίᾳ τοῦ 4ου αἰ. π.Χ. ....	181-205
ANTONIS K. PETRIDES ἡμεῖς δ' ἴομεν: Menander and Sophocles in Intertextual Dialogue ( <i>Dyskolos</i> and <i>Philoctetes</i> ) .....	206-225
DIMITRIOS KANELLAKIS <i>Lysistrata</i> Against the Greek Military Junta .....	226-250
HALLIE REBECCA MARSHALL Tony Harrison's <i>The Common Chorus</i> and Dramatic Trilogies .....	251-272

ANTONIS K. PETRIDES <i>Euripides, The Trojan Women: A Comic</i> by Rosanna Bruno and Anne Carson. A Survey .....	273-305
EFIMIA D. KARAKANTZA <i>Antigone Goes to School: Georgina Kakoudaki's Production</i> of the Sophoclean Play (2014) for Teenage Audiences .....	306-324
Θ. Κ. ΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ Γρηγόρης Μ. Σηφάκης (1935 – 2023) .....	325-332

DIMITRIOS KANELLAKIS

## *LYSISTRATA* AGAINST THE GREEK MILITARY JUNTA



**ABSTRACT:** After an overview of the reception of Aristophanes during the Colonels' Dictatorship in Greece (1967–1974), the paper focuses on George Zervoulakos' film *Lysistrata* (1972), to analyse its script, aesthetics, and politics. Particular emphasis is placed on the tricks employed vis-à-vis state censorship: the creators adapted the ancient text, manipulated the censored script, and orchestrated the spectacle (settings, costumes, acting, music and cinematics) in such a manner as to produce a *prima facie* carefree hippy musical which nevertheless parodies the dictatorial regime. Only this film, amidst the not-yet-rebellious atmosphere of 1972, adopts a rather pessimist tone (in contrast to the optimist call for resistance a year later, in Kambanellis' play *Our Grand Circus*).

**I**N 1972, amid the decaying years of the Military Junta in Greece (1967–1974), the first domestic cinematic production of an Aristophanic comedy was released.<sup>1</sup> It was an adaptation of *Lysistrata*, directed by George Zervoulakos, scripted by Yannis Negrepontis, starring Tzeni Karezi as Lysistrata, Kostas Kazakos (who was also the producer) as Kinesias, Anna Fonsou as Myrrhine, and Dionysis Papagiannopoulos as Proboulos. Stavros Xarchakos composed the music, Ioanna Papantoniou designed the costumes, while the shadow-theatre puppeteer Evgenios Spatharis performed an embedded scene with a mini Karagiozis' show. The film opened the

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\* I am grateful to Kaiti Diamantakou and the anonymous peer-reviewer of *Logeion* for their constructive feedback, as well as to journalist Katerina Rovva and the staff of the General State Archives for facilitating my access to the required files.

1. For some 'forerunners', see Diamantakou (2021b); those include video-recordings of theatrical performances, short films which borrow from Aristophanic plays, and Nestoras Matsas' *If All Women in the World* (1967), whose second half adapts some emblematic scenes of *Ecclesiazusae* and *Lysistrata*. For the international filmography concerning the years 1910–2002, see García (2010) 206.

13th Thessaloniki Film Festival (24/09/1972), where it won the ‘best production’ award, and sold 191,459 tickets in Athens and Peiraeus, thus becoming the third most commercial film of the year, among 64 productions.<sup>2</sup> Movie theatres kept the production on their programs for 451 days. This success marked a milestone in Zervoulakos’ career, whose most watched film until then —but only 26th in box-office terms for the year— was *The house of lust* (1961), a precursor of the soft and not-so-soft porn-film industry.<sup>3</sup> More important, the key-team of *Lysistrata* (Karezi, Kazakos, Papiagiannopoulos, Xarchakos and Spatharis) collaborated again a few months later, on the historic staging of Iakovos Kambanellis’ *Our Grand Circus*, whose performances “became massive political demonstrations, the biggest ones during the seven-year dictatorship — before the events at the Polytechnic”.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many of *Lysistrata*’s screenings overlapped with the first performances of *Our Grand Circus*,<sup>5</sup> hence the theatrical production could be viewed, and possibly was intended by the creators, as a ‘sequel’ to *Lysistrata*.<sup>6</sup> It should therefore go without saying that this first appearance of Aristophanes on screen merits closer scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> After a brief overview of the comic playwright’s reception during the dictatorship, I will analyse the script and aesthetics of the particular film, with special emphasis on how it dealt with censorship in its “attempt to update the anti-war message of the play”.<sup>8</sup>

That intention of the film was made known from the outset, most notably via a cartoon advertisement by Bost (Mentis Bostantzoglou), published in *Ta Nea* (Fig. 1). In that cartoon Lysistrata says (in rhyming and intentionally misspelled lines): “Girls, put it [i.e. your vagina] on a strike, do not

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2. Soldatos (2002) 40. *Maria in Silence* with superstar Alikì Vouyouklaki came first and *Thanasis, Take Your Gun* with Thanasis Vengos came second, with only 11,000 and 8,000 tickets more than *Lysistrata*, respectively.

3. Karalis (2012) 164.

4. Koumandos (1975). Karezi was sent to prison for three months because of that project.

5. Van Steen (2007a) 329 n. 7.

6. Karezi and Kazakos conceived the idea for *Our Grand Circus* in the spring of 1972, i.e. just upon/after the script of *Lysistrata* had been licensed by the authorities. The two productions shared several aesthetic codes —most notably, shadow theatre— but the political stance of the theatrical play was (very much reasonably) considerably stronger; cf. n. 68.

7. As a happy coincidence, another detailed paper has been prepared and is forthcoming by Diamantakou (2023), who has already discussed the film in brief, in Diamantakou (2021a) 253–56, 595–99. The only close analysis so far has been García (2010), who nevertheless only focusses on the aesthetic dimension.

8. Kyriakos (2002) 163–64.



Figure 1. Cartoon by Bost (Mentis Bostantzoglou), advertising Zervoulakos' *Lysistrata*. Newspaper *Ta Nea*, 13/11/1972.

offer it, to avoid wars and the black dresses of mourning. Rising your legs, at any age, will be punished severely by the court-martial” — “Come and get it!”, exclaim the girls, appropriating Leonidas' famous response to Xerxes at Thermopylae. Neither Aristophanes' text nor Negrepontis' script have that exact exchange. Van Steen (2000:207) notes that here *στάσις*, ‘the [missionary] position’, may be read as a political term, i.e. ‘revolt’. However, this ‘revolt’ is far from democratic; parodying the colonels who were branding their coup as *ἐπανάστασις*, the cartoon *Lysistrata* (as well as the cinematic, I shall argue) takes on a transient dictatorial persona.<sup>9</sup>

## ARISTOPHANES AND THE JUNTA

Aristophanes was certainly not the warmest advocator for democracy, but he was the fiercest advocator against tyranny. If he loathed the ‘radical democrats’ of his day, that was not because of the social mobility and civic freedoms which *that* democracy facilitated —if anything, he embraced such visions in several of his plays (*Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Wealth*)— but because he viewed those demagogues of post-Periclean Athens as tyrants in the making.

9. Hence the threat with the court-martial. On the semiology of the underwear, see p. 242.

His seeming ambivalence explains the cautious yet conciliatory stance of the dictatorial regime against him.

On the one hand, Aristophanes was a conservative, celebrated ancient author, indeed an author whose pure-classical Attic idiom was especially praised by Byzantine scholars, and thus he ‘adhered’ to the regime’s fetish with *katharevousa* and ‘Helleno-Christian’ agenda. It is no wonder then why Aristophanes was not officially banned from education: during the first semester of their final year at high school, students were supposed to read passages from *Frogs* in ‘proper’ translation (*ἐκ δοκίμου μεταφράσεως*).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, George Papadopoulos rushed to ban a certain book on Aristophanes published by the Moscow State University, among thousand other books thought of as “communist or sympathetic to communism”.<sup>11</sup> Because, on the other hand, Aristophanes was already suspect of... communism — not so much for his text, e.g. for his vision of socialising the (fiscal and sexual) means of production in *Ecclesiazusae*, as for his contemporary theatrical reputation after Karolos Koun. Notoriously, the pre-junta, conservative Karamanles government had banned Koun’s 1959 production of *Birds* under the guise of artistic and religious concerns, but essentially because the translator Vasilis Rotas, an active communist with EAM,<sup>12</sup> had inserted too many anti-American references; at the same time, an “implicit bias against gay artists and Jewish liberals” is evidenced by the press-coverage of the incident.<sup>13</sup> But that strikingly authoritarian act of

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10. That was at least the provision of the Royal Decree no. 723 (1969) 1623, which Papadopoulos himself signed as (*inter alia*) Minister of Education. In practice, people of that generation inform me that they were not taught Aristophanes. An obvious explanation would be that no ‘proper’ translation could be found, while the anthology of comic passages by Stavrou (1951), which was once distributed to teachers as a sourcebook, was in *démotiké*. It was only with the restoration of democracy that a coursebook with Stavrou’s translation could be introduced at schools; Gryparis & Stavrou (1975). On Stavrou’s translations, philological, demotic, and prudish, see Karageorgiou (2011) 836–44.
  11. Papadopoulos (1967). The Russian book had been translated into Greek; Deratani (1957), esp. pp. 147–48, 167, 206–8, 236 on Aristophanes as a proto-Marxist.
  12. Cofounded by four left-wing parties, but essentially dominated by the outlawed Communist Party (KKE), EAM (= The National Liberation Front, 1941–1947) was Greece’s main resistance coalition, with the largest guerrilla force (ELAS), fighting against the Axis powers.
  13. Van Steen (2000) 125, 127. Koun, whose father was of German-Jewish extraction, neither self-identified as Jewish nor was he openly gay; yet a racist and homophobic bias against him can be traced among the press of the time. For example, a satirical cartoon by Fokion Dimitriadis, published in *Ta Nea* the day after the ban on *Birds*, portrayed Koun, rather unmistakably, as a caricature of a Jew (even though the cartoonist’s main target was Minister Konstantinos Tsatsos, the instigator of the ban, whom he depicted

ensorship, as well as the tremendous international success which Koun's (revised) *Birds* soon met with, winning the first prize at the Théâtre des Nations in Paris 1962, heroised the 'Aristero-phanes' of Koun and Rotas.<sup>14</sup> Naturally, the junta continued cancelling performances of those *Birds*<sup>15</sup> — a martyr of oppression which returned triumphally on the stage of Epidaurus in 1975 with the restoration of democracy, and set an aesthetic paradigm which all subsequent modern Greek productions of *Birds* have been, inevitably, compared to.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the political and financial pressure put on him, Koun did not surrender:<sup>17</sup> in 1969 he presented *Lysistrata*, first in London and then in several Greek cities (of course, not in the state-organised summer festival), in translation by Kostas Varnalis, a passionate Demoticist and declared Marxist who had been awarded the 1959 Lenin Peace Prize.<sup>18</sup> The production had a rather serious tone, with its finale — a siren interrupting the ongoing reconciliation — pointing to the totalitarianism of the regime. At the same time, Koun's version was a counter-paradigm to the much-repeated, 'official' *Lysistrata* of the Greek National Theatre, directed by Alexis Solomos

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holding a hen). That is not to say that Dimitriadis himself was guided by antisemitism — Koun's somewhat exotic facial features anyway made him 'caricaturable' — but that such a portrayal drew on *an existing stereotype* about the director. [I am grateful to the peer-reviewer of *Logeion* for helping me refine this point.] Indicative of homophobic bias, an anonymous review of the performance (*Embros*, 5/9/1959) read: "[Such productions] not only castrate Aristophanes and turn him into a pitiful capon [i.e. a castrated rooster], so that he is no longer, according to current view, a spectacle 'just for men'; they also load him with colourful flags, phonographs, barrel-organs, and a language pertinent to... Piraeus [i.e. cruising]". According to actor George Lazanis (*Ta Nea*, 22/4/1997), one of the elements which upset the audience was the near-nudity of the (mostly male) chorus, who were dressed in white briefs.

14. The meaningful pun was introduced by Rota's wife Voula Damianakou, and is followed by Van Steen (2000) 124–35 in her analysis; cf. Van Steen (2007b). It would not be far-fetched to say that Koun's legacy made the Russian book on Aristophanes look doubly 'dangerous', since they seemed to legitimise one another.
15. Van Steen (2001) 174 and (2015) 109. Yet three performances were given in 1968, in Patras, Delphi, and Athens (at a private theatre); see Mavromoustakos (2008) 219.
16. See, for example, Andrianou (1999) on Kostas Tsianos' *Birds* of 1999.
17. That was made possible because, on the other hand, *Theatro Technis* received consecutive grants from the Ford Foundation — grants which Koun openly acknowledged. Not only did the Foundation endorse Koun's anti-dictatorial approach to drama, but also they did not intervene (as far as we can tell) in his work to force their own constitutional (i.e. anti-Marxist) agenda; see Vasiliou (2017), esp. 64, 72–73, 78–80.
18. See Van Steen (2001) 174–5; Mavrogeni (2006) 263–65; Diamantakou (2021a) 252, 583–84. On Varnalis' translations, poetic but with a rough rural idiom, see Karageorgiou (2011) 827–36.



(1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972). The dictators had no reason to prohibit his sanitised and carefree version of the ancient play, which targeted upper-class audiences, had Classical-Greek aesthetics, and was indifferent to current affairs. On the contrary, by patronising Solomos' production —only the National Theatre was allowed to participate in Epidaurus Festival— the regime could fake a liberal profile, i.e. that they did not censor Aristophanes in general, but 'Aristero-phanes' in particular.<sup>19</sup> Of course, there is no such thing as an 'objective' or 'true' Aristophanes; that was only a device to justify the attack on Koun and to monopolise the interpretation of the classical playwright.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Solomos had the opportunity to also stage at the National Theatre *Knights* in 1968, *Clouds* in 1970 (both in translation by Nikos Sfyroeras), and a reperformance of his 1959 *Frogs* in 1973 (in translation by Apostolos Melachrinou).<sup>21</sup> Recalling the rhetoric of the rulers, even if unintentionally, Solomos' *Clouds* presented the Thinkery-students as hairy hippies, and Strepsiades and Unjust Speech as gay caricatures, to satirise the "inclination of the young towards novel ideas which threaten the foundations of our religion, our families, our democracy, our morals".<sup>22</sup> From the colonels' perspective, such artistic uses of Aristophanes enabled what I already termed a "cautious yet conciliatory stance" towards him, and (even worse) legitimised his methodised appropriation. The most explicitly political (ab)use of the ancient playwright, which indeed may have drawn inspiration from Solomos' *Clouds*, came by Papadopoulos himself a year later. During a state visit

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19. The only non-conforming element in Solomos' *Lysistrata* was the translation in *démotiké* by Stavrou, but insofar as his modest *démotiké* (unlike that of Rotas or Varnalis) was free of obscenities and anachronisms, the regime was content. See Van Steen (2000) 199–205.
  20. The earliest symptom was that "The program of ancient drama performances in Athens, Epidaurus, and Delphi, revised after the April 21 coup, has omitted the saltiest plays of antiquity's comedy-writer Aristophanes: *The Birds*, *The Clouds* and *The Frogs*", *NYT* (1967). The Epidaurus Festival was the main lieu for the ideological and aesthetic instrumentalisation of Greek Tragedy too; see Arvaniti (2015), in an earlier volume of *Logeion*.
  21. Only once during the junta was Solomos' monopoly on Aristophanes at the National Theatre broken. In 1971, *Ecclesiazusae* (in Stavrou's translation) was commissioned to Socrates Karantinos, whose hard-core antiquarian approach was known since the '50s. See Mavrogeni (2006) 211–15, 241–43 [quotation from p. 212].
  22. That is not to say that Solomos was a mouthpiece for the regime — on the contrary, his translating and directorial approach to *Thesmophoriazusae* (1971) demonstrates his anti-tyranny stance. Only such a production had no place in the National Theatre and the summer festival, hence it was produced privately, by his 'Proskenion' team; see Diamantakou (2021a) 584–91, who also suggests (595) that Zervoulakos' film was possibly inspired by that production in some aspects.

of the U.S. Vice-President in October 1971, the chief-dictator committed himself to exposing the opponents of his regime, in the same way that Aristophanes exposed the sophists, to save the nation [*sc.* from communism].<sup>23</sup>

But the bureaucrats working for the junta, not always the most brilliant and educated minds —yet chosen by the system precisely for that manipulable nature of theirs—, would foil Papadopoulos' grandiose plans on several occasions. Thus Aristophanes' anti-tyranny message would find opportunities to slip under the censors' nose, as of course happened with several other plays, books, songs and films. Characteristically, the same year as Koun's *Lysistrata*, Spyros Evangelatos translated and directed *Ecclesiazusae* for the State Theatre of Northern Greece (1969). The censor who read the script to approve the production, contented himself with crossing-out some vulgar words, which ought to be corrected (e.g. 'kissing' instead of 'fucking'), but he ignored the play's inherently 'communist' vision, as well as the director's Brechtian interpretation. *Prima facie*, Evangelatos' play was revolutionary only in its aesthetic intention, insofar as it introduced a modern way of staging Aristophanes, different from Solomos' urban-neoclassical and from Koun's rural-folklore paradigm, both of which were centred around 'Greekness'. Evangelatos' *Ecclesiazusae* was a pop-art opera, combining musical genres from Mozart to jazz and to *rembetiko*, and bringing on stage divergent popular figures, such as Karagiozis, footballers, and strippers. And while that spectacular farce could give the impression that the director-and-translator underplayed the political potential of the play, the looming satire on the kitsch Americano-European Helleno-Christianity of the sixties, which culminated in the regime's mass fiestas, was a deeply political statement.<sup>24</sup>

From 1970 the regime started relaxing its censorship machine, in an attempt to appear liberal, and preventive censorship was replaced by repressive/punitive procedures for those journalists, literati, and artists who were found to have violated the national principles: 'morality', 'patriotism', 'Orthodoxy', 'decent language' etc. With the historic uprising of the students at the National Polytechnic School at Athens, in November 1973, which was

23. See Van Steen (2000) 181–82.

24. On the colonels' fiestas, see Van Steen (2015) 172–81. On Evangelatos' production, see Van Steen (2000) 176; Karaoglou (2009) 106–12; Diamantakou (2021a) 605–7. Other, less notable performances at the State Theatre of Northern Greece were: *Peace* (1967), translated by Kostas Varnalis —of course his name was removed from the program— and directed by Kanellos Apostolou; *Wealth* (1969), translated and directed by Kyriazis Charatsaris; *Frogs* (1971) and *Birds* (1973), directed by Kostis Michaelides in translations by Thrasvoulos Stavrou and Nikos Sfyroeras respectively; cf. Karaoglou (2009) 104–22.



Figure 2. A selection of panels from the comic strip *Lysistrata* by Kyr (Ioannis Kyriakopoulos). Magazine *Epikaira*, issue 314 (8–14 August 1974), 14–15.

violently suppressed by use of military means, the colonels attempted to impose full censorship anew but failed, as public outrage was now uncontrollable. Thus a few months before the collapse of the junta, a weekly comic strip version of *Lysistrata* appeared in the popular magazine *Epikaira*, escaping the censors’ attention altogether. The cartoonist Kyr (Ioannis Kyriakopoulos) adapted the ancient source—with explicit self-sarcasm for doing so—to openly satirise the dictators and the American intervention in Greek politics. For example, in the panels shown above (Fig. 2), Kyr identifies the sexually-deprived men of the play with the dictatorial army: the claim of a “disorderly situation” (*ἐκρῦθμον καταστάσεως*, top-left corner), here referring to the sexual embargo, was verbatim the justification for the coup of 21st April 1967, as announced on the radio. Moreover, the phoenix rising from the flames was the regime’s official symbol, propagating the supposed rebirth of Greece, but here it is reinterpreted as a phallus burning in lust. Of course, the colonels’ puritanism around (*inter alia*) sex fits well with their portrayal as sexually frustrated. The comic dic(k)tators march against the democratic women, who have occupied the Acropolis. The parallelism with the 1973 uprising of the Polytechnic is unmistakable, exemplified in the military tank-chariot. The slogan “Oust the American fingers from our interiors” reads both sexually and politically, ‘finger’ being a metaphor for ‘interference’ (cf. ‘to have a hand in something’). However, Zervoulakos’ *Lysistrata*, which premiered a year *before* the Polytechnic uprising, was

subject, like any other film or play, to the previous legal frame. Preventive censorship could not be avoided, but it could be tricked — and so it was.<sup>25</sup>

#### THE PLAY, THE TEXT AND THE SCRIPT

The very choice to make a film of *Lysistrata* is not difficult to explain.<sup>26</sup> The play's pacifist message aside — a message which other Aristophanic comedies served too —, marketing must have been the creators' primary motivation. First, the commercial success of Solomos' theatrical *Lysistrata*, which brought in masses of domestic audiences and tourists at the summer festivals for consecutive seasons, had confirmed the public's undiminished interest in the play. And second, *Lysistrata*'s sexual aspect and pornographic potential, which indeed the other two pacifist comedies (*Acharnians* and *Peace*) fall behind in, was a 'goldmine' amid the boom of erotic cinema, and given how suppressed that potential had been in Solomos' production;<sup>27</sup> Zervoulakos' name alone was a guarantee that the film would be sexually liberate, and that was also signalled out in the advertising poster (see Fig. 3).

However, the creators obviously also weighed the political relevance of the ancient play to the contemporary context, i.e. the junta. Whereas *Acharnians* was staged at a time where most Athenians opposed the prospect of peace-making (425 BC) and *Peace* was written at a time when the Athenians were optimistic about achieving a peace treaty with Sparta (421 BC), *Lysistrata* came at a time of deep despair (411 BC).<sup>28</sup> Such was the common

25. On Kyr's comic strip, see Van Dyck (1998) 106–13, 124–25; Van Steen (2000) 207. On the procedures of censorship, see Van Steen (2015) 106–20, esp. 118.

26. The idea was initiated by Karezi and Kazakos themselves; García (2010) 198.

27. "Every year between 1970 and 1974, an average of 70 to 80 films were produced; most of them melodramas, comedies, and the rising industry of the period, soft porn. It was clear that Greek cinema was declining, and the commercially successful films were using and abusing a well-tested formula. Aiki Vouyouklaki was on the front line of this demise; with her films becoming more repetitive, self-indulgent and formulaic, she gave audiences an excuse to remain at home and watch television serials. [...] From 1970 until the early 80s [...] the industry itself evolved to hard-core porn, with violent sex scenes, rape, incest, bestiality, and more; [...] From 1969, an average of 20 to 30 films were made each year, some of them box office successes. For example, in the most political year of 1975, Angelopoulos' and Koundouros' ground-breaking films were selling fewer tickets than the venerable *Women Lusting for Sex*, *Honey on Her Body*, *My Body on Your Body* and *Her Lustful Body!*", Karalis (2012) 157, 164.

28. The so-called Nikias' Treaty was signed almost simultaneously with the staging of *Peace*, in the spring of 421 BC, but was certainly *not* a given when Aristophanes conceived (and

feeling in 1972 Greece too.<sup>29</sup> Of course, to adjust the political dynamics of the ancient play to the contemporary context was not an easy task. For Aristophanes' comedy spoke of a voluntary war between two independent city-states, argued that both sides were losers, and envisaged their reconciliation; by contrast, Zervoulakos' film had to deal with a dictatorial coup, where the roles of victims and violators were clear and a middle-ground solution would be disastrous. The common element, which provided the key for paralleling the two eras in the film, was that both the Peloponnesian War and the colonels' regime resembled a *civil war* among Greek people, Athenians and Spartans in the former case (despite them being two separate political entities in antiquity), conservatives and liberals in the latter (despite not all conservatives compromising with the junta). Indeed, the legacy of Greek Civil War (1946–1949) “cast long shadows over contemporary Greek history and some rifts remained unresolved. [... Thus public consensus] was lacking under the junta. Many dissident voices called for more public solidarity against the colonels and the lack thereof was often felt to be one of the reasons why the authoritarian regime stayed in power for as long as seven years”.<sup>30</sup> To convey those political correspondences, the film resorted to a semiotic manoeuvre: in the first half, the old men represent the regime, the rebellious women represent democracy; in the second half, i.e. after the lynching of Proboulos (≈ vv. 599–613) who is an implicit caricature of Papadopoulos,<sup>31</sup> both women and men (of a younger generation this time) share the desire to unite — and so they do in the finale of the film, giving themselves over to orgiastic sex. This ideological/semiotic adjustment of the source-play required a good deal of textual ‘unfaithfulness’. Characteristically, in Aristophanes' text, it is the old men who voice their resistance against the women's tyrannical coup (vv. 616–19, 630–1), for indeed such was their enterprise in practical (ancient-Greek) terms. Consequently, that part of the text did not make it into the script.<sup>32</sup> Overall, the film remained

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submitted for approval) his play; at that time, the ongoing negotiations were a bright beam of hope. The treaty was supposed to last for fifty years but was abandoned as early as 414 BC, i.e. three years before *Lysistrata*. Add to that the humiliating defeat of Athens in the Sicilian expedition of 413 BC; see MacDowell (1995) 48, 108, 180, 197–98, 229, 248.

29. The first sign of hope came with the abortive Greek Navy mutiny in May 1973, which nevertheless undermined Papadopoulos' backing from the U.S.; see Rush (1973) to Nixon.

30. Van Steen (2001) 165.

31. See below, p. 241.

32. Following Lorna Hardwick's terminology, Diamantakou (2021a) 597 classifies Negre-

‘faithful’ to the structure of the ancient play, with some scenes shortened, but took significant liberties with the dialogues and songs.

The script could not have been submitted for approval under its actual writer’s name, for Yannis Negrepointis was a leftist known to the authorities and, as such, exiled to Gyaros and Leros (1967–1971). Thus Zervoulakos signed the copy sent to the preventive censors, presenting himself as both the director and script-writer, while Negrepointis’ name, omitted from the poster too, was only revealed in the opening credits of the film.<sup>33</sup> Today, that copy lies at the General State Archives, allowing us to know both the censors’ comments and any differences from the script that was actually filmed.<sup>34</sup> In their final decision, the authorities approved the production “on condition that the instructions noted on the script will be adhered to”, and an explanatory note on the top-left corner of the first page of the attached script reads “APPROVED on condition that the risqué scenes of the play will be rendered in a manner not offending public decency”. The approval was given by a 4/5 majority, with one member of the censorship bureau recording his disagreement in the minutes of the committee: “he rejects the script, considering that showing the particular storyline in movie theatres will possibly cause an uproar in public opinion”. As exaggerated that fear sounds, that much superficial the actual scrutiny was; the censor who read the script only underlined some verbal obscenities, which ought to be corrected: “Oh, you torn-apart buttock-gender” (*Αχ, γένος ξεκολιάρικο*), “For when a man has a hard on —let’s be honest— how can a woman resist?” (*Γιατί ορθός σαν είναι του αντρός, για να τα πούμε αληθώς, να κρατηθεί θέλετε πώς κι η δύναμη της γυναικός;*), “a pee-only hard-on” (*κατουροσηκώματα*), “You moron, I have my vagina total black, like a crow, and fluffy” (*Μωρέ το ’χω του κοράκου αραπάτο και φλοκάτο*), “all forms of whory tricks” (*κάθε είδους πουτανιά*), “what arse could handle such a peg all alone?” (*ποιος κώλος θα το βάσταγε μόνος ένα τέτοιο παλούκι*).<sup>35</sup> But the creators, knowing how unlikely it was

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pontis’ script as lying between a ‘version’ and an ‘intervention’, with several elements of ‘hybridity’.

33. Mainly known as a lyrics composer, Negrepointis wrote in 1966 the ground-breaking *negrika* songs for Manos Loizos, inspired by the contemporary African-American civil rights movement in the U.S. The songs were enthusiastically received in folk concerts, then banned by the junta, and only recorded in 1975. Cf. Diamantakou (2021a) 596–99.
34. The file comprises the producer’s application (29/03/1972), the script attached to it with the censor’s annotations, the minutes of the censors’ committee (18/04/1972), and the final decision of approval as notified to the producer (25/04/1972).
35. Negrepointis (1972) 13, 43, 46, 48, 60.

that the censors would review the final product, unless the premiere caused a fuss and given that movie theatres operate after public-sector work hours, could play around with the authorities' corrections. Thus, only half of the above-listed 'improper' phrases were removed, the other half making it into the film.<sup>36</sup> As if that were not enough, the film incorporated additional obscenities, absent from the submitted script, e.g. the choral:

*Χαράμι τα χειλάκια μας, / τα μπούτια, τα βυζάκια μας,  
στράφι το λάγνο μας κορμί, / έρημο μένει το πουλί!  
Χαράμι τα χειλάκια μας, / τα μπούτια, τα βυζάκια μας,  
στράφι το λάγνο μάτι μας, / έρημο το κρεβάτι μας!*

Our sweet lips go waste, / as do our thighs and our titties,  
our body is lusty but in vain, / the dick is deserted!  
Our sweet lips go waste, / as do our thighs and our titties,  
our eyes are lusty but in vain, / our bed is deserted! (0:08:34)

Deviating from the approved script by adding lines was also employed to put political messages across, which of course entailed a greater risk for the creators. For example, while the old men are proceeding towards the occupied Acropolis holding lit torches to attack the women (≈ vv. 286–320), the leader of the female chorus sings the interpolated verses:

*Γέροι δαυλί αναμμένο / σαλεύουν, μα πεσμένο.  
Παλιά βρακιά χεσμένα, / βρακιά κατεστημένα.*

The old men are wagging / their lit torch, but it's falling.  
Their old panties are full of shit, / panties of the establishment.  
(0:26:58)

The falling torch is a metaphor for the faulty erection of the elderly. But the song's crucial point lies in the end-word *κατεστημένα*, which appears *para prosdokian* for *κατεστραμμένα* or *κατεσχισμένα*: instead of 'fully torn-apart', the old panties are 'the establishment'. The synecdoche is clear, or rather... dirty: the establishment —an establishment of malfunctioning men— is shitty! The rhyme *χεσμένα-κατεστημένα* confirms the satirical intention. Equally obvious is the parody of the colonels' nationalistic rhetoric, when

36. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:13:23, 0:53:20, 1:10:28.

Lysistrata orders a frontal attack against the old men with these off-script words:

*Στα όπλα γυναίκες Αθηναίες, αμύνεσθαι περί πάτρης, ίνα στήσωμεν την γαλανόλευκον υπέρ του Ελληνο-ειδωλολατρικού Κρητο-μυκηναο-αθηναϊκού υπερχπολιτισμού!*

Take your guns, Athenian women. Defend your fatherland so we can raise the blue-and-white flag of the Helleno-pagan Cretan-Mycenaean-Athenian super-civilization! (0:36:40)

Here Karezi becomes momentarily a mouthpiece for the regime, rather than the democratic crowd, but only to ridicule it. This choice recalls the laughable multi-compound words with which Lysistrata addresses the women in the original text (vv. 456–58), mingling military language with that of street brawls,<sup>37</sup> and with a paratragic touch in the repeated interjection: *Oh you female comrades, full ahead! Oh you seed-market-porridge-vegetable-sellers! Oh you bed-and-garlic-breakfast-sellers!* (ὦ ξύμμαχοι γυναῖκες ἐκθεῖτ' ἔνδοθεν, / ὦ σπερμαγοραιολεκιθολαχανοπώλιδες, / ὦ σκοροδοπανδοκεντριαρτοπώλιδες). As absurd as this verbal amalgam sounded, so was the dictators' definition of Greekness.

The creators' boldness aside, conveying an anti-junta message became possible also thanks to the censors' inadequacy in spotting indirect (and often direct) political language. Those bureaucrats were alert to words such as 'freedom', 'democracy', or... 'red', and to obscene vocabulary of course, but their perceptiveness about metaphors, symbols or intertexts was mutilated. Therefore, creators had the opportunity to emphasise in the film any political hints which had passed under the censors' nose, hence without personal liability (in theory). The following examples are characteristic. When Lysistrata binds the women to refuse sex to their husbands even if the latter try to force them (≈ vv. 160–66), the female chorus agrees by shouting "No pasarán!" seven times, with their fists up and their attuned voices echoing all around — a proper protest rally.<sup>38</sup> The slogan, included in the submitted script but written only once so as not to attract attention, was famously the Republicans' cry against Franco during the Spanish Civil

37. Sommerstein (1990) 177.

38. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:19:03 = Negrepointis (1972) 17.



War; but the parallelism was too elaborate for the censors to grasp. In the same context and spirit, the women exclaim five times “We will resist, that will be our resistance!” (*Εμείς θ’ αντιστεκόμαστε, θα κάνουμε αντίσταση!*), but again, that was written only once in the script and without the directorial specifications.<sup>39</sup> Later on, when Lysistrata encourages the women not to quit the sexual strike (≈ vv. 762–67), Karezi sings on an upbeat tune “Endure, hold out, have a bit more patience” (*Σφιχτείτε, κρατηθείτε, κάντε λίγη υπομονή*) — an unmistakable self-reference by Xarchakos to his own song of 1965 “Be patient, the sky will brighten up” (*Κάντε υπομονή κι ο ουρανός θα γίνει πιο γαλανός*), which had become an anti-junta anthem.<sup>40</sup>

#### AESTHETICS AND CINEMATICS

Just like the script, the aesthetics of the film —from its settings and costumes to the acting style and cinematic techniques— also give the impression of a naively joyful musical but actually amount to a highly political parody. In fact, a film’s visual content could be more effective than the script in commenting on topical issues, because it was less vulnerable to preventive censorship.<sup>41</sup> For example, that Zervoulakos’ *Lysistrata* is entirely filmed

39. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:16:03 = Negrepointis (1972) 14.

40. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:49:40 = Negrepointis (1972) 42. On Xarchakos’ earlier composition, in lyrics by Alekos Sakelarios, a telling testimony is: “In 1973, [singers] Dalaras and Alexiou came to Veroia [...], strictly forbidden to sing anything political. That was just before the Polytechnic events. We, however, participated in their song message ‘The sky will brighten up’, and felt that we were resisting”; Nazlidis (2015) [my transl.]

41. A trial projection, or a complete dress rehearsal for theatrical plays, was required before the final approval was given. Some productions were indeed banned at that stage, despite their script having been (censored and) approved earlier; to avoid that financially disastrous eventuality, producers and creators applied ‘self-censorship’, shelving several projects they were planning; see Van Steen (2001) 143 and (2015) 112–13, 116–17. In the case of cinema, in particular, post-production preventive control was introduced by Legal Decree no. 249 (1969), whose Article 1.2 specified that “The committee [for approving productions *shown at film festivals*] examines the respective films in terms of artistic and technical adequacy [...] and judges on their suitability”. But as the regime was inevitably led to relax its oppressive mechanisms, the ‘aesthetic examination’ became a repressive/punitive procedure by time; Legal Decree no. 58 (1973) Article 10.2 specified that “The [censorship] boards have the right to prohibit the screening of a film in public, if it is judged inadequate in artistic or technical terms and, as such, it may be harmful to the aesthetic development of the people”. Of course, the vagueness in law of the “artistic and technical” criteria, as well as the censors’ lack of expertise, made that kind of control hardly applicable; cf. Komnenos (2012) 118–19.

outdoors, around the Acropolis (in the neighbourhoods of Plaka, Anafiotika and Theseio), is *prima facie* a stylistic decision: to stay ‘faithful’ to the dramatic space of the play; to allow the sun to cast its harsh-yet-natural light; to utilise beautiful open-air spaces for the chorus to dance. But the semiology of this aesthetic choice is thoroughly political: the women claim back the public space —indeed by means of a revolt and after a democratic debate— which the regime had forcefully ‘de-publicised’. With the announcement of the coup on the radio in the morning of 21st April 1967, a curfew was imposed throughout Athens ‘upon further notice’, all indoors and outdoors gatherings were forbidden, while anyone found on the streets after sunset would be shot; throughout the seven-year dictatorship, political gatherings (let alone parties) and workers’ strikes were not allowed. Therefore, with its sunbathed public dances the film offered a vision against those dark days of repression.<sup>42</sup> And whereas the heart of the regime was beating at Syntagma square, where the first battle tanks appeared at the dawn of the coup and where the Parliament was hijacked by the dictators, the ancient city centre, i.e. the neighbourhoods around the Acropolis, was a strong topographical symbol of democracy. To highlight the modern relevance of that topography, Zervoulakos and Papantoniou decided not to ‘restore’ the ancient landscape, but to allow, and further insert, several anachronisms. Thus the “blithe disregard for the precision of the time period, in both setting and costumes” (e.g. a car is seen moving in the background at some point, and the streets in Plaka bear their modern blue signs)<sup>43</sup> is ‘blithe’ only on the surface.

The dress code is equally incoherent and purposeful: the female chorus wear miniskirts, bikinis, hippy cloaks, grandmothers’ headscarves, gipsy necklaces, ancient-like chitons and warrioress’ suits — each member with her own style. Of the men, some wear farmers’ clothes, others are topless and with tight wrestlers’ pants, others are in ancient-like military armour, and others in rags; some younger males have long hair and beards. Miniskirts (for women) and long hair (for men) were a red flag to the regime, among whose earliest decisions was to ban those stylistic choices from schools, while the hard-core colonel Ioannis Ladas launched a crusade against ‘teddy-boyism’ and ‘hippieism’ under the notorious Law 4000 of 1958. But at the same time, and under the financial loss caused by a temporary ban on

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42. Because 21st April 1967 was forecasted to be a bad day weather-wise, the colonels even censored the respective column on newspapers, to avoid any negative associations with their coup; cf. Papaioannou (2019).

43. MacKinnon (1986) 171.

such-dressed tourists, brigadier general Stylianos Pattakos endorsed and zealously attended miniskirt beauty pageants.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the film's hippy dress code (let alone the ample nudity of the final scenes) was not only a commercial lure, but also an ironical test of the dictators' integrity — at least Pattakos would have appreciated it! Moreover, the absurd coexistence on screen of so many historically-unmatching dresses, as well as the extremely cheap quality and design of the soldiers' costumes in particular, create a carnivalesque parody of the regime's nationalist parades, where policemen, sailors, evzones, 'ancient' phalanxes and horse riders, torchbearers and skydivers, were brought together at Kallimarmaro to 'glorify' the Greek past and, above all, the 'Revolution of 21st April'.<sup>45</sup> Like another Papadopoulos with his characteristically shrill voice, Proboulos (Papagiannopoulos) blows the whistle to guide his incoherent parade of men, until he is confronted by Lysistrata.<sup>46</sup> The latter wears a white long gown, reminiscent of the War of Independence era (1820s), indeed with a *koumboura* tighten on her waistband like another Bouboulina.<sup>47</sup> But instead of the matching headscarf, she wears an ancient-style helmet with feathers, thus becoming an Athena-Bouboulina hybrid; besides, Karezi's blue-green eyes and elegant facial structure effortlessly evoked the *γλανκώπις* goddess of wisdom. Solemn and beautiful, her figure stands as polar opposite to Proboulos' childishy dressed and hunched silhouette.<sup>48</sup>

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44. See Ntaloukas (2013); Markou (2012) 151–52; García (2010) 202; Van Steen (2001) 177–78.

45. "Costumes, inventively silly for the men and daringly sexy for the women, and hearty overacting indicate the overall level of sophistication (low)"; Winkler (2014) 929.

46. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:32:04 ff.

47. A prominent figure of the Greek War of Independence, shipowner Laskarina Bouboulina (1771–1825) organised her own Spetsiot fleet and achieved significant victories, most notably the siege of Nafplion in April 1821. She was the first woman to be awarded (if posthumously) the rank of Admiral by the Russian Navy. A *koumboura* was a long flint-lock pistol, the standard gun of the era.

48. Van Steen (2001) 179 aptly notes that in Zervoulakos' film *Lysistrata* impersonates Karezi, rather than vice versa. For while Karezi had a powerful public profile, Aristophanes' heroine lacks personality. Let me clarify: she does have the typical attributes of the comic protagonist, e.g. "heroic decisiveness" (Whitman 1964: 201), "a degree of intelligence, will, and eloquence" (Henderson 1987: xxxvii), but no individual traits. That she does not have "any weakness for sex, alcohol, or [...] frivolity at all", unlike the other women (Robson 2010: 52), "make[s] her a bit of a boring comic heroine: sober, entirely rational, non- or even asexual" (Revermann 2010: 74). That *Lysistrata* is a "clearly drawn, heart-warming and memorable personality" (Hall 2010: 36) is only wishful thinking, or what she achieves to become in certain modern performances. But her character has no colour at all: nothing of the naivety of *Strepsiades* or *Tyrtaeus*, or the megalomania of *Peisetaerus* and Dio-



Figure 3. The poster of the film. The font and colours used for the title-banner anticipate the hippy aesthetics and playful sensuality, as of course do the girls with the lifted skirts. The close-up on Karezi's penetrating gaze and Papagiannopoulos' grimace anticipate the fun-yet-serious intention of the production. Negrepontis' name is omitted for reasons explained above, p. 236.

The confrontation of the two choruses, the deplorable male establishment on the one hand and the determined female rebels on the other, constitutes the central scene of the film — central both in terms of narrative, in accordance with the ancient text, and of aesthetic impression. As the men are heading on towards the Propylaea, the women line up behind a barricade with a large American flag on it; Lysistrata stands on top and invites the women to “Tear apart the ‘paper tiger’ of male imperialism!” (*Τσακίστε την χαρτινή τίγρη του ανδρικού ιμπεριαλισμού!*) — famously the metaphor was used by Mao to describe American imperialism as superficially powerful. Then a group of sexy girls comes forward, emerging from behind the American flag, march-in-place in front of the men and lift their airy skirts to reveal their underwear, which have the sign of peace on them. The capturing of this moment in both the poster (Fig. 3) and the advertising cartoon (Fig. 1) highlights its symbolic prominence. Thereafter a belly-dancer takes over and knocks the men out with her hip-blow;<sup>49</sup> confused and seduced, the men fail

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nysus, or the wifely diplomacy of Praxagora; no clue on her age, while her husband is mentioned only in passing (vv.514–20). Whitman (*op. cit.*) asserts that “The role can be played properly only by an actress of singular grace and charm” — and such was Karezi.

49. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:37:00. Of course, neither Lysistrata's political cry nor the meaningful details of the setting and the costumes were specified in the submitted script, which only had a vague summary; Negrepontis (1972) 31.

to resist and are forced to retreat back to their camp, whose gate bears the notoriously chauvinist slogan *ΠΑΣ ΜΗ ΕΛΛΗΝ ΒΑΡΒΑΡΟΣ* (“Whoever is not Greek is a barbarian”),<sup>50</sup> reminiscent of Papadopoulos’ own motto *ΕΛΛΑΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ* (“Hellas, country of the Christian Hellenes”).

The scene abounds in political messages. First, the American flag in the background unambiguously signifies the interference of the U.S. in Greek affairs: not only did the American government support the dictatorship, but also the (still partially-only) declassified documents demonstrate that CIA anticipated the coup, whose instigators they knew at least since 1966.<sup>51</sup> So the women’s occupation of the Acropolis parodies the colonels’ occupation of the state: both were done with American backing. In this reading, of course, we have a semiotic inconsistency, for it is *the men* who represent the regime in the rest of the film; yet that inconsistency is consistent with the ancient text, in which *the women* are called tyrants, as I pointed out earlier, hence Lysistrata’s momentary nationalist paroxysm. Secondly, the American flag may be seen as a reversed (i.e. Western) Iron Curtain: it is *this* curtain which blocks the way to freedom and needs to be pulled away for peace to emerge, against what the right-wing propaganda in West sustained. Since the film could not be openly pro-Soviet —both Karezi and Kazakos were members of EDA and later joined KKE<sup>52</sup>— anti-American parody offered a safer alternative. Thirdly, a specific occasion may lie behind such a parody: in 1968 Nixon run for the presidential election with the promise of a ‘peace with honor’ with Vietnam, but the American troops did not withdraw until five years later. In a similar manner, the women of the film exhibit their pacifist intentions only to prepare their next attack. If the aforementioned visual-political messages appear perplexed, even irreconcilable between one another —e.g. do the peace-branded underwear signify a sincere or an ironic attitude?— the purpose is to amplify the comic potential of the script and, above all, to confuse the censorship machine.

From that point on, the film moves on a rather weak pace. Even the most emblematic scene of the play, the encounter between the

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50. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:21:02; 0:30:42.

51. Papadopoulos himself had collaborated with CIA during his service for the Greek equivalent intelligence agency (KYP). See Papachelas (1997) 23–4, 237–42, 251–60, 270–76, 292–93, 315–21.

52. KKE, the Communist Party of Greece, had been banned in 1936 by dictator Ioannis Metaxas and was only made legal again in 1974, with the restoration of democracy. EDA, the United Democratic Left Party, had been founded in 1959 to substitute the outlawed KKE but was dissolved during the military junta, like all political parties.

flirtatious-yet-uncompromising Myrrhine and the excruciatingly aroused Kinesias, is awkwardly monotonous and slow.<sup>53</sup> The most characteristic aesthetic moment in that second half is the inclusion of a shadow-theatre puppet-show, and its human-size duplication by actors, to render (what very loosely corresponds to) the second stasimon.<sup>54</sup> A reason for that choice was to pay homage to Karolos Koun, who had successfully infused the tradition of Karagiozis into the staging of Aristophanes, in line with his folkloristic approach to ancient comedy.<sup>55</sup> For Kazakos himself was a student (and later a teacher) at *Theatro Technis*' drama school, and had been directed by Koun in several productions, including *Wealth* (1957) and *Birds* (in its 1963 repetition, at Aldwych Theatre). At the same time, and perhaps more importantly for the creators of the film, Karagiozis had a strong political legacy which was pertinent to current affairs. First, in terms of typology, the eponymous protagonist portrays a Greek commoner of the city who suffers from poverty under the Ottoman oppression. And secondly, in terms of reception, shadow theatre had been a voice of solace amidst, and occasionally a voice of resistance against, the 1941–1944 German occupation.<sup>56</sup> Evgenios Spatharis himself, who started his career as puppeteer next to his father Sotiris in 1942, was once arrested and sent to Kommandantur to be executed, because his patriotic plays, themed after the great fighters of the 1821 War of Independence, were so popular that the German authorities considered him a rioter — out of pure luck he was released.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, both Karagiozis in general and Spatharis' Karagiozis in particular were anti-tyranny figures, whose participation to the

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53. Of course, such verdicts largely depend on personal taste and expectations. For instance, Van Steen (2001) 177 deems that the film “lacks surprise and is poorly paced; early on, it builds up to a high pitch, which it is unable to sustain with the necessary dramatic tension”. On the other hand, Karalis (2012) 157 praises the “fast narrative pace”. García (2010) 198, 201 sees “a perfect cinematic rhythm”, but acknowledges that “the film has some technical defects, especially in editing, which denote a certain clumsiness on the director’s part in terms of polishing his work”. I would say that, while the film moves fast *in relation to the ancient text*, with several dialogic and choral parts having been omitted or summarised, there is considerable fluctuation of pace within the film itself, with its second half being evidently slower. At any rate, it must be added that Aristophanes’ own texts often flag a bit after the parabasis.

54. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:53:53 ff. ≈ vv. 781–828.

55. On Koun’s engagement with Greek shadow theatre see Diamantakou (2021a) 24–5, 177–79, 225 ff., with 254–55 on Zervoulakos’ particular scene.

56. See Angelopoulos (2022) and the shocking testimonies by Meimaroglou & Dorizas (1965) and Spatharis (2020) 203–8, 475–77, 481–84, 486, 606–7.

57. See Platanos (2007).

film (highlighted in the opening credits) was inherently, if subtly,<sup>58</sup> a statement against *the current* oppression.

Apart from all the abovementioned symbols (flags, miniskirts, helmets etc.) and acting codes (parading, demonstrating, shadow-theatre kinesics etc.), the very cinematic technique is politically purposeful. For in an otherwise wide-frame filming, where the camera captures the open-air setting being crowded, and where the actors perform in a deliberately poorly-rehearsed and unrealistic style, so as to convey a sense of naivety,<sup>59</sup> the director reserves the film's rare close-ups (*gros plan*) almost exclusively for Karezi — as the advertising poster anticipates. The focus on her penetrating gaze while she articulates her political messages leaves no room for questioning her extra-cinematic intention, which is to awake the public:<sup>60</sup> “We will resist, that will be our resistance!” (≈ vv. 153, 161), “I will endure, so that it [i.e. male force/dictatorship] will not pass!” (≈ vv. 223–24); “Tear apart the ‘paper tiger’ of male imperialism!” (≈ vv. 362–67), “What else do you think keeps the war going on? It is profit that lies behind all evil!” (≈ vv. 487–9). A similar *gros plan* is afforded to Anna Mantzourani, the chorus' leader, when she sings about the “shitty establishment” — see p. 237.<sup>61</sup>

#### THE END (?)

The concluding scenes are soaked in nudity — Reconciliation barely hides her genitalia while exhibiting her breasts and giving the men lustful looks. The very finale “might best be described as a tastefully shot orgy in a vineyard”,<sup>62</sup> with the united (at last) male and female choruses singing:

*Τον έρωτα, τη λευτεριά χαρείτε όλοι αντάμα, / υμνήστε την αγάπη μας  
και της ζωής το θάμα. / Εμείς αγάπη θέλουμε και μαλακό γρασίδι / και  
αγκαλιά ως το πρωί και χάρδια και παιχνίδι. / Σ' αυτό το μέρος που 'ρθα-  
με, φάτε, πιέστε, γλεντήστε. / Ειρήνη, έρωτα, ζωή χαρείτε και υμνείτε!*

58. That is, despite the *non political* content of the lyrics which the puppets and actors sing.

59. Watch, for example, the unnatural laughs of the two semichoruses and the stumbling of an actress in Zervoulakos (1972) 0:45:09 ff. Cf. n. 45.

60. Cf. García (2010) 198.

61. Zervoulakos (1972) 0:15:40; 0:19:00; 0:27:06; 0:37:01; 0:39:58.

62. Traill (2015). Yet the nudes “are quite innocent”; García (2010) 203.

Enjoy passion and freedom all together. / Praise our love and the miracle  
of life. / All we want is love and soft grass, / and hugging all night long, and  
fondling, and playing. / Having gathered here, let us eat, drink, have party; /  
let us enjoy and praise peace, love, and life! (1:25:50)

A contemporary review on the press (*Makedonia*, 26/09/1972) said that, with such a finale, “one eventually gets convinced that love for sex and passion is greater than love for peace. But was that truly the ‘spirit’ of Aristophanes? The film will certainly meet with great success in Greek movie theatres. Apart from the protagonists’ fame, the fancy colours, the music and the risqué dialogues, audiences will be attracted by the profuse nudity — it is profuse indeed”.<sup>63</sup> Concerns about the ‘true spirit’ of an ancient playwright and about a director’s right to ‘deviate’ from it, or even to ‘betray’ it, are still often voiced, especially in the case of Aristophanes’ plays, whose topical nature makes the need for anachronistic adaptations inescapable.<sup>64</sup> But in this particular case, the review apparently had Solomos’ asexual *Lysistrata* as its point of reference — understandably, given how successful that production was— rather than Aristophanes’ own work, where sensuality and nudity (either theatrical or real) were anything but censored.<sup>65</sup> The explicit eroticism of the women in the original play aims both at entertaining the audience and triggering political reflection, for it “enabl[es] the male spectators a voyeuristic glimpse of other men’s wives, while underscoring their function as mothers and producers of future Athenian citizens, a com-

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63. Reproduced in Diamantakou (2021b) 111. Cf. Matsas’ review in Kousoumidis (1981) 218.

64. The debate was recently reopened on the occasion of *Birds* directed by Nikos Karathanos (2016); the production was so (consciously) ignorant of the play’s political layer, that several reviews, even positive ones, openly accused Karathanos of misleading the audience by using Aristophanes’ name in the title; e.g. Koltsidopoulou (2016). If I am allowed to take position in this debate, I would agree that, while any artist has the *unnegotiable right* to deal with antiquity however they please, and while classical authors anyway cannot be harmed, it is still a matter of principle that one should declare their products in honesty, e.g. in the example of *Die Antigone des Sophokles nach der Hölderlinschen Übertragung für die Bühne bearbeitet von Brecht*.

65. It has been proposed that the mute roles of prostitutes were performed by actual (naked) prostitutes, rather than by male actors dressed in leotards; Zweig (1992) 78–81, 85. In either case, Aristophanes often uses physical exposure “to excite amusement or pleasure in the audience by arousing their sexual feelings”, most notably in *Peace*, where Trygaeus passes Theoria over to the Councillors, who were seated in the first rows of the theatre; Henderson (1991) 7, 66. Cf. Olson (1998) *ad* 905–6.



*modity that has been jeopardised by the war*".<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the closing caption of the film comes to confirm that the intention of the orgiastic 'happy ending' was only to highlight (via contrast) how unhappy reality is; "but nobody listened to the women in THE END", it reads. In other words, what we watched so far was only a fairy tale, and that realisation makes us retrospectively decode Karezi's song from a few minutes earlier (in *gros plan* and with doves flying at the background):

*Κόκκινη κλωστή βαμμένη, στην ειρήνη μπερδεμένη,  
δώσε κλώτσο να γυρίσει, παραμύθι ν' αρχινίσει. . .*

A red-dyed skein [i.e. a bloody regime]; peace has been entangled in;  
Give it a kick [i.e. fight] to unroll it [i.e. to overturn it],  
so that the fairy tale [i.e. freedom] may begin. (1:21:18)

Whereas these verses rework a traditional opening-formula of several folk tales for children,<sup>67</sup> the message here was neither cheerful nor addressed to children. And the 'moral of the story', presented in the film's closing caption, exemplifies how utopian that message of freedom sounded in 1972: with the *status quo* remaining unchallenged, fantasy was doomed to remain a fantasy.<sup>68</sup> In the same way that Koun's *Lysistrata* had (literally and metaphorically) sounded the alarm (see p. 230), so did Zervoulakos and Negrépointis activate the ironic/pessimist dynamics of the play, which several philologists have also brought forward.<sup>69</sup>

All in all, by combining sensuality with political criticism (insofar as censorship could be deceived), by fusing diverse aesthetic codes, by inserting telling intertexts, by preferring parody over direct satire, and despite any weaknesses in the cinematic pace, the film is exemplarily close to

66. McClure (2015) 71; my italics.

67. "Red thread wrapped around the wheel; give it a kick, let it spin; the fairy tale may begin!" (*Κόκκινη κλωστή δεμένη στην ανέμη τυλιγμένη, / δώσ' της κλώτσο να γυρίσει, παραμύθι ν' αρχινίσει*). See Sarafidou (2008) 23–4, 53, 160–1, 166, 211, 218, 226, 228, 339, 382, 384, 408, 460, 491, 500.

68. By contrast, the message in *Our Grand Circus* (premiered in June 1973) is both more direct and optimistic, reflecting the current anti-dictatorial activation of the society; in the finale of the play, Karezi shouts "Something starts happening!" (*Κάτι γίνεται!*) and the crew sing "People, don't bend your head any longer" (*Δαέ μη σκύφεις άλλο το κεφάλι!*); see Diamantakou (2021a) 255–56; Van Steen (2015) 213–15.

69. Most notably, Konstan (1995) 54–55, 59–60: "The utopian gesture has been recon-tained."

Aristophanes' own *technique*. As for his 'spirit', I myself do not claim to have ever met it — thankfully!

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## ΠΕΡΙΕΧΟΜΕΝΑ / CONTENTS

---

### ΙΟΑΝΝΙΣ Μ. ΚΟΝΣΤΑΝΤΑΚΟΣ

Ancient Comedy and Iambic Poetry:  
Generic Relations and Character Depiction

### ΜΙΧΑΛΗΣ ΚΑΡΔΑΜΙΤΣΗΣ

Αίσχυλος, άναγνώστης του Όμηρου:  
Άπό τήν όλολυγή τής Εύρύκλειας  
στο εύχος τής Κλυταιμήστρας

### EDITH HALL

Tragic Temporalities in Euripides' *Trojan Women*

### DAVID KONSTAN

Emotion and Abjection: Voices of Despair

### ΑΓΙΣ ΜΑΡΙΝΗΣ

Η σκηνή της Κασσάνδρας στις *Τρωάδες*:  
Τελετουργική επίτευση και πολιτικό υπόβαθρο

### C. W. MARSHALL

Euripides' *Trojan Women* and the Stagecraft  
of Memory

### ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ Ι. ΧΑΣΚΗΣ

Οι θηβαϊκοί μύθοι στην τραγωδία  
του 4ου αι. π.Χ.

### ANTONIS K. PETRIDES

ήμεϊς δ' ἴωμεν: Menander and Sophocles in  
Intertextual Dialogue (*Dyskolos* and *Philoctetes*)

### DIMITRIOS KANELLAKIS

*Lysistrata* Against the Greek Military Junta

### HALLIE REBECCA MARSHALL

Tony Harrison's *The Common Chorus*  
and Dramatic Trilogies

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*Euripides, The Trojan Women: A Comic* by  
Rosanna Bruno and Anne Carson. A Survey

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Production of the Sophoclean Play (2014)  
for Teenage Audiences

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